



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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Just hours before Jesus was to be arrested, he washed the disciples' feet, including Peter. Shortly after that he said something kind of odd. He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you." He followed that up by saying, "By this, all people will know that you are my disciples." What's kind of odd about that is why is that a new commandment? The commandment to love your neighbor as yourself had been around for hundreds of years. What is new about that? And what is it that allows the Christ follower to love at such a level that is other than what is possible without Christ, that it actually becomes the distinguishing mark of a follower of Jesus? I would suggest to you that in that moment in the upper room, Peter had virtually no idea how to answer those questions. But thirty years later, he would write a beautiful theologically-rich explanation of the answer to those questions.

That's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 1. We have been working our way through 1 Peter. We find ourselves in Chapter 1, Verse 22. I mentioned the importance of understanding Christianity is not a try-harder religion. It is understanding what God has done for us through Christ, then believing that, and based on a new belief system, there is an outflow of new behavior. I mentioned last week Paul writes his letters that way with the front end loaded with doctrine and the back end loaded with application. Peter does it a little differently; he kind of keeps weaving the two together back and forth through the whole letter, and that is evident in our text. So, Verse 22: Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls... (*NASB, 1 Peter 1:22a) So, this is past tense. The Greek grammar is the perfect tense which means something that happened in the past but has ongoing ramifications. Since verses 3-12 are true, you have been radically born again on the basis of the mercies of God. In obedience to the truth basically is Peter's language for having believed the Gospel. You'll see him use this terminology consistently. To obey is to believe; to disobey is to disbelieve. So, on the basis of our belief—our acceptance of the Gospel—our souls have been purified. It's temple language. He uses that a lot in his letter. In verse 2 he talked about sprinkled with the blood, which is temple language. In a previous paragraph he talked about the blood of the lamb, which is temple language. Here again, temple language: on the basis of our obedience—our belief in the Gospel—we have been cleansed from the sin that defined us, so we stand righteous in the presence of a holy God. But it is for something. Whenever you read through the Bible, we are

always called, chosen, saved for something. It is not ever an end to itself, but for something. In this case...for a sincere or genuine love of the brethren, fervently love one another... (Vs. 22b) So, if that's what we're saved for, you get to the commandment: then do it fervently, passionately. It's the word that was used to describe Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was praying. It is a very strong term. It's kind of get your game face on and do it. If you are saved for it, then do it: ...fervently love one another from the heart, (Vs. 22c). Why? for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring 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 ENDURES FOREVER.”

And this is the word which was preached to you. (Vs. 23-25)
Again, the basis by which we love is not trying harder, it's that we have been radically changed; we have been born again through a seed which is imperishable. The idea of a perishable seed is illustrated in the quotation from Isaiah chapter 40: Life in the flesh, life apart from the imperishable seed of God is like grass; it's like a flower—here today, gone tomorrow. But when that's all we have, it creates these fears, these insecurities, this hopelessness, this despair. It creates this performance-based system because everything about it is self-oriented. When I'm in charge of my own safety and my own security, when I'm functioning as my own god, the system requires me to be selfish, to be focused on myself. I am self-righteous; I am self-sufficient; I am selfish. That's really the only option on the table until we have been set free from that orientation that defines us. That's the result of the perishable seed—that's who we are apart from Christ. What makes us dramatically different is when we have been born again by an imperishable seed, now everything we've talked about in verses 3-12 is true of us, not based on our performance, but based on the grace and mercy of God. That completely changes our orientation and allows us to be set free to actually love one another. What was different about Jesus' commandment? “A new commandment I give to you,” is that Jesus said, “You love one another as I have loved you.” That was virtually not possible until God fulfilled the promise of salvation—that we might be radically born again, and all those longings and desires and insecurities could be addressed in who we are now in Christ, and our hope is found in Him. Now that we have been set free from the selfishness that defined us, it is possible to love one another at a whole new level. That's in essence what Jesus was talking about there. So, when we're talking about loving one another, what exactly are we talking about? It's helpful to remind ourselves biblical love is not defined by a feeling. It doesn't mean we gather together and have kind of warm, fuzzy feelings about each other. That's probably just not realistic. Biblical love is a commitment of the will; it's a choice I make to think of someone else as more important than myself, to stop thinking about myself all day long and to think of others which is really not possible until we have experienced the new birth in Christ. There are a lot of good deeds that unsaved people do, but at the end of the day it's rooted in self-orientation. It's about their own shame; it's about their own guilt; it's about their own self-righteousness; it's

about a feeling they want to get. At the end of the day, it roots back to something selfish within them that is driving the action, and it's only when we have been radically changed by the power of Jesus that something real and dramatic within us changes, and we choose to love one another.

Now let's face the fact that the church is made up of people—sinners and misfits and losers—who have been made right by the power of Jesus. The fact is people are quirky...are odd...are a little bit weird. I know I am. It's true of all of us, isn't it? We're all kind of quirky and weird. I've often thought if something ever happened to Patti, I doubt I could remarry. I can't imagine letting someone else into the weird world that is Bryan. We all are odd in our own ways. And yet at the end of the day, what brings us together is our understanding of what is true of us in Christ: that every single one of us who has trusted Christ as Savior—what is described in Verses 3-12— is equally true of all of us. We learn to see one another through a new lens, a lens of theology that describes how absolutely magnificent we are in Christ.

One of the things that our world, our culture is really struggling with is there is this growing sense of tension between peoples. There's more anger. There's more racial tension. You kind of feel all this stuff unraveling. There's kind of this desperate desire to somehow bring us together, but it's not getting better; it's getting worse. And what people don't realize is a secular worldview does not have a belief system that pulls people together. It actually has a belief system that repels people. It's so selfish and protective and self-oriented, that ultimately, it's only going to create more and more anger, more and more conflict. I'm not a prophet, but I would suggest to you it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better if we continue down this path.

However, the Christian worldview actually has a belief system by which we come together. First of all, we believe that all people are created equally in the image of God; nobody more than, nobody less than. But for those who by faith have trusted Christ as Savior, we all stand equally righteous in the presence of a holy God because it's not based on our performance; it's based on who we are in Christ. Therefore, it's irrelevant if you're black or white, male or female, rich or poor, if you're two months into the journey or fifty years into the journey. We all stand equal before a holy God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, it's a belief system by which we come together as one people to love one another. That is kind of the unique thing that distinguishes us as the people of God from those who choose not to believe.

Now I have to say, the older I get, the wearier I am becoming by Christians who are so cynical about the church. I expect that from unbelievers. I'm weary of Christians that have become so cynical about the church. Cynicism is a position of superiority. Somehow those that are cynical believe somehow, they've figured it out and they sit in a position of superiority above everybody else who apparently can't figure it out. And for those who are so cynical, a good starting place to gain some perspective is perhaps to look in the mirror and realize that they have their own struggles and baggage. They don't sit superior. They're no better; they're no

worse, but we all come equally on the basis of who we are in Christ together as the people of God, and that's how we should view one another. I grant you, if you want to find hypocrites in the church, you can. They're in every church. Frankly, they're in every gathering of people anywhere in the universe. I acknowledge that. Nobody's ever said the church is a gathering of perfect people. But I'll also tell you this: If you're willing to open up your eyes and look, the church is full of wonderful, serious, God-honoring Christ followers. This weekend thousands of people will walk through these doors who love Jesus. They are serious about their faith. Some are new believers; some are mature believers, but they are people that sincerely want their lives to matter. Every week they lay their lives down. They sacrifice a considerable amount of time, talent and treasure to invest in the things that will last forever. They deeply care about representing Christ out into the marketplace, the community, the schools and the neighborhoods and their families. They're people who sacrifice a great deal to make a difference in the world, and those people are all around you if you choose to look. I tell you unapologetically, "I love the church. We are a people." {clapping}. We are the people of God, called out and made radically new by the power of Jesus, and our calling is to fervently love one another, which goes to Chapter 2, Verse 1: Therefore, (because this is true) ...putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander...

So, the question would be, "Well how exactly, practically speaking, what does this love look like?" What Peter offers is a clothing metaphor. Putting off is like taking off articles of clothing, and then he lists five things. So, we put aside, these are behaviors that should not define us. Malice is kind of like mean-spiritedness, being unkind to others. Deceit is literally a Greek term that was used to describe the baiting of a hook or the baiting of a trap. Those of us that love to fish understand that fishing is the art of deception, and that's ultimately what this word is referring to. Deceit is half-truths; it's deception. Not only have we as a culture abandoned the concept of absolute truth, we by and large abandoned the concept of truth. We just lie as a way of life. As long as our version of truth advances our cause, then that's good enough for us. We live in a culture where everybody lies. The government lies; the politicians lie; the media lies; the schools lie; the preachers lie; husbands lie; wives lie; everybody lies as a way of life, and this is devastating our culture. There is no possibility of cultivating genuine love in a culture of lies and deceit. It requires that we are people of truth.

Cara: Bryan, there's much more that you're going to be sharing from this section in First Peter, but I'm actually glad that we're stopping here today because it's really hard bringing up kids in a culture where lies are so pervasive, they're everywhere. What's the best way to help them discern truth?

Bryan: Yeah, so huge problem. That's a great question. So, I think as parents, it starts with you knowing the truth. You are being able to discern the lies. As parents, you have to get it, and then you teach and train your children of the truth. You're never going to be able to keep up with the lies. So, you need to know the truth and the truth exposes the lies. But here's an interesting way to think about it. How much time does a parent spend getting their children trained in soccer, in a musical instrument, in dance, in all these activities we have, compared to how much time do we actually spend trying to prepare our children in the truth?

Arnie: I have such a respect for the idea of fervently loving one another. And Bryan, you're a great pastor, but I know you've experienced a lot of problems from within the body of Christ. How do you navigate through those times with people like that?

Bryan: Well, I think first it has to do with expectations. The idea that once people become a Christian, then they're perfect is not realistic. And the fact is Christians don't claim to be perfect. They are people in need of a Savior. So, you think of the church is like a hospital. When I go to a hospital, I expect to find sick people and that's often who's walking through our doors. I think the second thing is for all of us, maybe take a good look in the mirror. You know, we're not exactly so wonderful either [Um, hm] and that's part of the reality of it. But I also think you see what you choose to see. Are there hard people and hypocrites in the church, yet those people are in every walk of life. But if you choose to see it, there's the most amazing, wonderful, committed, sacrificial, loving people in the world that walk through the door of our churches. And I'm sure a lot of our listeners fall into that category. So today when I left to come here, we had roughly a thousand children in the building. It's VBS week, about 400 adults, four hours a day, five days in a row. A lot of these people will take vacation time to do this. It's like they're amazing people [That's right] and I think they're there if you want to see it.

Cara: What do you think the cynicism within the church comes from then?

Bryan: Oh, I think some of it might be a reaction to levels of spiritual abuse and hurt and legalism and hypocrisy, religion. I think religion really beats people up and so it creates kind of this cynicism.

Cara: Do you think any of it's warranted?

Bryan: Well, I think it's, the hurts are real. I think people have to work their way through it. So, if you go to a restaurant and the food is not good, you don't say, I'll never eat in a restaurant again. So yeah, you can have a bad experience in a church. But that doesn't mean all churches are bad, or we just decide to walk away. And the fact the church is the Bride of Christ, you know, I have pretty thick skin. You can criticize me all you want, but when you start criticizing my spouse, my wife, the love of my life, I respond to that differently. And the church with all our warts is the Bride of Christ and He loves her. So, I'd be a little cautious about doing too much of that. But I also think that the church is a community. And so, we do life together. That's really out of step with the culture. So, kind of back to your question as to why: as a culture, we've become so individualistic, so selfish. We've become consumers. We don't really think, what am I here to give? We think, what's in it for me? I think all those dynamics create kind of these negative thoughts toward the church. Life in America's pretty easy. [Yeah.] And so, it's kind of like who needs it? And it's a little bit sobering to think about, there's lots of places around the world where people will put their lives at risk to gather together and be the church. So, you just think about that. They're willing to risk everything to come together and oftentimes at no risk, we take it for granted and don't.

Cara: Yeah. When you think about the miles and miles that they walk to meet in secret, huddled down in a room without air conditioning. [Yeah]. Yeah.

Bryan: But it's easy here, so it's like, man who needs it? [Right]

Arnie: At some point in life, you get to a place where you truly realize life isn't forever. And some ways that's depressing, I guess. But you know, through all of these troubles and tribulations, you get to a point as a Christ follower though, that that can be really freeing, because you now have laser focus on that imperishable seed you talked about.

Bryan: I think that's absolutely true. I think for many people, the reality of death for one reason or another becomes a turning point. It's often when they come to Christ. I honestly can't imagine anything more frustrating than trying to create heaven on earth because it isn't going to work. There's a lot of preachers determined to tell you that this is to be a life of health and wealth and prosperity. To me, that's like trying to build a playground in a war zone. You're setting yourself up for hurt. It needs to be more like, I'm a soldier that's been deployed and let's get the job done, and then it's time to go back home. That's the mission. Let's get it done and let's go home and then it's paradise forever.

Arnie: Yeah. It's kind of like that saying, if you want to take the island, burn the ships, there's no turning back. Right?

Bryan: No turning back.

Cara: I like it.