

## A Community of Love

1 Peter 1:22–2:3

I've shared this story before and so some of you have heard it. In the summer of 1995, Cindy and I were part of a team in Hungary with the ministry of Cru. We were running English camps as an outreach. During the summer we had the opportunity to get to know a Hungarian couple named Szabolcs and Katie who ran the facility we used. During our time there we learned that they were atheists, which wasn't surprising since they had grown up under communism. Over the course of the summer they were able to observe how our team of fifty staff and students interacted with one another. On one of the last nights there, they invited about some of the staff couples over to their apartment for refreshments and conversation. During that conversation, Szabolcs said an amazing thing. I don't remember word-for-word what he said, but it was something like this, "If you would take fifty Hungarians and have them live together and work closely like you have this summer, they would not get along. There would be fights. But you have worked together so well." And then he said this, "Because of how you have loved each other, I believe there might be a God."

When we, as the people of God, walk together as a community of love, it is a powerful thing.

As we continue in our study of 1 Peter, Peter is continuing to talk about the results of salvation. In our passage today, he will focus on our relationships with our brothers and sisters in the family of God and he will say that our salvation should create a community of love. Today we are looking at 1 Peter 1:22 through 2:3. And so Peter says that . . .

### I. **We are Called to Earnestly Love One Another** (vv. 22-25)

*<sup>22</sup> Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, <sup>23</sup> since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;*

The core command here is *love one another earnestly*. To love earnestly means that we have a self-sacrificing desire to meet the needs of others – a desire that is expressed in tangible acts of love. Now, Scripture calls us to love all people, but Peter's focus here is on *one another*, in other words, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to love one another *earnestly*. This word has the idea of fervency, constancy and effort.

Now, this command to love one another is modified by the phrases before and after it. These phrases express spiritual realities that have happened to believers, which enable us to love. First, *having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love*. Believers have obeyed the truth about Jesus – the gospel. And the result is that one's soul has been purified giving us the ability to express a *sincere brotherly love*. That love is *sincere* means that it is genuine. It's not hypocritical or fake. Jesus shed his blood for the purpose that we

would be enabled to love each other. And so since this is true, Peter commands us to love one another earnestly.

The second phrase that modifies the command to love is in verse 23. He says we can love one another *since you have been born again*. Before Christ, though we had physical life, we were spiritually dead. But when we trust Jesus, we are made alive spiritually. We are born again. And this new spiritual life, the life of God within us, enables us to love.

We have been born again, Peter says, of an imperishable seed. This *seed* is the life-giving message about Jesus. This *seed* has been planted in our hearts, and, because it is *the living and abiding word of God*, it will continue to grow in us enabling us to obey the command to love one another earnestly.

Now, in verse 24 Peter cites a passage from Isaiah 40:6-8. Isaiah is telling his audience to hope and trust in God, because anything that is merely mortal will ultimately fail. But not God's word. It will *remain forever*. He says:

<sup>24</sup> *for*  
    *"All flesh is like grass*  
    *and all its glory like the flower of grass.*  
    *The grass withers,*  
    *and the flower falls,*  
<sup>25</sup> *but the word of the Lord remains forever."*

And then Peter makes this statement:

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

Peter takes Isaiah's statement about the eternal nature of God's word and applies it to the word about Jesus. The word about Jesus, the seed that is planted in the life of a believer at conversion, is eternal. It will continue to grow and do its work enabling us to love one another.

And so we are commanded to love. And we CAN love since it is truth that our lives have been set apart by the truth purifying our souls, and since it is true that we have been born again with a living, eternal, spiritual nature, rooted in the very life of God. And so love one another earnestly!

Now, a lot of times when we think about biblical love we stress that it is a matter of actions not emotions, right? We should just decide to do what's loving regardless of how we feel. And this IS important because if we always wait to do what is loving until we feel like it, we'd never get there in some cases. But Peter is commanding more than acts of love. He is commanding that love should also be our desire. Our love is to be *sincere*, which means a genuine, unfeigned love. We are to love earnestly from a pure heart. God wants us to have a kind of love that wells up from genuine care and compassion. God doesn't want us to just do loving things; He wants

us to be loving people. And the only way that will ever happen is through the life of God that is at work in us. And if you are a believer in Christ, that life IS at work in you!

Do you love? Do you find in your heart an impulse to love other believers – and not just the ones that are easy for you to love, but also those that hard to love? Do you love them earnestly from a pure heart? This is Peter’s command. And when we do this, we build a community of love.

If you have no impulse to love other believers, this passage would demand that you take stock of your spiritual life. Have you truly believed the message about Christ? I’m not saying that loving others is easy or that you will always feel like it. But this passage is very clear that those who are truly born again and have God’s Word implanted in their hearts will have His character growing in them and God’s character is to love.

Now, there are all sorts of reasons why it is important that we love one another. Peter is writing to people who are exiles and who are facing various trials (1:6). Life was hard. They were suffering. A community of love was vital for them to help sustain them in such a time. We too are exiles in this world. This is not our home. But when we are together as believers, we are with our eternal family and to live as a community of love can sustain us in this world with all of its struggles and hardships and suffering.

As most of you know, we just finished sign ups for life groups. One of the reasons we do life groups is not just to keep you off the streets at night. We do it to create little communities where we can live out this command. We can’t love one another from a distance. We do it as we do life with each other. We are called to love one another earnestly from the heart. There is a lot at stake in obeying this command. We need the support of a community of love.

Now, as we come to chapter 2, Peter says that . . .

## II. **Our Ability to Love Grows when We Desire Spiritual Nourishment (2:1-3)**

<sup>2:1</sup> *So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.*

<sup>2</sup> *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—<sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

There is one imperative in this passage and that is to *long for pure spiritual milk*. But we see a connection back to what he has talked about through the connective “so” in verse one. If we are going to love one another earnestly, we have work to do. We need to *put away* some things. When he says, *put away*, he is using the language of taking off garments. And the things that we need to take off are these attitudes and behaviors that are destructive to relationships and Christian community.

And so Paul says we are to put away *all malice*. This is the most general term in the list. It can be translated “evil” or “wickedness.” Malice is destructive to relationships and so put it away.

We are to put away *all deceit*, which means to deceive by trickery or deception. Trust is violated when we deal with each other deceitfully.

Put away *hypocrisy*, which involves giving an impression of having certain purposes or motivations, while in reality having quite different ones. Hypocrisy would be the opposite of loving one another from a pure heart. It is the opposite of a sincere brotherly love (1:22).

We are to put away *envy*. This is an attitude of jealousy or spite towards another in light of what they have or their success.

Finally, Peter says to put away *all slander*, which means to speak ill of another. These are words that damage the reputation of another. We are to put this away.

It is pretty clear that where such attitudes and behaviors exist that a community of love is violated and destroyed, right? These vices are the very opposite of the love to which we are called. And so we must put them away. And as we are putting these we away, Peter says, in verse 2:

*<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—*

We are to *long for the pure spiritual milk*. This is the central command in these 3 verses.

Now, if you have an NASB your Bible says, “long for the pure milk of the word.” The NASB translators and most commentators understand that Peter is talking about the Word of God. And there are plenty of reasons in the context to understand this phrase in that way. Peter has been talking about the living and abiding Word. At the same time, we do need to understand that “of the word” is not in the original text. It simply says *pure spiritual milk*. And so it is possible that we should understand this phrase more broadly to refer to divine grace – to all things from God that sustain spiritual life. I’m open to this broader idea. I do think that God does nourish us in many ways. But I also believe that Scripture teaches that the Word is one of the central ways that God nourishes us.

Now, here’s an important point of clarification. In Hebrews 5:12-13 it talks about how “milk” is fitting only for the immature. It is contrasted there with solid food and so continuing to need milk, in Hebrews passage, is a negative thing. But that is not what is in view here. Peter is simply using a human experience that everyone understands – a newborn infant longs for milk that will sustain her life. This desire for milk is a characteristic of a healthy baby. All Peter is saying is that like a baby’s desire for milk, we must long for what truly sustains our spiritual life. God’s Word and all that God uses to sustain our spiritual life.

We do this, Peter says, so *that you might grow up into salvation*. As we pursue the nourishment of pure spiritual milk, it causes us to grow spiritually. Contextually, this would include putting off the vices that he has listed. And so longing for pure spiritual milk is connected to obeying

the command to love, because in being nourished, our lives are changed. We put off things that destroy Christian community and we put on love.

Now, one of the questions I've asked myself this week is how do I make myself long for pure spiritual milk if I don't have that desire? I don't think we can just make ourselves have desires. Desire is a response. I think verse 3 gives us some insight to this question:

*<sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

This phrase is written in such a way that it means "since" you have tasted. In other words they had tasted that the Lord is good, which is a quote from Psalm 34:8. Peter's point is that they had already experienced God's goodness. And this fact is to drive them to continue to crave more of that experience and to seek it.

If you lack desire, reflect on what you know about the Lord. He is good. Remember what you've experience from Him. Reflect on the cross and how God has loved you. He has saved you. He has forgiven your sins. It is remembering these truths that our stir our desires to pursue God.

Today, we are celebrating communion, which is one of those things built into our rhythms of worship that can stir up our desire for God because we are reminded that we have been re-deemed, as Peter said, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with precious blood, as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. As you taste the bread and the juice today let it remind you that you have tasted that the Lord is good. Let that stir your desire to seek Him.

We are commanded to love one another. And we CAN love because we are born again by God's eternal word. And if we are going to truly love, we put away vices that are destructive to love and the way we do that is by desiring and seeking spiritual nourishment through God's word and any way that God nourishes us. When we do this we will grow up into salvation and live more consistently with who we are in Christ. And that will help us to love from a pure heart. That will help us walk as a community of love.

Now, I think Peter is saying that we need to walk in a community of love because we need each other. Life is hard. And we need the support that a community of love offers. But I also want us to consider what love means in terms of our mission.

I started today sharing about Szabolcs and Katie. They were moved to consider God because they saw a community of love. We live a world full of Szabolcs and Katie's – people who have no interest in God. And we also live in a world that is so full of the darkness of hatred and divisiveness and self-interest. But, if we will truly live as a community of love then we will be an outpost of God in this world – an outpost shining brightly in the darkness. And I believe there will be other Szabolcs' and Katie's who notice and who are drawn to the light by our love.

As we come to communion today, certainly let the reminder of Jesus' sacrifice for you stir up your desire to seek him. But I would also encourage us to do some soul searching in this time. What does the world see when it looks at us? Does it see a community that loves one another earnestly? Or is malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy or slander in our lives hurting our community? If so, confess it. Ask God to help you put away such things and to truly love. Is there anyone in this community that you are not loving earnestly? I would ask that you would not let that continue. You may need to seek forgiveness. You may need to forgive. There is too much at stake to not be a community of love.