

Growing in Love

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Introduction

What do I want my family and friends to say about me when I am gone from this earth? How do I want to be remembered? I believe many people would say that they want to be remembered as a loving person. As a person who cared. As a person who was compassionate. Jesus expects His disciples to be loving people. He tells us that the world will know who belongs to Him by the way that they love others. So, the question that I want us to attempt to answer this morning as a church is this: **How do we grow in love?**

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;²⁴ for

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

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

^{2:1} So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Exposition

I. Growth in love begins with faith in Christ (1:22-25)

The key command in verses 22-25 is found at the end of verse 22, which reads, “love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” But before we look at that command, we encounter three other phrases that qualify the command: 1) “Having purified your souls” 2) “By your obedience to the truth” and 3) “for a sincere brotherly love” The second phrase, “by obedience to the truth,” explains how the first phrase, “having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers,” came to be true.

The purification that Peter speaks of here is the initial work of sanctification that takes place when a sinner turns from their sin and trust in Jesus Christ. You might recall that we consider sanctification last week when we were confessing our faith as a congregation. I read the article from our confession of faith on sanctification, which stated that “Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.” And, according to Peter, as the believer obeys the truth, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is at that point that they are “set apart” for “obedience” according to 1 Peter 1:2. Specifically, the obedience is said to be “for a sincere brotherly love.” In summary, then, Peter’s audience has been set apart by their belief in the gospel (the truth) for the purpose of sincerely loving their fellow Christians.

All of these remarks serve as a preface to the command: “**love one another earnestly from a pure heart.**” Considering the depth of Peter’s prefacing comments, it almost seems like there would be no need to mention the command. Yet, even though the command may seem redundant, Peter does not assume. Even though his readers should embody the purpose of their salvation in love for their fellow Christian, he still commands them to love each other.

But how can a Christian love like this? Verse 23 tell us! By reminding the reader of their new birth, Peter points his audience to the supernatural and enduring nature of their new life in Christ Jesus. Verses 24-25 present a contrast to the reader between their old way of life and the life that the gospel produces in them. Before they were born again, they were without hope and strength to do what was pleasing to the LORD. In fact, they couldn’t love God or others the way they were suppose to, but in the gospel, new life is granted to all who believe. And if the word of the gospel never perishes, neither does the fruit that it produces in the life of the believer.

For Peter, then, his readers need to see the connection between what the Gospel had done for them and what they were called to do as Christians. Specifically, in this case, they were called to sincerely and earnestly love one another with a purified heart, with a heart like their Father.

We, like Peter’s audience, are called to love one another with sincerity and earnestness. **The only way this is possible is for us to hear the gospel and responded to it in faith.** As we respond to the gospel, we are transformed and set apart to love like our Father. When we want to know what the Father’s love looks like, we do not need to look any further than Jesus Christ. The love of our Father is both sincere and earnest. He genuinely loves us and pursues us, even when we are rebellious an unlovable in this world. God’s love for us, then, becomes our example for love.

Maybe you are here today, and you really struggle to love other people. I don’t mean struggling to say the words, “I love you,” but rather, you struggle to pursue others when they drift away from the church, or you don’t genuinely forgive people when they wrong you. **This text shows that you must first start with God’s love for you and then move from there to your love for others.** In other words, growth in love begins faith in Christ. It starts by seeing the greatness of God’s love toward us in Jesus, then it overflows in love toward others.

T.S. – Now to Peter’s second point about growing in love. Growth in love begins with faith in Christ, but...

II. Growth in love requires a hatred of sin and a desire for holiness. (2:1-3)

In 2:1, Peter states negatively what he had previously stated positively. Instead of saying, “Be holy” again, Peter spells out what a holy life **MUST** exclude. Specifically, Peter tells his readers to “put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”

While one could spend a great deal of time detailing all of these words, Peter's point is not to provide his readers with a bunch of specific categories of sin that need to be avoided. In fact, the first term "malice" is comprehensive. You could very easily and correctly translate this verse as "Rid yourselves of all evil!" It is interesting, however, to note that things like deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander are explicitly associated with the category of evil. Most people want to think of evil strictly in terms of some sort of violent act or sexual immorality. And while it is true that such things are evil, Peter does not explicitly name them here in this passage. Instead, he deals openly and honestly about the types of sins that tend to plague the churches of Jesus Christ. We would all do well to take note that there is no such thing as a respectable sin or a sin that is "not that bad." All sin deserves the wrath of God, and all sin can be forgiven by faith in Christ!

After negatively stating the command to be holy, Peter positively states the call for holiness by speaking of the Christian's desire. He compares the intensity of the Christian's desire to the desire of a newborn baby. Like a newborn baby wants food, the Christian should desire the things that make them grow in spiritual maturity. Contextually, the things that the Christian needs to desire are the things that accord with their new life in Christ. While many have interpreted this verse to speak mainly of a Christian's need to read the Bible, Peter's point is broader than this. While Peter would certainly expect Christians to meditate on the Word of God, he is most concerned with the desires of Christian life that come from their communion with Christ. The Christian's need then, is to continue to grow in their salvation by the "pure spiritual milk," which they have "tasted" in the LORD. In other words, the Christian needs to continue to have their sin exposed to the holiness of God and then met by the love of God in the cross of Jesus Christ. For this is not only the first place that they tasted that "the LORD is good," it is the continual fountain from which grace and mercy flow.

This passage has significance for us, because we are in the same condition as Peter's audience. We have to realize that sin is incompatible with holiness. The call to rid ourselves of sin is a call to live. It is a call to grow in salvation. It is a call to joy. It is a call to love. If we really got these truths, we would make it our ambition to rid ourselves of sin. We wouldn't see laying aside sin as setting aside fun and freedom, but we would see it like food for the soul.

Conclusion

So, how do we grow in love? We trust in Christ supremely. We hate sin intensely. We pursue righteousness fervently. This is how we grow in love.

Think deeply on the kindness of God in Christ toward you, and then go love your brothers and sisters in Christ, go love your neighbor, go love your enemy, while fleeing the sin that threatens to rob your soul of everlasting joy and satisfaction. Go grow in love this week!