

Week 7 - Live Lovingly - 1Peter 1:22-25

Scripture Reading: 1John 3:11-19

Introduction

Believe it or not, this is our seventh sermon in our study of Peter's first letter, and today we will be finishing up with chapter 1 of the letter

I hope you have been enjoying our walk through the letter and found it as informative and beneficial as I have

We began seven weeks ago by looking at Peter's opening salutation in verses 1 and 2

Then we spent three weeks looking at verses 3-12 which tell us about the characteristics of our great salvation

Then we spent the last two weeks looking at how we should respond to the reality of our great salvation

In verses 13-16, we saw that we should live holy lives

In verse 15 [**1Peter 1:15**], Peter commands: *"As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct."*

And in verses 17-21, we saw that we should live reverent lives with verse 17 commanding [**1Peter 1:17**]:

"If you call on him as Father...conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile."

So, really, verses 13-21 tell us how followers of Jesus Christ are to conduct their lives in the presence of God

Of course, living holily and reverently will have an effect on our interactions with others because none of us exists in a vacuum, but the main focus is living properly before God

In our passage today, however, Peter's focus shifts as he addresses for the first time in his letter specifically how we, as Christ-followers, should live with one another because of our common salvation

And in verses 22-25, Peter tells us that we are to live lovingly toward each other

Before Kathy and I were married, we went through pre-marital counseling with our officiant, as most Christian couples do

I remember how, in one of our counseling sessions, the pastor asked me to define "love."

Being put on the spot, I had to think far too quickly and, failing to come up with a compelling answer, I responded,

"Many men far wiser than I have endeavored to define love over the centuries and failed, and I believe it would be foolish for me to try to define it on the spur of the moment like this."

I thought that was a pretty clever response that would surely make him think and get me off the hook - but, nope

He just told me, "Nice try," and proceeded to teach us about biblical love

Our world talks a whole lot about love without really understanding all that much about it

For some, love is all about feelings; for others, love is a biological action and reaction; for still others, love is a bargain where the love they show is only reciprocal to the love they receive

In general, our world views love as a very self-serving thing, and people claim to love each other only as long as they feel it benefits them in some way, and when those feelings disappear, they no longer love

But that's not biblical love, and it's not what Peter is talking about in the verses before us

This morning we are going to see that the love we are to demonstrate toward one another as Christ-followers is tied to our salvation and that love is to have certain characteristics - all because of the eternal nature of God's Word

Since we have God as our heavenly Father, we are part of God's spiritual family

And because of our love for God, we also have the ability to love our spiritual brothers and sisters the way we should

Beginning in verse 22 [**1Peter 1:22**], Peter says that **affection is an extension of salvation**

I. Affection is an extension of salvation

Having sincere brotherly love for other believers is a mark of being a Christ-follower

Peter says as much in the first part of verse 22 [**1Peter 1:22a**] as he sets up the indicative part of his argument saying:

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love...”

Remember, Peter’s original audience was experiencing all the pangs of being sojourners in exile here and suffering for their faith in a society that is hostile toward them

And, like birds of a feather, those who were saved and being faithful to the commands to live holily and reverently that Peter has just written about in verses 13-16 naturally have affection for one another

Peter states that the obedience of his audience is to the truth which some argue refers to their obedience to the gospel which resulted in their salvation

However, “obedience” is never used to indicate belief in the gospel anywhere else in the New Testament and Peter has just used it in verses 2 and 14 to indicate obedience in conduct so it’s likely that’s what he means here

That indicates that he means his readers were obeying the way of life that pleases God with the result being they were experiencing ongoing progress in gaining moral purity subsequent to their salvation

We see James use the idea of purification in that same way in **James 4:8** which says:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

And John also uses it in the same way in **1John 3:3** which reads:

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

And the context here is Peter’s call to holiness that we see in verse 15, which suggests that the purifying obedience he has in view here results from an active response to that call

Also, believers are never said to be active agents in the cleansing of their souls at the time of salvation - that is a work of God alone - while here Peter clearly says the purification he is talking about is the result of the activity of his readers

Therefore, it seems most likely Peter is saying that they are active participants in the progressive work of their salvation

Paul speaks to this ongoing process in the life of a Christ-follower in **Philippians 2:12** where he commands: *“work out your own salvation...”*

And Peter says that this “brotherly love” is a component of the process of sanctification and he says that it isn’t simply a feigned or even false affection but rather it is “sincere” or genuine

There are also two different senses in which we can understand the beginning word of verse 22 - “having”

One way would seem to be natural in that this purification resulting in sincere brotherly love has already been accomplished

The other is that it is speaking of a state that will occur but may or may not yet have occurred

If we understand Peter to mean the second sense of the word, a passable translation of the first part of the verse would be:

“Once you have grown in holiness so that you have a genuine affection for one another...”

Either way, Peter’s meaning is that the condition he describes, when it is attained, results in the command that follows

And we see that command in the final part of verse 22 [**1Peter 1:22b**]:

“...love one another earnestly from a pure heart”

It’s interesting that Peter switches Greek words for the word “love” when he gives the imperative that follows the indicative

In the beginning of the verse where he describes the condition that triggers the command he uses the Greek *Philia* which indicates brotherly love or affection

But when he gives the command he changes to the Greek *agape* which is a strong, deep love

And he goes on to use some descriptive terms that tell us how we are to love one another

II. How believers should love

The first adverb Peter uses is “earnestly”

A. Earnestly

Looking at Webster’s 1913 dictionary we find that the root word, “earnest,” means:

“Ardent in the pursuit of an object; eager to obtain or do; zealous with sincerity; with hearty endeavor; heartfelt; fervent”

And our Greek lexicon defines the Greek word Peter uses here as:

“Pertaining to an unceasing activity, normally involving a degree of intensity and/or perseverance”

We find the exact same Greek word used by Luke in **Acts 12:5** after James had been put to death by Herod and Peter was imprisoned and presumably being held for execution and Luke writes:

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Imagining the kind of prayer that was being offered up by the church in the wake of one of their number being executed and another who seemed about to be should give you a sense of the word “earnestly”

The prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is referred to by a form of this same word as he strained so hard in prayer that he literally had droplets of blood break through his skin to mix with his sweat [**Luke 22:44**]

“Earnestly” pictures a stretching out or an intense straining to accomplish something - in this case to love others

What Peter is commanding here, in the authority of the Lord, is for Christ-followers to stretch themselves to the utmost without ceasing in loving their fellow Christ-followers

And Peter then goes on to say that we must love purely - or “from a pure heart”

B. Purely and genuinely

The literal meaning of the word Peter uses here is “clean” or “not dirty”

It’s used in that sense in **John 13:10** where Jesus taught that the one who has bathed is completely clean and may only need to have his feet washed

And when we think of a pure heart we think of a heart that is free from ulterior motives or guile or hypocrisy or deceit

King David wrote about his desire for this kind of heart in **Psalms 51:10** –

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

And the fact that Peter tells his readers to love from their heart indicates that this love should come from who they are at their core - it’s a love that proceeds from their innermost being - it’s genuine

Next, Peter indicates that we must love mutually and sacrificially

C. Mutually and sacrificially

The “one another” of Peter’s command indicates that our love is to be reciprocal and not one-sided

However, the duty to love isn't dependent on being loved in return - to believe so is to fall into the world's deceitful definition of love

The fact that Peter uses the *agape* to describe the kind of love he is commanding shows that we are to love as God loves **1John 4:8** tells us not only that *agape* is a defining characteristic of being a follower of Christ but that God himself is *agape*

And **John 3:16** introduces the element of sacrificial love when it says "For God so *agape-ed* the world, that he gave his only Son..."

Agape is the kind of love that is produced simply because the object that is loved is so precious

The love in our passage isn't conditioned on anything except the fact that the person is a child of God

Every one of God's children is precious in his sight because he ransomed them with the precious blood of his Son and so they should likewise be precious to us and we must be willing to engage in self-sacrifice for their benefit

Even if they don't love us back in the same way or even at all

That's a tall order, isn't it?

But, the fact that God commands us to do it should encourage us because God never commands us to do something that he doesn't also make possible

And Romans 5:5 tells us that loving the way Peter commands us to love is possible because it's empowered by God - let's look at the last part of that verse together [**Romans 5:5b**] –

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

See what that says?

God poured his own love into our hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit and that means we can love like God loves

Does that mean it will be easy? Hardly.

Loving the way Peter commands is going to require a lot of work on our part

See, love is an action; it's a thing we must choose to do not a thing we simply feel

If *agape* was a feeling we would be off the hook because we don't exactly control our feelings - we feel like we feel

But we choose what we do

We aren't animals that act on instinct and there is always a choice that we make even if it's fleeting and barely noticeable when we act

Loving in this way is a matter of the will and the reality is that we don't always want to do what God wants us to do

And even when we do want what God wants we often have difficulty doing it

Paul wrote about that in **Romans 7:15-20** where he laments over his carnal tendencies that get in the way of doing well

As long as we wear these earth-suits of flesh we are going to have to do battle to do what God wants us to do

That's why Peter preceded his imperative with the indicative that shows us how we can begin to mold our will to do what God desires by "*having purified [our] souls by [our] obedience to the truth*"

See, Peter didn't say his readers were being sanctified by obedience to a command or a set of commands but by obedience to the truth

And as we allow the Word of God - the Truth - to permeate our lives and submit to it in obedience, we will find that we are progressively more and more able to love in this way because the Holy Spirit is better able to work in and through us

Next, Peter turns to support for the command that he has just issued but, I have to admit, his reasoning seems a bit confusing when one first reads it because he seems to veer onto a rabbit trail about the word of God

Let's see if we can make some sense of the point Peter is making which is that we must love as he says because our fellowship is an eternal fellowship

III. Because our fellowship is eternal

Look with me at verses 23-25 which make up the "because" portion of Peter's argument

He says that once a Christ-follower attains the level of sanctification whereby they have genuine affection for one another they need to take their love to a new level and love one another earnestly from a pure heart and then he writes:

Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

When we read the first word of verse 23, "since," that alerts us that Peter is about to give us support for what he has just said and then he goes on to stress the permanent nature of the new life that is given through the word of God

And he writes that we must love as he has indicated "because" we have been born of imperishable seed through the living and abiding word of God

No one is saved apart from the activity of the Word of God whether it be the written Word or the proclamation of the Word in a presentation of the gospel message - without the Word of God no one would be saved

Peter then quotes from **Isaiah 40:6-8** as he stresses the character of God's words

God's Word is imperishable

Jesus made that plain in **Matthew 24:35** where he taught:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

And not only will it last forever it is also living and abiding

The author of Hebrews supports this statement in **Hebrews 4:12** –

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And Peter says that the Word of God is the "seed" by which we are born again

Of course every person who has ever lived has been born of perishable seed and therefore has a life that will end - because the seed is perishable the birth it generates is perishable because the birth shares the character of its source

But, when one is born again they are born of the imperishable, living, abiding seed of the Word of God making their second birth eternal and living and active

So, rather than being tied to the physical laws of decay and death, the spiritual life that is implanted by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God is tied to the eternal nature of God himself

Then, in the last sentence of verse 25, Peter ties his readers to this same living and abiding word of God by saying [**1Peter 1:25b**]:

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

This makes it most likely that Peter is stressing the fact that our lives cannot be self-centered and individualistic because when we were born again, we were born into a fellowship that will remain for all eternity

And precisely because the new life is eternal and supernatural in its origin and essence, it must find expression in love for our spiritual siblings that is also supernatural and eternal

Conclusion

Peter's teaching here isn't all that surprising

After all, Jesus commanded his followers to love one another and taught that this love would be a hallmark of a Christ-follower in **John 13:34-35** –

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

But, let's be honest, loving like Peter commands is difficult because it goes against our natural inclination

And let's face it, not every believer is a big ol' lovable fuzz-ball and we would likely prefer to endure a pulled muscle than spend time with some of the members of the body - it would be less painful

We've talked about how what our culture does becomes the norm and eventually what is normal begins to seem right

And the same is true when it comes to defining and practicing love and we have the propensity to love those who we like or those who love us in return

Jesus taught against this tendency in **Luke 6:27-28** when he commanded those who followed him to:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you”

Then he expanded on that theme in verses 32-36 saying [**Luke 6:32-36**]:

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

The kind of love that is demonstrated in spite of everything that cries out against it is the kind Peter and Jesus say we must have

And we can only show that kind of love by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit because it's a supernatural love

But loving sacrificially doesn't just happen - it's still a matter of the will and we must work at obeying the command to love

And I think God puts unlovely people in our lives to teach us to love as he loves the same as he sends us frustration in order to teach us patience

In the last part of our passage Peter pointed to the gospel message by which his original readers had been saved

And reflection on the gospel tells us how God set aside our unloveliness and bent down to show us his supreme love

So the gospel should motivate us to love others as God loves us not only as our example but because it's through the gospel that we have the ability to love at that level

Those things that separate believers may look large today but they will perish as the grass and fall away like the flower of the grass but our fellowship in Christ will abide forever

So let's let that be what is important to us and strive to live lovingly toward each other

Let's pray

1John 3:11-19 (page 1002)

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him