

5 Telltale Traits of an Immature Christian

The first epistle of Peter (written somewhere around the year A.D. 63-64) is addressed to those who have been scattered throughout the greater Asia area. The letter is addressed to the aliens scattered, but the theme of this amazing book is the true grace of God. For the next few moments, let's consider some of the implications of grace in our lives. That grace, or unmerited favor of God, has been deposited into us because of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Grace means that we are secure because of who Jesus is and, since we've entered that relationship with Him, the text tells us that we have "an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that does not fade away (1 Pet. 1:4a). We are secure in Christ and as a result of that security, we are called into holiness and are challenged to live a holy life that reflects the character of Jesus because "you shall be holy for I am holy (Lev. 11:45c). Holiness leads us into fear of a holy God. This fear is not the same as that which goes bump in the night; rather, this fear is a wholesome dread of displeasing Him. The continuing result of this grace is that we are to grow. That's where we pick up the text in 1 Peter 2:1-10. I encourage you to grab your copy of the Scriptures and read those verses.

First, we see a prerequisite to growth. The apostle Peter tells us to "put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and slander of every kind" (1 Pet. 2:1, NIV). We are to put away malice, that is a vicious disposition, that spirit of doing harm, always thinking the worst of other people. Even as a child of God, malice, or distrust of people, so easily creeps back into our lives and we can come to that place where we are the ones who truly have a vicious disposition.

Peter not only says "malice" but he talks about "deceit,"

which means to mislead. It really comes from a fishing term, to bait the hook. If you're an avid fisherman, you know that baiting the hook is a way to try to deceive the fish into believing it's going to get something good to eat, but when it bites into that food and grabs hold of that hook, it is now caught. Deceit is intentionally misleading. As a child of God, it should not be part of our lives. And yet, church leaders sometimes find themselves misleading their people, not telling them all of the truth. Or sometimes, as a child of God, we mislead the church leadership into thinking that we are far more holy or spiritual than we really are. Sometimes it's in our work environment where we shade the truth just a little bit so that we look better than we actually are. Sometimes we try to make someone look worse than they really are! So, Peter says you need to put away malice, that vicious disposition, deceit, to intentionally mislead. Then he goes on to talk about hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is an outward show, masquerading as something you are not. Now, let's be completely honest with one another! There have been times when we all have been the hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another; condemning an action and then finding ourselves doing the exact same thing. Peter tells us to stop doing this.

The next prerequisite for growth on the list is envy. Envy is coveting, or wanting what others have, resenting their prosperity. Instead, we are to rejoice with them that they have been blessed with such great possessions, wealth, or position! It can be a challenge for us to learn to be grateful to the Lord for what others have, and to be incredibly grateful to the Lord for what we have.

The next part of the list is slander, which means to defame or give an evil report. These are negative things that Peter speaks about that need to be removed from our lives if, as the children of God, we are going to grow in this amazing grace.

In verse 2, Peter gives us a positive point when he says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2, MEV). Just as a newborn infant longs for his mother's pure milk, so we, as newborn children of Jesus, need to long for God's Word, because that is how we grow. Acts 6:4 tells us that "we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Coupled with the ministry of prayer is the ministry of the word, feeding on the Scriptures. If we only do this on Sundays at church and then not again until the next Sunday, it's like eating at a buffet for Sunday lunch and then not eating again until the following Sunday. As children of God, we need to be in His Word to learn from Him, seek His face and rejoice in who He is. So Peter tells us to grow! Grow up, putting aside these evil things and longing for the pure milk of the word.

As a result of this, as we see in verse 5, we are living stones, and we who believe in Jesus will never be disappointed. In verse 6, we see Jesus as the cornerstone who was rejected, the stumbling stone. But, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You see, we must grow so that we can fulfill the mission that Christ has given to us as a chosen people, God's own possession, a group who have the privilege of proclaiming the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness.

The task of reaching a lost generation, a lost world, is at stake. If we are going to see our nations reached for Jesus, then we, the church, must be renewed by seeking His face; by longing for the pure milk of the Word; and by growing into a deep, mature faith which will not tolerate things like malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Let's grow together for the sake of the gospel.

Taylor is president of Strategic Renewal Canada. This sister ministry launched just a year ago and is seeking to be used of the Lord to ignite the heart of the local church to seek the face of God in Canada, a nation in great need of spiritual renewal. If you are reading this article and you are in a Canadian church, we want to encourage you to contact Strategic Renewal Canada. You can do that through their website, which is simply www.strategicrenewal.ca, or you can call Lindsay directly at 519-993-1597. He will be glad to assist you and your ministry.