

Some Things Should Never Change

In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 5

1 Peter 1:22-25

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Because we are in a new family and under a new and lasting authority we dare to follow the command to love one another with sincere, fervent and intentional love.

Discussion Points:

In v. 22 we see that the foundation of our love for one another is anchored in our salvation from death to life. In other words, having been saved by means of the truth of the gospel and cleansed by the purifying work of the Holy Spirit, the believer actually has the potential *now* to love other people with the right kind of love.

- There are plenty of people outside of Christ who talk about love. Is it possible for someone who has rejected Christ to truly love someone? Why or why not?
- In John 13:35 Jesus says that, “all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” What does this imply about those who do not follow Jesus?
- Explain as best you can why obedience to the gospel is necessary for sincere love to exist.

Because of our standing in Christ we have been given the ability to love with a sincere love. Given this reality we are commanded to love one another fervently. This kind of love is not a feeling but an act of the will of the heart. The good news is that we have been given new hearts.

- What does insincere love look like? It is true that we all are guilty of this type of love at times. Think of a concrete example in your own life where you have loved without sincerity and confess this to the group.
- We are commanded to be fervent in our love for one another. This implies that we will be stretched beyond where we are comfortable. What specific attitudes or interests in your life would keep you from loving this way?

Discussion Guide cont.

- Our love is not a feeling. It is an intentional act of the heart that is produced by the Holy Spirit. Give specific examples of what our church would look like if we loved this way or how it is already doing this well.

Gospel Connection:

It seems impossible to love some people. There are some people that simply do not have any redeeming qualities and we feel no affection for them. However, we are commanded to love as Christ loves. He loved us even though there was nothing redeemable about us. In salvation the focus isn't on us but on His indescribable love. This is how we love others and this is a testimony to the world that we are truly His disciples.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** We are commanded to love everyone that has come into our life, especially those who are in Christ. Think about people this way, not as obstacles in your way but as objects of Christ exalting love.
- Pray:** Ask God to supernaturally stretch your capacity to love others. Be watching for how he will do this.
- Do:** Think of at least one person in your life that it just seems impossible to love. How are you going to obey the command to love this person in your life? It will only be by the Spirit's enabling but think of concrete ways that you can begin obeying this command.

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In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 5

I Peter 1:22-25

One of the members of our elder team gave me some time ago a copy of the magazine edited by Charles Spurgeon in the late 1800's. Spurgeon was the renowned pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle for many years in downtown London. The Magazine is called, *The Sword and the Trowel*.

I'm holding in my hand an original copy, dated February, 1887. It includes sermons, devotionals and advertisements.

I found it interesting that Spurgeon listed the names of every donor to his pastor's college and orphanage and then beside their name, listed the amount they gave that month. That's what you call, high pressure fund raising, to say the least. I also found it very interesting to read all the advertisements in magazine, which no doubt funded the publication.

130 years later, these advertisements were interesting to read: for instance, inside the flyleaf is an advertisement for Keating's Cough Lozenges which promises, "Absolutely the best remedy ever made for coughs, asthma and bronchitis – strongly recommended by the most eminent doctors and sold everywhere."

There's an advertisement for a new washing machine – which of course is hand cranked – but it promises "magical effects in your cleaning."

There's an ad for a stove called a Kitchener – which makes me wonder if that's where we got our word kitchen from; anyway the Kitchener stove promises "to use half the coal to cook your meal and it cures your smoky chimney." I noticed in fine print underneath a drawing of the stove, there is a testimonial that, "Mrs. Charles Spurgeon is pleased to use a Kitchener for herself."

Then there are advertisements for a Swedish Seaweed liquid treatment that "immediately cures lung problems"; there are several ads for baby food that "promotes the formation of firm flesh and bone."

There are advertisements for dress patterns, for calico and flannel suppliers and also, I noticed, a

number of advertisements by Pearl Soap, "the finest soap in the world for your complexion."

One full page ad says, "Grasp this startling fact! Why drink inferior tea? The United Kingdom Tea Company provides the finest tea in the world. Of course, now it's at Chick-fil-A."

Across the page is an advertisement for Beetham's Capillary Hair Fluid which is "unequalled in preserving hair; arresting it from falling out." (I should have had mine arrested – but it's too late).

How times have changed. The medicine now seems so primitive, along with the hand cranked washing machines; coal heated stoves and the fashion designs. How things change.

In fact, in the world of fashion, things change in your own life time – your tastes change too.

A few weeks ago, my wife and I were with some other couples and we were recalling how we met each other back in the day – and some of the details of those first dates.

We laugh about it now, but my wife well remembers when I showed up for our first date – I was taking her to church – how spiritual is that? I've been taking her to church ever since.

I walked to her dormitory to pick her up and I put my best foot forward . . . I showed up wearing my best suit – it was a heavy wool, navy blue suit with thick mafia-style pinstripes – and never mind that it was 95 degrees outside, this was my best suit! I also had on my favorite dark blue dress shirt – so I had on a dark blue pinstripe suit, with a dark blue dress shirt – and then I had on my solid white necktie made of 100% polyester – it would glow-in-the-dark. You paid extra for that. And I was wearing my favorite blue and crème saddle oxford shoes.

When she opened the door to greet me, she nearly fainted. I figured she was really impressed.

Several years later, she told me what she *really* thought about that first date: she said, "Stephen, when you showed up, I really wanted to *be* with you, I just didn't want to be *seen* with you." What I've put her through!

I do take some comfort in the fact that Charles Spurgeon, the pastor and editor of this magazine, made the same kind of impression when he arrived at a London church to preach for the very first time – the church he would pastor for many years. At the time of his first visit, he also was around 19 years old.

A teenage girl in the congregation that Sunday happened to recall how Spurgeon’s appearance was terribly distracting – if not comical. She wrote in her diary that night – and I quote – He wore an oversized black satin coat and his [mismatched] blue handkerchief in his breast pocket had large white polka dots; and he used his handkerchief as an illustration, calling all the more attention to it. He awakened in me feelings of amusement.ⁱ

Within two years Spurgeon asked that girl to marry him – and she accepted – I imagine on the one condition that she would pick out his clothes from then on.

So many things have changed from the publication of this little magazine 150 years ago – from medicine to fashion; but when it comes to that which defines us as children of God, some things should never change.

There is this unique distinctive which sets us apart from our world – and it has nothing to do with the matters of fashion or hygiene or medicine . . . it is a matter of the heart.

It was first published 1,900 years ago – written by the Apostle Peter – and it’s as true today as it was back then.

We call that publication, First Peter, – so take your copy and turn there and let’s rejoin our study as chapter 1 comes to a close.

1 Peter 1 . . . notice **verse 22**. *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23. For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.* (As if to say, through the living – and never-out-of-date – word of God.

Now these verses are actually one long sentence. But you might circle or highlight the primary verb in that sentence, around which everything finds its place – there at the end of **verse 22** is the phrase – **love one another**. Underscore that singular imperative – that command.

From the time this was written, 1900 years ago, these are truths that have never changed.

Now before we get to the command to love, let me point out the foundation of love. In other words, without this foundation, you can’t really love, like Peter is describing.

1. The Foundation to Love

And the foundation is described here in **verse 22 as obedience to the truth** and the **purification of the soul**.

The phrase here, **obedience to the truth**, is first and foremost a reference to the gospel and to our salvation.

In **2 Thessalonians 1:8** Paul warns the unbeliever who does not **obey the gospel**. To the Ephesians, Paul identifies **the word of truth** as the **gospel (Ephesians 1:13)**.ⁱⁱ

Even Peter, later on in this letter, refers to the unbelieving world which **does not obey the gospel of God (1 Peter 4:17)**.

It’s helpful to understand that the word for obedience here is a compound noun which combines the words for *listening* and *under* – *listening under*.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, obeying the truth is another way of saying that you have attentively listened to the gospel and then submitted to its command to repent and follow Christ.

So Peter is effectively saying that if you haven’t come to love the gospel of Jesus Christ, you’ll never really be able to genuinely love anyone else.

Now Peter mentions also here in **verse 22** the foundational element of a **purified soul**.

Again, this is all synonymous with spiritual conversion.

Here it might sound like the believer is the one doing the purifying of his soul, but that would be both physically impossible and biblically incorrect.

Peter uses a tense for this participle for being **purified** that informs us of a past transaction. Peter refers to this past moment in **verse 23** – **notice, for you have been born again**.

In other words, there was a moment in the past when your soul was purified; when you were spiritually born again – made alive – through faith in Christ; when you turned from sin and trusted in Christ alone – and you were born spiritually; Peter calls it here, **born again**.

So you’ve been born once, physically – but you were **born again**, this time – spiritually, when you were saved.

And Peter pictures it here in *verse 22* as that moment in the past when you had *your soul purified*. In fact, the tense of the verb for purified means that this purification was in the past, but it has continuing results in the present.^{iv} We were purified by God's Spirit . . . through the blood of Christ, as Peter has informed us; and now we need to act like it.

Ezekiel the prophet looked forward to this spiritual reality when he prophesied of what God was going to do for believers in the New Testament covenant: he writes: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ezekiel 36).*

In other words, God's Spirit cleansed your soul from every sin at the moment you were saved; and He gave you a new heart and He even now inhabits you as His living temple.

He has permanently changed your status – your identity in Christ; it's permanently and eternally changed:

from lost to saved;
from corrupt to incorrupt;
from fallen to rescued;
from to corrupt to cleansed.

Now . . . choose to demonstrate the demeanor that best communicates your identity. And how do you most effectively demonstrate the demeanor of a new heart and the Spirit of God within you?

It won't be the soap you use or the clothes you wear or the medicine you take or the stove you use in the kitchen . . . it will be the love you have for the brethren.

Before we get to the specifics, let me turn this foundational truth around a bit to reflect it a little differently.

Genuinely loving other people demands obedience to the truth; which means, if you're going to genuinely love other people, you can't obey yourself; you can't listen to your inner urges; you can't be obedient to your inner feelings, or bound to follow the example of other people – you obey the truth of God's standard of what it means to live and love like a Christian.

This is going to exclude pride, and impure desire, and self-centered grudges, and prejudices, and resentments – everything that is corrosive to the soul.^v

So let me summarize it this way: having been saved by means of the truth of the gospel and cleansed by the purifying work of the Holy Spirit, the believer actually has the potential *now* to love other people with the right kind of love.

And what will that kind of love look like, exactly?

2. The Command to Love

Three words surface in this passage that describes genuine love. The first word is *sincere*.

Notice *verse 22b* again, you have *purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren . . .*

Peter describes it as a *sincere love*. He uses the adjective *hupokritos* – which gives us our transliterated word, *hypocrisy*.^{vi}

He says literally, this is a love without hypocrisy. The *hupokriton* (which gives us our word, hypocrite) was the mask worn by the actors and actresses in Peter's day. The mask had an expression painted on it – it could be a frown or a smile – but the true feelings of the actors could be hidden behind the mask as they played their part on stage.

Peter uses that word here to describe the love of the brethren to be without acting. There are no masks. Nobody's pretending to love someone else, but hiding their true feelings behind the mask.

This isn't a handshake and a smile, but "I hope he doesn't sit next to me." This isn't, "Hey, how are you doing?" and I hope they don't tell me because I don't really want to listen.

Peter uses another descriptive word here – notice – *fervently love one another*. Sincerely . . . now, *fervently*. It isn't getting any easier, is it?!

In fact, the word he uses here for *fervently* is used only here in the entire New Testament. And it means, get this, it means, *fervently*!

Keep in mind, as you pursue holiness for the glory of God, other people are part of God's sanctifying purpose in your life.

One author put it this way; instead of struggling with the thought, I wonder why God is allowing that other person to bother me or upset me or hurt me; think instead – God is using that other person to sanctify me.^{vii}

And maybe you're thinking, that would really stretch me to think that way. Peter would agree. The background of this word is the world of athletics. You could woodenly translate it, *stretched out* love.

Just picture a football player on the sidelines before the game – or a runner before the track meet – stretching out their leg and calf muscles . . . stretching their arms in the air . . . bending and pulling and turning and pushing to the limit their muscle’s capacity to stretch. That’s the word here.

So, if loving someone has you saying to yourself, “That’s really going to stretch me to the limit . . . I’m probably going to sprain something . . . I won’t be able to move for a week!”

That’s the idea here. Love the brethren even though it takes you to the limits of your capacity.

Peter adds one more descriptive phrase – genuine love is not only sincere and fervent, but thirdly, **intentional**.

Notice again – *fervently love one another – notice – from the heart*. This isn’t external pressure, this is an internal principle.

A principle of spiritual life initiated by the indwelling Holy Spirit who grows within your willing heart the fruit of the Spirit and the first nuance of that *fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22)* Love from the heart.

The word heart is used as a designation throughout scripture for the center and core of your inner life – the place where you think and where you make up your mind.^{viii}

Which is why love can be commanded. And it can be commanded because agape – the word Peter uses here – “isn’t a matter of feeling, it is a matter of willing.”^{ix}

Agape will involve deep feelings and affection, but agape begins with a decision. Agape doesn’t wait for merit earned by the one who receives love; and agape doesn’t wait for inspiration.^x

- Agape is an act of the will – and the body follows through.
- Agape is a decision in the heart – and the hands and feet cooperate.

Throughout the New Testament, agape is the love God has for us – and we merited none of it. We did nothing to inspire His love or attract His devotion. In fact, while we were still sinners God demonstrated His love by sending His Son to die for us (*Romans 5:8*).

It’s hard to love the hard-to-love, but it is possible – because Jesus loves you . . . and me . . . and now indwells us by His Spirit to love the same way.^{xi}

We often overlook the fact that when Jesus Christ said to His disciples, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you (John 13:34)* – that Jesus didn’t first deliver that to the church in Jerusalem that numbered fairly quickly in the thousands. That would have been easier. It’s easier to be told by Jesus to love 3,000 people than a handful of people.

When Jesus delivered that command, He was sitting in the upper room, only hours away from His crucifixion – and he was looking into the eyes of 11 disciples.

Jesus was effectively saying:

- Peter, I know you and John have totally different personalities, but love each other.
- Andrew, I know how quick you are and daring and you rarely stop to ask questions, but Thomas over here is going to need facts and assurances and he’s a bit slower to take a step, so you two need to love each other.
- Simon the Zealot, I know how you hated the Roman overlords and any Jew who betrayed Israel was your deeply felt enemy, but there’s Matthew across the room who used to work for Rome as a tax collector in order to defraud his own Jewish countrymen – all of your lives, you’ve been on opposite sides of the fence, but now, you two need to deeply and without any mask or pretense, love one another.

Put it into action.

I love the little Peanuts cartoon where Schroeder, the kid who’s always playing that little miniature grand piano, he’s playing away and Lucy, who has been crazy about him forever, comes up and interrupts him and says, “Schroeder, do you know what love is?” And Schroeder immediately stands to his feet at attention and rather woodenly recites, “Love is a noun, a strong affection for, or an attachment or devotion to a person or persons.” And with that he sits back down and plays away at the piano. Lucy sits there, stunned, disappointed and then says somewhat hopefully, “*You know, on paper, he’s terrific.*”

Jesus doesn’t tell us to love by definition; He tells us to demonstrate love by application.

Now what Peter does next is reinforce the command to love by adding two more thoughts – or what I’ll call, two incentives to love.

3. The Incentive to Love

The first incentive to love is that the believer is in a new family. Again, *verse 23, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable.*

You have been born again – the perfect tense emphasizes that the new birth occurred in the past, with ongoing results in the present. And the chief result in the mind of Peter is that you love one another.^{xii}

You belong to the same family – and this family is going to last forever!

The 4th century Roman Emperor, Julian the Apostate, once remarked that Jesus had successfully implanted in the Christians the belief that they were related.

Minucius Felix, a Roman lawyer who lived in the 3rd century wrote of the Christians, “They love each other, even without being acquainted with each other.”

And we certainly do – for we understand, don’t we, the truth of John’s Gospel, *that as many as received Christ, to them He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).*

We are *children of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26)*. You’re in a new family. So love your brothers and sisters who belong to you.

You’re not only in a new family, secondly you’re under a new authority.

Notice verse 24. *For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable.* (Now Peter quotes from Isaiah 40) *For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass, the grass withers, and the flower falls off, 25. But*

the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.

Quoting from Isaiah 40 wasn’t coincidental. Peter didn’t quote it because it was just one of his favorite verses of scripture.

Isaiah 40 was given to Israel during their sojourning – during a discouraging time where they were resident foreigners – surrounded by social hostility.

And God is telling them and through Peter, the church, that God hasn’t forgotten His scattered people. He hasn’t overlooked their suffering. Even though it looks like the empire of Rome is going to last forever, it won’t – what will last forever is the word of God . . . the word of the Lord stands forever.^{xiii}

Medicines will change; fashions will change; what you feed infants and the stove you cook on will change. But the word of the Lord will stand forever.

We are in a new family and under a new and lasting authority – and because of it, we dare to follow the command to love one another with this kind of sincere, fervent and intentional love.

I close with the words of John Henry Jowett, a faithful pastor who lived more than 100 years ago wrote in his commentary on this text in Peter’s letter, “There is a love which is like an umbrella. There is a love that is like a great tent. There is a love that is like the immeasurable sky. The aim of the New Testament is the conversion of your umbrella into a tent; and the merging of your tent into the canopy of the heavens; so push back the walls of family love until they include your neighbor; again, push back the walls until they include the stranger; again push back the walls until they include your enemy.”^{xiv}

And with that, we will begin to love like our Lord loved us and gave Himself for us.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/11/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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