

The Family of True Love

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Date: 24 September 2014

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're back to 1 Peter and looking at this question of what is the church. So maybe you would join me in turning to your Bibles, page 1014, and we're going to read together once again at the end of chapter 1, beginning at verse 22.

So Peter says, Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have 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.

And 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 crave for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

I'll keep that open and let's pray together as we come to God's word. Heavenly Father, we rejoice that you have indeed, through the scriptures, proclaimed to us your living and abiding word, a word that calls us to the obedience of faith, through which we are indeed purified and born again into your family, into your home.

[1 : 5 4] And so help us, Lord, as we meditate upon these words now, in the middle of this busy week. Help us to be those who crave that pure spiritual milk.

Open up your word to us, we pray. And make us receive it with thanksgiving and joy and with obedient faith.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what is the church today? The answer is the family of true love.

Now, we are looking at what the apostle Peter teaches about the nature of the church of Jesus Christ, the true church. And to our great relief, we've already discovered, it is nothing to do with architecture, nothing to do with ceremonies, nothing to do with governance, nothing to do with any of these things.

But rather, the building that Peter is interested in is a living one. You'll see it there in verses 2 and 3. He's interested in a building made of living stones, God's household, the people among whom God himself delights to dwell.

[3 : 0 8] That's the building that he's talking about. And last time we looked at the privilege of what it means to belong to God's household, to his church, to belong, as we saw, to the house, the home of true life.

It is the home forever, as verse 23 says, of those who have been born again, who are born into everlasting life. If you remember, through the planting of God's imperishable seed in us, the life of God, his life-giving seed which gives us life.

And that comes to us through the preaching of God's living and enduring word. That is the instrument that God's Spirit uses to implant his life in us.

But Peter doesn't stop at this idea of the new birth. He goes on immediately to speak about not just the privilege of the new birth, but the purpose of that birth.

And we know, don't we, that babies are not born to remain as infants, cute as they may be at that stage. Those of us who've had children, we can remember those days of newborn infancy and their cuteness from a distance.

[4 : 20] Because when you're in the midst of those days, you long, don't you, for the end of nappies, for the end of squawking babies, for the end of all of these things. You long for these infants to grow up. Well, that is exactly what God wants for his household.

Not for his church to just be a nursery school, to be a creche. He doesn't want us to be forever stuck in that stage of immaturity and babyhood.

But rather, he wants the children who are born of his holy seed to grow up. Look at chapter 2, verse 3. To grow up into salvation.

So having talked about the great privilege of this new birth of God's imperishable seed, immediately, Peter starts talking also about the purpose.

The purpose is that God's household may be found growing up to maturity. That's why he plants his seed in people's lives. And he shows us that the church, as the home of true life, everlasting life, that it must show itself to be growing to maturity as the family of true love.

[5 : 35] That's why God has brought his people to birth. Look at chapter 1, verse 22. We're born again of imperishable seed. We're purified through obedience to the truth for, Do you see that word for?

Sincere brotherly love. To love one another earnestly from a pure heart. So let's focus today on this understanding of the church as that family, that family of true love, which is so clearly stated there in verse 22, and then described in practical terms in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2.

It's all about growing up and growing together into real spiritual maturity. So let's talk about this in two aspects of it that I think Peter puts here absolutely inseparably.

The fruit of true spiritual maturity and the feeding of true spiritual maturity. So first of all then, the fruit of spiritual maturity is seen in Christians humbly loving together.

Growing up into salvation, according to Peter, means growing together in pure spiritual love. Verse 22, Love one another earnestly from a pure heart since you have been born again.

[6 : 55] You see how the new birth and this new love are quite inseparable there. And it must be because this love is the characteristic that is implanted into all of God's family by the very nature of their birth.

It's intrinsic to the seed which brings us all to birth as Christian believers. It's fixed, if you like, in the very warp and woof of their spiritual DNA in God's house.

It's so characteristic indeed, this love of the brethren, that it's the proof of our true paternity. That's how you test for paternity, isn't it?

When it's in dispute, you take a blood sample and you match the DNA and you say, well, is there a perfect match with the Father's DNA? Well, the family DNA that the church shares is the seed, the DNA, if you like, of God himself.

And do you remember what John says in his letter? God is love. You see? John in his gospel, doesn't he, talks about this new birth, this birth from above.

[8 : 07] And in his letters, he's very, very clear that that new birth is characterized by love. Love of both the Father and, therefore, all of our brothers and sisters.

So everyone who loves the Father, everyone who loves the Father, loves whoever has been born of him. 1 John 5, verse 1.

Well, it must be so, mustn't it? Because we share the family DNA. What does Paul say in Romans chapter 5? God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us.

That's what makes us into born-again children of God. The God who is love has poured his love into our hearts. He's planted his seed, the DNA of love, from which all that new life in us springs.

He's planted it into us so that we may grow up into maturity. And the fruit, the evidence of that spiritual growth is seen as the church, as the family of true love grows together in love.

[9 : 18] In Brothers and Sisters, verse 22 says, Loving one another earnestly. That means constantly, strenuously, at full stretch. Loving one another from pure hearts, he says.

Well, what does that mean? Well, look at chapter 2, verse 1. It's only possible to love like that with a putting away of the attitudes of impure hearts. Attitudes of anti-love.

The things that destroy relationships. The things that drive people apart. That's what these are, aren't they? Malice. Malice. Ill will towards others. Deceit and hypocrisy.

That's dealing falsely with others, including all kinds of false spirituality. Envy. And slander. That is anti-love. Promoting of yourself.

And so often when you want to promote yourself, how do you do it? You diminish others. You speak ill of them. You slander them. Just think of our politicians. It's what they do all the time. In his second letter, Peter calls heaven the home of righteousness.

[10 : 28] In other words, the place where rightness and right relationships abound. Right relationships between God and man and therefore between all men. And Peter's telling us in this letter that that is our permanent home.

That's the true home of this family, the church. It's the family of love, of pure spiritual love. The very antithesis of what verse 1 speaks of here. So we need to ask ourselves, don't we, quite soberly, is our church, or what we call a church, is it?

A home of right relationships, of pure spiritual love. Is there the fruit of real spiritual maturity there? Our brothers and sisters growing together there in real spiritual love.

Jesus said, by their fruit you will know them. In other words, whether people who are full of all sorts of impressive spiritual talk, whether they're actually real, or whether in fact it's just a sham, by your fruit you'll be known.

And Peter's just saying the same thing here. It's by the fruit that you can tell the nature of the seed from which you were really born. I just have to look around the little kids and the toddlers in church.

[11 : 53] And one of our girls was saying to us just on Sunday about one little girl they'd been looking after in Christ. You know, she's really pretty. She's going to be a really stunning girl when she grows up. And I thought to myself, well, yeah, her mother's a very attractive woman, so it's all in the DNA.

And that's right, isn't it? And the fruit of God's true family is real brotherly love. Because his seed, his DNA of love, of the God who is love, is what brought us to birth and what grows our life to maturity.

And the fruit of maturity, that real brotherly love, is something that is all through this letter in 1 Peter. You'll find it in every chapter. Look at chapter 2, verse 17. Love the brotherhood.

Chapter 3, verse 8. Finally, he says, have brotherly love. Chapter 4, verse 8. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly.

That's how you survive in a hostile world. Look at the very last verse of this whole letter in chapter 5, verse 14. Greet one another with the kiss of love. That is the mark, according to Peter, of a people, of a family, of a household on the road to God's salvation.

[13 : 16] Remember our full salvation, which is our certain hope, is not yet our possession. But it is being shaped, according to Peter, by the whole of our life here and now.

Our full salvation that we will receive at the revelation of the Lord Jesus will be the consummation of what we, as God's people, are becoming now. We're shaping our future destiny.

And as one writer puts it very memorably, those who live in hell cannot expect to arrive in heaven. That's stark, isn't it? But it's true. And that's why Peter, all through this letter, he has a focus on the future.

But he is urging us to live now in the present for what will be permanent and what will outlast this earth. We're living, he says in chapter 1, verse 13, for the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of the Lord Jesus.

That's why he keeps warning and encouraging his readers to be the home of true love. Because that is the thing, isn't it, that's going to last forever. Love never ends, is what Paul writes to the Corinthians.

[14 : 31] Remember in chapter 13 there, he says all sorts of good gifts, good things that God gives to us in this life will come to an end. Gifts of knowledge and prophecy and all sorts of things. Even our faith and our hope will one day give way to sight, won't they?

We won't need faith and hope anymore, the return of Jesus. But God's love will never end. And that's why Paul, in his letters, just like Peter here, is focused on the church growing up as it grows together in love.

The only thing that counts, he says to the Galatians, the only thing that counts as you await that hope of righteousness is what? Faith working through love.

See, the whole of the New Testament speaks with one voice on this. It says you cannot grow up in the Christian life without growing together in Christian love.

And the fruit of real spiritual maturity is seen in believers humbly loving together. The church is the family of true love. Well, how does that happen?

[15 : 44] Peter says for there to be the fruit of true spiritual maturity, there must be the feeding of true spiritual maturity. And that is seen in Christians humbly learning together.

Growing up into salvation, according to Peter, means feeding together on the pure spiritual milk. Chapter 2, verse 2, do you see? Like newborn infants long for, crave the pure spiritual milk.

That is the word of the gospel truth. Well, anybody who's been a mother will know how determined and how persistent the baby is in its craving for milk.

There's no waiting around, is there? If the baby wants its milk, my goodness, that baby is going to have the milk or you will know about it. And Peter says, well, that's the only way to grow spiritually.

If we crave that pure spiritual milk, the sustenance that comes to us from God himself. It's the spiritual life that in verse 3, you see, he says we've already tasted in coming to faith.

[16 : 48] His life-giving seed was planted in us at first through that living and abiding word. That's what verse 25 says. And we grow up into salvation in the same way as we came to birth.

Verse 2, by feeding more and more and more on that living and abiding word. Jesus said in John 6, remember, my words are spirit and life. This is your food and drink.

Not just to be tasted once, but to be craved constantly. To be drunk in, to be digested, to make us grow up. James, as well, says something very similar to Peter in his letter.

He says that having been brought forth by the word of truth, born again, we are to receive with meekness this implanted word which is able to save us.

Here he's saying the word that has been first implanted, first tasted, must go on. And it must go on nourishing us so that we can grow up into salvation.

[17 : 53] And according to Peter, that maturity is always evidenced in the fruit of a church that is growing together in love. And you see what it means for Peter to put together so inseparably this growing together in spiritual love and the feeding together in real spiritual milk, the fruit of maturity with the feeding of maturity.

What he means, and this is so important for us to grasp, is that where there is no true earnest loving of the brethren, then there cannot be a church that is true and earnest in its love for the Bible.

No matter how much prominence seems to be given to the Bible, or its doctrine, or even its preaching. If there's no love of the brethren, there is no real love of the Bible, because real love of the Bible, real craving of spiritual milk, always produces love of the brethren.

So it simply cannot be a church that is truly humbly learning together and craving pure spiritual milk and actually taking it in and digesting it so as to put on real spiritual muscle, real spiritual flesh, if that is not being evidenced in real spiritual love.

Learning together humbly and loving together humbly just can't be separated. Otherwise, neither of these things is really happening.

[19 : 23] It's just a sham. It's pretend. See, the evidence of a baby that's feeding properly isn't just that it takes hours and hours and hours feeding and seems to be taking in milk, is it?

The evidence is that the baby is actually growing and gaining weight. That's what's measured every week by the midwife, isn't it? Is the baby gaining weight? And the evidence that it's really growing is that it's becoming more and more recognizable as a developing and growing human being.

Not just that this baby is starting to look like a great big bottle of milk, full and overflowing. That's not what we expect, is it? So you see the point, the evidence of true feeding and the spiritual milk of God's Word is not that we as Christians just become like enormous great biblical encyclopedias, regurgitating all sorts of undigested knowledge.

Some Christians can think they're becoming very mature because they're like that. And they can recite creeds and catechisms and books and all the rest of it and read great big tomes. But you know, sometimes those are the very last people you want to be around.

Isn't that right? They think that they've drunk in spiritual milk by the gallon, but it seems to have gone through them really rather undigested.

[20 : 43] I don't need to elaborate, do I, how unpleasant an aroma undigested milk gives at the other end of a baby. Not to mention that that will cause the baby to fail to thrive if the milk is not digested.

It will not grow. Now, the evidence of true Christian growth from true feeding of God's Word is that we become more and more truly human, more and more recognizably the children of our Heavenly Father, more and more in the image of our true brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy One, the Pure One, the Loving One.

That we love one another as He loved us. Love as I have loved you, says Jesus, as He was just about to walk out into the dark and give His life as a ransom for those He loved.

So Peter's clear. We've been brought to birth to grow, to grow up into salvation. But we grow up into our abiding destiny as God's true family only if we are growing together in love.

And we won't grow together in love unless we're feeding together in God's pure, unadulterated milk of the Word of the Gospel of Christ. Love without real learning, well, that would just be sentimentality, won't it?

[22 : 13] But how are we to feed purposefully and for real spiritual maturity so that we are humbly learning together, that we're feeding and growing up in love, not just being puffed up in knowledge and in pride?

Well, that's a real question, isn't it? It's a vital question. But Peter says here it's all in our attitude to feeding. Look again at verses 1 and 2. Do you see how closely connected they are?

Peter's saying that to really feed for spiritual maturity, we need to seek the milk of the Word with both perseverance and with penitence. We need to crave it like an infant, knowing that nothing must get in the way of that feeding, that we won't be distracted, that we'll persevere, even when it's hard to learn how to suckle and to feed, even when it makes us tired.

And it is hard work learning how to feed deeply on the Word of God. It is tiring at times. There's no doubt about that. It requires effort. But we will also have to make sure that there is no obstruction in the way.

Look at verse 1. It reads better like this. Putting away all malice and deceit and so on, like newborn infants crave the purest spiritual milk.

[23 : 34] What he's saying is that that is the only way to feed. You have to be putting away these wrong attitudes, even as you take in God's Word. In other words, we have to have an attitude of genuine penitence, of putting away sinful attitudes, and a craving of genuine faith for the true life of God to feed us, to sustain us, to shape us, to change us.

That's the only way to feed, according to Peter, that brings real fruit, putting away that with repentance and turning to Christ with an appetite. There are some medicines, you know, that if these medicines are going to be effective in your body, you have to make sure that you're not taking other medicines, or certain herbal remedies, or even certain foods, because they block the absorption of that medicine and stop it getting into your bloodstream.

You can eat it, take it in, but it won't be absorbed. And Peter says, for the medicine of God's Word to get into your system and do its work, you have to get rid of all of these kind of attitudes.

And you have to crave that medicine that alone can save you. And what he means, friends, is that if a church doesn't do that, if it harbors pride and arrogance and ill will and envy, so that in fact you are hating your fellow believers, not loving them, then even the purest, finest, best, most wonderful Bible teaching just won't do any good at all, none at all, because it'll just go right through undigested.

Can't be absorbed where there are all of these things. No, we rightly crave God's Word when we come not proudly, seeking to master it so that our learning might outgrow others, but when we come humbly, seeking for it to master us so that our love might outgrow others.

[25 : 49] That's the kind of feeding that results in the fruit of real spiritual maturity and is seen in a family of love where brothers and sisters are really growing up, humbly loving together as they humbly learn together and crave that pure spiritual milk of salvation.

So let's pray that God would help us to be right feeders of His Word. Let's pray. Growing together, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, putting away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander and growing up like newborn infants, longing for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up to salvation.

To that end, Lord, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of His Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Amen. Amen.