

Supernatural Love, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:22-25

Code: 60-15

Let me call your attention for our study of God's Word tonight to 1 Peter chapter 1...1 Peter chapter 1. We're looking at verses 22 through 25. The title of this section, "Supernatural love," and this is part 2 in our study. First Peter 1:22 says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 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."

Now the emphasis of this particular passage is bound up in one statement in verse 22, "Love one another." Everything else in the passage surrounds that very basic Christian principle, love one another. That is a principle which is repeated often in the New Testament and I'm not going to belabor the point to take you through passage after passage but to point out a couple of things tonight that I think are of great interest with regard to that principle. Not only is it important for its own sake in order that we might show the love of Christ, and that we might therefore benefit and bless and encourage and strengthen and assist those in the body of Christ, but our loving one another just so happens to be probably the most important factor in our impact, not only on the church but on the world. In John 13:34 Jesus said, "I new commandment I give to you that you love one another, even as I have loved you that you also love one another." There's the same command. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." A very significant statement, we are known as the disciples of Jesus Christ on the basis of loving one another.

In John 17 verse 21, Jesus, of course, praying that we all may be one even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee that they also may be in us that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. Now that's pretty basic and what Jesus is saying is that not only does the world know that we belong to Christ, but the world knows that Christ belongs to God on the basis of our loving one another. We are thus identified with Christ who is thus identified as having been sent by God when we manifest love to one another. We are then to love one another for the sake of that love and its benefit to each other and for the sake of that love and its benefit to the watching world that is perceiving the kind of love that is foreign to them and thus attracted to the reality of Christianity.

Another illustration of this which is monumental in my mind and you might turn for a moment to the passage, 1 Corinthians 10 verses 27 and 28. And this is a very very overlooked portion of Scripture but one which is extremely significant. And it really stands on its own without necessarily digging way back into the context. Verse 27 says, "If one of the unbelievers invites you and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience's sake."

Now this is an evangelistic opportunity. Let's assume that you're a young Christian and you have been converted out of paganism. And when you were in paganism you were worshiping at an idol temple in the city of Corinth. And let's assume that in that idol worship you were involved in drunkenness and in debauchery of various kinds and let's assume that you were perhaps even involved in some of the sexual orgies that were characteristic of the Corinthian worship, so much so that to Corinthianize came to mean to commit fornication. Let's assume in your pagan worship there was gluttony and drunkenness and fornication and now you have come to Christ. And as a new Christian you want absolutely nothing to do with the former life. You want nothing to do with the paganism from which you have been redeemed.

One of the elements of your paganism was that when you worshiped your deity in the pagan temple where all the orgy and the feasting went on, you would bring food and give it to the God that you were worshiping. Obviously that god couldn't eat it, the priest would eat some of it, the rest they would take out into the marketplace and they would sell on the open market. So they would literally market what they didn't eat. And people then in the marketplace would buy meat offered to idols. That was never a problem for you until you became a Christian, now you're a Christian. And now for someone to offer you meat offered to an idol would conjure up in your mind all the idolatry and the fornication and the gluttony and the drunkenness and the orgy that was your former religion and because it was offered to an idol and now all the heinousness of that idolatry fills your mind, you would be unable to eat that meat, your conscience just wouldn't let you touch it because you had been delivered from that kind of thing.

That's the setting here. But notice verse 27 again, "If one of the unbelievers invites you and you wish to go for the purpose obviously of evangelism, eat anything that is set before without asking questions for conscience's sake. Don't even ask, just eat it for the sake of winning that unbeliever, for the sake of maintaining a good testimony and a kindness and a graciousness to him. Verse 28, "But if anyone should say to you, This is meat sacrificed to idols, do not eat it for the sake of the one who informed you and for conscience's sake."

Now what's this? Well this means you've got another Christian with you and maybe you're not even going to ask the question, you're a little more mature but this other Christian is a brand new Christian and he says to you, "This is meat offered to idols," and he has first-hand information. Now you've got a dilemma. You say to yourself, "If I don't eat the meat I offend...whom?...the host, the unbeliever. If I do eat the meat I offend...whom?...my brother, the Christian. The dilemma then in my evangelism is do I offend the unbeliever or do I offend the believer?" Initially common sense would tell you offend the believer, don't defend the unbeliever and that's exactly wrong. Paul says don't eat it for the sake of the one who informed you and for his conscience's sake. In other words, offend the unbeliever before you offend the believer. Why? Because it is your love toward that believer that makes your faith attractive. If I offend the believer not to offend the unbeliever, then the unbeliever says it's better to be an unbeliever, right?, because Christians don't offend unbelievers they just offend their own. And again what it points up is that the demonstration of our love to one another is the significant element relationally in our evangelism. It is love that attracts. And when the watching world sees that

we not only don't offend each other we love each other, then they know we're the disciples of Christ. And that's the substance of our testimony relationally.

In 1 John chapter 3 verses 10 and 11, "By the the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious, anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother; for this is the message which you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another." That's how we can be separated from the children of the devil, we are known by our love...we are known by our love. It is the substance of our witness relationally.

Now with that in mind let's go back to 1 Peter again. We understand perhaps a little more richly the phrase "love one another" in verse 22. We are loving one another, again I say not only for the sake of one another but for the sake of the watching world that is examining us to see who we belong to, to understand the character of Christianity and what it involves and what it brings to a relationship. So Peter calls on us here to love one another. That is what Jesus said and that is what John says and that is what Paul says and it is replete throughout Scripture that that is very basic to our Christian experience. The word "love" here comes from agapao which means basically the love of choice, the love of will, the highest level of love possible, not the love of feeling, not the love of uncontrolled emotion, not the love of physical attraction but the love of will, the love of choice, the highest level of love. Peter is calling us to love one another.

Now remember this is all in a section in which he is calling for a proper response to the gift of salvation. You remember, don't you, that in the first twelve verses of chapter 1 Peter describes salvation and then he says in response, starting in verse 13, there are some things that ought to be true of your life, toward God verses 13 through 18, you ought to honor Him, glorify Him, worship Him, hope in Him, and all those things. Toward one another, you ought to love one another. So this is a response to the gift of salvation, we are to love one another.

Now we asked some questions, let's go back to those questions, all right? Question number one which will unfold the text for us, when were we enabled to love supernaturally? Do you remember the answer, look at verse 22, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." When were we enabled to love supernaturally? Do we have that ability? The answer is yes, the time is when we obeyed the truth and purified our souls. To put it in terms of verse 23, when we were born again. It was at the moment of salvation, we've already seen this so this is just review, it was at the moment of salvation that we were enabled to love. We can now respond to that command because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, Romans 5:5 says. Salvation was the moment that we purified our souls. It was the moment in which we obeyed the truth of the gospel. It was the moment in which we were born again, to use all the terminology that is used in verses 22 and 23. And in that moment of purging and obedience and new birth, we were given the capacity to love.

Now let me tell you something. To love then for a believer is natural, or maybe I ought to say supernaturally natural. It is natural to our new state. In fact, John says if we don't love one another we are not the children of God, 1 John. So we have received the truth, the gospel. We have obeyed it. Therefore our souls have been purged and we've been born again. And having been born again we

have entered upon a new capacity to love, we now naturally love supernaturally. This then qualifies us to be responsible to respond to this command.

And many Scriptures point this out. I don't want to take too much time, I'm thinking of 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "Now as to the love of the brethren you have no need for anyone to write you for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." There is now within the believer the resident Holy Spirit who is teaching us to love one another with the very love of God which has been poured into our hearts. It is supernaturally natural. We have the love, we have the Spirit of God to teach us how to apply that love and that's why in 1 John as we said, John says it is characteristic of a believer so much so that not to love means you're not a Christian at all, to love is indicative of the new birth.

Now would you please notice back in to verse 22 that Peter notes that this love is a sincere love. Having been purified, having obeyed the truth, having been born again, we have entered upon a sincere love, an unhypocritical love, not a phony love, a genuine love, a real love, something that is not forced, that is not simply outward, it is love without hypocrisy...to take the term out of Romans 12:9. It is genuine love. There is much fake, false, shallow, superficial love but that's not the love of Christ, that's not the love of God. That true love is produced in us by the Spirit as the fruit of the Spirit indicates, Galatians 5, love then joy, peace and so forth.

So when did we receive the ability to love in a supernatural way? At the time of salvation. Question number two, and we looked briefly at this last time, very briefly: who are we to love? We now have the capacity since we were saved, so much so that it is supernaturally natural to us, we have the love, we have the Spirit within us to move that love through us, we have opportunity to love, but who are we to love? Well let's go back to verse 22, it says to love one another. Well to whom does the one another refer? Backing in to the verse a little further, "Sincere love of the brothers," other Christians, other Christians. We not only have been given, mark this, the ability to love but we have been given a new family in which to exercise that love. The one anothers are the brothers, that is brotherly love. In fact, the word philadelphia is used here, it's really a noun instead of a verb, it says since you've purified your souls for sincere brother love, for sincere brother love, we have been given the capacity to love one another in a very unique way. God's quickening work, the new birth, the tremendous gift of God's love poured into us energized by the Spirit of God now is expressed toward a new family. And we're right back to John 13:34, we're to love one another so that men will know that we belong to Christ, that we're the family of God. And again in 1 John 3 it's so very frequent in 1 John, but in 1 John 3:16, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." And again, as Christ loved us by giving His life, then we're to love the brethren by giving our lives to them.

You say, "What does that mean? I'm supposed to die?" No, verse 17 says here's what it means, "Whoever has this world's goods beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" How is that consistent with His capacity to love supernaturally when he has the goods and somebody else has the need and he's indifferent? "Little children, let us not love with word or tongue but let us love in...what?...in deed and in truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him."

One of the great evidences that we have to show ourselves that we're the children of God is the love that we share with others in need. If you have the goods and somebody else has the need and you hold back the goods, then you are not demonstrating the kind of love that is characteristic of your very refined redeemed and regenerated nature. And so we have a new ground of affection, oneness in Christ. And it exceeds all earthly relationships, it exceeds all earthly limitations. Beloved, I want you to understand this principle, it is much more important that we demonstrate love to one another than even that we demonstrate love to the outside world because it is the attraction and the love within the church that draws them to us, that affirms that we are Christ's.

John 15:12, Jesus put it this way, "This is My commandment, that you love one another," and then He added this, "just as I have loved you." How is that? "Greater love hath no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." Sacrificial love, sacrificial love. You know, we believe, I think, falsely that the attraction of the church is its ability to develop evangelistic technique, clever methods, clever gimmicks to generate exciting events to attract the unbeliever and the real heart of it all is that they see the love of the church.

I think about that even with reference to our coming Christmas concerts. What they will experience here in the communion of the saints and what they see in the love of Christ in the lives of those who bring them is the most powerful testimony of all. And when we love, we do that which is most characteristic of redeemed nature. It might be good for all of us to go back and get our Bibles and read John...1 John 3, 1 John 4 and right through chapter 5 verses 1 and 2 and remind ourselves of how essential this is.

So when were we given the capacity to love like this? At salvation. Who are we to love? Each other. And I don't want to belabor that point anymore. Let's go to the next question. How are we to love? How are we to love? Back to verse 22, one word and then another at the end, "Fervently...that's the first word...fervently." That's a very important word to Peter, he uses it again in chapter 4, would you notice it in verse 8? "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." Why? Because love covers a multitude of...what?...sins. Love floods over all transgression. So many people hold grudges. So many people become bitter and unforgiving. Love covers a multitude of sins. God wants us to love in a covering way so that our love is dominant. He wants to love fervently, twice Peter says it, fervently. Now what does it mean? It's the Greek word *ektenes*. It's really a physiological word, it speaks of the anatomy, it is used to speak of a horse, it is used to speak of a man. And it means to stretch to the limit of a muscle's capacity, to literally stretch to the very furthest point until that muscle reaches its maximum limit...a very graphic term. It means metaphorically to go all out, to reach the very limit of love as far as you can reach which in terms of 1 Peter 4:8 would mean to cover whatever sins exist. Very much like what Jesus said when Peter said, "Shall I forgive seven times? And He said, Forgive seventy times seven times." And He was talking about within the household of faith, within the church among believers, the children of God, we are to love so that our love reaches very far, stretches to the limit and covers any iniquity and any transgression with loving, gracious forgiveness.

The same word, by the way, is used in Luke 22:44 where it says that Jesus was praying in the garden, He was in agony, He was praying very fervently and His sweat became like drops of blood,

falling down on the ground. That means He was extremely extended in the matter of prayer, extended to the point where He literally began to ooze from His flesh, as it were, great drops of blood, that kind of love that stretched fervent love that goes beyond the casual level which is what most of us experience and little else.

That same word is also used, by the way, as I'm thinking about it, in Acts 12:5 where it says Peter was kept in prison but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church of God. They were literally praying to the limits that their faith could stretch them.

Commentator Hort(?) who has done so much in the past to help us in understanding the Word of God writes and I quote, "All genuine love is a principle and is founded on the perception of a permanent relation as opposed to the self-pleasing casual and short-lived impulses which have but an imperfect right to the name of love." That's good. All genuine love is a principle founded on a permanent relation. Then he says this, "Our word *ektenes* or *ektenos*, either form, expresses the manifested character of a genuine love, it is steady and unremitting. The birth from above is the only consistent and rational justification of such a love and the ever-flowing stream of life from above from the living and abiding God at once demands this character in love and renders it possible. It is the life of God in man which raises the love of man for man to its highest power," end quote. It's loving at the limit. It's loving at the extremity. It is a love that stretches as far as it can possibly reach.

In Luke chapter 10 and verse 27 we read this, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." You are to stretch your love to love God with all the loving capacity you have, heart, soul, mind and strength, and you're to stretch to love your neighbor in the same way you love yourself. What does that mean? That you care for your neighbor, that you look on your neighbor's needs in the same way you meet your own.

And then Jesus said, "If you want to understand that, let me tell you a story. A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, he fell among robbers, they stripped him, beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. By chance a certain priest was going down on that road and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. The priest didn't have any love, he didn't want to help that man. And then a Levite who served the priesthood also came to the place and saw him, he passed by on the other side, went the very opposite way, walked on the other side of the road. And a certain Samaritan who was an outcast was on a journey came upon him and when he saw him he felt compassion, came to him, bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them and he put him in his own beast, brought him to an inn, took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, Take care of him and whatever more you spend when I return I will repay you." That's loving to the limit. You come across a perfect stranger, you're an outcast, you have compassion, you pick him up, you put him on your own beast of burden, you take him to an inn, you nurse him back, you pay the bill and you say whatever else he needs I'll cover that when I come back this way. That's stretching to love the unlovely, the unloved.

That was the whole point. Who is my neighbor? Anybody in your path with a need, we are to love one another. How are we to love? We are to love to the limit of our capacity. How does this apply to you?

You say, "How am I going to love somebody? I don't see anybody lying in the road like that?" Well maybe you do sometimes. I know there have been times when I've castigated my own soul at my indifference having passed by someone in need, even in physical need. But we're talking here about loving the brethren with a fervent love. How does that apply to me? Well I don't want you to trivialize it. I don't want you to fuss with sentiment. I don't want you to fuss in your mind with the emotion and your own little world and how you can show affection to the folks in your little world. That's not the idea here at all.

I want you to ask yourself the question...how do you know that has real need? Who do you know that has real need? Who do you know that's struggling financially? Who do you know that's struggling emotionally? Who do you know that's struggling spiritually? Who do you know that's struggling maritally? Who do you know that's struggling in any number of ways or in many ways? Who do you know that's a widow in need? Who do you know that's a single parent trying to raise children all alone? Who do you know that's an orphan, a foster child that needs somebody to care for him or her? Who do you know that's struggling in tragedy? Who do you know that's facing the death of a spouse? Who do you know that's in illness, in a hospital or a resthome? Who do you know that's in sin? Who do you know that's lonely? And maybe I've said too many things and I've covered up the ones you were thinking about.

I went to the hospital the other night late because a man called me and he said, "I think I'm dying and you promised me that when it was time to go to heaven you would tuck me in." I said, "I will." And so it was in the middle of the traffic in the middle of the five o'clock traffic, I went into Los Angeles to the Good Samaritan Hospital and we had a marvelous time of fellowship. And it wasn't until his wife came into the room as he is there really dying of heart disease and they're going to try to do surgery tomorrow, but it wasn't until his wife came in that I began to realize that maybe the real tragedy here was going to be what she would do with her life all alone after the loss of her husband. And so we began to talk about ways in which I might be able to minister to her personally so that her needs would be met and he wanted to be sure that that was the case because all he could think about was heaven, frankly, and he was happy to go except for the fact of leaving the wife whom he cherished so deeply.

And as I left the place and drove home I thought to myself, "How many people are there in my world that are at a desperate level such as that? How many people are there in my world that are hanging by a thread in one way or another, desperately needing somebody to touch their life and I'm so busy with my own little world I can't do it?" I told you a few weeks ago that we were going to establish an office of pastoral care to meet the needs of people. We've already taken some steps to do that, to have pastoral availability 24 hours a day and we'll be letting you know about that. But it's more than just what we do as pastors, we only do it to set a standard and set an example for you, to set a pattern and a pace that you might follow. So ask yourself the question, who do I know has a real need and what am I doing about it? Who do I know that has a real spiritual need, they're just not victorious in their spiritual life? Who do I know that has a financial need? Who do I know that is struggling emotionally because of a wayward teenager? Who do I know that's married to an alcoholic struggling

in loneliness? Who do I know that's ill? Who do I know that has a spouse facing death? Lord, direct me toward those people and help me to stretch my love.

Peter says the kind of love is a stretching intense unrelenting sacrificial love that reaches out, it's not so much from a requirement. No, look what he says, "It is fervent love toward one another from the...what?...from the heart." It's not external. It's not something compelled legalistically, it's something compelled from within. God, help us to have that kind of compassion who are so easily distracted.

It must be what Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5 that we're to have love from a pure heart...love from a pure heart. It must come from the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace. It must be the kind of love the Spirit produces from within.

So Peter...we ask the question, how are we to love and Peter says, "Oh, you're to love to the limit, to the limit of your own sacrifice. Whatever it costs you in time, whatever it costs you in energy, whatever it costs you in money, whatever it costs you in weariness, whatever it costs you period, you're to love to the limit and it's to come from the heart...it's to come from the heart." And, you see, that's so very important otherwise we would say, "All right, I'm going to grit my teeth and I'm going to love that way if it kills me. I'm going to do my duty." Peter says don't do that, it has to come from inside.

You say, "How can it come from inside?" It's the fruit of the Spirit. How do you...how do you know and experience the fruit of the Spirit? Galatians chapter 5, "If we walk in the Spirit He'll produce the fruit," right? So you need to get your life under the control of the Holy Spirit. That's a moment by moment thing. As I long for the Spirit of God to control my life moment by moment, then the Spirit produces the love from my heart that reaches out to touch these people. And, you know, it's a wonderful thing to experience that. As I sat by the bed the other night with Robert in the hospital and began to hold his hand and at first fighting all the traffic down and realizing I would have to fight it all the way back, I was a little hurried in my spirit, but as I held his hand and we sat together and I read him from a Bible, he asked me if he could have one of my own Bibles to keep. And I think I mentioned to some folks that I said..."Well, I'll bring the Bible down and I'll give it to you." He said, "I just would...I want to have in my last days one of your Bibles in my hand." So I gave him one and he said to his wife before I left, "Put this in my will and will it back to John." So I'm going to get it back. But as we sat there and read together out of his Bible that was my Bible, I began to experience in an hour and a half the tremendous peace and calm and richness of the sharing of that kind of experience. Sometimes we cheat ourselves out of the richest and the best, don't we? Because we're not willing to love from the heart. That's the work of the Spirit and sometimes the Spirit has to pull us into the situation in order to get us to yield to that compelling love.

This is a good place maybe to say this that we have the capacity to love, every believer does. That's very clear. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, it's part of our nature to love supernaturally. But we also, and I must say it, have the capacity not to love, don't we? Sure we do. We have the capacity to sin, don't we? And we can sin in not loving. That's why there are so many exhortations in the New Testament that call us to love. We need to be exhorted to use that available love, to allow

the Spirit of God to move. And that's why, for example, in Philippians 1:9 Paul says, "I pray this that your love may abound still more and more." We have the capacity to love, we also have the capacity to sin, so Paul prays for the abounding of the potential to love. Also, Paul writing in 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 12, well actually verse 11, "Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you," then he says this, "And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another." I want to see more of it. I want to see it expanded and extended.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 3, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting because your faith is greatly enlarged and the love of each one of you toward one another grows even greater." That's what God wants to see. He wants to see that love on the increase. Peter even says in 2 Peter 1:7 that we are to add to our godliness brotherly kindness, we are adding to our brotherly kindness love. So the commands in the Scripture to love, the commands to love more and more indicate that there's a capacity in us not to love and that's our fallen flesh. We are commanded to love...to use the resource God has given to us.

When did we become able to love? At our salvation. Who are we to love? One another. How are we to love? Fervently and from the heart. The fourth question that helps us understand this passage, why are we to love like this? Why are we to love like this? And this, dear friends, is the richness of this great text. Why are we to love like this? Verse 23, "For you have been born again." You're to love like this because it is consistent with your new life. It is consistent with the outworking of that new life and when you were born again it was not of seed which is perishable but imperishable.

In other words, you have been born again by an imperishable eternal seed which has produced an imperishable and eternal new life. And your loving is consistent with your living that new life. I just think that's so direct, for you have been born again, it's almost as if Peter anticipates that someone would say at the end of verse 22, "Well why should we love like that?" "For you've been born again," he says. You must love like this because it is consistent with your new life. Back to 1 John 3, "Everyone that is born of God loves his brother. Everyone that is born of God experiences the love of God, the love of Christ." First John 4:7 puts it, "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." 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, by this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments." Loving God, loving Christ, loving one another are all tied together.

And by the way, the verb here is a perfect passive participle, it literally would be translated "for having been born again...for having been born again," already in the past with present results...this marvelous marvelous concept of the new birth. The verb used here appears twice in the New Testament. Again down in verse 3...in verse 3, yes, it alludes to the new birth, it says, "If you've tasted the kindness of the Lord in salvation, that's reason to hunger for His Word," verse 2. But here he is saying, "Since you have been born again into new life, that's reason to love...that is reason to love." Back in verse 3 of chapter 1 he said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again." There's the same term, *anagennao*.

So, Peter says, "Look, you've been born again." In chapter 2 he says, "Look, you've tasted the kindness of the Lord. You have a new life. Consistent with that new life is a new love."

Can I stop for just a moment here and say that being a Christian is living a new life? It is living a new life. Look with me for just a moment at Romans 6, and let me refresh you on one of the greatest passages in all the Bible. I'm excited because I'm going to have the privilege of studying through Romans right away cause the next commentary I'm going to write is on Romans and I'm going to get back into this tremendous book. But in Romans 6 verse 3 it says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized, that is immersed into Christ Jesus, have been baptized into His death" In other words, when you became a believer you were placed into the death of Christ. "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism...that's not water baptism, that's being placed into Christ spiritually in His death...in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." When you were saved the old life died and you rose in the resurrection to walk in newness of life. Spiritually when you're saved you're crucified with Christ, you rise with Christ, you walk in newness of life. It is symbolized by baptism but Paul is not talking about water here. This is not a wet verse, this is a dry one.

But verse 6 says, "Our old self was crucified that our body of sin might be done away." The old self is crucified, the body of sin is done away. We died and now we rise to walk in newness of life. This is a radical change, this is a complete change. This is a total change. Death and new life and through that union with Christ in His death and that union with Christ in His resurrection, Paul says in Ephesians 4:24, "We have a new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Oh my, do you understand that? That you are a new creature in Christ, old things have passed away, behold, new things have come? That you are a new self created in holiness and righteousness? Colossians 3:10 says it, "You have put on the new self, renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created Christ and the one who created you." The one who created Christ in the incarnate sense.

What is he saying in Colossians 3:10? You're a new self. You're a new man. You're a new creature. You're a new person. This is radical. The old is dead, the new lives, the change is deep, the change is real. We're talking about the new birth here, regeneration, new birth. Regeneration means new birth. Now think with me theologically for a moment, just follow my thought. The new birth or regeneration meaning your old life died and you were born to a new life, regeneration in Christ, listen, changed your disposition, changed your nature from lawless godless self-seeking which by the way dominates man in Adam. And it changed your nature into one of trust and love, of repentance for past rebellion and unbelief and a nature now that has a loving compliance with the law of God. That is the pattern of your new life.

Secondly, regeneration eliminated your darkened blinded mind and enlightened your new mind to discern spiritual reality. Thirdly, regeneration liberated you from your former master and liberated you and energized your formerly enslaved will to now become obedient to God. It's a marvelous thing. That's regeneration. It changed your nature from lawless godless self-seeking to loving compliance with the law of God. It changed your mind from darkness to light so that you can discern spiritual

realities. And it liberated your enslaved soul and will which is now free to express itself in joyous obedience to God.

As we look at this term, new birth, or being born again, look at it in verse 23, you notice that there's something...there's something very momentary about that in one sense. The figure of the new birth, first of all, focuses at an event, and I want to call that to your attention. To use a term that some theologians have used, there is a decisiveness in this, a birth is an event. Yes, there is an element of preparation and certainly there is continuity after birth and life, but birth is an event, it is a momentary event. And so I want you to look at the concept of being born again from the viewpoint of its decisiveness. There was an immediate and momentary and eventful death and new life, an immediate transformation occurred in history. The regenerate man in a moment of miraculous time ceased to be the man he was. The old life was over and a new life began. It was decisive. The old creature is gone, the new creature lives. The old man dies, the new man rises. He's a new creature in Christ. The old man is buried, the new man is out of the reach of condemnation, called to a life of righteousness.

There's a second element here, not only do I see in this being born again a decisiveness but I also see what theologians called monergism(?). Monergism is really different than synergism. Synergism is the coming together of various parts. Monergism is single. And the theologians would like to remind us that the new birth is monergistic, that is it is the single work of almighty God. Infants do not cooperate in their birth. Infants do not induce their own procreation. And no more than those who are dead in trespasses and sin give themselves life, it is the work of almighty God.

So look back at verse 23, you have been born again in a decisive moment, an event in redemptive history, you were transformed from darkness to light, from blindness to sight, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God's dear Son. Your old life died, your old man died, your new life lives. And it was all of God. The verb here makes you passive, you were born again. You didn't give birth to yourself, God did it...God did it. It is thus an irresistible work. It is the work of God. In John chapter 3, do you remember as Jesus talked with Nicodemus He said, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it comes from and where it is going, so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." It's the Spirit and He comes and goes as He pleases and gives new life. As the Old Testament says, "An unwilling people are made willing in the day of God's power." "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2:1, "has He made alive." He did it. He did it.

And how was it effected? How was it accomplished? Go back to verse 23. "You have been born again." How did God do it? "Not of a seed which is perishable." What does he mean by that? Well not an earthly birth, not the human birth. No, not a perishable one like your human birth. You think about your human birth. You were born of sinful parents. You were born of a corruptible perishable seed and you will die, we all will. You were born of the flesh. You were born Satan's slave. And you were born an object of divine wrath. That's your physical birth. Not very happy when you think of that way, is it? But that's being born of a seed which is perishable. "But you are born again of a seed which is imperishable." Your second birth, the parent is God, the seed is incorruptible, the birth is not of the flesh it is of the Spirit, spiritual. You are not born to be Satan's slave, but Christ's free man. And you

are not an object of divine wrath, you are an object of divine love.

So, Peter says...Look, love one another. It's consistent with your new birth and your new birth was effected by an imperishable seed...an imperishable seed. Not an earthly one, not a human one...a heavenly one, a divine one. What's he talking about? He's talking about God. God produced that new life. God created that imperishable seed. God brings life in this world through seeds, but the seed of new life in Christ is an imperishable seed. God brings life into this world through seeds, all of life. Everything that grows by seeds is a creation of God. The fact that God uses seeds doesn't make it any less His creation. But all the seeds in this world die, they all die, they all die, even the human ones. But here is one that does not die.

Now follow the thought. Because life comes through seeds makes it no less God's sovereign divine creation. It is the seed by which He creates, but it's nonetheless God who is the creator. Now follow this. The new birth, spiritual regeneration is also God's work, but God has a means by which He does it. He has a seed by which He effects it. And what is that seed? It says it, "Perishable?" No. "Imperishable," that is through the living and abiding...what?...Word of God. That's the seed God uses, the living and abiding Word of God, the alive and remaining Word of God. The Word lives as God lives, it is as undying as He is undying. It is the seed that ever lives so it is the seed that gives ever living life.

In James you recall, I'm sure, from our study of James, chapter 1 verse 18 of James, talks about the fact that He brought us forth by the Word of truth. We're saved by the Word of God. It is the seed that gives life. The Word of God is the seed which gives life. That's why, you see, it says in Romans 10, "How shall they hear without a preacher for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ." There must be the Word, there must be the truth. In 1 John 3:9 it says, "He who is born of God practices...no one who is born of God practices sin because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he's born of God." His life won't be a pattern of unbroken sin because he has a seed from God. And that seed is the Word of God, the living and abiding Word within him. What does he mean by that? The saving truth...the saving gospel...the Word.

And so, he says...Look, you have been saved and the means by which you have been saved is the Word of God which God uses as the seed to effect new life. But it is no less the miracle of God. To demonstrate the authority and consistency of his point, Peter does something that the New Testament writers love to do, he turns to the Old Testament and just briefly we'll look at it. He turns to Isaiah and he quotes Isaiah 40 verses 6 through 8, notice it in verse 24 and the first part of 25. "For...he says...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." That's Isaiah 40:6 through 8 with a portion of verse 7 left out. What he is saying here is, "Look, the new birth is from God by an imperishable seed so that it's an eternal new life. That imperishable seed that God uses is the living and remaining Word of God, the truth, the gospel, the saving Word." And then to prove that the Word is this abiding living remaining seed, he quotes Isaiah, where Isaiah says, "Everything that's flesh is like grass and grass dies. Everything that's of flesh is like a flower and a flower falls off. But the Word of the Lord abides forever." And then he closes by saying, "And this is the word which was preached to you."

This is such a great truth. By the way, this same passage out of Isaiah 40 is a familiar principle in the Scripture. You find it in Psalm 39:4, in Psalm 103 verse 15, in Job 14:1 and 2. You find it in James 4:14. But look at it for a moment here. All flesh is like grass. All flesh means mankind, the animal kingdom. It's all like grass. And all its glory...follow this thought...all its glory is like the flower of grass. You look at a field, it's grass. And what is the glory of that grass? Once in a while a beautiful flower rises out of the grass and that's the glory, that's the beauty of the grass. And he is referring to the typical pastoral scene of the beautiful grass and rising out of it the wild beautiful flowers. There is the common, that's the grass, and the uncommon. There is the plain, that's the grass, and the spectacular, that's the flower.

But look, the grass--it withers. And the flower--it falls off, fades, crumbles, dies. This would be very vivid to the reader because Palestine...much of the country of Palestine was flowers set in wild grass, flowers were scarlet and other colors. What's the point? The point is those two words "all flesh," everything that is of the flesh dies whether it's common or spectacular. Did you get that? Whether it's common or spectacular? Think of it. Think of the best of flesh, the best of man's life, the best of human kind...beauty. The most beautiful of human beings, the healthiest, the strongest, the most honored, the most articulate, the wisest, the most profound, the most gifted, think of the flower of man, art, music, education, culture, architecture, the genius of man, the greatness of man. And that's the flower. But it dies like the common man. In the grave, prince and pauper lie side by side. Everything of the flesh dies. Generations come and go and like the leaves of each successive year, they die and decay. If some men...if some men may be momentarily conspicuous, standing out among the multitudes, if some men may be momentarily distinguished by rank or riches or learning or status or great deeds or triumphs or successes, all these glories of man are no more abiding than the grass. And though some men's lives be a rare flower, delicate and gorgeous, shining in brightness among the common grass, nevertheless it has no permanence, it has no longer lease on life, it droops, it withers, it fades, it dies. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. And the dust of Caesar is no more regal than the dust of a beggar.

And so, says Peter, quoting from Isaiah, you have been born not of that kind of seed, in Christ you have a new imperishable life. Is that not magnificent? And we, dear friends, be we grass or flowers will never die. We will never fade. And it is that abiding Word, he says, which was preached to you. It was that truth that evangelized you, that true unchanging Word. When it says in verse 25, "The Word of the Lord," it uses the term *logos*, the general reference to Scripture. And then when it says, "And this is the word preached to you," it uses the word *rhema*, the specific statement...the specific statement out of the general Scripture was preached to you, both are abiding, the total is abiding and the parts are abiding as well. And they brought you new birth...they brought you new birth.

So, when did we receive the ability to love? At salvation. Who are we to love? One another, brethren. How are we to love? Fervently from the heart. And why are we to love? Because it is consistent with our new life. And though we have a new life there is enough sin in us to hinder us from doing what is most consistent to that new life and that is loving...loving...loving. And I exhort you as Peter did, beloved, love one another, it is the truest expression of your new life, the new imperishable life of God

that will never fade and never wither and never die. And I submit to you it's time for the church to show this world what a genuine love is all about. We're capable of that by God's grace in Christ. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for again making Your words so clear to us and, Lord, help us to demonstrate that kind of love that You showed to us when You gave Your life. Teach us by Your Spirit momentarily as we live each day to show love to all those in the household of faith that the world may know we belong to You and that we may enrich the lives of those in Your family and show the character of our new life. In Christ's name. Amen.

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