

Authentic Church

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and you'll find it in Peter's first letter. 1 Peter chapter 1, page 1014, if you have one of our church Bibles.

And if you have your own Bible, near the end, after Hebrews and James, we come to Peter's first letter. We've been in this letter now a few weeks, and we're going to read this morning.

From just beginning at verse 18 of chapter 1, down to chapter 2, verse 10. Peter says, You were ransomed from the futile ways you inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in these last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

[1 : 27] Since you've been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

For all flesh is like grass, and its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. This word is the good news that was preached to you. So, putting away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves are like living stones, being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and honored. And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

[2 : 47] So, the honor is for you who believe. But for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Amen. May God bless to us this his word. But please do turn in your Bibles with me back to 1 Peter chapter 1.

And we're looking particular this morning at verse 22, just down to that first paragraph of chapter 2 at verse 3. The last two or three Sundays we've been looking at these opening paragraphs of Peter's first letter, where immediately his subject is authentic salvation.

[4 : 29] And authentic biblical salvation, Peter says, is all about hope. Hope is what brackets the whole passage. You'll see verse 3 and verse 21 begins and ends with hope.

A living hope, which we cherish and possess as believers. And we have this sure and certain hope, Peter says, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, which will guarantee the return of Jesus Christ in glory to bring us to share in that full salvation of resurrection glory which is to come.

And therefore, because this hope is real, it must be, Peter says, a lived hope. In other words, it must be evident and real now in the lives of, well, lives as we saw last time, of worthy response that we live in response to this wonderful redemption that we have.

And that is authentic salvation according to Peter, Christ's apostle. And we therefore live now for the future. We live as our heavenly fathers and we live in fear, not in terror, but in honest and reverent respect for the God who will at the last judge all men without partiality, as Peter says. And that's how people of genuine faith in Christ will live and must live. We must live as people of true hope in God. But now if you look at verse 22, you'll see that Peter is moving here to a related theme.

[6 : 17] It's a new theme, but closely related to what goes before. And the focus is now not so much on the future, but it comes clearly into the present. You'll see that very clearly if you look at chapter 2, verse 10 at the end of the section.

And you'll see that he's emphasizing there the contrast between what once upon a time was true and what is now true for those who are in Christ. And what is true now is that the believer's true hope has brought him into a truly new home.

Authentic salvation cannot be, can't bring us into a new relationship with God without also at the same time bringing us into a new relationship with God's family.

That is, authentic salvation inevitably implies the authentic church. So in verse 17, Peter says we call God Father. In verse 14, he calls us obedient children.

And therefore, we shouldn't be surprised in verse 22 when Peter starts to talk about our relationship with God's other children. That is, our brothers and sisters, whom he says we are to love.

[7 : 29] So what he's saying is you can't have God as Father without also having all God's other truly believing children as brothers and sisters.

Simple as that. It's the plain fact. Now, we might find it a little bit distasteful at times, especially when we look around and see who we're talking about with one another. But that is the fact.

As the saying goes, you don't get to choose your family. Why? Well, nor in the Christian church. The one who believes in God, Peter says in verse 21, believes through Christ.

In chapter 2, verse 4, he says we come to him. And we're being built by him into a spiritual house. Together, that is, with all Christ's other people. Now, you'll notice if you read through this passage, all the verbs are plural.

All the pronouns are plural. Whenever you see the word you, it's you plural. It's where the old version was helpful because it was ye and not thee. It made it easy for us to see that it was plural, but it is.

[8 : 35] And that is because there can be no authentic salvation that doesn't result in authentic church. And it's that authentic church that Peter is dealing with here from verse 22 of chapter 1 right through to chapter 2, verse 10.

And he does so with three distinct pictures of that church. The church, he says, first of all, is a family of brothers. Then he says it's a temple of priests, a temple of life.

And then he ends up saying that the church is a people of praise, the people of true light spreading that light in the world. That is what the authentic church of Jesus Christ will always be.

Peter, of course, is talking here about the universal church of Christ, which is the true worldwide fellowship of God's true people everywhere. And that's what the New Testament means when it refers to the church.

Church, of course, finds expression in every place where there is a tangible reality, gathering, a congregation, an ecclesia. That's where the word ecclesiastical comes from.

[9 : 43] It's the word congregation, church, gathering. And the one true church finds expression everywhere where there is a true gathering of true believers, a believing community in the local church.

But it is one church, the body of Christ, just without crops in these various places. And that is the church that Jesus Christ is building and which will last forever, that alone.

Very important, isn't it, to emphasize that today and get it clear in our minds because many, many people have become confused about what the church really is. Because often today people's focus when they talk about the church is on an institution or a denomination or all the structures that go along with those sorts of things.

But if you read the pages of the Bible, you will find that absolutely nowhere is the church ever described in those kind of ways. There is only one church in the Bible, the universal church.

And then there are all the various tangible historic manifestations of that true church in the local churches where the genuine characteristics of that one true church are in evidence and are visible

among real professing Christian people, united in their obedience to the truth that is in Jesus.

[11:09] That's the church. And so you see, what Peter is laying out for us here in these verses are the essential characteristics, the essential nature of the true Christian church.

That's why it's not surprising that there's absolutely nothing here at all about institutional matters or ecclesiastical order, nothing to do with clergy, nothing to do with the sacraments, nothing to do with government, nothing to do with authority, absolutely nothing to do with any of that.

The things that people are so often taken up with when they think they're talking about the church. It's very striking. What a blessed relief. Peter just doesn't go there.

That's not to say, of course, that there's no place for these things, nor is it to say Peter has no interest at all in these things. We'll see when we come to chapter 5 in particular that Peter has very clear interest in the leadership of the church.

He has much to say about proper leadership and what that should constitute, proper shepherding. But it is to say that unless there are these essential foundations of what truly makes the church the church, then it matters not a whit.

[12:24] What structure or order or government or anything else that there might be. If there aren't these essential things, then no matter what you call it, it will never be an authentic church in the biblical sense of that word.

So you can have an institution ever so historic. You can have a building ever so classical. You can have a spire and a bell and all of these things and a notice board on the front. But if on a Sunday morning the doors are locked and there's no people in that building, then it's not a church.

Absolutely not. It can't ever be. Because without the gospel of Christ and without the people of Christ, there is no church of Christ. Simple as that.

But by contrast, where you have any gathering of believers, large or small, in the name of Christ, who are committed to him and obedient to him and committed to one another in love, there is the church of Jesus Christ, even if there's nothing else there.

And there you will find the spirit of Christ dwelling in the midst of his people. That's the Bible's view of church. So, of course, although there may be many other things that we need to think about and be talking about in terms of being the church today, wherever we are, these three pictures, which Peter speaks of here, if they are in evidence, you have a real church.

[13:49] And if they're not in evidence, you don't have a manifestation of the church of Jesus Christ at all. Because authentic church, according to Peter, means that it must be a family of love, it must be a temple of life, and it must be a people of light.

And today I want us to focus particularly on that first of these pictures, where Peter tells us that the church is God's family. So we're going to look at verse 22 of chapter 1 to verse 3 of chapter 2, where Peter tells us that the church is a family of love.

The true family of God, he says, are God's permanent progeny. They're born together, and they're brought up together through the living and abiding word of God in Christ.

And therefore, they are a people sharing that love together. The central command of the whole section is very clear to see in verse 22.

You see it. Love one another earnestly. Or maybe constantly would be better. From a pure heart. Now that gives the theme to the whole paragraph.

[15:02] And Peter repeats that command in a negative way in chapter 2 and verse 1, where he says, put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and so on.

Put away the things that destroy mutual love. And you see, the command follows naturally and logically because the purpose of the Christian's conversion, the purpose of his setting apart to be purified and made holy through obedience to the truth, well, it's there in verse 22 at the beginning. It is for a sincere brotherly love that we've been set apart through obedience to the gospel. You see, all the language here is about family.

It's about God's family. It's about birth, verse 23, born or begotten. It's about babies, chapter 2, verse 2, infants. And therefore, it's about brothers.

It's about all the privileges and the purpose of that life together as God's permanent progeny, as his children together through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

[16:17] So let's look first at the privilege that this family has by birth. Look at verse 23. Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, sorry, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

Christian believers, he says, are siblings who have been born, or perhaps better, who have been begotten and new, because the seed of God's everlasting life has been planted in them through the living and abiding word of God, through the agent of God's creative power.

And quite simply put, God's children have been begotten, as John puts it in the prologue to his gospel, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but by God.

Chapter 1, verse 3 of 1 Peter reminds us of the same thing. He says that the new birth is all God's doing. It's according to his sovereign mercy, that he has caused us to be begotten anew to a living hope.

It means God has fathered us with his own seed. That's the language that Peter's using. And verse 23 emphasizes for us that that seed is not perishable seed, like mere earthly seed, but it is imperishable.

[17 : 43] That favorite word of Peter's, as we've seen. In other words, this is an everlasting work of God's creative power. And that's the main point of his quotation from Isaiah here in verses 24 and 25.

All flesh is like grass, the glory is perishable. All the beautiful flowers born of earthly seed of whatever kind will fade and will fall, but not so with that which is born of God's imperishable seed. No, the word of the Lord remains forever, and therefore the work of the Lord through that living and abiding word will also remain forever, will not perish. And this, says Peter, is the word of power and permanence that was preached to you.

It's a living and abiding word that planted an imperishable seed to bring forth permanent fruit, permanent progeny, God's true family born forever.

And born, verse 22, 4, sincere brotherly love. That's the permanent, everlasting characteristic of this family.

[19 : 01] It comes from the very seed by which we were begotten. He means it's fixed, if you like, in the DNA of these progeny, so to speak. It's such a characteristic thing that it is the proof of our paternity.

This attitude of filial love that characterizes, says Peter in verse 3, indeed, if we have tasted that the Lord is good, that will be the characteristic of us. In other words, if we have truly come to Jesus in living faith and in new birth, then this will be the thing that shows to everyone our true parentage.

That's what he's saying. Now, Peter is putting it here in particularly intimate family language. But, of course, he's not saying anything different to the rest of the New Testament writers who are absolutely united on this, this essential characteristic of true Christian conversion.

John, in his gospel, talks plainly, doesn't he, about this new birth from above by the Spirit. And that new birth, he says, when you read his letters, is characterized above all by one thing.

What? Love. Love for the brothers. Everyone, says John, who loves the Father, loves whoever has been born of him, his brothers and sisters.

[20 : 27] And it must be so because our family DNA is from the seed of God himself, and God is love, according to John. And so to be a Christian, to be converted, to be born of God, means, as Paul puts it in Romans chapter 5, that God's love has been poured into our hearts by his Holy Spirit, which was given to us when we believed.

And that's the privilege that we have as Christians by our new birth. The God of abiding love has begotten us through his imperishable seed of abiding love.

Notice in verses 23 to 25 that the focus is solely on God's sovereign power at work. It's God who brings this family into being by the new birth.

It's all his doing. And yet, notice how God's sovereign regenerating power does its work. It's through that living and abiding word of God being proclaimed by the messengers of the gospel, whoever it was that preached that message first to these people.

And notice verse 22. By being obeyed by those who heard that gospel preaching. That's how their souls were purified, through obedience to the truth.

[21 : 54] We might translate that word better as consecrated. Consecrated, set apart as holy by obedience to the truth. It's very like the word Peter uses in chapter 1, verse 2, about being sanctified, set apart as holy by the Holy Spirit.

And both there and here, Peter is very clear that by their conversion to Christ, by their becoming Christians, it is through their believing the gospel of Jesus.

Through submitting and obeying the word of Christ. That's what faith is in the New Testament. Faith is submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Faith is turning away from your rebellion against God and submitting in obedience to God in Christ. In a loving obedience or an obedient love, whichever way you like to put it.

And that's how you become part of God's family, according to Peter. You must be begotten again of God's imperishable seed. You must be regenerated, reborn by God's sovereign power.

[23 : 06] You can't beget yourself. That's impossible. Only the Spirit of God begets life and gives life to whom he will. But at the same time, Peter says, you must obey the truth.

Unless there is that true and willing submission that trusts in Jesus Christ, that submits to the lordship of Jesus Christ, then there can be no purifying, no forgiveness.

Peter's very clear in chapter 1, verse 2. Obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood that cleanses us. These are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. Just the same here in verse 22.

You can't have the forgiveness for sins, the being made holy in God's sight, the purifying in God's sight, without the new birth that verse 23 speaks about, a new life.

That miracle of cleansing and new birth by God's seed comes through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and submission, obedience to that word of God in Christ.

[24 : 12] That's how God brings his family to birth. That's how the authentic church comes into being. There's no other way for it to happen at all. See, what Peter is literally talking about here is church planting.

The imperishable seed of God, which begets his children, is planted through the proclamation of the gospel, and it grows through the reception of the gospel.

There's no other way. So if that's not happening, if there's no true gospel proclamation, if there's no true obedience to God's truth, then there's no real Christian faith, and there's therefore no real Christian church, and no real Christian love.

So you could call something a church. You could do all sorts of churchy things, but it's never going to be God's true family, because it's not begotten of God's imperishable seed.

But a different branch of the tree, which is the church, is a different tree altogether, not the church.

That's why that kind of thing, that kind of entity, however official it might be, will ultimately fall to the ground and will wither and fade, because it is not born of God's everlasting seed.

[25 : 32] That's why any so-called church planting that isn't truly gospel planting, well, it isn't church planting at all. We've got to be careful not to fool ourselves about that.

And at the same time, any attempted church preservation, which thinks that it can ignore obedience to the truth, and yet still expect to have God's imperishable seed of life and love in the midst, well, that's equally deluded.

It just can't be so. Now, it is the word of the Lord alone which abides forever, and it is that which is brought forth by the living and abiding truth, the word of God alone, that will be nourished and will likewise abide forever.

But that is the privilege of God's true family, says Peter, that through real and willing obedience to the truth that is in Jesus, they are born of this imperishable seed.

We are permanent progeny forever. I think that must have been a great, great comfort to the many beleaguered Christians that Peter was writing to who felt like aliens and foreigners, surrounded as they were by all the manifest power and glory of the Roman Empire.

[26 : 54] It must have seemed so mighty, so enduring, so indestructible over against their puny and frail existence that seemed so, so weak.

But friends, long, long, long ago, Rome's proud empire bit the dust. Lies in the dust today. But the church of Jesus Christ is still colonizing this whole world today.

Living. We need to remember that today, don't we, as the seeds of the secular empire in the West seem to be so fertile all around us.

That too will wither and fade and be trodden in the dust. It's inevitable. As will that dark and menacing empire of Islam which brings such fear to Christians in so many parts of the world today.

Think of those dreadful pictures that many of us were looking at from Imran this week in Peshawar. In their grief, don't they need the reassurance of words like this?

[28 : 05] That all the glory of these wicked powers, all of them, will wither like the grass and die and fade and be trodden underfoot.

But the word that brought to new birth the church of Jesus Christ abides forever. And the family that is brought to birth by that living and abiding word will abide forever.

No matter all the power of man to destroy. That's what Peter's message is here. You've been born of God into a permanent life.

That is the privilege of your birth. And since God's family is characterized by permanent love, says Peter, you must live out your family purpose.

Verse 22, love one another earnestly, constantly, permanently and persistently. That's what must characterize your love.

[29 : 04] So let's think about this purpose of this family's birth. This family that is born together of the imperishable seed of God's life planted in us must continue, says Peter, to be brought up together in this same life as we're nourished, as we're feeding on Christ's living and abiding word.

And the evidence of that happening, Peter says, is that like newborn babies, we're growing up and like loving brothers, we're growing together.

So Peter's focus here moves from birth to babes and to brothers. Verse 2, speak of the longing, the craving of the infant for their mother's milk.

Well, you young parents, especially, especially you mothers, you know, don't you, how determined and how persistent that craving for the milk is. There's no stopping it when your infant wants that food.

There's no waiting. That baby will let you know very, very quickly and very persistently. And when they want it, you have to provide it. I don't know if any of you saw that picture in the paper this week.

[30 : 17] Did you have that lady in China who was fined? Anybody see that? She was fined for breastfeeding her baby when she was driving along on her scooter in the middle of this enormous road in, I think it was in Beijing.

I couldn't believe it. But the poor woman was fined and I felt a little bit sorry for her because here she was going along and that baby was determined to have some milk. That baby didn't care there was six lanes of traffic going along here.

I want a drink. And so she was providing that drink. That baby wanted to grow. And Peter says, well, that's how you grew up.

You crave the pure spiritual milk. Verse 2. That is the sustenance that comes from the Lord himself. It's his spiritual life that he says there in verse 3, we've tasted already when we came to faith.

It's God's seed that was planted in us through his word and it's his sustenance that comes to us as we seek more of that word, as we continue to feel on the same living word.

[31 : 25] Remember in John 6, Jesus said, I am the bread of life. And Peter's saying the same thing here. He is the pure milk of spiritual life that we need and we find him and we find his life in his living and abiding word.

Jesus said, my words are spirit and life. That's your spiritual food and drink. Not just to be tasted once, but to be longed for, to be craved, to be drunken, to be digested so that you'll grow up.

This is very, very important. James, in his letter, just a page or two back, James uses remarkably similar language at the end of chapter 1, verse 18.

He says, we were brought forth by the word of truth. Very similar language about being begotten. And then he says, we must receive this implanted word with meekness, the word which is able to save us.

We must be doers of the word, not just hearers. In Peter's language, he's saying, we must be feeders on the word, not just tasters. In other words, that implanted seed that caused us to be born must go on being nourished so that we will grow up to salvation.

[32 : 47] And according to Peter, growing up in spiritual life means and is evident in growing together in spiritual love.

Brothers, loving one another earnestly, constantly from pure hearts, verse 22. And that is only possible, he says, if there is a putting away.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1. A putting away of attitudes of impure hearts. Things that are anti-love, things that destroy relationships, things that drive people apart.

Malice, ill will towards others. Deceit and hypocrisy, that's false dealing with others, including all kinds of false piety and false spirituality.

Envy and slander, the things that make us want to promote ourselves and diminish others. And that's so often, isn't it, what leads to ill talk of others behind their backs to put them down.

[33 : 53] We've got to put away all of that if we're good to love. In 2 Peter 3, Peter says that the new creation, the new heavens and the earth is called the home of righteousness.

That is, the place where pure and right relationships abound and thrive and flourish between us and God and between us and our brothers. Now, Peter's saying here that is our home.

It's a family of love. If, verse 3, indeed, we have truly tasted the Lord's goodness, if we claim that family name, then we must be a family growing together in love.

And if that's not so, then at the very least it is a mark, says Peter, of great immaturity, a lack of growing up as Christians. However much knowledge we might have, however much we might know about Bible doctrine and theology and all of these things, there must be love.

Paul says the same thing, doesn't he, to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Without love, all of these things count for nothing. And it's so important, friends, some Christians clearly think that you can be very mature just because, well, you have a lot of knowledge.

[35 : 10] You read lots of dense theological tomes, especially perhaps if they're 300 or 400 years old. You recite lots of biblical truth. You drink spiritual milk by the gallon, or at least so you think.

But you see, Peter seems to be saying that you can drink all of that milk and it can go through you quite undigested. And that tends to leave a pretty bad smell at the other end.

That's what Paul's speaking about in Corinthians. They're boastful. They haven't loved. They're arrogant. They're rude. They're resentful and irritable. They insist on their own way.

They crow over the wrongdoings in others. And you see, Peter is saying and Paul is saying and James is saying that some Christians can think they're very mature, very grown up, very knowledgeable, but they're quite the reverse because they're not digesting and absorbing gospel truth so as they bear fruit of the Spirit which is love and joy and peace and all of these things which are evident in lovingly joyful and peaceful relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ whom they love.

You see, it's the fruit, isn't it, that tells you the true nature of the seed from which you've been born and brought forth. And the fruit of God's family, Peter says, is real brotherly love and you'll find it all through this letter.

[36 : 45] Chapter 2, verse 17. Chapter 3, verse 8. Chapter 4, verse 8. Above all, keep on loving one another earnestly. The very last verse of the whole letter. Greet one another with a kiss of love.

That's the mark, says Peter, of being on the road to salvation according to him. Of course it is. He's already made clear to us that our full salvation which is to come is being shaped now through our life here.

Our full salvation is the consummation of what we are becoming now in Christ. And as one writer sums it up, those who live in hell can't expect to arrive in heaven.

We spoke last time about living for the future, living for what is permanent and that is Peter's great theme. Living for the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. And that's why he keeps urging his hearers to love one another.

Because as Paul says to the Corinthians, love never ends. All sorts of even really good things that God gives to his church in this life will pass away and end.

[38 : 02] Gifts and knowledge and prophecy and all sorts of things. Even faith and hope will give way to sight one day. But love never ends because God is love.

And his living and abiding word has begotten us into his family of living and abiding love. And that will remain forever in the home of righteousness.

The home of pure and undefiled relationships of love. But Paul says to the Galatians while we wait for the hope of righteousness as he calls it, the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

The New Testament is so, so consistent about this. Paul and James and Peter everybody. They all say the same thing. You can't grow up in the Christian life without growing together in Christian love.

And so a church where brothers and sisters are not growing together in love cannot be a church where babies are growing up to Christian maturity. Simple as that. Let me put it another way, perhaps a bit more provocatively.

[39 : 15] A church where there is no love of the brethren cannot be, cannot be a church which truly loves the Bible. No matter what prominence is given to Bible doctrine in its, in its statements of faith or even in its preaching, can't be a church that is truly craving pure, genuine, spiritual food and drink and actually drinking it in and digesting it so as to put on real spiritual muscle and real spiritual flesh

and blood that is alive and active and producing real spiritual fruit.

Why am I laboring this? Well, just because we cherish the fact that we are an evangelical church, a church that is devoted to the evangel, to the word of God.

And so we need to be clear that learning together and loving together can't be separated. Not if either thing is really to be happening and the evidence, the evidence according to the Bible that we are truly learning the Bible is that we will be seen to be truly loving our brothers and sisters.

You see, the evidence that a baby is feeding properly is not just that they spend many hours suckling, is it? It's that they're growing. It's that they're gaining weight. It's that they're becoming more and more recognizable as developing human beings.

Not that they're turning into something that resembles a giant bottle of milk. However overflowing with milk it might be. I'm keeping to bottle feeding obviously for this particular analogy for the sake of decency.

[41 : 14] But you see the point. You see, the evidence, this is important, the evidence of Christian growth, the evidence of true craving and feeding on the life of Christ through His Word is not that we will become a bunch of biblical encyclopedias regurgitating all sorts of undigested knowledge.

No. The evidence that we are truly feeding on the living and abiding Word is that we are becoming more and more truly human beings. More and more children of our Heavenly Father.

More and more in the image of our true brother, the only true human, Jesus Christ. And therefore that we love one another. How? As I have loved you, says Jesus.

As He was about to give His own life for His true friends. So we won't, you see, grow up into real salvation, into the true and abiding destiny we have as God's true family, unless we are growing together in love.

But nor, of course, will we be able to grow together in love unless we are growing up to maturity through feeding on God's pure and undiluted Word of life in Christ.

[42 : 39] Love without learning like that will be just mere sentimentality. Love in today's world is just a fuzzy sentimental thing. It's a romantic thing that you feel. That is not at all what Peter means by love.

He means an earnest, persistent attitude that comes from an undivided heart, a pure heart. It's an attitude that determines to act rightly, righteously towards our Christian brothers by putting away these things in verse 1, ill will, and all deceitful ulterior motives, all pretense, all simmering envy, all slanderers behind the back, gossiping and putting down.

In other words, he's saying that true love comes from turning away from the natural sinfulness of our human hearts and living at full stretch so as to reflect the holiness, the love of God himself, the love that has been planted in us, in his seed.

The only power to nourish us, the only power to sustain that life of God in us is his living and abiding word. It's God's word that leads us and teaches us what it means to walk in love.

It's God's word that gives us strength to do that. It's his word that teaches us the way of righteousness, the way of right relationships that are characterized by mutual obedience to the truth.

[44 : 11] It's only God's word that can reshape us into Christ-shaped humanity. So how then do we focus on the Bible so as to truly grow up as we learn, so as to truly grow together in love, not just be puffed up with knowledge?

That's the vital question, isn't it, for every one of us? But it's a simple answer really. It all comes in our attitude to our feeding.

Peter says we are to long for, we are to crave pure spiritual milk and I take it that that means that as an infant knows, it instinctively knows what it needs, it trusts in its goodness so that nothing will stop it taking that in and digesting it properly.

It will not be distracted, it wants to be fed. It will persevere even though at first it may be very hard work to learn how to feed and to learn how to take in enough so that it really grows.

And it is hard work for a baby and it's hard work for a Christian to begin to learn how to feed properly and enough so as to really grow.

[45 : 32] But we will also, according to Peter, make sure that there are no obstructions to that feeding doing its proper work. Do you see how verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2 are so closely connected?

