

"I love with the love of the Lord" (8)

One night two friends were camping out in the deep woods on a warm summer's night. Suddenly, their sleep was abruptly interrupted by a large furry visitor. A huge black bear began to tear through their camp, crushing supplies, throwing backpacks, and scaring the two men half to death. Thinking quickly, one of the men began to lace up his sneakers for a quick getaway. "You will never outrun that bear!" his friend yelled. To this he replied, "I don't have to outrun the bear, I just have to outrun you!"

Now I don't know about you but I'm not sure what I would do in a situation like that. But I do know that Jesus always reminds us to put others first. The way He dealt with the beggars, the lepers, and thieves showed us that He had compassion for the lowly. And so while the world measures a man's greatness by the number who serves him. We need to remember that Heaven measures a man by the number who are served by him.

The last time we were together Peter reminded us that if we to continue to be called God's children we need to be obedient to our heavenly Father's will. In **1 Peter 1:4** he reminded us that we are no longer to be involved in the sinful things we did before we were Christians. In **1 Peter 1:15+16** he reminded us that we have been set apart and we are to be holy in everything we do. In **1 Peter 1:17-21** he reminded us that we are to live our lives in fear and awe of God.

And today he is going to remind us of another responsibility if we want to continue to live as God's children. **1 Peter 1:22** "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently."

Peter says, if truly want to continue in the blessings which come from being God's children then we need to "love one another fervently". Now what does "fervent love" mean? And how is this type of love possible? Now before we go on and answer those questions we first need to ask ourselves why is this type of love important? Well simply put fervent love is important because it actually demonstrates whom we really follow as believers.

You remember when Jesus was betrayed by Judas, well straight after Judas left Jesus gave a new command. **John 13:33-35** "My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, 'You cannot go where I am going.' And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

In other words if we truly claim to love Jesus, we need to love others liked He loves us. And loved ones this is not an optional extra, Jesus says it's a command. And do you know why it's an important command? Well like Sola preached a few months ago, your life is a walking talking Bible. **2 Corinthians 3:2** "You yourselves are the letter we have, written on our hearts for everyone to know and read."

It was **D. L. Moody** who said, "Out of one hundred men, one will read the Bible, the other ninety-nine will read the Christian." In other words, the reason we are commanded to love one another is to convince the world that we are truly His disciples. Because if we don't truly love one another like Christ loves us then our actions don't back up our words.

Yes we may profess to be followers of Jesus Christ but as **G. Campbell Morgan** once said, "The Jesus that men want to see is not the Jesus they really need to see." Watering down the gospel and living a half hearted life of faith in Christ is not going to save anyone loves ones. Because if we fail to have a fervent love like Christ had for us it is only going to cause the world to doubt who we truly follow. In other words we need to ask ourselves are we showing people the God of the Bible in our lives or the god that the people want to see and hear?

Because not only is fervent love needed to show the world whom we belong to but showing fervent love is also a demonstration of our spiritual life. You see Christian we need to remind ourselves that we were dead in our sins and trespasses, but now thanks be to God we are alive.

Ephesians 2:1-5 "In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins. At that time you followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God. Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to

suffer God's anger. But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved."

You see loved ones becoming a Christian means we moved from one place and entered another. Spiritually we were dead, cut off from God because of our sins but now we're alive spiritually in Christ. And to show each other and the rest of the world that we truly have moved from death to life spiritually we need to show it. 1 John 3:14 "We know that we have left death and come over into life; we know it because we love others. Those who do not love are still under the power of death".

Make no mistake about Christian John is clearly telling us that if we fail to demonstrate our love for one another then it's possibly down to us being still spiritually dead. So not only is fervent love needed to show the world whom we belong to and a demonstration of our spiritual life, fervent love also demonstrates our relationship with God.

1 John 4:7 "Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God". We love because God loves and whatever our heavenly Father does, we too should be in the habit of doing.

I love that story about the little boy who was out in the woods one day and he came across a cave. He shouted 'hello' and the voice came back and said, 'hello.' He shouted 'who are you?' and the voice came back and said, 'who are you?' Becoming a little frustrated he shouted back 'don't play games with me' and the voice from inside the cave shouted back, 'don't play games with me', so he shouted 'I hate you' and the voice replied, 'I hate you'. So the little boy went running home to his mum all upset and crying and told her all about it and his mum said to him, 'son that was just your echo from inside the cave, if you had said 'I love you' it would have replied, 'I love you'.

What message are we telling people? Is it all 'repent, repent, repent' or are we taking the time to tell people that God is love and God loves everyone? What message are we telling each other? Is it 'I love you but' or is it 'I love you like Christ loves you'? 1 John 4:8 "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love".

John says if we fail to love like God loves us then we leave each other and the people in the world with the impression that we really aren't true Christians. We leave each other and people of the world with the impression that we don't really know God. Now I hope that you understand why these three reasons we've looked at as to why we should love one another fervently are so important loved ones. Because most people are not going to take the time to read the Bible but what they will do is seriously examine the genuineness of your relationship with God.

There was man in Birmingham a few months ago who was desperately seeking a job so he went to the extent of making a 6.4 foot billboard advertising his CV and walked all over Birmingham trying to get a job.

Now you need to know that you're a walking, talking billboard for Christ and people should see your CV which says 'I belong to Christ' written all over it. I mean people should know that we're Christians not just because we come to worship every week, not just because we tell people we are Christians but as the hymn writer Peter Scholtes says, 'they will know we are Christians by our love.'

Now what does Peter mean by the term "fervent love"? What kind of love does Peter have in mind which will demonstrate our discipleship, our spiritual life, and our relationship with God? Well it might help if we can understand what the word "fervent" means.

It's the same word which is used in reference to prayer in Acts 12:5 where Doctor Luke tells us, "So Peter was kept in jail, but the people of the church were praying earnestly to God for him." The word 'fervent' means 'constant' or 'earnest.' In other words just as the disciples were constantly praying for the release of Peter, so our love for one another is to be "constant." So what Peter is telling us is that we are to demonstrate the type of love which is constant and earnest.

But not only is it to be constant and earnest, Peter reminds us that our love for each other needs to be sincere. 1 Peter 1:22 "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently." Now I know the translation I'm using uses the word unfeigned and other translations use the word sincere. The Greek word literally means "not hypocritical."

Now this is important because Peter is telling us that this is not some kind of show, this is not some kind of performance we put on for each other whenever we meet together. This love needs to come from the heart. The Good News Bible puts it this way **1 Peter 1:22** “Now that by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves and have come to have a sincere love for other believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart.”

Paul says in **Romans 12:9** “Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good”. Listen church, coming to worship every week telling your brothers and sisters in Christ that ‘you love them with the love of the Lord’ and then going off and totally slandering them as soon as you leave is not loving one another sincerely.

Coming to worship every week and saying to someone ‘I love you with the love of Lord’ and then going off holding a grudge or gossiping about them isn’t loving one another sincerely. Coming to worship every week and seeing someone in need and saying ‘I love you with the love of the Lord’ and not doing anything to help them when you can help isn’t loving one another sincerely. **1 John 3:17** “If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God?” You see loved ones, our love for each other goes beyond words it needs to be shown, it needs to be sincere.

And finally for us to love each other fervently we also need to **keep our love pure**. **1 Peter 1:22** “Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently.” So what does Peter mean by keeping our love for each other pure?

Well he simply means that our love for each other must always be kept in the context of moral purity. **Ephesians 5:2+3** “Your life must be controlled by love, just as Christ loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God. Since you are God's people, it is not right that any matters of sexual immorality or indecency or greed should even be mentioned among you.”

In other words under no circumstances is our love to be a cover for sexual immorality. You see loved ones loving one another with the love of the Lord doesn’t mean we ignore sinful behaviour which is taking place among our members. Loving someone with the pure love of the Lord doesn’t agree with anything which is impure. Pure, sincere, fervent love is a love that imitates Christ's love, a sacrificial love.

How do we measure up to this type of love? Do we have a pure and sincere love for one another? Does the word "fervently" accurately describe our feelings and actions towards each other? If our only contact with one another is a weekly assembly, and if we are not opening our hearts and our homes to one another, **can it be said that we love one another fervently?**

Now having said all that you might be thinking ‘wow this is a high calling’ and you would be right. But you need to know that loving each other with the love of the Lord is possible. **1 Peter 1:22** “Now that by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves and have come to have a sincere love for other believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart.”

Peter says, yes this is a high calling but it is possible because **our souls have been purified**. Peter says yes this is a high calling but it is possible because **we have obeyed the truth**. And because we have obeyed the truth **we have been forgiven**. **Acts 2:38** “Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit”.

So we are forgiven at our baptism and as **we continue to obey the truth**, we are taught over and over again that we need to be pure. **Ephesians 4:20-24** “That was not what you learned about Christ! You certainly heard about him, and as his followers you were taught the truth that is in Jesus. So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to---the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, and you must put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy”.

So it is possible loved ones to love each other with the love of the Lord because **our love is a pure love**. Loving one another with the love of the Lord is possible because **we’ve been born again by the incorruptible word of God**. **1 Peter 1:23** “For through the living and eternal word of God you have been born again as the children of a parent who is immortal, not mortal.”

There is no city in the world, perhaps, where the treasures of art are more appreciated than Florence, Italy. It is told that an American visitor to the Pitti Palace, after viewing some of the paintings there, said to his guide: "Are these the great masterpieces that everyone tells me about? I don't see much in them to arouse such enthusiasm." "It is not these paintings that are on trial sir," the guide answered, "but it is you who view them."

And loved ones it's the same with the Word of God. Sometimes we run across scoffers, men who sneer at divine revelation, who say that they cannot feel much enthusiasm about the Bible. But we need to remember that the Bible is not on trial. Whether men believe it or not, it is the Word of God, which lives and remains forever as Peter tells us.

Now you might ask, well in what way does being born again by the Word of God prepare us to love one another fervently? Well God bless you, it's simply through the Word of God that we come to know what true love really is. Because it's the Word of God that tells us of the love of Jesus. 1 John 3:16 "This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for others! If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action."

It's the word of God that tells us of the love of God. 1 John 4:9+10 "And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven".

In other words we can have this fervent love because we have been purified and understand the need for a sincere, pure love of the brethren. We can have this fervent love, because the love of Jesus and God motivates us. You see the love of Christ appears in his amazing sufferings for sinners. That love is immense, unsearchable.

The inexpressible wrath of God fell from heaven upon Him, as a tremendous thunderstorm, from which there could be no flight, no shelter; so that it entirely crushed His human nature; and the extremity of pain and anguish dissolved the bond between his inmost soul and body.

Jesus was brought into the blackest regions of death and darkness and his love brought Him there, that the sinner might be brought to the regions of light above. As someone once said, 'every thorn was a pencil, and every groan was a trumpet, to publish abroad His love to man'.

Let me share with you a short poem.

Could we with ink the ocean fill, were the whole earth of parchment made,
Were every single stick a quill, were every man a scribe by trade:
To write the love of God alone, would drain the ocean dry;
Nor would the scroll contain the whole, though stretch'd from sky to sky!

Now remember what I said at the start, loving one another isn't an option it's a command. And if you're struggling to love someone with the sincere, pure love of the Lord then ask yourself why? Have we really been purified and born again or is it simply because we're not allowing the love of God and Jesus to motivate us? Are we truly disciples of Christ who possess spiritual life and enjoy a great relationship with our heavenly Father, or have we simply stopped God's word having any affect in our lives?

This could be the reason why Peter is going to remind us a little later in 1 Peter 4:8 "Above everything, love one another earnestly, because love covers over many sins". Now some of you may not know if you're starting to fail in the love department because you've forgotten how much God loves you.

And my prayer for you is Paul's prayer as we read it in Ephesians 3:17-19 "I pray that Christ will make his home in your hearts through faith. I pray that you may have your roots and foundation in love, so that you, together with all God's people, may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ's love. Yes, may you come to know his love---although it can never be fully known---and so be completely filled with the very nature of God."

Now some of you may think well I'm doing very well in the loving department. Well my thoughts for you are the same as Paul's 'love even more'.

He says to the church in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 4:9+10 “There is no need to write you about love for each other. You yourselves have been taught by God how you should love one another. And you have, in fact, behaved like this toward all the believers in all of Macedonia. So we beg you, our friends, to do even more”.

Now this is one of these sermons where you can just sit there and say ‘amen’ and go home and do nothing different from yesterday or you can start practicing right now how to love one another with the love of the Lord. Let me challenge you in the week and months ahead to think how you can demonstrate your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ, instead of just saying it.

But I don’t want you just to think about it, I want to challenge you to act upon it. Open your hearts to the love of God, allowing your brethren to love you with the love of the Lord. Open up your homes to each other; invite each other for dinner or a cup of tea. Pick the phone and tell them your thinking and praying for them. Help them when you see a need and if you can help on your own then go for it but if you think the church can help more than ask the church.

And if you are not a Christian this morning, then you need to know that God loves you too and so do we. And you also need to know that we want you to enjoy the blessings of God's love and the love of His children. But these blessings are only for those who have purified themselves by obeying the truth.

So let me encourage you this morning to talk to someone about what it means to obey the truth. Then you too like God’s children here at Great Barr can learn just what it means to love with the love of the Lord.