

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,*
23 *for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*

24 *For,*

*“ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS,
AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.
THE GRASS WITHERS,
AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,*

25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.”

And this is the word which was preached to you.

In 1965, before some (most) of you were born, Burt Bacharach and Hal David wrote a song that everyone is familiar with. ***What the World Needs Now Is Love***

And in typical fallen human fashion, they wrote the song as a prayer from the standpoint of telling God something He needs to know and they could tell Him if He would just listen.

*What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
No, not just for some but for everyone*

*Lord, we don't need another mountain
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross
Enough to last 'till the end of time*

*Lord, we don't need another meadow
There are cornfields and wheat fields enough to grow
There are sunbeams and moonbeams enough to shine
Oh, listen, lord, if you want to know*

What the world needs now is love, sweet love...etc.

There was a time when a lyric like *Oh, listen Lord, if you want to know* would have been considered if not blasphemous, incredibly stupid and dangerous.

Job and his friends, who I might add were far ahead of Burt Bacharach and Hal David in their understanding of God, got themselves into a mess talking as if God could learn a thing or two if He would just listen. Remember?

Job 38. 1 *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,*

2 *“Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?”*

3 *“Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!”*

4 *“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding,*

5 *Who set its measurements? Since you know.
Or who stretched the line on it?”*

6 *“On what were its bases sunk?
Or who laid its cornerstone,*

7 *When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”*

That goes on for about 4 chapters.

The fallen human race retains enough of the attributes of God who created us in His image to recognize and talk about them, but in our fallen state, we don't really get it done. We are not seeing clearly. Fallen man's vision is skewed.

We talk about love, and justice, and other lofty things that God is, but

our understanding apart from what He is gracious enough to reveal to us in His word, is hopelessly flawed.

Bacharach and David wrote that song in 1965, and in 1967 the psychedelic love generation combined free sex and drugs and called it love. They acted as if they had discovered the lost potion. But in the end, every single person was harmed, some, completely.

Our problem in our brokenness is that the word "love" has come to mean something dismally less than what is being spoken of by Peter. In terms of communication, we're doing what the experts call bypassing.

Peter speaks of love, but we misunderstand what he's saying because in our culture, the word love, depending on which channel you're watching means something on the ratio of 67% sex and 33% squishy emotions.

Ask any teenager to define love for you. But in the Bible, love is never about you. It's always about what you can do to sacrificially meet other folks needs.

I'm working with a guy right now from Florida, and I asked him what his hobbies were. What are you interested in, and he told me that him and his wife were all about being foster parents. He spoke of how they had discovered giving lavishly to meet some under privileged kids needs was what was making them happy.

That's about a 1000 times closer to the biblical ideal than anything our culture is doing and talking about. He said the goverment kicks in a little bit, but it is a drop in the bucket repayment for how his wife loves to take them shopping and get them fixed up.

But beyond that, what they love to give the kids is something far better. A picture for a few weeks or months of what a functional family looks like. Mr. Keith and Miss Lynette. But he says the little ones can't help themselves from calling them mom and dad.

What are you doing for someone else that needs you to do it with no possible hope of ever being repaid.

We've talked about this before. This confusion of throwing around the word love and who knows what kind it is. In our culture, the meanings are mostly shallow and all about me.

The greeks were more articulate. They had three different words all of which our translators just say *love*. But the three words for love are quite different.

Eros. This is erotic love between a husband and a wife. Exclusively. This covers 60 or 70 percent of what our culture wants to talk about. But in Bible times, and indeed, into my lifetime, this love was private, behind closed doors between married partners.

Now it's slobbering out of the TV set like a broken sewer pipe 24/7

Then a second word, philadelphia. This is brotherly love. Meaningful friendships that can have incredible depth. Soldiers fighting side by side and workers working side by side. People who for whatever reason have become soul mates.

The best marriages are steeped in this love. Eros is just the frosting on the cake. The cake itself is brotherly love.

Then finally the third kind is agape. This is the love that gives with no possibility of repayment. It is a self giving love. An action love that works tirelessly for someone else, no compensation sought, or required.

That describes our situation before a holy God. Bankrupt. Worthless. Broken. Filthy. Indebted past any hope of any repayment, at all. And God poured out His love on us. He lavished us with every possible spiritual gift in the heavenly places.

That's the kind of love Peter says, OK, since God lavished His riches on you, you go and lavish that love on others.

There was an interesting interview by Scott Simon on NPR last week. He interviewed Richard Dawkins, the renowned atheist, and of course

Richard Dawkins says all of the terrorism, all of the struggle is caused by religion. Religion is the problem.

But Scott Simon, to his credit said, Why is it that after the terrorism there are always religious groups who are the first on the scene trying any way they can to bring relief to the victims. Where are the atheists?

Christianity has deep within it's roots in this book, it's orders to love selflessly. That's where hospitals and orphanages came from. Actually, in some sense, it's where western civilization came from.

Stephen McAlpine wrote a blog this week called; Choose your apocalypse in response to the Manchester bombing. He makes a good point. There are 2 apocalypses. One is violent, ugly, frightening, an easy threat to see and define in radical Islam.

But the other is a beautiful phantasm. He went on to explain to us old fogees who don't have a clue what some of the lyrics that Ariana Grande as role model to 10 year old girls was singing at that concert. All the code words that the parents don't have a clue about. Multiple partner multiple gender sex. So filthy I could never even get close to defining in this pulpit.

Secularism has so gutted western civilization that we have 2 apocalypses. The empty vile beautiful chimera one, or the radical satanic violent one. Take your pick. They're both in our midst. Both are equally lethal.

All of the remnants of the selfless love brought to western civilization by this book are gutted. Hospitals get drained of all possible capitol, bankrupted and left for dead by greedy men. Orphanages get run by the secular state.

And this week in Illinois, the hammer came down on any foster parent who cannot and will not affirm and enable any child to undergo LGBTQQ activity, to step down. Christian folks with their selfless love must go.

So, let's unpack verse 22. Peter uses 2 of the 3 greek words for love in this verse. philadelphia and agape. eros has no business to discuss outside the bedroom of married binary couples. Sad that I have to keep mentioning that.

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,

If we were to do a word for word translation greek to english in the order written, you would have something like this;

The souls of you having (been) purified by obedience to the truth unto brotherly love sincere out of a pure heart one another love fervently.

Peter wants to talk about love, he will in this letter, over and over again, and his premise looks back on what we have been studying now for several weeks.

Salvation, salvation, salvation. That's what Peter has been talking about so far, and he continues talking about salvation. Regenerated people. People snatched out of this world and made citizens of another place.

And here Peter will argue, since *that* has happened, something else has happened in parallel. Before your souls were purified, for the most part, you couldn't stand each other. Just normal stuff for the human race.

Without Christ, there are people in this room who would never give me the time of day. We're all different. Without Christ, Carl wouldn't have any reason to put up with me. The Baca's would be indifferent. Kind, I'm sure, but indifferent. Duane would give me tickets. Cindy would never wave. Carmen and Kirk wouldn't know we lived in the same town, and Tom Jennings would never say hi and crack jokes in the chow hall.

What happened that causes selfless love to replace indifference at best and scorn at worst? What changed that brought about this selfless love that replaced selfish indifference?

And again, Peter's like a broken record. Salvation. Regeneration. We have become new creatures. Old things are passed away. All things are new.

Peter's premise is; Since you have been purified by becoming obedient to the truth. And we'll camp right there for just a minute or two.

The basis for a regeneration that makes you a new creature is stated as obedience to what? The truth. This book. Not just the gospel, everything revealed in this book.

The souls of you having (been and continuing to be) purified by obedience to the truth

Regeneration comes to those who have been obedient to the truth of this book. You say, "you're getting really close to sounding like works righteousness there Jim." Let me try to explain. Again.

I keep falling back on John 7:17. "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself."

Obedience to the truth begins in a repentance of a sinful old life made evident by the commandments in this book, and at the very least, a willingness to change. You can't change without Him, but the rock bottom line is a willingness to change.

I keep saying that over and over because our modern evangelical era has taught almost universally a two tiered christianity that I just don't see in this book.

Every where I go I meet so-called christians, who have heard some form of some gospel about Jesus, and been told Jesus will take you just as you are, you don't do anything. And there's a whole bunch of people in the mega churches and perhaps a few in this one who believe the lie that you can have fire insurance devoid of any growth or obedience to the things in this book.

That's not what Peter says in this verse. Trust me on this. *The souls of you having (been) purified by obedience to the truth*

obedience to the truth is obedience to a gospel that calls you out of Satans kingdom and into God's kingdom. Repentance is required. Repentance is at minimum a willingness to step away from your old life and embrace a new one. Defined by the truths in this book.

Obedience to that gospel, a willingness to be obedient to a new master, Jesus the Lord who died in your place, is what regenerated you. Ye must be born again.

So Peter bases his argument around people who have been regenerated. Reborn. A new life, with Christ which has, and will continue for as long as we're on this earth, purified your souls. That is the basis for the love Peter wants to talk about.

*The souls of you having (been) purified by obedience to the truth **unto a sincere brotherly love out of a pure heart one another love fervently.***

This is an exhortation to expand that brotherly love which has been born anew in souls that are regenerated and purified. Peter says you have a sincere philadelphia love for one another. It's part of the package. Born again; sincere love, philadelphia, for the brethren.

We see that every single week in this church. We take time to greet each other. I see lots of people embracing each other warmly. It's real. It isn't phony at all.

In fact, do you realize that the church's single most effective evangelistic tool is just that. Someone from the outside comes in and they witness people who sincerely love each other, from the heart, and the possibility exists that someone from the outside will say, this other-worldly love is what I want. At any cost.

I stand before you today a christian, exactly because of that. I said to myself, I want what these people have, no matter the cost. This is real. And Christ swept me into His body, His church, that very night.

Regeneration, true salvation with the Holy Spirit living inside you, causes a purified soul, which has the effect of unconditional love for a whole bunch of people you have nothing in common with except, they also love the Saviour, and they have it inside them too.

But Peter is going to challenge us to expand that love. This verse is an exhortation to go beyond that love that Christ has poured out in our hearts, the brotherly, philadelphia love.

The souls of you having (been) purified by obedience to the truth unto a sincere brotherly love; out of a pure heart, one another love (agapēsate) fervently.

This is the only occurrence of this form of the word agapao. And the ending in the greek is an imperative that ties the word to the next word. Fervently.

So Peter says expand the brotherly love that regeneration has brought you. Expand it to a selfless love, like the love God had for you. A love that reaches out with no possible hope of any repayment. And Peter says do that with fervence. That's the final word we want to look at and understand.

This word, ektanos, is the word for something that is stretched completely. Taut, like a violin string. Streeeeetched. It's the same idea as an athlete that finds in himself somewhere, some final burst that brings the victory. Like those runners that burst across the finish line and then collapse.

Peter says, love like that. Love, selflessly, with all your might, a love that is foreign to us that God supplies. Actually, when we are obedient to this, we are simply the vehicles for God to take His love to the wretched lost world.

This selfless love, originates in God and is poured out through us to the world. We are vessels. Peter says get athletic about it. Wear yourselves out doing this. Stretch yourselves taut, tight, thin, loving like

this.

This is so foreign to our culture that we have to some point bought into. We don't love like this. Our lives are OURS. They're for us. I'm preaching to myself. I'm as guilty as anybody.

My life is about me. My toys. My house. My lot next door. My workshop I want to build so I can retire and play with my old cars. Me. Doesn't sound like much fun for Pam, does it.

You folks overpay me and I spend about 10 hours each week preparing these little studies, but whoa is me if you suggest I do more than that. It would cut into my ME time.

What would it look like, and I confess, part of my problem is I'm loathe to do any more and be the only one doing it, but what would it look like if all of us stretched ourselves thin, like Peter commands us here.

This is the Word of God. Peter isn't making helpful suggestions for 2nd tier christians that want to take christianity to the next level. These words are from God, through His servant Peter, telling the army, the church, what God expects. We think it's optional!

What would it look like if all of us, as a body of believers, stretched ourselves to the breaking point, loving with God's love. Spill that out everywhere all over our community.

You're sitting there saying to yourselves, That's unrealistic Jim. Peter's going to argue that next.

23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

OK, there's my problem. I'm too busy living the perishable life to be bothered by the imperishable one. I'm worried about retirement so I can play with my cameras and my stupid old cars, and Peter reminds me here, all of that is going to burn up. Shortly!

It's like he's trying to shake me awake. Wake up Jim. *you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable*

Everything in this world begins with seeds. Perishable seeds. This world and everything in it is somewhere in the process of perishing.

Some of the antique cars I drive around are further along in that process than others. They're in the process of rusting away back to the elements they came from. And I do my best to arrest the decay, temporarily. But ultimately, they will return to the earth. Just like we also will.

Peter is calling us to live differently. Not like the rest of the perishing world. He says *we have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable*

How did that happen? It's like there's an echo in the room. *for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*

The book did it. The imperishable seed which caused imperishable life is this book. It's all mixed up together. God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit. They are alive and they have made this book, alive.

Never forget that the apostle John in his gospel states it this way. In the beginning was the what? God? Jesus? The Spirit? No, in the beginning was the Word. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

This book is alive, and it can give life. These words in this book are imperishable, and they can turn perishable people into imperishable. This book causes life to those who are obedient to its message.

I was thinking again this week. Some guy was saying, the commandments kill, but the Spirit gives life. In other words, get rid of the commandments and just flow with the spirit. Have you heard that before. The law kills but the spirit gives life.

Baloney. You were already dead. The commandments are there to be a

mirror that shows you that truth. They didn't make you dead. Adam did. The commandments show you clearly, YOU ARE DEAD.

The commandments force you to the cross, crying out for mercy. The commandments let you know that you are bankrupt before a Holy God. This book is the story of redemption from what those commandments so clearly, like a mirror, show us.

This book gives life, to those who are willing to obey it. The imperishable seed that brings life *is, through the living and enduring word of God.*

Peter argues for living an exhausting love, because it causes the perishable to become imperishable. He's exhorting us to live in another dimension. The imperishable one.

Finally, he argues for selfless love, from the imperishable book itself. He quotes Isaiah to strengthen his defense.

24 *For,*

*“ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS,
AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.
THE GRASS WITHERS,
AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,*

25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.”

And this is the word which was preached to you.

The church, is to wear itself out, pouring God's love through perishable vessels.

I love to read christian biographies. Incredible stories about incredible people who saw incredible fruit for the glory of God. It dawned on me as I wrote these things this week. All of those books are about people who literally wore themselves out, burned like a torch and finally burned out, for the glory of God.

Your life is like grass that wears out. Turns brown in about 5 minutes.

Gone. Or a flower that blooms for 5 minutes, then wilts and is gone.

We can live in that futility, or we can be obedient to God's command through his servant Peter and wear ourselves out, stretch ourselves thin, pouring God's love out on a world that doesn't want it, in fact is downright angry at the hearing of it.

My house. My old cars, and new ones with 158,000 miles on it. My rusty treasures. My antique cameras. My artwork. All of it is going to be burned up. And SOON!

Why wouldn't I wear myself out taking the word of God to people, most of whom do not want it, but some of whom, the imperishable seed will germinate and grow and last forever.

Those are Peter's marching orders, given to us, through him by a higher command. You were saved . . . to do this.