

A Love for The Brotherhood

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“How good God must be, how pious God must be, in order to love rascals. I cannot do it, and yet I am a rascal myself.” In the midst of all the density of COVID-19, it is easy as biblical Christians to be swept away of what our responsibility is to the Lord, His Church, and to one another. Being born of the ‘*water and the spirit*’ (John 3:5) involves a radical change in our disposition. The teaching of Scripture is clear and the change agent is the Holy Spirit. The Bible is explicit when the Spirit is received, at Christian baptism. Dr. Jack Cottrell speaks of baptism as such, “*Baptism is the time during which God graciously bestows upon the sinner the double cure of salvation. As such it is the divinely appointed condition for salvation during this New Covenant era.*” Many will read this and think automatically within their minds Josh now; he’s solid, he knows the plan. But often times those same people who “know the plan” are the very one’s who never execute the plan. An individual can know the plan and never know Jesus Christ (John 17:3, Phil. 3:8). The result of this new birth is not having a full knowledge of baptism, if that’s the case then I need to be re-baptized because I know more about baptism today than I did yesterday. The result of the new birth is *after* baptism their will be a necessary evidence within your lifestyle. I must make it very clear at this point that perfection will not be attained in this life, nor that the evil principle, the flesh, is ever eradicated from our beings, or even fully purified. Nevertheless, there will be a yearning after perfection, there will be the indwelling of Holy Spirit that aids in resisting the sinful flesh, and there will be a striving against sin. The Christian seeks to grow in grace and as Paul said “*pressing forward*” (Phil. 3:13) along the narrow way which leads to heaven.

In this current pandemic many professing Christians are divided. The call of being diligent to preserve the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:3), has been overlooked. Satan has deceived so many Christians during this current situation. One Christian may believe this is all a political joke. Another may see you wearing a mask and make the claim, “they have drunk the

Kool-Aid”. Another may believe it’s a plague from God. Yet there are still those who believe in taking COVID-19 seriously and taking pre-cautions. The freedom of self-expression dominates the western world doesn’t it?

The Result of the New Birth

In light of this pandemic, the Lord through His word, has revealed to me where my focus needs to be. That is *not* on any of my preconceived subjective political opinions regarding COVID-19, but instead understanding that salvation is two-fold: It is both legal and experimental, and it consists of justification and sanctification. It must be the Christian’s responsibility not only to our Lord Jesus Christ, but to all the persons of the Trinity (2 Thess. 2:13, Titus 2:4, Luke 15:8-10, Titus 3:50.) One of the main characteristics of the Christian apart from personal holiness is saving faith will be manifested by an energetic love for the brethren.

1 Peter 1:22-23 (NASB)

22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a [a]sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from [b]the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

The apostle Peter gives us two truths that will characterize the Christian after baptism. The *first* thing he tells us is our souls have been purified. That is the product of being born again. That is to say, you have been initially sanctified (i.e. joined the ranks of the saved). In the original Greek it’s a participle in the perfect tense, which means it was a past action or act but it still has perpetual results. That means at baptism is where cleansing starts but it’s not where it ends. It is ongoing; thus, sanctification is progressive, it is a continuing action of growth.

Relevance: Many will say amen to this! As there are many who read this right now, with a disposition of seeking to find a chink in my armor, reasoning all my doctrine and theology. Yet

often those very ones' themselves are not growing in the Lord. They might be to concerned about being a theological traffic cop, blowing a whistle every time someone uses a Biblical term incorrectly. One might have correct doctrine (as we should) and all the while not be in a right relationship with God. Having a right relationship with God requires us to put God first in a meaningful way.

The *second* evidence of the new birth, will be defined by a '*brotherly love for other Christians*'. At baptism, believers become one with Christ's body and the Holy Spirit empowers them to love (Romans 5:5, 1 John 3:14, 23; John 15:12). Peter uses the word "sincere", which in the Greek (*anupokrition*), means "unhypocritical". This corresponds to the apostle Paul in Romans: *Romans 12:9 (NASB) Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.* Peter also tells the Christians how they are to love other Christians, "*fervently love one another from the heart.*" This is the *agapao* kind of love, that which is exercised by the will rather than emotion, its not determined by their beauty, social status, political status, or if they have a different position regarding COVID-19 than you do. This is a love of unselfish caring and service toward one another. This is a love that we must work at and strive at in order to accomplish. It is based by the noble intention of the one who loves. The word Peter uses is "*fervently*" (1 Peter 1:22c). In the Greek (*ektenos*), is a physiological term meaning to stretch to the fullest limit of one's muscle's capacity. Such a love goes far beyond external legalism (Psalm 40:8, Romans 8:2, Galatians 5:1). Peter tells us that this sort of love is an attitude compelled from within: "*fervently love one another from [b]the heart (1 Pet. 1:22)*

Many know the plan of salvation, and totally rebel against this command. The true Christian praises God for the gift of Holy Spirit and the fact that they have been given a new heart and a new super natural strength for obedience. This is the evidence of a Christian who is becoming holy (1 Peter 1:16). Despite your pre-conceived "opinions" on COVID-19, the true Christian loves from the heart and understands that baptism is where it all starts. At baptism, by becoming born-again we have become part of the family of God and thus, we are knit together by such love as this. If this does not define our love, then our baptism was not (*anypocritos*) "*sincere*". It was merely a hypocritical dog and pony show. The sincere Christian takes off his mask at baptism; and replaces it with a garment of humility (1 Peter 5:5-7). The true Christian is a radiant light in a secular society (1 Peter 2:11-12). The true Christian will love other

Christian's to the upmost degree. What you see is what you get. *1 Peter 4:7-9 (NASB)* ⁷ *The end of all things [a] is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of [b] prayer.* ⁸ *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.* ⁹ *Be hospitable to one another without complaint.*

Being Right with the World

A Christian can know about certain doctrine, and still never be right with the world. After baptism, we must find a right relationship with all persons we interact with in the world. Sometimes people enjoy grumbling. Sometimes we enjoy grumbling about things around us when more than often our unhappiness is actually within ourselves. As thinking Christians, we must understand that we must come to peace with what we cannot or will not change and determine to change that part of our lives that makes us unhappy and can be changed. A few people get along with everyone, some people frustrate us, others anger us, some we just don't like, yet we must remember beloved God commands us to love one another.

A Prerequisite for Evangelism

A Christian can know 700 reasons why baptism is for the remission of sins, and still never execute the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The personal prerequisite of loving one another is the necessary evidence of the new birth. Jesus explained this to His disciples in the gospel of John, "*John 13:34-35 (NASB)*"³⁴ *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.* ³⁵ *By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" Our Lord clearly understood that the defining mark of the one who has received Him will be manifested by a deep love, first to God, and second to his neighbor. This prerequisite calls us to be at peace with others in the world. Christians are to be the salt and the light (Matthew 5:13-16) of the world. Salt creates a thirst. This is due to the fact that it increases the body's craving for water, salt tablets are sometimes given to those who work hard in in extreme heat. The reason is because without a diligent intake of fluids, dehydration or even sudden death is just around the corner. God's

children understand that our love is a prerequisite for evangelism to a lost world. Therefore, our lifestyle (i.e. what we do on social media) is a testimony before a lost world that others will be made more aware of their spiritual dehydration and danger. The desired outcome is that our personal holiness is not a show but because of who we are (Christian), our confidence in what we believe, brings about the lost individual persuaded to try our faith. That brings about an attractiveness to the God's gospel, that God's Word is true, precious, and sweet, and most importantly it creates a thirst.

Why Should Christians Love?

This question can be answered in the following words given to us under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, under the apostle Peter: *1 Peter 1:23-25 (NASB) ²³ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, ²⁵ But the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was [a]preached to you."*

Christians are to love one another because this is consistent with the new life in Christ (1 John 5:1-2, 3:14; 4:7). In regards to the extreme persecution that Peter's audience was undergoing, it was as if Peter anticipated his readers' possibly asking why they should love? Peter told them the reason why because they had been born again. The reason so many don't love is due to the fact that they don't actually understand what happened when they "got saved". At baptism, a complete, radical, decisive transformation takes place, it's a death and a new birth (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who are born again go from being godless, lawless, and selfish (Rom. 3:9-18; 8:7-8) to manifesting genuine repentance, trust, and love. We now can serve the law of God (truth contained in His Word) rather than the law of sin and death (Rom. 6:17-18).

Conclusion

Christians that claim to be born again possess a regeneration. That is the essence of new life in Christ Jesus, which in turn carries with it a capacity to love in a transcendent, godly manner, even though sin still has a beech-head of the unredeemed flesh (Rom. 7:14-25), this awareness causes us to strive *fervently*. Thus, we desire obedience, the New Testament has

spoke and it contains a number of exhortations regarding our love for other believers to genuinely love. All of the below footnotes are for the New Testament Church. We make the claim that we are like the early Church, just because we have coined the market on New Testament baptism and the Lord's Supper, we believe we got it all licked! We all too often forget the true reason of why the early church was explosive in the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthopraxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community in which the watching world could see. We have lost the call of God, and that is a love for the brotherhood (John 17:21). Thus, the church must be known for its purity of doctrine and the reality of its community. We could also could put it this way, the principle of the practice of purity of the visible church and the practice of observable love among all true Christians. When we allow COVID-19 and different opinions to divide us, then their must be swift repentance because our hearts are not right with God. In such cases we are not showing forth the love of God and the holiness of God. The call in the text is for saints to manifest an undying love for fellow Christians, which is consistent with an imperishable new life in Jesus Christ by the power of the gospel word which is itself imperishable.

“All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, ²⁵ But the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word which was [a]preached to you.”

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