

Open Your Hearts To One Another

by Anton Bosch

This sermon focuses on the importance of fervent love for one another in the face of challenging times, emphasizing the need to cover sins with love and to be hospitable without grumbling. It highlights the concept of serving one another with the gifts and abilities entrusted by God, as good stewards of His grace, recognizing that everything we have is a result of His multifaceted grace.

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7, Romans 12:6, Ephesians 4:7, 1 Corinthians 12:4, 1 Corinthians 4:2, James 1:17

Topics: "Fervent Love", "Stewardship of Grace"

Description

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Transcript

And we'll read 7 through 11, 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 7 through 11. But the end of all things is at hand, therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things, have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.

Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.

If anyone ministers, let him do it as the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. So we started with verse 7 last week, the end of all things are at hand, therefore be serious, or sober, or clear-headed, and watchful in your prayers.

And so because we're in these times, and remember that we've been emphasizing the fact that while these difficulties that Peter's audience were facing, which was really physical persecution, may be different to what we are facing, we find ourselves in equally stressful times. So we have the virus, we've had the demonstrations, there is this political upheaval and uncertainties, the elections are coming, and I have little doubt that the elections are not going to be pretty from both sides. It's going to be a particularly stressful time, and there are difficulties all across the world.

There are increasing earthquakes. I just saw on the BBC News tonight the massive flocks of locusts in Africa consuming the livelihood of the people. There's just trouble on every hand.

And so in the light of these things, I believe that Peter is saying, these are the things that we need to do. And so this passage that we're dealing with here from 7 through 11 is really dealing with our internal situation, how we relate as a church, so that we are in a position to be able to deal with the difficulties out there, whatever they may be, whether they are persecution or whether they are just the turmoil and the upheaval of our times. And so the first thing we need to do is pray.

Now verse 8 then says, and above all things, have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. That last part of the sentence obviously is easy to misunderstand, and we'll explain that. But the first thing is, above all things, in other words, the most important thing.

I think that this is quite a statement, because if you ask different Christians what is the most important thing, some will say, well, doctrine is the most important thing. I heard another guy last night say that worship is the most important thing. Everybody has their own idea as to what is the most important thing in the life of the church.

And obviously we must have balance. It's no good having one thing and we don't have the other. It's no good having love, and our doctrine is all wonky, and we're heretics, and we don't even know what we're believing, but we love one another.

At the same time, it's no good having all our doctrines straight, but we don't have love. So we must have the balance. But Peter is saying that the most important thing in this context is love for one another.

And remember, the context is the environment out there. We're not going to get a lot of love out there, and it's becoming increasingly hostile out there. Never mind interface with people.

Just watching television has become a hostile environment. As every aspect of one's values, of one's traditions, of every area is just being undermined and being questioned, and I just find watching the news increasing, and I know I've spoken a lot about this, but it's just getting worse and worse, so that I'm watching less and less news, and that's good. And I was encouraged, I was watching my friend in Bulawayo, a preacher on Sunday, and they're still under lockdown, but so he was speaking from his study, and he made the statement which really is what I've been saying, and I just found great confirmation in that, and he was saying, we must be informed, but we must limit our intake of the news, not because of a political thing, not because the news is skewed left or right or anything like that, but because of the impact it has upon our spirits as Christians, the impact it has upon our emotions and our attitudes towards people.

And I think that in the light of the stuff that's been happening, it doesn't matter which side of the spectrum you're on, your position towards the other race, and depending on, obviously it's just not a color thing, I mean there are white people on the black side, black people on the white side, and so on, but people's positions are becoming hardened. Instead of things getting better, as some are saying, well things are getting better, we're seeing change. No, I'm not seeing change, what I'm seeing is people are getting more and more bitter and angry and frustrated on both sides of the spectrum, and we can't allow that to happen to us.

And so, because of what's happening out there, we need to find a place of safety and sanctuary, as I said last week, and that is based on our love for one another. There's no love out there. The only love you're

going to find is in the body of Christ, and obviously in the context of family, and we know that oftentimes family is dysfunctional also.

But God help us that the church would be a place that we love, a place that we love one another, and that we at least can come and feel loved, and come out of the storm of the dysfunction and the hatred and the animosity and the fighting that's going on out there, that we might be able to come together and find that there is love amongst us. Now, so above all things, have fervent love—the word fervent, fiery, hot love. Not lukewarm love, not sort of, well, you know, tolerance.

We need tolerance out there. We need fervent love in here. We need to love one another with a passion and with a zeal, because the problem is this is all we've got.

Increasingly, we have less and less in this world, and well, certainly I'm finding I have less and less in this world. I find nothing in the world that brings me joy anymore, that brings comfort anymore. But we need to find within the context of the body of Christ, not just love, but fervent love, zeal for one another, looking out for one another.

And he's going to apply this in a practical sense in the next verse. But then he says, because love will cover a multitude of sins. Now, the problem we have here is that the moment we see this idea of covering sin, we assume that this has to do with our salvation, that this has to do with the forgiveness of our sins, or somehow the removal or the washing away or the covering of our sins before God.

He's not speaking about our sins before God. He's talking about our sins amongst one another. Remember, in the Lord's Prayer, he says, forgive us our sins or our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass or sin against us.

So we sin against one another when we do things, say things, don't do things that we should be doing. And so we sin towards one another. And obviously, if we've sinned against a brother, we've sinned against the Lord.

Jesus said, what you've done to the least of these, my brethren, you've done it to me. But the issue between me and God remains. But the issue between me and my brother can be covered by love.

Does that make the wrong right? No, it doesn't make the wrong right. But what it does is that we let it go. That's the way the world works.

The world, it's tit for tat. It's keeping score. It's keeping record of how many insults, how many this or how many of that.

And remembering, and remember, I was spoken about the problem in marriage. You always keeping record of these things. But love covers those things.

Wipes them off and says, let's forget about it. Let's leave it. Let's move on.

Let's find grace to forgive and let's rebuild and establish that relationship. And so love is necessary for a relationship. You say, well, you know, that doesn't make any sense.

You know, I mean, that's no whiz-bang revelation. Well, when you've spoken with so many dysfunctional marriages as I have, it is a revelation because a lot of marriages, there is no more love. And then they wonder why it doesn't work, why everything becomes an issue and everything becomes a problem.

And so love in our relationships in the home, love in our relationships amongst one another is that which causes us to forgive even as he has forgiven us. And remember that that's the whole principle of the man who owed this huge debt, goes to his master, his master forgives him his debt, and then he finds his fellow servant who owes him a small debt. And he grabs his colleague by the throat and throws him in debtors jail.

No, we have been forgiven much. We need to have grace to forgive one another. And if we love one another, it's not hard.

But when we don't love one another, it's hard to let things go. It's hard to just cover things and say, well, let's move on. Let's not keep a record of our grievances and of our problems with one another.

And it's not just, you know, the problem is that we can say, well, you know, because Corinthians says love doesn't keep a record. And I'm paraphrasing. And we say, well, you know, I must not keep a record.

Yeah, he didn't do that. She didn't do that. I must forget.

But it doesn't work because it's not love driven. It's driven by a law that says I must forgive. It's driven by a sense of guilt that God won't forgive me if I don't forgive.

And remember the Lord's prayer, forgive us as we forgive others. And so, yeah, I must forgive him. I must forgive her because I'm going to be in trouble with God.

That shouldn't be the motive or the motivator. The motivator should be, I love my brother. I love my sister.

I want things to be right. I want nothing between us. I want for us to be able to move on.

And so, above all things, have fervent love for one another because love will cover a multitude of sins or grievances or trespasses, whatever word you want to use. Now, remember again the context. Out there, there is animosity all the time.

People keep accounts. People keep a record. You can't even open your mouth anymore.

I don't even want to read Nextdoor. Anyone know what Nextdoor is? Nextdoor is a Facebook group. No, it's not Facebook.

It's on the Internet. And your community is in there. And so Sun Valley and Shadow Hills and Sunland, I think, is in one group.

And, you know, people say, oh, I saw a coyote over there. Oh, there was a, you know, there was a break-in over there. But I don't even want to read that anymore because the kind of stuff that people are getting into each other's faces about, all sorts of nonsense.

And, you know, there's just no tolerance for a different point of view. There's no tolerance for anything anymore. I mean, I saw a thing the other day, someone was complaining about the gophers and somebody got on their case because, you know, you just got to learn to live with the gophers.

Now, I mean, if you love the gophers, good, you know, that's fine. But other people want to have a garden and they can't have a garden. But people will get all their blood pressure up about that kind of nonsense.

That's out there. God help us that we don't become the same way. And, of course, we know there are Christians that do that.

I experience that all the time. Christians want to, people want to get on my case for the most ridiculous things. There's almost nothing that I can say that someone won't get on my case about.

That's out there. In here, we need to have love and we need to be able to forgive and we need to be able to trust one another. That we're not, you know, when someone doesn't greet you, it doesn't mean that they've got a problem with you.

They may be preoccupied. They may have the problem I have when I have my mask on, my glasses fog up and I can't see a thing. But some people say, you know, he walked right, he didn't greet me.

But love covers a multitude, not just one or two, a multitude of sins. All right, verse nine, and here's the practical outworking now. Well, the first practical outworking is covering the sin.

The second one is be hospitable to one another without grumbling. Now, we understand the word hospitable in the context of what, I suppose, the way it's used most often around here is we speak about the hospitality industry. In other words, hotels, motels, bed and breakfast, those kinds of things.

To be hospitable means to put people up. So if you want to pun the previous verse deals with putting up with people, this verse deals with putting people up. This is not quite right, but never mind.

Now, immediately the idea that comes to mind is being able to have people stay in your house. Remember that those days they didn't really have hotels or motels or places where, and so if you were traveling from one place to the other, you either slept in the market square or somebody invited you home and gave you somewhere to sleep in the house. And so that was the immediate meaning of it at that time, but I believe it extends beyond that.

It's more than just giving someone somewhere to sleep, but it's really opening yourself to people. So it's not just opening your home to people, but it's opening yourself to people and being able to take people in, not in the sense of cheating them, but to take people into your life, to let people, you know, for many of us it's hard to let people into your home because that's your little castle, that's your little domain. And yet, as Christians, we need to be willing to bring people into our homes.

I think that that's a very important aspect, and it's something which is very difficult, particularly today with the coronavirus and all of those kinds of things, but it's even more difficult to allow people into our personal space, into our lives. It's one thing to have a relationship with people at a distance, not just a six feet distance, but emotionally distance, you know, hi and bye and, you know, how are you, and, you know, well I'm not really listening, but, you know, yeah, I'm fine, I'm fine, okay, let's go. That's not fervent love.

Fervent love is allowing people into your space. Allowing people into your emotions. Allowing people into your life.

And opening up to people. Now, I'm not propagating because this can get cultic very, or cultish very quickly, I'm not suggesting that, you know, we wash our dirty laundry in front of everybody else, that we, you know, just spill all the beans on, but I think you understand what we're talking about. We're talking about really building a relationship, being real with one another, being open with one another, sharing with one another, and that's why it's good that on a Thursday night we have a time of sharing, and sometimes

there are good things and sometimes there are bad things that we're experiencing, but as we share that with one another, we learn to bear one another's burdens, but we also learn to understand one another better, and we're opening ourselves to one another.

So there's a need then for us to open ourselves, our hearts, but also our homes to, when things get better, to have people for a meal, whether it's in a restaurant or whether it's at home, but to actually spend time with people, rather than just high and by. And so be hospitable to one another without grumbling. You see, we can do these things, but we do them grudgingly.

It's my duty. I've got to do that. I know when we first got married, and I'll probably get beaten up for this, but when we first got married, I used to invite people home every night after the service, and I never always appreciate that.

Now, I understand that it becomes a burden. I understand that too much becomes too much, but we need to do this with joy, not feeling that we're being imposed upon. And obviously, we need to respect one another's space at the same time.

While we need to be willing to invite people into our lives, we also need to be careful that we're not forcing ourselves into other people's space, forcing ourselves into... So you don't look so good tonight. Well, now, what's the problem? Now, why did you sort yourself out? Now, what about this? What about that? No, I mean, that's just not being respectful. There needs to be a willingness to open up from our side, but we need to be careful that we don't force ourselves in and knock somebody's door down or break someone's door down so that you can get into their home or into their hearts.

And so when we do that, let's do it with joy, without grumbling, without feeling that this is a burden, because it's driven by love. But at the same time, let's respect one another. Some people just don't know the boundaries.

You know, if you open your home to them, they'll be there every day, all day. And, you know, and then they don't help at all, but they expect you to feed them and to help them and to do stuff for them. No, let's be respectful of one another, but let's build real relationships.

All right, verse 10. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. As each one has received a gift.

Now, this is a thing that is debated in the New Testament, the question as to whether every Christian has a gift. Now, every Christian clearly has a gift, because that's what he is saying here. But the moment we speak about gifts, our thinking immediately goes to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, that there are the gifts of the Spirit, the nine gifts of the Spirit, or to Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, the five ministries, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

That's where we immediately go. And we say, well, you know, every Christian has to be a teacher or a speaking tongues or have a gift of knowledge or whatever it is. No, the gifts clearly extend beyond that.

And if you look at Romans chapter 12, there's another list of ministries or of gifts there. And there's a gift of helps. There's a gift of giving.

There is a gift of loving. So each one of us has a different gift, and it's not necessarily a preaching gift or a speaking gift. It may be a gift to help.

It may be a gift to, some people have a real gift to support the work of God financially. That's a gift. God has blessed them financially and blessed them with a generous spirit.

And so that may be what God uses them to do. Each one of us has a contribution that we can make. And of course, the thing is to find out what it is that I can do.

What is my gift? And remember, when we speak about gifts here, we're not talking about Tim's gift to draw pictures or, you know, to do art or the gift to do music. This is just an ability to do something that builds up the body of Christ. And so it's important for us to say, what is it that what can I do? And remember the Scripture, that which your hand finds to do in Ecclesiastes, do it with all your might.

So it's just finding something to do. And there's a lot of things that can be done. Some of them are practical.

Some of them have to do with maintenance and repairs. Some of them have to do with the electronics ministry. Some of them have to do, like the guys who are doing the soundboard and, you know, others.

There are just all sorts of things that can be done. And I know that people say, well, you know, brother, if you tell me what to do, then I'll do it. And I appreciate that.

But at the same time, you know what you can do and you know what is on your heart to do. Not all of us have the desire or the heart or the spirit or the God-given desire to do certain things. Now, I'm not talking about not humbling ourselves and being willing to to clean the toilets if we have to or to do the wipe down after that.

I'm not talking about that kind of thing. We all need to be willing to do any of those kinds of things. But if you don't have a, I'm trying to find an example that is not controversial.

If you have no ability at the electronic stuff, well, you know, it's no good saying, well, you know, I'll take on the media ministry, which has become a very big thing now. And we really do need people to help us. And we're glad for those who do help us.

But it's no good saying, you know, I'll take care of all the electronic stuff. I'll take care of the Internet and of YouTube and Facebook and of streaming and all of these things. But you don't even know how to turn a computer on, you know, so we need to say, well, you know, I have an ability in this area I can do, you know, and it doesn't mean that you can necessarily do everything, but you have an aptitude for a particular thing for a particular area.

And then you say, well, let me let me learn so that I can do this thing. Whatever, whatever is necessary. And so as each one has received a gift, has received a ability, minister.

And remember that word minister means serve, serve. You see, here's again the problem with the language is because we have this word. And so what we've turned it into, we've turned it into a church or ecclesiastical term.

So the moment we see the word minister, we think about the pastor. When we speak about ministering as a verb, we think about preaching. No, the word is simply serve.

And it would be much better translated if we had the word serve. Serve one another, minister it to one another, serve one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. And so we serve one another.

It's not a matter of trying to be something. And if that's our motive, then obviously we better not do it because it's the wrong motive entirely. But if our desire is to serve one another, serve the body of Christ through whatever means, then let's do it.

And let's do it with all of our hearts. And so minister to one another. And notice it's not to the to the church as a as a nebulous pie in the sky thing.

It's to one another. So so when you're wiping down the pews after, if it's your turn, this is your way of serving everybody else in the body of Christ. You're not doing this for the building.

You're not doing it for me. You're doing it for everyone else here. And particularly in our context, when you talk about wiping down the pews, who are we really doing it for? We're doing it for the Spanish church who come in after us.

We're serving them by cleaning the pews. And remember the whole principle of Jesus who didn't come to rule initially, but he came to serve and he washes his his disciples feet. And then he says, as good stewards, there's another important word as good stewards.

The word steward, again, is not used much in English today, but we have the word trustee. What is a trustee? Our Constitution doesn't have trustees, but some churches do have trustees. The trustees are the ones who have the responsibility to look after what has been entrusted to them.

So if you have a trust, you have trustees over the trust, and their job is to take care of the money that has been put in their trust. And so that's the word steward here. The word really is trustee.

So certain things have been put in our trust. We've spoken about the building. The building has been put in our trust.

We need, it's not ours. We may hold it free and clear, but it's not ours. It's God's building.

And we, those who've been with us when we made the transition know beyond any doubt, God gave us this building. And, and so it's his building, but he's given it to us in trust. He said, I'll lend it to you.

You take care of it. In a sense, we're holding it in trust for the next generation, but it is not ours. I don't own this building, but you know that I'm fastidious about how we care for this building because I am a trustee, not in the legal sense, but in the spiritual sense.

Now, God has put in each one of our lives, certain things that he has given to us in trust. Your children, you're stewards of your children. God has entrusted them to you and you need to care for them, but they are not yours.

They're ultimately his. Your job, God has put in your trust, your own home. If you own your own home, these are things that God has entrusted to us.

He's lent them to us. But remember that the trustee is accountable for the things that he is caring for. Now, in this context, he is saying then that we have received a gift.

If God has given you an ability, doesn't matter what that ability is, then it is a gift, but it is not a gift for you to dispose of as you wish. So in a sense, it's not a gift. A gift is something that you receive and you can throw it away if you want to.

You can sell it, you can do with it whatever you like, but the gifts that he has given to us, we know clearly from the rest of scripture, he's going to call us to give an account for what we did with the gift that he gave us. Same with the gift of life. We can't just squander our lives and do with it whatever, because we're going to have to give an account.

What did we do with the life that he entrusted to us? And so the gifts, the abilities that we have in the context of the body of Christ, those are things that he has entrusted to us. And if he's entrusted them to us, we will need to give an account for them. And so Paul speaks about this.

He says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that we may receive for the things done in the body, whether good or bad. Remember, that's not speaking about our salvation. It's speaking about rewards.

It's speaking about giving an account for whatever it is that God has given us. And so the question we must ask then is what has God given me? What has God given you and entrusted to you? God has entrusted to us certain gifts, certain talents, certain abilities, but also other things. Our temporary things, our houses, our cars are not just there for us.

They are there to be used for his glory. And so as good stewards of the manifold grace of God, so it gets more complicated. So on what basis does he give us those gifts? And remember now, I've gone a little bit all over the show here, but we're talking about, first of all, spiritual gifts or abilities that can be used for the sake of the church or the body of Christ.

But it also includes everything else that we have, our time. What do we do with our time? He's entrusted that to us. And on what basis do we have those things? It's on the basis of his grace.

You see, here's where the problem is, is that we say, well, you know, my abilities, my time, my money, my whatever it is, is because I worked for it, because I earned it, because I learned certain skills. No, it is the grace of God that gives us whatever we have. We don't have anything that is not the grace of God.

I may have shared with you before, but let me share this with you because it's very personal, and yet I believe that it does illustrate this point. There was a time in my ministry, and you probably all know that I was bivocational a lot of my time, both pastoring and in secular work at the same time. And I had been in business, and I had done very, very well, and got to a place where I felt deep down that I had made a success of my life.

I was still a believer, I was still preaching, I was still loving God, I was still preaching, in fact, more frequently than I even do now, preaching every night of the week. And then one day, God took everything away. The long story, but I lost everything.

I faced bankruptcy. In fact, not only did I face bankruptcy, but I owed far more than I was worth. If I sold everything, I couldn't pay my debt.

I didn't declare bankruptcy, I came to an arrangement with my creditors, and we were able to, took in and out of some really, really hard times. We sold everything we had, we cut everything down to the bare minimum, and we eventually paid it all off. But as I went through that time, a time of tremendous depression as well, I, and I can still clearly remember driving around a traffic circle in our hometown, and as I drove around that traffic circle, the penny dropped.

There was nothing that I saw there, it was just God working in my spirit, and I realized that everything I had was His grace. It wasn't an intellectual thing, it was a heart thing. I understood the skills that I had, the opportunities I had, the breath that I was breathing was His grace.

Because of His mercies, we are not consumed, and it was a life-changing moment, it is something that dramatically changed my life from that point on, and to this day, and together with that, as I was driving up the hill towards Town Hill Hospital, the next thought came, and I realized that I was praying for blessing in the business, I was praying for a good year, I was praying to get out of my troubles, and I realized that the scripture says, give me today my daily bread, that's all I'm entitled to, Lord just give me food for today, and that's literally where we were at financially, literally living, not paycheck by paycheck, but day by day, and I realized for the first time in my life that there is nothing I have, my possessions, my skills, my business, my health, that was not God's grace, nothing that I had earned, nothing that I had deserved, nothing that I had worked for, it was His grace, and so we are stewards of His grace, the breath that we breathe is His grace, and I need to use that for His glory, and then the last thing before I close, the manifold grace of God, and I thank God for that, the word manifold here, I suppose men understand that word in the context of a motor car, it has an exhaust manifold, and an outlet manifold, that has many branches, and that's really what the word means, many faceted, many aspects, many branches to the grace of God, God's grace is not just in the context of salvation, His grace is in the context of every area of our lives, it is a multifaceted grace, the fact that we're here this evening, the fact that we have a building, the fact that we have, that we are able to come to church, the fact that we are healthy, the fact that we have a desire to be here, is His grace, every aspect, every detail of what we have, the fact that your motor car didn't break down from home to here, and you say, well you know, I have a good reliable, it's still His grace, everything is His grace, He's multifaceted grace, every aspect of our lives is covered under His grace, and is because of His grace, and so He's given us gifts, and the next verses which we'll deal with next week, deals with some more practical aspects of these, but He has given to us a, each one of us, gift or gifts, and we need to serve one another with those gifts, as good stewards, good people, people who will give an account of the manifold grace of God. You see, here's the problem, is that we often serve God out of grudgingly, and well, you know, it's, you know, I wish I had that, and you know, I wish we didn't have to wear masks, and I wish we didn't have to have the doors open, so we can get the air conditioning down, and or the heat down, and I wish everybody, no, God's grace has given us what we have. Let's be grateful for that, and let's use that to serve one another as best as we can.

Father, we thank you for your Word, we pray Lord, that we may be able to love these things, that these things may be realities that grip our hearts, and not just things that we have learnt in our minds. Lord, that we may love one another with a fervent love, Lord, that we may cover, that we may hide, that we may just forgive the sins of others against us, and Lord, that we may use the grace and the gift that you've given to us in a way that we may serve one another, and that we would be able to give an account before you on that day. And so Lord, I pray that you'd help us to continue to meditate on these things, and to figure out how we can put these things into practice in our lives in a real and in a practical way.

I pray Lord, for those who are not able to join us because of the restrictions, Lord, and for those who are watching on live streaming, Lord, we long to be with them. We think particularly of Lisette right now, and of Henry, and others who can't be here this evening. Lord, we pray for them.

We pray that you would minister to each one, and Lord, as while they're far away from us physically, we pray Lord that they may not be far from us spiritually, and that we may be together in the Spirit in a real and a true sense. And so Lord, I pray that you'd go with us now, keep us, and protect us, and bring us

together again safely on Sunday. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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