

Brotherly Kindness

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Introduction.

- A. Once again this evening, we turn our attention to figuring out what we're supposed to do, according to 2 Peter 1:5-8. As we continue our climb toward spiritual maturity, we come to brotherly kindness. This is another unusual item on the list. A week or two ago, as I was discussing the remainder of the sermon series with Lauren, she opined that I would end up combining brotherly kindness and love into the same sermon, because there wouldn't be enough in the Bible about brotherly kindness to justify its own sermon. Obviously, that hasn't been the case, but it does illustrate how little brotherly kindness appears on our spiritual radar.
- B. Part of the reason why that's so is the way the word is translated. The Greek word used here, in 2 Peter 1:7, is *philadelphia*. Ever heard the city of that name in eastern Pennsylvania called, "The city of brotherly love?" That's certainly not because the inhabitants of Philadelphia are famous for their loving nature; at least, the Eagles fans aren't. It's because the word *philadelphia* means "brotherly love" in Greek. When William Penn named the city, he took the name right out of the Bible. That's the word translated as "brotherly kindness."
- C. It's hard to tell why. I suppose the translators thought saying "brotherly love" and "love" right next to each other sounded funny, so they opted for "brotherly kindness" instead. Strangely enough, in other places in Scripture, various versions of "brotherly love" are used to translate *philadelphia*. Even had it been more literally translated, I think we'd still struggle with this idea of brotherly love. When we think of love in the Bible, we think of *agape*, but *philadelphia* isn't related to *agape* love at all. It's *phileo* love, which we treat as the poor cousin of *agape*. However, when we overlook *phileo* like that, we're missing out on an important Scriptural concept. Let's remedy that this evening as we look at brotherly kindness.

I. Figuring out *Phileo*.

- A. Naturally, if we're going to be studying brotherly *phileo*, we need to figure out what *phileo* itself means first. A passage that does a wonderful job of showing us what *phileo* is is John 11:33-36. This chunk of verses is part of the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, and here we see Jesus' reaction as He comes to the tomb of Lazarus. He groans within and is troubled in spirit as He sees His friend Mary mourning, and when He comes to the tomb, He weeps. The Jews observe all this and conclude, "See how He *phileoed* him."
- B. *Phileo*, then, is just that kind of love that leads us to mourn at the death of a friend. *Agape* is impersonal. We are supposed to *agape* everyone, regardless of what they've done to us. *Phileo*, on the other hand, is personal. It's the love of liking, of friendship, of emotional devotion, of being connected in a sentimental way to somebody else. It's much warmer and fuzzier than *agape*. You can *agape* your enemies, but only your friends can be the objects of *phileo*. Jesus died for *agape*, but He ate with His apostles for *phileo*.
- C. Once we have this idea of what *phileo* is fixed firmly in our heads, we might develop some suspicions about who would *phileo* us and why, and by and large, the Scripture bears out those suspicions. For instance, consider what Jesus tells His apostles in John 15:19. The word "love" here isn't *agape*. After all, the world doesn't *agape* anybody; that's what makes it the world. Instead, this text is talking about the *phileo* of the world, and how Christians can expect to be hated instead of *phileoed*. This fits right in with our discussion of godliness a couple of weeks ago. Remember how we were talking about the way that godliness leads to persecution, because when we are godly, people in the world see us as different and don't like what they see? This is that. People in the world don't have a warm, sentimental attachment to true Christians, because true Christians aren't like people in the world. They see that we're different from them, react negatively to the difference, and rather than *phileoing* us, they dislike us, or even actively hate us. It's inevitable.
- D. Of course, if in our time in the world, most of the people we run into do *phileo* us and treat us like their buddies, that should set off warning bells in our heads. If all of these outsiders naturally like us and want to spend time hanging out with us, it isn't a sign that we're different from the world. It's a sign that we're the same as the world. Brethren, we can't have it both ways. As James tells us in James 4, friendship with the world is enmity with God. We have to be the people the world doesn't naturally like if we want to be with God.
- E. On the other side of the coin, we see the people who should *phileo* us described in Titus 3:15. Once again, the word translated "love" here is *phileo*. Paul is greeting those Christians who have a friendly affection for him because of their shared faith. Friends, this is the way that it should be. Like calls to like. When we transform our character so that we become unlike the world, we become not just more like God, but more like other Christians. That's why it's common for us to feel a close connection to other Christians, even if we just met them five minutes ago. That connection happens because the part in us that loves God and wants to be like Him *phileos* the part in them that wants the same thing. Our similarity in the things that truly matter makes it easy for us to be friends with them. In this life, folks, our dearest friends shouldn't be the worldly. They should be Christians, because those are the people bound to us by the cords of brotherly love.

II. Beginning Brotherly Kindness.

- A. Now that we've worked our way from *phileo* to *philadelphia*, we can look at the beginnings of brotherly kindness in our own lives. First of all, we learn that this brotherly kindness is a natural thing that God teaches us and expects to see. Look at the way Paul depicts it in 1 Thessalonians 4:1. He regards brotherly love as a given. Christians should always have that warm affection of liking and friendship for one another. Just as it's a problem if we *phileo* everybody in the world, it's a problem if we don't *phileo* those in the church. I've heard people say about brethren, "I love him, but I don't have to like him," and that's about as unscriptural an attitude as can be. It allows the devil to sow discord and division in the church, and 99% of the time, when splits in a local congregation happen, it's a *philadelphia* problem. Sure, there's usually all sorts of doctrinal noise made, but at the bottom, it's brethren not liking one another even though they're commanded to.
- B. If we don't want church splits happening in our congregation, the best way to stop them before they start is not to watch carefully for false teachers. It's to watch ourselves carefully to make sure that our attitude toward one another is what it should be. If we don't have brotherly love, that's a sin, and we need to fix it.
- C. Nor can the liking and affection that Christians feel for one another be forced or feigned. Peter tells us that the opposite is true in 1 Peter 1:22. All of us know fake people who pretend to like us. One of my co-workers in law school was like that. She was sweetness and sunshine around me, until we were at a function together one night, she got drunk, and the truth came out. Brethren, we simply cannot act out that fake love toward one another. It might satisfy the rules of politeness, but it doesn't fool anybody, and it especially doesn't fool God. I'd be the first to admit: there are some brethren I have a harder time liking than others. Some, I connect with immediately; others, it takes me months or years to warm up to. Sometimes, personalities don't mesh well, but none of that changes our responsibility. Even if there is a Christian who rubs us the wrong way, we can't even allow ourselves to think thoughts that are incompatible with *philadelphia*. God expects us to straighten our minds and our hearts out, and if we choose to cherish our dislike instead, we will suffer for it.

III. Results of Brotherly Kindness.

- A. Just as there are things that characterize the essence of brotherly kindness in us, so too there are results that brotherly kindness will produce in our lives. First of all, brotherly kindness is the sort of emotion and action that will always be accompanied by like-mindedness. Consider the way that Peter groups the two together in 1 Peter 3:8. It's pretty easy to figure out why this would be true. If we truly have brotherly love for one another, we will not want to be divided. This is something that I see sometimes in my marriage. Lauren's not just my wife; she's my best friend, and so our relationship is characterized by a lot of *phileo*. When we get into a fuss and go stomping off in two different directions, that's no fun. I miss talking to her, I miss being able to share what's on my mind with her, and I miss doing things with her. As a result, the pressure of what I'm missing out moves me to make up as quickly as possible. The *philadelphia* we have for the other Christians with whom we worship should function this way as well. We shouldn't be OK with fusses in the congregation. We should be upset when a brother has something against us, and we should want to make things right with him as soon as we can too, simply because when things aren't right, we miss him. I guarantee you, friends, that if more Christians had this attitude, church splits would become an endangered species. Let's make sure they're an endangered species in Joliet by being of one mind.
- B. It makes just as much sense that brotherly kindness would lead us to put one another first. Paul brings this up in Romans 12:10. Let's think again logically about why this would be so. If we truly have brotherly love for another Christian, we're not going to be concerned with making sure that we get our own over him. Instead, we're going to put him first, because what makes him happy is what makes us happy. Similarly, we're not going to be upset because some other Christian is a better songleader or Bible class teacher than we are, or because he gets appointed as an elder or deacon and we don't. Instead, true brotherly love will lead us to rejoice in his gifts or in his position. All of that is very simple, but that doesn't make it easy. Probably every human being on the planet is troubled by envy sometimes, and Christians aren't immune to the disease. What we have to do then is pray for help and work on getting our minds straight. Satan is persistent, but if we keep at it, we can be more persistent. We can make sure that we put one another first in honor.
- C. Nor is brotherly love just going to have an effect on general attitudes like these. Instead, it will also shape our specific behavior. Along these lines, consider the words of the Hebrews writer in Hebrews 13:1-4. Much of the time, we're tempted to read this section like a set of unrelated bullet points. In reality, Hebrews 13:1 is like a subject heading, and the other ideas are subpoints under that main heading. This tells us, then, that *philadelphia* should lead us to be hospitable to other Christians, even if we don't know them that well. Brotherly love led Christians in the first century to remember those who were imprisoned for the cause of Christ, just like our affection for our shut-ins leads us to remember them. Finally in this section, *philadelphia* actually leads us to honor one another's marriages. We don't seduce a sister's husband or a brother's wife not only because we don't want to get roasted, but because we don't want to hurt a friend like that. These are just examples. Rightly practiced, brotherly kindness defines everything we do for one another.

Conclusion. If you want to share in the love of the brethren, you have to become a brother or a sister first.