

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 30, Number 29

July 21, 2013



Step Six: To Godliness Brotherly Kindness

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5–9, KJV 1900)

What is "brotherly kindness"? How do we distinguish it from "charity," Peter's final capstone trait in our study list? We may show brotherly kindness toward those around us in any number of ways, but perhaps the most common means is by the words we speak and by the attitude that we reveal when we speak those words. In advising young preachers, one of my strongest counsels is for the man to maintain eye contact with the people in the congregation when he is in the pulpit. Only by this link will he be able to receive the message coming from the pew to the pulpit, a crucial ingredient in framing a message that edifies as it goes from the pulpit to the pew. I have often changed my words solely due to sensing how people in the congregation were reacting to what I had said, not always in the way that I thought or desired. Many a sermon that was drifting toward tedium has become highly edifying by the preacher actively engaging the people in the congregation through this interactive mindset.

Even as Paul sharply rebuked the Galatians, he reminded them that his rebuke grew out of his godly love for them, his "brotherly kindness" felt and shown in actions.

Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all. (Galatians 4:12)

Paul's objective was not to win an argument or prove to the Galatians that he was right and they wrong, but to win them to the truth of Christ and the gospel. Many years ago, I read a brief quip that voices a reality that is so central to edifying preaching, "I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care." In matters of Biblical faith, anyone who desires to influence others to his/her way of thinking utterly fails when using harsh words that fail to convincingly communicate that the speaker speaks out of godly and tender love for his hearers. Sheep need to be fed, not manipulated by overpowering or coercive words and attitudes. However deeply convicted of the truth of what he believes, any believer who speaks with such weight and attitude as to leave his

hearers feeling as if they have been verbally "Bullied" will fail to benefit those hungry sheep in any worthwhile way. "...speaking the truth in love..." (Ephesians 4:15) is not a Biblical option. It is a Biblical commandment, and one that we should take quite seriously.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Colossians 4:6)

When we read Jesus' words about salt and its savor (Matthew 5:13; Luke 14:34), we likely do not think of "grace" as a synonym of salt, but Paul makes that precise association. If I speak to another believer with such a compelling demand that I am right and any who disagree with me are necessarily wrong so as to leave my hearer feeling bullied or intimidated, I may win the argument, but I shall lose the battle for that person's heart—and for any spiritual growth in his/her faith. If we build our beliefs that our words must contain—and radiate—Biblical grace, we shall be well on our way to implementing this thing called brotherly kindness.

I have repeatedly noted during this study that Peter builds his list of spiritual behaviors in a logical and interlinked progression, so that we cannot possibly build any behavior until we have invested in building those behaviors below it in the list. Thus, the practice of brotherly kindness, next to the top behavior in the list, must grow out of a careful and faithful construction of the underlying traits in the list as part of our lifestyle. We cannot practice traits higher on the list until we have entrenched the conduct leading up to it in our habitual conduct.

The believer who desires to speak in brotherly kindness, but who has failed to build those foundational principles that undergird such kindness, cannot effectively frame his/her words to other believers with such kindness. When such a believer aims at something that he/she wants others to do to his/her liking, you will often see a sharp, harsh, and overpowering flow of words. "**I want this**, and I intend to force you to believe it or do it, whether you like it or not." This attitude is the

farthest thing imaginable from New Testament brotherly kindness.

You see, linking “grace” with the Biblical symbol of salt and associating it with our words, our “...answer to every man,” imposes a precise dimension onto our interactions with people. It takes over far more than the words that we choose. It governs our whole outlook toward this person. The overbearing attitude and words of the “My way or the highway” believer described above cannot possibly be accurately described by the word “Grace.” Such an attitude displays more the opposite of grace.

I recall the first time that Paul’s wise words to Timothy caught my attention with conviction.

*And the servant of the Lord **must not strive**; but **be gentle** unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26; emphasis added)*

When a preacher in the pulpit is highly focused on his topic and highly zealous at its bright truth in his mind, he might easily speak with sharpness beyond his intent. And there are times in a man’s ministry when he must quietly and privately confront others “...who oppose themselves,” but who fiercely refuse to acknowledge that they in fact are opposing themselves. Only by this gentle instruction can the godly minister have any influence whatever on such a self-conflicted person. I suggest that this compelling passage applies to any believer who engages another believer in a spiritual dialogue.

We examined the distinction between virtue and godliness earlier in our study. Here we again must examine two words that convey a similar idea, “brotherly kindness” and “charity.” The two terms clearly relate to similar attitudes and behaviors, but Peter lists them as separate commands in this list, so we must also acknowledge some element of distinction as well.

One such distinction appears in the fact that brotherly kindness usually manifests itself in the words that we speak. One commentary observes:

Brotherly kindness”...is thoughtful consideration of fellow believers....”Love” is the highest form of love, God’s kind, that seeks the welfare of the person loved above its own welfare.... “Christian faith is the root from which all these virtues must grow, and Christian love is the crowning virtue to which all the others must contribute. In a list of this kind, the last item has a unique significance. It is not just the most important virtue, but also the virtue which encompasses all the others. Love is the

overriding ethical principle from which the other virtues gain their meaning and validity.”⁴¹

Many years ago, I tried to make a proverbial “Mountain out of a molehill” over these two words in Jesus’ interrogation and charge to Peter. (John 21:15-23) However, if we make such a major issue of the two words translated “lovest” or “love” in the passage, we must also confront that different Greek words appear for “feed” and “sheep” and “lambs.” The actual difference in meaning may be far more subtle than we think. In the case of this passage, we may split hairs to distinguish the meaning of these two words, both translated by our English “Love,” at the expense of actually accomplishing what Jesus commanded Peter to do above all else, to feed His sheep and lambs.

The subtle distinction of “...thoughtful consideration of fellow believers” from love that “...seeks the welfare of the person loved above its own welfare” is sufficient that one obviously builds on the other. You can’t show unselfish regard for others above yourself when you actively neglect “...thoughtful consideration...” of them. Paul actually links the two words.

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. (1 Thessalonians 4:9)

Here “brotherly love” is the KJV translators’ rendition of the Greek word that is the root for the City of “Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love,” while “love,” as in “...to love one another,” is their translation of the Greek word commonly translated in our King James New Testament as “Charity.” Linger here. Paul interlinks the two words rather than disjointing them. Yes, they are different, but one is essential to accomplish the other. Why did the Thessalonians not need Paul to further write them about “brotherly love”? Because God personally teaches His children to “love one another,” “...thoughtful consideration” of other believers is an essential quality of that behavior.

A friend of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, once reminded her of an especially cruel thing that had been done to her years before. But Miss Barton seemed not to recall it. “Don’t you remember it?” her friend asked. “No,” came the reply, “I distinctly remember forgetting it.”²

Forget the proverbial memory of an elephant when dealing with past hurts from others. **Chose “Brotherly love;” remember to forget.**

⁴¹ 41. Bauckham, p. 193.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 2 Pe 1:7.

² <http://www.a4t.org/Stories/remember-forget.html>

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