

1 Peter 1:22-25 | “Born Again to Love”

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If there was one group in the world who shared their hearts with each other, shouldn't it be the church? If there was one group in the world who sacrificed for each other, shouldn't it be the church? If there was one group in the world who loved each other deeply, shouldn't it be the church?

The answer is, “Yes, it should be,” *but* that's not always the case, is it? So where's the problem lay? It's certainly not in God or His Word, for he is perfect and Scripture commands us to love one another. It's in us. It's in Christians, who still struggle with sin, and who need continual reminders to spur them on to love and good works.

That's exactly why we need the command to love one another because it takes intentionality, effort, and reminding. It doesn't always come easily to love others. If loving others came effortlessly, why would he even have to give the command?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

It is Scripture that teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains us in righteousness, so that we are equipped for good works. And so that's what this morning's passage is supposed to do in our lives, it's supposed to snap us out of our lack of love for others, and get us going, loving others well. No matter if you have failed at loving others like you should, or even if you have been getting better at it recently, we all need the reminder to love one another this morning.

God's command for us, given through Peter's letter is this - **Love one another earnestly!**

It's so simple, yet so profound - so simple, yet so difficult. The command to love one another is so simple that a child can understand it, yet it's so hard to do that the most mature Christian still struggles to do it well. And that very directive is the directive that we will unpack today.

Peter has spoken all about our salvation, and then he said, “therefore,” meaning, in light of our great salvation, we should live differently. And he has been giving us commands, and so he told us to set our hope on the grace to come, to be holy like our Father is holy, and to conduct ourselves in reverent fear of God. Now he gives another command: love one another earnestly.

So the prior passages dealt with more of our individual Christian lives like our hope, our holiness, and our conduct. But now he moves into talking about our relationships with others in the church community. This shows us that God cares about our personal hope, holiness, and conduct, but he also cares greatly about how we treat others.

And so our text for this morning tells us to love one another earnestly. But if you consider our passage for this morning, that's not all that it entails. For the command to love one another is

sandwiched between two reasons for why we can love this way, and that's what I want to talk about first...

### **I. Why we can love this way**

As I have said in earlier sermons in this series, the Bible's commands are grounded in grace first, and we see that once again with this command to love one another. We can't just muster up the ability, strength, and motivation to love one another in ourselves without God's aid, but we actually need God to work first. We need His enabling, and the motivation that only comes from Him.

If you look there at the command to love one another at the end of verse 22, all you have to do is look a little bit before it and after it, and you can see these reasons for how we can love this way.

The beginning of verse 22, "Having purified your souls...love one another." And then the end of verse 22 into verse 23, "love one another earnestly...since you have been born again." There you go, there's your two reasons, as simple as that, right? Well we need to dig deeper, don't we? It's one thing to hear these reasons, it's another to understand them and understand how they enable us to love others.

Peter is big on your identity in Christ. Throughout his letter so far, he has been stressing our new identity. Now that we have become Christians - we are temporary residents in this world, born again, those called by God, children of the Father, and ransomed believers in God. And in light of this new identity, we ought to live differently than we used to.

We no longer live like this world is our permanent home. We no longer live according to the evil desires of our old lives, or according to the futile ways passed down from generation to generation. But rather, we live with hope, faith, joy, and love. We live persevering through trials, knowing the glorious good coming. We live with minds set on hope, and conduct in line with being a child of God. We live hope-filled, holy, reverent, and loving lives. This is what it's supposed to look like to be a Christian!

That's what Peter is pushing us towards - to be who you are, to live in light of your new identity. You are different now, so live differently. You are a child of God now, so live obediently. You have hope now, so live with a mind set on hope. So now as we look closely at our passage, we see that "identity change leads to conduct change" concept once again.

The first reason that we can love one another is because we have purified our souls by obedience to the truth. 'Purified' here reflects the cleansing and forgiveness received when we believe the Gospel. And actually, that's what we see come out in this passage, for the obedience to the truth causes our souls to be purified. This obedience to the truth is belief in the Gospel.

If you think about it, faith is inherently obedience to the truth, it is a positive response to the truth. Unbelief on the other hand is rejection, rebellion, and disobedience to the truth. At the

beginning of Romans in Romans 1:5, Paul says, “we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* for the sake of his name among all the nations.”

You hear the Gospel and you are confronted with the question, ‘Will I believe and obey it, or will I reject it?’ Faith means I’m submitting to the truth and obeying by placing my faith in Jesus Christ. It’s then that our souls are cleansed, purified, forgiven.

And this purification is a decisive act in the past that has continuing consequences, meaning, we have purified souls in the sight of God, and as we continue to obey the truth, we are continually being purified from sin. This is what we know as salvation and sanctification.

Everyone responds to the truth of the Gospel, either you obey the truth or you rebel and disregard it. What has been your response to the fact that you are a sinner, your sin deserves punishment, but Jesus died for your sins and took your punishment, and then rose from the dead? There must be a response of faith to the Gospel!

This obedience to the truth actually shows us one perspective of conversion - our response to the Word. And we will see the other perspective in the next reason that we can love others.

Significantly, that’s not the end of what he talks about when it comes to purification. This purification of our souls that comes from our obedience to the truth has a purpose. One of our purposes of being saved is “for sincere brotherly love.” We are saved to have genuine love for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

God has made us into a family, that’s what he intended us to be. This is important for us to always remember - we as a church body are a family. We are an assembly, but not just an assembly. We are a community, but not just a community. We are a *family*.

What this means is that we don’t love other Christians *as though* they were brothers and sisters, but we love other Christians because they *ARE* our brothers and sisters! Our souls are purified FOR sincere brotherly love because we have all been placed into one family. We are a family, and it’s like God is saying, “I’ve adopted you all. You are brothers and sisters, so now reflect that and love each other!” Do you treat those in our church as family? (I’ll talk a little more about that later.)

We can love one another because our souls have been purified by obedience to the truth, but a second reason we can love one another is because we have been born again by the living and abiding Word of God.

To be born again is to have the Spirit give you new, spiritual life. This is the other perspective of conversion that I was talking about. There must be a response of faith on our side, but there is also God working in our lives to change our hearts and give us new life at salvation. This is something that we can’t do at all, but it must be God doing it, and even our response of faith is a gift as he draws us to Himself.

We are told in this passage that this birth wasn't done with perishable seed. So nothing in the natural universe caused this birth, but the imperishable Word of God was the seed. The Word of God is like a seed that gets planted in our hearts and then produces new life. It's when someone hears the Gospel, and new life is formed.

In order for us to have imperishable life, we have to have an imperishable seed give us life, and that seed is the Word of God. It is living, giving us new life. It is abiding, enduring, and eternal, giving us eternal life. And Peter uses an Old Testament quote from Isaiah 40 to remind us that all flesh is like grass that withers and fails, but the Word remains forever.

I wish I had more time to talk about this enduring Word, but for this morning, we are simply reminded that His Word never fails. His Word gives eternal life because it is inherently enduring.

What we study from and learn from every week is not some temporary fad from a fallible book, but it's the living and abiding Word of God! We don't come here to hear motivational speeches. We don't come here to hear the opinions of men, or some self-help tips, we come here to hear from God's living and abiding Word!

What we need and what the world needs most is the life-giving, love-empowering, and lasting Word of God. Don't ever turn away from it, but depend on it! It is sufficient!

So just like our lives will endure forever because of the enduring Word, so our love for others should endure. With both of these reasons, purification of our souls and our new birth, the call to love is rooted in our conversion! That's the only way we can truly love others! Love for others is a *result* of being forgiven and given new life. Our new identity change enables us to love others, that is, it gives us the empowerment to do it.

In 1 John 4:7 it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." Love for others comes from being born again. And that means that love for others cannot be based on our first birth, but our second birth. What I mean by that is that loving one another cannot be done through simply natural human effort because we will continually fail. But rather, it comes from the supernatural work of God, so we must continually rely on His Spirit.

Our purified souls and new birth actually gives us new motives, new thoughts, and new actions. We no longer live for ourselves. We no longer live according to the world's standards because we have been born of God. New life brings new conduct.

Unbelievers can love others to some degree, but not to the degree as Christians. How often do you see the world sacrificially love someone totally unlike them? How often do you see the world sacrificially love someone that sins against them and hates them? What do you hear instead? They say, "Love yourself," and "Cut toxic people out of your life." But Christians are called to love that's different and deeper. We are to love others, and we are to love even our enemies.

The only way that people so different from each other can love each other earnestly is because the Gospel has changed them and given them a new life with a new heart that has new desires. And Peter is telling us this morning, ‘You have been purified, you have been born again, so live in line with your new identity!’ It’s like Peter is telling us, “You are a fish, so swim!” It’s who we are! It’s not merely imitation, but living in accordance with our new nature. So center and align your actions on your new, enduring life.

It’s kind of like this: Imagine if when I became a pastor, I didn’t preach. You would say, “You are a pastor now, so preach!” So that’s a little like us, but vastly deeper, as it’s not just a new role or position, but a new transformed life. Your identity has changed, so now live in accordance with it! Love others! Be who you are!

I think a part of the reason that we don’t think this way is that too often we view salvation as merely a decision and that’s it. And it is a decision, as it’s a response of faith, but it’s more than that, it’s a whole new life, a whole new transformation. You have been born again and purified! God has given us the ability, empowerment, and motivation to love others. Because we think of our new birth and remember also that God so loved us, so we can love others like he loved us.

So those are the reasons for why we can love this way - it all goes back to the miraculous work that God has done in our lives at the moment of salvation, our identity has changed. And when we look further at this passage, we also see...

## **II. How this love is described**

In 1986, a 20 year old man from Maine left his house, walked into the woods, and lived there 27 years straight. The man’s name was Christopher Knight, and for 27 years, he lived all alone by himself in the woods. He didn’t live in a house or even in a cabin, but he lived in a tent in the woods and lived off of stolen food and items from nearby cabins. For all of those years, the only conversation he had with another person was a hiker, who he simply said ‘Hello’ to.

Christopher Knight’s hermit-style life in the woods made me think about our lives as Christians. As Christians, we may not walk into the woods and live there for decades. As Christians, we may not avoid contact with all people for years, but how often do we avoid the necessary work of loving others? And in that way, many believers may not be a literal recluse, but a ‘love recluse’.

You see, Christopher Knight’s life revolved solely around himself. He interacted with no one, thought about no one else, and loved no one outside of himself. Is that the kind of life that Christians are called to? Are we called to a life that loves no one outside of ourselves? Certainly not. Rather, God calls us into community, into a family, where we are to intentionally and consciously love one another.

Peter gives us a command, “Love one another earnestly.” The fact that this is a command should get our attention because it means that loving other believers is *not optional*. It’s not something

that is to be done merely by the people who *really* want to be involved in church or the “super-spiritual” people. It’s not something that is to be done, if you have some extra time.

There are no exceptions given. It doesn’t say that you have to have a certain spiritual gift to do this, or even a certain spiritual maturity. It doesn’t state that loving others is to be done only if you feel like it or want to do it. It doesn’t say that we are to love others if they are loveable or if they love us back. It simply says, “Love one another.”

He makes it clear that it is a Christian’s responsibility to love one another, yet I wonder how many Christians are derelict in this duty. How are you doing at loving other believers in the church body? Do you do it at all? This is a command! If you are not loving others in the church, then you are disregarding a clear command of God. So let’s all wake up out of our slumber, and make sure that we are living according to our responsibility as a Christian. I want you to understand that this is one of your responsibilities. Even Jesus says in John 15:12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

So it’s a responsibility of ours, but that doesn’t make it easy. Just the fact that Peter has to command this implies that it doesn’t come easily. It will be hard. It will take your time and effort, but it’s essential. What excuses do you make in your mind to not love others? Do you even think of it as your responsibility? We can and must love one another - love should dominate our relationships with other believers.

Now in this passage, there are no exceptions given, but there are attributes given to describe what this love looks like. In verse 22, he talks about how our souls are “purified...*for* a sincere brotherly love.”

This brotherly love is family affection. Since we are all brought into the family of God, then there should be a family-type love for one another. In a family, there is affection, love, and care. We must see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ because that’s what we actually are. But how often do you view the church in this way?

I’ve said this before, but I think that we often view others in the church as more like fellow volunteers, fellow co-workers, or acquaintances. Most often, other people in the church body are more distant than family. They are like acquaintances or friends who we tend to keep at a distance. But the Bible presents our relationships as deeper than that.

The church should be the very place that we have some of our closest relationships. It should be the very place that you openly share your struggles, sorrows, and heart. The church should be a place where when you are having your hardest moments, you feel like you could call someone up and they would be there with a listening ear and comforting words. But here’s the thing: you should feel that way about calling others, but others should feel that way about calling *you*.

So many times, we feel like others need to seek us out, love us, and show affection to us, but we aren’t willing to step out and do it for others! If you want to be loved and to love others, then

take some initiative and go and talk to someone you don't know well yet. We expect everyone else to do, but we aren't willing to do it ourselves.

So our love for others is to be brotherly love because we are in a family, but it is also "agape" love. When Peter tells us to love one another, he uses the term "agape," which is an unconditional, deep, and chosen love. This is love that doesn't simply come from family affection, but comes because you deliberately choose to love someone.

Often, people connect love with feelings, but love is a choice. Just as God chose to love us when we were sinning against him, so we should choose to love others, even when they are unloving towards us.

It's kind of like marriage. At the wedding ceremony, you are actually making a life-long commitment where you choose to love and be faithful to another person. So as fellow Christians, we are to choose to love others, and we are to make that commitment to do it regularly.

How else does Peter describe this love that we should have? It should be *sincere*. That is, our love for others should be genuine and without hypocrisy. Your love for others should not be a show, it should not be something faked, or something done to simply impress others. Rather, it should be sincere and genuine love for other people. Like, 'I genuinely love you, and so I'm going to do this for you.'

No one likes a hypocrite, yet I wonder how often people fake their love for others in the church. How would you feel knowing that someone was showing love to you just to look good in front of others? Not good at all. In fact, if love is insincere, then it's not really true love. It would probably be extremely hurtful if you found out that someone was faking their love for you.

Just apply that to your spouse. Imagine if you found out that your spouse didn't genuinely love you, but was faking it. Wow, that would hurt.

We need to sincerely love others, but also, we are to love others *from a pure heart*. Now this characteristic is similar to being sincere. I don't just outwardly appear to love others or outwardly profess my love for others, but from a pure heart, I love them. We don't display love to others to get something in return. We don't demonstrate love to others with an evil intent, but we really love them out of a pure heart.

Do you genuinely love others? Or is it all a show? Is it simply a facade that you put on around other people? Is it done merely out of duty? That is also not in sincerity or out of a pure heart, either. Let's show genuine love for one another.

As Peter continues to describe what love for others should look like, he shows us that sincerity isn't enough, though. We should also love others *earnestly*. The idea here is love that is fervent and constant, a love that is intense and deep.

Could that characterize your love for those in the church body, or could it be characterized by the *opposite* of those attributes? What's the opposite? Unenthusiastic and passionless, kind of like apathetic, where you either don't love others, or you show no excitement about loving them. Kinda like that person where you can tell they are simply doing it out of duty.

What are some other opposites of the kind of love we are talking about? Superficial and shallow. This is where you fake it, or your love for others is very shallow and on the surface level only. You are willing to love others, as long as it's at arms length. You are willing to love others, as long as you don't have to open up with them. You are willing to love others, as long as you don't have to sacrifice too much or do anything too hard. That's not the kind of love that we are called to show! Our love should be earnest! It should be fervent, intense, and deep, where you are willing to put great effort into it.

That's the thing - this kind of love takes effort. It takes intentionality, where you are regularly thinking of the needs of others, and willing to sacrifice for them. Don't wait for others to love you, you go out and love others and take the initiative - that's what fervent love does.

Our love for others should be a normal part of our lives. Do you love people deeply and earnestly from the heart? Do you actually show that love? Think of that person on the other side of the sanctuary that you never talk to, why not love them in some way? Think of that person who you would think has nothing in common with you, why not step out and do something for them?

There are thousands of ways that love can be shown to others, but let me just give you a few ideas to get your mind going. I could give different ones, but because COVID limits our options, I'll keep them geared toward our current situation.

You could send someone a card, but not just a card by itself, for you could include a very encouraging note in it.

You could give someone a call, and not just talk about shallow things, but talk on a deeper level. Ask, "How can I pray for you? What have you been struggling with lately?" You could ask, "I know that everyone has many things to do, so think over your to-do list items and please tell me one or two that I could do for you."

You could buy some groceries or essential items and drop them off randomly and say, "I was just thinking of you."

Instead of asking, "Let me know if you need anything," simply say, "I want to bring you a meal, so what day is best to drop it off?"

Think of the most impactful things that people have done for you, where you felt very loved, and that may give you some ideas. Often the most loving things are things that are sacrificial and/or thoughtful.



Don't just limit yourself to the ideas that I said, either. You can be creative. Think outside the box with how you show love. And each situation is different depending on the people involved.

We are called to love one another earnestly, but are you doing that? To just come to a church service, sit in your seat, say "Hi," to a couple people, listen to the sermon, go home, and live the rest of your week for yourself is not what God calls us to. That is not what true Christianity looks like. Rather, yes, we come to church services to learn and grow, but it's more than that. It's being in the Word throughout the week, it's encouraging others with truth, it's loving other people deeply, it's using your gifts in the church, and serving the Lord.

The church in America has been infiltrated and plagued with a consumer mindset. It's this mindset where church is all about what *I* get. It's this mindset where I come simply to hear a sermon, and as long as the sermon doesn't challenge me too much, then all is well, I'll be back to *get* more. As long as they sing the songs that I prefer and do things how I like them, then I'll be back, and if not, I'll look for a church that gives me what I want. But is that the picture in the Bible? Definitely not.

Of course, there is an aspect of receiving and getting, where you are hearing sound teaching from God's Word. You are growing from these things because the Word is taking root, but that's not all. Church is also about giving of yourself. It's about giving, loving, serving, sacrificing, stewarding. It's this mindset, where we think, "How can I encourage someone else? How can I step up and serve? How can I use my gifts to serve others? How can I love someone today?" Paul says to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12:15, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls." Imagine if we each had *that* mindset when it came to church?

Now when it comes to loving others, I understand realistically that there are many things that vie for our attention throughout the week. You need to fix that leaky sink, you need to do laundry and dishes, you need to go to work, you need to invest in your own family, etc. And also, I know realistically that you can't demonstrate love to every single person of the church body all in one week, so spread it out. Maybe you could focus on 1 person per week. "I'm going to fervently love this person from church this week, and then choose a different person the next week." Or maybe it's, "I'm going to show love to these 3 people this week."

The Bible gives us a glimpse into one way that the early church showed love to one another, as it says in Acts 2:45, "And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." They were thoughtful and sacrificial. They thought of others' needs and sacrificed their possessions for others, who needed it.

I know that this isn't always easy. It takes effort, intentionality, thoughtfulness, and sacrifice, but it's what God has called us to. Other believers are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And just because you have failed in the past doesn't mean you can't obey and faithfully love others now. In fact, Peter's purpose in even giving this command is to wake us up, and get us going in our love for others. So let this passage do that in your life, let it be a time of rededication to love for others in the church body.

Yet as we think about these things, we remember that in ourselves and our own power, we could never love others like we should. That's why we need God's enabling power to give us the ability and motivation to love one another like we should. We need Him. We need His Spirit. We need His aid. So trust Him, rely on His power, and love one another earnestly.

*(The sermon actually spoken may be slightly different than the sermon manuscript.)*