

Above Everything Else – I Peter 4:8

I. Introduction:

- A. No sincere Christian would readily admit to arguing with Peter or any other penman of the scriptures.
1. Every well-taught Christian knows that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Word of God, and no one should argue or differ with the Lord.
 2. But the truth of the matter is we all do it; sometimes inadvertently or unintentionally, but we do it.
 3. An extreme example would be **Jonah**.
 - a. God, in essence said, *"I love the people of Nineveh; go evangelize them."*
 - b. But Jonah suggested that they were not worthy of love, as he began running in the opposite direction.
 4. Again, we do the same sort of thing:
 5. For example, what is your opinion of that homeless man or that transsexual man?
 6. Do you really want to evangelize him or see him in your church where he might here the gospel?
- B. After reading this evening's text, and hearing my announcement this morning you probably know the answer to my next question.
1. But if I had asked you last Wednesday, *"What is the most important duty of the Christian,"* what might you have answered?
 2. Going back to recent lessons, you might have replied: *"evangelism & obedience to the Great Commission."*
 3. Other might have replied, *"living a sanctified life by dealing with our obvious sins."*
 4. The Pharisees among us might have answered, *"Doctrinal purity is the Christian's most important duty."*
 5. The Christian politicians might have said, *"Draining the swamp in Washington DC."*
 6. Without the context of our text, and without some previous thought on the subject, together we might have come up with a dozen answers all of which would have been different from what Peter tells us.

II. What is it that Peter tells us in this verse?

- A. He says, *"And above ALL things have fervent charity among yourselves."*
1. I have friends who are venerate our King James Bibles to the point of near idolatry.
 2. Now, don't get me wrong, I love the King James and would never consider using any other Bible.
 3. But sometimes, comments need to be made to improve our understanding of the 17th century language.
 4. And none of my near Ruckmanite friends, would mind, if I tell you that the word *"charity"* does not refer to *"the voluntary giving of help, or money, to those in need."*
 5. That is the common, current definition, and I don't have any problem with that.
 6. But the Greek word which Peter uses and which is very common throughout the New Testament is *"agape,"* and its meaning is *"love."*
 7. No one I know would deny that Peter is saying, *"Above all things have fervent LOVE among yourselves."*
- B. I hope that I don't need to define the word *"love"* for you, but I'll try do it anyway.
1. Most of us understand it reasonably well, whether we have an actual definition or not.
 2. Love is an intense **feeling of deep affection** for something or someone.
 3. Jesus tells us to *"love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."*
 4. This the **"FIRST commandment"** in importance, which is very similar to *"above all things have love."*
 5. But in Peter's statement he isn't repeating the Lord's command **to love God**, but to love **one another**.
- C. I am at a loss as what to say any more about this love, except to exhort us not to balk at the exhortation.
1. You are **not given a choice** as to whether or not you should love that fellow saint. You are to **DO** it.
 2. We are not given the privilege to weigh the reasons for our love.
 - a. *"Does he love me? If he doesn't love me then I'm not obliged to love him."*
 - b. *He may SAY that he loves me, but what he did the other day didn't show love, and therefore I don't have to love him. I don't have to love him, if he doesn't tell me that he loves me."*
 3. We are to love our brethren whether or not we think there is reason to do so.

- D. I will remind you that there are two families of words which are translated “love” in the Greek New Testament.
1. The **second** word is “*phileo*,” it is related to “*philadelphia*.” This latter word is translated “*brotherly love*.”
 2. The **first** word, “*agape*” or “*agapao*,” while used in other ways, is the only word which speaks of God’s love.
 3. Peter is essentially reminding us to love our brethren **as God loves** – as God loves **US**.
 4. Based upon that, it should not be necessary that we have a reason before we love someone.
 5. God loved us when we were completely unlovable, and that is our standard for loving others.
- E. Our subject this evening is love.

III. Think about the “above all things” statement.

- A. Peter doesn’t say, “*besides these other things*” love one another. He says this should **above** other things.
1. And Peter is not the only Apostle to elevate love. Remember, Peter is not known as the Apostle of love.
 2. Paul, in writing to the **Colossian** Christians, exhorts them to a number of important traits.
 - a. “*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*
 - b. *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*”
 - c. Then he says, just as Peter does, “**And ABOVE all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness**”– **Colossians 3:12-14**.
 3. Prior to that, Paul spends an entire chapter elevating the quality of love in **I Corinthians 13**.
 4. To the **Thessalonians** he said, “*The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another*” – **I Thessalonians 3:12**.
 5. And in the next chapter: “*But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another*” – **I Thessalonians 4:9**.
 6. Then to **Timothy** he said that the end of God’s commandments is to love out of a pure heart.
- B. And then, of course, there is the Apostle John – someone known for his love.
1. **I John 3:23** – “*This is (God’s) commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.*”
 2. “*And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also*” – **I John 4:21**.
 3. Can we honestly say we are children of God, if we don’t love the brethren – all of them – as we should?
- C. The apostles essentially were repeating the word of the Lord Jesus.
1. He said, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*”
 2. Why is it that so many Baptists insist that Christ’s disciples are to be known for the exactitude of their doctrine, when the Lord Jesus tells us that He uses a different standard?

IV. Peter applies the adjective “fervent” as he gives us this exhortation.

- A. “*And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.*”
1. In English, that word speaks of something **hot**, even to the **point of boiling**. That is its Latin root.
 2. Then Webster speaks of something **swelling, expanding** as it heats, and he also points to a boiling, churning, fervent swarm of bees.
 3. It is easy to see what Peter is saying about our love.
 4. It should be growing, heating up, getting more and more excited all the time.
 5. **Hebrews 13:1** says, “*Let brotherly love continue,*” but Peter is saying much more than that.
- B. However, the Greek word for “*fervent*” carries even a little more meaning, which doesn’t emerge in English.
1. The Greek word is used only twice, the second time being found right here.
 2. The first time the word is used (**Acts 12:5**), we read, “*Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*”

3. The Greek word implies something which grows incessantly.
4. The Jerusalem church loved their Apostle, and while he was in prison, where he could easily have been killed, they fervently and incessantly begged the Lord for his release, and of course, he was.

C. Earlier in this epistle, Peter used a different adjective to describe Christian love.

1. *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto **UNFEIGNED love of the brethren**, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”*
2. Once again, he used the word *“fervently,”* but in the same verse he spoke of *“unfeigned”* love.
3. Don’t **pretend** to love one another – love them.
4. Don’t be **hypocritical**, showing love when you are with that person, but then gossiping about them when they are gone. Be **genuine** in your love.

V. Why is it important to love one another?

A. For one thing, it helps to **keep** things in **perspective**.

1. As I have said, we are to love as God loved us.
2. *“For God so loved the world...” “We love Him...”* We love period... *“because He first loved us.”*
3. And here is the truth: we are a bunch of unworthy, unlovable sinners before God steps in with His grace.
4. You are no more worthy of love than that other Christian whom you refuse to love.

B. Why is it important for us to love one another?

1. Because the **people** around us **need that love**, and they need to hear of us speak of that love.
2. I have a male friend, a man happily married, a man who has no societal or sexual hang ups, who quite often says to me, *“I love you, brother.”* And you know what?
3. My heart feasts on that statement. And I am no more emotionally dysfunctional than he is.

C. The other day I was with a Christian man who for years was a way from the Lord, living somewhat like Jonah and experiencing his own whale. Like Jonah he has come safely out the other side.

1. After a pleasant hour of conversation, and we were starting to go our separate ways, I said to him in all sincerity, *“I love you, brother.”*
2. I’m not sure that he has heard those words in a very long time, except from his wife and kids.
3. He was caught off guard, but after a moment’s hesitation I could see what I said meant something to him.
4. There are people out there. There are thousands of people out there who need to know they are loved.
5. And who is going to do it if God’s people don’t?
6. How they going to hear those words if we don’t sincerely speak them?

D. And by the way, you and I **need to share** that love as much as we **need to receive** that love.

1. Like an athlete working a specific set of muscles to get better, we need to exercise this special muscle.
2. The heart is a muscle, and the better shape it is, the better our general health will be.
3. And extending that illustration, the stronger our heart becomes the more onward progress we will make.
4. Love is part of the pavement we need in order to find our way into the throne room of the Lord.

E. And just in passing, just because Peter is talking about brotherly love, he isn’t forbidding enemy love.

1. Love is an unlimited commodity. We will not run out simply because we are loving more and more people.
2. Without neglecting the lover of the brethren, love that lost man as well.

VI. Going back to the brethren, *“for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.”*

A. Here is another in a series of recent statements which has the potential to lead into serious false doctrine.

1. I can just hear some heretic telling his congregation that if they love one another sufficiently they will endear themselves to God and encouraging Him to eventually take them to Heaven.
2. But that is not what Peter is saying.
3. The sins which are covered are not our own, but those of the person we love.
4. And it has nothing to do with salvation from those sins.

B. Why do marriages dissolve?

1. The hundreds of specifics can be merged into a very few generalizations.
2. And one is the clash between a great love for oneself and a lack of fervent love for one's spouse.
3. Where there is true love, there will be the means of covering a multitude of sins.
 - a. Yes, your spouse snores, and is half deaf, making you repeat every other sentence.
 - b. And there are a dozen other little habits which are like pin pricks on your soul.
 - c. But because you love your wife – your husband – you can live with all those little offences.
4. And the same thing can be said within a church context.
 - a. We all have our share of irritating idiosyncracies.
 - b. Where there is love, there is the ability to rise above them.
 - c. But in the absence of love, that church may explode some day.

C. Was Peter thinking of **Proverbs 10:12** when he wrote this verse?

1. *"Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all sins."*
2. Has anyone ever truly hated you? Then you know what the first part of this proverb is saying.
3. The person who hates you will find a multitude of reasons to stir up strife between you.
 - a. But then there was your mother. Didn't that wonderful woman truly love you?
 - b. That is the reason she stuck with you through all those rebellious years of yours.
4. **Love** is one of the few things in the world with the **consistency sufficient** to **cover** sin.
 - a. **Patience** might work for a while at covering sin, but it will become really thin after a while.
 - b. **Physical gratification** might also work for a short time making a marriage work, as will the piece of paper called a *"marriage certificate."*
 - c. But in actual fact, only strong love is thick enough, sticky enough, dark enough to cover your many sins.

D. I don't know if I am justified in pointing to the definite article in the last part of this verse, because it can't be specifically be found in the Greek.

1. But notice that our translators wrote: *"for charity shall cover **THE** multitude of sins."*
2. Doesn't that article, *"the,"* suggest that there is a specific multitude.
3. Isn't it true that the Lord knows about each and every one of them? Well, He may not be the only one.
4. I'm sure we all have someone who also would be happy to make an itemized list of all your transgressions.
5. Praise God for the blanket of love.

E. **Love is important** within a church context for a variety of reasons.

1. It should be something which **animates our prayers** for one another.
2. And – no pun intended – **love is charitable**.
3. Love loves to give to people, which is always beneficial within a church.
4. And love makes for a **very good glue**.
5. Notice the words, *"among yourselves"* – *"And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves."*
 - a. Love should be like a thread of gold, running this way and that way throughout the congregation.
 - b. As it is shared in one direction, it is picked up and sent in another direction.
 - c. Running and weaving, it binds together that congregation.
6. When love is present, there will be a congregation that rejoices with them who rejoice and weeps with those who are sad.

F. In the next few verses Peter talks about hospitality, and ministry, and support of people under persecution.

1. In their day, and in that context, those were important subjects, whether or not we think so today.
2. But before them he says *"love one another."*
3. *"Above ALL (other) things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."*