

Undying Love

Holy Living Part 4

1 Peter 1:22 7-1-2012

Summary: Before giving the command to love continuously, Peter gives a three-part reminder about our conversion. When you decided to become a Christian it was a decision to purify yourself by obeying the gospel – part of which commanded love, so your conversion was a movement in the direction of brotherly love. The command: keep going in that direction. Use your recollection of the purpose of your salvation to enable you to keep going in those times when you are tempted to give up on love.

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1 Peter 1:22 Having purified your souls by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from a pure heart. **23** For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. **24** For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, **25** but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

1 Peter 2:1 Therefore, having rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. **2** Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, **3** now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Introduction: The Problem of Temporary Love

We live in a world of temporary love.

"I will love you forever! Now just sign right here on this pre-nup."

We have to have prenuptial agreements because "I will love you forever" means "I will love you until it gets too hard, too costly, too uncomfortable, or too 'abusive' – and then I'm done." All love in the natural world is temporary because love can only last as long as its source lasts. Whatever it is that causes you to love something or someone – that thing is like a battery. And when that battery – that power source runs out, love runs out. Some batteries last longer than other batteries, but all of them go dead eventually.

And there are certain things that make the batteries drain even faster than normal. Isn't it true that there are certain people in your life who, when they do certain things, it just drains the batteries of your love? They do or say those things and you can just feel the affection for that person drain right out of your heart, and there is nothing left but cold indifference or even hot animosity. When they do those things or say those things it is like throwing water on the fire of your love for them.

How do you keep loving someone when they do that? Or is it even possible? It is *not* possible for the natural man. But for the believer it is, and starting in verse 22, Peter is going to show us how.

Remember Your Direction

We return today to our verse-by-verse study through 1 Peter, and we are in the middle of a section on holy living. Peter is giving a series of commands, and at the end of verse 22 he delivers another one. But this one is one of those commands that we will never be able to obey unless Peter helps us out with some crucial insights about our salvation. So he gives us some of those insights before the command, and then some more after the command. Those we will plan on looking at next time, but for today let's take a look at the insights about our salvation that come before the command in verse 22.

The form of this verse is this: "Now that you have done that, go ahead and do this." In order to obey the command at the end of the verse we have to be reminded of this thing that we have already done in the past. So what is that thing that we have already done in the past?

22 Having purified your souls by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers...

That is what happened in the past. You have purified yourself by obeying the truth resulting in sincere love for the brothers.

"When did I do that? I don't remember doing that."

You did it the day you became a Christian. What Peter is talking about here is something that is true of all believers. He does not say, "Some of you have done this." He just makes a blanket statement that this is true of all of us.¹ This is what happens at conversion.

The word **purified** is in the perfect tense, which refers to a past, completed action that has ongoing results. It is talking about your decision to become a Christian. Peter wants us to remember our conversion. And there are three things about your conversion that he wants you to remember.

22 you purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers

First he says what you did, then how you did it, then the result. What did you do? You **purified** yourself. How did you pull that off? **By obeying the truth.** What was the result? **Sincere love for the brothers.** That is what we need to be reminded of in order to obey this command that he is going to give us at the end of the verse.

You Purified Yourself

So let's start with the purification. The word translated "purify" comes from the same root as the word "holy." It means to purify yourself in the sense of taking yourself out of the general population of people, and separating yourself from sin, and setting yourself apart for the Lord (Jn.11:55, Acts 21:24,26, 24:18). That is what you were doing when you decided to become a Christian.

¹ He is writing to all the elect in all the churches in all the cities in the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. How does Peter know that all those people in all those churches in all the various cities in each of those regions have purified themselves by obedience to the truth? He knows it because it is not something that is true of just some Christians and not others. It is true of every single Christian.

Self-Cleansing?

And I know some of you might be a little uneasy about the fact that Peter says you purified yourself. Why doesn't he say, "Now that God has purified you..."? Doesn't Peter understand that it was God who did the actual purifying of our hearts when we were born again?

Acts 15:9 [God] purified their hearts by faith.

Doesn't Peter understand that? Yes, he does. Peter acknowledged that back in verse 2 where he made it clear that the sanctifying, cleansing work was done by the Holy Spirit. When he says that you have purified yourself, he is not negating the fact that it is God who does the actual cleansing. But he is also affirming the fact that there is a human role in salvation. And he is emphasizing your role to remind you that you decided to become a Christian for a reason. We had a reason in our minds for why we wanted to become Christians, and Scripture constantly calls us to think back and remember that reason.

When God saved you He did it by working in your will so that coming to Him was something you desired and willingly chose. Now, of course it was God's grace that brought you to make that decision, but it was still in a very real way, your decision. You decided to devote yourself – your whole life, your whole existence - to God. And in that sense you purified yourself.

Through Obedience

And how did you do that? How do you purify yourself? By reforming your ways and cleaning up your act? By being religious and following a lot of religious rules? By faithfully doing rituals and ceremonies? No – look at verse 22.

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth

The Gospel is a Command

That is a reference to the gospel. The way you became a Christian was by obeying the gospel. "Wait a minute – I thought the gospel was something you believe – not something you obey."

If it sounds odd to you to talk about the gospel as something you obey, it is important that you understand that the gospel is not just information about what Jesus did. The Gospel is also a command that must be obeyed. It is a command to believe and to repent and follow Christ. Those people who speak out against the Lordship of Christ in salvation, who say that obedience is not required in order for a person to become a Christian – they have a real problem with this kind of language. And it is not only here. 1 Peter 4:17 refers to unbelievers as those who **do not obey the gospel of God**. In 2 Peter 2:21 the gospel is called **the sacred command**. Romans 6:17 describes conversion this way:

Romans 6:17 though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

The gospel is a **form of teaching** we must obey. 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says that at the Second Coming Jesus will return and He will **punish those who do not ...obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.**

Romans 1:5 we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience of faith.

Becoming a Christian is an act of obedience.

What is the Gospel?

Now, if there are so many times in Scripture where we are called to obey the gospel, why is it that the idea of obeying the gospel sounds so strange to a lot of people's ears? I think in many cases it is because we have tended to over-simplify the gospel. We trim it down to a few basic statements about what Jesus did, and we leave out the parts that command a response. I looked up every occurrence of

the world “gospel” in the New Testament, and I isolated the ones that give some indication of what is meant by the word, and here is what I ended up with: The gospel is the good news of the kingdom, which Jesus preached (Mt.4:23, 9:35, 24:14). It is a message of grace (Acts 20:24) that says that in order to avoid the coming judgment (Ro.2:16, 1 Pe.4:17, Rev.14:6-7), all men must worship, fear, and honor the true God (Rev.14:6-7) through faith in Jesus Christ Jesus who died for our sin and rose again according to the Scriptures, guaranteeing the resurrection of believers (1 Cor.15:3-4). Believing this gospel involves repenting (Mk.1:15) taking a posture of obedience (2 Thes.1:8, 2 Cor.9:13) and bowing to Christ as Lord (2 Cor.4:3-5), resulting in justification and a pattern of living by faith (Gal.1:1-18).

All of that is the gospel, according to the writers of the New Testament. And the entire New Testament is an explanation of that. If you just flop your New Testament open and point to a random paragraph, it will be an explanation of one of those aspects of the gospel, which means the gospel is the entire New Testament. In fact, we will see next week that Peter even includes parts of the Old Testament as aspects of the gospel. The gospel message is a marvelously profound and rich message that must not be over-simplified.

But when it is over-simplified, usually the parts that get trimmed off are the parts that call for an obedient response. And that is why so many people scratch their heads when they see Scripture over and over talk about obeying or disobeying the gospel.

“Jesus loves you and died on the cross – how is it possible to obey or disobey that?”

The gospel is much more than just “Jesus loves you and died on the cross.” The gospel also commands that we trust Jesus Christ and treasure Him and prefer Him above anything in the world. That is the part we must obey. That is why I believe every biblical sermon is an evangelistic sermon. Even if a whole sermon is about Christian living – it shows the unbeliever what trusting in Christ, treasuring Christ, and preferring Christ looks like. We get people all the time who say, “Oh yeah, I’ve trusted in Jesus. I’m a Christian.” But then after several months or sometimes years of hearing sermon after sermon moving through the New Testament, eventually they realize, “Oh – *that’s* what it looks like to trust Jesus.” And they discover that they never have really trusted Him. And in many cases they respond by truly trusting Him. I know there are a number of you who got saved that way.

The Truth of God Obligates Us

That phrase, **obeying the truth**, points to something very fundamental, not just about the gospel, but about the Word of God in general. The truth of Scripture is not like other kinds of truth. There are mathematical truths, scientific truths – all kinds of different things that are true. But most of them are mere facts that imply no moral obligation. The fact that the earth revolves around the sun and not the sun around the earth is true, but it has no impact on how I live my life. It makes no demand on me. Believing that kind of truth involves nothing more than intellectually endorsing it. If you just agree that it is accurate, that is all there is to believing it.

But theological truth is different. Everything that is true about God obligates us. If God is love, the very fact that He is that way obligates me to be loving. The way God is is the best way to be, and therefore it is the way I ought to be. So all theological truth comes to us in the form of an obligation. There is an implied command in every true fact about God that is revealed. Scientific truth is inert. It requires nothing of me, nor does it give life. The truth of Scripture is the opposite. When it is believed it comes into inner man and grips you, and molds you, and transforms you, and animates you, and impels action.

Obedience Purifies

And when you obey it, it purifies you. And that is true not only at conversion, but all throughout the Christian life. There is a sense in which every act of obedience has a purifying effect on the soul. Normally we think of it the other way around. First you purify the soul, and from that pure soul come godly actions. Make the tree good first, and then from it will come good fruit. And that is true.

However, it is also true that when that good tree produces good fruit, it becomes an even better tree. When a purified soul produces an act of obedience, that act of obedience will actually have a purifying effect on the soul to make it even more pure than it was. Each time you choose to obey God, that improves your soul, because obedience is a response of faith, and it is through faith that the Holy Spirit purifies us.

Result: Sincere Love

So what did you do? You purified your soul by setting it apart for God. How did you pull that off? By obeying the gospel. And what was the result of that?

22 you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers

The outcome of your conversion was love for the brothers and sisters in the Church. The word translated **so that** means *toward*. It has the nuance of direction. You purified yourselves by obeying the truth *toward* or *into* love. Becoming a Christian is like getting on a highway that takes you in the direction of love. It is not southbound; it is not northbound; it is love-bound. What Peter is saying is this – when you first became a Christian you launched yourself in the trajectory toward loving the saints. The aspect of the gospel that Peter has in mind here is the part that calls us to love. That is part of the gospel that you embraced when you became a Christian – the gospel that says, “Come, trust in Jesus Christ. Trust Him when He points in the direction of love and says, “That’s the way to go.”

The Household of God

I hope you do not think of your conversion as just being between you and God. It was not just a private transaction. When you walked through the door of salvation you were walking into the household of God. You were entering a family. More than any other writer in the Bible, Peter emphasizes the fact that the Church is the household of God. We relate to God as Father, and we relate to one another as siblings.

And it is a good thing Peter takes the time to remind us of all this, because I think a lot of folks have forgotten this part. They think of their salvation as a private, isolated interchange between them and God where God became their own, personal, private Savior and they got their sins forgiven and gained a future inheritance and a special relationship with God, and the whole picture has a giant privacy fence all the way around it so it is just me and God. And Peter is reminding us, “No, that’s not what you did when you became a Christian. You did not walk into a private enclosure with just you and God. You entered into the family room of His household and took a seat among all His other children.” Movement toward God is always movement toward love.

“But I never experienced that. When I became a Christian, it didn’t result in me having any special love for the Church. I’ve never really cared all the much for the Church.”

If that is you, then you need to examine whether your conversion was actually a conversion. Because if what happened to you did not result in a special, brotherly love for the saints in the Church then it was not conversion to Christianity.

1 John 4:20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother ... cannot love God

It is absolutely impossible to love God without loving the Church. Like Jeff says – trying to love Jesus Christ without loving the Church is like saying to your wife, “I love you, I just hate your body. And I will interact with you, just as long as I do not have to be anywhere near your body.”

I recently heard a pastor tell his congregation, “Loving my wife and children equals loving me.” And when I heard that I thought, *Isn’t that the truth!* That is so true. If you come pat me on the back, that may encourage me a little bit. But you do something to make my wife feel encouraged and loved – you have just won a friend forever in me. There is nothing you can do for me that will make me even

half as happy as if you do something that brings joy to my wife or one of my kids. And there is nothing you could do to me that would anger me more than rejecting them. And I think God made fathers that way so we can understand when God says to us, “Loving My children equals honoring Me, and rejecting My children equals rejecting Me.” Or when Jesus says, “Loving My bride equals loving Me. Rejecting My bride equals rejecting Me.” That is just basic. If you are a genuine Christian, then the most important thing in your life is Christ. And so obviously there is going to be a great affection for others who love Christ.

We talk a lot about loving one another in the Church, but it is so important that we understand why we must love one another. We do it to honor God. People in the world love worldly people because they treasure the world. We love the saints because we treasure Christ. We love in order to honor God, which is why we especially love His children. God loves all people, and so we honor God by loving all people – but God especially loves His children so we have a special love for His children. The phrase “one another” appears one hundred times in the New Testament. In the Church we are to have an especially deep love for one another.

Deep Relationships

There is no place in God’s household for private family members. There is no place for separatist siblings. If you are the type who wants to just come here, listen in on the worship service, then duck out before the one-another’s hour where we interact with one another and pray for one another and express love for one another and obey those one hundred one-another commands – if you are not interested in doing the one-anothers, you are not interested in Christianity. Christianity is not listening in – it is loving – loving God and His children.

God never gave us the option of observing from a safe distance. I know it is fashionable today for churches to advertise themselves as a safe place. That is absurd. If a church is a safe place then it is not a church, because a real church is a place where there are love relationships. And love relationships with sinners is guaranteed pain.

You can keep safe if you keep all your relationships shallow. But the one another commands found in the gospel call for deep relationships. Not surface, shallow, acquaintances. This is part of the greatest commandment. It is not optional – any more than any other command in Scripture. Thou shalt not steal, and thou shalt not commit adultery – not optional. And love your neighbor as yourself – not optional either. If you are part of God’s family, you do not have the option of deciding not to make yourself vulnerable or avoid the hard work and the risk of love relationships with the rest of the Body. And Peter is not going to let up on this. We see it here in chapter 1.

1 Peter 2:17 Love the brotherhood of believers

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Keep Going

OK, now with all that under our belt, now we are finally ready for this command. Peter has reminded us of three things about our conversion – the fact that we purified ourselves, the fact that it happened through obedience to the Word, and the fact that it impelled us toward brotherly love. Now we finally get the command.

22 Having purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers love one another deeply, from a pure heart.

“Wait a second – I thought we already did love one another. Didn’t he just get done saying that when we became Christians we purified our souls resulting in sincere, unhypocritical love for the brothers?”

Yes, he did. But what he is calling us to here is something greater than that. He is saying don’t just stop with sincere brotherly love – move to the next level and **love one another deeply (earnestly) from a pure heart.**

Undying

That word translated **deeply**, or **earnestly**, comes from a root that means “to stretch” and it means to stretch yourself both in time and effort. We need to love with a lot of intensity, and we need to love for a long time. So to translate it “deeply” or “earnestly” emphasizes the intensity part – but you can see in the context that what Peter is emphasizing is more the time part. That is clear in the verses that follow.

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord stands forever."

The emphasis is on imperishable, enduring, ongoing, forever. So I think the stretching here focuses more on time than on intensity. So instead of translating it “deeply” or “earnestly,” a better translation might be “continually.” The idea is that now that we have this wonderful, sincere, brotherly love – we need to make sure that love continues and endures and persists and keeps going and going. So the command is to take that love that already exists, and make it an undying love.

We Tend to Give up on Love

We need this, because there are so many times we are tempted to give up on love. Your spouse pushes you over the brink and you can’t take it anymore and you say, “That’s it, I’m done.” Love just runs aground. It peters out – runs out of gas. Grinds to a halt.

This is a problem we deal with constantly – in big ways and small ways. Maybe it is not to the extreme of a divorce or separation – it is just one of those, “I give up” moments. Do you know what I’m talking about?

Do you know what it feels like to just give up on loving someone – not permanently, but for a few days, or a few hours, or even a few minutes? Someone you love irritates you or hurts you or disappoints you – again – and in your heart you are just like – “That’s it, I’m done trying.” You do not say that out loud or even think it in those terms explicitly, but there is just an attitude that gives up on showing kindness or warmth to the person. It is just an attitude that says, “OK, you’re being difficult, you just hurt me – I’ve been trying to show love, I give up. I just won’t talk to you anymore.” Or, “I’ll talk to you, but I’m going to be cold, I’m going to be short, I’m not going to humble myself anymore for a while, I’m not going to put forth the effort to find creative ways to reach your heart anymore. If we’re going to be on good terms again you’re going to have to make the move toward me – I’m tired of being rebuffed.”

Now, I know a whole bunch of you are thinking, “Wait a minute – aren’t there times when you have to let a relationship go? Aren’t there times when the other person is just refusing to get along, and turns everything into a fight, and no matter how hard you try every encounter is just an occasion for more and more sin, and so you have to back away?” Yes, there are situations like that. Jesus told us that when you give pearls and holy things to someone, and they just trample them underfoot and then turn and attack you, just leave them be and move on (Mt.7:6). So yes, there are times when we need to do that. But there is a difference between that and what I am talking about. When you are forced to break off contact with someone for the sake of righteousness, it should break your heart. And love continues. You long to be reconciled, you are willing to reconcile, you are willing and eager to do anything you can do with a clear conscience to be reconciled, and the only reason it is not happening is

because that other person refuses. That is not what I am talking about here. What I am talking about is when love itself runs out of gas on your side. The batteries powering your love run out. You give up on kindness and warmth toward the person because your affection toward that person has just dried up. Your backing away is not a heartbroken patience for their sake; it is an indifferent withdrawal to protect yourself from pain, or even an angry, passive-aggressive kind of retaliation because of what they did or said – or failed to do or say. I think we all know the difference between those two things.

And I am not saying it is always easy to know when the most loving thing to do is to back off from a relationship for righteousness sake. That requires a great deal of wisdom. I am saying, though, that if you are willing to be honest with yourself, you know the difference between that and the times when you are backing away, cooling off, withdrawing – not because love is driving you, but because your love for the person is giving out.

“I don’t want to continue to act in loving ways toward this person. It’s too hard, the love is gone, I can’t do it – I don’t want to do it, they don’t deserve it, I’m done.”

Someone does something that hurts and angers you, and you can just feel all the systems of love inside you wanting to shut down. And you just want to mope, or withdraw, or retaliate in subtle ways – and kindness, warmth, or continued effort to love just seem out of the question.

And when that happens, sometimes it is because the person has done something really severe – other times it is just because of your mood, or because you are sick or you are tired or your computer crashed or your hormones are whacked out or whatever. But whatever is behind it, the bottom line is this – when that happens, what is happening is a love failure. And what Peter is commanding here is a love that does not fail like that. He says, “You already have brotherly love for one another. Now, love one another continuously, perseveringly, tenaciously with unstoppable, unflappable, continuation that can’t be shut down.

The Importance of Remembering your Cleansing

“How do I do that?”

You can start by remembering why you became a Christian in the first place. Persevering in love in those times when you are tempted to give up on it requires that you remember that loving the Church has been part of your salvation from the very beginning. So turning your back on loving someone is turning your back on the very purpose of your salvation. It is turning your back on a portion of the gospel itself.

There is so much benefit that comes from remembering your conversion, and there is so much harm that can be done by failing to remember it. In 2 Peter 1, Peter gives a long list of virtues – faith, goodness, knowledge, etc. Then he says this:

2 Peter 1:9 if anyone does not have [these virtues], he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

One of the things that will short circuit your whole Christian life faster than anything is forgetting about your past cleansing. If we forget our past cleansing that took place at conversion, Peter says we will become spiritually nearsighted and then blind (v.9), we will become ineffective and unproductive (v.8), and we will lack faith, goodness, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (vv.5-7). Everything falls apart.

A Road, not a Door

And here is why – salvation is a road, not a door. Too often people think of salvation as a door. Years ago they heard an invitation to come to Christ, they came forward, prayed a prayer, got their sins forgiven, and now they are in. They think of Christianity like a big room, and salvation is when they first walked through the door.

That is the wrong way to think about it. Salvation is not just a door; it’s a road. The reason the writers of Scripture keep calling our attention back to our conversion is to remind us what road we

decided to travel. It is like you decided to go down to Colorado Springs to help a family member who lost his home in the fire. So you get in your car, get on I-25 south, and start driving. After a while you find yourself pulled over on the side of the road, and you are spending hours walking around, going into some stores, taking a hike, and the whole time you are saying things to your wife like, “Hey, what would you think about going to dinner tonight at that restaurant we like in Ft Collins?” And finally she says to you, “Don’t you remember what we’re doing? Why are you pulled over to the side of the road? Why are you talking about driving back north? Don’t you remember why we got on I-25 south to begin with? We’re going to Colorado Springs.” That is what the Bible writers are doing when they remind us of our conversion. Your conversion to Christianity was a decision to get on the on-ramp to Interstate Narrow Road, which leads in a certain direction. Not northbound, not southbound, but love-bound. We got on because we decided that is the direction we wanted to go. We got on because we decided we would rather leave the whole world behind than miss out on the wonderful destination of this road. We got on because we trusted Jesus Christ when He pointed us in this direction. So whenever we are tempted to stop or slow down or get off and go back the direction we came from, Scripture says, “Don’t you remember your decision to get on the on-ramp in the first place?”

Born to Love

One last thing. This is from next week’s sermon, but I just can’t resist. Remember at the beginning when I said love can only last as long as the source of that love? Next week we are going to discover that the source of Christian love is the Word of God. How long does that last? Forever. As Christians we are capable of undying love – even when people push our buttons and annoy us and hurt us and abuse us and throw cold water all over our love – we are capable of continuing with undying love for them for two reasons.

#1 – the source of our love is the eternal Word of God.

#2 – when we were born again we were born with the capacity for undying love.

When you became a Christian you got on the on ramp for the highway toward love – that was your intention when you got saved, and it was also God’s intention. And so He built some DNA into your new nature that makes it possible – through the living and enduring Word of God.

How does that happen? That is next week.

Benediction: Col. 3:12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

1:25 Questions

1. Are you confident that you have purified your soul through obedience to the gospel resulting in sincere, brotherly love? (In other words, do you have assurance that you have been born again?)
2. Think of which kinds of contexts tend to tempt you to give up on love. What could you do so that in times like that you are reminded of direction of the highway you are on and the reason you got on that highway?