

1 Peter 1:22-25

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[0 : 0 0] Do we love one another? Do we love one another deeply? Look around you. To your brothers and sisters gathered here this morning, do you love them deeply? Peter challenges his readers to love one another deeply from the heart. We find that language there in verse 22 of the first chapter of 1 Peter. Love one another deeply from the heart. How important is that? How important is it that we love one another deeply? In this same letter in chapter 4 and in verse 8, Peter uses the same language and in doing so establishes this matter of loving each other deeply as of first importance.

Notice the language he uses there in chapter 4 and verse 8. Above all, love each other deeply. The same language, but there with that emphasis that allows us to establish with Peter that this is a matter of first importance. Well, do we? Do we love one another deeply? I don't think so. Now, with that, I'm not making a very profound or deep or harsh judgment on ourselves.

As a congregation. But as we will discover what it is that Peter is calling us to or exhorting us to, I think it's reasonable to say that we don't love each other in this manner. I'm not saying we don't love each other at all. I'm not saying that there is no love amongst us. I'm not saying that for a moment. But my initial response to the question I pose, do we love each other in this way, love one another deeply from the heart, is that I don't think we do. Now, given that it is so important, how can we become believers who love one another deeply? If this is an important matter, as it clearly is, how can we get there? How can we become what perhaps we are not today? Peter, in these verses, in verses 22 to 25, identifies three distinct stages in reaching what we might call this happy destination of loving one another deeply. Let me just outline what these three stages are, if we can call them stages, and then we'll think about them and see where we are along the road. First of all, he identifies the importance of a heart reborn. This is where it all begins. The destination that we would love one another deeply from the heart, but where does this begin? It begins with a heart reborn. It continues, it progresses with what we might call a heart purified, a heart purified, and that is where we are now.

Certainly, that is where Peter's readers were. Peter speaks to them as those who enjoyed a purified heart. Now that you have purified yourselves, purified your souls. So, it begins with a heart reborn. It continues, it progresses with a heart purified, and it culminates, if you wish, with a heart that loves deeply. Love one another deeply from the heart, from the heart. This is where God would have us be.

This is where Peter wanted his readers to be, and that is where God would have us be. So, a heart reborn, a heart purified, and a heart that loves deeply. Let's think of each of these. First of all, then, a heart reborn. If loving one another deeply is the destination, then the new birth is our point of departure. And this is where it all begins for the believer. Peter acknowledges this is so in verse 23.

[4 : 3 7] Having exhorted them to love one another deeply from the heart, he then says, for you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring Word of God. You have been born again. He's speaking of that which is already true of them.

He's casting his gaze backwards into their spiritual history, and he is saying, this is where it all began. You have been born again.

What does it mean to be born again? Jesus used this picture, for picture it is, to impress upon Nicodemus the radical change required if a man is to see or enter the kingdom of God, and enjoy eternal life. We've read of that conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John's gospel.

The theological vocabulary that we use to speak of the new birth is the language of regeneration. There is much that could be said concerning regeneration or the new birth, but I want to limit myself this morning to three points and focusing in on the principal point that Peter makes in our passage. But three things to say about this first aspect of what Peter deals with, a heart reborn, where it all begins. And the first thing I want to say is this, that it is indispensable. Again, if we cast our mind back to our reading in John's gospel and in chapter 3, notice what Jesus says to Nicodemus in this regard. There in chapter 3 and in verse 3, Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. On this matter, Jesus is clear. This is indispensable. If we are to know spiritual life, if we are to become part of God's family, if we are going to be citizens of the kingdom of God, we must be born again.

There can be no exercise of faith in Jesus as Savior, no true repentance, no true discipleship apart from the new birth. It is indispensable. But the second thing I want to say about a heart reborn is that it is God-given. The new birth is God-given. The new birth is entirely the work of God.

[7 : 26] God by His Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who engenders new spiritual life in those who are, by nature, spiritually dead. Faith in Christ is the new birth's immediate fruit. It is not its immediate cause. Let me just say that again because it's important for us to be very clear on this. Faith in Christ, trusting in Jesus, is the new birth's immediate fruit, not its immediate cause. It is God who enlivens and enables us to believe. So, a heart reborn, something that Peter says is when it all begins. He's calling them to this deep love one for another, but he goes back and he says, but remember where it all begins. It all begins in this reality that you have been born again, that which is indispensable, that which is God-given. But then as we focus in particularly on what Peter says, we can say this in the third place, it is through the Word. This new birth is through the Word.

Let's read verse 23 again. For you have been born again, not of perishable as seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring Word of God. God is the one who engenders new life, but God uses His Word as the instrumental means whereby we are born again. God plants in our hearts and minds the seed of His Word, and from that seed life blossoms. The Word of God preserved for us in the Bible is both living and life-giving.

It is this Word. It is this Word that God uses to awaken new life in an unbeliever. A heart reborn. It's God's work, but it is a work that God does through the Word, through the living and enduring Word of God.

I wonder if we appreciate the power that resides in the Word of God. If we cast our minds back to the dawn of time, and there we read in the opening chapters of the Bible of how God said, God spoke, and it was so. God said, and it was so. The Word of God, powerful beyond measure.

The Bible that we read today, that we're considering even now as we look at these verses in Peter's letter, the Bible is the Word of God, and it is imbued with that same power. It is, in the words of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, living and active, living and active.

[10 : 44] And what does Peter also say about the Word of God? It is enduring. It is the enduring Word of God. It is living and active to engender new life today. This is not a power that somehow has waned over the years or centuries or millennia. Living and active, enduring to engender new life. Yes, even today, even here, even this morning. And in this regard, Peter contrasts the Word of God with men and women, who he says, as he quotes from the prophet Isaiah, are like grass or the flowers of the field that wither and fall. But the Word of God stands forever. The Word of God stands forever. It is enduring in its power. And this feature or quality of the Word of God is reflected in the new life that it is the means of engendering. The enduring Word engenders enduring life. The eternal Word engenders eternal life.

This is where it all begins. But before moving on, having considered a heart reborn, before moving on to consider the next step, if you wish, a heart purifying, I should say that this spiritual beginning that we have been speaking of, albeit very fleetingly, is not always clearly or immediately discernible to us.

This work of God in the heart of man, it's not something that can always be clearly seen. The new birth, let's be very clear, is radical. It's indispensable. But it is also, in a very real way, unseen by the human eye. It is the work of God in the heart of man, and it is a work that requires no human cooperation or consent. And so, we might say consequently, it is often a work that is initially indiscernible. Indiscernible even, perhaps especially, to those who are the object of God's regenerating work. The words of Jesus to Nicodemus that we've read, verse 8 of chapter 3, captures something of the mystery of this work of God. The wind blows whatever it pleases. You hear it sound, but you cannot tell what it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. Or we might think of Peter's language of a seed sown. And notice how that language, that picture is helpful in portraying how this work of God in the heart of man can often be unseen and indiscernible until in God's time it blossoms in spiritual life and vitality. Much like a seed that is sown in the ground, and you can't see it. You don't know anything is happening. The seed is hidden under the soil. You could look at that patch of ground and say, well, nothing is happening there. And yet the time comes when it sprouts and blossoms. And you can see that there has been a work going on there in the soil, hidden, unseen to the eye of man. So, with the work of the

Spirit through the Word in the heart of man. Not always, but often unseen and indiscernible. Peter said to Nicodemus, and he says to us, he says to you, you must be born again. Are you born again?

Some of you can answer in humble gratitude, praise God, yes. Yes, I am born again. Some of you, in commendable honesty, may reply, no, that is not true of me. Perhaps some of you say, I don't know. I'm not sure. And perhaps what we've just been saying about how this work of God is often difficult to see and can be indiscernible, should be of some comfort to you as you ponder on these matters. But perhaps more importantly, for those of you who are unsure, or perhaps those of you say, well, no, I'm not, but I surely wish to be. What can you do? You might reasonably say, well, in the light of what you've just said, there's nothing I can do. You've made it abundantly clear that this is the work of God that requires no cooperation or no consent. It's the work of God in the heart of man. I have nothing to do in this matter. So, what can I do? Even if I wish to be born again, what can I do? Well, we've also said that God uses means. We've also noticed how Peter very clearly says that this work of God is through the living and enduring Word of God. And so, I would say to you, go to the Word. Read the Word. Meditate on the Word. Ponder on the Word. Grapple with the Word.

[16 : 10] Listen to the Word preached. Read the Word in your own home, in your own life, in the privacy of your own bedroom, whatever you are. Grapple with the Word. You can't say to me that you are serious about this matter if you will not use the means that God has provided to do His work in your heart.

So, a heart reborn. This is where it begins. But also, we notice we have what we might call a heart purified, a heart purified. A heart purified. This is where we are or where we ought to be in the here and now. This is what Peter says to those he is writing to there in verse 22. Now that you have purified yourselves. Now that you have purified yourselves. Notice, and this is of some importance, that what is translated there in the version of the Bible we have in front of us as yourselves.

Now that you have purified yourselves is literally, what literally Peter says is your souls. Now that you have purified your souls. Or on this occasion, the word souls is one that could be used interchangeably with the word heart. It's not always the case in the Bible, but on this occasion, I think that would be reasonable to say. Peter is speaking here of a purified soul, or a purified heart, or a purified life.

And on this matter of a purified heart, which is what we've now moved on to, I also want to make three points. We have three things to say about a heart reborn, and we also have three things to say about a heart purified. The first thing that we want to stress is this, is that purifying, purifying our heart, is a continuing work. It is a continuing work. For the believer, the new birth is of necessity in the past. It has to be in the past. If we are believers, then it is because God has engendered that new life in us. And so of necessity, it is in our past. But the purifying that Peter is speaking of is subsequent to the new birth. Peter is not speaking here in verse 22, at the beginning of verse 22, of the believer's initial conversion, but of his subsequent sanctification or purifying.

That this is the case can be demonstrated on a number of grounds, but we limit ourselves to a couple. First of all, we would notice that in the New Testament, the word obedience that is used there in verse 22, you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, is a word that is never, at least unequivocally, used in reference to initial saving faith. And in this very chapter, and this we can say with great confidence, the word is used to speak of the continuing fruit and lifestyle of the believer. Notice how this very word is used on two other occasions in this chapter.

[19 : 22] In verse 2 of chapter 1, when Peter is describing what God has done and is doing for those he is writing to, he speaks of the purpose of their salvation, and he speaks of for obedience to Jesus Christ, that which is the continuing characteristic of the believers. They're already believers. They've already been born again. Why? That they might obey. And then, much closer to our text, we also have the language of obedience found in verse 14, where there we read, or the believers are described as obedient children in reference to their regular characteristic or lifestyle, children of obedience, those who obey.

And so, when here in verse 22, Peter speaks of a heart purified by obeying the truth, he is speaking of a continuing work, not something that has occurred in the past and is done and dusted with.

But we can also say to justify this claim that what Peter is referring to as a continuing work is the fact that Peter presents this purifying as something the believers themselves do. Notice the language. Now that you have purified yourselves. Now that you have purified yourselves. Now, such language would be wholly inappropriate if Peter had in mind their initial conversion. But as we've already stressed, the beginning of spiritual life is the work, the exclusive work of God. And this brings us to our second point. Having established that this purifying is a continuing work, it brings us to the second thing we want to say about a heart purified, and that is that purifying is our responsibility. It's your responsibility as a believer. God has given you a new heart. It is a gift of God, but God requires you to keep it clean. It's not an unreasonable demand on God's part. He gives you a new heart. You couldn't procure a new heart. You couldn't create a new heart in yourself. That is God's work. God has done that for you. He's given you a new heart, but he does say this. Keep it clean. Keep it clean, this heart that I have given you. By our sin, we pollute even our new heart, and we must take seriously the need for continual and permanent purifying. Now in our text, Peter is commending the believers for the measure in which this is something that they have already done. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth. He is writing to believers who were very different, I imagine, in terms of spiritual maturity and growth, and yet he is able to describe them corporately as purifying. And he points to one powerful piece of evidence that allows him to come to this conclusion. You have love. You have sincere love for your brothers. The evidence that Peter is able to identify that gives them the confidence to be able to say to these believers, you have purified yourselves, is this sincere love that they have for each other. Now this is not to say that any of them, any of those to whom Peter was writing, and by extension any of us, is not to say that any of them could declare job done and imagine that no further purification was required. This was and is a continuing duty that is laid upon every believer.

It is, as I am stressing under this heading, it is our responsibility. A heart purified. It is a continuing and permanent work. It is our responsibility. But the third thing I want to say about this is the following. Purifying is through the Word. How do we purify ourselves? How do we purify our hearts?

Well, Peter gives a very clear answer. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, by obeying the truth, where the truth refers, I think, very clearly to the whole of Christian teaching on doctrine and life. In other words, the Word of God. Purifying is through the Word, by obedience to the truth. We can see the parallel, can't we, between the initial work of God, where it all begins, we are born again through the Word. That is what Peter very clearly says, that the means that God uses to engender in us spiritual life. But now we discover that in that which is our responsibility to purify ourselves, that also is to be done through and by the Word, by obedience to that same Word.

[24 : 37] And so, I say to you, believer, this morning you have been given a gift that is precious beyond measure, a new heart, a heart reborn. It is your duty, and may it also be your delight, to keep your God-given heart pure. The cleansing agent that God provides for you is obedience, obeying the truth. Know the truth. Meditate on the truth. Grapple with the truth, but always, always, obey the truth. So, a heart reborn and a heart purified. But finally, we notice in what Peter says in these verses, a heart that loves deeply. This is the destination we spoke of at the beginning. This is also what we described as where God would have us be. A heart reborn is where it all begins. A heart purified is where we are now in a measure. A heart that loves deeply is where God would have us be. And again, three points to make briefly. To love deeply from the heart is a distinct and further exhortation. Now, what am I trying to say there? Well, what I'm trying to say is that if we were to read verse 22 superficially or very quickly, we might imagine that Peter is saying the same thing in two different ways. Now, let me explain what I mean by that. Peter says in verse 22, as he addresses those who are reading his letter, he says, you have sincere love for your brothers.

You see that there at the beginning of verse 22. And he also goes on to say, and this is the phrase that we're focusing on, he goes on to say, love one another deeply from the heart. Now, the question I'm posing is, are these two statements not, it would appear essentially the same? To have sincere love for your brothers, to love one another deeply. Is this not a case of Peter saying the same thing in different ways for the purpose of emphasis, to stress the importance of loving one another? And I would suggest that that is not what Peter is doing. And I would suggest that for two clear reasons. Two clear reasons that allow us, I might even say require us, to understand the call to love one another deeply as distinct from, or certainly a progression from, having sincere love. The first reason is that having sincere love is presented as something that they already have. As Peter writes to his audience, now that you have purified yourself by obeying the truth, so that you have sincere love for your brothers. This is a current reality. He's able to say to them, you have, I know you have, I've seen it, you have sincere love for your brothers. It's already the case. It's commendable, but it's already the case. But then he goes on to say, love one another deeply from the heart. This is something he is calling them to. The implication being that this is something that they have yet to experience, certainly in the measure that Peter would wish for them. So, there's a progression. You have sincere love. I'm calling you now to a deeper level of love. Even the word deep kind of draws us to that conclusion. So, for that reason, I think we can say that this call to love one another deeply is distinct from, or certainly a progression from, having sincere love for your brothers. But the second reason concerns the words that Peter uses. In his first statement in verse 22, the word that we have translated love is the Greek word Philadelphia. Some of you are familiar with that word, a word that is generally translated, as it is here, as brotherly love. It's translated here as a phrase, love for your brothers. It is one word, Philadelphia, brotherly love. In the second statement that Peter makes concerning love, where he calls us to love one another deeply, he uses the verbal form of the Greek word agape. It's another word for love that perhaps you're familiar with. Different words, I would suggest, as carefully selected by Peter. And this leads us to our second point concerning a heart that loves deeply. Not only is this a distinct and further exhortation, but we can say this, that to love deeply from the heart involves a particular quality of love. When Peter speaks of the believers having a sincere love, sincere love, he is speaking, as we've just mentioned, of brotherly love for Philadelphia.

The stem of the word Philadelphia, the part at the beginning, Phil, carries the sense of related. And that gives us a helpful clue. Philadelphia, brotherly love, is the love that exists between those who are related in some way. A husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters among themselves.

In such circumstances, in such relationships, Philadelphia is expected. It's not always found, and it's great when it's there, but it is, in a sense, something you might reasonably expect to find. It is a good thing. It is a beautiful thing. It is, in the mind of Peter, evidence of purified hearts. I'm not in any way minimizing what a good thing it is to have sincere love for the brothers. Peter is commending his readers for this sincere love. But then Peter does go on to exhort them to a deeper love, to agape. They are to love one another deeply. Now, we do have to be a little careful here, as in the New Testament, the words we are distinguishing, Philadelphia and agape, are not always used in an entirely distinct way. And there is sometimes overlap in their usage. That is true.

But that said, on this occasion, there is, it seems to me, a real sense of Peter calling those he is writing, calling for something more, something deeper. Love that goes beyond the care and affection you might expect among a group of like-minded people. Love that is surprising and unexpected. Love that gives without seeking in return. Love that considers others better than oneself. Love that reflects the self-giving, self-sacrificing, self-denying love of Jesus. We might say the love of Jesus in us. Such love proceeds from the heart. Love that loves deeply. Love that loves deeply. Love that loves deeply.

[31 : 49] We're suggesting, we're proposing that this is indeed a distinct and further exhortation that Peter makes to his readers. We're also suggesting that it involves a particular quality of love. But we can say, thirdly, of the call to love deeply from the heart, that it is what matters to God above all.

Given what we have said concerning this love, we can well understand why God would call us above all to love deeply as we've noticed there in chapter 4 of the letter. Above all, above all, love each other deeply. We return to where we began. Do we? Do we love one another deeply from the heart?

If our answer to that question, and I'm not proposing that I have the definitive answer, I'm perfectly happy for all of you to come up with the answer that you think is right.

But if you are of the opinion, if you conclude that, no, we don't love in this measure, we don't love one another deeply from the heart. Well, what to do? Do we beat ourselves up and go home miserable because we're not doing what God would have us do, what is of primary importance to love one another deeply from the heart? Do we despair at our lukewarmness in this matter of love one for the other? Do we abandon ship and search for a fellowship where believers really love each other and their things will be as they ought to be? Well, I don't think any of these things would be a very wise response to an honest appraisal of where we are. No, what we must do is thank God that we are on the road to where He would have us be. We thank God for a heart reborn. We thank God for a heart purified, and we take on board seriously the duty to continually purify ourselves. And we ask God to show us what it means to love one another deeply from the heart and to help us so to love. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to You and we thank You for all that You have done and continue to do in us. We thank You for that great work in the heart of man where You, by Your Spirit and through Your Word, engender new life in those who are by nature dead, spiritually dead. We thank You that this is a work that You continue to do. We thank You that this is a work that You are doing today in the hearts of many. We look forward to seeing that life blossom in a way that is unmistakable and thrilling. We thank You that You have called us to a life where that heart that You have given us is to be pure. Help us to take seriously the challenge and the responsibility that is ours to purify our hearts, to purify ourselves.

[35 : 21] We thank You for this great calling, this great destination, that we would love one another deeply from the heart. We pray that You would help us so to love one another. Help us to better understand what that involves, what that looks like, and help us not only to understand what it looks like, but to love in such a way.

Forgive us for the great measure in which we fall short. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close our service this morning by singing. And we'll sing words that we find in Psalm 108.

Psalm 108, on page 146. Psalm 108, and we'll sing verses 1 to 5. And we'll sing to the tune Blaine Warren.

Psalm 108, verses 1 to 5. Oh, Lord God, my heart is steadfast, and with all my soul I'll sing. Harp and lyre I will awaken, and my song the song the dawn will bring. Psalm 108, verses 1 to 5. Let's stand to sing.

Psalm 108, verses 1 to 5. Let's stand to sing. Amen. Lord, my God, my heart is steadfast, and with all my soul I'll sing.

[36 : 55] Heart and lyre I will awaken, and my song the dawn will bring.

Lord, my God, among the nations, I will ever give you praise.

In the midst of all the peoples I will sing of you always.

For your sacrifice's love is boundless, greater than the heavens high.

And your faithfulness towards us reaches heaven to the sky.

[38 : 12] far above the highest heaven, be exalted through my God.

And through all the earth around us, let your glory spread abroad.

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.

Amen.