

PURIFIED UNTIL WE LOVE LIKE BROTHERS

Part 4: Strangers to war

1 Peter 2:11-12

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Introduction

I hate mushrooms.
 I know some of you like them.
 Cheryl likes them, but I think they are nasty.
 Well, I went to that new Chinese buffet that opened up in Langley Square
 and it's amazing!
 It's got everything you would expect from a Chinese restaurant --
 plus: sushi, steak, ham, a grill, a chocolate fountain, and
 those dreaded, foul, slimy, gross, disgusting ... mushrooms.
 But with so many good things to eat,
 I was able to avoid the mushrooms.
 If someone puts mushrooms in my food,
 I'll pick them out and lay them aside for Cheryl to eat.
 If all I had to eat were mushrooms,
 if it was "mushrooms, or starve," I would eat mushrooms.
 But when there are other things to choose
 I'm staying away from the mushrooms.

Similarly, the advice we received from Peter two weeks ago:

1 Peter 2:1-3

1Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander
 of every kind.

is easy to accomplish when you have a better choice

2Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk,
 so that by it you may grow up in your salvation

Today we are going to return to 1 Peter
 and it's call on us to be purified until we love like brothers.
 So let's get ready to hear how God wants to feed us today

I. Holiness is measured in our love for each other

As I come downstairs each morning
I look at the device that measures the temperature,
and I evaluate how I have to dress that day.
Down in the kitchen I measure out a little bit of milk to put in my cereal.
After breakfast I like to get on my bike.
I reset the device that measures how far I rode the day before
and start riding again.

After my morning ride,
my routine involves some imprecise measurements:
I squirt some shaving lotion into my hand,
but don't pay attention to how much I have.
I pour some shampoo into my hand, and again
don't pay much attention to how much I have,
I just know I don't need as much as I used to need.
I'll turn the news on while I'm getting dressed
and hear how the economy is doing, as measured by the Dow Jones,
how the war in Afghanistan is doing, as measured in bodies,
and how far Rt. 64 is backed up, as measured in hours.
After the shower I look in my calendar to measure how far I will be
behind by the end of the day.

Once I'm in the car
I write down some measurements of how far I drove the day before,
look at the gauges to measure my fuel supply, and pull into traffic.
Soon I check the sign at the Mercy Seat Baptist church
and compare its measurement of the temperature
with what my car is measuring... they never match.
As I continue to drive I occasionally use that device that measures
how fast I'm going.
Usually I'm more concerned with the device that measures how late I'm
going to be if I don't drive faster,
and like many of you I take all those measurements before 9 AM

but so few of them have anything to do with

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the most important thing in our lives:

God's call for us to become like him

1 Peter 1:16 ... "Be holy, because I am holy."

I have a thermometer to measure the temperature,
 cups to measure milk,
 an odometer to measure the length of my bike ride,
 a calendar to measure the business of my day,
 a gauge to measure the pressure of the oil in my engine, and
 the Hampton police have a device to measure my speed on Marcella Rd.
 But how do we measure holiness?

It's an important question because we are called to holiness
 therefore we need to be able to know when we've attained it.

Some of us grew up in a church that said holiness was
 measured in men by -- not wearing shorts, long hair, or jewelry.

They said holiness in women could be measured by:
 not wearing pants, makeup, jewelry, short hair, colored hair,
 pig tails, hair ribbons, hair clips, or red dresses.

(I'm not sure why the list for women was longer than the list for me,
 except of course, the list for women was made by men.)

Sometimes we were told holiness was measured by
 not watching TV, not going to the movies, not dancing, not playing pool,
 not smoking, drinking, doing drugs, and
 a whole long list of other no-no's.

To sum it all up, holiness was measured by a long list of do's and don'ts.

So if you did the do's

and didn't do the don'ts ... you were considered "holy."

This resulted in people who, without grace,

would say the cruelest things and act in the most condemning ways

towards anyone who did not comply with their measurement of holiness.

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Let's look at how the Bible measures holiness

1 Peter 1:22

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Temperature is measured in Fahrenheit.

Distance is measured in miles.

Money is measured in dollars.

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The depth of our holiness can be measured by the depth of our love for others who also are trying to attain holiness.

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Measure the feelings Peter has for those to whom he sent this letter:

11 Dear friends,

These two words at the start of this passage are like an envelope sprayed with perfume...

you know it didn't come from the IRS, a bill collector, or someone who's going to sue you.

When I was taking metal shop in the 8th grade

I had a way of measuring how upset the shop teacher was.

He used a certain term to let us know he was angry.

If I heard him call out "Carnahan,"

I knew what he would say next was routine such as

"Carnahan, you can't weld aluminum."

But if the word "Carnahan," or "Collins," or "Koppenhafer"

was followed by the word "jughead,"

I knew the next interaction was not going to be positive.

We know this letter is going to be good news because the words

Peter uses at the start of this paragraph signals something good.

He doesn't say – "Hey jugheads..."

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II. Becoming a stranger

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world...

This is the second time he used that word "strangers."

We saw it the first time in *1:1*

If you remember when we dealt with this concept a few weeks ago
 “stranger” simply means “foreigner.”

But that word “aliens...” that’s trouble.

I remember the first time I saw that word on a poster in the Post Office.
 I was about eight years old and the popular TV shows at that time were

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Lost in Space, and My Favorite Martian

Shows about aliens from other planets.

If you are so young to not have had the benefit of watching TV during
 the 1960’s back when TV was worth watching,

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just think of **Alf, 3rd Rock from the Sun, or Men in Black**

and you’ll have the same mind set I had

when I walked into that post office.

The sign said “Aliens must report.”

At first I was surprised to find out the government believed

there really were little green men among us,

then I reasoned they were just trying to cover their bases;

sort of like “We really don’t believe there are people from other planets,

but just in case there are, and you’re one of them,

you need to turn yourself in.

My eight year old mind reasoned

“That’s ridiculous. Real aliens try to hide the fact that they are aliens.

Sure it might be illegal but

Uncle Martin is just not going to turn himself in.

My older brother had to explain what the government meant by “alien.”

The people who read this letter the first time
 didn’t need any explanation.

The persecution of Christians had forced them out of Jerusalem

so they were living as aliens in foreign Asian cities.

So with these words, the Bible relates to us, now, here because
 the unique thing about Hampton Roads is
 how many people here are not from here.

When we did that impromptu survey the other week I noticed
there are as many people here who are not from here
as there are people here who are from here.

So we relate to this passage that calls us “strangers”
I’ve lived so many places; I’ve been a stranger all my life.
But that’s not all Peter’s talking about.

He’s talking to his dear friends about holiness and
the holiness is measured by our obedience to the call to
1 Peter 1:22

love one another deeply, from the heart.
and that may be strange to other people.

I remember my high school friends discovering
how often I went to church...

Back then it was

9:00 Sunday school,

11:00 worship,

lunch together,

5:00 NYPS

6:00 Evening worship

and Wednesday night it was

7:00 for Prayer meeting or youth group

8:00 choir practice

Thursday night we got together for softball

Friday night there was some kind of fellowship.

My high school friends were stupefied that anyone would go to
church that much.

One friend asked if my parents were trying to “force religion on me.”

They could not understand.

It seemed strange to them, and that was a good thing.

We’re not supposed to fit in.

We’re not supposed to conform.

We can be visibly different from the rest of the culture.

The guys in high school who thought the amount of time

I spent at church did not understand -- my best friends were at church.
 I didn't mind going to church so much because it was at church
 I got to be with David, Larry, Doug, and Donna.

We who follow Jesus as Lord,
 are strangers to this society who does not respond to his call
 to a holiness that's measured in love.
 We're aliens in this world that measures success by how much
 stuff they have for themselves.
 We don't fit in, and that's the way it's supposed to be.
 It's good if we are strange to a world that only loves self.
 It's right if we are alien to a world that doesn't love those around them.
 Outsiders might think it strange, but it's compelling and
 the stranger it is, the more the world will want in.

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That's why the Bible tells us

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that,
 though they accuse you of doing wrong...

The first part of this verse should be easy to understand:
 We don't use the "term" pagan too much anymore.
 Yet I think you understand it refers to people who are either
 "non-believers" or are hostile to believers.
 To follow Jesus is to be concerned with the impact
 our lives have on such people.
 Because how we live says so much more than what we say.

Christians were suspect in Peter's day.

Their culture believed the safety and prosperity of the community
 depended on the worship of the many gods who supposedly
 ruled over these things.

For example:

They believed Jupiter was the god of rain, thunder and lightning.
 Since the Christians would not pray to Jupiter
 the rest of the community accused them of causing famine.

In America today we are not dealing with people who
 believe our failure to pray to the rain God is doing wrong.

But there has been so much media coverage on the sins of a few people
it has left the impression that all pastors are pedophiles,
all church trustees are embezzlers,
all evangelists are con artists.

In another church my office secretary told me her husband's friends
couldn't believe he would let her work in a church!

They felt he was putting her at risk because
all they knew about Christians was what they saw on TV.

Our call is to a love for each other that is
measurable to people are not yet a part of us.

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The followers of Jesus are tasked with living such good lives
they may see your good deeds and glorify God ...

Notice they the Bible is not concerned with what they hear from us.

It's more concerned with what they see in us.

The easiest way for the world to measure the value of Christianity
is through the condition of our relationship to other believers.

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Jesus said

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:35

It's difficult to measure someone's love for God.

But relatively simple to measure our love for each other.

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III. The war against your soul

I have enjoyed history all my life.

My parents were interested in it,
so family vacations often included trips to battlefields.



So here I am with my father,
Cheryl's father and two good friends at Gettysburg National Battlefield.

Which may be the most tragic site in America.
 Sure, 9/11 ground zero is tragic because so many people were killed
 I think Gettysburg is more tragic,
 not just because of the 46,000 casualties,

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but because the battle was between us.

The Gettysburg Church of the Nazarene
 sits on the edge of the battlefield.
 Recently, they changed their name to Gettysburg “Harvest Field COTN.”
 I suppose because they didn’t want people to think
 the church was a battlefield.

(There is a “Battlefield Church of the Nazarene” in Georgia.)

Concerned that the church might become an actual battlefield
 Peter gives some instruction to his dear friends
 that will help them avoid the battle.

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11 ... abstain from sinful desires...

As soon as we see the that phrase we instantly think of
 the kind of sexual immorality that impedes spiritual progress.
 But that’s not the context of this letter.
 You can be left wondering which sinful desires he’s referring to.

It reminds me of the pastor I had years ago.
 He was a gruff guy who needed to read Philippians a few more times.
 Whenever he would pass by the teens
 he would stick his head in the door and demand they “knock it off.”
 But he never specified what “it” was.
 It was like those report cards some of us used to receive which said
 “needs improvement,”
 but never specified what needed improvement.

If we look at verse 11-12 alone
 it appear like Peter is doing the same thing.
 It looks like he is telling us to “abstain” without telling us

from what we should abstain.

To make sense all we have to do is connect v. 11 to the context of what Peter has already said:

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1 Peter 2:1

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

Two weeks ago, we took the time to explain each of these sins.

If you missed it, let me know and I'll make a copy for you.

Today we need to see the "sinful desires" within the context of this letter are those sinful desires that ignite war within the community of dear friends.

The advice Peter gives his dear friends is to "abstain from those sins" which turn the church into a battlefield.

Last week I mentioned the pork chops I made.

Cheryl didn't have any because for some reason, she cannot digest pork. No pork chops, no pork loin, no bacon, no sausage, no ham sandwiches. If she eats them, she's going to get sick, so she "abstains."

If we are going to love each other deeply we need to have the same attitude towards sinful desires that war against community as Cheryl has with pork, and I have with mushrooms:

Not "watch it..." abstain.

Don't just "cut back..." abstain - don't have any.

If it's in v. 1 it should not be in our lives.

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If you are one of those intelligent people who can read ahead you'll notice Peter's reason for calling for this abstinence doesn't seem impact on their community.

It seems to have more to do with the impact on the individual and that's why he uses the phrase *which war against your soul*.

You might think –

he doesn't say "sinful desires war against the community,"

he says war against *your soul*, and that's personal because my soul is my business, your soul is your business, and what each of us do to our own souls has nothing to do with how it affects each other."

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Don't fool yourself.

Sinful actions make war against the soul because they destroy your ability to relate well to other people.

In all of history there's not been a divorce, busted up business, or divided church that didn't begin with someone's sinful desires. A battle within anyone will always result in a battle with others. The solution for conflict in any relationship is a result of a resolution of the conflicts within us.

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We are unashamedly trying to create opportunities to improve the loving relationships within this church.

But those opportunities cannot create the kind of holiness that can be measured by our love for each other.

For all the good it does the café will not improve relationships if sinful desires get in the way of those relationships.

We'll have the super bowl party this Sunday, and the all church Valentine's pot luck next Sunday.

Those events are opportunities for people to show their love each other but they will not create love between people.

All the events in the world will not cause us to love each other If it's not in our hearts to love each other then more time together just breeds more contempt.

Over and over the Bible warns us, the problems we face are not external.

Our biggest battles are internal.

As long as our hearts are messed up we will never be able to fulfill the command to

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1 Peter 1:22

... have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

**If there are issues inside of people,
there will always be issues between people.**

This is why the scripture calls us to “purify ourselves”

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**The ability to love one another deeply
is a result of the process of purification which goes on to eliminate
any attitude or action which makes war against our soul.**

When you don't understand that --
you keep looking for your relationships to improve
by waiting for the other person to change.
But you have no power to change the other person
so nothing changes.

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Here's

IV. The good news

Lights: begin to fade here

Hebrews 1:3

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Piano begins here

The purification necessary for the health of your relationships
has already been provided.

The purification necessary for the health of your relationships
is already available!

I'm not saying love is impossible unless we have our hearts purified by
the Holy Spirit.

I am saying that when our hearts are pure, it's impossible not to love.

If our hearts are messed up, love is impossible.

If our hearts are right, love is inevitable.

and we can be purified until we love like brothers.

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PRAYER/RESPONSE

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5. I GIVE YOU MY HEART (DVD) - *start when piano ends*

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Epilogue

When I go see someone in the hospital,
and people from our church are already there –
your love for each other is measurable.

When we have a quiz event, and you volunteer to cook and clean up
your love for each other is measurable.

and people are already praying for each other,
your love is measurable.

When you arrive early on Sundays and Wednesdays,
just to have more time with each other,
then cut your time in the café short
so you can be with people who are praying at the altar.
your love is measurable.

When you volunteer to sign cards for absentees,
your love is measurable.

When somebody does something you don't appreciate,
and you show them more grace than they showed you,
your love is measurable.

When you take a turn in the nursery,
your love is measurable.

When you get on the prayer chain,
not because you want the latest gossip,
but because you enjoy praying for other people,
your love is measurable.

When you participate in a small group,
because of the people in that small group
your love is measurable.

When you contribute financially, joyfully because

you know it's helping the youth program
 your love is measurable,
 and when your love for each other is measurable,
 your holiness is measurable.

Holiness is measured in the love we have for each other.

Robert is coming to give us the announcements about
 events coming up in the life of our church

I hope you see these announcements as opportunities
 to love each other.

Sources

AB

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