

“Loving One Another – A Real Possibility?”

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

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Ron had been swindled!

He and a trusted Christian friend had built a business together.

For several years it was enjoyable and successful, very successful.

When Ron came to me it was several months after he had learned that his friend and business partner had embezzled so much from the company that the company went bankrupt and Ron with it.

His partner somehow avoided criminal prosecution and appeared to be getting away with the entire scheme.

Ron and his wife came to see me at his wife's insistence because Ron was obsessed with revenge.

Refusing to get on with life and get a job, he spent night and day strategizing.

He neglected his family; he blamed everyone including his wife and God for not helping.

And he used all the assets not taken in the bankruptcy in his attempt to gain his revenge.

His bitterness was palpable.

He ate, breathed and slept revenge.

In spite of offers of help from many others, and me, Ron withdrew from his friends, lost his home, left his family and dropped out of sight.

The injustice Ron suffered was huge.

He was deprived of his livelihood, stripped of his assets, and worst of all, the injustice was perpetrated by a close friend.

My example is rather excessive but not totally unfamiliar to some of you.

Most of us have been hurt, even deeply hurt, by another person.

And the deepest hurts are inflicted by those we know the best.

Can you put yourself back in touch with one of those times?

Maybe the hurt is going on right now or maybe it has been partially buried by time.

I don't mean to reopen old wounds but I do mean for us to have a sense of the relevance of the issue the Apostle Peter is addressing in our text for today.

In his letter, that we call *1 Peter*, he begins, as we have seen in recent weeks, with a great reminder of our relationship with God.

1 Peter 1:1-2 "To God's elect...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."

God chose us not for anything he saw in us, but purely because of his love.

He brought us out of the death of sin and eternal destruction by giving us new life through the Holy Spirit.

And he made that possible by cleansing us from our sin by the substitutionary and sacrificial death of Jesus.

Not only that, he has also given us a future that is guaranteed by God's own power.

1 Peter 1:3-5 "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."

We have a living hope and an inheritance with God that can never be taken away.

I can't take the time to re-preach the first three sermons, but those texts are powerful and essential reminders to us of this relationship we have with God – it is all by grace and it is more important and valuable than anything else in life.

In the next major point of the letter, as Pastor Luebcke reminded us last week, Peter says as a result of this awesome relationship and future we have with God we are to live our lives imitating God.

God said, "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:13-16 "Therefore,...As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Transforming our character, changing us, is a major goal of Christ's redemption of us.

God purpose is not just taking people to heaven; his purpose is to shape us to be like Jesus.

Ephesians 5:25 "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy."

Hebrews 13:12 "to make the people holy through his own blood."

400 years ago Robert Leighton said it is this way:
"Redemption and holiness are undivided companions" (Robert Leighton, 1 Peter, 98)

With that background, we come to our text for today.

Please stand for the reading of God's holy Word.

With this call to holy living, to imitating God, Peter gives his first command of what that holy living looks like.

Please read it with me:

1 Peter 1:22 - 2:3 "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For,

"All men are like grass,

And all their glory is like the flowers of the field;

The grass withers and the flowers fall,

^{1PE 1:25} But the word of the Lord stands forever."

And this is the word that was preached to you.

^{1PE 2:1} Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

PRAY

I want you to notice that there is only one imperative, one command, in the first two verses.

Do you see what it is?

"Love one another deeply, from the heart."

To imitate God, to live an increasingly holy life, the very first example Peter chooses is what? Love one another!

Come on Peter! Surely there are bigger issues than that.

Why didn't you say, "To live a holy life I want you to stop stealing, or stop murdering or committing adultery, or dishonoring your parents"?

I haven't done any of those things, at least for a while, and therefore I like to think that I'm well on my way toward holiness, toward being like Jesus.

The whole culture places taboos on the big sins.

But where we struggle is down underneath in our attitudes.

We don't have much trouble loving the whole world.

When people we don't know offend us, we usually get over it quickly we just don't care.

And we don't have much trouble loving all Christians.

Our trouble is with particular Christians.

So Peter goes straight to the heart of all our other actions – love one another.

Love for one another is the greatest evidence of the genuineness of our relationship to God.

Jesus said, John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The Apostle John wrote, 1 John 4:8 "Whoever does not love does not know God"

Wasn't it Jesus who said that the summary of all the commands of God is to **love** the Lord your God with all you heart and **love** your neighbor as yourself?

Love is the intended nature of the church (and the individual Christian) and love is the means we have to convince the world of the gospel.

I think there is another reason why Peter mentions love first as the example of holy living.

Remember to whom he is writing.

These people were living in a culture hostile to Christianity.

1 Peter 1:6 “you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

Isn't it likely that the greatest “trials” they faced were from those they knew best;

that the greatest hurt was from friends and family who now shunned them or even betrayed them?

Isn't it also likely that even among themselves there were offenses and hurts?

Would they really have been so different than any other group of human beings, including us?

In that same context Peter wrote, 1 Peter 1:6-7 “you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine...”

God intends that the hurts we experience, maybe especially the hurts from one another, are the very means he uses to prove the genuineness of our faith.

Again from Leighton, “Forgiving injuries argues the truth of your piety.” (Leighton, 99)

He also wrote that people “are subject to great hypocrisy this way, and deceive themselves; if they find themselves diligent in religious exercises, they scarcely once ask their hearts how they stand in regard to love for other Christians. They can come constantly to church, and pray, and at home too, and yet cannot find it in their hearts to forgive an injury.” (Leighton, 99)

This ‘love for one another’ is the best starting place and even the best summary of what it means to be holy as God is holy.

And so God commands, “Love one another deeply from the heart.”

That word “deeply” can be translated “fervently,” or “earnestly” as with great effort.

In Acts 12, using the same word, it is recorded that while Peter was in jail, his fellow-Christians prayed “earnestly” for him.

Acts 12:5 “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

It’s the kind of prayer you offer when your child is deathly sick.

Peter says I want you to have a fervent, earnest, worked-at love for one another.

That’s not natural!

That’s right. In fact it is so unnatural that when non-Christians observe it among us they are amazed.

John 13:35 “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

What does that love look like?

One cannot help but remember the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 “Love is patient, love is kind... (It) rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.”

Or Philipians 2:3-4 “In humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

I think I prefer passive love because it demands so little of me.

Even if someone has offended me, the easiest is to offer a kind of forgiveness and then simply move away – “relational homicide” I’ve called it at other times.

But God calls us to an active, deep, fervent, earnest, effort-filled love.

Oh my! Is that possible?

Before attempting to answer that, I want you to see that Peter describes this love by showing its opposites.

If you are going to love one another this way there are some attitudes and actions that will have to go.

1 Peter 2:1 “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”

I wish Peter had begun by saying “Therefore rid yourselves of all smoking, drinking, gambling, dancing, bad movies, and vulgar speech.”

What they are to rid themselves of are not the normal bad habits that we so easily criticize in others, but the community-destroying and relationship-destroying vices of which we are often guilty. (Davids, 80)

We may not use God’s name in vain or worship idols, or sleep with our neighbor’s wife, but we hold grudges and speak ill of our Christian brothers and sisters.

It is the **first** word on his list that also makes me think that Peter is talking about loving even those who have hurt us.

He says, “Rid yourselves of all malice.”

Malice is ill will. Malice is not usually explosive; it is an internal, slow-burning desire for something negative to come to the other.

Malice can even lie behind our good actions.

Therefore he also says to rid us of deceit.

Deceit is acting with ulterior motives.

Then there is hypocrisy.

In this case it is pretending to be respectful and loving but inwardly wishing or even aiming to hurt them.

Psalm 55:21 “His speech is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords.”

Envy is our inward grief at the other’s success.

Instead of “rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep” we do the opposite.

We secretly love it when they weep and we inwardly chafe when they are happy.

Slander – Envy often comes out of our mouths sounding like slander - literally “talking down.”

Speaking ill of others for their harm.

I think intent is crucial here, whether what we are saying is true or not.

On this subject of slander or gossip, Stuart Briscoe wrote that we should ask three questions:

- “Is what we are saying of them true, really true, do I know its true?”
- Secondly, even it is true, is it fair or is it only part of the truth, selectively indifferent to some pieces of information?
- Thirdly, even it is true, and the whole truth, is it necessary; what will the sharing of this information achieve that is constructive?”

(Stuart Briscoe, *Holy Living in a Hostile World*, 73)

Howard Marshall, commenting on this passage, wrote, “Love does not act from spite; it acts for the good of the other person. Love does not practice cunning or act as a mask for selfish motives; it is honest and openhanded in its dealings. Love does not desire to be better than other people or to destroy other people’s reputations; it rejoices in the success of other people and is glad to give them praise and commendation.” (I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, 63)

Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander are strong words that we don’t like to use of ourselves.

But they do come naturally to us.

- Jesus said it is not what goes into a man that makes him unclean but what comes out of him, Matthew 15:19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts...false testimony, slander.”
- Jeremiah said, Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”
- Paul said in Galatians 5:19-21 “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are... enmities, strife, jealousy...dissensions, factions, envying.”

These things come naturally to us and unless curbed will characterize our relationships especially with those who hurt us.

Doesn’t it make you sick at heart to realize how easily we fall into thinking and acting in these ways and excusing it because of how wrong the other person has acted toward us?

Once more we come back to the command, “love one another deeply from the heart.”

And again I ask, is that possible?”

At the risk of over-simplifying this text, I think Peter says it is possible by remembering two things and doing two things.

The first thing you are to remember is given in verse 22:

1 Peter 1:22 “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

His argument goes like this: Now that **this has happened** you must love one another deeply from the heart.

Now that what has happened?

Peter says now that you have done something.

What did they do?

They purified themselves by obeying the truth.

In the OT the person would make him or herself ready to be in the presence of God by ceremonial washings symbolic of their need for internal forgiveness and holiness.

The purification ritual set them apart for God.

According to 1 Peter 1:2 we are saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

1 Peter 1:1-2 “To God’s elect...chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, **through the sanctifying work of the Spirit**, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood...”

The Spirit is the one who sets us apart, who applies the justice-satisfying merit of Jesus’ death to us and purifies us, makes us right with God.

To be sure, this is a work of the Spirit but we are active in that by obeying, by trusting.

In Romans 1:5 Paul called it the “obedience of faith”).

The obedience is the trusting. Trusting is the obedience.

One man wrote, “The proper obedience to truth is to give credit to it” – believe it. (Leighton 102)

This purifying, sanctifying, work has two sides to it:

In verse 2 the action of the Spirit is emphasized.

In verse 22 our obedience of faith is emphasized.

When Peter says you “purified yourselves,” he doesn’t mean we save ourselves.

If I were in an accident I might say, “The airbag saved my life.”

You would know that I meant that the person who installed that airbag in the car saved my life, or the one who designed it or invented it or believing in the providence of God, that God saved my life.

You would know that the airbag was the instrument in saving my life, not the cause of it.

Our obedience of faith is not the cause of our salvation but it is an instrument of it.

When you became a Christian you entered into a whole new relationship with God and with other Christians (and for that matter, with the rest of humanity).

You obeyed the truth of the gospel; you repented and began trusting Jesus as evidenced first in your baptism in Jesus’ name.

Ephesians 1:13 “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.”

You made a covenant to follow Christ.

When you were baptized this is what you said:

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world, which rebel against God and corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

YES!

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? YES!

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and trusting him alone follow him as your saving-Lord? YES!

The result is “that you have sincere love for your brothers” – for other Christians.

Yes, we are to love non-Christians also but the emphasis here is on our love for one another.

You have agreed to set yourselves apart from the way you formerly treated people and to now treat them differently.

Peter says remember, remember you made a commitment, a covenant to follow Christ and love who he loves, now get on with it.

There is no longer a question as to whether you **will** love one another; you already made that decision when you began to follow Jesus.

But there is a second thing you must remember.

The first rationale preceded the command to love - this one follows it.

Why should you love one another?

1:23 “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

In fact we were only **able** to “purify ourselves by obedience to the truth” because God gave us new birth – regenerated us.

Karen Jobes captures this truth well when she writes, “The Christian’s decision to obey the truth by coming to faith in Christ is the manifestation of ones rebirth as a child of God.” (Jobes, 125)

But the main point is that we **can** love one another deeply because we have been born of God, we are his children.

When earlier Peter said, 1 Peter 1:16 “Be holy, because I am holy” it was not just an ethical obligation but also a real possibility.

We now bear the Father’s name and the Father’s likeness.

You can hear a loving aunt say of a young man, “You’re just like your father!”

Or less elegantly, “He’s a chip of the ol’ block.”

And so again the point is that those who are born of God will have God's likeness, including love for one another.

Jesus said, John 13:34 "As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Again it is not just a new ethical obligation but also a new possibility because we are God's sons or daughters.

And therefore we, fellow Christians, who have the same Father have the same blood running in our veins.

I have said it before, and I'm convinced it is biblical – the relationship of brothers and sisters in Christ is built on a more substantial and enduring foundation than that between natural brothers and sisters.

Peter says remember that the next time someone offends you – you are siblings, siblings with the same Father.

You have the ability to love one another!

So remember these two things: You've been born again into the family and you have already made the decision to trust and follow Jesus in love for one another.

But there are also two things we are called on to do:

One we have already looked at – we must rid ourselves of those attitudes and actions that destroy our relationships – malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander.

This is a decision to do the right thing, even if we don't feel like it at the moment, trusting the Spirit of God to enable us even as we step out in obedience.

The second thing we are called to do is given in 1 Peter 2:2 "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation..."

This is what we are going to look at next week.

But suffice it to say that it is obvious that as we reflect on the truth of our relationship with God, reflect on his character, and learn to trust him more by seeing his faithfulness in the pages of the Bible, we will "grow up in our salvation."

Love one another deeply from the heart – impossible?

Yes, except for the power of God to redeem us and change us.

John Murray wrote, “The redemptive process...is the only answer to the impossibility inherent in our depravity.” (John

Murray from *Principles of Conduct*, 202 in McKnight, 95)

It is a process to be sure.

We can't expect to see full maturity in these matters in mere days or even months.

But by God's grace we can grow, we can better reflect the nature of our God and the truth of our relationship – we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hear it again from the Word of God

1 Peter 1:22-2:3 “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All men are like grass,

and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;

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And this is the word that was preached to you.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”