

Loving More in Troubled Times

September 13, 2020

Roy Collette and his brother-in-law, Larry, exchanged the same pair of pants each year as a Christmas present. At the time of a news story about this they had been doing so for 11 years. Each time the package got harder to open.

It all started when Larry Kunkel was in college. His mother gave him a pair of moleskin trousers. He wore them a few times, but they froze stiff in cold weather, and he didn't like them. So he gave them to Roy, his brother-in-law. Roy, who called the moleskins "miserable," wore them three times, then wrapped them up and gave them back to Larry for Christmas the next year.

The following year Larry gave them back to Roy for Christmas. This friendly exchange continued routinely until one year when Roy twisted the pants tightly, stuffed them into a 3-foot-long, 1-inch-wide tube and gave them back to Larry. The next Christmas, Larry compressed the pants into a 7-inch square, wrapped them with wire and gave it to Roy.

Not to be outdone, the next year Roy put the pants into a 2-foot-square crate filled with stones, nailed it shut, banded it with steel and gave the trusty trousers back to Larry. The two guys agreed to end the whole thing if the trousers were ever damaged. But they were as careful as they were clever.

Larry next had the pants mounted inside an insulated window that had a 20-year guarantee and shipped them off to Roy, who broke the glass, recovered the trousers, stuffed them into a 5-inch coffee can and soldered it shut. The can was put in a 5-gallon container filled with concrete and reinforcing rods and given to Larry the following Christmas.

That year Larry installed the pants in a 225-pound homemade steel ashtray made from 8-inch steel casings. Roy had some trouble retrieving the treasured trousers but succeeded without burning them with a cutting torch.

The last Christmas before the article about them, Roy found a 600-pound safe, put the pants inside and welded the safe shut before giving them to Larry.

The following year Larry had the pants trucked to Roy in a drab green, 3-foot cube that once was a 1974 Gremlin automobile. A note attached to the 2,000-pound scrunched car advised Roy that the pants were inside the glove compartment. "This will take some planning," Roy said. "I will definitely get them out."

Some product on TV used to have the slogan, "The gift that keeps on giving". I don't think this is what they had in mind. But there is a gift that, the more you give it, the

more it comes back, the more it grows. That gift is love. And it is what Jesus commands of his followers in their relation to each other.

John 13:34-35 (NIV) A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

This command of Jesus is stressed by the apostles all through the New Testament. It is mentioned far more than any other command. Paul stressed this in all of the New Testament churches, including the one at Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3, 9-12 (NIV) Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified...

Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Our whole world changed when we became Christians. One of the things that happened is that God adopted us into his family. And that created new relationships for us.

Our adoption by God makes us related to each other.

We are now brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family in the mind of Jesus. So we must accept this interpersonal relationship to each other. And such relationship comes with responsibilities and obligations.

Some churches adopt the use of calling each other brother or sister to foster this idea of family. When Dr. Smith came as the Executive of the Baptist Convention of Maryland Delaware many people called him Dr. Smith. Some called him Kevin. So I asked him one day what he prefers. He said he has always been partial to Brother Kevin. So that is what I call him.

We see the Holy Spirit guiding the first Christians to this understanding in Acts 2.

Acts 2:42 (NIV) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

We use that word fellowship to mean meals together. But the Biblical meaning is one or relationship. **Fellowship = not meals, but relationship**

They devoted themselves to each other as family in the Gospel. They understood themselves to be a new unit in Christ Jesus.

Paul brings this out even further in comparing the church to a physical body. Each of us is a part of the body of Christ. Some of us are his hands, some of us are his feet. We dare not say that any one part is all important. We also dare not say that any one part is unimportant or unneeded.

1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-15, 21-22, 27 (NIV) **The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.**

... Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

... The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...

... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Our adoption by God makes us related to each other.

So what is the practical living out of this?

> Family seeks good for each other.

We see the first example of this back in that Acts 2 passage.

Acts 2:44-45 (NIV) **All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.**

> One aspect of being family in Christ Jesus is to help supply basic needs to the needy in the church.

I want to say thank you to the members of Emmanuel for doing just that. Before this pandemic started we had a good bit of money in savings designated to helping the folk that make up our church family. This is in addition to money we use to help the needy outside of the church. The benevolence fund has increased a lot in this year of pandemic. We have not had many requests yet. But we expect that they will pick up soon.

Again, I thank you for thinking of others in this current crisis and contributing to the needs of others.

> A second aspect of being family is to work to meet emotional, social, and spiritual needs of each other. Paul brings this out in his letter to the church at Philippi.

Philippians 2:4 (NIV) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

He is writing to a group of Christians about their responsibility to each other. There are many examples of what this means in the New Testament. Here is just a sampling:

Galatians 5:13 (NIV) You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Ephesians 4:2 (NIV) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

The first kind of love requires a sacrifice of money.

This second requires a sacrifice of time and attention.

Let me suggest one way of fulfilling this command of Jesus during these isolated days. **Use your church directory as a prayer list.**

Write down what you know about each individual.

What problems are they having?

Are they having a hard financial time?

What decisions are they facing?

What health problems do they have?

What spiritual struggles are they dealing with?

Are they dealing with work or school issues?

Those living alone are having a harder time than ever.

Pray for each other and more as the Holy Spirit leads you.

We used to be able to say, "Well, I'll see so and so on Sunday. I'll catch up then." We can't say that these days. So, we have to be more intentional about loving each other.

Let us do so more and more in obedience to Jesus.