

1 Peter 1:21-25
Hope in the storm

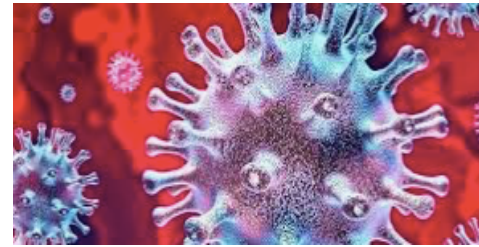
The Obvious Offspring of Imperishable Seed



First, an update and it is GREAT news! In two weeks this church raised enough money to get started on the new camera system! By the end of last Sunday morning we had over 8K! That is incredible, and I commend you for your vision and generosity! We will continue to need your contributions to this project as there are more needs to come to make it all work, expensive ones - but we believe it will be worth it in the end, as we will be reaching many we otherwise would not have reached with the Gospel of Jesus!



Secondly, the church board met this week to assess our situation as a church amid this continuing COVID pandemic. We are continually reassessing how we can do church during this time while doing our best at protecting the most vulnerable among us. We decided upon one change in our second service. We are loosening things up a bit. The second service will be mask-optional starting next week. But for that service we will also divide the church down the middle. Those who choose to attend without masks will be seated on the north side of the church, and those with masks on the south half. Those with masks can actually sit anywhere but there is not much benefit to wearing a mask if you are sitting right near people that aren't. So, anyway, make a note of that,.. and spread the word. Just remember that if you₂ are feeling off in any way, keep it at home.



My garden has gone crazy this year! No brag, just fact! It is a beautiful thing to care for the handiwork of our Creator/God in this small manner! Even the weeding of the garden is cathartic for me as with a little work and sweat, I can control something in a world that has quickly spun out of control – at least to all appearances. But my garden has sprung up so quickly this year, and ***grew*** so quickly, that I have been harvesting produce out of it for 3 weeks already! This past week I harvested large quantities of peas, beans, Swiss chard, zucchini, cucumbers, beets and beet greens, some tomatoes are ripening already – it is so exciting for me to see this natural phenomenon happen before my eyes, even though it happens summer after summer! But this year is a ***banner*** year! Anyway, I decided a few years ago that when I grow beans, they will be purple beans. The reason is that they are simply more easy to see when I am rummaging around in all that leafy growth try to find mature beans to harvest. So, the purple color stands out better for harvesting purposes, and then low and behold, when you cook them, the purple color just vanishes and they turn green right there in the cooking pot! What is so great about them is that at harvest time, they are easily seen!



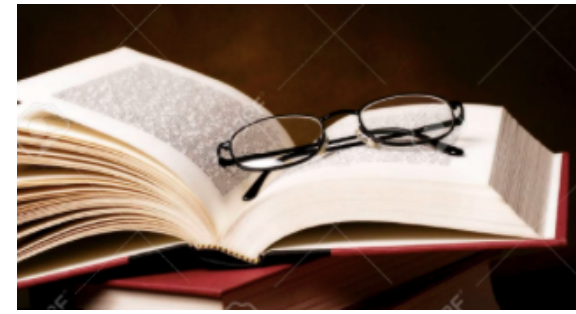
When we follow Jesus, there is visible fruit. He is the Master Gardener and His followers are the fruit of his labors. His desire is to establish little pockets of unspoiled Eden that resemble the paradise on earth that He had begun with, where He had originally walked with and conversed with the first man, Adam, in the cool of the morning. Jesus said that His followers must be born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable! He was referring to the supernatural event – a transition that occurs when a person decides to switch sides, from the world system to that of their Creator. The world system opposes the Creator at every turn, and abuses the Creator-given gift of free will and intellect to oppose and offend Him energetically in every nook and cranny scattered across the entire face of this sorry planet – from the seats of power to the homelife of the average human being!

In the midst of this foul human cesspool of ugly strife - of enmity, hatred, of unseemly lusts and unbridled appetites, and because of it, relationships in perpetual turmoil swimming in a heaving sea of betrayal! And within this mess are those individuals in whom the Creator/God has done a miracle – the miracle of the new birth! When a person surrenders to the Lord Jesus Christ by deciding to switch sides, and when they give Jesus their heart, their allegiance, their devotion, as well as their life energies in serving His purposes on this earth - *a miracle has transpired!* In the same way that our loyalties have switched over to Jesus, the me-centered life switches around and becomes *outwardly* focused! We seek to channel the love of Jesus to those around us, beginning with our spouse and children and spreading out to all those around us - even our enemies! Simultaneously, as the main manifestation of that love, we seek to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus (what the living Christ has done for us), and we seek to share this good news with people that do not know Him and that do not know how desperately they need Him! But Jesus Himself said that this would be a visible change in the lives of His true followers. He said “*By this will all men know you are my disciples, if you love one another*”! The obvious implication in those words of Christ is that the new growth following the new birth would be *obvious* fruit! Such fruit does not blend in with its surroundings! People’s eyes are drawn to it like the stars in the universal sky, and they immediately recognize someone who manifests the beautiful fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace,..! Jesus and the apostles are forever imploring us to keep growing into who He has made, or re-made, us to be! And who is He making us into? Just like original creation - *into His own image* – the image of Christ! We are to *BE* like Jesus! Not just look like Him in some superficial way – paying attention to appearances. No! We are to learn think, feel, process, act and react like Jesus.



[Ph’p 2:14-16a]

This does not normally just come to us. The Holy Spirit works through His word when we read and meditate upon it and He makes into that surgical sword that cuts to the bone and marrow – that gets to the heart of the personal issues – the sins and destructive personality flaws that are getting in the way of the new creation – made in the image of Christ - that God is trying to implement in our lives. Then the Spirit of God works to help us when we are willingly and eager to apply what we've learned to who and what He is making us into, and we apply it to our everyday life experiences. It requires learning, and learning only happens when the Christ-follower *applies* themselves to learning! So we apply ourselves first to reading the word of God, and then to studying it. *I study while I read. If I'm reading through the Bible and I run into a question, I don't hesitate to pursue the answer. It may take the rest of my devotional time, but by the time I have looked up two, or even *ten* cross references, my soul is enriched as if I had just kept reading – in fact more so – because I have meditated on something where it benefitted me to know more about what God's word says about it. Then if there is still a question, I can ask someone who I know knows more than me – and whose opinion I respect. It might be a scholar in a book, or an elder in your church. But learning is meditating. You will not learn what the new creation looks like unless and until you apply yourself to learning what the image of Christ looks like in your own life! It does not happen intuitively. Like I have said many times now. Christianity is cerebral. We have to learn things to know them. So let's be real for a moment. If you have little interest in learning and growing in your faith, then your claim to be a Christ-follower is mere words! Then you just want heaven and to avoid hell when you die, and you want God to basically leave you alone and *not* do His re-creative work in you, then you have a problem with God. Only He knows if you are saved, but you might be deceiving yourself! So I would counsel any would-be Christ-follower to actually follow Jesus – to apply yourself to learning and to cooperating with the Holy Spirit's effort to remake you in the image of Jesus and to enlist you in the army of recruits that are out there telling the world that Jesus is alive and that they need Him!



So, our text this morning makes this clear – the apostolic expectation and admonition is that the Christ-follower must bear fruit in the Kingdom of God and that it be **obvious** fruit – that it show up like purple fruit in a sea of green! How do I know that? Well, because He names the king of the spiritual fruits – LOVE! Love is what Jesus said would ID his followers. It was the object of His one and only law. *“A new command I give you that you love each other”*, Jesus said. The apostle Paul concludes his famous love chapter, 1 Cor. 13, with the statement that the greatest of the the three biggies – faith, hope, and love, is LOVE! Love is the foundation of all the other fruits of the Spirit. So then Peter confirms this New Testament emphasis in our text for this morning. First, **vs 22** He says that Christ-followers are *“obeying the truth - so that you have love for each other”*. Obedience to what you know regarding the will of God. He confirms that he has seen people acting lovingly toward each other. But then he goes ahead and tells them to **love more deeply**. Their love cannot remain at a superficial/surfac-y level! It must go deeper - and to go deeper is to give more of yourself! If you are already committed to love Jesus with all your heart, soul, and mind, this is not a hard thing! This is simply the reaping of a bountiful harvest spilling over from our life to theirs – an overflow of the love that the Holy Spirit has given us for people - **all** people! The Spirit makes us a blessing of love to whomever we are with! Our conversations bless people, our demeanor is kindness and good humor personified! Our heart is pure toward people! We are not saying nice things to someone’s face and at the same time silently thinking bad thoughts about them! We are not supporting them to their face and running them down behind their backs! Our love for them is not an act! It is simply who we are in Christ being visible! / Can you say that about yourself? If not, do you know that that is where you are going next in your walk with Christ – and without delay?!



Vs. 23 – “... *born of imperishable seed*”. This word “*seed*” here is an unabashed reference to DNA – to the semen of a man. The human DNA of a man is combined with the human DNA of a woman, and the combination contains all the genetic information and building blocks it needs to build a human individual! The combination produces a **zygote** – the first cell, and this cell then divides and multiplies again and again until a little human takes shape. But the moment this baby begins to live and take shape, the clock starts the countdown. The clump of cells grows into a child, the child grows up, lives and gains its adult powers mentally and physically, which it enjoys for a few decades and then as quickly as that individual grew up, it begins to grow down in a rather rapid decline in the personal powers he or she has built up over the years! So there is this descent in mental and/or physical health - until the body cannot sustain life any longer – and then the person dies and is gone from the earth! Over and over and over again this cycle has happened for all these generations since creation. No one has escaped the life and death cycle unless the Creator God has chosen to take them before death and that has only happened less than a handful of times that we know of – Elijah, Enoch, and perhaps there is a weak case for Melchizedek!



But, when a person is “born again”, Peter is emphasizing it is a different kind of birth! The Creator/God adds **ETERNITY** to our lives in the second birth! It is not a physical birth - but the spirit, the mind, and the soul enters into the supernatural transformation process that I spoke of earlier! We grow up into both the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and into His character/personality traits. Then, throughout that learning process, we take on and apply ourselves His mission to add the souls around us that are in the “lost” column to the “won” column, starting with the new birth! Then everything about this new life of the soul is endowed with permanence! “... *but the word of the Lord stands forever*”! Know that when you deny yourself, “*take up your cross*”, and live your new life for Jesus, it will pay off in a life that will not end in death, but only in more life – but not just existence, but in the exuberant joy of seeing God and being accepted and loved by Him!

Jesus – **[John 11:25]**

Listen, Peter is reminding us that when we deny ourselves to follow Jesus we lose nothing that we will not lose anyway, and instead gain everything that will accompany us into eternity! They say “*you can’t take it with...* ”..