

## Marks of a Healthy Spiritual Family

### 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Introduction: 1) On the night that he would be betrayed by His disciples and arrested by the leaders of Israel, Jesus would perform the act of a slave and wash his disciples feet (John 13:1-17). And, He would teach them about the importance of being a servant and deliver one of the most important statements in all of Scripture, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

2) The Bible talks a lot about love. I suspect it does so because we are often not very good at doing it. The fact is if we were good at it, we would not need to be reminded about it so often. Jesus addresses it in Matthew 22:34-40 in terms of the two great commandments of loving God and loving our neighbor. Paul devotes an entire chapter to love in 1 Corinthians 13. John does the same in 1 John 4:7-21. Solomon adds a marital perspective in Song of Songs 8:5-14.

In our text Peter addresses the importance of love as the final of four commands in chapter 1. He adds a 5<sup>th</sup> in 2:2. They are:

1) Fix your hope fully (1:13)

2) Be holy (1:15)

3) Conduct yourselves with fear (1:17)

4) Love one another (1:22)

5) Desire the pure milk of the Word (2:2)

Love for one another is an essential and distinctive mark of a Christian and a healthy church family. So is a longing, a consuming desire, a passion, for the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, a love for one another and a love for the Bible go hand in hand. It is difficult, if not impossible, to love one and not the other. Now, before we move into our text, it would be good for us to define love. One way to define love is “giving ourselves away for the good of another.” I once heard it called “passion in action.” J.I. Packer grounds his understanding of love in the cross and says, “God’s love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, he has given his Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation” (*Knowing God*, 123). Giving at great cost for another’s good, without regard to oneself. This, I believe, is at the heart of what it means to love. What, then, are two essential marks of a healthy church family?

I. We will love one another

1:22-25

I often say that God gives us the supernatural ability to love people we don’t like, or at least people we find difficult to get along with. Sometimes we are in

the same spiritual family, the same local church. Peter is sensitive to this reality and provides four keys that will unlock our hearts and allow love to flow out in every direction.

1) We need a pure soul 1:22

Peter commands us to love one another “having purified our souls by obedience to the truth...” Purified is a perfect tense, participle looking at an event in the past with results that continue. Peter’s point is this: your soul began a transformation process the moment you were converted, born anew (1:3). That process continues in your sanctification and growth in Christlikeness. Your “obedience to the truth,” your faith in the gospel (see Rom. 1:5), continues its work in your life and enables you to have a “sincere love”, (*CSB*, “show sincere brotherly love”) for others. Such love is authentic, genuine, the real deal, because it emanates from a soul that has been purified and continues to be purified. The new birth changes us on the inside and gives a supernatural ability to love others without distinction.

2) We need a sincere heart 1:22

The theme of purity continues. We need a pure soul. We need to pure in all that we are. We also need a pure or sincere heart. Peter attaches his command to this idea when he writes, “love one another earnestly from a pure heart”

(CSB, “heart love one another constantly”). The idea is our love for one another is to be without hypocrisy, fervent, alive with heartfelt passion and zeal. The love that a husband and wife are to have for one another as described in Song of Songs 8:6-7 comes to mind. Warren Wiersbe says it well and makes it so very practical and clear: “Not only is this love a spiritual love, but it is also a sincere love (“unfeigned”). We love “with a pure heart.” Our motive is not to get but to give. There is a kind of “success psychology” popular today that enables a person to subtly manipulate others in order to get what he wants. If our love is sincere and from a pure heart, we could never “use people” for our own advantage.

This love is also a fervent love, and this is an athletic term that means “striving with all of one’s energy.” Love is something we have to work at, just as an Olympic contestant has to work at his particular skills. Christian love is not a feeling; it is a matter of the will.” (*Be Hopeful*, 57).

### 3) We need the new birth

1:23

Peter alluded to the effects of conversion or the new birth in v. 22. He is crystal clear in teaching that the new birth (“you have been born again”) is essential if we are to rightly love one another. The new birth changes our heart, transforms our soul and makes us brand new. One evidence, probably

the most important evidence is that we love one another. David Helm is right, “The mark of the Christian life is love” (*1 & 2 Peter and Jude* [Preaching the Word]), 66). It is not our theology, though this is important. It is not our politics, though this is important. It is not our education, wealth, religious activities or standing in the community, all of which are important. The issue is this: do you show you are born again by the way you love others?! Do people say of you and me, “look how they love others?”

Perhaps a word from an ancient Christian teacher name Aristedes (c. A.D. 133) would be helpful for our careful reflection. Writing to Emperor Hadrian (AD. 117-138) he says: “Now the Christians trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ. And He is acknowledged by the Holy Spirit to be the son of the most high God, who came down from heaven for the salvation of men....

They have the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself graven upon their hearts; and they observe them, looking forward to the resurrection of the dead and life in the world to come. They do not commit adultery nor fornication, nor bear false witness, nor covet the things of others; they honour father and mother, and love their neighbors; they judge justly, and they never do to others what they would not wish to happen to themselves; they appeal to those who injure them, and try to win them as friends; they are eager to do good to their enemies; they are gentle and easy to be entreated; they abstain from all

unlawful conversation and from all impurity; they despise not the widow, nor oppress the orphan; and he that has, gives ungrudgingly for the maintenance of him who has not.

If they see a stranger, they take him under their roof, and rejoice over him as over a very brother; for they call themselves brethren not after the flesh but after the spirit.

And they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ; for they observe His commands without swerving, and live holy and just lives, as the Lord God enjoined upon them.” (*The Apology of Aristides The Philosopher*, trans. from the Greek, pgs. 508-09).

Here are the evidences of a born again believer!

#### 4) We need the living Word of God 1:23-25

I love the way the Bible talks about itself. Think of Psalm 19:7-14. Think of all 176 verses of Psalm 119! Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24; John 10:35; 17:17. Recall the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Peter in 2 Peter 1:20-21. Here in 1 Peter 1:23 Peter says the Word of God is “imperishable, living and active” (cf. Heb. 4:12). It is this imperishable, living and active word that planted in us the “seed” of the new birth. And, this seed that has burst forth in new life is a life that will remain

forever because the Word of God remains forever. Peter backs this up by a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, 40:6-8, which he cites in 1 Peter 1:24-25: ““For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you.” Grass and flowers have a temporal life or “glory.” In time they wither and die (“fall”). Not so the imperishable, living and abiding “word of the Lord.” It “remains forever.” And it is “this word,” specifically the word of the gospel (“good news”), that was preached (*CSB*, “proclaimed”) to you!” *The Message* renders it, “This is the Word that conceived new life in you.” Peter loves the Bible! God uses it to save us. Not surprising, he has more to say about it in 2:1-3.

## II. We will long for the Word of God

2:1-3

I understand why there is a chapter division here. However, I believe Peter continues in 2:1-3 the argument he began in 1:22. It is certainly clear the theme of the “word of the Lord” (1:23-25) and “the pure spiritual milk” of the Word (2:2) concern the teachings of the Bible. Further, evidence is also provided of what genuine love looks like (esp. 2:1). A longing, a panting, for the Lord and His Word is the second mark we will always find in a healthy church, a longing that produces tangible results outside (actions) and inside (attitudes).

1) The Word helps us put away evil works 2:1

Allowing love to flow from our hearts and soaking in the Word of God will compel us to “put away” or “rid” ourselves of sin, especially those that are inconsistent with the ethic of love. The comprehensive nature, of what has the force of a command, is made clear by the word “all” which is used 3 times in 2:1. Five particular sins are identified in verse one:

1) Malice – a general word for evil, “the opposite of that which is good in character and beneficial.” It is “moral evil in all its forms.”

2) Deceit – cunning or craftiness, “the attitude that desires to get the better of another by cunning and deception...[a] two faced attitude that deceives and hurts for personal gain.”

3) Hypocrisy – someone who plays the actor and conceals his real goals and motives; “a man who meets with a face [and words] which is very different from his heart.”

4) Envy – “displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others... the running-mate of hypocrisy.” It covets the good fortune of others and wants it for oneself.



5) Slander – speech that “disparages another...that deliberately assaults the character of another and usually takes place behind the victims back” (Taken from *1 Peter*, Hiebert, 121-22).

Peter commands his readers to rip these vices from your life like you would discard a filthy garment. They are to have no place in our lives or our churches because they stand in moral and spiritual opposition (they are enemies) to love and the living and abiding word of God.

2) The Word helps us grow in our salvation

2:2

Peter returns to the Bible but with a new and beautiful image. He challenges us (actually “desire” is an imperative) to desire, long for, “like newborn infants,” “the pure milk of the word.” Just as a baby craves the nourishing milk of his mother, we must crave the nourishment that can only come from the Word of God. On the one hand, it will keep us away from the malnourishment of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander (v. 1). And, it will provide exactly the healthy nutrients we need “so that by it you may grow up into your salvation” (v. 2). Once more our sanctification is in view. Here it is progressive sanctification Peter has in mind. Our very souls grow in spiritual vitality and Christlikeness by the nourishment we receive from a steady, daily diet of the Word of God. And, it cannot happen any other way!

Further, desiring the Word on a daily basis is another evidence that you are saved! Lost people loathe the Word of God. Saved people love the Word of God. The wonderful British Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon says it perfectly: “If young men would read their Bibles more, they would not be so easily turned aside as they are now.” “The law of his God is in his heart.” “Take this expression as a referring to the whole of Scripture, and I may truly say that it is the best thing. O my brethren, what can be better for informing the understanding than the Word of God? Would you know God? Would you know yourself? Then search this Book. Would you know time, and how to spend it? Would you know eternity, and how to be prepared for it? Then, search ye this Book. Would you know the evil of sin, and how to be delivered from it? Would you know the plan of salvation, and how you can have a share in it? This is the Book which will instruct you in all these matters. There is nothing which a man needs to know for the affairs of his soul, between here and heaven, of which this book will not tell him. Blessed are they that read it both day and night; and especially blessed are they who read it with their eyes opened and illuminated by the Divine Spirit. If you want to be wise unto salvation, select the Word of God, and especially the Spirit of God, as your Teacher. There is nothing else that is equal to the Bible

for inflaming, sanctifying, and turning in the right direction, all the passions of the soul.” (*MPT*, vol. 52, Sermon 3002).

3) The Word helps us see that the Lord is good 2:3

“The pure milk of the word” helps us mature in our salvation, a salvation that climaxes in our future glorification. As we grow in our experience of salvation something else wonderful happens. We “taste that the Lord is good.” Peter again quotes from the Old Testament and Psalm 34:8. Psalm 34 is a psalm of David when he was going through a time of trial and difficulty. When those times come “bless the Lord at all times” (v.1), “boast in the Lord” (v. 2), proclaim his greatness and exalt his name (v. 3), seek the Lord (v. 4), look to him (v. 5), cry out to him and trust he will save you from all your troubles (v. 6). “TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD” (v. 8, emp. mine). There is a perfect connection here. Long for, desire the pure milk of the word and you will taste that the Lord is good. The goodness and kindness of God is our experience through his word. God’s powerful word has the spiritual protein of lean meat and the delightful taste of an ice cream sundae! Feast on this and you cannot help but spit out malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. All of it!

Conclusion: At conversion we get our first taste of the goodness of the Lord Jesus. After all, as Hebrews 2:9 reminds us, “he tasted death for everyone,” that we might taste only that which is beautiful, healing, healthy, nourishing and sweet. He drank and tasted the bitter cup of God’s wrath that we might taste the sweet nectar of him and his salvation. What are you hungry for? What excites your spiritual taste buds? Taste the Lord! He is good. He will satisfy. He is what we have all been looking for all of our lives.