

FIRST PETER
Lesson 8**Love and the Word**

1 Peter 1:22—2:3

Often people ask me, “How can we know whether a person is a true Christian, since there are so many people who call themselves Christians, even referring to themselves as born again, who do not act very Christian?” We know a person is a Christian by his lips and life—by what he says and by what he does.

There are many evidences given in Scripture whereby one can conclude that a person is a true Christian, but in 1 Peter 1:22—2:3, there are two evidences mentioned specifically: the love for Christian brethren and a longing for the Word of God. These two outward works can be used to determine if the new birth has really taken place in an individual’s life.

We want to place this section of Scripture in the context of Chapter One. First Peter 1:13-25 is a basic unit of thought in which there are four commands in the Greek which stress certain products or attitudes that the Christian is to possess because of the great salvation God bestowed on him: “*fix your hope*” (1:13), which deals with our attitude towards the future salvation which shall be ours, “*be holy*” (1:15), which deals with our attitude towards separation from worldly sin, “*conduct yourselves in fear*” (1:17), which deals with our attitude about God and His judgment of Christians for the good and bad works done in this life, and “*love one another*” (1:22), which deals with our attitude towards our Christian brethren.

First Peter 2:1-3 seems to be closely connected to 1 Peter 1:22-25, in that the Word of God is mentioned again and the hindrances to true love for the brethren are set forth.

BROTHERLY LOVE (1:22)

“Since you have in obedience to the truth (through the Spirit) purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren”

These Asians to whom Peter was writing were true Christians. They had obeyed the truth of the gospel by believing in Christ (1:2). Consequently, they purified themselves. Peter is not saying that these Christians saved themselves by good works (purified themselves); he is stressing the human agency as having an important part in the saving of the soul. He is not referring to the first cause of salvation, which is God, but to the secondary cause, which is faith and repentance.

These Christians had turned away from sin to a life of purification and cleansing and thus purified themselves. This resulted in moral cleansing, for these were sinners who responded to Christ. “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded*” (James 4:8).

It is interesting to note that in some Greek manuscripts, the phrase “through the Spirit” was added between “obedience to the truth” and “purified your souls.” If this

translation is correct, then it shows the supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit in a person so he may believe in Christ and purify himself in repentance.

The result of these Asians being saved was “a sincere love of the brethren.” They were saved “unto a sincere love of the brethren.” This initial purging brought these Christians to a point where they actually had a love for the brethren. Their salvation in Christ had effectively changed them until they experienced a love for the Christian community. This was a “sincere” love which literally means it was non-hypocritical or unfeigned. This kind of love is not to be pretended or wordy, empty sentimental mush; it is to be real, active and vital. We are not to fake this kind of love.

The Greek word for love is *phila* which is a love of affection. It is a love that responds to love, a love of liking, fondness or human attachment. Apparently these Asian Christians, because of their common salvation in Christ, had come to the place where there was a real fondness between them, but Peter wanted it to be more than just fondness or affection. He wanted them to have a deeper kind of love for one another—the kind of love that does not operate on emotion alone but on commitment and obedience to the Word.

“fervently love one another from the heart”

This is a command. The word for love is *agapao*. This kind of love indicates unconditional love which does not hesitate to give love to an unlovely, unresponsive object. It is the type of love that sacrifices for another.

Peter is summoning these Christians to a higher type of love than affection (*phila*). He wants to emphasize a point. These Christians have a fondness, affection or attraction for one another, but they are to go beyond that type of love to a divine, sacrificial love that loves when there is nothing there to love. This *agapao* love is a love of commitment based on obedience to the Word of God.

These Christians were to love “fervently,” an athletic term meaning “to stretch out” or to go all out.” It is an energetic kind of love which takes effort to produce; it is to be entered into with full intensity. We have to work at it by God’s grace. Although it is supernaturally produced by the Holy Spirit, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love*” (Gal. 5:22a), we Christians must make diligent efforts to make sure this kind of love is in our lives.

“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, Christian love” (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

Agapao love is not to be from the head but the heart. It is not sentimental or emotional gush but a vital commitment to our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a love which will be felt because love is an emotion. As the old Scotsman said, “It is better felt than told.”

Our Lord said that this kind of love is what will distinguish true Christians from the world.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

The Apostle Paul said that the goal of all of his doctrinal teaching was to produce love in Christians. *“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5).* The Apostle John clearly states that when a person who professes Christ begins to see this kind of love show up in his life, he knows he is truly born again. *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:14).*

Kenneth Wuest says this about *agapao* love:

Thus, the exhortation is to love one’s brother because he is precious to God, and to love him with a love that is willing to sacrifice one’s self for the benefit of that brother, a love that causes one to be long suffering toward him, a love that makes one treat him kindly, a love that so causes one to rejoice in the welfare of another that there is no room for envy in the heart, a love that is not jealous, a love that keeps one front boasting of one’s self, a love that keeps one from bearing one’s self in a lofty manner, a love that keeps one from acting unbecomingly, a love that keeps one from seeking one’s own rights, a love that keeps one from becoming angry, a love that does not impute evil, a love that does not rejoice in iniquity but in the truth, a love that bears up against all things. That is the kind of love which God says one Christian should have for another.

BORN AGAIN THROUGH THE WORD (1:23)

“For (because) you have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable”

The “for” should be translated “because” and this gives the reason we can produce *agapao*, divine love. All Christians have been born again (twice born) by means of the sovereign work of God. It is the new birth into the family of God which gives the basis for love and a sense of belonging to God and one another. It is God who brings about the new birth in the soul of an unregenerate sinner.

“Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).

“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures” (James 1:18).

The perishable seed speaks of our physical birth by physical parents, which perishes and corrupts. The imperishable seed may refer to the Word of God, *“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11)*, or to the divine life which has been implanted in the soul of every Christian, *“No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).*

“For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Pet. 1:4).

It seems better to see this as the new birth where an individual receives the very life of God by means of the Word.

Christians can love with divine love because they have been born again. Because of the new birth, because our hearts have been changed, because we have the very spiritual nature of God in us, we can now love with divine love. Before Christ, all of life was self-centered. We loved ourselves, we thought in terms of ourselves, everything revolved around “I, me and mine.”

But when Christ came and we experienced the new birth, our thoughts began to go out to others because that is our new, divine nature. Like Father, like son. We have the eternal seed in us and this will produce eternal results. We are what we are because of the divine nature in us. We can now reach out to people in need regardless of their educational level, economic level, color of skin or various idiosyncrasies, knowing that the very love of God is undergirding us.

The new birth makes it possible for us to love in a way we never loved before, a divine way. We now can forgive and forget when our brother sins against us. We now can accept a person as he is, not only as we would like him to be. We can now overlook flaws in one’s character or personality because we know the life of God is in him as well as in us.

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

I once asked a woman about how she became a Christian. She said that she came under conviction and knelt down on her knees to pray. While praying, she fell asleep. Before this time she was not a born-again Christian. God brought the new birth to her while she was asleep.

“That is, through the living and abiding word of God.”

Divine life is implanted into the sinner’s soul by means of the written Word of God (James 1:18). Peter states that the Word is “living.” It is alive; it is active and can have such a profound impact upon the soul of a Christ-rejecting sinner.

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

The Word also abides forever. Everything else in the world may pass away, but the Word will not. *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).*

In our evangelism of the lost world, we must get people to the Bible. It will be the Holy Spirit using the written Word that will bring men and women the new birth. We must not get people enamored with our personalities or methods or intelligence, but we must get them to the Word of God, and then God will do His sovereign work in the salvation of a soul.

BLOW TO MAN'S PRIDE (1:24-25)

“For, ‘ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF”

This is a quote from Isaiah 40:6-8 to show that everything man produces and prides himself on is temporary, fleeting and transitory. Even man himself is corruptible and dying. All that man prides himself on—his wealth, his rank, his intelligence, his talents, his beauty, his learning, his forms of government, his art, his science, his philosophies, his religions and his splendors—will pass away as grass which fades and withers.

“BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDES FOREVER.”

The Word of God endures, remains forever. It is unmoved, fixed and permanent. Amidst all the revolutions on earth, the fading glories, of natural objects, and the wasting strength of men, God’s truth remains forever; it’s beauty never fades; it’s power is never checked.

The Bible is just as relevant today as it was 4000 years ago. Kings, rulers, prime ministers, presidents, have perished; kingdoms and countries have ascended and fallen, but the Bible stays God’s Word forever. In fact, the Bible is the only thing we can trust in this day of religious decay, economic disaster and political unrest. Yes, the Word of the Lord abides forever because it has eternal significance.

“And this is the word which was preached to you.”

This was the gospel that entered the hearts of these Asian Christians because they were regenerated. It seems that the word “gospel” has a wider connotation than just the basic truths of Christ and Him crucified. It includes all the truths related to the basic subject of Christ.

BARRIERS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH (2:1)

“Therefore . . .”

The “therefore” begins another unit of thought but it also refers back to 1 Peter 1:23 where it was stated that the Christian has a new spiritual life or nature by means of the Word of God. In light of the new life, a new kind of experience is expected of a Christian. Having been born again through the Word, we must now grow by the Word of God in our Christian experience.

“putting aside”

These words could be translated “strip off,” as a filthy garment. Peter is about to list some sins which keep the Christian from loving his brothers and hinders his spiritual growth. They are to be stripped off like a filthy garment. They are to be put away.

This probably is an *ingressive aorist* tense in the Greek and could be translated, “begin to put aside once and for all.” There is a great need in every Christian’s life to be

cleansed daily from sins, for no day goes by in which the Christian is not plagued with moral defilement, either in action or thought.

As Christians, we now have the potential, because of the new birth, to say no to sin and to tear it out of our lives. Christianity necessitates a separation from sin. The desire of the Christian is to cleanse himself from all sins in this life through the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, but in experience this is a lifetime process. Nevertheless, we are to “strip off” all sins in our lives; we are to put sin to death.

“all malice”

Peter is going to list five sins which keep the Christian from loving the brethren and hinders one’s growth in spiritual matters. Malice is a settled ill will, a mean disposition. It is “having it in” for a person, being irritable, touchy and defensive. It is tough to be around this kind of person because you must guard every word and walk on egg shells so as not to get a reaction out of him. Attempting to get close to this kind of person is like snuggling up to a piece of sandpaper—he continually rubs you raw. God says, “Strip this malice out of your life”

“and all guile”

The word “guile” actually means “to catch with bait.” It implies deceit, trickiness, deceptiveness and treachery. It involves misleading people, not being open and honest. God says, “Put out guile from your life!”

“and hypocrisy”

This is a Greek word which means “to speak out from under a mask.” It was a drama term used in the Greek theater. To portray different emotions actors would pick up the appropriate mask, depicting happiness, gloom, discouragement or whatever. The face that was displayed would not depict the true attitude of the person behind the mask. This is hypocrisy; it is being two-faced. It is pretending to be something we are not. It is putting on a false face or mask. It is acting out a role which really does not fit us. Christianity requires that Christians should be open and above board. Their lives should be like an easily read book. God says, “Tear off hypocrisy from your life!”

“and envy”

Envy is to want what another person has—his clothes, his occupation, his car, his mate, his brains, his money or whatever God has blessed him with. God says, “Rip off envy from your life!”

“and all slander”

Slander is speaking against a brother, defaming him. Backbiting of any kind which would tear down another’s character is to be put to death. God says, “Strip off slander from your life!”

These five sins are defiling and they blunt our taste for the Word and inhibit our appetite for spiritual things.

BASIC NOURISHMENT FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH (2:2-3)

“like newborn babes”

Peter does not say that these Asian Christians were at a babyhood level of maturity in spiritual matters, but he wants to draw an analogy between the hunger a baby has for milk and the hunger a Christian should have for the Word of God. This figure of the newborn babe was probably taken from Isaiah 28:9.

“long for the pure milk of the word”

These Christians were to desire the pure, unadulterated milk of the Word. This is a command and a *constantive aorist*, looking at one’s need for the Word for one’s whole life. The words “long for” mean an intense desire, an insatiable hunger for the Word of God. As an infant who longs for the milk of a mother’s breast, so we Christians should have an intense, earnest longing for God’s holy Word.

What kills the desire for the Word? Sin! Sin destroys the appetite for the Word; therefore the Christian must begin to put away sin as mentioned in 1 Peter 2:1. Remember, a healthy infant is a hungry infant. A spiritually healthy Christian is a hungry Christian for the Word.

“Milk” is a basic nourishment and it is used in this context to refer to the pure Word of God. The Word of God is pure, unadulterated, that is, it has nothing added to it.

Peter wants all his readers, whether they are beginners or veterans in Christianity to act just as newborn babes in regard to their longing to be nourished from the Word. As a baby longs for nothing but its mother’s milk and will take nothing else, so every Christian should take no spiritual nourishment except the Word. *“Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).*

Christians are to long for the pure, unadulterated milk of the Word; that is, the Word itself. It is good to read books about the Bible—they should not be ignored—but primarily we are to read the Word itself. There is a supernatural aspect to the written Word of God. We must go to the Word because it leads us to Jesus Christ and His will for us.

“that (in order that) by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”

This phrase is very poorly translated. The word “grow” may be “thrive.” A good translation might be, “in order that by it you may thrive unto full salvation.” Peter tells these Christians that the way to grow up to and thrive in full salvation is to take in God’s Word, the spiritual nourishment, for the soul. How then do we grow spiritually? We read, meditate on, and obey God’s holy, inspired Word.

*“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”
(2 Pet. 3:18).*

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Bible is our basic nourishment, and without a consistent intake of Scripture we will be unhealthy and stunted Christians. Surely these verses tell us how important it is to have a quiet time where we are reading the Bible devotionally. Do we set aside time daily to read, ponder and memorize God’s Word? No Christian would ever think about going a week without eating food because the result would be weakness, and if the situation continued death would result. Yet, there are Christians who go days and sometimes months without opening their Bibles. Then they wonder why they are so dry spiritually and why they are not happy Christians and why they are not basking in the blessings of God.

The Bible is our basic nourishment. It is good to hear sermons; it is good to read Christian books, but there is absolutely no substitute for personal Bible study in which the Scriptures are read devotionally for truths to apply in one’s personal life. Only as we get into the Bible for ourselves will we grow in respect to salvation.

“if (since) you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

These Christians had initially tasted the Word when they were converted and they found the Lord to be kind, good and excellent. However, they are to continue desiring to know the Word of God that they might experience a full salvation.

Tasting the Word of God initially and going on in the Word are two separate actions. It is through the devotional study of Scripture that we Christians are known as disciples of Christ. *“If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 3:31b).*

CONCLUSION

If you are not a Christian, let me ask you one question: Do you want to be born again spiritually into God’s family? If your answer is no, then I have nothing more to say to you except what Jesus Himself said to that self-righteous, religious man, Nicodemus: *“Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3b).*

But if you desire to be born again, I would direct you to Jesus Christ, God’s dear Son who came to give man the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It is through Christ that a person realizes he has been born of God.

The Bible says, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).* God is the one who causes the new birth, and we know the new birth has come to us the moment we believe that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead to be the Lord and King of our lives. You will never experience the new birth until you bow your will to Christ. When you do this, then, and only then, will you know you have been born into God’s spiritual family.