

## **“Hope that Brings Us Together”**

1 Peter 1:22—2:3

As long as newspapers remain in print, the immortal memory of Charles Schultz will live on. I would imagine that his Peanuts comic strip has been the curious morning interest of generations. In one of the cartoons, Lucy demands that Linus change the TV channel, going so far as to threaten him with her fist if he didn't. “What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?” asks Linus. “These five fingers,” says Lucy. “Individually they are nothing, but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold!” “Which channel do you want?” asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, “Why can't you guys get organized like that?”

That's a funny little thought, but I wonder if it is not an accurate illustration of the local church? The church could be powerful agent of life change in a community if only she would come together in gospel-centered unity.

In the preceding passage, Peter has called upon believers to pursue holiness in view of the hope that they possess in Christ. Along similar lines, he now calls upon them to pursue unity in their fellowship with one another.

Our hope motivates us to live holy lives, but it also inspires us to come together as brothers and sisters.

In His high priestly prayer recorded in John 17, unity is one of the things that Jesus prayed for, that it might be on display in the lives of His followers. The love and unity that Christ's followers have with one another would serve as an authenticating witness to the world of the gospel message. Nothing hinders the spread of the gospel more in the community on the outside where there is no

community on the inside. Before we will ever prove our love for those who are unbelievers, we must first demonstrate our love for one another.

Unfortunately, we Christians have not always presented a pretty picture to the world around us. Our actions can contradict our words whether through infighting, church splits, or through very public moral failures in the lives of our leadership. And all too often, we have failed to portray the love of God and the beauty of Christ, and as a result, the world has turned a deaf ear to our message. Our lives can eclipse our words, rendering them meaningless. When our lives are no different than theirs, why would unbelievers really want the 'hope' we claim to be in possession of?

One of the most profound comments made about the early church came from the lips of a man by the name of Aristides. He was a Greek philosopher who wrote an apology to the emperor Hadrian in 125 A.D. It was basically an early statement of what he had observed of those early Christians. Having seen them in action, Aristides gave the emperor an amazing report:

*“But Christians...show kindness to those near them; and whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly...they do good to their enemies...through love towards them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction. Falsehood is not found among them; and behold, how they love one another! And he who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their own homes and rejoice over him as a very brother...And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity...Such, O King, is their manner of life...truly, this is a new people, and there is something divine in the midst of them.”*

Of particular interest to me is his observation, “Behold, how they love one another!” After all, isn’t this exactly what Jesus said His disciples were to be known for?

Peter was present that night when Jesus said:

**John 13:35—“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

And so it is this love for one another that Peter appeals to in this passage. He says that our common hope in Christ is what brings us together as believers. Believers are unified on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ, and our hope impacts our relationships with one another as the church. Just how exactly does hope do this? Well, here in the text, Peter mentions four ways that our hope brings us together.

### **1. We are bound by a common LOVE (1:22)**

*22—Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,*

The gospel that changes our life also gives us the capacity to love others the way that God has loved us. When love is on display in the believer’s lives, it serves as evidence of gospel unity. This unity is something that God desires for His church, something He produces supernaturally.

There is a big difference in unity versus mere union.

If you don’t believe that, let me encourage you to try an experiment. Take two cats, tie their tails together, and throw them over a clothes line. Believe me, you’ll have union. What you won’t have, however, is unity!

**D.L. Moody** — *“There are two ways of being united. One is by being frozen together, and the other is by being melted together. What Christians need is to be united in brotherly love, and then they may expect to have power.”*

Unity is when we are melted together by the love of Christ. When you keep in mind what these persecuted believers were faced with, it will help you see Peter’s exhortations in context. They were suffering for their faith. Many of them were going through various trials. Some were no doubt being tempted to conform or compromise. The pain of their circumstances threatened their fellowship with one another.

Peter knew well that when hope fades, community often fragments. Yet whenever hope is kept front and center, it provides believers the much needed incentive to keep going, to not quit on one another.

#### Condition that makes it possible

Peter says in the first part of verse 22, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.” He is describing a condition that was true of their lives. (Indicative/Imperative)

**“Purified”** — *reference to their conversion; perfect participle which speaks of past action with ongoing consequences*

The idea is that they were made holy by their belief in the gospel message. When a person repents of his or her sin and simply believes in Jesus Christ, that person is set apart and made holy. He or she is made pure. This is essential for every Christian to know because the enemy often will try to keep us sidelined through an unhealthy guilt.

Notice that Peter refers to their obedience to the truth. This is a phrase that is used interchangeably throughout the New Testament with 'belief in the truth.' To truly believe the truth is to become obedient to the truth. The Scriptures know nothing about a faith that 'says' but never 'does.' It is obedient faith that results in Christ-honoring works.

And then notice Peter says that these believers have been purified by the truth for a purpose—sincere brotherly love.

**“Brotherly Love”** — *word is 'philadelphia' and uses the word 'phileo' which describes familial love with the word 'delphos' which refers to the womb*

Peter is describing a special type of love for those who are born from the same womb. Since believers are sons and daughters of God, that makes us brothers and sisters with each other. We have been saved and set apart for the purpose of being united in the same family of faith.

#### Command that makes it practical

Peter says, “Love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” In view of what it true, here is how we are to live it out.

Since the condition is true, the command is obvious. We must demonstrate love in our relationships. However, the word 'love' in this sense is the word 'agape' which refers to the love of God. Love that is unconditional and sacrificial.

**“Earnestly”** — *word means to fully stretch oneself out*

It was a word that was used to describe the strenuous effort of an athlete in the heat of competition. The image is of a Olympic runner stretching to cross the finish line.

Peter himself had been a recipient of this kind of love that he is now writing about. In Acts 12:5, the same word is used to describe the prayers of the Jerusalem church on behalf of Peter who was locked up in prison. The church prayed ‘without ceasing,’ the idea of stretching themselves out on Peter’s behalf.

Having been the recipient of such love and concern, Peter now calls on these believers to demonstrate the same kind of ‘earnest’ love for one another. He says, “Stretch yourselves out for one another. Don’t be superficial in your love. Rather instead, lay down your lives for each other.”

We are to go the distance in our relationships with each other. We are much to prone to give up and quit on each other. Thus, Peter’s command here cuts against the grain.

Our connection classes and small groups serve as a vehicle, a practical outlet for us to do what Peter says here. In a class or small group of other people, you have an opportunity to love each other on a personal level, to get messy, to sacrificially love one another in a way that goes the distance. Our hope in Christ means that we are bound to one another by a common love.

## **2. We are related through a common BIRTH (1:23-25a)**

*23—since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;*

As believers, we have a relationship to one another, and notice that Peter also says we have a relationship to the Word of God. We are to love one another because we share a common birthright. The implication is that we all have the same Father, which truly makes us brothers and sisters.

The source of our new birth is the 'imperishable' seed of the Word of God. The seed of the gospel has been planted in the soil of our hearts and has produced new life. While each of us have our own unique testimony of how we came to know Christ, all of us have entered the kingdom of God the same way, through the same means. (One way!)

The means is the 'imperishable seed' of the gospel. At some point in your life, someone shared the good news of salvation with you. Like a seed, the gospel was sown in your heart. The Holy Spirit nourished that seed and saw to it that it fell on fertile soil. By the grace of God, you came to believe what you heard. The marvelous result is new life in Christ. You have been born anew.

As those who have been born into the family of God by the same Word and the same Spirit, we are all members one of another. We've been adopted into the same family, we call on the same Father, and we've come to Him the same way —through Christ alone. Our background, our ethnicity, our social status, our education level, all are now irrelevant.

We are now brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus!

**Galatians 3:26-28—“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

What matters now is our God-given unity in Christ.

Peter is saying that if we try to build our unity in the church on the basis of our first birth, it will be doomed to failure. Color, social status, things relating to our

flesh, this is not what brings us together. However, if we build unity on the basis of our new birth, it will inevitably succeed.

**Tony Evans** — *“The reason we haven't solved the race problem in America after hundreds of years is that people apart from God are trying to create unity, while people under God who already have unity are not living out the unity we possess. The result of both of these conditions is disastrous for America. Our failure to find cultural unity as a nation is directly related to the church's failure to preserve our spiritual unity. The church has already been given unity because we've been made part of the same family.”*

The gospel is what brings us together as the multi-cultural, multi-colored, beautiful bride of the Lord Jesus. We who have been born again are the family of God, and God is our Father.

And notice Peter says that my new birth and my new family is something that I never have to fear losing. I don't fear losing my relationship with my heavenly Father because it is eternal. It is just as eternal as the Word of God itself is:

*24—for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,*

*25a—but the word of the Lord remains forever.'*

All flesh is like grass. The best of empires that man builds is nothing but a pile of straw. The glory of man's kingdom is like the flower of grass. Like a blossom that is here one day, and withers the next. Why would we try to our base unity on something so short-lived? The grass withers, and the flower fades. But the Word of our God remains forever.

**3. We are subject to a common AUTHORITY (1:25b-2:1)**

*25b—And this is the good news that was preached to you.*

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

Peter says that this same eternal Word is the good news that was preached to these believers, the same Word that gave them life also commands their life. The life-giving Word that has been planted in our hearts and lives is also the life-changing Word to which we are to now subject ourselves. The seed that had been planted needed to grow and produce fruit in their lives.

In view of this, notice what we are commanded to do. He says, “So put away.” The word he uses carries the idea of taking off dirty clothing. He mentions some attitudes that are characteristic of the former life, attitudes that need to be cast aside. These are five barriers to brotherly love that need to be broken down and put away with.

- Malice—a word that refers to evil in general; characterizes those who are entrenched in the world’s system
- Deceit—speaks of being two-faced
- Hypocrisy—one who plays a part in a drama; idea of wearing a mask; disingenuous
- Envy—resentment toward others over an advantage

**Edward Selwyn**— *“...a constant plague of all voluntary organizations, not least religious organizations, and to which even the Twelve themselves were subject at the very crisis of our Lord’s ministry.”*

- Slander—speaking ill of someone else; gossip and rumor; the natural result of previous attitudes festered

Keep in mind that all of these attitudes have potentially disastrous effects on our relationships with one another. Each one of them flies in the face of Peter's call for us to demonstrate fervent, brotherly love. Unity demands that we take his instruction here seriously.

The idea is that evil in general, together with deceit and envy, are in no way to be tolerated in the believer's life. Likewise, spiritual pretending and a harsh critical spirit must also be done away with. This is the natural result of the new birth whereby the Holy Spirit has now taken up permanent residence in the believer's life.

Unity demands that certain negative attitudes and actions must be put away, but it also demands that some positive steps be taken.

#### **4. We are hungry for a common DIET (2:2-3)**

*2—Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—*

*3—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Negatively, there are some attitudes that we need to put away. Positively, there are attitudes that we must cultivate. In the positive sense, Peter commands us to crave the Word of God like a newborn baby craves its mother's milk.

**“Pure”** —*means unadulterated*

**“Spiritual Milk”** —*word is 'logikon' and refers to true logic, rational logic of God's Word*

He says, “Long for the pure milk of the Word, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Keep coming back for more and more and more!

This is essential for living in a corrupted culture, and it is essential for our corporate health. When you consider Peter's own example, for over three years he had followed Jesus up close and personal. He listened intently to the Lord's words. He paid careful attention to the Lord's actions. Peter himself had personally tasted the grace of God as Jesus showed him patience beyond measure and forgiveness beyond what he deserved.

Peter could look back on his life in Christ and give God the glory for his own spiritual growth. Thus, he is now able to encourage these spiritual infants much in the same way. As newborn babies, you and I must constantly crave the pure spiritual milk of God's Word, and thereby grow up into salvation. Maturity in Christ is the goal.

**A.W. Tozer** — *“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”*

Application:

I can't help but wonder that if Aristides were to spend some time with us, what report would he come away with?

Would he leave saying, “Behold, how they love one another!” Or, would he say, “Behold, how they compare themselves with one another. Or, behold, how they bite and devour one another. How they ignore one another, judge one another, pretend to love one another but are really insincere. Or might he find us going

the distance in our relationships with one another, stretching ourselves out on one another's behalf, all while looking in singular faith to Jesus Christ? The world is watching and waiting.

Perhaps you need to ask yourself some questions:

- How well have you been loving others lately?
- Do any of these attitudes describe you?
- Are you hungry for gospel milk?

If you've never personally tasted that the Lord is gracious, then why not come to His table of grace today? Right there where you are, repent of your sins and place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. He died for your sins, and He rose again from the dead to give you hope. His Spirit will come to live in you as a believer, He will place you in His family, and His Word will be soothing, satisfying milk to your hungry soul.