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**The Family** by Ben S.

**We are Family:** As elect believers we are called to live life in our new identity in Christ. We are to be a people of hope and holiness, a separated, treasured people. There are two ways to live out our new identity: "love one another" and "feed on God's word". No one will come to the end of their Christian life regretting that they spent too much time loving their fellow Christian or reading God's word because God's family and his word go on together into eternity.

**Keep loving your Church Family:** "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart." (1Peter 1:22) Peter is writing to people who heard the gospel and obeyed the word by coming to Jesus. We are cleansed from our sins for sincere and genuine love for the Christians family here and all around the world. We are not to put on a mask when we come to church. But I see you all have one on! This is completely different. We are not to put on a mask of hypocrisy. We are not to pretend we are so pious when we have no genuine affection for the people sitting around us. The church is a family of believers who love one another. We are not founded on numbers and size but the quality of our relationships. People will know that we are disciples of Jesus by our love for one another.

**Why should we work hard at loving one another?** "You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. "All people are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." (1Peter 1:23) You exist physically today because your father's seed came together with your mother's egg and a new life was conceived and born nine months later. Isaiah was right when he wrote that all flesh is as grass. (Isaiah 40:6) We wither so quickly and return to the dust. We perish because we are of perishable seed. But what happens when we are spiritually reborn? The good news of Jesus is the imperishable seed, the enduring word of God. Someone was kind enough to share that gospel with you. By the power of the Holy Spirit the seed of the gospel penetrated your heart where it conceived this indestructible, spiritual eternal life within you. You were saved, born again and were given faith in Jesus Christ, the one who said, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." So Peter concludes this is why you should show sincere brotherly love to one another because we are born again into the family of God. We are family, related to each other for eternity. So, sorry about that. You've got me as your brother in Christ for ever. It could be worse. I've got you as my brothers and sisters in Christ for ever! [cheeky grin] Therefore, "Little children, love one another". "Love is the most excellent way."

**Things that hinder love 1Peter 2:1:** One: pluck out malice. Confess it and ask for forgiveness and grace to love. We are not to be mean or hateful and hostile. There is no place for malice in the church family. Two: get rid of deceit. There is no place for lying or half-truths and manipulative words in your life as a child of God: no subtle digs to make your point. We need to keep confessing our sins when we lie. We are to speak the truth in love to one another with a deep desire for wholeness for others people. We don't want to bring them down. Three: Peter says take off hypocrisy.

(see above.) Four: Get rid of envy. Pluck out and confess the weed of jealousy. If you envy someone you are not going to send them messages of encouragement or offer them help; but that person needs your love and care and you need theirs. "Love does not envy." This is a serious thing. Get rid of it. Five: Peter says to take off slander. Our church family is not to be a place where we put people down, gossip, back-bite or talk about people behind their back even if we disguise our comments in a subtle way. Get rid of slander by confession and the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Is the Holy spirit convicting you?** Which one of these things do you need to confess to the Lord Jesus? What do you need to confess and ask for his help to grow in grace and love? This is a challenge to us at this time of coronavirus. There is a number of extra challenges which make it harder to love each other sincerely and deeply. There are ways to overcome difficulties like social distancing: a chat on the doorstep, a walk in the park, a message or a phone call. The pandemic has caused all of us to lose some confidence. There is more anxiety in everyday life. Many of us feel sad because we grieve for the old ways. The regulations make some of us feel frustrated and irritated. Remember being born again heals anxieties and loneliness, bad tempers, anger, and our lack of love. We have support for the extra burdens of work and family life.

**Keep feeding on God's good word.** "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." (1 Peter 2:2) Babies instinctively know that milk is good to nourish them. If they don't get it the whole world will know about it! As children of God we are to be just like that when it comes to God's word. As we look for Jesus in God's word and feed on the bread of life by faith we are nourished and strengthened. The word of God is alive and active. It makes a difference in our lives because it 'thoroughly equips us for every good work.' The message of the Bible endures for ever. It is always relevant to everyone across the world unlike old textbooks that are soon out of date. Pray that God will give you an appetite for the word. As you read the word, and look for Jesus, his goodness and grace you will begin to crave it more. If it's hard it may help to try to remember those passages in the Bible where you first tasted the goodness of God. Maybe you have an old Bible with underlinings you can reread and be reminded of God's goodness in the past.

The word Peter uses for 'good' in verse 3 means kind, loving, generous and easy. It's the same word that Jesus used when he said his yoke is 'easy'. His yoke is like lifejacket rather than the burden of the law. 'Jesus has done everything for me so I come to him and unburden myself and find rest for my weary soul.' Have you tasted the goodness of the Lord? Ultimately the message of the Bible is about what Jesus has done for you, not what you do for him. It's about how he saved you by his grace, not how you have to make yourself acceptable to him. It's such a good message. It tastes so good. It is so nourishing. So as a church family, let's drink deeply of the good word of God together because we have tasted the goodness of Jesus. As a church let us love one another sincerely, deeply, because we have been born again into the family of God.