

Building Your Christian Life Pt. 3
Brotherly Kindness and Love

2 Peter 1:7 (06/01/14)

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Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 2 Peter 1:5-7

This passage calls for careful self-examination. Patrick Morley, in his fine book *Man in the Mirror*, tells this story to warn us of living an unexamined life. Mr. Samuel Scudder went to Harvard University around 1859 to study under the great naturalist Professor Louis Agassiz. This Professor had a unique teaching method. The day Mr. Scudder showed up to study fish, the professor asked when he'd like to begin. "Now." So the prof pulled a jar off the shelf preserving a fish. "Take this fish, look at it, and after a while I will ask you what you have seen." Professor Agassiz left the room and Mr. Scudder began looking at the fish. After about ten minutes he thought he'd seen everything, so he went looking for his professor. Mr. Agassiz couldn't be found, so he went back and looked at the fish some more, turning it all around, looking at it in every direction. Finally it was lunch time. When he returned to the laboratory he learned the professor wouldn't be back for several hours. So he pulled out that dreadful fish again. He pushed his finger down its throat, felt the teeth, counted the rows of scales. In desperation he took a pencil and began to draw the fish. Finally the good professor returned and asked him what the fish was like. Poor Mr. Scudder told him all he had learned, waited, and then this famous naturalist said, "You have not looked very carefully. Look again, look again." "What should I do next?" "Oh, look at your fish!" For three long days the student examined that fish. "Look, look, look," urged the Professor. Scudder later concluded this was the best lesson he ever received for a career in entomology and paleontology.

Look at the fish. Look at your life. The Bible calls us to examine ourselves. Lamentation 3:40 says, "Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord." Psalm 139:23-24 calls to God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

Look at your life. We're not talking about morbid introspection, but the importance of prayerfully and thoughtfully bringing your heart and life before God. First, do you truly have a genuine faith in Christ? That's the foundation. Do you honestly believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to this world to bear the wrath of God your sin deserves? To miss this is to miss everything. Then, how's your moral excellence? Are you committed to integrity and honesty? How's your knowledge? Are you growing in greater and greater understanding of the Word, of discernment? Look at the fish; look at your life. How's your self-control? Are you keeping your tongue, your time, your habits, your work, your finances, your emotions and desires and reactions under the control of God's Spirit? What about your endurance? Are you sticking with your commitments, even when you don't feel like it? Are you seeing God in your trials and setbacks, living out Romans 8:28-29? And your godliness, are you growing in godliness, or are there serious cracks in the wall? Is godliness a daily discipline of walking with God, knowing God's eye is on you and He loves you and you will give account to Him? Examine yourself and then go to the cross because I can assure you, we all fall way short in these qualities and we need forgiveness and encouragement in Christ. We are so glad we are saved by faith alone and not by our growth, but we have to remember, true, God-given faith in Christ always leads to sanctification or spiritual growth. You've got the life of God in you and you will be growing, progressively and aggressively, applying all diligence!

Now we come to the last two, and what a couple of amazing qualities these are. Up to now God's been dealing with our personal lives, but now we are to diligently add love: brotherly love and agape love. God created us for relationship! Adam and Eve were to love God and love each other. That's it! No sooner had they sinned and Adam is blaming his wife. Where's the love in that? Sin blasted love like a nuclear bomb, and you have hatred and revenge and spite throughout history right down to today's newsfeed.

This is where the Genesis 3 world and our fallen nature reveal itself the most. People leave a path of relational misery. Bitterness, grudges, rejection, abuse, hurting litter the landscape. "I can't stand her." "I demand respect." "I will make you obey me if it's the last thing I do." Rage, anger, conflict. Sin destroys relationships on every level. We're watching the tragedies of war and hatred unfold daily in the Ukraine, Syria, the Sudan, Nigeria, Pakistan. A young man in California, so filled with self-serving rage and intense self-love, murders girls because they won't pay attention to him. Class envy and hatred are stirred by popular voices.

Karl Marx called for forceful suppression to bring about his New Man. Stalin applied Marxism to his own nation and ruled by the barrel of a gun. "Shoot him" was the solution to political and relational problems, costing the lives of millions.

Here comes Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with two commands: love God and love your neighbor, even if he's your enemy! You simply can't over-express the genius, the wisdom, the perfection of God's redeeming plan for mankind. Love God and love your neighbor, even if he's your enemy. So let's look at these last two and try to apply them as personally as possible.

Brotherly love – you are part of the family of God and therefore you are to care for your brothers and sisters in the family.

We are children of the same Father, servants of the same Master, members of the same family, travelers to the same country, and heirs of the same inheritance! (Matthew Henry) We're going to live together forever! There's that sad line, "O to be there with the saints that we love, that will be glory. But to live here with the saints that we know, that's a different story!" And it's not all that easy to get along down here with all our idiosyncrasies and weirdness. Brotherly love doesn't mean there won't be differences among God's people. In Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement about taking along John Mark. Paul went his way and Barnabas his. Martin Luther rejected unity with Zwingli over one point about the Lords Table and fractured the Reformation permanently. John Wesley said some harsh things against Whitefield's views on divine sovereignty, but Wesley preached Whitefield's memorial sermon in 1770, giving him high praise! Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott disagreed sharply over the basis of church unity, but John Stott was gracious enough to say Lloyd-Jones was among the seven most important men in his life.

God puts a premium on brotherly love and we're to diligently pursue it. 1 Peter 1:22, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." What is brotherly love? It's friendship glued together by our mutual faith in Christ. If you truly know the Lord, you're my brother or sister and I need to practice brotherly kindness. This is why the local church is so important, because it's as you get to know other believers in the body that you have the privilege of practicing this friendship, this love to others. What does it look like? People who care for one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, assist one another, reprove one another. This is Christian friendship. Brothers and sisters who are sincere and fervent in their love. You'll listen, you won't have a selfish agenda, you won't be all about trying to outdo others, constantly talking about yourself. You won't always be in a teaching mode. There are times when you'll just say, "Hey, thanks for sharing that. I'll be praying that God will give you wisdom." You just genuinely care and your Christian friend knows it. That's brotherly kindness. No one upmanship, no competition. He doesn't have to prove anything to you and you don't have to prove anything to him. We're two soldiers out on the battlefield fighting the enemy, helping each other, covering for each other, wanting the best for each other. Isn't that good?

This is where all those "one anothers" come in.

- Galatians 5:13 says we're to serve one another in love. Christ was willing to wash dirty feet. How about you?
- Ephesians 4:32 says we're to forgive one another and refuse to hold grudges. We are part of a forgiving family, and we all know we often offend and need Christ and His forgiveness.
- Romans 12:10 urges us to be devoted to one another. No lone rangers in the body of Christ.
- Galatians 6:2 calls us to bear one another's burdens. This is one of the neat things about small groups. You get to know people. Church is the people, not just a meeting. If you are a believer, pray about how well you know the burdens others are carrying.

- Colossians 3:13 challenges us to bear with one another, or put up with one another, and, well, there's lots to put up with in me! We need a really good set of heart shock absorbers in the body of Christ. Don't wear your feelings on your sleeves. Some stuff I do will irritate you. Can you handle it? If it's sin, you need to bring it to me. One of my favorite little messages of Charles Spurgeon's is "A Blind Eye and a Deaf Ear" in his Lectures to My Students. Every leader, every believer needs to practice not reacting to every comment or criticism or "important detail" of something going on in the church. He didn't mean we should overlook sin.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says we're to encourage and admonish one another.

Back to 1 Peter 1:22 – sincere love of the brothers, and fervently loving one another. One author gives a great list of opportunities to practice this kind of love in the body. You may know a teen lured by the world, a discouraged single person, a new person who needs friendship, a mom carrying loads of responsibilities, a man not making it with his wife, a young person whose parents just divorced, a woman with cancer, a couple with mountains of debt, an elderly lady who just lost her husband, a young person struggling with impurity, and on and on.

This is the church! This is the family of God. God is renewing His image in us as we grow and fervently get involved in other believer's lives. Put yourself out there. Be quick to confess when you've been wrong and quick to forgive when someone offended you. We're part of the family of redeeming love in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, when you love one another." By the way, there isn't a ton of difference between brotherly love, or in the Greek, philadelphia, and agape love, since both are used together in several verses (see 1 Thessalonians 4:9). Brotherly love focuses on family love, whereas agape love, well, let's see what it is.

Agape love is sacrificial, self-denying, Christ-like love, the capstone of your Christian life.

At the peak of this building, this quality is like the sun shining in and giving life and warmth to all the rest of your Christian life. None of the other qualities is complete without love. Virtue without love, knowledge without love, self-control without love, endurance without love, godliness without love, and even brotherly kindness without love – without love you can be a hard, severe, bigoted person. It would be like having all the earth but no sun – everything freezes in coldness. But bring this love of God into your heart, the lights turn on, your heart warms and becomes tender, helpful, thoughtful, sympathetic, humble, compassionate, caring! You can't avoid this. Agape love is the crowning quality, the most beautiful excellence of what Christ does in our lives! And do know, this is not natural, human love. We can only love God's way because He has shed His love into our hearts through the gospel. We love because He first loved us.

Notice how God puts love as the **main thing**. 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul says the goal of our preaching is love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. In Galatians 5:22 love leads the vanguard of the fruit of the Spirit. In Colossians 3:14, like our passage, Paul puts love as the final and great wrap on all the other graces, "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." There you are, all dressed in the graces of Christ, and finally you wrap your heart all around with agape love! And then you have 1 Corinthians 13 with 15 descriptions of love in action, ending with this, "Now abide faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love!" Jonathan Edwards has an amazing sermon entitled, *Heaven, a World of Love*. Heaven will be a place of perfect love flowing from the triune God with nothing ugly or tainted by selfishness.

But what is this agape love? It's the opposite of selfishness. It's self-denying, sacrificial concern for the good of other people. I'm not here for me but for God's glory and the blessing of other people, including my enemies. Jesus Christ did not come to be served but to serve and to give Himself for others. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. That's agape, Christ-like love. Not living for my own pleasure, to use people to make me happy, to expect others to do for me. And God uses all our relationships to give us opportunity to learn to love and help others to grow in love.

Think about your **marriage**. How many enter marriage basically saying, "I love you because you make me feel so good." Or "I just can't make it without you." We see tons of marriages crumble under that weight. Obviously we marry because we are drawn to one another, we like each other, but your marriage doesn't rest on feeling good about each other, because you well may not feel so good about each other in

a little while. But marriage is the chief human relationship where we learn to love sacrificially. "Husbands, love your wives, just like Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her." Marriage is God's workshop to shape you up, to knock off those selfish edges, to show you how much you need Jesus, to help you grow and learn to deny yourself!

The same is true with your **family**. Can you see God has put those children in your family to give you the opportunity to grow in love and self-denial? How different when you see a disobedient, obnoxious child as God's way of giving you opportunity to love and serve even in the hardest times compared to reacting in anger, cutting them down with your words, or shutting them out. Colossians 3:21 tells us dads, "Don't exasperate them; don't take the wind out of their sails." This doesn't mean indulging them, giving them everything they want or demand, but it does mean refusing to switch from loving and serving and caring to anger and bitterness or yelling and screaming and slamming doors. Easy? Not always. Been there. Yep. Ever get it perfect, this loving thing? Not till glory. But you and I are in God's Love Training Camp for a future world of love perfected, with no self-serving, self-demanding old sin nature to clog up and destroy the whole thing.

What about your **world**? God has left us here to live self-denying lives for the good of other people, whether next door or around the world. What motivates missionaries to spend their entire lives in a foreign country to bring them the gospel? Our love should drive us to pray for the people of this world, specifically the people we know. Our self-denying love should move us to give abundantly for the ministry of the gospel, and more and more. Maybe God's love moving through your heart will take you to places desperately in need of the gospel.

But how do you love your **enemies**? First, it's not easy. But Christ calls us to do it. He did it, and He gives us the grace, the strength, and the conviction to work at it. There are people who just get under your skin. But our treatment and reactions to others must never depend on who they are. You have to pray for them and do good to them if possible. Bake them a batch of chocolate chip cookies with walnuts (don't forget the walnuts). And you have to look past their behavior, their treatment of you, to the fact that your enemies have eternal souls. They are probably lost and deceived and desperately need someone to pray for them and if possible to share Christ with them. God didn't love us based on who we are or what we deserve, but He was governed by his own love. "God looked at this sinful, arrogant, foul world, and He sent His only begotten Son into it to save it."

What does agape love look like in practice? Let's go to 1 Corinthians 13. Paul has said without love, no matter what else, you're still a big empty zero. God has poured out his love into our hearts through the gospel, and this is what it looks like. Hang on, these are tough.

Instead of lashing out	You're patient with others who irritate you.
Instead of being mean and critical	You're kind and thoughtful of the needs of others.
Instead of being jealous	You're glad others have succeeded.
Instead of blowing your own horn	You're quiet about your own accomplishments.
Instead of feeling above others	You're quick to give credit to others.
Instead of being offensive in manners	You act appropriately and thoughtful of others.
Instead of grabbing the best for yourself	You're willing to let others go first.
Instead of being easily angered	You control yourself, not insisting on your way.
Instead of holding grudges	You're quick to forgive.
Instead of being glad when others fail	You grieve for others in their troubles.
Instead of lying to get out of trouble	You rejoice in telling the truth.
Instead of taking offenses personally	You cover a multitude of sins against yourself.
Instead of distrusting others	You give the benefit of the doubt.
Instead of giving up on others	You hold out hope through the gospel.
Instead of quitting when pressured	You endure the most severe opposition.

Remember Mr. Scudder, "Look at the fish." Look at your life. Are you diligently adding each of these qualities to your precious faith in Christ? Pray your way through each one. All capped off with agape love,

the sun that lightens and warms the entire house, giving and living for the blessing of others, from your family through your church to this entire world, including your enemies.