

1 Peter 1:22-2:3 (Part I)

Introduction

This morning, we come to command number four (out of five). We might think of the first three of these imperatives—or commands—more in light of our relationship to the world. We remember that we are “resident **foreigners** of the dispersion” *here*. (cf. 1:1-2) We’re “outsiders” who don’t fit in, and who will therefore to some extent be always hated and maligned and marginalized by the world. And so it’s in light of *this* reality of our relationship **to the world** that Peter exhorts us with these three commands:

- “Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”
- “Be holy in all your conduct.”
- “Conduct yourselves with fear during the time of your exile.”

Not only might we think of these commands more in light of our relationship to the world, but we might also be tempted to think of them more personally and privately as commands that I can obey, as it were, **by myself**. But in the Greek, these commands are all in the plural. We could translate something like this:

- “**All of you**, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to **you all** at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”
- “**You all** be holy in all your conduct.”
- “Conduct **yourselves** with fear during the time of the exile of **you all**.”

The New Testament letters are always, at all times, **assuming** the community and the gathering of God’s people. So it’s *in* “togetherness” and *in* fellowship with one another that we are to hope, and to be holy, and to fear. If this was all assumed in the first three commands, then Peter makes it explicit in the fourth and the fifth commands (which we’ll see next week go together). If the first three commands emphasized our conduct in light of our relationship to this world, then the next two commands emphasize our conduct in light of our relationship to **one another**.

I. 1 Peter 1:22a — Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love...

Once again, we see how Peter prefaces, or sets up his next command with an “ing”: “**Having** purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love...” Peter’s talking, here, about something that’s *already* happened, something we’ve already done at some past time in our lives, but something that still today has powerful effects and implications for our lives. We have already purified our souls *by* our obedience to the truth. In other words, when we heard the truth of the Gospel and first responded to it in obedient faith, that’s when our souls—all our conduct and all our living—were purified and cleansed.

But what is it that we were purified and cleansed *from*? We’ve already seen that we were ransomed from the futile *conduct* of our ancestral heritage. But what was that futile conduct? It

could be described in lots of ways, but most of all it's a self-centered, self-seeking approach to all of life. It's this preoccupation with *self*, and this idolization of *self* from which we have all been purified and cleansed **by** our obedience to the truth. This is *so* important for us to understand. I want to skip ahead, now, to another "ing," the one that sets us up for the fifth and the last command in this section.

II. 1 Peter 2:1 — Therefore, having put off all malice and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all slanders...

Can you see how these two verses (1:22a and 2:1) go together? By our obedience to the truth—by our responding in obedient faith to the Gospel of Jesus Christ—our lives were purified and cleansed **from what in particular**? From that entire self-seeking, self-centered approach to life that always leads to things like malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander in our relationships with one another.

We could paraphrase like this: "Therefore, having put off **every different form** of malice and **every different manifestation** of deceit, and **all the different kinds** of hypocrisies and envies and slanders – *any* possible thing that might in *any* way hinder or harm or destroy your relationships with one another..." Aren't there so many subtle ways that we can seek to build *ourselves* up by, even just in our minds, seeking to put others down – by thinking less of others? We can envy others – resenting how others have been blessed and wishing those blessings for ourselves. We can slander others – speaking even the truth about others in ways that are subtly destructive and hurtful in order that we might appear the more righteous. We can be false and insincere towards one another, using even our apparent kindnesses in order to get our own way or just to be liked and thought of more highly by others. (cf. Goppelt) In a twisted and distorted way, we can even have malice and ill-will towards others – even *wishing* hardships and trials upon others or somehow being "satisfied" with their "misfortune." But these are all the very things that in our obedience to the truth of the Gospel, we have all "put off." These are all the very things from which we've all, already, been purified.

We love to talk about the cleansing power of the Gospel, don't we? Now we need to remember that this cleansing power is not just about reconciling us and God, but also about reconciling us fully and in every way to *each other*. Can you see, now, how our relationships with one another stand at the very core—at the very heart—of the Gospel itself? So now maybe it will make perfect sense to us when we go back to verse 22 in chapter one and read these words:

III. 1 Peter 1:22a — Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth **for a sincere brotherly love...**

What is the *goal* of our obedience to the truth? What's the whole *purpose* of having had our lives and our conduct purified by responding in obedient faith to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The goal and the purpose of the Gospel and our salvation is a "sincere brotherly/sisterly love." It's impossible to overstate or overemphasize how our relationships with one another stand at the very core—at the very heart—of the Gospel itself. So in chapter two, we saw that we are those who have put off all "hypocrisies" (*hypokrisis*) – all falseness and pretending in our relationships with one another. And here Peter says that the whole goal of being purified of these hypocrisies

is so that all our conduct might now be characterized by a sincere—or an *unhypocritical* (*anypokritos*)—brotherly love – a love for one another that’s no longer tainted in any way by selfish or self-seeking motives, but that truly *delights and rejoices* in the good of others. This is the goal for which you were saved – reconciliation, and peace, and wholeness with one another not in outward appearance only, but in actual inward reality. So therefore Peter writes:

IV. 1 Peter 1:22b— Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth *for* a sincere brotherly love, **love one another unwaveringly from a pure heart...**

The fact that we’ve **already** been purified and cleansed from our old self-centered, self-seeking approach to life doesn’t mean that we don’t still need to be commanded and exhorted to love one another. Knowing what we’ve already been purified and cleansed **from** is what actually gives this command to love one another a *life* and a *power* that it couldn’t otherwise have. In chapter two, when Peter says, “**having** put off all malice and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all slanders...” this doesn’t mean there’s no longer any need for us to keep putting these things off. It’s exactly the opposite! Knowing that these are the things we’ve already put off through our **initial** obedience to the truth of the Gospel is what then reminds us and encourages us and empowers us to keep putting these things off today in **continued obedience** to the truth of the Gospel. So therefore, in light of the self-seeking life you’ve been **saved from**, and in light of the sincere brotherly love you’ve been **saved for**—*Therefore(!)*, “Love one another unwaveringly from a pure heart.”

One thing that should be obvious here is that this is love *around* the truth. Peter’s talking about a love that always assumes obedience *to* the truth. To be clear, then, love is not the truth. What is the truth? It’s the full, unadulterated message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s the truth.

But having said that, the ultimate, outward, visible mark of any true Christian *is* his **love** – and here specifically his love for those who have now been made his own brothers and his own sisters in Christ. “Brotherly love” (*philadelphia*) was an important virtue in the pagan Roman world of Peter’s day, but the Greeks and Romans used this word only for relationships in a biological family. It was *only* Christians who took this same word and applied it to relationships where there was no blood connection at all, and yet where people were, now, truly brothers and sisters with family bonds even stronger and more powerful than blood. (cf. Goppelt) Are you seeing again the miracle and the power of the Gospel, and how our love for one another is what’s deep down at the very heart of the Gospel itself?

The one new ingredient in Peter’s command to love one another from a pure heart is to love one another **unwaveringly** from a pure heart. The ESV says “earnestly,” but what does it mean to love one another earnestly? The point isn’t that we’re to be always more and more “passionate” and filled with feelings of love for each other, but rather that we are to persevere in loving one another ever more and more faithfully until the end. One person says:

“The love Peter has in view is neither a warm, fuzzy feeling nor friendships around a coffeepot after worship, though love as Peter defines it may involve both. Rather, it refers to righteous relationships with each other that are based on God’s character... Righteous behavior toward others defines love.” (Jobes)

So let me say again: The point is not that we're to be ever more and more "passionate" and "intense" and filled with feelings of love for each other (though this may happen, and these feelings may certainly come), but rather that we are to persevere in loving one another ever more and more faithfully until the end. Remember the first three commands?

- "Set your hope **fully** on the grace that will be brought to you **at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**"
- "Be holy **in all your conduct.**"
- "Conduct yourselves with fear **during the time of your exile.**"

All three of these commands are flowing out of the reality of our foreignness as exiles in this world and so our need to keep persevering in obedience until the coming of Jesus. And so now, in the same way, we are to keep persevering in loving one another ever more and more faithfully until the coming of Jesus.

Are we loving one another "perseveringly," and "unremittingly," and faithfully from the heart? In all of our thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions toward one another, are we characterized by true righteousness? Are we characterized by hearts that truly delight and rejoice in each other's good?

Peter **introduced** the command to love one another with an "ing" and now he **follows it up** with another "ing." **Having** purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, **love one another unwaveringly from a pure heart...**

V. 1 Peter 1:23 — ...**having** been [or, "since you have been"] begotten anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...

Do you know one of the things that's completely unique about Christianity is that it spends so much time on the "why" of Christian living. This is not only what's unique about Christianity, but it's what gives Christianity its power and beauty. The "what" is, in a sense, simple to grasp, if not always so simple to live out: "Love one another unwaveringly from a pure heart." The "why" is deep and wonderful, and it's what motivates us and empowers us from day to day to faithfully live out the "what" that we already know to do. "Love one another unwaveringly from a pure heart, **since** you have been begotten anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

Remember all the way back in verse three how Peter began the main part of his letter with these words: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abounding mercies, has begotten us anew..." We are brand new creatures with a brand new divine life coursing within us. And now Peter returns to this same reality to show how and why we are to love one another. If, on the one hand, we've been **purified and cleansed from** our old self-seeking ways through our obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then on the other hand we've been **begotten anew into** a life of unwavering, faithful love for one another. Sincere and genuine love for one another is the very nature of the **life** that we have as children of God.

And now let's follow Peter's reasoning: Our love for one another must be unwavering and persevering and faithful until the end **because** when we were begotten anew to this new life, it was "not of perishable seed (or sperm) but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." How many of us would have found here a reason and a motivation for persevering faithfully in love? But are we seeing, now, what a powerful reason and motivation it is? In all life and in all accomplishments that are the result of human seed—or human sperm—there is decay, and corruptibility, and ultimately death. We're seeing this **all** the time. But the seed and the life that we have within us from God is imperishable, incorruptible, never fading away, never dying. Do you believe this? Then love one another with an imperishable, incorruptible, never fading away, never dying love – from the heart.

Peter says that this imperishable seed by which we have been begotten anew is the living and abiding word of God. Think of the word that God spoke in the beginning when he brought the world into existence.

- Psalm 33:6 — By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

Do you see how the **word** of the Lord, here, is something alive and living because it's carried forth on the **breath** [*ruach*] of His mouth? (cf. Gen. 1:2) And so the word of God is powerfully effective to always accomplish and do all that He says. God said, "Let there be light," and "there was light." In the same way, we read in Isaiah:

- Isaiah 55:10–11 — For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

And now, here in Peter, we see that it's this same living and abiding **word** of God which He has spoken—His seed or "sperm"—that's imparted **life** to us as His new creation. As Peter writes these words, he has in mind a Scripture from Isaiah, which he quotes from now:

VI. 1 Peter 1:24–25a — 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."

Peter's quoting from Isaiah chapter forty which begins a brand new section in Isaiah focused on comfort for God's people and the promise that one day God will deliver them from their exile among the powerful nations and empires of the world and bring them home to Zion. So with that in mind, let's read in Isaiah chapter forty:

- Isaiah 40:1–5 — Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

But how can these things be? In the face of all the great powers of the world (such as the Babylonian and Persian and Greek and Roman empires) it might seem hard to truly be comforted or to truly hope in a day when the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together. It all sounds so good, but *really*? Will it really ever happen? It’s in response to thoughts and feelings just like these that we read in the very next verses of Isaiah:

- Isaiah 40:6–8 — A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

What “word” does Isaiah have in mind when he says this? What “word” is it that will stand forever? It’s the word of comfort and salvation that we just read in verses 1-5. Do God’s people feel overwhelmed by all the great powers and empires of the world? What are all of these empires to God but mere flesh—which is like grass, and all its beauty no more than the flower of the field? What happens to the grass? It withers as quickly as it sprouts. What happens to the flower? It fades as quickly as it blooms. And what is it that causes the grass to wither and the flower to fade? In the climate of the middle east, it was the scorching south wind, and here that wind is pictured as the breath, or the wind, or the Spirit (*ruach*) of God. Do you remember what it is that’s carried forth on the breath of God – it’s His **word**. It’s the power of the ***Spirit of God*** that carries forth the **word of God** and causes it to always accomplish the thing for which He has sent it forth. And so before God’s word of judgment all flesh—all the great powers and empires of the world—wither and fade away. Isaiah 40 is especially famous for its description of the might and the power and the greatness of God. But now we can understand these words in context and read them with a greater understanding as God’s **word** of comfort to His people:

- Isaiah 40:21–24 — Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

But(!) while all the great powers of the world soon wither and fade, God’s **word** of comfort and salvation to His exiled people—*this* word, **God’s** word—will stand forever. So in the very next verses after those that Peter quotes, Isaiah goes on to write:

- Isaiah 40:9–11 — Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, **herald of good news [euangelizo]**; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, **herald of good news [euangelizo]**; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before

him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

This good news **is** the very **word of God**, carried forth on the breath of His mouth, and so this is the word that will stand forever. Brothers and sisters, we can have complete, unquestioning, implicit confidence in the word and the promises of God – no matter how unlikely that word may seem given the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Now Isaiah was prophesying about some time in the future when this good news would one day be preached to Israel. But now look how Peter takes this prophesy of Isaiah and sees it fulfilled in the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all of us today who have believed in Him.

VII. 1 Peter 1:23–25 — You have been begotten anew, 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 [*this word!*] is the good news that was preached [*euangelizo*] to you.**

Are you seeing the nature of the new life that **we** have? Are you seeing the imperishable quality of the seed abiding within us by which **we** have been begotten anew? And now remember **why** it is that Peter is reminding us of these things. Peter believes that if we understand the imperishable nature of the seed by which we have all been begotten anew—**in contrast** with the fruit of all other perishable seed that’s destined to wither and fade away—then we’ll be reminded of our obligation and also enabled and empowered to persevere in loving one another faithfully and unwaveringly until Christ returns. **This** (the Church as God’s new creation) is the reality that will last forever, **not** the world around us, and not the things of the world. So therefore, our love for one another is to be as reliable and unchanging, and as persevering and faithful as the powerful Word of God by which we have all been begotten anew. Our love for one another need not—and **must** not—ever fail in the midst of our own foreign exile in this world because we know that the powers of this world will all wither and fade away like grass, while that word that came to us in the power of the Spirit, creating new life in us—that is the word that will remain forever. (cf. 1 Thess. 1:4-5)

Brothers and sisters, we have already purified our souls by our obedience to the truth **for what? For a sincere brotherly love**. In this obedience to the truth, we have already put off—and are to be constantly putting off—all malice and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all slanders. Not only have we been purified from all our former self-seeking, self-promoting thoughts and ways, we’ve been begotten anew of a seed that is imperishable, incorruptible, never fading away, and never dying. Do we **believe** that? Then we **must** love one another with an **equally imperishable, incorruptible, never fading away, never dying love – from the heart**.