

Sermon 8: 1 Peter 1:22-2:3: Love One Another with the Help of the Scriptures

OUTLINE

How love begins
How love grows

INTRODUCTION

If you could learn the secret to growing love, and then sell it you would probably be a millionaire! Many people today have written books on how to grow your love, so books on how to revive love between a husband and a wife are very popular indeed. There are many different types of love, but Peter has discovered the secret to growing brotherly love. Brotherly love like all loves between people, waxes and wanes. Relationships need maintenance, and relationships in the body of Christ suffer the same, if not more strain, than other human relationships do. In the Church people you wouldn't choose as friends are now your spiritual family, it could be people that are your families enemies, your childhood bully, your boss, schoolteacher, your competition in business, a policeman, the mentally retarded, the local beggar, people of different race, the parents of the child that bullies your child, etc. And yet we are to love our fellow Christians with a true and a genuine love, the million dollar question is, how do we do it?

Peter is going to focus our attention on two stages of love in our Christian lives: Firstly, he is going to show us that through salvation we now have a true love for the brethren. And secondly, we are able to grow this love by feeding upon the word of God. Peter's overall thought is this one: If the Bible can give you life, the Bible can give you love.

How love begins

We have said before that Peter roots the imperative in the indicative, because God has done something first, this leads to our responsive acting. Since God has given you new birth and an inheritance rejoice in our trials and be holy. Peter continues in this section to root our responsibility in our privileges showing how our obedience is a response of gratitude to generous grace. Since you have been purified by truth for love, love in truth. Since you have been begotten by a good Father's seed, the word of God, imitate your Father's love like good children. Since you have tasted the Lord's goodness, long for His word. This underlines for us that our Christian duties are not arbitrary difficulties and obstacles placed in our way, but responses fitting to the love God has given to us.

In v22 we see that Peter argues from past experience to present duty. 'Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.' Purification is of course another way of speaking of salvation. Souls speaks about the deep and fundamental overhaul that we experience in regeneration as the very core of who we are is cleansed and renovated. This conversion happened we are told 'by your obedience to the truth.' We have said before that obedience to the truth is one way the bible speaks of responding to the gospel. We see in Rom. 10:16-17 that obeying the gospel is a synonym for faith, 'But they have not all obeyed the

gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"

¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.' This must not lead to confusion by thinking that we are saved by obedience. No, we must insist that saving faith is not a meritorious act or a giving act, but a receiving act. But accompanying this act of receiving God's gift of righteousness in Christ is a submitting to the truth, repentance from sin, taking Christ as our Lord and King. We must keep distinct faith as a receiving act even though it is accompanied by these other acts which can be summarized in terms of obedience. The reason I think Peter phrases it this way in this context is to highlight that if we are saved by the truth, it is only appropriate then that we love in truth, or with sincere love as he puts it. If we are saved by truth don't live a lie. What does it mean to love sincerely/in truth. It means to love from the heart and not only outwardly in a hypocritical way. It means to love with deeds not only empty words.

Please notice that we are saved for love, for the good works of walking in love. We are saved to do good works, especially love. Getting saved is very important, you cant go to heaven without it, but we must not neglect what we are saved to do. We are saved to love.

Peter uses the word Philadelphia in the Greek which we translate as brotherly love. The peculiar love that fittingly flows from salvation is especially love of other believers. John in 1 John makes this a test for salvation. 1 John 4:7-12, 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.' because we have the most important things in common, and because of the Spirit putting these new desires within our hearts, this is what all Christians will do. However, Peter having to command us to love one another also implies that the remaining sin in our hearts can cause us not to fulfil these new desires and duties. And so in 2:1 he will list the things that are opposite to love.

Peter calls us to love earnestly/strenuously. We have no better example than Christ who on the night He was betrayed washed His disciples feet as a demonstration of what it means to love as He loved us. To willingly take the servants part as He did.

Peter adds a second motivation to love in v23, 'since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.' If being purified by truth should lead to loving in truth. Then being birthed and Fathered by God's word should lead us to imitating our Father in His love and obedience to His word as good children. Peter is of course referring to regeneration. If you are not born again you are not a Christian. Peter deliberately uses the word for born again/begetting which describes the Father's part in procreation. God birthing us by His word is a common idea, James 1:18, 'Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.' It is as we hear the truth of the gospel that the Spirit uses the sword of the word of God to save us. He causes us to be born anew and this newness manifests as the faith and repentance we are called to.

The logic behind what Peter is saying is quite simple, if a bad, weak person makes, let's say a car, you would expect that car to be faulty, to bear certain faults because of the power and the character of the person who made it. As believers we have experienced a resurrection to life, we have been birthed by the perfect parent, by the living and abiding word of God. Living refers to its ability to give life, and abiding is describing the irresistible outcome of God's will and promises. The same word by which God speaks the universe into being, this He used to make you a new person fitted to walk in holiness and love. This God became our Father and made us as children in His likeness to walk in His ways including love. Adam's seed was perishable/corruptible, he begot children and they died. God has begotten us by a living and abiding word. The applications for this life are many, you could think of how the life we have from God's birthing of us cannot die and so persecution cannot take it from us, and this could encourage us to push on despite how strong our opponents appear and how many set backs we experience in this life. We can endure because our life cannot be snuffed out. We will outlive our enemies. Peter is using this truth to encourage these believers to see themselves as a family under one Father. We are to pursue brotherly love because we have been made brothers and sisters to one another forever by God's eternal word. Love your forever family that God has miraculously birthed you into.

Peter quotes Is. 40:6; 8 to reinforce the nature of the power of God's word that has given us this new life. In the original context Isaiah was making a promise to Israel who were going to experience exile. God was telling them that He would restore them, He would fulfill His promises to them, His promise; His word is greater than the exile they would suffer. He was asking the Israelites to place their faith in His word. Peter is saying that these believers who have experienced the gospel are living in the fulfilment of those promises. The great restoration that God was promising after the exile was actually pointing to the great salvation that we have in Christ, 'And this word is the good news that was preached to you.'

How love grows

2:1, 'So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.' Peter has given the positive commands and motivations to love; now he gives the negative side. Peter commands them to put away those things that prevent and oppose love. It has been pointed out that the sins mentioned here are not the crass; criminal and openly violent sins of the worst parts of society but rather those subtle ones that religious people partake in.

Peter describes 5 sins that we should put away. The words put away/ get rid of means literally take off like removing a soiled garment. These can be viewed as part of the old life that we shed when we become believers. The gospel should be our motivation for removing each of these from our lives. Firstly, malice, this is that wicked intent with the desire to do ill. That cold willingness to see another harmed in some way. Christ did not have malice towards us wishing us ill. In fact He loved us when we were deserving of judgement. His willingness to suffer what we deserve acts like cold water on any desire in our hearts to hurt another. Secondly, deceit. Paul sees our new family oneness as motivation to put away lying, Eph. 4:25, 'Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.' We are no longer children of the father of lies but of the Father of truth. Thirdly, hypocrisy. We are not to put on a show because of a fear of man or to win

praise, we are to be truthful in our love for God before others and not be two faced towards our neighbors. This would include not being nice to their faces but then speak ill of them behind their backs. Fourthly, envy. This is that heart attitude that is grasping and cannot stand to see another blessed. Envy cannot tolerate to hear another praised, or promoted, or experience good without wanting to bask in their blessings. Envy even turns to wishing ill on others growing malicious. And fifthly, slander. Slander is weaponized speech which does so much damage. It can use the truth or lies, but as James warns the tongue is a fire that does terrible damage. I think we are too accustomed to running our brethren down, I am always very convicted by the WLC on the ninth commandment. It looks at the duties required and the sins forbidden, here is the answer on the sins forbidden by the ninth commandment, 'Q. 145. *What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of the truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstruing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any; endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.' If slander our neighbour's name in our own hearts, thinking ill of them, it will spill over into our speech.

Peter not only tells us what actions and attitudes we must put away to allow love to flourish, he now goes on to talk about how we grow love, v2, 'Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.' Any parent who has had to endure a hungry child screaming in the middle of the night can appreciate what Peter means when he says crave like a new born. A baby is desperate for milk, and cries and goes red in the face that you think it might die if it is not fed. That is the strength of desire that we are to have for the word of God. We are not simply to be partial to the word of God, but desperate for it. For it is the word that is our milk, it is the word that cause us to grow like nothing else can. It is the word that will mature our love from a real love to a deep love, from sincere affection to sacrificial servanthood. The reason the bible encourages love is because the love of God, the love of Christ, is the central message that is found on every page. In no other book do we find the revelation of God as He shows His love for sinners. There is no other book that is called the sword of the Spirit. This is a critical means of God's grace to bring about transformation in our lives as we are renewed through the renewing of our

minds. It was said of Charles Spurgeon that if you pricked him his blood would be bibline, well this should be true of us too. It is the man who meditates upon the word day and night that will experience prosperity and blessing. It is those who hunger and thirst that will be filled. How is your diet of God's word, are you getting your daily bread.

What is the balance of your diet, think about how much time you spend thinking God's thoughts after Him, when reading His word compared with how much time is spend thinking about other things. If we continue to nibble on things that curb our spiritual hunger, if we continue to over-stimulate our flesh that spiritual exercises such as studying the word seem boring, if the only hunger we are experiencing is for the things of this world, we need to take hold of ourselves. Self control and self discipline are the things that are needed. We must put away the things that quench our thirst for God's word. We must protect our spiritual hunger and longing, but we cannot do this while gratifying every whim of the flesh.

And what is Peter's final motivation in this section, it is found in verse 3, "if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." Freely we have received therefore freely we should give. We have been loved better than we deserve; therefore we should love others better than they deserve. It is as we live daily on the knowledge of God's immeasurable love that our hearts will be shaped to love in a similar fashion. We should seek to be loving because God has put that love in us; we should seek to deepen our love for this is fitting given the way by which we are saved; we should put away sin because it contradicts love; we should hunger for God's word because we will benefit from the growth. But Peter saves his greatest motivation for last, we should be loving and hunger after God's word because we have tasted his goodness. Strive to be loving by feeding on the word because God is so good to us. let us respond in gratitude and willing obedience for he has done so much for us. So "love one another deeply from the heart".