

Love The Brethren

1 Peter 1:22-25

A question as we begin our study of this passage today, “Are the fellow Christians with which you spend your days really easy to get along with? Are they slow to speak, slow to anger, and quick to listen, esteeming other better than themselves?” And may I ask the same of you as one of those fellow Christians. “Are you easy to get along with? Are you slow to speak, slow to anger, and quick to listen, esteeming other better than yourself?” That is the subject of God’s exhortation to us here in 1st Peter 1. Listen as I read!

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:22-25 (ESV))

May we begin our study by first looking at the “personality” and the “character” of the Apostle Peter who was the one honored by God to write these words from Him?

All throughout these words of this letter and also of his second letter, we find that God is allowing us to clearly see the individual personality of Peter, a personality that is strong, aggressive and intentional, always pushing forward to know and to love the Lord Jesus more and more, and also always exhorting others on to do the same.

But though his personality be strong and intentional, his heart and his behavior towards his flock were always tender and gentle. He used words of encouragement as he assured them that they had everything they needed for “life and godliness” through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus, and through the salvation He provides, calling on them to not return to the lifestyle and the behaviors that once enslaved them to sin, but instead to “be holy” as God Himself is Holy.

And here also, Peter assures his flock of who it is that they are being called to worship and bow down too, that Jesus Christ though being in appearance the same as them, was no ordinary man. He was and is God! He was God in the beginning with the Father, “foreknown” to be the King of Glory, the one who

came among men to suffer and die, paying the penalty for all sin and setting captives free from their bondage to sin and death; that everything that Christ did as Savior and Lord was done to provide them, and also you and me, with all that we would need to have “faith and hope” in God and in Him alone.

And because so much had been given to them, much would be required. Listen again!

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Remember the context of these words. They were written to very strongly committed believers, men and women, who truly had, as verse 22 tells us,

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth,
(1 Peter 1:22 (ESV))

A reminder as we examine this passage, none of God’s words are miscellaneous and neither are they simple metaphors to be taken lightly. As we know from 1 Corinthians 2, there is “secret wisdom” from God that fills each word and is intertwined into each phrase. Here, the “secret wisdom” is that God’s word has a mystical power that resides within it, that as we read it, or as we hear it read, or as we sing it in a hymn, there is power within that word that actually cleanses and purifies our souls, washes away, wipes away the filth and the taint and the stain of sinful behavior.

Recall also the words in Ephesians 5 that speak of how we husbands are to minister to our wives. We are told there that we are to “wash her with the water of the word”, an odd expression, but a profound truth. I am commanded each day to shower the word of God over my wife, and then, by that word, she is cleansed and purified from her sin.

And also, you will recall in John 15, Jesus telling His disciples,

3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.
(John 15:3 (ESV))

You and I may not at all comprehend how it works, but it really does do exactly that; His truth is able to cleanse and purify each one of us from our sins and having been cleansed and purified, change our behavior.

And that had taken place in the hearts of these believers. Their hearts have been purified. And now, having been purified, they were prepared to work out the salvation they have received in all the practical matters of daily life. And it was to be especially evidenced in the way that they showed love towards one another. Listen!

2 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; (1 Peter 1:22-23 (ESV))

This is Peter faithfully passing along that which He had been given by the Lord Jesus. You will recall when after Jesus had risen from the dead, He came to visit and to speak with His disciples on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. There He took Peter aside asking him three times, “Peter, do you love me” and then exhorting him each time to “feed His sheep”.

Folks, such words as these tell us that our Christianity is not given to us solely for our own personal gain and enjoyment. It is that yes, but even more so, it is to be given back out for the benefit and gain of others. How can we know that for sure? These words tell us so, but also, that was the whole ministry of the Lord Jesus. Everything He did was done so that others might gain, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection, all done for the benefit of others.

And also, such in the nature of the blessed gift of “grace”, one of God’s ultimate demonstrations of love! The “grace” of salvation, and the “grace” of the gifts and of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is of no small measure. Folks, “grace” has changed our lives and our personalities completely. It has made us alive in this present “kingdom of God”, and we are admonished with all urgency to pass that grace along to others. We dare not be found guilty of hoarding God’s grace for our own benefit and enjoyment, of forming a “log-jam” where it cannot flow out to others. It is the nature of “grace” to be like a “free-flowing river”, washing and cleansing the soul, and blessing everyone it touches.

And the best evidence of that free-flowing grace is the “love” that we show towards one another. As we read in 1 Corinthians 13,

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NIV))

Unfortunately though, we are too often like those who find buried treasure. We do all we can to hide it from others and use it only for ourselves.

But such cannot work well with “grace” and especially the “grace” of the “gift of love”. As you well know, love not shared and enjoyed with someone else is of no value, even worse, it almost always becomes painful to us. And unrequited love leaves a person broken and lost.

I’m reminded of a sermon I heard once that used the embers of a fireplace as a metaphor, that as burning embers are kept closely touching other embers, they keep each other alive and burning brightly. But if those embers are separated and isolated from the other embers, they quickly languish and die.

And such is the “grace” of the “gift of love”. As love is allowed to flow out to the blessing and benefit of others, that love flourishes and thrives. Love is the most essential element to the life of the Body of Christ. And here we read,

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May we pause here for just a moment to notice another of God’s precepts, one that if we are not careful we will miss, the words . . .

23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, (1 Peter 1:23 (ESV))

As we are “born again”, we actually become a whole new creature, the old creature is gone, the new has come. And as these words tell us, the new creature, our “new being” is of an “imperishable seed.” What does that mean? It means that we can never, never perish, that our eternity, our “eternal life” is now guaranteed. We are now of “imperishable seed”. Praise be to God who will never allow us to be taken out of His hand. That is how much God loves you and me!

Our passage again . . .

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God (1 Peter 1:22-23 (ESV))

May we take a moment and again consider the specific circumstances given to us here in these words. The exhortation being given is for these brethren to “love one another”. Do these words perhaps imply that these particular believers had not been getting along well with their brethren? Perhaps!

Having worked in a close-knit ministry environment for over 30 years, I know first-hand that Christians do struggle to remain in agreement with one another. And may I quickly say that such lack of agreement did not necessarily have to stem from some great and awful blatant sin. That was seldom ever the case. To the contrary, most of the disagreements and arguments took place when two or more “on-fire” Christian workers wanted to do similar things, but in different ways.

Or another common point of disagreement that would come between the workers and their supervisors was when the worker really felt God leading them to develop some new project, but their supervisor would not support their efforts.

Simply put, close-knit Christian ministries are rife with opportunities for the brethren to fuss and not get along with each other; and the more “zealous” and “on-fire” the members, the greater the probability of disagreements.

But God’s answer is always a simple one. “Love one another as I have loved you”. Those words from John 13,

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35 (NIV))

One last scriptural confirmation concerning our loving the brethren, this one in 1 John 3, and this one seems also to lead into the next verses here in our passage that give indication that “vanity and pride” can often be the basis for disagreement among the brethren. Listen!

11 This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. 13 Do not be surprised,

my brothers, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. 16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.(1 John 3:11-18 (NIV)

All of these words and all of the other exhortations from the Lord for us to “love one another” are common to all of the relationships that we develop and live in amongst each day, whether it be in our workplace, our church or within our families.

In the workplace and in the church, “vanity and pride” are especially evident. “Merit” is of first order. In our workplaces, “titles” and “credentials” and “positions of authority” give open invitation to all forms of “vanity and pride”. Esteem is honored because of the initials after our name or the sign above our doorway. And once “vanity and pride” have been given entrance into a person’s mind, there is little way of keeping it from corrupting and even destroying relationships.

And so it is also within the churches. Two often the members will have their little enclaves of power, beginning with the pastor, the elders and the deacons. Even the music directors and the ones who do the “special music” are often influenced by “vanity and pride”. But here the Lord gives us a reminder of how fleeting our “claims to fame” and our “positions of importance” can be. Listen!

24 for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.” (1 Peter 1:24-25 (ESV)

It is only the “Word of the Lord” that is worthy of esteem and of remaining forever. Bosses come and go, supervisors come and go, pastors come and go, and on and on, but only “the Word of the Lord” is worthy of lasting through the ages.

And it is this “love” that we are admonished to show towards one another in the body of Christ that carries on forward this “Word of the Lord”, both to those among us today and on out into the future generations. Loving one another within the brethren is the “life-blood” of every congregation; and to the extent that we are willing to humble ourselves, and to esteem others and their needs above

our own, that is the extent to which the body of Christ will flourish and thrive. So then my brethren,

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

(1 Peter 1:22 (ESV))