

“A LIFE OF LOVE”

HOLINESS **DR. BRUCE BICKEL** **September 26, 2014**

Bruce: Well, good morning, men!

Men: Good morning.

Bruce: Good to be with you. Let’s pray, and ask the lord to teach us, because there are exciting things to learn today about harmony in the body of Christ. Heavenly Father, it is with a great sense of joy, as well as anticipation, that we assemble to sit at Your feet. We pray, Lord, and we thank You with great appreciation for the power of Your word, how it redeems us, changes our lives, refines our character and our conduct, and that we have a chance to glorify You in the everydayness of life. Father, teach us now through Your Holy Spirit, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Why don’t you open your bibles, please, to our passage of examination for consideration for today, found in 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 22 to the end of the chapter, verse 25. We find Peter’s instructions recorded for us, beginning at verse 22 of chapter 1.

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly, from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. For “all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the LORD remains forever.”” “And this word is the good news that was preached to you.” May God be pleased to open our eyes, that we might behold Him more clearly, for Christ’s sake.

Peter has been telling us and teaching us in recent weeks that the effects of the gospel are many. In verses 1-12 of chapter 1, he has taught us about our gracious and glorious salvation, which produces a life of hope. In verses 13-16, he says that the gospel produces a life of holiness. A life of hope, and a life of holiness. Last week we examined verses 17-21, which taught us that the gospel produces a life of hallowedness or reverence. And today, in verses 22-25, he’s going to teach us that the gospel results in a life of harmony. So the believer’s lifestyle is based on what the gospel produces in our lives. And through God’s miraculous grace and mercy, the gospel produces in our lives a style of hope, holiness, hallowedness or reverence, and harmony. So we have a hopeful life, a holy life, a hallowed life, and a harmonious life.

So the design of the gospel, brothers, is much more than just assuring somebody that they have eternal life. It’s design is to penetrate the depth of a person’s soul, the depth of a person’s life, and dramatically alter their conduct and their character, by having the life of God being revealed in their physical being, by living a life of hope, holiness, hallowedness and harmony.

And when these fruits of the righteousness of God are not displayed, you have to question a couple of things. First of all, if you don’t see the fruit of hope, holiness, hallowedness and harmony, you’ve got to question the validity of the message that was preached, because the message of the gospel produces much more than just the assurance

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of eternal life. That’s the whole point of what Peter is teaching us. Remember this: doctrine precedes conduct. We found the doctrine of our glorious and gracious salvation in verses 1-12. That produces certain things. And when you don’t see the evidence, one of the things that you might have to question is, what is the validity of the message, because the design of the gospel is much more than just assuring somebody of eternal life.

The other thing that you might have to question is the validity of the response to the message that is preached. Now that does not mean that you and I go around saying, “Oh, you are a Christian,” and somebody else is not a Christian. I’m not saying that. All I’m saying is that there has got to be some Biblical evidence of a true regenerated spirit in the conversion of a person’s life that manifests itself in certain Biblical injunctions that give us evidence of the true validity of a person’s conversion. So when you don’t see these evidences, such as hope, holiness, hallowedness or reverence, and harmony, you’ve got to question two things—the validity of the message.

We talk about the gospel spreading in America. Is that really right? Is that really happening? What does the evidence say? People say, “Well, look how many people raised their hands at the rally.” Well, that’s wonderful, and that may be legitimate. I’m not knocking that. But all I’m saying is that there has got to be some longer evidence that basically says that a Biblical gospel has a greater effect on a person’s life than just giving them assurance of salvation. It results in a life of hope, a life of holiness, a life of hallowedness, and a life of harmony.

And the other thing you have to question is the validity of the response to the message preached. If you have a weak message, you’re likely to have a weak response. Correct? A weak message will produce a weak response. What is the message? You see, the power of God’s word is this, as Paul tells us in Romans chapter 1. “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.” You see, the power is in the message, and if you’ve got a weak message, you’re going to have a weak response. Peter is making sure that we understand that the message of the gospel is very, very powerful. The biblical gospel is very, very powerful. It deals with the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and repentance and faith. Now if that biblical message is preached, you’re going to see some evidence of that over time. And the evidence Peter is telling us is a style of life that is characterized by four features—hope, holiness, hallowedness, or a sense of reverence, and today we’re going to talk about harmony.

He has been telling us that there is a certain power and permanence in the Word of God that produces these results, and gives evidence that has taken root in a person’s soul and a person’s character. And the evidence we’re going to talk about today is the evidence of harmony. We’ve talked about hope. We’ve talked about holiness. We’ve talked about hallowedness, and today we’re going to talk about harmony in the body of Christ.

Now one would think that people who have a life of hope, a life of holiness and a life of hallowedness are going to get along with each other all the time, and they will have a

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lot of harmony. But sometimes it just doesn't work. And today Peter is going to teach us the reason for that, and the result of that, and the solution for that.

And basically, he says this. The problem and the solution are found in the Scripture, but the root cause is not disharmony. The root cause is not disunity. Peter will tell us that the root cause of disharmony in the body of Christ is disobedience on the part of either one of the two parties. It's an act of disobedience—not disunity or disharmony, but an act of disobedience.

The solution is a life of love, which Peter is going to define for us in our passage. Now he does this because there is more to a life of love than just merely feeling good. This is not an ooey-gooney, wishy-washy thing, like Sig and I just exhibited.

Sig: It had a special meaning to me, Bruce. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: Speak for yourself, Sig. (*Laughter.*)

So he's going to define it. He's basically saying that harmony is based upon the understanding of the quality of love that we have in the body of Christ. He's going to give us three insights into that. First of all, he's going to teach us about the quality of love. Then he's going to teach us about the cause of love, and thirdly the origin of this love that is supernatural.

So let's take a look at this. First of all, the quality of love. You'll see that in verse 22. “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love.” Now this is a word which is a deep love from the heart. Peter reminds us that an immediate effect of the gospel is this, that you begin to have an affection for the body of Christ. It's just a natural consequence, because you realize this: that we all have the same heavenly Father. There is an immediate response, where you have an affinity for somebody else who has an affection for Christ. And Peter is saying this, that one of the first responses in the understanding of a harmonious relationship is realizing the uniqueness of your relationship.

Now I would suggest this. Remember when we studied the fifty-eight “one another” commands? When you take the word *aleon*, which is “one another,” there are fifty-eight commands in the Scripture that teach us how to get along with each other inside the body of Christ. This is not for the world. This is for the body of Christ. This is how we maintain harmony in our relationships.

And do you remember our study that we did several years ago? There are four ingredients to our fifty-eight “one another” commands. First of all, one of the commands starts with this. It's our relation to one another. We realize that we all have the same heavenly Father. And that gives me a sincere affection for you because you're a brother in Christ, because I realize this. As I look out and see this audience of men, I see that you have the same heavenly Father that I do. That breeds within me, as a member of the body of Christ, an immediate affection for you, because you have the same heavenly Father. So the fifty-eight “one another” commands start off with our relation to one another.

Next is our reception of one another. How do we receive each other? We studied that in our fifty-eight “one another” commands.

The third element would be our response to one another. How do I respond to you based upon my reception of you, based upon my relation with you?

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And the last thing is our restoration of each other. So the fifty-eight “one another” commands can be broken down into those four categories—our relation to one another, our reception of one another, our response to one another, and our restoration of one another. Those are the fifty-eight “one another” commands. Now the first one is our relation to one another. I have an affection for you, as my brothers in Christ, because you have the same heavenly Father. That’s what Peter is saying in verse 22. There is a natural affection that you have for somebody because he is in Christ, and you realize that you have the same heavenly Father. It’s like the phrase “birds of a feather like to flock together.” I enjoy being with you on Friday morning because of my affection for you, and yours for me.

Participant: Likewise.

Bruce: that’s a natural, normal result of the gospel taking root in a person’s life. You have an affection for members of the body of Christ because you realize that we all have the same heavenly Father.

Now this word “sincere” is an interesting word. It’s the Greek word, translated “hypocrite.” And when you put the letter a in front of it, it means “not a hypocrite.” So what he is saying is that you need to have a sincere love for one another that is not hypocritical. It’s a non-hypocritical love.

The Greek word for hypocrite is a person who is an actor. The use of an actor on a greek stage was one who played the part of another person. A hypocrite is an actor. And what Peter is saying is this. The first natural affection you have for members of the body of Christ is not to be a hypocrite. It is a non-hypocritical love.

That’s the word *philos*. It’s the love of liking. It’s a love that takes pleasure in the person loved. It’s an affection or a fondness towards somebody, a human attachment for another person because of the characteristics you see in that other person, and that’s because you realize that this person is a brother in Christ. There is a natural affection that Peter says is the first expression of one of the roots of the gospel, in building harmony in the body of Christ. Peter’s idea here is that we have a very natural affection toward other Christian people, because they, too, are Christians, and they are like us, and we recognize that we have a relationship to one another because of the body of Christ.

But he doesn’t stop there. He goes on to a deeper expression. Now Peter exhorts us, and he is telling us that even though we have a natural affection for one another in the body of Christ, it doesn’t stop there. It has got to go beyond that. And notice how he says this in the next phrase. “love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” So we go from a natural affection for one another because you recognize that you’re a brother in Christ, now to we love each other earnestly from a pure heart. That’s a different word, and this is a unique word, *agape*. It’s love because of the preciousness of the person loved, and so you go to a deeper level. He’s saying that it doesn’t stop there in the body of Christ. Yes, you have a natural affection which the gospel produces. But it has got to go beyond that. It now takes on a different dimension that the world doesn’t know. That is *agape* love, which is self-sacrificial love. It’s love for the preciousness of the person that you are loving. It’s very sacrificial.

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An example of that would certainly be John 3:16. the meaning is illustrated by God. “For God so loved the world that He gave.” That’s the word “sacrifice,” the idea of sacrificial love. He’s saying that yes, you have a natural affection, but you go beyond that. Now you need to develop a sacrificial love.

In 1 John 4:8, He tells us this. “God is love.” It’s this kind of sacrificial love that describes God. So when we’re saying that the gospel takes its root in us, we’re going to have a sacrificial love for one another that goes beyond our natural affection for one another. They’re two different words.

Participant: Could you elaborate on that a little more, Bruce? The difference?

Bruce: One is a natural affection, a brotherly love. I just have a natural affection for you because you’re a brother in Christ. Now we go to the next level of this. Peter is saying that you need to have an earnest love for one another from a pure heart. In other words, you now say, “Because of my natural affection for you, I’m going to go one step further. I’m going to sacrifice because of the preciousness that I hold for you. In my love for you I’m going to self-sacrifice.” It’s not putting yourself to be the center of the universe. You accept that other person to be the center of the universe. And so it means that the world doesn’t revolve around me. It revolves around that other person whom I love, because I hold him with such precious esteem because we are brothers in Christ. It’s the idea of sacrificial love. God tells us to go beyond the natural Christian affection, and to love each other from a pure heart that is willing to sacrifice itself for the benefit of the other person. That’s what he is talking about.

Now the world is going to have the natural affection for people. That’s normal. We have a natural affection for people because of the body of Christ. But Peter is saying this, that it doesn’t stop there, folks, because we are to go on to another level, and that is where you begin to have the self-sacrificial love for your brothers in Christ, because of the uniqueness. Jay?

Jay: In the New King James Version, it uses the word “fervent,” which means “to stretch to the limits.”

Bruce: Correct. You see, you’re going into another level now. The ESV says, “earnest.” “Love one another earnestly,” (or fervently) “from a pure heart.”

Now notice that the source of this love is what? The purity of your heart. That’s the uniqueness of the difference of this type of love that we’re talking about. That can only come from a pure heart. That comes through regeneration and the work of the Holy spirit.

So it’s the love that causes one to rejoice in the welfare of another, and there is no such room for things as envy, jealousy, or comparison. Now we need to understand about comparison. Two things happen when you compare. They are both bad for us. You’re always going to find somebody who doesn’t do it as well as you do. That’s going to produce pride. It’s not good for you. You’re always going to find somebody who is going to do it better than you. That’s going to produce discouragement. All comparison does is produce pride and discouragement in us, and neither one of those are good for us.

What peter is saying here is this. The type of love that goes beyond the natural affection for a brother in Christ is the self-sacrificial love that doesn’t have any room for

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comparison. I don't compare myself to you, or have you compare yourself to me, because we're both coming to each other with a life of harmony that the gospel produces, and we have a life of precious affection for one another that goes deeper, a life of self-sacrifice. And so we put our earnest love in, and stretch it to the point to where we now begin to sacrificially love one another.

You see, the way to describe this is that keeps one from seeking one's own rights. You see, we don't have any rights. When you were regenerated, God took away your rights and gave you responsibilities. Here is one of our responsibilities: to love one another earnestly after we recognize that we have a brotherly love and affection for that person, not merely for the fond attachment that we place on this person, which is very natural, but also for the self-sacrifice and self-giving. A way of describing this is self-sacrificing and self-giving. It means this: to put another's well-being before your own, not because it's always pleasant to do, but because it's the right thing to do, because God said to do it. It means this: to put another's well-being before your own, not because it's pleasant, but because God said to do it, because you realize this: that this is the depth of the magnitude that God gave me. In His sacrifice for me, I now have something to give away, and I GIVE THAT TO SOMEBODY ELSE. I give that to the body of Christ.

Here is one Puritan who says it this way, “to make someone else the pivot around which the wheel of your life activity revolves.” That's the type of love he's saying we must do earnestly.

So when we decide to add to our natural, sincere affection a supernatural self-sacrificial love, the result is harmony. And when that does not happen, it's because of disobedience from either one or both of the sides of the parties. The result is harmony. It's a heavenly fellowship of saint with saint, which glorifies the Lord Jesus, as most blessedness results to us in the body of Christ for His glory.

You see, honestly, brothers, it's this. Harmony is a choice. You don't make the choice to be harmonious.

Now we need to deal with the exceptions, because there will be times, we know, when it's just not possible. The question we have to ask is not what are they doing? The question is what am I doing, or what am I not doing?

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes?

Participant: To that point, is there a reason that we should split, as church denominations have in this country?

Bruce: Well, let me just say this. The Christian life is not ruled by the exceptions. There are exceptions which make it difficult because of our sinful humanity. What I'm saying is that we need to understand the standard. Let's talk about the standard today, and don't talk about the exceptions. You'll come up with all the “what ifs.” We'll deal with that later.

But we need to understand the standard first, and that is this: that you have a self-sacrificial, self-giving love for everybody because of the natural affection you have, and you do that from a pure heart. When you do that, there will be harmony. The other

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person may choose not to do it. It's their choice not to do it. The issue is not what are they doing; the issue is what am I doing.

And so, let's realize this, that the Christian life is not based upon exceptions; it's based upon the standard of doctrine. And Peter is giving us a doctrine of harmony, and that is basically that we have the self-sacrificial love earnestly from the heart. Yes, Brian?

Brian: To tie into this, Luke 9:23 and Mark 8:34. “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” As I'm prodding through this, I just keep hearing, you know, “Be a disciple of Mine. Be a disciple of Mine.” That really puts in that self-denial there.

Bruce: that's a good cross reference there. What are the three characteristics of a follower of Christ? Self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission. That's how Jesus defines a disciple. A lot of times, people say, “I'd like to become a disciple of Christ. Will you disciple me?” Well, the answer is that I'll teach you three characteristics you need to learn: self-sacrifice, self-submission and self-denial. Those are three things you learn to be a disciple. That's how Jesus defines a disciple.

That's part of this *agape* love we're talking about in the body of Christ, which is supernatural and radical. The world does not understand what we're talking about. They'll understand the natural affection, the *philos* love. They'll understand that. But they won't understand the self-sacrificial love. They don't understand the fact that it means that somebody else is going to be the wheel around which my life revolves. Somebody else is going to be that, and not myself. That's foreign to the world. That's the power of the gospel. That's one of the effects of the gospel of many. It produces a hopeful life, a holy life, a hallowed life, and also a harmonious life. That's the context in which Peter is teaching us these insights.

Now notice that harmony is a choice, a choice to add self-sacrifice to an already existing natural affection. That's how you put the two together. You add self-sacrifice to an already existing natural affection.

Look at verse 22. “Having purified your souls by an obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love,” (that's natural affection), “love one another earnestly, from a pure heart.” That's adding to your natural affection a self-sacrificial love. When you put those two things together, you're going to have harmony.

Now this requires both sides to be doing it. And, later on, we need to talk about what you do when somebody doesn't do that. But the real issue is not what are they not doing? It's what am I doing? Yes, Jim?

Jim: I was just thinking that Peter was the one who, when Jesus asked him, “Do you love me?”, *philos* was his answer.

Bruce: His answer was “*philos*.”

Jim: He didn't go on to the next step.

Bruce: He didn't go on to the next step. Now it's interesting that he is the one who is writing this passage, isn't it? You see, I find that really interesting, that the one who writes and always has the keenest insights is the one who failed in doing it first.

Participant: Amen.

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Bruce: Look at Jonah. Who wrote the book of Jonah? Jonah did! This is the thing: he’s telling his own story. He’s saying, (*paraphrase*): “Let me tell you what it means to be disobedient, and how hard it is to be disobedient, because that’s what I did.” He’s the one who is telling this story. And I find it most interesting that the ones who give us the most insights are the ones who failed in doing it the first time. Yes, sir?

Participant: Refresh my memory. Didn’t the church invent the word *agape*?

Bruce: THE CHURCH?

Participant: I mean that word didn’t exist until Christianity.

Bruce: Correct. That’s correct.

Second Participant: *Agape* was used in classical Greek, but not very often.

Bruce: It was a very foreign word. There was no word to define it, until it was modeled by the Christian church. Then they came over and said that this is what they were describing.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: The model of the Christian church put evidence of skin and bones behind the concept. They said, “We can’t describe it any other way than with this particular word.” That’s the word *agape*, which is self-sacrifice. Bishop Rodgers, is that correct?

Participant: It’s used many times in the New Testament. Is that correct?

Bruce: Yes, it is. Bishop Rodgers, do you want to add to that, please?

Bishop Rodgers: Well, it’s the continuity of *chesed*, which is God’s covenant love in the Old testament.

Bruce: Right.

Bishop Rodgers: It speaks of God’s covenant relationship to us from the very beginning.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Bishop Rodgers: But Jesus gives us the definition. “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Bruce: There you go. He says in John 13, “a new commandment I give you.” It really wasn’t a new commandment, because the old commandment was “love one another.” What made it new was “as I have loved you.” That’s the purity of the earnest love of the self-sacrificial heart. That’s the new model, the new description, and now the new dimension is “as I have loved you.” And when you and I have a tough time loving somebody, let’s be honest. What do we need to do? Go back and realize how much God loves you! You see, if I am to love that person as He loves me, if I’m having a tough time loving him, it may be because I don’t understand how much He loves me, because that’s what I have to give away. Ministry is giving away to somebody else what God has given you. Yes, sir?

Participant: I think it’s in 1 John. The summary says, (*paraphrase*), “As Christ has laid down His life for us, so ought we to lay down our lives for one another.”

Bruce: Amen.

Participant: He’s talking radical language.

Bruce: Absolutely. In fact, you know, when you look at that statement that Jesus says, that if you want to be a disciple, you must deny yourself and take up your cross, the

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taking up your cross meant death. In other words, it means this. If you want to be a disciple of Mine, it may require your life. Are you willing to do that? You see, that’s the magnitude of this. Self-denial and self-sacrifice meant the possibility of sacrificing your life for the cause of Christ, and then self-submission. You can’t do that unless you deny yourself.

So the whole concept here is really radical to the world system. That’s why, when I’m trying to say and introduce this, remember this, guys. The impact of the gospel is far more than just expressing eternal life. It really manifests itself in a radically altered character quality of life that is hopeful, holy, hallowed, and harmonious. That’s the impact of the gospel. Yes, please?

Participant: Yes, Bruce. When he says, “lay down our lives,” I’m not sure he’s saying that we, like Jesus, literally laid His life down, but what is our life but our actions? What are we willing to set aside our own things for our fellow man when they need something?

Bruce: Well, that’s all involved in that. But the real end of the concept—the word *cross* meant crucifixion. Now that doesn’t mean that we go to be crucified. I’m not saying that. There is the concept behind it that says, “am I willing to go as far as, if required, giving my life if it’s needed?” It may come to that. I’m not saying it will. But all I’m saying is that this is the mindset I must have if I’m going to be a disciple. So it may not happen, but am I willing to do it, to go that far? That’s the self-sacrificial love we have for one another.

Participant: It’s happening a lot today.

Bruce: Boy, it is, isn’t it? You read about ISIS, and what they’re doing. They’re taking men, women and children, and saying that if you don’t deny Christ, we’re going to execute you. And they’re doing that. And yet, you see people who are saying, “I can’t deny Christ.” You see, they know more about discipleship than I’ve ever taught, because their boots are in the ground. That’s really difficult for them. But it may require that. That’s not something that happens naturally. That is not based upon a natural affection. That’s based upon a radically altered style of life from love and purity of the heart where God has radically changed us because of the regenerating work of the Holy spirit. That’s a supernatural love that we’re talking about. That’s what Peter says produces harmony in the body of Christ. That’s supernatural. It is not something that we can humanly make happen. It’s not part of our human nature. It’s all part of the mercy and grace of God.

Participant: Hey, , Bruce?

Bruce: Yes?

Participant: Before we go on, two things. One, it kind of made me laugh whenever you said, “Why can’t you love somebody else?” What the world would say now is, “Because you don’t love yourself.” You know, it’s so distorted, how the world views it. They say, “Well, you can’t love somebody else until you love yourself,” but that’s not at all what scripture is teaching. I don’t know if you want to comment on that, but the second thing is more of a question. Whenever it says, “having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth—“

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Bruce: Hang on! We’re getting there next. (*Laughter.*) That’s the next point. Now notice. Peter says this. Harmony is a choice. You are adding self-sacrifice to an already existing natural affection. That is what is unique to the body of Christ. It’s a choice that I’m making, to add self-sacrifice to an already existing affection that I have for you because of the uniqueness we have in the body of Christ. Do you see how that works? That’s how that phrase in chapter 1:22 works.

Now notice. There is a reason why supernatural love is possible. That’s because you’ve been purified by obedience to the truth. Now that’s where we get the idea of the cause of this love in verse 22—purified by obedience. “Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” The cause of this love is purification by obedience. Peter says that the reason you have this non-hypocritical love and affection for other believers is because you have purified yourself. The means of purification is by obeying the truth. Do you notice how he says that? The means of purifying yourself is by obeying the truth. That’s why I say that disharmony in the body of Christ is the result of disobedience on the part of either one or both sides of the issue. Somebody is not being obedient to the word, because you purify yourself by obedience to the Word. Habitual obedience to the word results in purification, because it puts sin out of the equation. Obedience to the truth of God is a process by which we are purified. Purification, Peter tells us, comes from obeying the truth. And it starts with obeying the gospel.

Now let me show you. You see, obeying the gospel is a command. The response to the gospel is not a choice. It’s an act of obedience. That is where our obedience starts; it’s with obeying the gospel.

Take a look at acts chapter 15, verses 8 and 9. You’ll see the purification process. You’ll see it in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 8. Gentiles or heathens are defined as “those who do not know God.” You see, the gospel is a command. It starts with that. That’s where your obedience starts. Obedience starts with the command of the gospel to repent and believe. Being purified from our sins by obeying the gospel enables Christians to show genuine affection to the members of God’s family. That’s something that God supernaturally works in us because of this: the effects of the gospel are many. They are much more than just convincing somebody that he has eternal life.

Jesus told His disciples in John 15, verse 3, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” His prayer in John 17, verse 17, says this, “Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.” How is it that you and I are sanctified? How is it that you and I are purified? It is by our obedience to the truth.

Now notice. When God speaks, what happens? Things are created. *Ex nihilo*; He created the universe out of nothing. When He speaks through His word, what happens? He re-creates. He creates a new being. You’re a brand new person if you’re in Christ. It is through the purification process, by obedience to the word, that you and I are sanctified, and we’re purified to express the impact of the gospel upon our lives. So it’s far more than just granting somebody eternal life, or telling them that. The power of the word is to purify.

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Look at psalm 119, verse 9. Great advice for a young man. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word.” What is he referring to? Obedience, obedience to the word. That’s how you’re purified. It’s a process. It doesn’t happen instantaneously. It’s just like revelation. It’s not instantaneous, it’s progressive. Purification is progressive in our lives as it relates to our sanctification. The more you and I are obedient to the word, the more that we’re purified, resulting in a deeper love, where we can love supernaturally, what the world does not understand.

Put this quality of love together, and you have this simple equation. Unless we are purified, we cannot love purely or deeply from the heart. And that comes through our obedience to the word. Loving deeply from the heart is only possible as we are made pure by being obedient to the truth of God. Loving deeply from the heart, as Peter admonishes us to do, is only possible as we’re made pure by being obedient to the word of God.

Sacrificial love is pure love. Sacrificial love is obedient love. That’s why I say that the problem of disharmony in the church is disobedience, not disunity. One or both parties are disobedient to the word, and that’s because people don’t believe in the sufficiency of Scripture anymore. We need to bring in some psychology, some psychiatry, some other things like that,--new techniques, new leadership skills, new organizational structures, because we think the Scripture is outdated.

So the problem, in my mind, is this. We really don’t believe that the scripture is sufficient, that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. We really don’t believe that, because we’re always bringing in extra things. Now that doesn’t mean that we don’t learn from the world. I’m not saying that. All I’m saying is that Peter’s point is this, that disharmony in the church is a result of disobedience, of either one or both parties.

Obey, and you will love. As we obey the truth, we shall be purified by it, and be able to love because of it. Obedience to the truth precedes love. Love is the result of a purified heart of obedience. And it’s all possible because of the origin of love.

Now do you follow me on that? The cause of love is being purified by obedience to the Word. Is the Word central in your life, in shaping your thought patterns? Paul tells us, in Romans 12, “do not be conformed to the system of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Brothers, if you don’t think right, you’re not going to act right. If you don’t act right, you’re not going to feel right. And how is it that we need to think right? It means that we need to think scripturally, biblically, because the way that I’m purified is by obedience to the truth.

Now what happens when you’re not obedient? What do you do? Repent and confess it. “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” You know that when you are disobedient that God is gracious in His forgiveness, and He will purify you, and give you the desire not to want to do that again. That’s a process, that’s a purification process. And it all starts with our obedience to the word.

Now let me read these last two verses for you. “since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but imperishable, through the living and abiding word of

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God. For “all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flowers of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the LORD remains forever.” And this word is the good news that we preach to you.”

So we’ve seen the quality of love, and we’ve seen the cause of love. Let’s take a look at the origin of love. You see that in verses 23-25.

Are you following this? Are you following the three stages of his defining this love for us—the quality of love, the self-sacrifice, the cause of love, obedience to the truth? And now we want to see the origin of this love. Where is the origin of this love? It’s regeneration by the Word, verses 23-25. It’s the regenerating work of the Holy spirit giving new life to a dead person in his sins. It’s possible because you have been born again, given new life because of the imperishable word. You were implanted with a seed which produced new life. That’s regeneration. You were implanted with a seed that produced new life. That seed is the word of God, as in the parable Ted taught us a couple of weeks ago—Luke chapter 8, verse 11. The seed is the word of God. The response to the word of God is the origin of this love.

God’s word is referred to as a seed by Peter, because it always imparts life. It’s referred to as a seed because it imparts life.

Look at Isaiah chapter 55, verse 10.

(Transcriber’s Note: Isaiah 55:10-11. “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”)

Look at Psalms 33, verse 9. “For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.” When God speaks, men, things happen. God creates. When God speaks through His word, He re-creates us. That’s regeneration. We were reborn by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit because of God’s word. When He spoke the word to you and me, we were regenerated. He took that heart of stone, and He gave us a heart of flesh.

Now the reason for our harmony is because we were all born from the same seed, and that seed is what?

Participant: The word of God.

Bruce: The word of God, exactly. Now that’s the seed, that’s the important thing. The reason for our harmony is because we were all born from that same seed, and that seed is the word of God. And when somebody is disobedient to the Word, you’re going to have disharmony. Either one or two parties are disobedient to the word—not disobedient to concepts or principles, but to the scripture and to the Word itself.

The same seed gave birth to all of us. Now harmony is not something you and I achieve or strive for. It’s something we maintain because of our common birth. The maintenance program for harmony is to love sacrificially by being obedient to the word. And brothers, you can’t do that in your own human strength.

That’s why we need to be on our knees, praying. Remember this. Prayer is preparation for the next response that is proper.

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Sacrificial love does not make harmony; it just maintains it. It doesn't make it; it maintains it. Disharmony is a result of disobedience by either one or both parties in a relationship.

Now let's go to John chapter 17 for a minute. Turn in your bibles to the wonderful prayer of our Lord in John chapter 17. Notice this, in verses 1-5—purified by unity. “When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, “father, the hour has come. Glorify Your son, that the son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all You have given Him. And this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed.”

You see, in verses 1-5, that He might be glorified. The whole prayer is that He might be glorified. Now He gives us the reason why that is going to happen.

Notice verses 6-19. first of all, the disciples must be sanctified. You read that in 6-19. And then, in verses 20-23, that the church might be unified. So it goes from Christ being glorified to the disciples being sanctified, and now the church is being glorified.

Notice the purpose of unity—verse 21 of chapter 17. I'm going through this rather quickly, because I want to point out the highlights of the impact of harmony in the body of Christ. Verse 21. “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may know that You have sent Me.”

Now let's take a look at a very practical implication of this. When the body of Christ is not in harmony, the world has a right to reject the fact that God sent Christ into the world. Do you see that? Notice verse 21 again. “I in You, You in Me, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” If they don't see this unity, and if they don't see this harmony, they have a right to reject the Incarnation of the Person and work of Christ.

That's such a serious implication. We don't take harmony in the body of Christ seriously. We're always looking for our own thing. My denomination does it this way; yours does it that way. We can't do it together. You do it this way; I do it that way.

There is a sense where we need to recognize the implications of disharmony in the body of Christ, or the world has a right to reject the Incarnation of Christ.

How about verse 23? Let's read verses 22 and 23. “The glory You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You have sent Me, and loved them even as You love Me.”

Now there are tremendous implications, brothers, to disharmony in the body of Christ. It's basically this. The world has a right to reject the Incarnation of Jesus, because they don't see us getting along with each other. Now that ought to cut us to the quick. It's not about my rights. It's about my responsibilities. It's not about “YOU DO IT THIS WAY AND I DO IT THAT WAY.” It's about “how can we do it together to the best of our knowledge, and both of us be obedient?” And there are ways in which we need to work

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that out when we're not in harmony. But we need to work that out, because it's obedience to the Word that purifies both of us.

So we go back to the scripture because of our common birth, the seed which produces life. Notice verse 23; “that the world may know” that Christ was sent by the Father? Now, what is that? That is evangelism. There is a definition of evangelism, that the world may know that Christ was sent by the Father. The world sees our unity and says, “Maybe there is something about this self-sacrificial love that I see in the way they treat each other. Maybe there's something to it. Maybe Jesus really was sent from God. Maybe there's some validity to what they're saying, because of the expression of their lives, because the gospel has taken root in their lives.” It's manifested in four ways—a hopeful life, a holy life, a hallowed life, and a harmonious life.

Unity is not uniformity. It's not absolute similarity of style or philosophy. It doesn't mean we're all alike. Unity is not unanimity, absolute agreement of opinion. We can be in unity, but disagree with each other's opinions.

Now honestly, folks, there is no argument where opinions are concerned. My opinion is this, your opinion is that. That's not an argument. You're just stating one fact; I'm stating another. There's no argument there. We argue over opinions. But in reality, there is no argument where opinions are concerned. So we're not talking about opinions; we're talking about harmony. You and I are saying, “that is your opinion; this is my opinion. How can we both sacrificially love one another and express the unity that we have in harmony? How are we going to do that?” It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort, but the cause of the evangelistic work of the Person and work of Christ is at stake.

Unity is not union, or absolute organizational affiliation, like the world council of churches. It's not bowing to the lowest common denominator so that we can get along with each other. That's not what we're saying. Jesus prays for unity, not uniformity, unanimity or union.

He prays for a unity of life and love that transcends those natural differences that we have as people. Now I'm not suggesting that we compromise our beliefs at all. That's not what I'm saying. Jesus isn't talking about ecumenical getting together. He's not talking about doing everything with everybody else. What He is talking about is an inner oneness that we talk about. It's a unity of life.

So we need to pick this up next week, as we go through this. My point is this, brothers. We need to take harmony more seriously than we do, It's the root and the basis for all the power of our evangelism. Why would somebody want to follow somebody when we can't get along with each other? Now that's a serious question, and the world has the right to reject the incarnation of Christ when they don't see the body of Christ getting along.

We need to go back and relive those fifty-eight “one another” commands. Those commands were given to teach us how to get along with each other inside the body of Christ. We make our mistakes inside the body of Christ, because we have the common seed of the word of God implanting us and regenerating us with a common birth. You see, we need to keep those things inside the body of Christ, not externally. And so we work on harmony, so that the world has the ability to say,

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“maybe there is something true about the way they get along with each other. Maybe there is something real to this supernatural *agape* love.”

So we add to our natural affection as brothers a supernatural love, because the origin is God Himself, and it comes through the imperishable word of God. You and I are impregnated by the same seed, and that produces life within us. The result of that is a life of hope, a life of holiness, a life of hallowedness, and a life of harmony.

Let us pray. Father, this is such meaningful truth that is so beyond our human comprehension. Father, we just pray that if we have said anything that is inconsistent with Your revealed word, and Your revealed will for us, that You would remove that from our minds. Give us only those things that are consistent with Your word, that we might be purified by our obedience. As we are purified by our obedience, we will love more clearly, more powerfully, and more sacrificially. And may it be so, for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.”