

Love Like God, part 8 of From Election to Perfection
November 23, 2014

We are almost finished this series of sermons from 2 Peter. We will wrap it up next week. This morning we are dealing with the last of the seven character qualities to add to our faith. For those who have not been here for all the series, let me catch you up to date. I'll do so by reciting the main part of the passage. We have encouraged everyone to memorize this, so if you know it, you can recite it too.

"Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Last week we looked at brotherly kindness. This morning we are adding love to our brotherly kindness. There is some overlap between the two. So in order to help you understand what the quality of love, let me point out two differences between these two qualities..

As Al (last Sunday's preacher) pointed out last week, the term "brotherly kindness" is not an adequate translation of the one Greek word "phi-la-del-PHI-a". A better translation would be brotherly love. Let me explain with a personal story.

(phi-la-del-PHI-a (fill-lah-dell-FEE-ah) = brotherly love or love as brothers)

As I was growing up, the men in my family were not huggers. At least we did not hug each other. But over time that changed. As my brother's kids were growing up, we would hug each other hello and goodbye. We saw each other only two or three times a year and enjoyed being together. So we showed each other affection upon departing. I would hug my nephew as well as my nieces, when they were little. As they grew, there was never a time that those kids did not want hugs. Even as teenagers, they did not flinch from hugs within the extended family. So since hugs were going around the room, my brother and I and my father and I also began hugging each other. We had not done that growing up. Now I do hugs within my extended family, even with the men.

The men of my family are the only men that I intentionally hug. With other men, even Christian men, I don't hug. I shake hands.

My attitude is different towards men of my family. Family carries a certain meaning that I do not share with those outside of my family. There is a certain loyalty to family, a certain affection in family that most people do not have for those outside of their family.

This one Greek word that we have translated as "brotherly kindness" refers to this special kind of relationship. It means that we have a special loyalty towards each other as Christians, that we do not have towards people outside of Christianity. We are a church family. We are a koinonia, a fellowship. We are partners in the gospel. And in this partnership we have special concern for each other, a concern that we do not have for those outside of the church except for family. This is brought out by the leaders of the church in passages such as Galatians 6:10.

Galatians 6:10 (NIV) Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Jesus has made Christians responsible for each other. He has made us accountable to each other. Because we have Jesus in common we have a special connection to each other. This is reflected in the 50 passages in the New Testament that refer to "each other" or "one another". (see end of sermon) Christians are told to love each other, pray for each other, help each other, encourage one another, etc.

This family love towards other Christians does not come naturally to us. We must learn about this in the Bible. We must then choose to believe it, and adopt it for ourselves. As Peter writes to us, we must add this to our faith in Jesus. We must intentionally add this to our faith. We must grow in this toward each other. And in this affection we have special regard for each other. We treat each other differently than we do non-Christians. This is brotherly kindness.

To this we are to add love. Peter doesn't define that word, doesn't explain that word, doesn't give examples of application for that word. He assumes that his readers knew what he was talking about. We were not his intended readers. So we need some help in understanding it.

This is the word **a-GA-pe (ah-gah-pay)**. It is not romantic love. It is not friendship love. It is not family love. It is a self-giving love, a self-denying love, a self-sacrificing love.

1 John 3:16 (NIV) This is how we know what love (a-GA-pe) is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Both kinds of love seek to help another person. Eros is self-centered action. Phi-la-del-PHI-a and a-GAP-e are others-centered action. Both seek to meet the need of another person.

So how do they differ? How does phi-la-del-PHI-a differ from a-GA-pe? How does brotherly kindness differ from love? Let me suggest two ways that they differ.

My actions of phi-la-del-PHI-a are focused on other Christians.

My actions of a-GA-pe are focused on every person.

This love is towards all people, whether they are Christians or not. It includes family, people at work, at school, in your neighborhood, with whom you play, your friends, even enemies.

My actions of phi-la-del-PHI-a are based on who you are to me. It is based on the fact that you are a Christian, like me. We have this in common, that we both follow Jesus. We have Jesus in common. We have salvation in common. We have forgiveness in common. We are both living for Jesus. We both are learning to live in obedience to Him. Brotherly kindness, phi-la-del-PHI-a is based on what we have in common with Christians. We choose to take care for each other based on the fact that we have Jesus in common.

My actions of a-GA-pe are based solely on who I am.

John 3:16 (NIV) For God so loved (a-ga-PA-o) the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Because God is perfect love, He gave. God shows love because it is His nature to do so. God cannot NOT show love. God always does what is best for everyone because it is His nature to do so.

As I choose to become like God, I will do what is best for everyone because it will be my nature to do so. I am becoming like Jesus, so I love like Jesus. I treat everyone the same. I do what is best for everyone. For example, I am intent on helping everyone to know God and become part of His kingdom because everyone needs to be saved from the penalty of their sin.

I do so because of who I am, not because of who they are. I do so because of Christ's love in me, not because of what the other is like.

I don't have much in common with non-Christians. I don't talk like they do. I don't use the same words they do. I don't act like they do. I don't have the same values they do. I don't have the same goals in life that they do. I have very little in common with them. Despite this, I choose to act towards them with love, just as God is doing.

In fact, they may be enemies of mine. But, like God, I will choose to show them His love, just as He does.

Romans 5:8 (NIV) God demonstrates his own love (a-GA-pe) for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We had nothing in common with God when God did this. Mankind was an enemy of God. All mankind is sinful. No one had anything in common with God except that He created us in His image. But that was not enough to draw God's heart to us anymore than it draws our hearts to each other. We are not prompted to love each other simply because we are all humans.

God seeks what is best for others because of who He is, not what they do or don't do. Mankind is sinful. Mankind has almost nothing in common with God. And yet God, because He is love, chooses to love all people.

God does not love you more because you love Him. God does not love you more than He loves the people who do not love Him. God loves everyone equally. This is because God's love, a-GA-pe, is based on what He is, not what they are.

Our actions of love towards others is not to be based on their love of us. It is not to be based on their response to God. Our actions of love stem from us becoming loving people. Loving people live out love towards others.

God's action is especially striking since we did not love God when He gave Himself. Loving means initiating action without immediate return (and, in the case of many whom God loves, without any return). Here is the model for our love towards all people.

So how do we become such a loving person?

Love is a choice.

2 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV) ... make every effort to add to your faith... love.

This love is a choice, a decision of your will, not an emotion. We aren't encouraged to pump up love as an emotion. Instead, we are encouraged to selflessly act in the best interests of all other people, just like God does. Such action will not be based on their interest or their response. God is love and always does what is best for everyone.

Love is fed by obedience.

1 John 2:5 (NIV)

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him.

Love is a result of our transformation by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is producing this love in you.

Galatians 5:22 (NIV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love

Loving people like God does will make the invisible God visible to a lost world. In our actions they will see the glimmer of God. Some will respond to that and become Christians like us.

But how do we love people who are so much different than us? How do we, as followers of Jesus Christ, relate to people who believe that sex outside of marriage is normal and good and expected?

How do we, who believe the Bible is the creator's revelation to us, relate to people who believe it is a bunch of myths, lies, and foolishness?

How do we relate to people who believe that homosexual behavior is acceptable to God?

How do we relate to people who want to re-define marriage?

How do we relate to people who want to make it a crime for pastors to preach parts of the Bible that do not fit current popular culture values?

How do we relate to people who want to limit the size of church buildings, or where they can be built?

How do we relate to people who have thrown modesty out the window when it comes to the human body?

How do we relate to people who are addicted to pornography, both men and women?

How do we relate to people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol?

How do we relate to people who are so much different from us?

We relate to such people by loving them. We love them like God does. We treat them with kindness, with mercy, with respect, with dignity. We offer a listening ear. We choose compassion for them in their pains and struggles. We pray for them. We keep contacting them. We show interest in them.

Even if they reject our help, we help. Even if they scoff at our values, we value them. Even if they put up roadblocks to what the church does, we walk around those roadblocks to show them the love of Christ.

Peter says to make every effort to add such love to your faith. This love is vital to the church in the world. It is necessary for the work of witness that lies before us today. We must add this love to our faith.

This brings us back to our target. We have been measuring where we are in each of these qualities, showing how far we need to grow, how much we need to "make every effort" to add these to our faith. (**target**)

As you view the target and think about where you are, let me read a description of the relevant aspects of this love. God gives us a description of such love in 1 Corinthians 13. But this morning, we need to read it differently.

Robin is patient. Robin is kind. Robin does not envy. Robin does not boast. Robin is not proud. Robin is not rude. Robin is not self-seeking. Robin is not easily angered. Robin keeps no record of wrongs. Robin does not delight when bad things happen to anyone else, even enemies. Robin rejoices in truth. Robin always seeks to protect everyone. Robin always trusts, hopes, and perseveres in relationships with others.

I have to read 1 Corinthians 13 that way before I attempt to evaluate myself on the target. You need to read it with your name in the blanks. I encourage you to do so this week as you pray. (see below)

God wants you to know today that He loves you. He loves you because of who He is, not who you are. His love for you is not based on how good you have been. Nor is His love for you lessened by how sinful you have been. There is a consequence for sin. It is called hell. But it is not God's desire that you go there. It is God's desire that you admit your sin, and accept the Savior, Jesus, that God lovingly provided you. Do so today. Accept God's love of you by receiving Jesus as your Savior and turning your life over to Him as your Lord.

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Evaluating your love.

_____ is patient.

_____ is kind.

_____ does not envy.

_____ does not boast.

_____ is not proud.

_____ is not rude.

_____ is not self-seeking.

_____ is not easily angered.

_____ keeps no record of wrongs.

_____ does not delight when bad things happen to anyone else,
even enemies.

_____ rejoices in truth.

_____ always seeks to protect everyone.

_____ always trusts, hopes, and perseveres in relationships with
others

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"each other" & "one another" passages:

John 13:34-35; 15:12, 15:17; Romans 12:10, 12:16; 13:8; 14:13; 15:7, 15:14;
1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:33; 12:25; 14:12, 14:26; Galatians 5:13, 5:15, 5:26;
Ephesians 4:2, 4:32; 5:19, 5:21; Colossians 3:9, 3:13, 3:16;
1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9, 4:18; 5:11, 5:13, 5:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:3;
1 Timothy 5:16; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25; 13:1; James 4:11; 5:9, 5:14, 5:16;
1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 4:8-9; 5:5, 5:14; 1 John 1:7; 3:11, 3:23; 4:7, 4:11-12;
2 John 1:5;