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Sermon: May 18, 2014
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER”
First Peter 1:22-2:3

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,” declares the Son of God: **“if you”** what?

“If you” give intellectual assent to the Gospel?

“If you” confess biblical faith?

“If you” adhere to correct Christian doctrine?

“If you” are an active member of a true church?

“If you” study the Bible, do daily devotions, pray before meals, listen to Christian radio, and view only appropriate movies and TV shows?

“If you” uphold the right values, support the right causes, and vote the right way?

No. **“By this [they] will know... you are my disciples, if you love one another,”** if you exercise mutual *αγαπη* [agapē] love (John 13:35).

? Can others see that we are Christ’s disciples? Is there sufficient evidence to prove that we follow Jesus? *Do we love one another* in word and deed?

■ First Peter 1:22: **“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other”** – I believe the better translation is *in order “that you” may be capable of “sincere love for each other,”* – **“love one another deeply, from the heart.”**

{1 P 1:1-2; 16} *Αγαπη* love is more than the *sign* that we are **“chosen... to be obedient to Jesus Christ and**

sprinkled with his blood.” It is also the *purpose* for our election, the Lord’s *objective* in calling us to **“Be holy, [as he is] holy.”**

To be sure, *holiness* and *αγαπη* love are not exactly synonymous. Nevertheless, there is a one-to-one correspondence between social holiness (the holiness of right relationships) and love: *αγαπη* is relational holiness; relational holiness is *αγαπη*. ♦

This is based in the character of God.

{Is 6:3; G.R. Lewis} What do the Scriptures say?

“Holy...is the LORD Almighty.” God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit **“is morally spotless in character and action, upright, pure, and untainted with evil desires, motives, thoughts, words,”** and **“deeds.”** Holiness is who God is and what God does.

{1 Jn 4:8; H.W. Hoener; C.H. Dodd} What else do the

Scriptures say? **“God is love.”** *Αγαπη* **“love... is the very substance and nature of”** the Living **“God.”** As God **“creates, He creates in love; [as God] rules, He rules in love; [as God] judges, He judges in love.”** Love is who God is and what God does.

God is not holy despite his love; God is holy because he is love. God is not love in spite of his holiness; God is love because he is holy.

Thus the imperatives to **“Love as I have loved”** (John 15:12) and to **“be holy, because I am holy”** (First Peter 1:15) are not in conflict. To the contrary, we are holy as we exercise *αγαπη* and we exercise *αγαπη* as we are holy.

■ Back to verse 22: **“Now that you have purified yourselves... love one another deeply, from the heart.”**

“Love one another.” Of course, the obligation to love is not limited to members of our spiritual family. Consider Messiah’s *parable* in Luke 10:25-37:

“A [Jewish] man...fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A [Jewish] priest ... passed by [without helping him]. So too, a [Jewish] Levite.... But a Samaritan [a religious, cultural, and political enemy, considered by many Jews to be less than fully human] ...took pity on him,” interrupting his journey, risking his safety, and spending his own money to rescue and heal him. **“Go and do likewise.”**

Consider Messiah’s *directive* in **Matthew 5:43-48:**
“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbors and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good... sends rain on the righteous and...unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? If you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect... as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

{Ro 5:8; Col 1:21} Above all, consider Messiah’s *example*. **“God demonstrates his... love for us in this: While we were still sinners,”** when we were **“alienated from God and we were [his] enemies in [our] minds,” “Christ died for us.”**

To love as Jesus has loved is to love friend *and* stranger, family member *and* enemy alike. The charge to **“love one another”** in no way negates the obligation to love anyone and everyone.

Still, there is a sense in which love begins at home. Messiah has set us apart for mutual *αγαπη* love. If we do not get this right with our spiritual family, how will we do it with strangers and enemies?

Take a look around at your brothers and sisters. Visualize those who absent today.

“Love [them] deeply.” The Greek word translated **“deeply”** is derived from a verb defined as “to strain.” There is no place in discipleship for a half-hearted attempt at love. We are called to make every effort, resolutely straining for it with focused concentration.

“Love [them] ...from the heart.” God’s intent is for our outward words and deeds of love not to be tacked on, but to grow out of our inward attitudes and thoughts. *Αγαπη* is not only what we do; in Christ, it is who we are.

This is a high and holy calling, issued to us by the Lord of the Church himself. Let us love as he has loved. Let us **“love one another deeply, from the heart.”**

■ Evidently, Peter’s original readers were having troubling doing this. And so in 2:1 he gets specific: **“rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”**

“Malice” is ill-will, hostility, animosity. This is anti-αγαπη. Do you harbor malice toward someone in your church? Get rid of it!

“Deceit” is not limited to outright lies. It also includes exaggeration, half-truths, manipulative words and deeds, and even misleading silence. This is anti-αγαπη. Have you practiced deceit? Cut it out!

We aren’t perfect. There are incongruities between what we believe, say, and do. But **“hypocrisy”** is major self-contradiction. This is anti-αγαπη. Are you wearing a mask? Take it off!

“Envy” can involve greed, jealousy, spite or resentment. This is anti-αγαπη. Has any form of envy taken root in your mind? Uproot it!

The word rendered **“slander”** literally means, “to speak against.” This can be false, but it is often true. What makes it **“slander”** is the intent to get even, inflict pain, or cause damage. This is anti-αγαπη. Have you indulged in slander? Knock it off!

“Malice ...deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.” This is not a complete inventory of the ways we fail to love each other. There are many others.

{Ro 1:21-32} Are we tempted to categorize these as minor sins? Well, in Romans 1 the apostle Paul lists them

alongside idolatry, sexual depravity, murder and hating God as acts that are worthy of death.

“Malice ...deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander” destroy individual relationships and tear apart congregations. They contradict the love command. They undermine holiness. They belie our claim to believe the Gospel.

Does anyone here desire that? No!

How can we **“love one another deeply, from the heart”**? What can we do to grow in αγαπη love?

Keep in mind that αγαπη love is the fruit of our new identity in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **“God”**, who has chosen us to be his children, **“is αγαπη.”** As we more nearly resemble our Heavenly Father we get better at thinking, speaking and doing αγαπη.

As much as we might want Peter to itemize a one-size-fits-all, step-by-step, to-do-list for this he does not. Relationships cannot be reduced to a formula.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he does suggest three practical actions (I won’t call them “action steps”).

✍ First, pursue holiness.

■ Last week we explored the holiness mandate in 1:13-21. Verse 22 establishes a direct connection between holiness and αγαπη: the Lord makes us holy in order that we may be capable of **“sincere love.”**

If we seek genuine holiness, our capacity to love will expand. According to chapter 1 we do so by **“not [conforming] to the evil desires [we] had when**

[we] lived in ignorance” (verse 14), by “[living] out our time here as foreigners in reverent fear” (verse 17) and “by obeying the truth” (verse 22).

Seeking holiness probably won’t make us feel all warm and fuzzy. It will help us to one another.

✍ Second, get into the Word. Get the Word into you.

■ {2 Ti 3:16-17} In 1:23 Peter says: “**you have been born again... of imperishable [seed], through the living and enduring word.**” Following our new birth God uses Scripture to shape our identity by “**teaching, rebuking, correcting and training us in righteousness, so that [we] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work,**” above all works of love.

This will happen, provided we dedicate our knowledge to God’s glory and neighbor’s good. If we do so, the *αγαπη* within will grow purer and stronger.

✍ Third, feast on the goodness of God.

■ 2:2: “**Crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.**” In context, growing up is exercising holiness and love.

■ “**Spiritual milk**” is not a metaphor for Scripture here. In verse 3 Peter completes his thought, “**now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.**” It is the Lord who is good. We are called to “**crave**” *him*.

Yes, Scripture is an essential means by which the Living God gives himself to us. So are prayer, worship, the sacraments and Christian fellowship.

The deeper we go in communion with God, the more completely he fills us. Since “**God is αγαπη**” the more he fills us, the greater our love.

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

First Peter 1:22-2:3 is the Word of the Lord.