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## *Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter*

### *Part 30 – The Badge of a True Christian*

*March 19, 2017*

**Sermon Text:** 1 Peter 4

**Scripture Reading:** 1 John 3

1 Peter 4:7-11 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (9) Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (10) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be

glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The mark or badge of a true Christian, of a person who is truly in Christ, *is the love of Christ operating in their lives, from their heart, not put on, not fake, but the real deal.*

John 13:34-35 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."

This is the subject Peter brings before us this morning here in verses 7-11 of this fourth chapter. *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly....*

Think of it. Peter says “above all.” Jesus commands us to love one another just as He loved us, and He said that THIS is *the* way people will be able to identify us as His disciples. Love for one another.

As I have mentioned to you before, when I was a new pastor years ago, coming to our first church, I was rather naïve about this. I had loved going to church on Sundays before that even though I had worked all night. I looked forward to being with those people and I preached my first sermon there before moving to Montana.

But I was naïve. Because I assumed that the large majority of the people in local, Bible-believing, evangelical churches were Christians. I was wrong, and I was about to find out the real truth. *Most people in even conservative, professedly Bible-believing churches, do not belong to Christ at all.* There are exceptions in that where there is faithful preaching of Scripture AND application of it, where evil finds a very uncomfortable environment and eventually leaves or is put out, you will find a remnant of real Christians, and thus a true church. But that is not the norm today.

I can say this with confidence because I have seen it for the last 34 years in four different churches. Think of it. In every single one of these churches, the vast majority of members were (and in most cases remain) unsaved. It has been the Lord's work and blessing here in this church to change that scenario, to sift us. [But don't be careless. Don't fall into a trap of playing the hypocrite].

How do I know? How do we know? How can I say such a thing – that the very large majority of people in 4 churches did not belong to Christ at all?

Because they did not have the badge of a true Christian. They did not have Christ and therefore they did not love one another as Christ loved us. You could see it. And the years that have gone by have demonstrated this to be an accurate analysis of them as eventually the real fruit of what a person really is will become even more evident. Is it not accurate to state Christ's words in a corollary form?

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. By this all people will know that you **are not** my disciples, if you **do not** have love for one another."

Listen to Peter once again:

(8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (9) Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (10) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order

that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Let's spend our time this morning sorting this out and looking carefully at what this genuine love looks like. Scripture, you remember, is like condensed soup. It has to be unpacked and applied. So let's do that.

### Above All....

*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*

Peter has just talked about a very important exercise of this Christian love, *hospitality* (vs 9). We saw that last time. We said that Christian hospitality is primarily concerned with the loving, warm, real reception of *Christian brothers and sisters*. It is kindness in action. Love in action.

Notice the qualifying words Peter uses to describe the love of Christ he is speaking of:

- Without grumbling
- Earnestly

These are not so much things we are to do because we are told to do them – *don't grumble now, be sure you work up this earnest love even though you*

*would rather not...".* No. These are descriptive words of genuine love. Christ's love shows hospitality and doesn't resent doing so at all. His love is genuine, zealous, earnest, just looking for ways to express itself for the benefit of others (particularly for our Christian brothers). It is a giving love. A sacrificing love. And as we see in the next few verses, it is a *servicing one another love-*

(10) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies...

Listen carefully now. THIS is necessarily *going to be the atmosphere and defining quality of a group of real Christians*. Earnest, genuine love for one another. Sincere, generous, all-out hospitality that is ready to share and give and help beyond all that is required.

Because THIS is the nature of the love of God-

Ephesians 1:7-8 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, (8) which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

Lavished, you see. Riches of grace.

Think about this. I have proposed to you this morning with confidence based upon 34 years of pastoral experience in four churches (and really in more because I have preached in and visited other churches as well) that the thing Peter is speaking of here *is for the most part entirely absent in most churches, because it is absent in the hearts of most people who claim to be Christians.* I used to say “many.” Now I used the adjective “most.”

Think of this matter of *serving* which Peter discusses here as an example of how we are to love one another in Christ. People who claim to be Christians, people who are often pillars of their local church, people who are on the scene busily doing things and holding committee meetings and... you name it...what is their motive in so many cases? It is the motive Peter speaks of here –

(10) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

No. It is rather for their own self-glory, not the glory of God. It is a self-love parading as Christian love.

If we are not wise about these things, we can easily (and thus our children too) be caught up in the hypocrisy –

Galatians 2:13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Above all. Above all. Above all – here is the chief thing – *keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.* Without this love of Christ practiced earnestly and genuinely from our hearts, well –

1 Corinthians 13:1-2 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

### **Love, Love, Love – It's all Talk**

Now, anyone who knows anything at all about Scripture and the gospel realizes that *love* is a central subject in Christianity. The love of God. God is love. Love one another. Christ loved us. And so it is not surprising that there

is much talk in most any local church about *love*. Love one another we are told. Drive down the street and you will see church signs – “First Church, Loving God and Loving one Another.” “A Friendly and Loving Church.” And on and on the slogans go.

But most of it is just empty words. After all, if it is true that most people and most local churches that claim to know Christ really do not know Him at all, then it stands that His love will not be present there. The thing is a counterfeit. For all the hugs, all the words, all the programs that include the word “love” in their title, in reality the love of Christ is not present at all, because it cannot be present apart from the regenerating and indwelling Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christ’s people.

### **Is Love a Coverup?**

*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*

Now, a large part of the talk about love that goes on in the name of Christ is actually an unbiblical, sinful coverup for evil. Well, after all, doesn’t Peter say here that love covers a multitude of sins? If you have ever been seriously sinned against and told someone about it, seeking justice, you probably were told something like this. “Well, it’s best to just forget about it. After all,

love covers a multitude of sins, you know.”

But of course this cannot be Peter’s meaning. Why? *Because God, who in His very essence is love, does not cover up sin in the sense of just forgetting about it even if there is no repentance on the part of the sinner.* Christ is love, but He is going to come one day as judge and the unrepentant wicked will end in hell. Covering a multitude of sins cannot mean forgetting and forgiving all sin no matter what.

Here is still another example of why I find Beale and Carson’s Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament so very helpful. Because sooo much of the NT is either quoting from or more or less directly alluding to some passage in the OT, apart from which you will not be able to properly interpret the NT. And here we have an example –

*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

You do this in your conversation and so do I. We will be talking to someone about a particular subject and suddenly a related phrase pops into our head.

And so we say something like, “Well, you know, blood is thicker than water.”

This is what Peter is doing here. A verse from the OT which applies directly to what he is talking about comes to his mind. He doesn't quote it formally, but he makes an allusion to it in his words *because as is true in these cases, he knows that his hearers will realize he is referring them to Proverbs 10:12.*

So what does that Proverb mean? Does it mean that the love of God covers up and forgives ALL sin no matter if there is repentance or not? Of course not. It means this:

*Hatred among people creates and incites trouble and conflict. It stirs it up. It doesn't let anything go. It looks for specks in the eyes of others and uses them as kindling to ignite more hatred and conflict.*

*Love, on the other hand, covers all offenses. When love sees a brother or sister committing some offense, it does not delight in destroying them because of it. Love covers those offenses. It does not broadcast the thing. It is patient. It is willing to maintain relationship. It is forgiving.*

Listen to Beale on this:

“A community (church) that is suffering abuse from outsiders may become a little frayed internally as well. But if they display hatred to one another, they will merely stir up dissension; by contrast, loving one another will ‘cover over’ the many wrongs that inevitably take place in any community, and this is the stance that they must adopt in light of the imminence of the end, and also because they are Christ’s holy nation and therefore different from the surrounding pagans, and because they follow the example of Christ.

It follows then that the love that Peter has in mind is the patient forbearance that nips in the bud wrong actions and attitudes that, if allowed to fester, will attract retaliation, virulent animosity, and ultimately dissension and division. It is the kind of love that ‘does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs....It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Cor 13).

In other words, Peter (any more than Proverbs 10:12) is not making a theological statement about sins being forgiven by God, ‘covered’ in that sense; still less is he saying it is all right to ‘cover up’ sins by refusing to deal with offenses that must on occasion be confronted. Rather, this is the love that breaks the downward

spiral of wounded sensibilities, hard feelings, nurtured bitterness, dissension, and vendetta.

The love that Peter has in view is far more than warm sentimentality; indeed its relational mandate is a point that he has repeatedly underscored (see 1:22; 2:1; 3:9), entirely in line with the wisdom of the quoted proverb.”

Isn't that great? Beale nails it!

Think it through carefully. In this small church community, we have been together for a long time. As a result, we know one another pretty well.

That means we know one another's strengths AND weaknesses, good qualities and not so good qualities. We each one could probably pretty well write a page or so long essay on every person here. You could certainly do so with me as the subject. What you appreciate and what is true about me that requires some of this loving patience, Peter is talking about.

And sometimes, in light of this, my thoughts go something like this. [Realize now I am not speaking about wicked, evil people who are active hypocrites and seek to destroy Christ's church]. I imagine that someone comes up to me and starts in on one of you. "Don't you know that she \_\_\_\_\_?"

Doesn't that drive you nuts?" Man, why can't she see it!

And let's say the thing is true. I know it. I've experienced it myself. It is at this point that I have a choice. I can stir up strife or I can cover a multitude of sins, and I imagine myself responding, "Oh yes, I know. She has that trait alright, but you know what? She is a real Christian. She loves Christ. She loves this church. And as long as those things are true of her, we can cover up the rest, patiently forbear, and choose to keep loving her earnestly. Because after all –

1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Isn't that great? What if you overheard such a conversation about YOU? Imagine standing on one side of the grocery aisle (next aisle over out of sight but in earshot), and you hear two people from your church talking *about you*. And after one of them finishes up listing two or three of your chief character flaws (which you know are in fact true), you hear the other say something like "I know. Oh yes, I know all that. But he's my friend, he is a brother in Christ for sure, he loves the Lord and this church body, and so we can forbear with those things. After

all, each of us have our own list of flaws too.”

Peter is saying that when we choose to respond this way, not only are we loving one another earnestly, *but we are in fact being Christ to that person.* This is how He responds when the devil or the devil’s children accuse and attack us. “I know. Yep, he did that. He said that. Yes, he has that sin streak in his character still. But we are working on that, my blood covers all his sins, and besides that, I love him. He’s my son. She’s my daughter.”

And THIS then is why we are to exercise our gifts the Lord has given us, diligently and earnestly *to serve one another.* Love in action, you see. From the heart. It is why a preacher preaches. It is why a teacher teaches. Why we give to one another and help one another. NOT for the reasons the hypocrite does these things:

Matthew 6:2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Matthew 6:5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners,

that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

No, they serve themselves.

### Conclusion

I remember thinking many years ago after evaluating the eight years we were in Montana at our first church. At one point there were about 100 people packed into that old log community hall on Sundays. It didn’t last of course. Christ was not present in the vast majority of those people, though most all would claim to be Christians.

But I found myself realizing, “what needed to happen in that church was for all but a handful, maybe 5 or so, the genuine Christians there, to leave. And then we could start over with a real remnant. People who loved one another as Peter speaks about here. People who were the real deal, so that the lost in the community who the Lord might be calling would see who Christ really is and not be hindered by the hypocrites.

Because Peter, you see, means that when we earnestly love one another in Christ, that is when true worship takes place –

in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him



belong glory and dominion forever and  
ever. Amen.