

Last Monday was a historic day. Indiana University shocked the nation this year by becoming the first team in the modern era to win sixteen football games in a season. This was the first time in almost sixty years that Indiana won the Big 10 Championship, the first time an IU player won the Heisman trophy, the first time the Indiana Hoosiers won the national championship. Monday was a big day!

It really was such a fun week to live in Indiana! What a special story and an unforgettable run! To all you Indiana fans, I'm just so proud of you.

Last Monday was also a big day because it marked the 40<sup>th</sup> year that our nation has celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day. On this day we remember that Dr. King was a man who insisted that love is not weakness, but strength. In his book "Strength to Love," King said, "Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it."

The power of love can change a life, and it can overflow into transforming relationships. Today we continue our series in 1 Peter, and we are called from the Scriptures to put love into practice. Our text for today is 1 Peter 1:22 – 2:3.

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. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

"All people are like grass,  
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;  
the grass withers and the flowers fall,  
but the word of the Lord endures forever."

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

There were so many incredible moments in the national championship game, such as HeisMendoza willing his body into the endzone, the interception to end it all, and the team from Florida getting toppled on their own field. IU sent a message to the world that they are here to stay! Another more important message was also shared during the game. It is a message that was first spoken in the Scriptures and has echoed through the ages. This message came just moments after running back Mark Fletcher, Jr., crossed into the end

zone on the first play of the fourth quarter to bring Miami within striking distance. After his touchdown, he ran straight to the camera and sent a message to the 20 million people watching the game by signing, “Jesus loves you.”

This is the most important message ever. John 3:16 says, “For God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life.” When we encounter this message, everything changes.

Peter is reiterating this reality here when he says in verse 23, “You have been born again.” The moment you are born again, a life-long process of transformation in the way of love begins to be shaped in your life. So what does this look like?

This morning, we are going to look at what love is and what love is not.

## **What Love Is**

*Christian Love is Authentic (Sincere)*

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth **so that you have sincere love for each other...**” (1 Peter 1:22).

While God calls us to love all people, Peter is specifically talking about loving our brothers and sisters in the church. The word translated “love” here is *phileo*, a word that means love for the brothers and sisters in the faith. Then Peter clarifies when he says, “Love one another.” So in the midst of persecution and hardship, when we suffer grief and trials and hardship, loving one another is essential!

I remember sitting around the dinner table on several occasions when I was in middle school when an argument with my brother and sister would unfold — it was not pretty. It was during a time when I had a lot of anger, and I would unleash on my siblings. On more than one occasion my parents would wisely call a time out and remind us that life was hard enough outside the walls of our home, and we couldn’t control that, but inside our home was love. Treating one another with kindness and compassion and courageous love was the essential foundation so that we could shine God’s love outside our walls.

This is what Peter is calling the church to, and he uses an important adjective: sincere. Love inside the church must be sincere, which means that it is free of hidden agendas or selfish motives. Love is not a tool that I use to get what I want. Love is not a word that I use as a manipulative force over someone.

Peter says now your soul has been purified and so out of the purity of soul, love grows.

## *Christian Love is Absolute*

“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**” (1 Peter 1:22).

The word translated “love” here is *agape*. This is a love that puts others first and sacrificially in the way of Jesus.

Peter says we should love deeply. Deeply means fervently, sacrificially. It literally means without slack. In other words, love doesn’t get a break. We can’t demonstrate love in one moment and then the absence of love in the next. We see this in marriages that struggle; one of the spouses will extend love for a moment and then they slack off and expect that they have done enough.

[Listen to the online sermon for an illustration about the dangers of slack in the line when water skiing.]

Peter recognizes our proclivity to slack off. In 1 Peter 1:24, he quotes Isaiah: “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” Peter says we have the potential to be different because of the word of the Lord. In fact, this word of the Lord is so potent, so alive, so filled with eternal gospel power that though you were initially born of flesh and blood, when you are born again it is not of a perishable seed, but of imperishable. This is a birth that comes straight from God who at the core of his being is love. 1 John 4:8 says, “God is love.” This love can and must endure in the lives of His children, which is why Paul says that the greatest and most essential virtue in the life of a Christian is love.

I love Victor Hugo’s novel *Les Miserables*. You have this criminal who has been so deeply loved by a priest that his entire life is transformed. Shortly before Jean Valjean dies in the musical, Fantine, a woman whose daughter he rescued, cries out to him: “To love another person is to see the face of God.” This echoes the words of John’s epistle, “Let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

Love goes all the way. John 13 says Jesus shows his apostles “the full extent of his love.”

So, love is authentic and absolute.

In his book *Surrender to Love*, David Benner states, “Love is the acid test of Christian spirituality. If Christian conversion is authentic, we are in a process of becoming more loving. If we are not becoming more loving, something serious is wrong.”

## **What Love Is Not**

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind” (1 Peter 2:1).

To “rid yourself” refers to taking off and laying aside old clothes; it pictures getting rid of the old life, as if these vices were a “soiled garment.”

This is like the language of Hebrews 12, “Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” or Colossians 3:9, “Do not deceive each other with lies. Remember that you have taken off your old nature, like an old coat. As a result, you can stop doing all the bad things that you liked to do before” (Easy English Bible)

### *Christian Love Is Not Malice*

Malice is ill-will, the desire to harm, punish, or see another person diminished. It’s a force that destroys fellowship. It causes grumbling, bitterness, and envy, inner problems of the heart that poison our words and actions.

One author wrote, “I doubt God keeps track of how many arguments we win; God may indeed keep track of how well we love.”

The desire to harm people often lies behind apparently good actions. 1 Corinthians 5:8 warns that malice leavens the entire community. The Passover imagery connects unchecked ill-will with yeast that infiltrates a loaf, necessitating decisive removal for the congregation’s health. “Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

1 John 4:20 says, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.” The greatest lie may be the one you are telling yourself. Because when you believe that you can be a follower of Jesus without loving people humbly and sacrificially inside the body of Christ, you are not living a transformed life by the Spirit of God, but a deformed life influenced by the spirit of the evil one.

There is no malice in love.

### *Christian Love Is Not Deceit*

Deceit is found three times in 1 Peter. It means speaking or acting with ulterior motives. Deceit is at the heart of manipulation, twisting and hiding the truth to control an outcome. It’s a deliberate attempt to mislead others. Notice what Peter says about Jesus: “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). Deceit is a vice rooted in twisted hearts (Mark 7:22 and Romans 1:29).

### *Christian Love Is Not Hypocrisy*

Hypocrisy is insincerity, pretending to be different than what you really are, making it appear that you are acting from pure motives, when your motives are self-serving. It involves pretense, deception, and inconsistency between your doctrine and practice, a different behavior in the church than in the home or marketplace (athletic field, locker room, school hallways, etc.).

When I was in eighth and ninth grades, I noticed how often my sister got in trouble for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, so I learned how to cover up. I would end up at parties I should have never been at in the first place, stay for as long as I could, and then call my parents and tell them I wasn't comfortable being at this party and would they come pick me up.

### *Christian Love Is Not Envy*

Envy is an inward attitude of longing for what others have. Along with envy, a silent root of bitterness grows up. Envy was one of the motives behind Christ's crucifixion (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10).

### *Christian Love Is Not Slander*

Slander is making statements that damage a person's reputation. It is criticizing others behind their back, which is sometimes cloaked in spiritual language (such as sharing a "prayer request" or "concern"). For the Jews, this sin was next to blasphemy because it defames those made in the image of God. Sometimes we slander others behind their backs, but it can be even more harmful when we slander people to their face in the presence of others. When we defame a person's character based on false accusations, this is heartbreaking.

In his book *Waking the Dead*, John Eldridge states that we never grow beyond the need of receiving and offering love. The longing to receive God's love endures through all eternity. Jesus says unless we become like little children again, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven. A childlike faith is the mark of Christian maturity!

This is what Peter is addressing when he says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). He is not speaking here to baby Christians, but rather saying, just as a baby craves milk from its mother, so we ought to have a single-minded focus on the nourishment from God. "Birth is not the end of the process, but the beginning, culminating in full maturity" (Peter H Davids in NICNT, p. 83).

Peter is painting a unified picture of spiritual growth. When I grow in one area, it impacts all of me and those around me. When I am warped in one area, it impacts all the other areas and it hurts the church.

Being born again into the love of God and living in a community of love is life's greatest joy.

Peter concludes this section by saying, "... Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good!" (1 Peter 2:3). On the night Jesus showed his disciples the full extent of his love, he broke bread and said, "This is my body," and he poured out the wine, saying, "This is the blood of the new covenant." It was a love of sacrifice. He would be wounded for our iniquity, pierced for our transgressions. He would take the punishment that was meant for us.

There is an old legend about the devil disguising himself as Christ to tempt St. Teresa of Avila. When she asked him to reveal the nail scars in his hands, the devil had to sneak away because he had no marks of sacrificial love. Today, as we take the bread and the cup we remember the marks of sacrificial love that Jesus offers for our salvation.