Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We live in times when people around the world find ways to disagree about pretty much everything. And the disagreements are getting deeper and stronger. But one idea that all people agree on is the importance of love. It led the Beatles, for example, to sing, “All you need is love.” And the importance of love is something we see in the Bible: In **1 Cor. 13:13**, the Apostle Paul said, “*And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love*.” And in **John 13:34-35**, Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one anothe*r.” And whenever Christian living is described in the Bible, love gets a lot of attention.

And it is the same here in 1 Peter. Peter began his letter by celebrating our wonderful salvation in Christ. And from verse 13, he began to describe what Christian living looks like. And so far, we have seen that Christian living is about **hope** – living in the expectation of the return of Jesus, **holiness** – striving to be like God in every aspect of life, and **fear** – understanding the power and majesty of God, and that He is watching and weighing every one of our thoughts, words, and deeds. And today we will see that Christian living is also about **love**. And we are going to see that just like Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, **Peter emphasizes the greatness of love as he connects love with conversion and regeneration**. And we will unpack this together as we work through the five parts of this command to love: **Position**, **Process**, **Purpose**, **Product**, and **Power**.

And people of God, the plain fact of the matter is that we need to hear this command to love again and again and again. And that is because we do not find loving one another natural or easy. I am sure that every single one of us can remember being on the receiving end of a lack of love. And if Jesus said that by our love for one another people will know that we are His disciples, then it stands to reason that the devil will do everything he can to keep us from loving one another, so that people will have no interest in the One who we claim to serve. So, we need to hear the command to love.

1. And we begin with the **Position** of those commanded to love one another. And we see this in the opening words of verse 22: “*Having purified your souls*.”
   1. And the way that this expression is put in the original language signifies **a past event that has ongoing effects**. And the past event here is our conversion. And we have talked about conversion, already, as we have worked through chapter 1. But conversion means to change from one thing into another. And each Christian was, at some point in their life, converted. Some of us will know exactly when that was, others may not remember a time when we did not consciously trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. But the Bible is very clear that to be a Christian is to be a converted person.
   2. And the way that Peter describes conversion here is “*having* ***purified*** *your souls*. And to purify is to make pure or clean. When you shampoo your hair, you are removing the oils and dead skin, so that your hair is purified. So, to be a converted person is to have a purified soul. And here is why that is necessary: **Romans 8:7-8** says, “*For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God … Those who are in the flesh cannot please God*.” And Ephesians 2 explains that before conversion we are dead in trespasses and sins, slaves to sinful passions. So, before conversion, we are not capable of producing anything pure.
      1. **Job 14:4** says, “*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one*.” And we all know this. Right? A good number of us wear glasses, for example. And glasses always end up covered in fingerprints and dust and grease, and needing to be cleaned. Well, sometimes I have tried to do this with a cloth that was greasy, and it just did not work. Dirty cloths cannot produce clean lenses. And in the same way, an impure soul cannot produce anything pure.
      2. And so, in **Isaiah 1:18**, when God spoke about the coming of Messiah and salvation in Him, He said, “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool*.” And this happens when we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. That is what conversion involves. And last week we read these words in **Hebrews 9:14**: “*How much more will the blood of Christ … purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*”?
      3. So, once converted, we are pure; we are able to do good works, to please the Lord.
   3. And notice that we are **active** in conversion. When we get to **verse 23**, we will see that everything here ultimately has its origins and power in the Holy Spirit. But at the moment, Peter’s focus is on what *we* have done and are to do. So, if you are wondering, today, what must I do to be saved? Well, you must recognize that you are a sinner who needs to be purified. So, you confess your sins to God and turn away from them. And you must believe that Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins.
2. And we see more about this in the second phrase of **verse 22**, which describes the **process** by which we are converted: “*By your obedience to the truth*.”
   1. And ‘to obey the truth’ is to hear the gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ and to respond with repentance and faith. In **John 14:6**, Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*.” So, to obey the truth is to believe that Jesus is the truth, and that He tells us the truth about sin and salvation, in His Word, the Bible, which is true and reliable. And just a few pages over from our text, we find **1 John 3:23**, which spells this out as well. Let’s turn there together. There we read, “*And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ*.” The number one commandment of God is that we believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. So, if you have repented and believed in Christ, you have obeyed the truth. And this has massive implications!
      1. You see, unbelieving people are perfectly fine with Christianity so long as we keep it to ourselves. The way they see it: If you need Christianity and it helps you, that is fine. But don’t force it down our throats. Don’t impose your religion on us. Don’t tell us that you are right and we are wrong. Don’t claim that only you have the truth. You have your opinion and we have ours.
         1. But you see, Christianity is not a private opinion; it is obedience to the truth! That we are all sinners who deserve hell is the truth. That our only hope of salvation is faith in Jesus Christ is the truth. That Judgment Day is coming is the truth!
      2. And this has implications for evangelism. In **Acts 17**, Paul was speaking to a crowd of unbelievers at Athens, and he said, “*God … commands all people everywhere to repen*t.”
         1. Much evangelism today *offers* Christ to people or *invites* people to receive Jesus. But that is not the language of the Bible. God *commands* all people to repent and believe. To refuse to believe is to disobey the command of God!
      3. But, once we have obeyed the command to believe in Jesus, then we are made able to obey *all* His commands. We will not be able to do this, perfectly, until we are with Christ in glory. But, as Answer 114 of the Heidelberg Catechism puts it: “Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, [believers] do begin to live according to all, not only some of God's commandments.”
3. And that is where we turn our attention next with the third phrase of **verse 22**: “*for a sincere brotherly love*.” And this is where we see that the **purpose** of our conversion is that we would love one another.
   1. A moment ago, we read **1 John 3:23**, which says, “*And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ.*” But the verse continues, “*and love one another, just as He has commanded us*.” So, believing in Jesus and loving our brothers and sisters are joined together in Scripture like night and day or clouds and rain. One always follows the other.
   2. And our love for one another is vital and important for at least two reasons:
      1. In **John 13**:**35**, Jesus said that our love for one another is **how people will know that we are His disciples**. So, the thing that should make Jesus Christ attractive to unbelievers is how the love of Christ for His people is reflected in their love for one another.
         1. There has been some lockdown baking and cooking going on at my house. And when you walk into the living areas and smell the aroma of fresh baking, you head straight for the kitchen!
         2. And similarly, there must be an aroma of love arising from us that draws people to Jesus.
      2. But perhaps even more fundamental than that is a point that is absolutely hammered in **1 John**. And if it was important enough for John to hammer this point, then we need to hear all that he said about this:
         1. Negatively: **1 John 2:9**, “*Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness*.” **1 John 3:15**, “*Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him*.” **1 John 4:8**, “*Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love*.” **1 John 4:20**, “*If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen*.”
         2. And positively, **1 John 2:10**, “*Whoever loves his brother abides in the light*.” **1 John 3:16**, “*By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers*.” **1 John 4:12**, “*If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us*.” **1 John 4:21**, “*And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother*.” **1 John 5:1**, “*Everyone who loves the Father loves whomever has been born of Him*.”
      3. Are you getting the picture? If we truly know God’s love to us in Christ, we *can* and we *must* and we *will* love one another.
4. And so, it follows from this that the **product** of our conversion will be what we see in the next phrase of **verse 22**, “*love one another earnestly from a pure heart*.” And this is our 4th point.
   1. Do you know what Jesus did ***before*** He gave His disciples the new commandment to love on another? He washed their feet. The lowest and grubbiest job of a slave, performed by the Son of God!
      1. The other day, I was listening to a parenting expert on the radio. And the expert was a mother who was talking about the lengths that a parent will go to comfort their children when they are upset. And she used the example of the time when her baby had a bad cold and was all blocked up, and she sucked the snot out of her baby’s nostrils, with her mouth, to give her baby some relief. Now, some of you are probably vomiting, right now, and thinking that that is disgusting! But the point is: that is love! Only love will make a Mum do something like that!
      2. And it was also love that led Jesus to wash the feet of His disciples.
   2. But that is nothing compared to what Jesus did ***after*** He gave them this command: He allowed Himself to be arrested, mocked, spat upon, tortured, crucified, and forsaken of His Father, and then He died and was buried. And He endured all this to secure the forgiveness of sins and entrance into eternal life for them and for all who repent and believe. And later in Peter’s letter, we will read these words: “*Christ … suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps*.”

* 1. So, what does this love look like? Well, **1 Corinthians 13:4-8** explains this best: “*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends*.” This is what you should be striving to put into action in relation to your brothers and sisters.
  2. And notice also **two important parts of the command in verse 22**: We are to love one another “*earnestly*” and “*from a pure heart*.”
     1. The Greek word translated as “***earnestly***” literally means to stretch a muscle’s capacity to the furthest limit. So, brotherly love is not the smallest amount we can get away with but maximum!
     2. And it is “***from a pure heart***.” So, it is not just obeying a rule because we must or calculating what we will get out of it; it is genuine, sincere, and selfless.

1. And congregation, brotherly love is this, fifthly and finally, because of **verses 23-25**, which is where we see that the **power** for love is regeneration: “*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 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*.”
   1. So, we *can* love one another, and we *must* love one another, and we *will* love one another, because we have been “*born again*,” which is what regeneration is. And with these words, Peter is completing the loop that he began back in verse 3: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again*.”

And we saw then that regeneration is not something we do; it is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit within us. He gives us new life; He makes us a new creation; He spiritually resurrects us; He transfers us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. These are different ways that the Bible describes regeneration.

* 1. And regeneration happens through the preaching of the gospel. And this is what the rest of **verses 23-25** explain. And Peter’s reference to “*seed*” should remind us of the **Parable of the Sower**. I am sure that you boys and girls remember that in that parable a farmer scattered seed. And it fell on different types of ground. And one type of ground was good soil. And it was in that soil that the seed took root and grew and produced grain. And that is a picture of regeneration. The Word is preached, and it is accompanied by the Holy Spirit, and it enters a heart that the Holy Spirit has prepared, and it grows and produces a crop. And do you know what another word for a crop is? **Fruit**. And what is the first fruit of the Spirit from **Galatians 5:22**? “*Love*.”
  2. And this is really encouraging! You see, in our own strength, we are not capable of loving one another. But we have the Spirit of God living within us. And He has given us a new nature. And this is why Peter points us to “*the living and abiding Word of God*.”
     1. At Guy Fawkes time, you children will have been handed a metal rod with a grey substance on the end. And what happens when you light that grey substance? You get sparks! Now, occasionally, you get a dud sparkler. Something is wrong with the grey stuff and it just won’t light. Well, Peter’s point here, about imperishable seed and the living and abiding word of God, is that there is no such thing as a dud convert! When the living and abiding word of God is heard by a Spirit-filled believer, it will light the spark of love!

So, yes, we are commanded here “*to love one another earnestly from a pure heart*.” Is this important to you? Is this something you think about and pursue and strive for? You must! It is the command of God! But remember that the power for this love comes not from you but from the Holy Spirit! And so, may the Spirit of the Lord cause this love to burn brightly among us! Amen.