

The Christian in a Hostile World The Way God's Children Behave, #3

Intro: If we asked someone today, "What do you think are the characteristics of a good child?" the answers would be pretty predictable. He learns from the example of his parents. He respects, honors, and obeys them. He loves his siblings.

This appears to become the paradigm that Peter is using as he addresses the people of God. After reminding them of the blessings they have as God's people, he turns his attention to the responsibilities they have as God's people. And he shows them that as God's children they must:

As obedient children imitate the holiness of their Father

Conduct themselves with respect for the Father the entirety of their life on earth

We are not surprised then to hear Peter's third admonition to the children of God:

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. For, "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever." And this is the word which was preached to you. (1 Pet. 1:22-25)

Peter in the paragraph has two pressing concerns:

What makes us family!

We have all purified our souls through obedience to the truth.

Peter uses a perfect tense suggesting a past event that has present consequences. You were purified and still remain purified. It is this event that unites us into the Lord's family. In contrast to the Law's rituals which only brought external purification, the gospel purifies us within and makes suitable to be members of the family of God. This purification of the soul comes through obeying the truth. Today many people, even some brethren, affirm that souls are purified even though they haven't fully obeyed the gospel. Whatever conditions God has stated must be accepted to receive the blessing of purification. It is God's requirements that make us a family, not human substitutes. *But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18)*

That "form of teaching" is faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism for the remission of sins.

We have all been born again of the incorruptible seed of God.

We have all been born again by the word of God! We are family because we have been born into God's family by "water and the Spirit" (that is by faith expressed outwardly in baptism and by the inward renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Notice the interesting chiasmas in this passage. When we see it, we see how one is born again. It is through obedience to the truth! And it takes the mystery out of this figurative expression. We are born again, added to the family of God when we obey the gospel of Christ!

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:26-27)

And so what relates us to God relates us to one another.

Peter shows us that what joins us is more than mere physical kinship through corruptible seed. This earthly seed yields to death; but the seed of our spiritual birth brings everlasting life. We are joined as a family by the very "seed" of God, the living and abiding word.

In this "seed" is the "divine nature" of which we are now to become partakers. God's own qualities are resident in this "living and abiding word" which produces a powerful, active, and enduring affect in those in whose heart it resides. To have the "seed" of God in us is to experience the character of God in us. So then, Peter expresses a second concern:

What being a family implies about how we treat one another

As different as people are who make up the church, there is one thing that ought to make us have respect and love for each other. Each of us has obeyed the gospel of Christ and indicated a desire to be a child of God.

Again John also reiterates this principle by showing that the real proof that we are born again and have the word abiding in us is to be found in the love we have for one another.

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 Jn. 3:10)

Our love needs to be unfeigned

Peters uses the Gr. word "philadelphos" which the Quakers borrowed from Greek to name their city. It means "brotherly love" and seems to suggest the warm feeling of friendship.

Unfeigned means "without pretense". It is a negative form of the word usually translated "hypocrite" and suggests that this is not merely an "acting" love.

Love one another fervently from the heart!

Love—Agape (an aorist imperative that implies decisive, once for all action).

The debate continues about whether there is a substantive difference between "philos" and "agape". Many maintain that

the latter is the divine love that seeks the highest good of another regardless of how he may act!

In other words this love says Lenski is “the love of full intelligence and understanding coupled with corresponding purpose”. It causes us to reflect upon how our actions affect others and to become informed about how to treat others so that we may give them what we really seek to bestow upon them!

Lenski insightfully comments: “From the heart marks the depth”; “Fervently” marks the intensity!

From the heart—This is the source of the love. It is not superficial or surface love, but a deep love.

Fervently-- stretching out, intense strain, going all out

Every parent who has raised children will appreciate what I’m trying to say. It seems almost all children go through a stage where they are at constant conflict with one another (sibling rivalry); but then when they mature they really value and appreciate one another.

I’ve often wondered how God feels when he sees his children putting each other down, fighting and quarreling with each other! Such reveals a lack of spiritual maturity. When we grow up in Christ we learn to value one another in spite of differences of opinion or personal wrongs.

Conclusion: We see very often in this congregation the evidence of a love that grows out of the living and abiding word living and abiding in people. I long to see the day when Christians will learn that “standing for the truth” commits us to loving every person who has obeyed the gospel fervently, without pretense, and from their heart. Today there still remains a need for Peter's exhortation, as simple as it is. We purified our souls for this purpose; now let's live out this purpose.