

# *Shedding Scales*

*1 Peter 1: 22-2:3*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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One of the most enduring pictures of what it means to grow in Christ can be found in C.S. Lewis' novel *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The boy named Eustace has made some selfish choices. He's surly and greedy and a big pain to the other children. In the story, Eustace

stumbles upon a cave filled with the treasures of a dragon's lair. He covets the jewels and the gold, and falls asleep thinking how he can keep all of this for himself. When Eustace wakes up, he discovers he has become a dragon. Lewis writes, "Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself." He wakes up as a dragon covered with scales. The thrill of having great power and owning immense treasure does not last long for poor Eustace. All too quickly he realized how lonely he was cut off from every other living boy or girl. He was a boy covered in scales, a monster who could not return to being a boy.



But one night, the great lion Aslan appeared to Eustace. Aslan led the boy deep up and into the mountains to a secret garden with a deep well in the center of it. Eustace understood that the lion wanted him to undress

and bathe in the pool of clear, cool water. Of course, dragons wear no clothes. They're covered with hard scales. So Eustace reasoned that he must shed his scales like a snake sheds a skin. He used his dragon claws to scratch through the scales until he had nothing on but smooth, baby-like skin. Leaving the pile of old scales behind, Eustace got ready to climb up and into the wide well. But just before he did, he noticed the scales had all grown back. Once again, he scratched the

scales away and made ready to bathe in the soothing water. But again before he stepped into the well, the old scales were back.

Aslan the lion said to him, “You will have to let me undress you.” Eustace knew that was true, so he laid down on his back and let the lion claw begin to *undragon* him. The pain was terrible as Eustace felt the scales cut away in their depth. At last the lion tossed him into the water. When Eustace came out, he was a boy again. He felt new and free and healed and forgiven. From then on, he would live striving to be a generous, helpful, grateful human being. <sup>1</sup>

I think C.S. Lewis has illustrated beautifully what Peter is talking about in our passage. Once in your lostness, when you covered with the scales of all the futile ways you had tried to make your life work on your own, and failed, Christ came to you. Someone told you the Good News, the truth that God sent his Son Jesus into the world to ransom us from captivity to ourselves. He came to cleanse our sins and restore us to our humanity. Peter writes, “you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” You’ve been made new. Because the seed of a living, eternal Word got planted inside you. It’s growing now, and changing you from the inside out. A seed from another world got planted in the hard, contaminated soul of your life. And it’s growing with sweet, green life. The new person inside you is replacing the old person. Jesus makes all things new.

This is a wonderful blessing. But God never blesses us, works in us, moves in us just so we can sit there fat and happy and say, “Well, this is great. Look what I have!” He creates new life in us for a purpose. So we can love! So we can worship God with full, free hearts. So we can reach to others in this broken world and share the Good News with them. Blessed *to be* a blessing. Peter tells them they have given themselves to the truth of the gospel in order that they might develop “a sincere brotherly love.” The point is that they would go on now to “love one another earnestly from a pure heart.”

Peter goes on to identify some patterns that will create disruption in their love. He tells them to strip themselves of these behaviors. To go back to poor Eustace as a dragon, we can hear Peter telling them that if the old scales grow back, claw them off. Don’t let yourself turn into a dragon. So we’re going to take a look at the five behaviors Peter identifies and see how we can better undragon ourselves. He writes, “Put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.” Take these off like you’d take off clothes. Shave them like you

would wild hairs. Scale them away. Let's think how to do this in a way that arises from our new life in Christ.

All destructive patterns and behaviors rise from sin, either our own or the sin of others enacted against us. But specific destructive patterns often have particular provoking causes. The antidote to blindly living out these patterns includes not only identifying the behaviors and their sources, but also the specific actions that counter them.

**1) Symptoms of Malice/Slander: Meanness.** There's a song I love by the Mulligan Brothers. Maybe you've had a Christmas like this one: "My family's estranged. We all share the same name. We sharpen our teeth on each other's mistakes. Our hearts pump the same blood. Now we know how it tastes. Happy Christmas and New Year. A shame and a waste. As long as love's been around, we have always been mean. Since the last time the Lord came to now in between."<sup>2</sup> We can be mean. Some of it is just in us. I tripped a girl in the hallway once, just to see her fall. She'd never done anything wrong to me. I suffered no neglect. I just thought I'd do it. The mean is there in all of us.

**The Provoking Source: Hurt.** But for some the mean goes further. As someone said, "Hurt people hurt people." Woundedness drives a lot of meanness. We transfer what has been done to us onto others. People who've been made powerless by a dominator try to get free by bullying power over others. Crippled by insecurity, wounded by the slights of their friends, there's a reason teenagers relate to movies called *Mean Girls*.

### **The Actions of Antidote: Forgiveness and Kindness**

Here we see where being united to Jesus makes all the difference. It doesn't work just to say "Well, I'm mean because I'm hurt. But maybe I should be nicer." We require the one who took wounds on our behalf. By whose wounds our wounds can be healed. One who says, "I stood in your place. I stood with you while you took the blows. And I never left you. I love you. And my wounds can heal your wounds." That's the undragoning of the heart we require. That's being born again into healing.

But after that, we have some choices to make. Christ has been kind to me. I will seek creatively and actively to be kind to others. Christ has forgiven me all the ways I transferred my anger at being hurt onto others. So I will seek to forgive those who hurt me. I will seek the forgiveness of those I hurt. And in the meantime, I'm going to practice kindness.

**2) Symptoms of Hypocrisy/Deceit: Pretending.** Hypocrites are fakers. We all do it when we make up white lies as excuses. We don't say, "I'd just rather watch TV than meet with you because I'm a lazy blob." We make up an excuse about some noble, hard working call on our lives. That's low level hypocrisy. It escalates when we become pontificators. We trumpet our goodness and the sins of those who are bad. Hypocrisy contains the terrible trait of projection. I see in you what I pretend is not in me. I call it out in you. I say you're only in this for the money when all I care about is the bottom line. I say you're just in it for power when what I want is total control. You are what I fear to be. Beware those who broadcast the sins of others—they're often projecting.

**The Provoking Source: Fear.** Of course, we pretend to be what we are not because we don't want to be exposed. We hide from shame. For if we were known, we would be judged wanting. Then we would be discarded. Rejected. Blacklisted.

**The Actions of Antidote: Confession and Faith.** At the deep level, we have to risk embracing the truth that Tim Keller made so famous. "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." We admit all. We take shame into the light. We hold it up to Jesus who went to the place of a shameful death. He got nailed up naked in public to hang until he died in disgrace and his family was socially cursed. He knows shame. He still takes our shame as his own and returns it as love.

The actions of antidote include confession. That's why this little time in every service is so important. We learn the habit of saying aloud in front of others. I am wrong. I am sinful. I am all this and more. And we discover we do not die. A word of forgiveness is spoken over us. We don't have to pretend anymore.

**3) Symptoms of Envy: Denigrating.** This destructive behavior is so embarrassing. Envy means wanting what someone else has. But more. It means not wanting someone else to have what they have. And it means not wanting to raise myself to the level of the one I envy. Rather, I want that guy to get knocked down beneath me. No one gets out of this pit unless I say so. It strikes me that so much of our angry national conversation is about envy. I want what you have. You don't deserve what you have. You should give it to me. It is right for me to take from you what I want. And so we wage war against each other.

At a more personal level, I know this feeling most as an author. Why haven't my amazing books sold more than a few thousand copies? Why does that guy sell so

many books. His stuff isn't as good as mine. They'll realize one day that he didn't say it as well as I did. Or maybe they won't and that's because people are stupid.

**The Provoking Source:** Feeling inadequate. Not enough. Fear of insignificance.

**The Actions of Antidote. Faith, Gratitude and Giving.** At the deep level, we recognize that we are not our own. We belong to Christ Jesus. As he said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to bear much fruit" (Jn. 15). Can I accept that I am where God has placed me. Can I trust that there is only one savior and his name is Jesus? He gives me a lane to run in. I can work hard to rise to the highest level of my capacity. But I consecrate myself to gratitude. I can actively bless others in their success. I can actively others a hand up to participate in what is good in my life. I can realize that I do not diminish when others expand. Every morning I can wake and thank God that I breathe, that I see, that I have slept. That there is food, and clothing, and familiar faces. There is work to do. There are people to whom I can do good. When I give to others, I discover anew the abundance of my life and the joy of sharing life and love. This is enough, more than enough. Imagine if we did that nationally?

If you are in Christ, he has planted an imperishable seed in you. A new life grows in you. If you are in Christ, he has undragoned you. You've been born anew into the person you were meant to be. Only Jesus can do that for us. But if you are in Christ, the work of peeling old scales remains. There are things we need to strive to strip: malice, slander, hypocrisy, deceit and envy. For we have been made new for a purpose: to love one another earnestly from the heart. The old life tastes so bitter. But we who are in Christ have tasted how good he is. Live from that sweetness. Share it with others that the world might magnify our savior with us.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), chaps 6&7.

<sup>2</sup> Mulligan Brothers, "Not Always What it Seems" from *Via Portland*, 2015.