

*The year 2020, is going to be remembered by our generation, as a time of enormous uncertainty; change; and if you like to use fancy words, you might say “A time of paradigm shift” ... (to change our way of thinking/the way we do things) ...*

- *WFH (not a rude acronym) (Working from Home)*
- *Zoom*
- *Taking everything Online*

*And of course, it's a time when churches have had to go online...*

And in church circles, it really has been a topic of conversation...

As I've talked to other Pastors, the conversation's been about:

- Have you gone online?
- How are you doing it?
- What equipment are you using?
- What format is your service taking???

And then many pastors realised, “Hey, we're getting more hits on our videos, than what we had people coming to church...”

And so there was a real feeling of encouragement

But, now the conversation's shifted... As churches started opening up again (and this has happened pretty-much across the board), we've noticed church numbers haven't returned to pre-lockdown levels... And there's several reasons for this:

- For churches who have a limitation on space, they're not allowed to let everyone back yet; and
- People have to book in for their services
- For churches like ours, we've got oodles of space, because we use a school hall... But, for us, under the

Covid rules, if anyone has a sniffle, the whole family has to stay at home...

But another reason I hear from Pastors and ministers, is people are enjoying the convenience of worshipping in their lounge rooms...

- They don't even have to get out of the jammies, Sunday morning... And:
- they can sit in their own time,
- with a cup of coffee,
- watch the bits they like,
- sing if they want to;
- stay quiet if they don't want to;
- fast forward over the bits they don't want to hear

It's the ultimate in 'consumer church'...

For goodness sake:

- if the local churches aren't doing it for me, I can watch one of the big, professional mega churches, and
- I can find a preacher who will make me feel good about myself, or affirm everything that **I** think....

But you know what??? I suspect there's possibly even **another** reason why some people are preferring to do church online... — You see, if I do church online, there's **no** chance of having to deal with any potentially difficult relationships, that might pop up within the church community...

Now, for some people, (such as those who are isolated by distance, and those who are isolated for health or mobility reasons) worshipping online, is a pretty good option for

them... But for the rest of us, it is not God's plan for the church...

Meeting together, and maintaining fellowship together, is an extremely important expression of our holiness and obedience to God... And if you stick with me, hopefully before we're finished, I'll explain that...

It's about maintaining fellowship, and building love within the church...

So, in **today's** reading, Peter talks about having a sincere brotherly love. **And** he commands us to **love one another earnestly**. This is a 2-part thing...

In the Greek, it's talking about 2 different types of love... The first one, is φιλαδελφίαν ( Philadelphian ), which literally means "Brotherly love" – Phileo (love) adelphos (brother). And Phileo love, is an affection that we feel for another person /friendship – it's the sort of affections we may have for our close friends/relatives...

But then he gives a **command**, to **love one another earnestly from a pure heart** . And this is a different sort of love – it's αγαπαω ( agapaō ) love – it's the sort of love that **God** has for us – it's an act of the will – it's something which is less about "affectionate feelings" and more about "a demonstration" of love..., In fact, usually in the New Testament, when we're **commanded** to love, it's αγαπαω ( agapaō ) love that we're commanded to do....

Righto. So, what Peter's really bringing out here, is that true believers, aren't on their own... He's writing to people who he describes as being (regenerated) born again . Alright, so he's speaking to a people who have experienced an initial salvation – this is something that God does in us (to regenerate us) – we can't regenerate ourselves... (we are born again by the Spirit)

And he ties this to the action that **we** should be taking, that he's been describing in the previous paragraphs... He refers to it as “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth”. And in the context here, he's not talking about our initial salvation – he's talking about the way we live in holiness and obedience (because we've been saved).

And so, what he's saying, is “*As we live in obedience and holiness, this brotherly love (between disciples of Jesus) begins to happen*”... And that shouldn't be any great surprise, should it... As we begin to live lives in tune with the Holy Spirit, of course, a natural brotherly love should begin to develop between us and our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are **also** living lives in tune with the Holy Spirit...

Alright, so if my life becomes more like Christ, and your life becomes more like Christ, there's no surprise that we'll get on, and begin to love each other...

But **this** is the point that Peter then commands, **but you've gotta take it deeper**... The way you feel about each other,

isn't enough... It becomes an act of obedience and an act of the will – increase your love...

The Tyndale New Testament Commentary put it like this:

*“Once you have begun to grow in holiness so that you have a genuine affection for one another, make your love for each other earnest, deep, and strong.”<sup>i</sup>*

How???

If you're someone who's pretty new to the Christian church, at this point, you may've only experienced the love and affection and brotherly love of other Christians... But if you're someone who's been a Christian for a number of years, you're probably under no illusion that maintaining love with your brothers and sisters in Christ, isn't always an easy thing to do...

And I'm not going to try and gloss over this, and give you a false image of what things can be like in the church... All we've gotta do, is read the letters of the New Testament, and we'll very quickly realise that a large part of the New Testament, was written to churches, who were experiencing inner conflict and turmoil, and they weren't getting on with each other...

And for some of you, your experience of other Christians, is controlling; vindictive; conniving; dishonest; hypocritical; gossips, liars and slanderers...

And my heart is filled with sadness, that that's been the experience of many people...

And so, if Peter's saying: make your love for each other earnest, deep, and strong.<sup>ii</sup>, we want to know how, don't we...

Well, we're jumping-the-gun there, because Peter doesn't start with the "How" – he starts with the "Why"...

**Why**, is it so important that our love for each other **does** get more earnest, deep, and strong?

Well once again, he points us to the eternal nature of our salvation... We were born again, not with something that is corruptible – not by seed that's perishable, but by the imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...

God's word remains. God's word is trustworthy. God's word is true... God's word, will not pass away...

In the beginning, it was by God's word, that He created/generated life... And now, we have been **re-generated** (born again) through His living word... And you haven't been regenerated to be a Christian on your own... just like I haven't been regenerated to be a Christian on my own... We have been re-generated to share life and love together...

The fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ (Fellowship of the Spirit) is something of eternal significance...

*Sadly, at this point in time, in this town, but not **just** in this town (it's happening across Australia), I've become increasingly aware of more Christians than ever, who are now viewing Christian fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ, as an optional extra, and something that they'd rather be without...*

But Peter is saying, because God's word is eternal (that word by which we are saved), the love of Christian fellowship is **also** something to deepen and strengthen – it's not meant to be short-lived... Christian fellowship isn't something that we give a bit of a go, and then we give up on, if it doesn't all work out.....

In V24, he quotes Isaiah 40:

<sup>24</sup> for

"All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,

and the flower falls,

<sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord remains forever."

Now, when Isaiah said that, he was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem (& Judah) under the judgment of God. But that God's word of **restoration**, would endure – God had promised, that He would restore them. And they could count on it, and they could trust that word...

And I think the point that Peter is making, is that for us, the **Gospel**, is the enduring word of God, of restoration... And therefore, the Christian church, is meant to be an expression of this Gospel, and be a community of restoration...

Righto, so that's the "why" – as a **community** of Christ, we've been enveloped into God's plan of eternity...

Alright, **now** we're ready for the "How?"  
How do we develop our love for one another, so that our love for each other, is more earnest, deep and strong???

Well, it begins with the word of God... In the Greek, it's the ῥῆμα ( rhēma ) word of God... That's the **spoken** word of God, or the **written** word of God – **that's** the word that endures forever... That's the Good News that was preached to us.

God has spoken through the prophets of old. God has spoken through His son. God has spoken through the apostles. And where is this eternal, enduring word??? It's been recorded in the Scriptures...

One thing I can tell you for sure: it's that when a church abandons biblical teaching, and starts embracing all sorts of other beliefs and philosophies – when that happens, there is no firm, sure truth that will develop unity and love... We'll come back to that more shortly...

It begins with the ῥῆμα ( rhēma ) spoken/written word of God...

Sometimes, it's rather unfortunate, where they decide to put chapter and verse numbers in the Bible... And here, it's unfortunate, where the divide is, between chapter 1 and chapter 2... Because there's no doubt about it – Peter's carrying on his train of thought here, into chapter 2...

Peter lists 5 attitudes and actions, that destroy fellowship... And these are the sorts of things that God's word condemns, and yet they are rife within the church...

Isn't it strange, that there are certain sins that some churches (or some people in churches) are very quick to condemn and very willing to deal with, and then others, they embrace...

And I want you to notice here, Peter is focusing on attitudes and actions, that destroy fellowship in a church. And he says to put these things away – get rid of this stuff – there's no place for these in the church:

**2 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.**

Malice, is the attitude of the heart, that brings the other 4 actions into being... Malice is the vice, you see, - the evil – depravity... It's the attitude that wants to see the other person come-a-croppa...

Put away all malice... How can our love for each other, ever, increase and grow, if we secretly wish evil for our brother or sister in Christ...

Get rid of all deceit... And when we get to v2, we're going to see that the deceit he's talking about here, isn't limited to, but it certainly includes deceitful teaching – believing lies, instead of the pure truth of God's word...

Among God's people, there is no room for deceit...

Just like there's no room for hypocrisy – saying one thing and doing another... Pretending to be all spiritual and Godly, but in reality, it's all a mask...

Envy – wanting to have what somebody else has... or being jealous of their position in the church; or despising the authority that another has been granted, because we're envious (why has that person got any authority over me?)...

And one of the most fellowship-destroying activities – slander... Telling untruths, or worse still half-truths – destroying somebody's character, with lies...

How can we ever expect the love within a church to grow and flourish, if we don't root out malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander????

But why are these things left to flourish within the church???

I'll tell you why – it's because we aren't taking seriously the word of God... The church of today, has become a church who delight in teachers who will affirm them...

We don't want someone who's going to challenge our way of life, and tell us that we are filled with malice and need to change... When sometimes, that's exactly what we need to be told...

In some churches, you'll never hear the word “sin” mentioned... And the gospel that gets preached, will be, *“Come to be set free from what ails you”*...

In other churches, the preaching won't be explaining the Scriptures – it'll be more about philosophy and maybe a bit of good advice for living, or personal development... And it might even embrace the standards and the culture of the world...

And then in other churches, they're very **forceful** to preach against sin – the sin of those other people, and at the same time, a blind eye is turned to the gossip; slanderer; and the one who harbours malice towards others in the fellowship...

**The enduring word of God**, is what we are to crave.

V<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation — <sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The word “pure” there, in the Greek, is literally the opposite of deceit... The Greek word for deceit (v1) is δόλον ( dolon ) And the word for pure is ἄδολον ( adolon ) — **not** deceit...

Just like a newborn baby craves its mothers milk, disciples of Jesus should be craving the pure unadulterated (not deceitful) written and spoken word of God... — That’s what makes us grow...

And that’s been my experience... How have I developed spiritually:

- Studying God’s word;
- Being part of a Bible study group;
- By listening to good Bible teaching;
- By getting into a church that won’t allow deceitful teaching;
- By growing in love and maturity with other Christians who are doing the same...

You show me a church who are hungry for the Word of God – and not just for any old preaching and teaching:

- a people who are hungry for the simple biblical truth to be taught in its entirety
- not a deceitful gospel:
  - by leaving bits out
  - by making stuff up, to suit our own hearts and our own desires...

You show me a church like that, and I reckon we will see a people who are poised to grow up into salvation...

They've tasted the Lord – they've heard His word – they know that he's good, and they just crave for His pure, spiritual word all the more...

As a preacher, whose main ministry is Bible teaching, I regularly encounter 3 different types of people...

1. Some crave to hear God's word being taught – they soak it up...
2. and others – they'd rather a few nice stories and a couple of good jokes... (entertained)
3. And others, want to be affirmed. They have ideas that have been instilled into them by men – their own theology, and they only want to hear stuff from the Word, that's going to affirm what they already believe...

There have been times when people in my congregation have said to me, “You spend too much time on your messages – and we're not getting much out of them – it's all just about God, and we want advice for raising our kids, and blessing our marriages...” Those people aren't in our church any more...

And yet at the same time, people who I've never even met, are engaging with us online, and every now and then, I get really encouraged, when an email arrives, thanking me for teaching God's word in its entirety...

Who do you think might be the ones who are growing???

I want to encourage you today,

- Get into the word of God;
- Get into a Bible study group;
- If you're not in a church that's teaching the pure word of God, you should be;
- If you're in a church that allows false teaching, get out... You can never have a strong and lasting, loving fellowship with people who accept deceitful teaching;
- And if listening to one of these recordings has become a replacement for fellowship, that's not good enough either... By all means, use this bible teaching to help you grow, but you also need to be growing together, with a fellowship, who are growing up in salvation...

We don't just get into the Word, to increase knowledge...  
The word of God is spiritual milk that makes us grow...

And when we grow, (I'm meaning here: when we grow together), and when we cast off malice and all those things that destroy fellowship... that's how we grow and increase in love for one another...

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

we thank You for Your rhema/spoken/written Word

Lord, we pray that by Your Spirit,

We would crave the pure unadulterated spiritual milk of  
Your word that makes us grow.

Not so that we would know more,

But so that we would grow,  
and be changed and renewed.

And Lord, we want to thank You,  
For the brotherly love we have experienced,  
With our Brothers and Sisters in Christ.  
And Lord, help us to strengthen and deepen that love,  
As we consume Your word, and grow...

Lord, help us to actively discard:

- Malice
- Deceit
- Hypocrisy
- Envy; and
- Slander

Not just some of it, but all of it, that in You,  
And in Your Word,  
We would grow in love and fellowship.  
In Christ Jesus,  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Grudem, W.A., 1988. *1 Peter: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>ii</sup> Grudem, W.A., 1988. *1 Peter: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.