

FAMILY AFFECTION

Last Sunday morning we discovered how important it is to have an intimate and affectionate relationship with God. After having received the *Spirit of adoption* we can cry out “Abba Father” (“Daddy God”) knowing that He always hears us. However, **adoption** also means that we have been placed in God’s family as sons and daughters with the status and privileges of joint-heirs. We are now one family with one Father, **“from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name”** (Ephesians 3:15). The big question is this, **“Do we act like a divine family?”** This will be evidenced by the way each family member treats the other.

In **John 13:34,35** Jesus said, **“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 was the Lord’s primary command - a direct instruction to each family member. It’s the one thing He expects us all to do! **Hebrews 13:1** says, **“Let brotherly love continue.”** The original Greek states, **“Let brotherly love abide.”** A modern translation would be, **“Let brotherly love remain.”** In other words, brotherly love should *continue, abide* or *remain* in your life - no matter what!

Brotherly love is the love of brothers (or sisters) in Christ for each other - in a special sense, because all are children of the same Heavenly Father. Occasionally, the New Testament uses the word “brother” to refer simply to another human being, whether a Christian or not (*Matthew 25:40*); or to one’s fellow countryman (*Romans 9:3*).

Consistently, however, it is used of a fellow believer in Christ. This is true of all places where the concept of **brotherly love**, or brotherly kindness appears.

In the Old Testament, Israelites were taught not to hate their brothers: **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart... but you shall love your neighbour as yourself”** (**Leviticus 19:17,18**). As we have just read, this emphasis is continued and is made even more challenging by Jesus Himself. In the New Testament, believers are encouraged to be **“tenderly affectionate to one another with brotherly love”** (**Romans 12:10**); and to **“love as brothers, be tenderhearted, and courteous”** to the people around you (**1 Peter 3:8**).

If you are a Christian “*brotherly love*” should be your badge, hallmark or calling card (**John 13:35**). Love is always a manifestation of spiritual maturity. The more you grow in Christ, the more love you will exhibit. But growing to maturity is a conscious decision - an act of your will. Our foundational scripture says, **“let brotherly love continue,”** which implies that you must make an effort for this to happen. Therefore, always be decisive concerning your love for others!

Brotherly love (*philadelphia*) describes the love we as believers should have for one another. *Philo* is human ‘love’; *adelphia* is ‘brothers’, and is often used in the context of a community made up of people united by a common interest or common calling. Have you noticed how difficult it is to connect with people whose value system is different to yours? The Bible says this is being **“unequally yoked”** (**2 Corinthians 6:14**).

Turn with me now to **2 Peter 1** and let's read **verses 5 to 8**....

Here we see fruitful growth in the faith, a process of maturity. Peter provides a list of virtues that, when established in your life, will cause you to be fruitful in **every knowledge of God**. Notice how an effective and productive life is achieved by 'character transformation' that begins with *faith* and results in *tender affection* ('phileo'). However, for the development of true Christian character it is necessary that your *faith* be supplemented by seven distinct elements. Not adding these one after another, but manifesting all the graces all the time. And this has to do with lifestyle!

It's interesting to note that Peter speaks of love as the end product of the Christian's striving and not the source of it. Many wait to "feel" love and then act upon it. Peter tells us that we have already received faith, and therefore, we are to act on it so that the outcome is love. For Peter, love is a destination and not merely a cause. It seems that love is both a cause and an effect! Peter would have you striving to obtain love by obediently pursuing the characteristics of the **divine nature**.

This passage provides the means for Christian growth and also the means for how stumbling can be prevented. I wish the Christian community would wake up and see how we have exchanged Peter's inspired list for another list, a list provided not under inspiration but from the confused thinking of the world system. According to a distressing number of believers, the key to understanding success in life, as well as failure, is "self-esteem."

Poor self-esteem is the source of failure; good self-esteem is the basis of success. Not according to Peter! So who then, will you believe? The truth is, whatever self-image you have it's going to be wrong if you have formed it outside of Jesus. "*In Him we live and move and have our being*" (**Acts 17:28**). The original Greek says simply... "*In Him we live and move and are!*" You are what He is - and He is love! "**God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him**" (1 **John 4:16**). Faith gives you the means to become like Him.

Brotherly love identifies us to those around us as Christ's disciples (followers of Christ) - "**By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you love** ('agape') **one another.**" Loving one another will lead you to a sincere 'love' for all of mankind. As mentioned earlier, this is not just a matter of emotions but of the human will. It is not a mere sentimental exhilaration to be experienced, but a commandment to obey! *Agape* - *the God kind of love* - is supernatural (not of human source). An unbeliever cannot love as Jesus commanded because he has not had divine life imparted into his spirit. It takes **divine life** to love one's enemies. People who are controlled by their lusts have no respect for others, and such people like to pull others down and entice them to do evil.

"Agape' love, on the other hand, always manifests itself in giving. For instance, "**God so loved the world, that He gave...**" (**John 3:16**). "**Christ also loved the church and gave...**" (**Ephesians 5:25**). You can show your love by **giving** your time, your talents, your hospitality, and your life (in general) for others. Remember, this kind of love cannot be self-centered, it must be totally unconditional!

In the “**Parable of the Lost Son**” (in **Luke 15:11-32**), the older son was consumed with jealous rage when he found out that his younger brother had returned home. He refused to participate in his father’s joy. Someone once said, “*Where God’s happiness is, there the self-righteous cannot come.*” When his father urged him to participate in the festivities, he refused, whimpering that the father had not rewarded him for his faithful service. He had never been given as much as a young goat, to say nothing of a fatted calf! Note, during this discussion with his father, the older brother refers to his younger brother as, “*this son of yours,*” not “*my brother.*” Is this brotherly love or selfish contempt?

The father’s answer indicated that there is **joy** connected with the restoration of a lost one; whereas an obstinate, ungrateful, unreconciled and selfish son provides no cause for joyful celebration. The father’s love is an example to all. Not waiting for his shamed child to slink home, nor standing on his dignity, the father ran out to greet him. Ashamed, ragged and muddled as he was, he threw out welcoming arms and kissed his neck. The father’s love was totally unconditional and he was genuinely moved by compassion. However, the older son’s selfishness was driven by jealous pride. In this instance, *brotherly love* could have brought unity to the family and caused every member to participate in the joyous celebrations. But it was not to be! Remember, love can be known only by the actions it prompts. ‘Agape’ must be seen!

I believe when Jesus gave us the command to **love one another**, He wanted our ‘love’ to be **seen** by the unchurched.

The obvious question is this:

Do you love the people of God because they are the people of God? Because you have discovered in them something that is altogether lovely. Do you love them, not merely because they love you, are in authority over you, or have done you favours; not because they are of the same ethnic or social group, but because they bear the image of your heavenly Father? Do you actually love them for their love of God, their self-denial, their godliness, their usefulness in the world, their good example, their faithfulness and love of duty?

Do you love them when they correct you, and when their example convicts you? And do you love them in proportion to the measure of these excellent qualities which they possess? Do you have a genuine interest in them and sincerely feel for them? Can you bear and forbear with them? Can you forget their failings, or do you magnify them or rejoice in them? Can you find it in your heart to cover their sins and pray for them, and watch over them, and have compassion, and love them still? Most importantly, can you feel and act this way toward the poorest, the least influential, the less talented and those dysfunctional people in the church? When Jesus said, “**as I have loved you, so you must love one another,**” there were no conditions attached.

So remember, love is the fulfillment of all its promises, the evidence of its power, the symbol of its joys, and the ripe of its fruit. **Love is felt and heard and seen!** Love never fails!