

A Christian Response to Others

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1 Peter 1.22 to 2. 3

The Roman world of the first century was a very religious world where the worship of many gods was woven into their culture. That expanded when Caesar Augustus, also known as Octavian, rose to power after the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. He succeeded with his belief that the Roman emperor was a god and should be worshiped, a belief and practice that became entrenched. As the practice of emperor worship was adopted throughout the Roman empire, all the citizens were required to pay homage to the emperor. Only Jews were exempt. "Among all the pagan religions in the Roman world, Judaism was the only legal religion not required to offer sacrifices to the emperor. Instead, they could offer prayers on the emperor's behalf."¹ Initially Christians were viewed as a sect of Judaism, but when they were expelled from the synagogues, they lost any shelter from persecution.

Such was the world of Peter's day when he wrote to Christians scattered throughout modern day Turkey because of persecution. When they refused to comply with the common practice of emperor worship and the pervasive religion of lifeless idols, they stood out because of their insistence on the worship of Jesus Christ alone. They had turned to Jesus Christ because they realized the religious practices of their day were bankrupt – their lives had been empty and without hope. Having heard the Gospel, they embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior – they experienced new life; their empty lives were filled with hope for all eternity.

However, predictable opposition and persecution followed. These new believers became outcasts when they turned their backs on the religion that was woven throughout the culture. When they refused to comply with the emperor's demand to pay homage to him, they became lightning rods. Their defiance was very public when they refused to burn a pinch of incense to the Roman emperor and declare him lord. Further, storm clouds were gathering and it was apparent that Nero's reign of terror was escalating and their trials were going to get worse.

How should someone respond in a situation like that? How should we respond in our world where Christian values and standards of conduct are increasingly out of synch with our world? Should we conform? It is certainly tempting to avoid doing or saying anything that draws attention to our Christian convictions when they conflict with our culture. In the first part of his letter Peter pointed out that to live victoriously in the face of trials we need to:

1. Look beyond the trials of today to the future with hope, knowing that our hope will culminate with the revelation of Jesus Christ.
2. In the meantime, we need to be holy in all our conduct patterning ourselves after God.
3. When we are tempted to compromise in the face of trials and difficulties, we need to remember one day we will give an account to God.
4. Remember the cost of our salvation – we have been ransomed by the precious blood of the Christ. The privilege of knowing God and a secure future in eternity, while free to us, was not free – Jesus Christ died for our sins at Calvary.

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 13*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 156.

Peter then expanded on how believers should respond to those around them, both to the community of saints as well as the watching world – the same watching world that was often responsible for their hardship.

Our Actions Toward Others

1 Peter 1:22 (ESV) Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Whether one is celebrating life on the mountaintop of victory or struggling in the valley of despair, Peter's counsel is to *love one another earnestly from a pure heart*. The striking implication is the community of saints. An interdependent body of believers to draw upon for support and encouragement and to provide support and encouragement to. This command presupposes a relationship among fellow believers.

When one is saved, they become a part of the Church of Jesus Christ, "which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23, ESV). The Church is His design to facilitate the many *one another* commands scattered throughout the New Testament; in this case attention is given to not only *love one another*, but to do so *earnestly*, and from a *pure heart*. It is common to view the Church as a place where *we go to get*, but the focus in this passage is on our responsibility to give, namely how we might meet the needs of others.

The Greek language, which most of the New Testament is written in, has more than one word for *love*. The one used here is *αγαπᾶω* (agapao) the highest regard or concern for another. It refers to a love not based on feelings but rather an unconditional commitment to one another. It is selfless and focused on the other person. This is the type of love which characterizes God's love for us and is to be mirrored in our love for Him. It is a love that refuses to let go, no matter how great the challenges are. That steadfastness in love is reinforced by the word *earnestly*, which means fervently, continuously, without ceasing, eagerly. The image evoked is that of a person stretching out to his or her limit to grasp something, and then a wee bit more. It is like an athlete who is all but spent but refuses to stop and presses on despite the pain to cross the finish line. Such is the way we are to love one another – without limit, refusing to let go.

1 Corinthians 13:4–8a (ESV) ⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never ends.

That comprehensive description of love in 1 Corinthians gives us insight into our relationship with fellow believers. Don't miss the last phrase, *from a pure heart*. It suggests this love is anything but superficial or temporal. Rather, it comes from the depth of one's being, their inner self, which is described as one's *heart*. The love commended here is not feigned, it is not self-seeking, it doesn't consider what it can get in return, but it flows from a genuine concern for another.

Certainly in the first century, loving fellow believers had a good deal of risk associated with doing so. It often meant revealing one's faith by identifying with another believer; in many cases someone who was the target of persecution and reprisals because of their faith. Some of the brethren were imprisoned and were therefore dependent on others to care for them – to bring them food and other necessities. It was not uncommon for Christians to be beaten and they were left with wounds needing attention. It was no small thing to respond to those in need, for in so doing a person put himself or herself in the cross hairs of persecutors and could be the next

one to be beaten or imprisoned or worse. Identifying with believers often ostracized a person from friends and family members. In our day Christians sometimes are reluctant to let acquaintances or colleagues at work, and sometimes even family members or friends know that they are a born-again Christian or are hesitant to take a stand for Christian values when they conflict with the world's values, because they may be ostracized or ridiculed. The trials people face in our country because of their faith in Jesus Christ are rather mild compared with those in the first century; however, let's be mindful that today believers in many parts of our world face trials paralleling those of the first centuries of the Church.

It is particularly important to exercise our love for one another when they are facing trials and adversity. It is in times like that where doubt can creep in and take hold and a person begins to rethink their faith and commitment to the Lord. That hope, which seemed so solid when things were going well and was focused on God's promises for the future, begins to erode and people become absorbed with their present trials and how to survive them. When a person's faith is being tested, it is so encouraging to have fellow believers come alongside to encourage and support them. Many times, people choose not to because of the proverbial, "I don't know what to say." In times of adversity and testing, the person going through it isn't looking for profound words as much as they long for presence, for a fellow believer to come alongside. And where people are looking for the illusive explanations for why they are facing trials, the best response is often a very simple, "I don't know!" We don't need all the answers to love one another earnestly.

Love for one another is a distinguishing quality among God's people. It is an action where we are to pattern our conduct after His, a practical example of being holy as He is holy (1.15-16).

Jesus said, **John 13:34–35** (ESV) ³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

As you picture the outworking of the love described in this verse, it is rather apparent that it is observable and it is extraordinary. It isn't some frivolous and sentimental love but often involves sacrifice and may have personal cost associated with it. It often necessitates setting aside one's own comfort and preferences for the sake of another. It is hard to fake it because of its nature. It is something that is supernatural and therefore requires supernatural enablement. It is a result of being born again, of having been made alive in Christ. The only way to fulfill this command is with God's help!

Let's look at the context of this command to *love another earnestly from a pure heart*. Peter introduced it "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22, ESV). It began with cleansing of their hearts – the removal of the accumulated sin and guilt within their souls – the depth of their being. Sin separated them from God and rendered them spiritually dead. That all changed when they obeyed the truth of the Gospel and placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation. The word translated *having purified* is in the *perfect tense* which means it refers to something that happened in the past, but the results of that action continue. The person has been made clean. When Paul instructed husbands how to love their wives he used the example of Christ's relationship to His Church as a model to follow.

Ephesians 5:25–27 (ESV) ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, *having cleansed her* by the washing of water

with the word,²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Christ cleansed those who make up His Church by the *washing of water with the word*. He pointed to the centrality of God's Word in a person being set free from his/her sins, or cleansed by His Word, or obedience to the truth as Peter said (1 Peter 1.22). That is central to loving from a pure heart. It is impossible to have a pure heart unless it has first been cleansed from sin.

Peter went on to emphasize to his readers that they were not born again of perishable seed but imperishable. Their salvation was not achieved through the sacrifice of an animal or purchased with great wealth, which also perishes, but rather through the living and abiding Word of God. To highlight the eternity of God's Word, Peter turned to a quote from **Isaiah 40.6-8**.

1 Peter 1:24–25a (ESV) ²⁴for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵but the word of the Lord remains forever."

We are all familiar with grass withering and flowers falling, especially during these hot days of summer, but in sharp contrast to those temporal qualities of not just grass and flowers, but of all humanity, the Word of God is eternal. It will not fail! It has been central in our salvation and it is a reliable guide for how we should conduct ourselves. You have surely noted already that the trustworthiness and authority of God's Word is a recurring theme throughout this letter; it is obviously critically important.

Unless one is made alive spiritually and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to genuinely love. Consider

1 John 3:10 (ESV) By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 4:20–21 (ESV) ²⁰If 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.

²¹And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is essential to love one another. "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." (John 14:21, ESV). It is then that one is supernaturally enabled to *love one another earnestly from a pure heart* – even when it means sacrifice.

Peter addressed another topic which would have been particularly relevant to his initial recipients but is also to us.

Our Attitudes Toward Others

1 Peter 2:1 (ESV) ¹So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Addressing these attitudes may have been considered a hot potato in Peter's day; something that would generate considerable pushback. In addressing these attitudes, Peter was surely considering more than just their attitudes toward fellow believers, but also toward the non-Christians they encountered – like the people who were responsible for their hardship, people

who opposed them and ridiculed them. It was because it was relevant that it needed to be addressed.

The passage is introduced with the conjunction, *So*, which can also be translated *therefore*, as is the case in the NIV. It connects what follows with the preceding. Thus, considering who his readers are and in light of the Word of God and its direction for how God's people should conduct themselves, here is guidance on very pertinent and practical behavior.

Peter draws attention to five attitudes which lead to sinful behavior. Just as loving one another was out of step with the world, so too is his counsel to *get rid of these attitudes*. *Putting away* is rejecting this kind of behavior; it is like taking off dirty clothing and getting rid of it. While we need God's help to be successful, we decide whether we will harbor or entertain those attitudes and behaviors that are destructive, or whether we will turn to the Lord to enable us for victory. The challenge facing us is emphasized for three of the five attitudes and the behavior they evoke, by preceding them with *all*:

1. **Malice** – is wickedness or evil. It is the desire that harm will fall upon another. That is something that is tempting to wish upon someone who is responsible for a hardship we experienced or who is interfering with our agenda. People can be consumed with ill will towards another; hence, it is essential to let it go, leave it with the Lord for His disposition. Think of the challenge facing many believers in the first century.

Romans 12:19 (ESV) "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

2. **Deceit** – is treachery or cunning aimed at intentionally misleading someone by what is said, or how it is said, or sometimes not said. Deceit was exemplified by satan in his interaction with Eve in the Garden. Much of what he said was true but mixed in with the truth were lies and half-truths all designed to deceive Eve into doing something she thought would be beneficial when just the reverse was the case.
3. **Hypocrisy** – is conveying to people that you believe something or that you are someone, that is contrary to what you actually believe, or who you really are. The word used describes an *actor*, someone who plays a part, pretending to be someone whom he or she isn't. There are people who succeed in convincing others they are followers of Jesus Christ, all the while knowing they are not. The behaviour of hypocrites changes to align with whoever they are with.
4. **Envy** – is wanting what others have and often resenting those who do have what you want. It can lead to bitterness towards others. The sin of coveting can escalate into all kinds of other sins.
5. **Slander** – is speaking evil of another. It consists of passing around negative information about someone with the intention of undermining their reputation. It looks for rumors and often embellishes them before telling them to anyone who will listen.

It requires conviction and discipline to put aside these attitudes and behaviors. A person must first be willing to do an inventory of themselves, and having discovered any of these sins, to

resolve to conquer and set them aside with the Lord's enabling strength. Success requires turning to God's Word and drawing upon the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Living in a God-honoring manner in a world that rejects God and His provision of His Son Jesus Christ for salvation, is a challenge. Jesus described what His followers face this way:

John 15:18–19 (ESV) ¹⁸“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

It is important to remember that while we reside in the world, we are not of the world. However, God has not abandoned us to figure out how to be victorious nor has He left us to our own resources to accomplish victory. He provides His living Word to guide and direct us and His Holy Spirit to enable us.

When Trials Come - Keith & Kristyn Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpScEpriWZs&ab_channel=tranceseraph