

Throw Them Off

I Peter 2:1

I want to begin this morning with a couple of stories. They are true stories that I hope will illustrate for us the admonition, even the urgency, with which Peter addresses his audience. His words are just as relevant for us today.

About 40 years ago I began the search for a house. It is a daunting task to go from one house to another to another comparing, contrasting, liking something in one house but something else isn't what you want. You know how it is.

The realtor took me to one house. The stench of now absent multiple dogs lay thick on the stale threshold as you opened the creaking back door that led into the kitchen. A single light fixture dangled from the ceiling. It was the shape of a giant light bulb illuminating a pale yellow against the yellow painted walls and black and white tile floor. I don't remember much else about the house except that I didn't buy it.

Oh, there was one more thing about the house that I remember. It's not about the square footage or how many bedrooms it had. I don't recall if there was carpet or a basement. I don't remember anything else that I saw that day, but I do vividly remember something I took with me from the house besides bad memories. I didn't notice it until I was in the car with the realtor. Glancing down at my white tube socks contrasted against my blue jeans there it was. They were all over, I'm guessing hundreds. Fleas were crawling all over my legs and shirt. They gravitated to me like a bunch of pins attracted to a magnet as it passes by.

I was living in an apartment above my grandparents at the time and when we pulled into the driveway, they were outside gardening. Grandma told me to go immediately downstairs and strip off all my clothes and throw them in the washer.

What an experience. That's story number one.

Here's story number two.

Several years earlier I had gone with a group of campers up into Canada to spend the week out in the wild. I was at the campsite a week earlier and knew all the cool things to do. It was my job to show the new batch of campers some of the fun spots. We were on White Lake. It was a very serene setting. In the early morning you could hear the call of the Loons echoing off the lake. Hiking one day we came across a huge tree that had fallen ages earlier. Its resting spot had recently been disturbed by a bear foraging for bugs based on the tell-tale paw prints it left behind. The markings were still fresh.

Another favorite spot was the river that emptied into White Lake. A man made dam had been built near the mouth of the river to regulate flow into the lake. The week prior we used it as a water slide. We would walk about 20 feet to the back of the dam, sit down and let the force of the water push us down into the river. With new campers I wanted to show them what great fun it was. Wading to the back of the dam I noticed something I had not seen the week earlier. The floor of the dam was darker and a bit slimy. It seemed to be on my feet and legs as well. Lifting one leg up there they were, little baby blood suckers all over my leg. I couldn't get out of there fast enough and of course the fastest way was to sit down and let the rapids shoot me over the dam. Now I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer but that was a dumb idea. I had little baby blood suckers all over me. Needless to say I had to go into the woods and strip down and wipe all those little things off and make sure my swimming trunks were free of those little buggers.

Take your Bibles and turn to I Peter 2:1. Peter will begin his instruction by telling us about some things we are to throw off. In a metaphorical way these things can bite us and suck the spiritual life out of us if we don't do something drastic like stripping

them off.

Peter makes a transition in chapter two. He leads into it with “therefore”. It’s a word that links what he just said with what he is about to say. Whenever you see a ‘therefore’ in Scripture always go back and read what the ‘therefore’ is there for. In chapter one he spoke about five things regarding these believers in Asia Minor. He begins by noting that they are scattered, dispersed throughout the region. Then he spoke about their position in Christ as strangers, sojourners, travelers. Their faith had transferred their citizenship to heaven and so they were just passing through this world on to their permanent home in heaven. This new citizenship came as a result of their salvation. This new faith and new way of living resulted in suffering.

V. 6 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” These trials were meant to refine them, to show that their faith was sincere, genuine, real, growing so that from it they might sing praise to God and give Him glory.

Let me repeat those five things from I Peter 1.
 He spoke about their being scattered
 He spoke about their being strangers
 He spoke about their salvation
 He spoke about their suffering
 He spoke about their sincere faith

He reminded them of the price that was paid for their salvation. It was by the precious blood of Christ as we read in verses 18-19 and through the imperishable Word of God noted in verse 23, a Word that stands forever.

As we come to verse 1 of chapter 2 I’d like us to consider from God’s Word three thoughts.
 There is a call for change
 There is a concern with character
 There is a challenge to consider

I. A CALL FOR CHANGE

The call for change is this: “rid yourselves”. It’s a compound word in the Greek. The first part means off or away. The second means to place, put or set. Combine them and we have to put off or put away.

There are certain things in our life that we are to get rid of because when harbored, when allowed to remain they hinder our appetite for God. They can actually keep us from maturing in our Christian faith. The tense of the word is also a command carrying with it a decisive act of the will, something that we are to do and do immediately.

This is once again metaphorical language appealing to the believer to strip these sins off like we would an old set of soiled clothes. In the days of the early church, when a person was baptized they would arrive to the baptism site wearing one set of clothes. Once baptized in a symbolic gesture they would take those old clothes off and put on new clothes given to them by the church. It was an indication of their taking off the old and putting on the new.

Paul reminds us from II Corinthians 5:17 that we are a new creature and the old nature has passed away. The trouble is our old nature hasn’t gotten the message it’s no longer wanted or that we have a new nature. I suppose we could say that this verse is the negative of 1:15-16 where God who is holy has called us to be holy in all we do. We do this by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

So here Peter challenges us to rid ourselves of sin. Other passages remind us of the same thing. Notice the kinds of sinful attitudes and actions that we are to get rid of.

Romans 13:12-14
 Ephesians 4:22-24
 Colossians 3:5-10

Perhaps the best passage that illustrates the call for change is found in Hebrews 12:1-3 with an admonition about how we strip off sin.

John MacArthur suggests that the key to this passage isn't in the putting away of sins but in running the race with endurance. The word race in the Greek is the word we get for agony. Running a week ago in the fun run for David's school was a lot different than competing in races when I was in High school and college. For one, I wasn't in the best shape of my life. When competing there is considerable training and commitment that is essential to doing well and completing the race. During the race you give it your all, your best. At the fun run it was all for the kids.

The Christian race isn't a leisurely stroll. It's not the Christian fun run. It takes commitment and training and exertion and well, agony. The Christian life can be grueling. Don't be swept up by the hype of some preachers or books telling you that the Christian life is a cake walk if you're walking with Jesus. While there is some truth to that, walking with Jesus doesn't mean He'll take all your troubles away, but it does mean He will be with you through thick and thin.

Jesus talked about persecution in this life.

Peter talked about trials in this life.

James spoke of the testing of your faith in this life.

The Christian life requires determination in choosing not to go back to the old way of life. We have to cast off sin that weighs us down like a runner has to throw off his heavy sweats before the race begins. Even if it's freezing out, the sweats come off. The coldest race I remember was 37 degrees and snowing. It didn't matter, off came the sweats. If you want to run the Christian life well, you must rid yourselves of the things that can easily entangle us and trip us up. To do well you must get rid of the weight of sin. When I was training and reading about training and racing I read that an extra 5 pounds of weight can feel like 25 pounds at the end of a 5 mile race. Throw it off.

Bruce Barton writes that the Christian "having a new God-given nature within them, has the ability

to break with their past life of sin. While we cannot become completely sin-free in this life, no matter how hard we try to put aside sin, we are commanded to get rid of sin in order to become more like Christ."

Now the sins that Peter mentions in this verse were a cause for concern. It isn't that he is in some way scolding them because these sins were prevalent in their respective churches, but more an awareness to watch out for them because they can devastate and decimate a church if they are allowed to take root. They can cause serious dissension within the body and create disharmony, disunity and division.

Scripture calls us to unity (I Corinthians 1:10; Romans 15:5-6), and the sins Peter mentions can sever that unity. Peter calls us to get rid of these attitudes so that unity can prevail.

This is a call for self-evaluation to see if we harbor any of these traits and if we find them to get rid of them. There is a verse which says that it is the little foxes that ruin the vineyard. Applying that to our passage we may do some introspection and determine that while we may have a little bit of one or more of these traits we conclude that they don't seem to be too big a concern, they only crop up once in a while. So we may choose not to do anything about them. After all everyone has their own little sins. The problem is left alone and they will at some point derail your life. Leave a small leak alone and pretty soon there is major damage.

A couple weeks ago I needed to get new tires. After waiting a while the mechanic called me back into the shop to show me something. He pointed out that on the edge of one of the rims there was a crack about ½ an inch long. Did I want to replace the rim? I could have reasoned that the crack was really small in comparison to the size of the rim and chose not to do anything about it. Instead of ignoring the problem I got rid of it.

With Carol's recent surgery, the medical team did a thorough job examining her to make sure they got all the cancer. They didn't want to leave even one cell. They were determined to get rid of it all. In that situation we would never be satisfied with a doctor who got most of it.

When Peter speaks of putting these things away he doesn't mean that we toss them in a drawer to retrieve later, but rather to totally eradicate them from our lives and he uses the word "all" meaning all, every bit of it. All means all that's all all means. Get rid of it. It is a call for change.

Next we see a concern with character.

II. A CONCERN WITH CHARACTER

Once again let me remind you that Peter is not chastising them for some sin evident in the church. It is a general call for change concerning their character so that as they navigate through a world of unbelievers their lives would exemplify the character of a holy God.

Paul would put it this way as he wrote to the Romans: "don't let the world squeeze you into its mold but instead be transformed by the renewing of your minds." (Romans 12:2)

Let's consider these character traits individually that we are to get rid of. Some things just don't belong in the life of a Christian and Peter lists five for us.

First of all there is the sin of malice.

A. The Sin of Malice

It is a word that is translated depravity, wickedness or malignity. One author defined it as wicked ill-will. That's the real underlying intent. It isn't just wickedness in general, but wickedness or ill-will toward someone else wanting some harm to come to them. Each of these five character traits we are to

get rid are in some way directed toward someone else to do them harm. In this case it is the wish that something bad will happen to someone else either at your own hands or by the hand of someone else.

Cain had ill-will toward his brother Abel

Sarah had ill-will toward Hagar

Balak had ill-will toward Israel

Saul had ill-will toward David

The religious rulers had ill-will toward Jesus

Rioters had ill-will toward Paul and Silas

Notice the kind of company that malice keeps in the following passages.

Romans 1:29

I Corinthians 5:8

Ephesians 4:31

Colossians 3:8

Titus 3:3

Another author defined malice as doing evil you in spite of the good you have done to them. It's the proverbial saying of biting the hand that feeds you.

In spite of all the good Jesus did for others they still turned on Him and shouted for His crucifixion.

We are reminded from Scripture that the heart is desperately wicked. Malice destroys fellowship and it is a character trait that we are to get rid of.

The second trait is the sin of deceit.

B. The Sin of Deceit

Proverbs 14:25

Mark 7:20-23

Deceit is deliberate dishonesty. It is the act of representing something as being true when you know it is wrong. You may have in mind the smooth talking used car salesman who would sell a lemon to his own mother. Facts are deliberately misrepresented. It's nothing more than a lie in sheep's clothing. The original intent of the word

meant bait or snare and was a term used for a fisherman's hook.

Speaking about Nathanael Jesus said he was someone who had no deceit. John 1:47

Abraham deceived Pharaoh by telling the Egyptians that Sarah wasn't his wife, but just his sister. He did it a second time. Isaac did the same thing. Jacob's name meant deceiver. Genesis 27:12

Or how about from Acts 5:1-11 where Ananias and Sapphira deceived others by saying they gave all the money from the sale of their property to the church.

Malachi 1:14

The world is filled with scam artists and con-artists who seek to deceive others. The Christian is to have no part in deceiving others.

A third sinful character trait similar in nature to deceit is hypocrisy.

C. The Sin of Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is pretending to be something you are not. The ancient Greeks used the term to describe an actor in a play. They wore several masks as part of their different roles. They were called hypocrites. It is pretending to be pious or loving.

There is an odd piece of sculpture that adorns the wall of Ribston Hall in Yorkshire, England. It is called the two-faced butler. On one side is the face of a smiling, polite butler and on the other side a face that depicts nothing but insolence and impoliteness.

It is said that it represents a butler who once served the household. One day after having received orders from the mistress of the household, all smiles and compliance, he was seen a moment later when he

thought she wasn't looking, sticking out his tongue at her and making other impolite gestures. So this statue was ordered made and erected in a very prominent spot both to shame him and warn any other servants who might have a tendency to imitate the behavior of the two-faced butler.

In Matthew 23 Jesus had some very scathing comments about the religious leaders whom He called hypocrites. In verse 33 He goes so far as to call them snakes and a brood of vipers. It was a fitting depiction of those whose ruse was for their own profit.

I Timothy 4:1-2

Even Peter was accused of hypocrisy. Galatians 2:11-13

In his book *Already Gone – Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it*, Ken Ham, founder of Answers in Genesis writes: "What is the number-one perception of the Christian church today? No matter how you slice it, it always comes down to one word – hypocrisy. Hypocrisy has far more to do with honesty and transparency than it does being perfect. It insinuates that people say one thing and live another way. It implies that people force their own legalism on others but are blind to their own faults and sins – even as they are very judgmental toward those who struggle with their own temptations."

"In our study, hypocrisy is more important than the church being too political, irrelevant, or boring. Not coincidentally, 20-somethings who have never been to church at all voice the same criticism. David Kinnaman notes in his book *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters*. In part, he (Kinnaman) discovered these perceptions:

1. Christians say one thing but live something entirely different.
2. Christians are insincere and concerned only with converting others.

In the research that was conducted to write his book, 1,000 20-somethings were surveyeded. Of those surveyed 35% cited hypocrisy of leaders third on their list of reasons they left. Farther down the list of reasons they left but at 95% was the hypocrisy of their parents. Understand that these weren't fringe kids or kids attending liberal churches. They were from fundamental churches much like ours.

That in itself is sufficient enough reason to get rid of hypocrisy. We can be a stumbling block to our kids.

Next we see the sin of envy is another character trait we are to get rid of.

D. The Sin of Envy

Envy is nothing more than sinful discontent. It resents someone's advancement or their acquiring something.

You resent someone for getting the promotion you wanted.

You resent someone for getting a new house.

You resent someone for getting a better grade when you know you studied harder than they did.

You resent someone because they have a big bank account and can travel all over.

The envy is so strong that it causes discontent and resentment.

Envy is different from jealousy. Where envy resents the person, jealousy covets what that person has. Envy resents, while jealousy wants. Envy creates an attitude of ungratefulness.

Proverbs 27:4 "Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, but who can stand before envy."

James 3:16 "For where envying and strife is there is confusion and every evil work."

Envy led Cain to murder Abel.

Envy led King Saul to strike at David.

Envy led the Pharisees to seek Jesus' life. (Matthew 27:18)

We are admonished in Romans 13:13 "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissensions and envying."

Again, this attitude leads to disunity.

In medieval art, envy is depicted as a hideous figure with the claws of a vulture, the ears of a donkey, and the tongue of a snake. Envy's ears are always stretched out to hear the faintest voice of a scandal, what it hears makes it tear at its own heart like a vulture, while its evil tongue, as a venomous snake, wounds its own forehead.

Be wary of the sin of envy. Get rid of it.

Finally, there is the sin of slander.

E. The Sin of Slander

Slander is made up of backbiting lies. We include in this the sin of gossip. It is speaking evil of someone else. It is defaming them, destroying their reputation by lying, rumors or gossip. Like malice and deceit the intent is ill-will toward another. Where deceit is often said to a person's face, slander is said in the person's absence.

If we harbor any of these then we severely hinder the work of God's Spirit in us to.

Last week I mentioned the story of Charles Tindley who grew up learning the alphabet and how to read by picking up pieces of newspaper on the side of the road. He became an avid reader and eventually ordained in the ministry. He pastored a church in Philadelphia loving the poor and building a church that was the largest African-American church in Philadelphia. He sought the position of Bishop in his denomination about another person seeking the

same position slandered Tindley falsely accusing him of having an affair. One night while studying, a piece of paper caught by the wind, flew across his lamp casting a shadow over his writing. Pausing, he considered the power of sin to darken a soul, and out of that came his great hymn: *Nothing Between*.

Nothing between my soul and my Savior,
Naught of this world's delusive dream;
I have renounced all sinful pleasure;
Jesus is mine, there's nothing between.

Nothing between, like worldly pleasure;
Habits of life, though harmless they seem,
Must not my heart from Him ever sever;
He is my all, there's nothing between.

Refrain:

Nothing between my soul and my Savior,
So that His blessed face may be seen;
Nothing preventing the least of His favor;
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.

Now, here is my closing thought. We have talked about some negative traits we are to get rid of. But if there is something positive for us it is in a challenge to consider.

We have pondered a call to change.
We have pondered a concern with character.
Let's close with a challenge to consider.

III. A CHALLENGE TO CONSIDER

Peter concluded chapter 1 by noting that we are to love one another deeply from the heart with a sincere love for our fellow Christians.

If we truly love one another as we should, as God loves us, then it will be our desire to get rid of these negative traits. Love for others seeks their best. We our focus is instead on us, then the traits of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander will be evident.

A lot of church growth literature is focused on

implementing certain action plans for church growth. They talk about marketing strategies, service and building styles, and your community presence.

I want to suggest that instead of looking at marketing strategies for building the church, we need look no further than how we treat others. How we act toward each other is a better marketing strategy that is more readily visible in a community that resonates the core of our faith than slick slogans and activities for every age, every day of the week.

If malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander are evident strip them off and express the kind of love Peter says we should have for each other. They are

As we close out our service I'm wondering if you have any fleas or blood suckers that you need to get rid of. We'll take a look at what we can do next week in verses 2-3 that will help us throwing them off for good.