

Supernatural Love, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:22

Code: 60-14

Open your Bible to 1 Peter chapter 1. We come back to 1 Peter and we're going to be looking at verses 22 through 25, 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 22 through 25. Peter writes, "Since you have been in obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere love for the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart. For you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and abiding Word of God for all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass, the grass withers and the flower falls off but the Word of the Lord abides forever and this is the Word which was preached to you.

One of my favorite old illustrators of Bible truth was a man named William Beeterwolf(?). He lived in the early years of this century and he had very unusual insights into Scripture. Dr. Beeterwolf relates the incident of a construction engineer who was inspecting a building site. And while he was out on a scaffold about three stories high, he suddenly tripped and his body plummeted to the ground in what appeared to be certain death. Dr. Beeterwolf says, "A workman below happened to be looking up just as the builder fell and since he was standing where the man's body would strike the ground, he instantly braced himself, taking the full impact of the falling man. The builder was only slightly injured but the workman was driven into the concrete. With almost every bone in his body broken, he walked the streets from that time on as an object of pity.

"Later in an interview a reporter asked him how the man whose life he had saved was treating him. The crippled man's reply was, 'Well he gave me half of everything he owns. I also have a share in his business. He never lets me want for a thing. He is constantly concerned about me and hardly a day passes that I don't receive from him some little token of remembrance.'"

It's a beautiful story of gratitude, isn't it? We understand that. But I think as Christians so many times we forget that out on the Hill of the Skull there was one who caught the full impact of falling man, who caught us when we would have been crushed in death. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed. He made Himself expendable for us and certain we ought to express gratitude to Him.

Now that wonderful story is a story about gratitude and the analogy fits the gratitude that we ought to have to the Lord Jesus Christ for catching our fallen souls and bearing the full weight of them and being Himself crushed through His own goodness to us. Peter began this wonderful epistle with a marvelous discussion of salvation beginning in verse 1 right on through verse 12, he discussed the glory of salvation. And now he is talking about the grateful response to salvation. First of all, how we

respond to God was his theme in verses 13 through 21. And there he called us to a proper response to God, responding with deep gratitude that would lead us to three things, hope, holiness and honor. And now as we come to verse 22 he calls for a second response, a response toward others. If we are genuinely grateful for Christ having caught us when we were falling to our death, then we should have a proper response toward God and we should have a proper response toward others. And what is to be our response to one another? How are we to treat each other, all of us who have been given salvation? The answer comes in that wonderful statement, "Fervently love one another...love one another." Our response toward God, verse 13, fix your hope. Verse 15, be holy. That's the right response toward God.

And then we are to have a reverent fear of God as well. We are to have a reverent awe of the One who reigns above. But in regard to each other, very simple, we are to love each other. That's the proper fruit of salvation directed to each other.

Now I want to talk to you about this tonight. I want to talk not only from the text but I want to talk in a personal way, if I might because Peter's exhortation is not unfamiliar to us. We understand this, "love one another" is an age-old command. Peter says it numerous times so you might as well get ready, we're going to come back through it again. Chapter 2 verse 17 he says, "Love the brotherhood." Chapter 3 verse 8 he says, "Let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brother love," is the Greek. He says it again in chapter 4 verse 8, "Keep fervent in your love for one another." So four times in this epistle he calls us to love one another. And as I said, it's not a new command with Peter, rather it's a command that Peter was given by Christ. Back in John chapter 13 and verse 34 you remember our Lord said, "A new commandment I give you," it was new then, "that you love one another even as I have loved you that you also love one another." Peter learned it there and Peter passes it on here.

Other New Testament writers repeat this same command which is to be the mark of Christians. In fact, Jesus said, "By this will all men know that you're My disciple." Paul in Romans 12:10 says, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." We've been studying Philippians chapter 2 where Paul says we are to maintain the same love toward one another. Perhaps you remember Hebrews chapter 13 where it says in verse 1, "Let love of the brethren continue." And 1 John, John brings it up, chapter 3 verse 11, it's a major theme with him. This is the message which you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another. So it's a basic Christian message. Peter says it, Paul says it, the writer of Hebrews says it, John says it, they say it because Jesus said it.

Now the verb here that is used by Peter is the verb that expresses that highest kind of love, the love of the will. And we've gone into this many times, I don't want to belabor the point. But it is that love, agapao or agapeas we know the Greek word familiarly to us. And it basically is not the love of emotion or the love of feeling, but the love of choice, the love of will. It is the kind of love that can respond to a command. You can't command emotional love, you can't command feeling but you can command this kind of love because it is the act of the will. Now we know that command well and so I don't want

to belabor that. But the modifying elements in these verses I do want to draw your attention to because they really do intensify and elucidate this commandment. And as Peter drives home the command to love one another, he uses terminology that really does surround that command with much richness and becomes for us very helpful.

Now the first question that he really answers for us and we'll look at them in the sense of questions, but the first question he answers for us deals with whether we can respond to that command or not. And if I were to go up to someone and command that they love one another, I would have to presuppose that they had the capacity to do that. Not everybody has that capacity. You see, the natural man does not have the capacity to love like this, it's foreign to his nature, he doesn't know it, he doesn't experience it, he can't do it. And the Scripture indicates this to us on a number of occasions and in a number of ways. It says, for example, that our Lord said to the Pharisees in Luke 11:42, "Woe to you, Pharisees, for you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb..." In other words, you're down to the details in terms of your religious ceremony. "But you disregard justice and the love of God." You know nothing about those things, those are absent from your life...you have outward religion, you have not the love of God.

Again in John 5:42 Jesus said this, "I know you that you do not have the love of God in yourselves." What an indictment of sinful men. You do not have the love of God in yourselves. It is characteristic of an unregenerate person that he is or she is incapable of loving in this way. In 1 John 3:16 John says, "We know love by this, that He lay down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" The point is, it doesn't.

We shall know by this, by loving with word and with tongue and with deed and with truth, we shall know by this that we are of the truth. In other words, you can tell a Christian by his love, by this shall men know that you are My disciples because you have love one for another, John 13:35. So we must begin by saying then as John does in 1 John 4:12 also, if we love one another God abides in us, conversely if God does not abide in us we cannot love one another with this level of love. We can feel erratic love, we can feel human affection, phileolove, we can even experience what is called in the Bible storge(??), the Greek word for family love, or natural love, but this rather supernatural kind of love that loves by an act of the will in response to a command is a love that is uniquely the possession of believers.

So Peter needs to face that question and that's the question he faces at the very outset of his discussion. The first question is this, when were we enabled to love like this? When were we enabled to love supernaturally? When could we even respond to such a command as is given at the end of verse 22, love one another? When did it happen? Now I want you to follow this, it's rich and Peter gives us a tremendously marvelous reply to the question. Verse 22, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren," stop at that point.

He's saying you received the capacity to sincerely love the brethren at the time when your souls were purified. And the time when your souls were purified was the time when you obeyed...what?...the truth. He's taking us back to our salvation. Salvation then became the great capaciator. Salvation then became the moment in time, the great event wherein we were given the capacity to love with a genuine love. This is a thrilling statement, let's follow it.

"Since you have purified your souls," let's just take that thought. And the verb here mean just that, to cleanse, to purify. The fact that it's in the perfect tense means it could be understood this way, now that you have purified your souls, now that that has already been accomplished...the perfect tense looks to a past act with present continuing results. Now that you have already purified your souls, love one another. In other words, the loving of one another is predicated on the purifying of the soul. An impure soul, a sinful soul, an unwashed soul, an unsanctified soul, an unredeemed soul, an unsaved soul, an unconverted soul, an untransformed soul cannot so love. By the way, soul simply means your person, yourself, the real you, your whole moral spiritual being. You are a soul, that's simply a composite way to see the real you. Peter uses the term also in verse 9 of chapter 1 when he speaks of the salvation of your souls. He uses it again in verse 4 verse 19, speaking about committing yourselves to a faithful creator. He means the real person.

So, you have received the capacity to love at the time when your souls were purified. He looks at a past event in which the readers were cleansed, purged, purified, with the continuing result that they now have the capacity to respond to a command to love. When was this purification? At salvation...at salvation. This purifying is obviously tied to the event of the new birth. How do we know that? Verse 23, notice this, "For you have been born again." And that is really essentially explaining to us what he has in mind when he says you purified your souls. Yes, you did it when you were born again. Also, by the way, a perfect tense, something in the past with continuing result. It too looks back to the moment of salvation. You were born again at the moment of salvation, you were purified at the moment of salvation. You will also note that "born again" in verse 23 is a passive in which God is the actor who gives you new life, whereas you purified your souls is an active and it sees it from the human viewpoint...you purified your souls at the time that God transformed you. One looks back to the moment of salvation from the divine side, verse 23. One looks back to the moment of salvation from the human side.

But note this please, salvation is a purging event. Okay? It purges not only the past...now you need to understand this...the purging that takes place or the cleansing that takes place at salvation not only cleanses the past but it capacitates the future. In other words, it not only deals with the sins of the past but in a sense it gives a new power for the future. It is a cleansing that not only covers but a cleansing that enables. That's a marvelous, marvelous truth.

Ezekiel saw it this way as under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. He looked forward to the coming of the new covenant. In Ezekiel chapter 36 and verse 24, "God promises I will take you from among the nations, gather you from all the lands, bring you into your own land...then this...I will sprinkle clean water on you, you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols." That dealt with the past. "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 and I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." That's the new covenant. It not only purges the past but it gives a new capacity for the future.

In 2 Peter 1 Peter is concerned about explaining to us the essence of the new nature and what it is in verse 4. He says, "You have become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." You have escaped out of a level of corruption into a pure pattern...a pure pattern. Down in verse 9, he says, "If you don't look at your life and see godly qualities, you will have forgotten your purification from former sins," and he looks back to salvation and calls it a purification. It is a purification...it is a purification. It is a purification of the past and it is a purification for the future that enables you to live a different life, to think different thoughts and to love in a different way.

Now looking at that phrase again in 1 Peter, I want to draw your attention to it. It appears to be on the surface a sort of a human effort that is referred to...Since you have purified your souls...sounds like they did it themselves, doesn't it? It sounds like it was a human work...you purified your souls. May I say this to you? It is not a human work...it is not a human work and I want to talk about this if I don't talk about anything I want you to understand this tonight. It is the work of God, it is the work of God, no less than the work of God. And we had just read it in Ezekiel chapter 36, let me remind you of what we just read, "Then I...says God...will sprinkle clean water upon you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness. I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you." It's all the work of God.

First Corinthians 1 verse 26, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen." You're saved because God has chosen, you see that. Why? Verse 29, "That no man should boast before God." Now listen to this, "But by His doing," oh that's so important, "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus." It's the work of God. "Who became to us...listen to us...wisdom from God and righteousness...and here it is...and sanctification and redemption." It's Him, it's His doing and through Him Christ became to us sanctification or cleansing or purging that just as it is written, verse 31 says, let him who boasts boast in the Lord. It's not a human work, it's the work of God, it's the work of God.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:11, and he's talking here about all the wicked people who don't enter the Kingdom, fornicators, idolators, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers and so forth. And then he says in verse 11, "And such were some of you." And then I love this, and he doesn't say you washed yourselves, he says you were washed. He doesn't say you sanctified yourselves, he says you were sanctified. He doesn't say you justified yourselves, you were justified. God did it all. God washed you. God sanctified you. God justified you.

Look at Ephesians chapter 5. Oh, this is so familiar and sometimes the nuggets are hidden because of familiarity. But listen to Ephesians 5 verse 25, and don't think of marriage here, think of Christ and the church. "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...listen to this...in order that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she should be holy and blameless." No, it wasn't us, He sanctified her, He cleansed her, the church.

Titus chapter 2 basically the same great truth in verse 14, it says that Christ Jesus gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed...listen to this...and purify for Himself a people of His own possession. He purified us. He did it. Titus 3:5, He saved us. That's what it says, you ought to underline that. He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration. He gave us the washing, the purging, the cleansing and the new birth...and that verse, Titus 3:5, sums up 1 Peter 1:22 and 23, includes both the purification and the new birth. It is His work.

In Hebrews 1:3 it says that Christ when He had made purification of sins sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Now I want to say all of that because I want you to know the Bible says that this purging is the work of Christ. You say, "Well then why does it say here that you have purified your soul?" I'll tell you why, listen carefully. Though the purification that occurs in salvation that washes you from your past sins and washes you in order that you might live purely in the future, though that is all the work of God, listen to me, it is never apart from the desire or the will of the sinner. Did you hear that? It is never apart from the desire or the will of the sinner. And that is obvious because all of the invitations to the sinner throughout the Bible assume that he must desire and act in response to the invitation. You can go in to the Old Testament, if you desire, and you will hear it there, you will hear it from the lips of Isaiah, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call on Him while He is near, let the wicked forsake His way and the unrighteous man His thoughts, and let Him return to the Lord." That's a cry to an unsaved person, Isaiah 55:6 and 7. And it pleads with him to have the desire and the will to turn from his sin.

You come to the New Testament, you hear it there. It comes from the pen of James. He says this, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you," James 4:8, "cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you doubleminded." And every other plea, Old Testament, New Testament, every

plea to the sinner assumes that though God does the purging it is never apart from the desire and the will of the sinner. So you must understand that. You're not saved against your will. You're not saved against your desire. God the Spirit moves on your desire, God the Spirit moves on your will and they are incorporated so that the invitations to the sinners are legitimate invitations that plead for a response.

So you say, "John, what you're saying is that when we were saved we were willing to be purified." That's right. "But it was all the work of God." That's right. You're saying, "When we were saved we had the desire to be cleansed of sin." That's right. "But it was all the work of God." That's right. God produced the conviction, too, and the will and the desire. At the point of salvation, beloved, we were purified...we were purified.

Well you say, "How come we still sin?" Oh because the purification is the process. There's a sense in which we were purified positionally and totally and our sins were all covered, but there's a practical sense in which that purification has to go on and on and on. It's really what Jesus said when He was talking to Peter in John 13, He said, "You know, I want to wash your feet. Peter says, I'm not going to let You do that. He said, Well if I don't wash you then you have no part with Me. And Peter says, Then wash me from head to foot. And the Lord says...in effect...Peter, you've already been washed, you just need your feet clean." And in a spiritual sense that's exactly how it is with us. At salvation there was a total washing, but we accumulate a lot of crud on our feet in this world, don't we? And we need to continually to be foot washed, as it were.

That's why 1 John 1 says that the blood of Christ, God's Son, keeps on doing...what?...cleansing us from all sins. It keeps on cleansing us. It's the work of God working in the sinner, continues the purging.

When did you receive the capacity to love each other? At salvation when you purified your souls, when your sins were washed away and you were given a new pure heart with a new capacity to love supernaturally. And he even gives us another insight into this moment. Look back at verse 22, "Since you have purified your souls by obedience to the truth." Oh my, what a great statement.

Would you please notice that there's a word that's absent here, a really glaring omission. There is a word that is always associated with salvation in our minds that is missing here, what is it? What's the word? Faith...it's missing, it doesn't say anything about faith. You have purified your souls. He is looking at the moment of salvation, first of all, as a turning from sin, as a purging of sin. The old sin washed away and a new capacity for holiness is implied. And then he adds this other remarkable phrase, "By obedience to the truth," and again he misses the word faith. And here he talks about obedience. Isn't that interesting? Two things he sees at the moment of salvation, a turning from sin and a submission to the truth. Beloved, these are always...always the elements of true saving faith. He does not avoid faith, he defines it. This is its essential nature. Faith is implied in the turning from

sin. Faith is implied in submission to the truth. And it's so much richer to use the word obedience. It's not just mental assent, it's active submission, active obedience. That's what happens at salvation.

Go back to chapter 1 verse 2. Peter says you're chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. There it is. That's the purging, that's the cleansing, that's the element where repentance fits. Your salvation included the purging, cleansing, purifying work of the Spirit in order that you may...what's the next word?...obey Jesus Christ. There's the same two concepts. And that obedience was sealed in that sprinkled blood, that magnificent covenant that you made, a covenant of obedience to God. And therefore, verse 14 of chapter 1, calls believers obedient children.

Do you see the picture here? He's taking us back to salvation and he is defining salvation in the truest purest sense. He's taking us right back through to the Savior Himself who demanded that men repent from their sins and follow Him. He is saying the moment of your salvation was the time when you purified your souls from sin, the time when you acknowledged submissive obedience to the truth. The truth was nothing more and nothing less than the gospel message...the message of Christ and His death and His resurrection and His salvation. And that truth came into your life and that truth became the cleanser.

Do you remember the third verse of John 15? "You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you," oh, I love that. When the saving message comes, it cleans and it brings submission and obedience. Faith, by the way, is often expressed as obedience, very often. In Romans chapter 1 verse 5 it says, regarding Jesus Christ our Lord, "Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." That's another word for salvation, it's the obedience of faith. Jesus said, "If you continue in My Word, you're My real disciple." That's when your faith is verified.

By the way, at the end of Romans, verse 26, where he uses the same phrase, chapter 16, he talks about Christ, the preaching of Christ, the Scriptures, the commandment of the eternal God has been made known to all nations leading to obedience of faith. And it doesn't just mean that faith is an act of obedience, it means an obedient faith, the kind of faith that goes on obeying.

I'm thinking of Acts chapter 15 also, and I would just draw your attention to verse 9 as we complete our thought on this. Acts 15:9, I love this, listen to this, "And He made...talking about the Holy Spirit...and God sending the Spirit...God sent the Spirit...he said...and He made no distinction...this is Peter...no distinction between us and them...that is between Jew and Gentile...cleansing their hearts by faith." There you see the other element. Faith and cleansing are linked. Faith and obedience are linked. Cleansing or purging or purifying and obeying are part of saving faith.

In Romans verse 16 of chapter 6, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness? Thanks be to God that you were the slaves of sin, you have become obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you are committed." That's salvation. Salvation is purging and obedience, purging and obedience, repentance and submission. It is always so.

That's an unpopular teaching today, by the way, if you wonder why I'm belaboring the point, very unpopular with some people. Beloved, salvation takes place, listen to me, salvation takes place when in response to the call of God the sinner hears the truth, turns from his sin and obeys the call to believe and submit. That's when salvation takes place. And, beloved, that's when you'll receive the capacity for supernatural love. Let's go back then to 1 Peter.

When did we get this capacity? Since we purified our souls in obedience to the truth. See, those terms just modify the main verb which is love one another. And he says since you've already gotten the capacity, do it...do it. You see, when we were saved, part of that purging is the new capacity to love each other. So you have it...in fact, Romans 5:5 says, "The love of Christ is shed abroad, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." It's there. Do you remember what Paul said to the Thessalonians? "Now as to the love of the brethren," he says, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "you have no need for anyone to write to you." Oh really? No, he says, you don't need it, "For you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." Wow!

You say, "Well what are you talking about? We don't need your sermon if we don't need that letter?" I'm just reminding you. No, he says, you don't need for somebody to write you to tell you that, you know that because God taught you that. It's deep in your heart. First John chapter 3 and verse 14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren." Did you get that? You know that's just part of being a Christian, you love the brothers. Somebody who says they're a Christian and has no desire to ever be with Christians, no desire to ever fellowship with Christians, no desire to ever meet the needs of others, no desire to have any on-going relationship with the family of God, John says their claim is useless because, he says, we know we've passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. Verse 15, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." This is just Christian character at work.

Over in verse 23 he says, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as He commands us." It's interesting, isn't it, on the one hand he says you have it because you're a Christian, on the other hand he says now do it. And what he means to say is it's there, the capacity is there, the love is there but you need to exercise it more and more...more and more. Let your love abound more and more, Philippians 1:9, you have it, let it

abound. By the way, 1 John 4:7, "Beloved, let us love one another," why? "For love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God, and the one who doesn't love doesn't know God for God is love." See, you have that capacity but you need to exercise it more and more, that's pretty simple. If it's absent, you're not a Christian. If it's present, fan it, build it.

Verse 20 of 1 John 4 he says, "If anyone says, I love God, I love God, and hates his brother, he's a liar." Boy, that's strong language. That's such a strong statement. But it's exactly what God meant to say. "If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar for the one who doesn't love his brother in whom he has seen can't love God whom he has not seen, and this commandment we have from Him that the one who loves God should love his brother also." And he keeps going back and forth. On the one hand he says if you don't love you're not saved. And if you are saved you do love but love more. We have the capacity and we have the love and he says do it. Chapter 5 he says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." You can't say you love God and not love Christ, and if you love God you love Christ, if you love Christ you'll love those who belong to Christ. "By this we know we love the children of God when we love God." It's basic.

So Peter simply says this, you ask the question when did we receive the capacity to love like this? He says at your salvation. So since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls, love one another....love one another. And by the way, he says, you have so purified your souls and so obeyed the truth and been saved that your love...note this word...is a sincere love...a sincere love, it's real. All the world can fake it, this is real. It's not hypocritical, it's genuine. And even though we have that real love, Paul still says in Romans 12:9, "Love without hypocrisy." Sometimes hypocrisy does intrude but we have the capacity for the real thing, genuine love, real love.

In fact, in 2 Corinthians 6:6 Paul giving his own testimony says that he has lived in purity and knowledge and patience, in kindness in the Holy Spirit and in genuine love. What a great statement...genuine love, not fake, real.

Now when did we receive this? At salvation. Second question, very brief, who are we to love? He says in verse 22, "Love one another." You say, "Well one another is pretty broad, who are the one another we're to love?" Oh, we already saw it in 1 John and we see it here. Sincere love of the brethren. Literally that's one word, brother love and the word in the Greek is Philadelphia, from phileo, to love, delphos, brother, brother love, other Christians...other Christians. That's right, we're to love other Christians.

Now listen to this thought, okay? When you were saved God not only gave you a new love to express but He gave you a new family to express it to. And that's the church. Love each other. We saw it in John 13. Love one another, by this shall all men know that you're My disciples. If you say you're a Christian and you don't love your brother, you're a liar. If you're a Christian, the love of God

dwells in you, you're going to love your brother. The new ground of affection is oneness in Christ and it exceeds all earthly relations, it exceeds all earthly limitations. We're to love other Christians. That's the very family that God has given us in which to exercise this new love. John 15:12 Jesus said to His disciples, "This commandment I give you that you love one another just as I have loved you...love one another just as I have loved you." He said that to the Twelve, and I want you to love each other in the same way.

You say, "John, you didn't say anything about loving the world." No, the Bible doesn't say anything about that in this regard. All it says is love not the world in 1 John, it means the evil system.

The point is this, you say, "Well how we going to win the world if we don't love the world?" Let me tell you how. If you love each other you'll win the world because the world is dying to be a part of an association of people who love each other. That's the strongest attraction we have. That's why in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 the Apostle Paul paints a phenomenal scenario, he says, "Look, you have an older Christian and a younger Christian, brand new Christian and one that's been a Christian for a while. They go out to dinner with a Gentile unbeliever. The older Christian is mature, grown up. The younger Christian has just been saved out of idolatry. This unbeliever brings out dinner and the younger Christian looks at it and it's meat. He says to the older Christian...I wonder where he bought this, you think he bought this in the temple marketplace? Because, you see, as a young Christian who has just come out of idolatry, if he knows that this meat was offered to idols, he can't eat it." And what they did in those days, the pagans brought meat, it was offered to idols, the priests ate some of it, the gods didn't eat any of it, they didn't do anything but just sit there, obviously, they were idols. The priests...the priests ate some of it and what the priests didn't eat they took out in the back of the temple and sold and made their living, so you would literally being buying meat that was offered to an idol. For a brand-new Christian who has come out of paganism, he can't eat it. It's just too...it reminds him of his paganism, it reminds him of the gross orgies that he was indulged in.

So he says to his mature Christian friend, "I wonder if he bought it in the temple." And the mature Christian says, "Look, forget it, eat it. An idol is nothing, eat it. Don't ask questions, we've got to win this guy." The guy comes back out of the kitchen and sits down and the young Christian can't resist it, this is the essence of that scene there, and he says, "Ah...ah, where did you buy this meat?" "Oh, I got it at the temple market."

Now the mature Christian is in a tough spot, right? He says to himself, "If I don't eat this guy's food, I'll offend him. If I do eat this guy's food, I'll offend my Christian brother. The question is, do I or don't I eat?" The answer is, don't eat. That's what Paul said. You say, "Wait a minute, you're going to offend the unbeliever." Yeah but listen, if you eat that meat, you have just said to that believer...to that unbeliever..."I treat unbelievers more lovingly than I treat Christians." And the unbeliever concludes, "Ah, it is better to be an unbeliever than to be a believer." On the other hand, you don't eat, and you say, "I can't eat, it would offend my dear brother," and the unbeliever says, "Wow, that's

love." And that's the kind of love that attracts the unbeliever. So if we simply take care of loving one another, the testimony will be overwhelming, right?

Let me just see if I can make this practical. You say, "Yeah, John, I know all of that. Love one another, I see the doctrine, I see the theology, I see what Peter is saying. Well what do you mean by that? What do you mean love each other?" I want you to understand what I'm going to say, it's coming from my heart. I am convinced that we have trivialized almost every great biblical truth in one way or another in our sort of pop-Christian culture. And if you talk about loving one another to most people, they're going to think you're talking about sentiment. They're going to think you're talking about emotional feelings. Or they're going to trivialize it down to the level where they will perceive Christian love as something very very minimal. If I asked you, for example, how have you shown Christian love today? What would you say?

"Well, ah, my wife asked me to help her clean up the house, I did that." Well that's nice. Or, "I noticed a guy in a parking lot and he needed a space to park and I was there first but I let him have it." Ho, ho, fat chance, huh? Who are we kidding? "Well, you know, I try to be real sensitive to my kids. Yeah, you know, my kids have real needs and I took them to the park." You want to know something, that's all fine, that is trivial. We're talking about a grandiose concept here, folks. We're not talking about fussing with emotion, we're not talking about sentiment in your little world and my little world. We can't keep trivializing every thing.

Who has real need? Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. If you see your brother have need and you close up your compassion, how dwells the love of God in you? We're talking about real need. When is the last time we reached out to a widow, a real widow in need? When is the last time we helped a single parent struggling to raise children without a husband? When is the last time we ever thought about taking into our homes someone with no place to stay? A foster child? An orphan? When is the last time we went to a hospital to sit on a bed with a grieving wife who had a husband who was losing his mind from a disease? When is the last time you went to the hospital to visit someone who was wracked with pain, who was facing surgery, who was coming out of surgery? When was the last time you stooped down to spend hours with someone caught in sin? When is the last time you gave away your choice plans to spend a moment with someone lonely? I'm talking about love that reaches down there where life is really lived, not the trivia of decorating your already happy little life with a nice feeling. We can trivialize it and kid ourselves that we have loved as Christ loved, as we have not.

How did Jesus love? He said, "I want you to love one another as I have loved you." How did He love us? He did not love us in a trivial way. He did not love us with a mushy sentimentality. He did not love us by listening to our little quirks. He loved us in profound depth by meeting us at the point of our need. He loved us by showing mercy in our brokenness. He loved us by being there when no one else was.

I have a plan. I have a plan for Grace Community Church to begin to have opportunity to love like this because I think sometimes we don't know these people with these needs. I mean, in our neighborhoods there aren't a lot of transients roaming the streets and nobody sleeps in my gutter, I don't know about yours. And how am I going to find these people? So I have a plan, it's for me too and you. We're going to start a ministry of pastoral care at Grace Church and we're going to have a person, a pastor, a shepherd who will be available in every crisis and in every need as a point person. There will be a phone number in the bulletin as soon as we can get this moving that you call in the event of any need, any need at all. And that person will take that need...applause...now wait till I'm finished before you get carried away...that person will take that need and disseminate it through a network of available trained loving Christians so that we can begin to meet the needs that we have as a church family. No one person can do that. I can't, we need to begin to love at the level where love is biblical, not at the level of its triviality and sentimentality that is being dosed out in heavy lumps by our pop-Christian society today.

Every time I see these over-dressed, over-done gaudy show- biz type people who are saying that Christianity is health, wealth and prosperity, I grieve in my heart because they continue to escalate themselves further and further away from the level where Christian love is really shown in its genuine character. And I speak to my own heart as well.

So, when did we get this capacity? When you were saved you got it. Who are we to love? The first line, one another. We're going to do everything we can to make that a reality. You pray for us, all right? Well let's bow together in prayer.

We do, Lord, so much want to love the way You loved us. We don't want to be content with kidding ourselves about our sentimental feelings. The kind of love You're talking about is painful and sacrificial, not self-indulgent, fun. And yet, Lord, it's so deeply rewarding and so joyous. Lord, help us to love this way. We have the capacity and we have the command to use that capacity to the fullest. May we be faithful that indeed as we love one another the world will know we belong to You. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).