

Before dying, Jesus told his disciples, **“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**¹ This must have lodged in Peter’s mind as love between believers is an emphasis for him. His **main point** here: **Believers are purified by the gospel for the sake of loving one another, therefore we should love one another and crave the gospel.** We’ll see this in three parts.

Point 1 — Believers are purified by the Gospel for the sake of loving one another. Verse 22 begins, **“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth...”** These believers have already purified their souls. This refers to their conversion—the “sanctification” and “new birth” in the opening of the letter. When we first believed in Christ, the Lord gave us a new nature and a new standing. We were born again and made citizens of his kingdom and not of this world.

Their souls were purified by **“obedience to the truth.”** **“Truth”** here is the gospel—Christ crucified for sin and raised from the dead. **“Obedience”** here refers to submission to the gospel in repentance, belief, baptism, professing faith in Christ. **When we submit to the gospel, we purify our souls.**

Application: What should we do when we feel “impure?” We tell an unbeliever—repent, believe the gospel, be baptized to signify your entry into the New Covenant community, and profess Christ publicly. For believers, what do we do? We turn away from sins, trust in Christ, remember our baptism and public confession (which signified we were born again into God’s people). **Obeying the truth—believing the gospel—is God’s only means of making us pure.**

Point 2 — Believers should love one another. Peter central command in this passage is **“...love one another...”** His first concern for Christians—after their relationship with God—is their relationship with other Christians. **Why?** It is impossible for the church to love the world if they cannot love each another. It is impossible for the church to survive a hostile culture if they are hostile toward each another. It is impossible for the church to declare the gospel of peace, if they are not at peace.

Love is a sincere desire for the good of another, expressed in a willingness to lay aside one’s preferences, comfort, convenience for the benefit of the other. That’s how Jesus defined love—“as I have love you, you are also to love one another.” **The love of the crucified Lord should inform, direct, shape, empower, motivate our love for other Christians.** The thoughts, words, deeds of one believer toward another should not differ from the thoughts, words, deeds of Jesus toward his people.

Peter says to love one another **“earnestly from a pure heart.”** **“Earnestly”** means your full energy and desire are in this love. A **“pure heart”** means free from sin. You’re not showing love from an ulterior motive, to win favor or a business deal or a reputation. It’s not a show. It’s sincere.

Application: Sincerely love other Christians! Make it a priority to think, feel, speak, and act toward other Christians (in public and in private) with sincere love. How do you feel and speak about

¹ John 13:34-35 (CSB)

Christians who differ with you theologically, politically, culturally, or in their response to COVID? Do your private remarks about believers to a spouse or friend evidence sincere love from a pure heart?

In **verse 23**, Peter gives us the reason we should love one another this way: “**since [or, because] you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable.**” Your love should not perish precisely *because* the source of your new heart does not perish.

What is this “imperishable seed?” You were born again “**through the living and abiding word of God.**” Peter quotes **Isaiah 40** to explain what he means: “**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.**” All human beings, like the grass, will one day wither and die. But the word of the Lord is eternal—or, in Peter’s words, “**living and abiding.**” This is good news! If you’re born of perishable seed, you will perish. But since we’re born again by eternal seed, we have eternal life.

Next, Peter tells us what he means by “**the word of God.**” “**And this word is the good news that was preached to you.**” The word translated “good news” is where we get the word “gospel.” The “word of God” that is eternal is the word about God, the gospel—the message preached about God coming to save us from sin through the person and work of Jesus. And Peter gets that from Isaiah.

Peter is a careful interpreter of Scripture. Isaiah 39 announced Israel’s coming exile to Babylon due to sin. Isaiah 40 follows with an announcement of comfort because sin will be paid for. A voice cries out that the Lord will appear. When he does, the proud will be torn down and the humble lifted up. The Lord will gather his sheep like a shepherd. Peter continues in chapter 2 by quoting from **Isaiah 28:16** and **8:14**. From these verses, Peter understands Isaiah to say the Messiah would be the cornerstone of God’s new people. However, before becoming the cornerstone, he will offend many and be rejected. But, in the end, he will be exalted and whoever believes in him will be saved.

So, Peter is putting the pieces together to argue that Isaiah preached the same gospel they heard—the Messiah, who is God in the flesh, would appear to destroy the proud and save the humble, to be rejected by men and then raised up by God to a place of honor. Through this, he would build a new people of God, and all who believe in him will be saved. Peter sees that Isaiah spoke of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. “**This word is the good news that was preached to you!**”

Application: We should interpret the Bible like the Apostles. Peter said in **verses 10-12** that every Old Covenant prophet understood they were serving the New Covenant people (us!) by speaking about the grace that would come through the suffering and glorification of Christ. We should read, understand, and teach the Bible in the same way.

Point 3 — Believers should crave the gospel. Peter’s second command in our passage is in **verse 2**—“long for the pure spiritual milk.” Before giving the command, Peter describes what obeying it will entail. The ESV starts **verse 1** as a command “so, put away...” But Peter didn’t write this as a command, but as a participle. It’s an action that characterizes obedience to the command. It’s better translated: “**So [putting] away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander...**”

Craving the gospel includes the on-going action of actively and intentionally getting rid of any attitudes and actions that kill love. If you crave the Gospel, you won't want anything to get in the way of the gospel's goal—love for other believers. So, Peter tells us to get rid of sins that kill love.

Malice is the desire or intent to harm another person. Sometimes this can be hiding behind what appear to be “good deeds.” “I’m *only* telling you this because I’m concerned...”

Deceit is a willing effort to deceive another by through lies, concealed truth, half-truths, and so forth.

Hypocrisy is pretending to be what you know you are not, such as feigning love to conceal malice. It is claiming to believe something that you do not. A hypocrite is like a stage-actor. They're playing a character that they know is not them. They're presenting themselves as something they are not for the sake of some advantage. (**Note:** People often confuse hypocrisy and inconsistency. Not all inconsistency is hypocrisy. We're all inconsistent. But, we often know this and grieve our inconsistencies. We know that we do not conform perfectly to what we profess. So, be very careful in accusing fellow believers of hypocrisy—you might be condemning them for a sin of which they aren't guilty. And *that* is not love.)

Envy is a desire for what another has that breeds discontent or resentment. It is unloving because it prioritizes self over neighbor. Instead of rejoicing in their good, you resent not having it yourself.

Slander is using your words to damage another's reputation. This includes lies, or even dropping allusions to opinions and impressions in a way that makes one think worse of the subject than they ought. If the church is a patchwork quilt—a work of art that God pieced together from diverse scraps he redeemed from the burn pile—then these thoughts, words, and deeds are seam-rippers that disconnect believers and divide the church. Lovers of the gospel will take special care to avoid (both in public and in private) anything that promotes division or dissension between believers. Peter says this is what it looks like when you “**long for the pure spiritual milk like newborn babies.**”

Believers should crave “pure spiritual milk” the same way babies crave milk. **What is this “milk?”** Peter calls it “**pure**” and “**spiritual.**” He commanded us to love “**from a pure heart**” because we were born of pure seed—the gospel. “**Spiritual**” is from the word “*logikos*” which sounds like “*logos*,” meaning “word.” —“**This word is the gospel.**” These verbal links show us this “milk” is the gospel.

So, the command is: **In the same way that newborn babies long for milk, you should crave the gospel.** Why should we crave the gospel? “**...that by it you may grow up into salvation.**” For Peter, our “salvation” is a past, present, and future reality. We have been saved, born again. Peter also speaks of a “salvation ready to be revealed.” Between this past and future salvation, we “grow up into salvation;” we strive to become what we are in Christ and what we will be at his return.

This is remarkable: How were you born again? Through the gospel! How will you be saved on the last day? Through the gospel! How do you “grow up” now? *Through the gospel!* From beginning to end, salvation comes by hearing and submitting to the gospel! That's why “gospel-centeredness” matters. Peter commands both affections and appetite—love for others, longing for the gospel. Your flesh cannot produce either! Only the gospel can. Remove the gospel, you kill both love and longing.

Peter is giving this command to every believer. All believers—regardless of age or how long they have been believers—should have an aching desire to feed on the gospel. **What does this look like in**

the church? A born-again person strives to put away every sinful thing that causes division in the church and to love other believers earnestly, without pretense. They go to their bible and to church *longing* to hear about Jesus crucified for sins and raised from the dead so that they can love other Christians.

This might be why Peter concludes, **“if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”** He alludes to Psalm 34, a song about God saving his persecuted people. The “goodness” of God in this Psalm is his saving work. So, Peter is saying, “If you have tasted God’s salvation, then you will continue to crave the message of God’s salvation.” Peter is not provoking doubt over their salvation. He’s provoking contemplation. “Reader, have you really experienced God’s saving kindness? If so, you’ll do this.”

So, let’s conclude with the same question: Have we tasted the goodness of God’s saving grace? If so, is it transforming our love for fellow church members and our thirst for the gospel of Jesus Christ?

If that question convicts you, there is good news. None of us love each other perfectly. None of us perfectly crave the story of redemption as our source of life. But Jesus did. He loved God and neighbor without failing. He laid down his life, suffering God’s wrath for our sins. He believed the good news that God would vindicate him and raise him from the dead. He tasted that the Lord is good. And, he is willing and able to save and transform all those who—like babies with milk—acknowledge their inability to nourish themselves and cry out for him to give them life. So, do that.