

## Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE  
EXPOSITION OF  
THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### The Life of Faith and Hope: Brotherly Love 1 Peter 1:22-25 (688)

Peter states the purpose for his letter most clearly in **5:12**. *Through Silvanus, our faithful brother I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!* John N. D. Kelly says, “This letter ... presents itself as a message of encouragement from the Apostle Peter to Christian communities in Asia Minor which are bewildered by the cruel treatment and persecution to which they are being subjected” (*The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, p. 1). Professor Fred Craddock suggests that 1 Peter was written to encourage these struggling Christians of Asia Minor in four ways: to call them to confidence in the power of God, to help them find meaning in their sufferings, to urge them to stay together in mutual support, and to renew their hope (*First and Second Peter and Jude*, p. 15). Indeed, hope is clearly the overall theme of 1 Peter. And so I’ve titled this entire series *Hope When Life is Hard*. And here is what I believe is the big idea of the entire letter. *The lively hope* (confident expectation) *of salvation* (gospel promises) *sustains the believer* (in both faith and godliness) *in times of suffering* (trial, hardship, difficulties met with in the path of obedience).

In **1:1-12** Peter lays out for us the glories of this salvation; of these gospel promises. Peter sets before us the truth that the one living and true God, who

exists eternally in three Persons, who dwells in unapproachable light, out of His own good pleasure, has chosen, cleansed, and is preserving a people for His own possession. In verses **13-25** Peter explores how we should actually live in light of this grand vision of the grace of God in the salvation of sinners. He tells us that the glories of the gospel demand the grateful and obedient response of holiness (**1:13-16**), of reverence (**1:17-19**), and of brotherly affection (**1:22-25**). Having preached sermons on the responses of holiness and reverence we come today to the third in this particular section of I Peter. Listen as I read **1 Peter 1:22-25**.

**1 Peter 1:22-25**, *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,*<sup>23</sup> *for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.*<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 off,"*<sup>25</sup> *but the word of the Lord abides forever." And this is the word which was preached to you.*

Peter's conviction is that appropriate Christian behavior is grounded in the gospel. Consequently, whenever he gives a command he also supplies the "theological basis for the behavior commanded" (Michaels, *I Peter*, p. 73). The command to *be holy* (**1:15**), for example, is grounded in the theological conviction that God Himself is inherently holy (**1:16**). The command to *conduct ourselves in fear* (**1:17**) is grounded in the theological conviction that God is a perfectly just Judge and that, by His grace, we have escaped His punitive justice (**1:18**). He follows the same pattern here in **1:22-25**. There is a command in **verse 22** - *fervently love one another*. The theological basis for obedience to this command is supplied in **verses 23-25**. Here's the big idea: a new life results in a new love (Davids, *1 Peter*, p. 78).

For the purpose of preaching I have divided the passage into three parts. We look first at our spiritual condition (1:22a). *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren.* On the surface this sounds like we have accomplished some sort of personal catharsis; that by walking barefoot over glowing coals or laying on a bed of nails we have purged our consciences; that through meditation, fasting, or self-denial we have attained some higher level of spiritual consciousness. But Peter is referring to that cleansing from the guilt and corruption of sin accomplished by God rather than by us. Now how do we know this?

Peter has incorporated all kinds of Old Testament ideas and language into his letter. With what do we most readily associate this idea of purification? Sure, the various Old Testament sacrifices and rituals. Passages such as **Hebrews 9:19-22** look back to those things:

**Hebrews 9:19-22**, *for when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people ...*<sup>21</sup> *And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.*<sup>22</sup> *And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are **cleansed with blood**, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Ex. 24:3-8).*

Hebrews also tells us that we are likewise cleansed with blood. **Hebrews 9:14**, *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **cleanse** your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? **Hebrews 10:19**, *since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of**

*faith, having our hearts **sprinkled clean** from an evil conscience.* Peter uses the same language in his letter. **1 Peter 1:12**, *that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.* In **1 Peter 1:19** he speaks of the *precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.* So this purification, this cleansing of which Peter speaks in verse 22 is that cleansing associated with the forgiveness of sin, the cleansing of the guilt and corruption of sin by the blood of Christ.

Now how is such a blessed condition realized or entered into? *Since you have **in obedience to the truth** purified your souls.* “The obedience to the truth of which Peter speaks is our initial submission to the claims of the gospel” (Clowney, *1 Peter*, p. 75). We may say that *obedience to the truth* is our reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ by faith (note that **4:17** speaks of *those who do not obey the gospel of God*). Truth is the word of God. Jesus Christ, the living word of God is truth. **John 14:6**, “*I am the way, and **the truth**, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.*” The written word of God is truth. **Psalms 119:160**, *The sum of Thy word is truth (John 17:17).* The preached word of God, the gospel, is truth. **Galatians 2:5** speaks of *the truth of the gospel.* Peter himself speaks of *those who preached **the gospel** to you (1:12).* In verse **25** he says, *This is the word which was preached to you* (see also **4:6**). So we may say that *obedience to the truth* is our reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ by faith. *Since you have **in obedience to the truth** purified your souls.* OK?

What is one of God’s designs in this cleansing by the gospel? *For a sincere love of the brethren.* Cleansed believers enter into a new relationship with God. Cleansed believers also enter into a new relationship with one another. Indeed, we become brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers in a spiritual family in which God is our Father (**Acts 1:15-16; Romans 1:13, 16:14; 1 Tim. 5:1-2**). The

prominence of this family theme in I Peter is clearly seen in the Apostle's use of the term *brethren* – a sincere love of the *brethren* (1:22); love the *brotherhood* (2:17); let all be *brotherly* (3:8); your *brethren* who are in the world (5:9).

*For a sincere love of the brethren.* The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks to our corporate identity in Chapter 26, *Of the Communion of Saints*:

1. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, **being united to one another in love**, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.
2. Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

*For a sincere love of the brethren.* We have been born into this community where love is the rule of conduct. The characteristic note, the overall tone, the prevailing atmosphere within the covenant community is brotherly affection. Sincere love is the goal of our purification. Sincere love is the fruit of regeneration. Sincere love is the result of conversion. Put it any way you like. Sincere love for other believers always accompanies true Christian conversion. If you have been *born from above* (**John 3**) the reality of that new birth will be most

clearly evidenced in sincere affection for others in the family of God (**John 13:34; 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:11-18**).

Peter is not talking about sit-com love, soap opera love, Bachelorette love. He's not talking about sentimentality. *Sincere* describes an affection that is free from false motives and pretense. **Romans 12:9**, *let love be without hypocrisy*. Sincere love is genuine love. It's like the difference between real leather and the fake stuff. On the back of my hymnal it says "Genuine Leather." In other words, the cover of this book actually possesses the qualities leather is reputed to have. And so Peter has described our spiritual condition. *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren.*

Now he issues the command (**1:22b**). *Fervently love one another from the heart*. When we hear the English adverb "fervently" we naturally assume that Peter is instructing us to love with greater intensity. Certainly this should be our desire and aim. However, the Greek adverb *ektenos* emphasizes the constancy or unwavering character of the love. Ramsey Michaels says, "This fits the context much better. We must love each other from the heart unremittingly; our affection must be constant and enduring, unshaken by adversity or shifting circumstances" (*1 Peter*, pp. 75-76).

*Fervently love one another from the heart*. Oh, no! This is very bad. Pastor, are we talking about the same heart that is beating in my chest? This heart that is deceitful above all else. This heart, in the deep recesses of which, stand pools of filthy muck? This heart that is filled with hatred and self-interest? This heart about which Jesus spoke in **Matthew 15:18-20**? *"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart ... For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders,*

*adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.”* How can constant, enduring, unwavering love flow out of such a heart as mine? How can this be? How can such a thing even be suggested?

This brings us to the third point. In **1:23-25** we have Peter’s theological conviction that serves as the basis for the command. *For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.* <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 off,* <sup>25</sup> *but the word of the Lord abides forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.* This past Thursday, May 6, I read this sentence in the women’s prayer update: “This past weekend (Dawn Thanisch’s] nephew Thane got a new heart.” In a spiritual sense that’s what has happened to us. **Ezekiel 36:26**, *“Moreover, 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.”* We know this comes in regeneration. In the new birth the Holy Spirit communicates the capacity to love the brethren by giving us a new heart. Remember, in the new birth the heart is purged; cleansed. **Hebrews 10:19**, *since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.* Love can actually flow from the heart. A new life, you see, results in a new love.

But how does God affect this heart transformation? He does so *through the living and abiding word of God (1:23)*. Now, of all the commentators that I read on verses 23-25, Martin Luther was, without a doubt, the most helpful. I want to use his brief paragraph as the basis for my own explanation:

“But how does this take place? After this manner: God lets the word, the Gospel, be scattered abroad, and the seed falls in the hearts of men. *Do you see in verse 23 where Luther gets this idea of seed? Not of seed which is perishable but imperishable.* Now wherever it sticks in the heart, the Holy Spirit is present and makes a new man (2 Cor. 5:17). Then there will indeed be another man, of other thoughts, of other words and works. Thus you are entirely changed. All that you before avoided you now seek, and what you before sought that you now avoid” (Luther, 1 Peter, p. 79). *That’s how Luther describes this new birth by the word of God.*

“In respect to the birth of the body, it is a fact that when conception takes place the seed is changed, so that it is seed no longer. *It’s like this oak seedling I dug up out of our yard this morning.* But [the word] is a seed that cannot be changed; it remains forever” (Luther, 1 Peter, p. 79). *Notice that Peter’s stress in verses 23-25 is on the permanence of the word - not of seed which is perishable but imperishable (1:23); the living and abiding word of God (1:23). To confirm this permanence Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 in verses 24 and 25 – the grass withers and the flower falls off (1:24); the word of God abides forever (1:25).*

“But [the word] is a seed that cannot be changed; it remains forever. It changes me, so that I am transformed in it, and whatever is evil in me from my nature passes away. Therefore it is indeed a wonderful birth, and of extraordinary seed” (Luther, 1 Peter, p. 79). One commentator says, “For Peter the focus of the passage is the word of God, which endures or remains forever, that is, can never be made ineffective” (Davids, 1 Peter, p. 79). Beloved, here’s the point: Because this seed is eternally effectual it is continually changing us.

“Peter emphasizes the eternal quality of the new birth, the life of God who is living and enduring and whose Word is therefore also living and enduring. When we hear the Word of God and respond to it with faith, it takes root in our lives and the new birth takes place. But Peter also is saying that the quality of our love must be persistent and enduring precisely because the new life given by God is everlasting” (see Marshall, p. 61). A new life results in a new love.

**Verse 25** ends with *this is the word which was preached to you*. The gospel. The word that changed your heart is the same word that nourishes and strengthens it in grace. This explains that familiar verse, **2:2**. The word that resulted in a sincere love for the brethren is the same word that empowers us to love unremittingly; to *fervently love one another from the heart*. God gives what He commands. The capacity to *love one another from the heart* is granted, supplied through *the living and abiding word of God*.

The implications for our relationships with one another are staggering. They are enough to cause us to go weak in the knees. To **not** *fervently love one another from the heart* is to deny the permanent, constant, effectual power of the word of God to change us. We ought to be those who overlook the little offenses, lest we deny the power of the gospel. We ought to be those who live according to our vows in the church and in our marriages, lest we deny the permanent, constant, effectual power of the word of God to change us. We ought to be those who love the ones who fail us and disappoint us, lest we deny the permanent, constant, effectual power of the word. We ought to be those who *refuse* to claim our own inability to change as an excuse for our bad treatment of others, lest we deny the power of the word of God to work change in us. Never has a spiritual obligation been so staggering in terms of its practical implications.

We recognize our new capacity. We recognize our obligation to one another. At the same time we confess that the command to love unremittingly from the heart is beyond us. This despair, however, drives us to the One who never failed. Christ loved us with an enduring, unwavering love. All He did He did for our sakes. He laid down His life for those whom the Father had given Him. **John 13:1**, *Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.* The gospel is that Jesus loved perfectly from the heart and His perfect righteousness has been imputed to us.

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#### THE BIG IDEA

A new \_\_\_\_\_ results in a new \_\_\_\_\_.

#### I. Our spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ (1:22a)

*Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren*

*purified your souls*

*in obedience to the truth*

"The *obedience to the truth* of which Peter speaks is our initial submission to the claims of the \_\_\_\_\_" (Clowney, *I Peter*, p. 75). We may say that *obedience to the truth* is our \_\_\_\_\_ of the gospel of Jesus Christ by faith (note that 4:17 speaks of *those who do not obey the gospel of God*).

*For a sincere love of the brethren*

Cleansed believers enter into a new relationship with God. Cleansed believers also enter into a new relationship with \_\_\_\_\_.

We have been born into this community where \_\_\_\_\_ is the rule of conduct.

Sincere love for other believers \_\_\_\_\_ true Christian conversion.

## II. The \_\_\_\_\_ (1:22b)

*Fervently love one another from the heart*

The Greek adverb *ektenos* emphasizes the constancy or \_\_\_\_\_ character of the love.

“This fits the context much better. We must love each other from the heart unremittingly; our affection must be constant and \_\_\_\_\_, unshaken by adversity or shifting circumstances” (Michaels, *1 Peter*, pp. 75-76).

*Fervently love one another from the heart*

## III. Peter’s theological \_\_\_\_\_ (1:23-25)

*For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.<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 off,<sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord abides forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.*

“But how does this take place? After this manner: God lets the word, the Gospel, be scattered abroad, and the seed falls in the hearts of men. Now wherever it sticks in the heart, the Holy Spirit is present and makes a new man. Then there will indeed be another man, of other thoughts, of other words and works. Thus you are entirely changed. All that you before avoided you now seek, and what you before sought that you now avoid ... In respect to the birth of the body, it is a fact that when conception takes place the seed is changed, so that it is seed no longer. But [the word] is a seed that cannot be changed; it remains forever. It changes me, so that I am transformed in it, and whatever is evil in me from my nature passes away. Therefore it is indeed a wonderful birth, and of extraordinary seed” (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude*, p. 79).

**Beloved, here’s the point:**

Because this seed is eternally effectual it is

\_\_\_\_\_ us.