

Born to Love

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[0 : 0 0] Again this evening we're turning to 1 Peter and chapter 1. 1 Peter and chapter 1 and we're reading at verse 22. We're going to look at these verses from 22 down through to the end of the chapter, these half a dozen verses or so.

So 1 Peter chapter 1 at verse 22. 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 all 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.

Good news there of course the same as the word gospel that we often use. Now we saw how in the previous passage the emphasis was very much on holiness and holiness of life.

[1 : 1 0] As we looked at there in these verses 13 to 21 last time following on from the previous part as well. But how do you recognize holiness in anyone's life?

If we can't see it in our own life, and that's always a very difficult thing to do, how do you recognize a holy person? How do you recognize a life that is living as a holy life in this world?

Well there are many ways in which you can answer that question, but one certain way of answering it is that a holy life is a loving life. A life which loves, and loves especially other people in the church and out with the church, but especially as it is here, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Just as we've seen an emphasis on rebirth, a rebirth that is unto holiness, God gives us rebirth, God gives us to be born again, and that is something directly that leads to holiness.

It's for holiness, it's to lead a holy life, that we are reborn spiritually. But so also we are reborn to love one another. And that is just as significant a factor as holiness of life.

[2 : 3 4] Of course there is more to holiness than love. But one thing you can be sure of, where love is absent, you will not find holiness. You cannot have holiness if love is absent.

Because holiness and love belong together in the life of the reborn children of God. They are born unto holiness, they are born unto love for one another.

And that's why you find here that such a, in a sense a very natural step from the emphasis he's been giving to holiness to now an emphasis on love.

He's really stepping out from an emphasis on the one into the other because they naturally belong together. The one fits alongside the other. Here he is saying all of this about holiness in the previous verses.

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

- [3 : 44] But as well as that, Peter traces back the roots of holiness to where it is grounded, and also in love to where it is grounded, in this being reborn again.
- What he says here, Having purified your souls by a sincere love, brotherly love, love one another, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable.
- So really that forms the basis of our study, or the structure of our study this evening, which we're calling being born to love. And first of all, we are born through the word of God.
- Born again through the word of God. Here is what he's saying. You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.
- And you see, the argument is, since that is the case, love one another earnestly. Since you have been born again through the word of God, since you have been born again through this imperishable seed, this living and abiding word of God, well then love, he says, one another earnestly, because that's what you've been born for.
- [4 : 59] Now the word of the truth here, as he's saying in verse 22, having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, you can equate the word truth there with this emphasis on the word of God, this seed of the word, this living and abiding word.
- They really amount to the same thing, this word of God that we have, and we have in its written form in the Bibles that we possess, the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.
- And that really fits in so much with what Paul, for example, says in Romans chapter 6. You recall there, that chapter is dealing with breaking the dominance of sin in a person's life, for that to be replaced by the governorship of the Holy Spirit, so that the dominance of sin which leads to death, is broken in such a way that is replaced by the dominance of the Holy Spirit of God that leads to life, but also to holiness in the meantime as well.
- And you remember perhaps how the Apostle Paul put it there in Romans chapter 6, where he talks there about obedience from the heart. God, he says, be thanked that where you were once the servants or the slaves of sin.
- He says now in Romans in chapter 17, in verse 17 of Romans chapter 6, where he says, but thanks be to God that you were, you who were once slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.
- [6 : 38] And having been set free from sin, from the dominance of sin, you have become slaves or servants of righteousness. You see what he's saying there? We've mentioned this text previously on other occasions, but it's important just to notice again what he's saying.
- You became obedient, or have become obedient from the heart, to the standard of teaching to which you were, or have been committed. In other words, he's thinking of the truth of God, the word of God, as a standard, as a shape of teaching, a teaching that has a certain shape to it.
- And the shape is the likeness of God himself, because it's holiness that really forms the shape of God's word, if you like, that word to which we have been committed by God.
- What God does is, he takes us under from the dominance of sin, and one of the things that happens is, he takes you under the rule of scripture, so that you become obedient to the heart, to that teaching, but it has this shape, that brings about the shape of holiness in your life.
- And you can see how that fits with what Peter is saying, having purified your souls, having come to have your souls washed and purified, and set free from the dominance of sin, by your obedience to the truth, having been born again, through the living and abiding word of God.
- [8 : 01] Therefore, love one another sincerely. In other words, he's saying that this love actually grows out of this rebirth, and that this love actually grows out from this obedience that is part of what it means to be born again, or a born again person.

Very interestingly, in 1 Thessalonians, I'm running about through a few texts this evening, just hope it's not too difficult to follow. You can find them, I'm sure, maybe mentioned in their summary, again, of the sermon, as you'll find it online, but, or listen to it again.

But 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4 and verse 9, and this is a very interesting connection again, or a jump very naturally, from emphasis on purity, and leading a holy life.

That's what he's doing really, essentially in verses 3, through to verse 8 there. This is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who do not know his God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in any matter, and so on.

For God has not called us to impurity, but to holiness. And he says in verse 9, Now, concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

[9 : 40] You see what he's doing, he's going straight from this very strong emphasis on holiness, and contending against sin, and putting away those things of a sinful lifetime, and then lifestyle.

And then he says, Now concerning brotherly love, I don't need to teach you, he's saying, you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. You see what's happening, when somebody is born again, what comes with that is God himself teaching that person through his truth that one of the absolute musts of that new life is to love God's people, to love one another.

Of course, that love goes out beyond the family of God, it goes out beyond other Christians. We're told by Jesus even to love our enemies. No difficult as that.

But this is a narrower focus in Peter, because he's dealing here with fellow Christians, he's dealing here with others who are born as the children of God, and therefore he's saying, love one another.

Since you have been born again, you have been born to this purpose, and to this end, that you love one another. And he's saying, part of being born again is that God himself teaches you that.

[10 : 59] In other words, Paul is not saying, neither is Peter, you've only learned to love one another because we've said so. It's not like that.

God has placed in your heart a principle of love and a practice of love if you've been born again. And to be a child of God is to be committed to love one another.

It's something that's natural to the newborn child of God. And since you have been born again, love one another from a pure heart.

And they're saying, in verse 23 here then, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable. Now that's really the language, if you like, of procreation.

In other words, the begetting or the production of children. And Peter is turning that into a spiritual sense, but he's using words there that remind you of procreation.

[12 : 02] You have been born not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, by which he means the living and abiding word of God. In other words, the word of God through which we come to be born again, in God's hands, it's a mighty power that overcomes sin.

It overcomes ourself. It overcomes that dominance of sin. It breaks that dominance of sin. It overcomes hatred. And everything negative in one's life under the dominance of sin.

So that you come to love one another. Very interestingly, when you go back to Genesis, for example, to Genesis 18, and the promise of Abraham to Abraham and to Sarah, that Sarah would have a child.

Now, of course, at this time, they were very old, advanced in years, as Abraham himself said. And the way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. She was beyond, in natural terms, the age at which she would bear children.

So when God said, I shall return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son, and Sarah laughed. Some people take it that it was the laughter of joy, but it was really the laughter of incredulity.

[13 : 25] She just couldn't take in that this would be true. And so God said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old?

Is anything too hard for the Lord? Now, it's possible, those who know the Hebrew language tell us, that it's possible that the word anything there can very readily and properly be translated any word.

So really, this is what God is saying. I have given my promise, and my promise comes with my power. When I give a promise, I mean to fulfill it. And however unlikely it seems that that promise will come to pass, however unlikely it seems that Sarah at her age will bear a child, that Abraham at his age will father a child.

Is any word too hard for the Lord? Is any word beyond his ability to fulfill it any word of promise?

And then you jump into the New Testament. Let me just take you to Luke chapter 1, a passage that's very well known to us, where the promise is given to Mary that she too is going to have a child, and that child is actually going to be the Savior.

[14 : 48] So in Luke chapter 1 and verse 37, this is what Mary is told. The angel came and said, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, verse 35, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. Behold, your relative Elizabeth is in her old age and has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And again, it's possible and proper to translate the word nothing by no word.

And that fits with what God said to Abraham. Here is Mary being told that in her unlikely situation, since she's not married, and yet she's going to have a son.

The Holy Spirit is going to cause her to become pregnant, and she's going to bear a son. He's going to be the Savior. For no word is impossible with God. In other words, the word of promise that God gives forth, whether it's to Abraham in his old age, or to Mary in her circumstances, because it's the word of promise from the Lord.

[15 : 59] It's not impossible. It's going to be fulfilled. Now you put all of that together and take it with you to this passage. Where you find an emphasis on rebirth. Here is the Lord saying, this is my promise that I will bring my people to be reborn.

I will bring my people to rebirth spiritually. This is my word. However unlikely it is, that's what I'm going to do. I suppose every case of new birth is unlikely when you look at what we are naturally.

Although it seems more unlikely in some cases than others. When you find people who weren't even in the practice of coming to the gospel or coming to worship God in church services and all of a sudden something happens in their lives, they're changed and they start reading the Bible and they start coming to church and they want to be with God's people.

What's happened? They've been reborn. God has fulfilled his intention, his purpose, his promise to that person, about that person, that they would come to be reborn.

Here is what Peter is, remember this is written to people who are really suffering for what they believe and for their lifestyle as Christians. Well he says, having purified your souls by obedience to the truth, you've come to be born again through this living and abiding word of God.

[17 : 24] And since that's the case, since God has fulfilled his promise concerning you in your rebirth, don't imagine that he's not able to fulfill every other promise for you as well.

This is the kind of God we believe in tonight, isn't it? Not the caricature of the secularists or the atheists or whatever other kind of twisted version of what the scriptures say you're brought to meet with from day to day.

we believe in a God of promises. A God who is real who gives real promises. And a God whose promise is powerful because he's attached to it.

It's his word. It's his word as it goes forth creatively as it went forth creatively when he created the universe. Where in Genesis 1 you find a whole string of words from the Lord let this happen let this come to pass.

Let this be so. And it was. Here it is with God our human life. Here we are under the dominance of sin as we enter into the world. Here we are as slaves to sin as Romans 6 reminded us.

[18 : 42] And God sends out his word and he breaks that tie and he breaks that power. And what does he do? He brings us under his word and he brings us under the shape of holiness through this word.

And being born again he brings us to love one another. to holiness and love in the one person this newborn child of God.

No wonder Peter calls the word not just imperishable seed but the living and abiding word of God. And he brings out a quotation then from Isaiah where he says all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers the flower falls but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you. That's the word in its preached form.

You know tonight there are many people that wish there were no gospel and there were no churches in Stornoway that people would actually see the futility of being Christians of worshipping a God you cannot see.

[19 : 56] You've experienced that for yourselves. They'll never destroy the gospel. The gospel will never be wiped out.

Why? Because it is the living word of God. The living and abiding word of God. That doesn't mean we should just become complacent when we're facing all these challenges to the gospel in our day and challenge to the church and to church attendance in our day.

Far from it but it does mean that God is giving us this mighty reassurance tonight. This is my word. This is my gospel. This is my church.

These are my people. This is my power. This is my promise. And wherever God has promised something the world can do its utmost.

but that promise will be fulfilled and that word will not return to him void. Aren't you thankful tonight that that's who's ruling in your life?

[21 : 03] That that's the power that's controlling your life? That that's the power you've given yourself into the hands of? And if you haven't tonight why not? Why aren't you born again?

why haven't you come to know the benefits of a reborn life? And you know you shouldn't just turn around and say well that's God's business.

That's God's work. I can't give birth to myself again spiritually. I know you can't. But God is saying I can do it.

My power can accomplish it. And God is saying do you want this? Because as sure as anything you and I need it.

And what he's saying to us is if you don't. If you don't have it. It's not rocket science. It's not difficult just to work out how.

[22 : 05] God is saying just fall on your knees and ask me. Ask me to do it for you. Ask me to change your life. To take control of it.

To take it out of the hands of sin. And to let me be the governor of it. Born again through the word of God. But born to love the people of God.

And you know what he's saying here. Having then purified your souls by your obedience to the truth. Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. And you know first he calls it brotherly love.

Now all those who are female should not feel left out of course in that. It's just the way in which things were taken in those days particularly and you know very well yourselves as are people well taught under the gospel over many years that when the Bible talks about brotherly love it talks about the love of Christians male and female together.

We're all whatever gender male or female were taken into this love for one another. You're born for a sincere brotherly love.

[23 : 19] And you know that's a major mark of being born again. First John chapter 3 verse 14 in this he says we know that we have passed from death to life.

In what? In that we love the brethren, that we love our fellow Christians. He's not saying in this we know that we've passed from death to life because we're only obliged to love some of them or some of them that see things from the same point of view as myself or do things the same way as myself or attend the same church as myself.

No, he's saying we love the brethren. Full stop. We love other Christians wherever they're found. However mistaken you may think they are about certain things.

However different to ourselves. This is the mark he says that we've passed from death to life. That we're born again. It's one of the chief characteristics of being born again.

That we love the Lord's people. That we love others who are born again. And he calls it also a sincere brotherhood.

[24 : 27] motherly love. Not only is it the love of God's family for each other, the children of God, but it's to be a sincere love. And the word literally there in the text is unhypocritical.

It's to be unhypocritical love. What does that mean? Well, it means that for one thing, to love one another is not to pretend at something.

It's not just to act it out without really meaning it. It's not to be choosy as to whether or not we love other Christians of whatever kind.

And you see, that's why it again flows, this passage, into the next chapters. We'll see God willing next time. So, therefore, is really the meaning of that. So, therefore, seeing this is the case, you've been born so that you will love one another, so love one another fervently, so put away all malice, and all deceit, and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander.

Absolute essentials of loving one another. We're not going to be loving one another if we're just living in suspicion of one another from day to day. We're not going to be loving one another if we're really just being deceitful and hypocritical.

[25 : 49] in all of that. We're not going to be loving one another if we're just living by enviousness and jealousy, and if we're eaten up by what others have that we don't have, or whatever it is that causes us to differ from them, if we're making an issue of that.

No, he's saying, love one another out of a pure heart, with a sincere, with an unhypocritical love.

Doesn't that take you back? To Jesus himself. And doesn't it take you back to chapter 13 of John, a passage that we come back to so often, and understandably so often, where Jesus, having put off his outer garments and girding himself with a towel, began to wash the feet of the disciples.

And of course, Peter was so much a part of what went on there. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus said, if I don't wash you, you have no share with me.

And Peter then said, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. And when he was finished washing their feet and put on his outer garments again, he said to them, do you understand what I have done to you?

[27 : 07] You call me teacher and Lord, and you're right, that's who I am. Well, if I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example that you should do just as I have done to you.

I'm telling you this now, he says, because as I have loved you, so you also are to love one another.

Now, you see what he's saying? He's not saying, because I have loved you, you have to love one another. He's not saying, since I have loved you, therefore you are to love one another.

He's saying, as I have loved you, in the manner in which I have loved you, in the manner in which I have divested myself of my glorious things and put them off and come to take the form of a servant and wash your feet as a servant does.

That's my love for you, he's saying, that's how I have demonstrated my love for you. Not in lording it over you, but in being your Lord and your master, have nevertheless washed your feet.

[28 : 21] Now, as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. Here we are tonight as a congregation, and we are obliged to love one another.

We are commanded indeed to love one another by the word of God. we have a great example in what it means to love one another, or even to love in the essence of love.

And it's this, to be a servant to others, to be like Jesus, to take him as our pattern of what love really is, and how it shows itself.

love. And it goes back again to what we said at the beginning. We are not holy unless we are also loving one another.

And if we're going to be holy, then we have to love one another, because the two things fit side by side. And you cannot have the one without the other.

[29 : 25] But then he uses another word here, earnestly. He says it's a sincere love, it's a brotherly love, a love of children of the same family. But then he says love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Now of course it doesn't mean by a pure heart or purifying your souls that everything about our life as Christians, as born again people is already perfect, that there are no faults to be found in us.

That's not what it means, of course. It simply means that the purity of heart that is talked about is a heart that's now devoted to God and looks upon those things of purity and holiness as he does, as he requires.

But this word earnestly, again the literal meaning of it is helpful I think to understand something of what is contained in it. Love one another earnestly. And the literal meaning is to stretch something out so that it covers the whole of what you're trying to cover.

If you've watched somebody dealing with pastry, I'm not talking from experience, I'm talking from watching somebody doing this, but if you're going to cover a pie or something like that where you need pastry to cover it, then it's rolled out, you stretch it, you stretch it until you're sure it's going to cover the whole thing.

[30 : 51] Because unless you stretch it out properly, it's going to shrink and it's going to not do what it's meant to do. Well, Peter is saying that's what love is really about. Love is something that needs to stretch itself out so that you be sure to actually cover everything you intend to do in loving others.

You don't leave others out, you don't leave what you're meant to love out in certain cases. Love one another earnestly. Love one another in a way that stretches your love out so as to cover God's people.

With your love. And that reminds us, of course, that we're not born again to pick faults with others.

It's very easy to pick faults with me tonight. If you know anything about me, you know that there are faults in my life, there are things in my life, as there are in every human life in this world, in every Christian life in this world, where you could very easily pick faults, where you could very easily say, well, look at that, that's not really what a minister should be doing, what a minister should be like.

Or you look at other Christians and say, well, that's really something that you ought not to see in Christians. Are we born again so as to simply find fault with each other? Well, look at that person, they go to church with all kinds of colors of clothes on there.

[32 : 15] Or this woman goes to church and she doesn't even wear skirts, she wears trousers. All these sort of picking at things, of appearances, of whatever else in practice we find fault with. That's not why we're born again.

We are born again to love one another with a sincere love, with an earnest love, a love that stretches out. And actually, Peter uses the word in chapter 4 and in verse 8, and it's very interesting how he uses it.

Now he says, again, you see, there's a, verse 7 there talks about being self-controlled and sober minded, holiness of life. And then he moves immediately, above all, keep loving one another earnestly, stretching out your love, he says.

And then he adds to it, since love covers a multitude of sins. We're not born again so that we can pick out certain sins and say about that person, you know, that's terrible, that person says they're a Christian.

what that's really doing is just looking down on them and say, I'm actually better than that. I'm above that sort of thing. I don't have that sort of thing in my life. That's what the Pharisees were doing, that Jesus denounced.

[33 : 39] Some people have struggles in their Christian life. some people have tendencies in their Christian life that they're drawn to, that they fall into again and again.

Some of these are public, some others are private, they don't get that seen by other people, but they're still there. They go back to the same sort of sins or have the same tendencies and they follow them out and they lapse when it comes to temptation.

We're not born again so that we can suddenly say, look at that person or that person, you shouldn't have that in a Christian life. We're born to love one another with this stretching out of love which Peter says covers a multitude of sins.

I have no right to come and criticize other people for what I see in their lives if my life is not absolutely perfect already. Let him that is without sin, said Jesus, cast the first stone at that woman.

love has to be stretched out so as to cover. And if you go to, again, Peter, of course, you remember perhaps back to our study of Peter's life and in Matthew chapter 18, you find him coming to the Lord with a question.

[35 : 00] And the question was, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him until seven times? Peter was doing well, he thought. He was stretching out his love, you see, beyond what the Jewish custom of the day or the Jewish requirement of the day said, if your brother sins against you and you forgive him four times, well, that's fine, that's sufficient, you've done your duty.

So Peter says, he goes a bit beyond that, he's going to stretch out his love for seven times. How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?

And Jesus says, no, Peter, you've got to stretch it further than that. No, he says, I say unto seventy times seven.

He wasn't really wanting Peter to calculate an actual number of times. What the Lord was saying to him was, Peter, you've got to be like me. That's what holiness is, that's what love is.

Stretching out your love to cover a multitude of sin. That doesn't mean we don't take sin seriously. That doesn't mean that we don't try and at times when we need to give admonition or counsel that's difficult to give or to receive for somebody's life that's gone astray or whatever, we don't shirk from doing that.

[36 : 26] But we don't do it condemningly. We do it in love. We do it with a view to restoration and to mending what is broken and to putting things straight when they're bent.

That's what the church's discipline is about after all. It's not there just to find fault with someone or to bring out their fault or to highlight and hold up that person as a faulty person.

It's just to reset that limb in the church that temporarily has gone out of joint or that spiritual bone that's temporarily become broken.

Above all things, love one another for love covers a multitude of sins. We are born through the word of God.

We are born through the word of God to love one another. And that love, along with holiness, is a chief characteristic of those who are born again.

[37 : 39] As the hymn writer Charles D. Meigs put it, Lord, help me live from day to day in such a self-forgetful way that even when I kneel to pray, my prayers will be for others.

Help me in all the work I do to ever be sincere and true, and know that all I do for you must needs be done for others. Let self be crucified and slain and buried deep, and all in vain may efforts be to rise again, and less to live for others.

Others, Lord, yes, others, let this my motto be, help me to live for others, that I may live like thee.

We are born to love one another. Let's pray. Lord, our God, we thank you for that prior love which you have shown toward us.

For it is that prior love that you have shown to us in sending your Son into the world to be a propitiation for our sins, that we find us that great source of the love that you cause to be produced in our hearts.

[39 : 05] Lord, forgive us, we pray, when we fall short of loving one another. Forgive us when we fail to be like you and stretching out our love to cover a multitude of sins.

Give us to be concerned, to highlight all the things that we find that are good and wholesome in other people's lives, and not to be concerned to overemphasize or highlight their sins.

Lord, we have many of our own. We pray that you would help us to increase in holiness and in love, that you would help us to see daily and more clearly the great purpose for which you have caused us to be born again, to be born unto holiness of life, and to love you people.

Receive us now, we pray in our thanks, in all our worship, cleanse us from our sin, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, let's conclude this evening singing Psalm 133.

Psalm 133, and the Sing Psalms version, that's on page 175, and the tune is Land of Rest. Psalm 133 on page 175.

[40 : 19] How excellent a thing it is, and how pleasant and how good, when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should. For it is like the precious oil poured out on Aaron's head, that running over down his beard upon his collar spread, like Hermon's dew upon the hill of Zion it descends, the Lord bestows his blessing there, the life that never ends.

And the word there means there where God's people dwell together in unity and live as brothers should. So we'll sing the whole of the psalm to the tune, Land of Rest, How Excellent a Thing It Is.

How excellent a thing it is, how pleasant and how good, when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should.

For it is like the precious oil poured out on Aaron's head, that running over down his beard, upon his collar spread, like Hermon's dew upon the hill of Zion it descends, the Lord bestows his blessing there, the life that never ends.

I'll go to this side door after the benediction this evening. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

[42 : 40] Amen.