



1 Peter 1:22-25
Will You Live Forever?

22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away,

25 But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

What are the oldest living things on earth? Well many of you kids probably already know that the longest lived animals on earth are the Giant Tortoises of Madagascar. The oldest known Tortoise was a presented to the Tongan royal family by Captain James Cook in the late 1700's, the tortoise was either 188 or 192 years old at its death in 1965. But compared to some trees, even that old turtle was relative youngster.

For some time I had thought the oldest living things on earth were the Giant Sequoias, you know the Giant Redwood trees of California, they have one of them that is apparently over 3,000 years old. But as it turns out, it isn't the Sequoia either. It is an ugly stumpy little tree that only grows at high altitudes called the Bristlecone Pine Tree.

A researcher was taking a series of core samples from a group of them in the 1960s when he discovered one that was well over 4000 years. He felt sure here he had discovered the oldest living thing on earth. The ironic thing is, in order to confirm that, he obtained permission from the park service to cut it down, and sure enough found out that until he killed it, it had been the oldest living thing ever found at 4,950 years old. In this world having survived almost 5,000 years is no assurance that you'll be alive fifteen minutes from now. *Especially when there are researchers with grant money and chain saws about.*

I mention that to emphasize the point that Peter makes here, namely that ever thing born into this world of natural, corruptible seed dies. Even the oldest trees end up becoming dirt. And when it comes to the longevity of men, of course Peter doesn't make an analogy between men and trees or even men and turtles. He takes his analogy from chapter 40 of the book of Isaiah. We he says, are like flowers, something a comparison from the book of Isaiah, What does he compare us to? He compares us to flowers.

The seed germinates in the ground and they come up in the Spring, and then they bloom and they may look very pretty for a time, but after just a little while they lose their bloom and they all begin to

wither, the petals drop off, and the glory is gone, and then eventually even the stem of the plant that produced the flower wilts and dies.

That is what all men brought forth from corruptible seed are like, their lives are like the plant, and the flower is like all the fleeting fame, and glory, and physical beauty that the world can give. Here today, and gone tomorrow.

But Peter speaks to Christians as though that is not the case with them. As though they are not here today and gone tomorrow, but as though they live and abide forever. How can that be, when everything born of corruptible natural seed dies, Flowers, Trees, Tortoises and Men?

Because Christians he says are not merely born once of perishable seed, **they are born twice**. They are born once of corruptible seed naturally into this world, and then they are reborn, re-generated, *born again of incorruptible seed*. It is that second birth that is the key to eternal life, in fact without it no man will be saved, no man will become part of the kingdom of God, no man will enter heaven. As Paul puts it in 1 Cor. 15:50 corruption doesn't inherit incorruption. Jesus made exactly that point to Nicodemus in John 3 and I have no doubt that not only John but Peter were there to hear that blessed conversation, turn there with me would you:

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

So Christians are people who have been born again of the Spirit, it is God the Holy Spirit who regenerated them. But how does that happen? Is it random, people are just walking down the street and >kapow<, they are regenerated? No, Peter tells us that the means by which we are regenerated is the Word of God. Now that tells you that God's Word isn't just information, it is an immensely powerful thing. First it is God's truth, and it will endure forever.

Long after the preaching of the gospel is finished, and the last sermon has been delivered, the last saint gathered in, and brought together in the New Heavens and the New Earth, the Gospel will still abide. And that is because while all human works originate from a corruptible seed, the origin of the word of the Word of God is from above. The bible, is not the word of corruptible men, it is literally *Theopneustos – God Breathed, from which we get our word, inspired*. This word is the product of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, although God could regenerate men however He wishes, and indeed the Gospel shows us via the examples of children regenerated in the womb, such as John the Baptist, that he sometimes does. Yet He has ordained the preaching of this word as the ordinary means by which men are born again. The Gospel is preached, men are called to faith, and that call is accompanied by the mighty life giving power of the Holy Spirit, whereby the elect are effectually called to faith. You see it is not faith that precedes regeneration, as though men were required to believe before they were born again. Rather it is regeneration which comes first via the preaching of the word and that produces faith by which they are united to Christ and thus saved. I think of all the wonderful statements in the Westminster

Confession, my favorite is taken from chapter 14 verse 1, because it is a potent reminder to me of what an amazing thing I, a humble servant of God am involved with, as I preach the word and administer the sacraments according to Christ's command. ***“The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.”***

But how can you know that you have been born again for certain? It isn't external signs. After all plenty of men have been baptized and have clearly *not* been born again. Peter himself baptized Simon Magus who later tried to buy the miracle working power of the Holy Spirit, Peter said to Him: ***“Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.”***

If you have been born again, you have a new heart, you have what Simon Magus didn't, a heart that is right with God, and therefore a heart and soul has been purified by the Spirit and desires to obey the truth. That is whereas before you were born again you were at enmity with God – you hated Him – and couldn't obey His commands, and didn't really desire to, now you Love God and desire to Keep His Commandments. Now there are some people who maintain that you can be a Christian and refuse to obey His commandments, living a life that looks just like that of the natural, unregenerate man. Christ is their savior, but not their Lord they say. But Christ says ***“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”*** Good works aren't optional. They are the fruits and evidences of lively faith. If you don't have them it's because you don't have the true faith that produces them. You haven't been born again. Living fruit trees, produce fruit, ***it is only dead ones that don't!***

Now the single greatest fruit and evidence of the presence of the new birth, and the new heart, is precisely what Peter started these verses with. It is love. Love is not a quality that the natural man has much of, in fact the word tells us that the distinguishing characteristic of the worldly man is not so much love but hate:

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

Romans 1 speaking of the fallen nature of man includes this description of his general nature – ***“being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;”***

Now of course generally he denies this, “no, no, I am filled with love. I am always doing loving things. I don't do things for people because I want them to love me, I do them because I am just love, love, love.” ***I know that mindset first hand, because that was me,*** prior to being born again. I thank God that he opened my eyes and showed me how self-deluded I was, and how black my heart was, and how the vast majority of my love was merely love of self. To really love God and the brethren, the way that Peter speaks of love, is the result of being born again by the power of Him who loved us first. That is God. As Spurgeon put it: ***“See how this love of the brethren is linked on to regeneration. The first time we are born, we are born in sin, and that tends to hate, but when we are born again, born unto God, our life tends to love.”***

Jesus tells you that this Love for the brethren, is also not optional, it is his commandment, and again and again in the word, Christians are told to love one another, and that this is the sign of our new nature.

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Brothers and Sisters, the natural man can do the outward stuff, he can even learn the walk and the talk, but the hate tends to bleed through and if you look at the love you notice how phoney it is. He loves his friends, he loves others just as long as they love him. But that isn't Christian Love.

So here is our first application: The Christian Love we are called to is Unfeigned, sincere, not hypocritical. It must spring from our new nature, not what we see in others, just as the Love of God towards us did not spring from something he saw in us. Christian love cannot be, I'll love you IF you love me.

Now a mother loves her child, not because they are perfect, or because they are cute, or even because the love her. She loves them because there is a natural relationship between them. So to we ought to love the brethren because there is relationship between us, a spiritual relationship in Christ that is stronger than even blood bonds, and which endures not for a lifetime, but forever.

Peter will discuss this love 2 more times in this letter, but if you are ever looking for a definition of what our love for one another should look like, then the best place to look is Paul's summary in 1 Cor. 13:4-8

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails.

Finally, Here is my second Application: Perhaps you have never before considered your life as being like a flower that grows, blossoms, and dies all in one brief season. Perhaps you find the contemplation of that something you turn away from, even now you are saying I won't think on that, I would urge you think on it! Calvin said very well "***until their own emptiness has been shown to men, they are not prepared to receive the grace of God.***" I know that from my own experience, it wasn't until I saw myself as a corrupt creature with no hope of eternal life that I gave up fooling myself and fled to God for mercy. I hope you will too, I hope you heard this word of God today. It is a powerful thing, it alone has the power to convey that new birth to you. As Calvin put it "***it can confer on us what is real, solid, and eternal. .. there is no permanent life but in God, and ...this is communicated to us by the word. However fading, then, is the nature of man, yet he is made eternal by the word; for he is remoulded and becomes a new creature.***"

The greatest reason I can give you for believing in Jesus Christ and becoming a Christian is not that your life here will improve, it is not even that you will become part of a community that you will love and that will love you, the greatest reason to believe is that only then will you escape the judgment that is to come, and only then will have real, solid, and eternal life.