

# Love One Another Fervently

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*A purified soul, achieved through obedience to the truth, is free to experience unsaned love.*

**Duration:** 1:14:42

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 1 Peter 1:13-15, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 Peter 1:24-25

**Topics:** "Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by reminding the audience of the encouraging statements about what Christ has accomplished for believers. He then reviews the five commands given in the previous portion of the scripture, which include being sober-minded, fixing hope on God's grace, and being obedient and holy. The speaker emphasizes the temporary nature of human life, comparing it to grass that withers and flowers that fall off. The sermon concludes with a prayer for the audience to have receptive hearts and a request for God to reinforce the message of Peter's words to the young church facing opposition.

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## Transcript

Well, let's turn and seek the Lord. Our Father, we do want to lift our eyes from ourselves. Lord, we don't want to look into the mirror.

We want to look through a window to see the precious work of the Triune God. We want our hearts stirred, thinking of those 12 things that you've given us to lift our countenance, thinking, God, of the path of obedience and those five commands that you've given us, the proddings to stir us to obedience and not to lag behind. And now, God, as we consider the incorruptible seed, we ask that you give us grateful hearts, responsive hearts, help us, God, even now, to tear our hearts away from the normal things of life, the things that are good in themselves, but they have no place in the worship service to become preoccupied with you, with your great work, with your claims upon our lives, our families, our workplace, this little church, God, the nation and the world.

We thank you, God, that you are the immutable God who cannot be altered by anyone from without, and you cannot be altered from within. You are the sum of all perfections. You cannot grow less and you cannot increase.

And God, we are grateful that though you are immutable, we are not immutable, born aliens, born enemies, born far from you without hope in this world. But we praise you that our character is not etched in stone, you can take out the old nature, you can put in a new life, you can open our eyes and stir our hearts

and free our will. You can make us new creations in Christ.

You can bring us to life and call us out of a grave. God, we can be transformed, saved from sin, made into the image of our Lord. Progressively altered day by day from glory unto glory as we view your son until that day when we see him face to face and we will not be ashamed of our hope in him, then awakening with his beauty, a beauty enviable.

Not in any way inferior to the angels. God, you know the struggles we have to believe these great truths. So we ask tonight that what Peter has said 2000 years ago to a young church facing terrible opposition.

That you would say it again to our souls tonight. And you would lend weight to what a man says. And you would, God, help us to have broken up, plowed up hearts ready to receive it.

Father, we ask this for the glory of your son and it's in his name we pray. Amen. Some of you may be jealous, but I have the privilege of returning to Chicago tomorrow where it's snowing and where my dear wife tells me it's going to be very, very cold.

Isn't God kind to give us such variety? And isn't it uncanny how greatly he loves variety? In every realm and in every way. Well, our final message tonight for me on 1 Peter 1 and tonight verses 22, 23, 24, and 25. My eyes are not sharp enough nor my memory good enough to be absolutely certain who's here tonight, who was not here last night or the night before.

And because I do not know that clearly, I will take just a brief moment to remind you who were here and to mention to those who were not that in verses 1 to 12, we saw a series of wonderfully encouraging statements about what Christ has accomplished on our behalf. And I described them as countenance lifters that which would indeed, if we kept going back to them, keep us from drooping in our confidence in the Lord. And we were looking at the first night in addition to the 12 countenance lifters at the five commands.

I want to review them tonight because of what we have in the last portion that we look at. So the five commands, gird up your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Number five, or number four, as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lust which were yours in your ignorance.

And number five, like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also as he is holy. Because it is written, you shall be holy just as I am holy. And last evening we were looking at the three prods or incentives or motivators to earnestly keep these words of command.

And they're lovely indeed and wonderfully helpful when taken seriously, the fear of God, the price that Christ paid for us, for our salvation. Then the splendor, the glory of the plan of God, of salvation, all arranged long before the existence of any of us or of the world itself. Now, tonight, what we have is a sixth command and five helps, a sixth command and five helps.

Look now at the four verses that we have in front of us. The command, fervently love one another from the heart. And then the five helps, and these are incredibly important.

Number one, obedience to the truth purifies the heart. Number two, the purified soul is free to experience unsaned love of the brethren. Now, those are two immensely consequential matters.

Let me repeat them, but we will dwell upon them. First, it is necessary that the heart be purified through obedience to the truth. Then, when the heart has been purified through obedience to the church, it is truly possible to experience unsaned love of the brethren.

Then, number three, this is verse 23, immensely consequential words. You have been born again, not of seed, which is perishable, but imperishable. Now, we've got to lay hold of the consequence of that, and it will be immensely helpful to us when we lay hold of that, of keeping this sixth command that we have in the passage.

Now, those who are from perishable seed, there's nothing there. They're like the flower, like the grass, it all withers and perishes. And as we focus upon the difference between the results of perishable seed and imperishable seed, we find splendid help.

And then, finally, we must forever be keeping in mind that the Word of the Lord abides forever, and there'll never be a time anywhere in our future or in the future of the world if it exists long after our passing, when the Word of God will not still be the abiding Word, but never alters, never changes. Now, let's take up these issues as they appear in the passage. We have the fact declared.

All they that obey the truth purify their soul. Now, we all have been told, we may not always practice this consistently, but we certainly have been told that obedience is part and parcel of being a Christian. To say that you believe Christ and yet not to obey Him is plain foolishness.

And as I've said already this week, and have said it on another occasion when you privileged me to speak to you, that in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, all the persons whose names in history are drawn before us are persons who were given something to do by God and did it. Now, Peter is very burdened about this issue of obedience. He's already made it an issue of consequence in this particular chapter.

Go back to verse 2. According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled by His blood. Now, it's a puzzle how there can be so many people in the church across the land who haven't even thought of obedience to Christ and yet they're sure they're Christian. So, we've obviously had to change the meaning of the word Christian to accommodate such a preposterous viewpoint.

And all of us surely must know that according to Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 4, we were actually elected to holiness. And what is so perfectly lovely about that is it's God Himself who elected us, the God who never failed in anything He set out to do. And what is utterly impossible for us on our own is wonderfully, gloriously possible through Jesus Christ Himself.

In verse 14, as obedient children do not be conformed to the former lust. So, the issue of obedience is indeed very much before us in this passage. Alexander McLaren, that wonderfully helpful commentator from years ago, said faith in its depth is obedience.

Now, here in this passage before us tonight, it is ever so plain that Christian is required to obey the truth. And what kind of a person are you if obedience to the truth is not very central in your heart's desire and in the purpose of your life? Now, granted, many of us who truly do desire to obey the truth allow our attention to be drawn from Christ. And we disobey.

But the fact that we disobey doesn't mean that we don't wish to obey. I have often been myself personally captured by the beauty of holiness. I scarcely go anywhere to speak for any length of time, but what I'm

bound and determined to say something on the beauty of holiness, I've said it to this congregation before.

But as a boy, as some of you know, my own parents were pagans. But when I was eight years of age, they sent my older sister and my brother and myself to a Methodist Sunday school. And in this Methodist Sunday school, we were taught about the fable of Jonah and the whale.

And we came home and told our mother that we had learned about this pretend story about Jonah and the whale. And my dear mother said, we don't send children to Sunday school to make them unbelievers. We are all unbelievers by nature.

Now that was an amazing thing. My mother had no religious background at all. But she made that adamant, you'll not return to that Sunday school in the glorious providence of God.

And aunt and uncle, who were believers, put the pressure on my parents at that time to attend a little holiness church in Schenectady, New York. A Christian and missionary alliance church. Where in a series of special meetings, they were transformed by the power of Jesus Christ.

So from then on, we were in church every time it was open. Now I didn't get much out of the services, but all around the walls of this church, there were scriptural placards. And over the podium, these words, Jesus Christ, the same.

Yesterday, today, and forever. And those words burned their way into my heart at eight years of age. And somehow in the course of all of that, I began to realize that there is no beauty like the beauty of holiness.

And ever since, I have been brought back time after time after time to that simple truth. As some of you know, I've traveled a fair bit in my lifetime. Lived in many different places.

Was four years in Portland, Oregon. Where in the place where I live, you could look out on three sides and see these glorious snow-capped mountains. Lake Louise, a glorious spot.

Up in the Adirondack Mountains. Up here near Asheville, Lake Lure. There are incredibly beautiful places on earth.

And there are beautiful people. But there is no beauty like the beauty of holiness. The one truly enduring and inspiring beauty.

The best beauty of all. The beauty of holiness. The beauty that comes through obedience to the truth.

All of us should see that beauty regularly. And should yearn for it. It should be indeed a profoundly powerful matter in our lives.

Now, in this passage, obedience to the truth results in a purified soul. Now let's think about something that is quite obvious. And some of you have wrestled carefully with this.

Every sin is against somebody. I challenge you to sit down sometime and to see if you can think of a sin that is not against somebody. Now, when you are sinning against somebody, you can't love them.

After all, the very essence of sin is self. And self means I'm more important than you are. My view is better than your view.

My wants more worthy of attention than your wants. And while almost every sin is against some other human being, absolutely all sin is against God Himself. So it's utterly impossible to keep this command to love one another from the heart when some sin is tolerated in the life.

Now take the sin of pride. How can you love others when you're using them to bolster your own ego? Most of you have come to grips with the fact, I hope, that pride is maintained by comparison. When I spoke of this the other night in Memphis, I asked a brother to stand next to me and I asked the people, now, who is the most attractive of the two of us standing here? Well, I mean, there was absolutely no question the other fellow, naturally.

But normally what we're doing in maintaining pride is lifting ourselves by a comparison with someone else. And as some of you have really truly learned, the way to deal with pride is to refuse to compare yourself with anybody else except Christ. And when you compare yourself with Christ, you've got an awful lot of reason for profound humility.

I'm simply saying that if you cultivate pride in your life, there's simply no way that you can express genuine love. How about dishonesty? Is not dishonesty always at the expense of truth? How about theft? In theft you're saying, what I want is worth much more than you. So I can harm you to get what I want.

But obviously you can't have love and theft. They don't go together. I'm just suggesting, name a sin and it will be quickly evident that you've got to purify your soul through obedience to the truth before you can come anywhere near love.

Plus, whether it leads to actual physical action or not, it's the preference of desire. Illegitimate, inordinate desire at the expense of somebody. Or take the commonplace issue of gossip.

Is it ever possible to gossip without sinning against someone else? Well, most certainly not. Or think about showing favoritism. Or think about greed.

Or think about the issue of anger. How many children are deeply and permanently scarred by explosions of temper in the hall? Sin, I'm simply trying to say, is against someone, always against God, but in almost every instance a sin against another person as well. Or take the less noticed sin of robbing God of his tithing.

Now, some, of course, don't believe that tithing has anything to do with Christianity. And I'm not making an argument for tithing. I'm just making the assumption that devout Christians love the Lord and his work and they want to support it.

So if you withhold your tithe, what does it mean? It means somebody else suffered so that you can have more yourself. Well, I don't need to press this on indefinitely, but all of us need to face the fact that the purification of the soul is mandatory to love. Now, all of us I expect are aware all but perhaps some very small child that Peter had a problem with the subject of love.

And though it's merely a repetition of what most of you know, after the death and the burial and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ when he stood on the shore and the disciples were in their boat fishing and they came to shore and found him there. We are well acquainted with the record in John 21 when Jesus said to Peter, Peter, do you love me? And Peter responded, I have brotherly affection toward you. And the second time the question do you love me? And the answer, brotherly affection.

Then the third time you remember Christ dropped from the level of agape to what Peter was responding with brotherly love. And when Jesus said it's as if he really said to Peter, Peter is the best that you can say that you have brotherly love toward me. Almost in exasperation it appears, Peter responded, that's the best I can do, but in this epistle he goes beyond that.

Perhaps you're well aware of this, but look again at this statement in verse 22. When it says a sincere love of the brethren, the word filios is used. But when it comes to that last phrase, fervently love one another from the heart, the word agape is used.

So Peter despite his stumblings and the great difficulties that he experienced did move from mere brotherly affection toward Christ to genuine agape love. So what he's saying here is if your heart is purified through the observance of the truth, then you are in a position to truly have brotherly affection. And when you are in a position to truly have brotherly affection then set your heart to fervently love one another.

Now all of us are aware I trust that the New Testament Christians were distinguished by the love they had for one another. And the rapid growth of the church was connected with this demonstration of love on an ongoing basis. And while it grieves us to even think it the lack of love is keeping multitudes from giving any consideration whatsoever to the truth of God's word.

I don't remember whether I shared this statistic with you or not but it's one that is worth repeating. I think it was the year 2011 I was engaged in a two week series of meetings in Texas. And it was a situation where I was speaking every night for two weeks but also Monday to Friday we had essentially all day pastors conferences so I was speaking somewhere around 25 times each week.

And the organizers of it being merciful brought in some to help out in the day time. But an official of the Southern Baptist Convention in the state of Texas was one of those who was brought in to speak and he made this statement in the year 2010 an average of 1,200 pastors were thrown out of their church every month among the Southern Baptist denomination alone. Now correct me if I'm wrong wouldn't that come to somewhere around 14,400 in the course of a year? Just think of that.

Now no doubt there would be cases where the pastor committed adultery or was pilfering from the church funds or for some other reason he was legitimately removed. But the bulk of those apparently were because of a lack of love. And we want to face as seriously we know how this teaching here the purified soul is free to love.

If there is not that purification of sin there is no possibility of love. Now would it be out of the way if I ask you to take this very much to your own heart and you ask before God alone with great seriousness is there any disobedience to the truth that is preventing me from having unfeigned love? Now clearly in most of the churches there is somebody at least who is prevented from having unfeigned love by disobedience to the truth. I think that you dear people readily understand by God's grace you have had, what would it be Chuck, 12 years or so since this church started.

And a lot of wonderful blessings during that 12 year period. But how long does the typical church last before it starts getting into trouble? Well there are an awful lot that are pretty well ruined before 10 years. There is absolutely no sound reason to think that because God blessed the church with a good beginning that it will continue indefinitely.

All it takes is a few people who are disobedient to the truth. In a congregation like this, one single person disobedient to the truth could create enough turmoil and difficulty so that this community is never swayed or moved by the power of the gospel. So I am not speaking to you here tonight because I have been sneaking around behind the scenes over the last six months and I have found illustrations of those who were not obeying the truth.

Oh no, nothing like that dear friends. I am concerned for you that a good beginning not come to a grievous ending. And in that multitudes of churches began well, but are not under the blessing of God now, I think a very real danger exists.

So in short again, I am asking each of you to review your own heart. Your life before God and ask genuinely are there any areas of disobedience to the truth in me? Because if there are, then you cannot practice unsane love. Now, I trust that for each of you, that word feigned is not a difficult word.

In some translations it's sincere or feigned. It's pretended. It's hypocritical.

It's false. It's not genuine. Now it's relatively easy to feign love.

Think of that incredibly large number of unhappy homes that exist. Because one of the two partners often both are feigning love. Pretending that love is there when indeed it is not.

And here would be an area where all who are married in this place could wisely ask, did what was once genuine love for a spouse degenerate to something less? Surely by any reasonable Christian standards our love for our spouses should be growing not decreasing. So I'm simply urging that each of us take to heart this first help. Let us be absolutely certain that we are in obedience to the truth.

For the purified soul is the soul that is free to love. This brotherly affection I just said is specified as unfamed. Not hypocritical.

Not pretense. Paul said in Romans 12 9, let love be without dissimulation. Well that's the same issue here.

A fraud kind of a love. And young people, if I may speak to you, don't even think of marriage until you know you have unfamed love. I think I'm in a position to tell you after 50 years of marriage, and I think my dear friends can support me in this.

They've had as much experience in this as I have. Marriage is tough. There's a lot of things that make marriage extremely difficult.

But unfamed love is what indeed enables two people to live together in joy and in great thanksgiving. So be certain of this in every realm of your life. Well, as I said, the first issue, obedience to the truth.

But then, this second step, this sincere love of the brethren. Now let's test ourselves in this regard. Are you honestly more concerned about what happens to someone else than about what happens to you? Can you really say, I prefer one another? Now let me take a very simple and not altogether consequential issue.

There's an awful lot of struggle in the church over interpretations of doctrinal issues. And I've had a good bit of trouble in my lifetime over what is called premillennialism. Now, if you don't know anything about it, don't worry about it.

Just get the point that I'm making. Because I decided under, I think, the guidance of the Spirit and the result of much study, that millennial issues simply were not worth having a position on. So, when asked, do you agree with premillennialism? I say, I don't agree with any issue on millennialism except one.

Jesus Christ is coming at an hour when you think not. Therefore, be ready. So, I have been under attack for years because I will not sign a particular statement.

Now, when you're under attack and picked on and your life is made difficult, it's easy to develop a nasty spirit. And I'm just being illustrative now. This is what I really hope.

I hope the premillennialists are right. And I'm wrong. Now, why? Well, there are so many of them and so few of me.

Why not? Why should we not truly prefer others? All of us need to develop the spirit not of competition with others, not with the urgency. I must be right. I'm going to make this next statement with a good bit of shame.

When I started out in the ministry, I honestly believed that being right was of foremost importance. I remember when I was pastor of a church in Portland, Oregon that had only one believer in the whole church and God was at work and some were being converted. In the Bible classes that I got started and people were coming to, a lot of these people had absolutely no biblical background at all.

And they would argue with me in class. And I remember saying on one occasion to a woman who was arguing with me, everyone has a right to be wrong. If you choose to be wrong, that's your choice.

Now, there was a great deal of pride and arrogance in me. But over a period of time, I began to realize there was something vastly more important than being right. That was being good in the sense that our Savior was described by others as being good.

I'm simply prodding now and urging you. Do you care enough about others that you would really prefer to be wrong if that meant they could be right? Now, I'm not talking about failing to stand up for the truth. I'm just talking about love.

Where we have been obedient to the truth and our souls have been purified and thus we are truly in a position to practice what this passage speaks concerning. Now, let's just dwell briefly on the command itself. The exhortation fervently love one another from the heart.

As I've already said, that's the higher level word, the word agape. The love that is a love of intelligence. The love that is like the love of God toward us.

Love one another fervently. Now, how fervently do you love other believers? Obviously, again, this is not an open examination. I'm not here to cry.

I'm not here to embarrass. But we do need to ask, do I, through a purified heart, have not only an unfeigned love, but a fervent love? Now, let's take a bit of time to consider what the love of Christ toward us is like. Let me give you a series of words for your consideration.

The love of Christ toward you is a sincere love without hypocrisy. Now, what would it be like to be loved by a Savior who is a hypocrite? How would you like it if, when God said, I love you, you knew perfectly well you couldn't trust Him? If we're going to have that fervent love for the brethren, it must be like the love

Christ Himself has for us. He not only loves us sincerely, but He loves us fervently.

But take the word consistent. The love of Christ toward us is a consistent love. Now, do you deserve consistent love? Do I? My word.

When I consider some of the grievously wicked and stupid things that I have done, if God's love were inconsistent, I would have been written out of the books long ago. And right now, I don't deserve consistent love, but by God's grace, I receive consistent love, as every believer in the room does. We're being called upon to love one another fervently.

And that means our love must be consistent. Now, again, without a mention to anybody, just ask your own heart. Is your love for your spouse consistent? Or if your spouse does something that you think is annoying, do you blow up? Or do you justify some evil action on your part because of their failure? And to think as well about the purity of Christ's love.

Oh, he loves us wonderfully, but there's an infidelity in Christ's love. Can you imagine the love of Christ being filled with infidelity? No, no, no. When we talk about love, we're talking about the fidelity of it, that there are no exceptions, that there is no impurity.

And we have to use the word merciful when we think about the love of Christ. How about today? Did you deserve the love of Christ in absolutely every thought? In every deed? In every word? Well, I doubt that you did. I know that it's a rare day when there isn't some blemish in my life obvious to me and probably five times more obvious to my wife and maybe ten times more obvious to you.

But isn't it wonderful that the love of Christ is a merciful love, that it's a long suffering love? I've often had a man say to me, well, I used to love my wife, but honestly, she is such a bummer. I can't imagine now why I was ever so foolish to even be attracted to her. Well, I bet if she spoke her heart, she'd find a whole lot more reason for wondering why she was ever attracted to him than he to her.

But is true love up and down? When the person fails repeatedly, do we cut them off or like Christ, is our love long suffering? And is it a forgiving love? What if Christ had said to you, now look, I put up with this for three years, now I'm telling you one more chance. And if you violate me again, you're finished. Thank God He doesn't treat us that way.

What an incredible thing that our dear Savior has forgiven us. So many times we couldn't possibly keep track. And fervent love for others requires that unselfishness, that forgiving spirit, that long suffering.

In the love of Christ there are no ulterior motives. Most of us have got to face the fact that there are times when there is an ulterior motive in an act of love. But never so with Christ.

So His love is truly understanding. And it is sacrificial. And that surely is a critical word for our time.

Sacrificial. The reason these 14,400 pastors were expelled from Southern Baptist churches in the year 2010 is because there was very little sacrificial love. And I'm simply urging you to face squarely that when I have obeyed the truth, I'm brought into that position where I can have a sincere or an unfeigned love of the brethren.

And when that's in place, then I have got to fervently love others. And I've got to pattern that love toward others by the love of Jesus Christ toward the church and toward me in particular. But now let's move to the

second verse.

Verse 23. You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable. That is through the living and abiding word of God.

Now anyone who takes verse 22 seriously is bound sooner or later to ask how extensive must this unfeigned fervent love be? Who is included in that? Now if you weigh the passage with any care at all, it's quite clear, isn't it, that in verse 24 there is this focus upon flower and grass that's perishing. But let's just put our hearts and minds together in gear and ask why this focus upon perishable and imperishable? Now let's begin by a very simple but magnificent observation of what kind of seed was the Lord Jesus Christ conceived. When the angel appeared to Mary and told her that she was to bear a child, and when Joseph was struggling with the issue of what to do after he discovered that the girl he intended to marry was pregnant.

And the angel told him, do not hesitate, do not be afraid. That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Surely you recognize that Jesus Christ was conceived as a result of imperishable seed.

Now every true believer everywhere in the world has been born again of imperishable seed. Now what that means very practically is our family relationships and in most cases they're strong. But our family relationship is a relationship that is based on perishable seed.

Our relationship with Christ and His Church is based upon imperishable seed. Now that clearly means that the tie between brothers and sisters in Christ must be much more powerful than the tie between family members on earth. So I ask, is that true in your case? Do you realize that every other believer throughout the world is truly your brother, your sister, because all were born again of the same imperishable seed.

If you have not faced that realistically, now is a wonderful time to do so. These courageous young men sit here on the front row, four of them together, and they told me at one point they didn't mind if I said something. Well, not you, I don't think, but these other guys know what to expect.

Have you thought, my dear sir, that every believer on earth has a closer relationship with you than even your dear twin brother? All of us need to face that reality. Now, if I attack your brother and you're standing by, what are you going to do? Yeah, he's quiet and modest, but he says, I'll try and stop it. But instead, some of us here, a brother or a sister, in Christ, attack and we don't try to stop it.

We don't defend one another. We do not take a strong stand on kingdom issues. We're much more likely to take a strong stand on earthly family issues than on kingdom of God issues.

Do not see how preposterous that is. And do not see how this ties in then to this issue of love. Who am I to love? I am to love in this fervent, in this unfeigned way, every brother and sister throughout the entire world.

Because we're all born of the same seed. Now as much as I love this church and you dear people, do you have any idea how kind you have been to me over the years? By permitting me to come time after time and to feel the warmth of your fellowship. It's been a magnificent gift to me.

You might be surprised, but my dear wife said to me, just before I came down here, you know maybe what we ought to do is to join Christ Church in Albany. We're wrestling with an issue relating to my ministerial standing about church membership. But that's how we feel about you dear folks.

As if somehow we're connected in a significant way, even though in a way we're hardly connected at all. But we are connected because we are all born of this same seed. Now let's think with some earnestness on this subject of regeneration.

It's one with which this church has considerable familiarity. But let's take a few moments tonight just to review some of the glorious issues that are involved here. There is a glorious parallel between physical birth and spiritual birth.

In this passage, we've got this distinction clearly made. The one is a result of the implanting of perishable seed. The other, the result of planting imperishable seed.

Now let's just review some of the things that we know about this parallel between the physical and the spiritual and the differences that exist between the two. There's always the element of mystery and wonder connected with birth. Most of us know something very real about it.

I'm a father. I'm a grandfather. You're, many of you parents.

Almost all of us have some acquaintance. But is it still, is it not still, a glorious mystery? How does it all happen? Oh, we understand some of the issues. But there is something absolutely marvelous in this whole issue of birth.

And as was stated in John 3, the wind blows where it will. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. A glorious mystery in birth.

Yet at the same time, we know perfectly well that a child that emerges in birth is never the cause, but always the result. That may not be quite clear to all of you. But when you think about the new birth, it's very urgent to realize that the new birth is not the cause, but a result.

It's the result of that seed being implanted. That seed of the Word. Now I mention that because there is such a struggle in the church across America over the simple issue which comes first.

Repentance and faith and then regeneration or regeneration and then repentance and faith. And multitudes of those people who think they're Christians and give no evidence of it, think they're Christians because they have been taught that because of something they have done, God has given them new life. But that's not the way it is in physical birth.

The child is the result of the implanting of that seed. We need to deeply understand that issue in terms of the new birth. Now, how many mothers are in the room? Would you simply raise your hand? Yes, a wonderful assortment of mothers.

So it'll be appropriate for me to ask. Will you stand now and tell us about your full grown child that emerged from your womb? Who will volunteer to give us particulars on that? Maybe you've read the book of Enoch. That apocryphal book where there were natural human mothers who had children a mile tall.

A bit hard to believe. But isn't it wonderful that no full grown adult has ever come out of the womb of a mother. It's always a baby.

And we've got to simply face the fact that in regeneration it's not adult Christians that appear but infant Christians who need to grow tall. And in many situations a person brand new is treated as full grown and then they become a disgrace to the cause of Christ because everything is so twisted up. And remember

too no child is born of a woman without at least some measure of pain and difficulty.

And to think that children are born of God without pain, without any difficulty whatsoever is simply not sound. And obviously in human birth there are sometimes still births but when God brings a person into life there's never a failure. So anyone who calls themselves a Christian and yet doesn't have the life of Christ in them is not really a Christian at all.

And I'm just urging you to weigh now deeply this incredibly significant truth. Every believer in this room was born of the same seed. The imperishable seed of the Word of God.

Every one of them is very meaningful to Christ. His love is fixed upon every one of his children. And that means simply that those that Christ loves I must love.

And the attention that Christ gives to his children I must give. And if I am allowing sin in my life, if I am not obedient to the truth, I can't even practice brotherly affection to say nothing of agape love. And the thing that is going to make this church strong if it survives another 20 years or another 60 years is going to be the spirit of Christ's love reigning in the heart of every believer here.

Again, I'm not suggesting it's been lacking. I'm just saying here is a beautiful passage to help us to be sure that the love of Christ prevails in a lovely ongoing fashion. But now, let's notice this other statement in verse 4. All flesh is like grass.

All its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off. We are all dying.

When I was a youth, the medical doctor told me that after 21, we cease to advance in physical strength and we begin to decline. So if you're 22, you've already had a year of decline. Think how many years of decline I've had.

But now look. Not long ago, we were with our grandchildren, and the second boy said, Grandpa, I'm taller than you. No, I said, you're not.

How tall are you? He said, I'm 5'7". Well, I said, I'm 5'8". I don't believe it.

He said, well, I got my wallet out, took out my driver's license. Look, it says 5'8" right here. No, he said, I'm taller than you.

Stand back to back. So we did, and his older brother was there. And he went across the top of my head and bumped into the head of my grandson.

He said to me, Grandpa, Evan is an inch and a half taller than you. Well, a very short time before I came down here, I had a routine doctor's visit. And you know, in our area of the country, at least, they always take your weight.

But they had this scale that had one of these bars set down on top of your head. The nurse went out of the room, so I said, I'll resolve this matter now. I'll be sure how tall I am.

And you know what I discovered? I've shrunk three inches. I'm like the grass of the field, the flower that's falling. All of us are in the midst of perishing in terms of our earthly bodies, if the only birth you have is the birth of perishable seed.

What a tragedy. I'm grateful to know that I have been born of imperishable seed. And when the flower is gone, when the grass is withered, there's still eternity with Christ.

So, here's a huge incentive to carefully consider, what seed have I been conceived with? Solely perishable or by the grace of God, physical birth through perishable seed and spiritual birth through imperishable seed. And the passage closes with this wonderful, wonderful statement, that the Word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the Word which was preached to you.

And not only the Word preached to you, but the Word itself is that imperishable seed. What a lovely thing for each of us to review where we're at in this whole area of obedience to the truth. And I'd like to ask, as an elder brother for most of you, are there not some areas in your life where you really cannot love the brothers and the sisters as you should? Because you have not walked in obedience to the truth.

I spoke about the beauty of holiness and it is a very precious beauty. But the world is not in a position to understand the beauty of holiness. They can see it in a light and be impressed.

But that which really grips the world is manifest love. And isn't it a glorious thought that through obedience to the truth, every one of us, young, old, makes no difference. We can become those who practice unfeigned, fervent love.

We show brotherly kindness and we feel the depth of the love of Christ toward others. That's what will make this church strong in years to come. So the simple appeal of the old man is be sure there's no area in your life where you are not being purified through obedience.

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