

## *Loving One Another Fervently*

It is my opinion of course, but I find the hymn number 448 to be one of the most uplifting songs we sing. I know there are some who really do not like it, and I really do not understand why except that it can be a little confusing if you do not know your part, and because with four different sets of words being sung by the four different voices—the alto, soprano, tenor and bass—it is easy to not hear and appreciate the whole message.

Even so, listen to the words of this song:

- alto: *“Love one another, for love is of God. He who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love, does not know God, for God is love. God is love.”*
- bass: *“Love bears all things, believes all things, love hopes all things, Endures all things.”*
- tenor: a simple repetition of the phrase, *“God is love.”*
- soprano: *“Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, all thy strength, all thy mind. Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, for God is love, God is love.”*

Of course I am sure that many of you realize that every part of that song is scripture, and as we sing it, we are reminding each other in song of what the Scripture says, that we are to love one another, even as we love God and even as God is love and loves us.

Well, that song, and the words of scripture in it are very much in line with something Peter wrote that was found in our text for today—**1 Peter 1**. I am referring to **verse 22**, and I would encourage you to opening your Bible to that text and let’s consider it together.

In this chapter Peter has reminded the Christians—he calls them “the elect” in verse 1—that they have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That’s verse 3. The hope that we have in Christ is not just in someone who died for us, but in Him who both died and was raised again from the dead on the third day.

He knows they have been undergoing trials and suffering for their faith in Christ, but he reminds them that those things are testing their faith in much the same way that fire tests gold, causing all of the impurities to be burned off.

In verses 13-16 he urges them to be prepared for the salvation that is to be revealed to them when Christ comes back for them. They are to not be conformed to the passions that were theirs when they didn’t know any better—verse 14. They are to live holy lives, just as God is holy, verse 15 & 16. And they are to conduct themselves with fear throughout the time they are upon the earth, verse 17. The reason why they are to have that fear is because their ransom was not some small thing, but the very blood of Christ, which was foreknown from the foundation of the world.

And then, in **verses 22 & 23**, Peter reminds them of yet another obligation they have; put simply, they are to love one another, and to do so fervently. Peter writes:

*“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.:*

This morning, I want us to fasten upon these words, and think together about several things that Peter was saying to these saints. And of course, we know that he was intending for us to hear and obey these words as well.

- In the first place, we need to think about what Peter meant when he spoke about them having purified their souls by their obedience to the truth for a sincere or unfeigned love of the brethren.
- In the second place, we need to consider what he meant when he spoke about love one another fervently, or earnestly.
- In the third place, let us ponder why loving one another in the way that Peter talked about is so important.

Let’s begin by thinking about what Peter means when he wrote about one purifying his or her soul BY their obedience to the truth UNTO, or FOR a sincere love of the brethren.

We understand what he means by their obedience to the truth. Peter has already alluded to that in verse 3, when he reminded them of their having been born again. Obedience to the truth leads one to being baptized, or being born again of the water and the spirit, John 3:3-5. That is what the scripture means when it speaks, for example, in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 as well as in 1 Peter 4:17, of *obeying the gospel*.

But what does Peter mean by one’s obedience to the truth “unto” or “for a sincere love of the brethren?” I want you to think about that with me. That’s kind of an odd expression.

I daresay that most of us didn’t really give the matter of loving the brethren a whole lot of thought when we obeyed the gospel. We may have already fallen in love with some of them, or maybe we really didn’t know anyone who was a Christian. The purpose of our being baptized was certainly not so we could love other Christians fervently. But possibly it was part of God’s purpose in our being born again!

I believe what he was saying is that when we obeyed the truth, our obedience brought us into a whole new set of relationships. Those relationships are to be characterized by what more than anything else? They are to be characterized by love, aren’t they. Jesus made that clear when he said, *“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,”* (John 13:34, 35). The apostle John writes, in **1 John 3:23**: *“And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment.”*

Now this love of the brethren may not be something we picked up at the time we were first learning and then obeying the gospel. But this is something that we are supposed to learn early on. Our decision to put on Christ in baptism is how we entered into the family of God. We were born again and when we came out of that delivery room, if you will, we began meeting all kinds of people that the Bible calls our brethren. There is a whole bunch of people that God expects us to love. In **2:17**, Peter says, "*love the brotherhood.*" We are supposed to love one another; us them, and them us!

Just as Peter had said a few verses earlier, you are to be holy because God is holy, guess what else you are supposed to be because of what God is? That's right. 1 John 4:8. God is love and John will tell us, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8) Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*" That's that hymn, The Greatest Command, isn't it?

Okay, so that's what Peter means when he wrote about one's obedience to the truth "unto" or "for" a sincere love of the brethren? Let's notice three things about this love we are to have for one another:

**Number one**, it is to be an unfeigned love. My ESV uses the word, "sincere." That is, the love that we are to have for one another is to be genuine; it is to be real. As John writes in **1 John 3:18**, "*let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.*" Ask yourself this question: Is my love for my brothers and sisters in Christ real, or is just for show? People can put on a good act. They can come to the assembly time and greet one another with enthusiasm, they can say all the sweet things, and maybe even make some pretense of caring for one another. But what are they thinking in their hearts, and what are they saying about other Christians when they are away from the assemblies, and what are they doing that really demonstrates that they love one another? It is easy to love in word and talk, but beloved, that isn't going to get it, is it? **Romans 12:9** says, "*let love be genuine.*" The ASV says, "*Let love be without hypocrisy.*"

**Number two**, we are to love one another fervently, or earnestly. The NIV says, "love one another deeply, from the heart." In **chapter 4:8**, Peter says, "*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*" He then goes on to speak about showing "*hospitality to one another without grumbling.*"

Our love of the brethren is to be real and it is to be fervent. This is the same word that is used in **Acts 12:5** where we read about Peter being imprisoned, after Herod had the apostle James beheaded. The bible says, "*So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.*"

The dictionary defines fervent as "*hot, burning, or glowing. Having, showing or characterized by a great warmth and earnestness of feeling.*" Is that how you love the brethren? It is how we love our grandkids but is it how we love one another? We are supposed to, aren't we?

Now keep this in mind, when we leave here today, will we be among those who are doers of the word, or will we be among those who are hearers only?

**Number three**, we are to love with a pure heart. In other words, there must not be any ulterior motive in our love for one another. In **Ephesians 5:2, 3**, Paul said: *“And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3) But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”* He told Timothy, *“Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.”* **1 Timothy 5:2.**

Well, why is this so important? Why is so important that we take seriously this admonition from Peter to love one another fervently? There are at least three very important reasons why we need to do that.

**First of all**, the way we love one another is an indication of whether or not we value or take seriously the privilege of being a disciple of Christ. I’ve already referred to **John 13:34, 35**, but let us hear these words of Jesus once again: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* Notice Jesus calls this a new commandment. John 14:15 and John 14:24 makes it clear that one cannot claim to love Christ if they do not keep his commandments. In **verse 24**, he said, *“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.”*

How does the world know that you are a disciple of Christ? Do they know that because they see you come out of your house every Sunday morning and follow you to the church building where you get out and go in? Is that how they know? No, Jesus said, they will know that you are one of his disciples when they see whether there is any genuineness and fervency to your love for your brethren. Now, think about that dear brothers and sisters. Do you genuinely and fervently love your brothers and sisters in Christ? How does anyone know that you do?

**Secondly**, our sincere, fervent love for our brothers and sisters is an indicator that we have truly been born again. The apostle John wrote in **1 John 4:7**, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”*

Too quickly many of us think that we know if one has been born again by whether or not they have been baptized, but John says, *“hold on a minute! Here is how you know if one has been born of God, if they have love for one another.”* John went on to say in **1 John 4:8**, *“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*

**Thirdly**, sincere, fervent love for one another is an indication of whether or not we have remained spiritually alive. Listen to these words from **1 John 3:14**: *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”* There is a sense in which everyone who is born again has been given eternal life (1 John 5:11) but it is a gift that they can lose. **Verse 12 there in 1 John 5** goes on to say, *“Whoever has*

*the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*” However, if one does not continue in the teaching of Christ—which includes how we are to love one another—then one does not have the Son. In **2 John 1:9**, John said that very thing. He wrote: *“Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”* So, fervently loving our brothers and sisters is an indication that the life of God is truly in us.

When we take seriously Peter’s admonition to love one another fervently, we are showing that we have been born again, that we are Christ’s disciples and that we truly do have eternal life within us. Maybe that is why Peter goes on to write, in chapter **4, verses 7-10**,

*“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sin. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”*

So, how are we doing with these things? No, let me rephrase that: *“how are you doing with these things?”* This is not a work of the church, even though it is the church at work. Loving one another fervently is something that every member of the church must do to best of their ability and as they have the opportunity.

Would you say that your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ is genuine, that it is unfeigned? Would you say that your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ is fervent and pure? Do you have any contact or involvement with other brothers and sisters in Christ beyond just seeing one another at services from week to week? Think about these things brethren! Maybe more than any other thing, this is what God is looking for when he looks at you and he looks at me. Maybe that’s why the song calls it, “The Greatest Commands!”

Have you been born again? Peter was writing to those who had been born again to a living hope and born again to a sincere love of the brethren, but if you have yet to be born again, then you need to give serious consideration to that decision. If you are ready to begin that new life, then we encourage you to make that known this morning by coming forward as together we stand and sing.