

- I. I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
 - A. I Peter 4:7-11 . . . The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. [8] Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Be hospitable to one another without complaint. [10] As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. [11] Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
 - B. Pray
- II. Fervent Love
 - A. I Peter 4:8 . . . Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.
 1. Though we are going to examine this single exhortation today, I am urging you to remember that it is part of Peter's warning that the end is near, which means harder times are either already upon us, or coming soon. And if we are going to make it through the hard times of the end times, if we are going to endure to the end, Peter points to several things we need to do as individuals and as a church.
 - a. First, we need to nurture sound judgment and a sober attitude for the purpose of persistent and wise praying.
 - b. Second, we are to keep fervent in our love for each other, because such love covers a multitude of sins.
 - c. Third, we are to be hospitable to one another, without complaint.
 - d. And fourth, we are to use our special gifts – given to us by the Holy Spirit – to serve one another.
 2. As you can see, the first of these four items needful for dealing with the end times has to do with maintaining a strong relationship with God – with an emphasis on wise praying. The last three items have to do with maintaining a loving and supportive relationship with our brothers and sisters in the church so that as a community of believers we can and will remain faithful to God in the face of hard times.

3. So, remember the context even as we examine this single exhortation from Peter to keep fervent in our love for one another.
- B. Above All, Keep fervent in your love
1. Peter begins this exhortation with the words, ABOVE ALL – Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another. What Peter is doing with these two words is exhorting us to place the highest possible value on love so that we do not lose sight of love or fail to practice this love for one another.
 2. But Peter does not stop with the words ABOVE ALL, he adds KEEP FERVENT – that is, keep fervent in your love for one another. In other words, we are to be both deliberate and zealous in expressing love to our fellow Christians, and I will add, to those around us.
- C. Putting these four words together, the idea they express is that we are to maintain a mindset, an attitude, and a life-style of focused, intense, and extremely earnest love for one another within the Body of Christ, and specifically toward those in our own church. Which raises the question, “What importance does God and His Word place on love?”
1. To answer this questions, or at least to point us in the direction of providing some answers to this question, I want us to look at some scriptures concerning the importance of love to God and to us. And as we look at these varied scriptures, keep in mind that the essence of love is seeking the good of everyone who is in any way affected by our choices and behavior.
 - a. Taking God’s words to Israel in Deuteronomy 6:5 and beyond, Jesus states that it is God who has made the commandment to love the most important commandment of all. Mark 12:28-31 . . . What commandment is the foremost of all? [29] Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; [30] and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' [31] The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." This commandment originates in Deuteronomy 6:5
 - b. Jesus further clarified the importance God placed on love by giving us a commandment that comes along side God’s commandment and that sets the standard of love that we are to practice. John 13:34-35 . . . A new commandment I give to you, that you

love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

- c. The apostle John affirms God's commandment in I John 3:23 . . . This is His [God's] commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.
- d. Then John goes further by using the test of love to establish who is a born again believer and who isn't, and to clarify who knows God and who doesn't: I John 4:7-8 . . . Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8] The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
 - (1) John ends this statement with the words "FOR GOD IS LOVE." Much has been made of these four words, and that is as it should be. However, sometimes we make more of them than we ought.
 - (a) When we say that God is love, we are not saying that He is so totally love that He is nothing else but love.
 - (b) Saying God is love is to be understood in the same way we understand the words that God is holy or God is eternal or omnipotent or omniscient. He is each of these things, but He is not any one of them exclusively.
 - (2) But there is another side to this great truth of God being love, and that side tells us that God is the author of love, the essence of love, the complete and therefore perfect example of love, and God is the fullest possible expression of love.
 - (a) God is the loving Father eagerly waiting for His wayward children to come home.
 - (b) In Christ, He is the loving husband, transforming His bride – the church – into a bride that is worthy of such a husband.
 - (c) He is the loving disciplinarian, disciplining us for our good.
 - (d) And He is the loving judge restoring justice for the meek, the weak, and the oppressed. And so we can rightly and confidently say that God is love!
- e. Returning to the scriptures about love, we see in I John 4:10-11, that John affirms the standard for love established by Christ: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and

sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

- f. Paul tells Timothy in I Timothy 1:5 . . . [That] the goal of our instruction is love, from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.
 - g. To the Colossian Christians, Paul says that love is the ultimate unifying force among Christians in the church. Colossians 3:12 . . . And beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.
 - h. Finally, Paul says that the practice of love is a sure way to fulfill all the moral and relationship commandments of God – which puts love on an equal footing as holiness. Romans 13:8-10 . . . Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. [9] For this, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
2. In pointing out these scriptures, I am trying to strengthen our thinking concerning the importance of love for us as individual Christians and for us corporately as a church. And again, keep in mind that love is seeking the good of everyone who is in any way affected are by your choices and behavior.

D. Keep fervent in love for one another

1. Love is never to be only self-directed. In fact, the very essence of love clearly points toward relationships as the context in which love finds its fullest expression and intended use. Therefore, Peter exhorts us to a fervent love that finds its expression and fulfillment in our dealings with and treatment of one another.
2. Paul wrote about this in a number of his letters, but his words in Romans 12:10-13, are especially relevant to our study today: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; [11] not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; [12] rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, [13] contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”
3. In other words, we are to keep fervent in our love for each other. And then Peter turns to the reason for loving each other in this way.

E. Because love covers a multitude of sins.

1. So what does Peter mean when he says, love covers a multitude of sins? In my opinion, we can best understand these words from Peter by applying them in two directions or in two ways.
2. First, love covers a multitude of sins by being gracious, merciful, and patient toward the sinner. And love continues covering sins by compassionately refusing to gossip or divulge information that does not need to be shared concerning the sins of others.
 - a. Let me explain by starting with a very similar statement in Proverbs 10:12 . . . Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.
 - (1) In other words, love does not unnecessarily spread or speak to others about a wrong done, so as to keep it private or concealed from those who do not need to know.
 - (2) Paul says something similar when he says that love does not keep an account of wrongs done so as to use a person's sins against them (I Corinthians 13:5b).
 - (3) And it is also Paul who says that love is the perfect bond of unity – uniting us in spite of whatever unloving ways there may be among us (Colossians 3:14).
 - b. However, when love covers sin, it does not mean that love overlooks sin or condones sin or approves of sin in any way. Rather, the scriptures teach us that we are to speak to and help our brothers and sisters in Christ when they fall into sin. And beyond that, there are times when sin needs to be exposed and dealt with in a public manner. God made this clear from the earliest days of Israel. Therefore, this exhortation from Peter does not outweigh or make void God's other statements about dealing with someone's sinfulness. So let's take a few moments and consider several scriptures exhorting us to either privately or openly deal with sinners in relation to their sin.
 - (1) Leviticus 19:17 . . . You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.
 - (2) Matthew 18:15-17 . . . If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. [16] But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. [17] If he refuses to listen to

them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

(a) Deuteronomy 19:15 . . . A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

(3) Luke 17:3-4 . . . Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. [4] And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him.

(4) Galatians 6:1 . . . Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

(5) James 5:19-20 . . . My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, [20] let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

c. My point here is that love, in a way that carefully balances the well-being of the community and the showing of grace, mercy, and patience to the sinner, covers a multitude of sins by refusing to divulge information about another's sin that does not need to be divulged.

3. The second way love covers a multitude of sins is that your acts of love have a covering effect on your own sins. In other words, one of the outcomes of showing godly love to others is that God shows greater mercy and grace to you when dealing with some particular area sin in your life. Now it is possible you are wondering how I could say such a thing as this. So let's turn to God's word, for according to God's word, our behavior has an impact on God's discipline and/or judgment of our sin.

a. Matthew 5:7 . . . Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.

b. Matthew 7:1-2 . . . Do not judge so that you will not be judged. [2] "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. (*God will judge us according to the way we judge others.*)

c. Matthew 6:14-15 . . . For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

- [15] But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.
- d. Luke 6:36-38 . . . Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.
[37] Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.
[38] Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.
 - e. Matthew 25:31-46 . . . Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.
 - (1) The sheep are those who showed love, kindness, and service to the weak, poor, and needy by doing something in an effort to meet their needs.
 - (2) The goats are those who selfishly held on to what they had, and therefore did nothing in regard to trying to care for those in need.
 - (3) Therefore, according to Jesus' words, the result of showing love or withholding love is that those who showed love entered into eternal life while those who remained selfish entered into eternal punishment.
 - (4) Now I feel it is important to assure you that I am not promoting a works based salvation by using Jesus' words to make the point that our acts of love can have a covering effect on our sins. Death, not loving deeds, is the only way we can pay for our sins – which is why salvation is only found in Jesus Christ. But I also feel it is important to understand that God's word tells us that loving others has a positive effect on God's dealings with us in light of our sins.

III. Conclusion

- A. To conclude today's teaching, I want to remind you that love is a vital part of living the Christian life – love toward God and love toward our fellow Christians and love toward all people. To love as we ought, especially during hard times, we must be deliberate and zealous in our efforts to love. And finally, one of the wonderful outcomes of love is that it covers a multitude of sins – be they the sins of others or our own sins.