

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 4 October 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **Steps to Fruitfulness (Part 4)**

### **2 Peter 1:7**

In early January of 1955, the world was shocked to hear reports of five missionaries named Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming, and Nate Saint, who had died in the jungles of Ecuador. These men had a burden to reach a jungle tribe called the Huaorani (or the Aucas), who had never heard the name of Jesus before, and who had a particular fear and hatred of outsiders. They knew that it would be a dangerous mission; but their hearts were beating with love for these souls for whom Christ died. In an entry in his personal journal on 28 October 1949, Jim Elliot had once written, “He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Elliot knew that “that which he could not lose” were the souls of those who would be saved through his sacrifices for the Lord.

Beginning in September of 1954, Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Nate Saint (the pilot), and another missionary friend named Johnny Keenan, began to fly over the Auca villages periodically; and, over a loudspeaker, they would speak simple messages of peace and friendship to them, with the few Auca words that they knew. They would also use a cable and a basket to pass down gifts to them. After several months of making these trips, they built a missionary base a short distance from the Aucas’ village, on the Curaray River. Encouraged by the seemingly friendly reception that they had received from the people on the ground below, they began to make plans to visit the Auca village after 1 January 1955. The first Auca who approached them was a man named Naenkiwi, on 7 January. The missionaries called him “George”; and they took him for a ride in the airplane. “George” seemed friendly enough; but, unbeknown to them, he lied about them to the others in the village. (In order to cover up for the fact that he had come back to the village with a young lady from their tribe, with no chaperone attending them, Naenkiwi claimed that the five foreigners had attacked their party, and that in their attempt to escape, they had been separated from their chaperone.) Willing to believe this story, the chief of the village determined that these dangerous foreigners must die. Meanwhile, encouraged by their *seemingly* friendly encounter with “George,” Jim Elliot and his friends were making plans to visit the Auca village. However, on 8 January 1955, a group of ten Auca warriors attacked these missionaries on the bank of the Curaray River, and speared them to death. They then burned down their mission compound, and stole their possessions.

However, this was not the end of the story. Jim Elliot’s wife, Elisabeth, did not believe that these men had died in vain. She, too, loved the Aucas, and desired that they would come to know Christ. Elisabeth was crushed, at first, at the death of her husband; but the words of **1 John 2:17** kept coming back to her: **“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”** She refused to be bitter at God, or at the people who had killed her husband. Believing that it was God’s will to take Christ’s love to the Huaorani, she took her 3-year-old daughter Valerie, and her missionary friend Rachel Saint (the sister of Nate Saint), and settled in the Auca village in 1958. She didn’t have a clue how to catch a fish with her hands, or how to make a clay pot, or how to weave a hammock; and she didn’t know the language. However, in time, she learned all these things; and, little by little, the Aucas not only came to trust *them*, but they also came to trust in their Saviour, Jesus Christ. Most of the very men who had murdered their loved ones came to know Christ as Saviour; and most of the 600 or so

Aucas were saved, as well. One tribal leader, who had participated in the murder of the missionaries, later said, “My heart was dark like night, but Jesus with his strong blood and the Holy Spirit, came and washed it.”

What compelled these people to dare to do such things? Love! Love is the greatest virtue of the Christian life. As we have studied **2 Peter chapter 1** in past weeks, we have seen that the Christian life begins with **faith** (when a sinner places his complete trust in Christ as Saviour). However, as that Christian’s faith grows, he should then add to his 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**.

As we will see this morning, **charity** (love) is listed *last* because it is the crowning characteristic of a Christian’s life. God desires every Christian to progress from faith to love. That is what we will be talking about this morning, in this message which I’ve entitled *Steps to Fruitfulness (Part 4)*.

**Read 2 Peter 1:5-7.**

### **I. Seventh step to fruitfulness: Brotherly Kindness (v. 7)**

Here in **verse 7**, we find the next quality that Christians should be adding to their lives: **brotherly kindness**. Now, I think we all have a good idea of what “brotherly kindness” might be. The term speaks for itself. It comes from the Greek word *philadelphia*, which is also translated as “brotherly love.” This word *philadelphia* refers to the kind of love that a person has for his own family. As for myself, I can say that I love my brothers and my sister very deeply. There is a deep bond between us, even though we are separated by thousands of miles. When I visited my two brothers and my sister during our furlough back in 2017, it had been seven years since I had last seen them; yet, we carried on with each other as if we’d only been apart for seven days. Despite the fact that we were not physically together during those seven years, our relationship had not changed. We all have the same dad; and the love that our dad showed to each of *us*, and the love he taught us to have for *each other*, has not changed.

Yet, as important as family love is, Peter isn’t talking about love for *flesh-and-blood* family. He’s talking about love for our *spiritual* family. He’s talking about the kind of love that Christians should have toward other brothers and sisters in the Lord. We who know Christ all have the same heavenly Father; and there are spiritual characteristics that we can expect to see in each other’s lives, because we have received these traits from our Heavenly Father. In fact, these family traits are so obvious, that oftentimes we can sense when we are in the presence of a fellow believer--even though we have never met that person before! I can testify that there have been many times when I have crossed paths with another Christian in a public place; and even though we were complete strangers, we both suspected that the other person was a Christian, even before any words were spoken. (In fact, there have been times when either I or the other person was bold enough to come right out and ask, “Are you a Christian?”) Likewise, we who know Christ can usually sense when we are in the presence of a *non-Christian*. Oftentimes we encounter people who *claim* to be Christians, and who give a testimony which, on the surface, sounds right. Yet, something inside us questions that that person is truly saved; and, in time, it becomes evident that that person is, indeed, *not* saved.

Now, how do we know these things? How is it that we who know Christ can often tell a saved person from an unsaved person, even though we know little to nothing about that person? It’s

because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. **Romans 8:16** says, *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”* In other words, the moment you were saved, the Holy Spirit came into your heart; and when He did, He let you know, in your spirit, that you were now His child. In the same way, the Holy Spirit also silently testifies when you are in the presence of *another* one of His children. Even Christians who barely know each other can often carry on with each other as if they have known each other all their lives. Why? Because they are bound together by a mutual relationship with their Heavenly Father.

Now, does this mean that there can never be a strain in Christians’ relationships—that they will always get on well, with little or no effort? No. If this were the case, it would not have been necessary for God to *command* Christians to have “brotherly love” toward each other. Let’s look at one of these many commands.

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10.**

Why is it necessary to work so hard to maintain and increase “brotherly love”? Because we still have that old enemy inside us—our sinful flesh. Just as sin and selfishness destroy relationships within *flesh-and-blood* families, they also destroy relationships within *God’s* family. This is why Paul exhorted the Christians in the churches of Rome, *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.”* That is why he exhorted the Christians in Ephesus, *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* Whenever there is a problem in a relationship between Christians, it is never the result of an “unfortunate circumstance”: there is always sin at the bottom of it, on one or both parts. While the leaven of sin is rising, a pretence of love may be kept up for a while; but sooner or later, the sin that is causing the problem will not be able to be ignored anymore: and it will cause damage. This is why Jesus instructed believers to keep short accounts with each other, and to initiate reconciliation, regardless of who is at fault.

### **Read Matthew 5:23-24.**

Brotherly love is a wonderful thing; but brotherly love isn’t always easy. Sometimes, brotherly love requires that you confront a believer about a grievous sin that he is committing. In **Galatians 6:1** Paul wrote, *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* When there is a grievous sin that is causing reproach to the name of Christ, ignoring the sin and acting as though it doesn’t exist is *not* the loving thing to do. It is, in fact, *unloving*, because you are not willing to tell that brother what he needs to hear in order to get right with the Lord. It is also *hypocrisy*, because you are showing love to his face, and putting on an act that “all is well”—when, in fact, he is suffering God’s chastisement because of his sin. (Even worse, you may be talking about his sin behind his back!) Brotherly love should be *“unfeigned”*—meaning “unpretentious.” The Apostle Peter wrote, *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”* (1 Peter 1:22).

Brotherly love also demonstrates itself in going out of your way to *help and care* for brothers and sisters in Christ. The New Testament is filled with records of people who went far beyond themselves to minister to other believers. There was **Dorcas**, who gave what little she had to help those in need, and who made coats and garments for the brethren. There was **Lydia**, who opened her home to Paul and his co-labourers while they were spreading the Gospel in the city of Philippi. There was the family of **Stephanas**, who “*addicted*” themselves to the “*ministry of the saints*.” (In other words, they continually served others in the church, and did everything in their power to advance the growth of the church.) There were **Fortunatus** and **Achaicus**, who refreshed the spirits of Paul and his helpers. (In other words, they encouraged them). There were **Aquila and Priscila**, who, when not working their secular job of tent-making, did all that they could to help Paul plant a new church in the city of Ephesus, and to disciple young believers such as Apollos. There was **Onesimus**, who delivered letters for Paul while he was in prison. There was **Phebe**, who was a “*servant*” of the church at Cenchrea, and who “*succoured*” (helped, assisted) many believers. I would encourage you, as you read the New Testament epistles, not to skim over the names of believers whom the Apostles took time to commend for their service to Christ. These were real people, who served God and fellow believers with all their hearts. Learn from them; pattern your life after them; and, as Paul said, “*Let brotherly love continue.*”

## II. Eighth step to fruitfulness: Charity (v. 7)

(**Read verse 7 again.**) We finally come to the last spiritual quality—the last “grace”—in Peter’s list: and that is “*charity*.” By the way, I call charity a “grace” because it is something that *God* gives to the believer. Charity is something that *God* enables us to practice. On our own, we cannot produce true “charity.” Because of our sinful nature, we are not able to produce untainted, spotless, love for others (and *especially* not love for God). However, as we allow the Holy Spirit to put sin to death in our lives, *He* gives us the power to practice true, godly charity.

Now, as I mentioned earlier in this message, “charity” is not thrown randomly onto the end of this list. (*Nothing* in God’s Word is stated haphazardly!) Just as there is a reason why faith is listed first, there is a reason why charity is listed last. Faith is the *foundation* of the Christian life; but “charity” is the *crowning grace* of the Christian life. Charity is like a beautiful capstone on the top of a building. Every spiritual quality in this list leads up to charity. You cannot separate charity from all the previous qualities. You cannot have charity without first having a relationship with God by *faith*; or without having virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness. Charity in a Christian’s life is the mark of completeness—the mark of being fully spiritually equipped.

**Read Colossians 3:9-14.** (“*Perfection*” means “completeness.”)

**Read Romans 13:8-10.**

Now, before I go any farther, let’s look a little more closely at the word “*charity*.” What is “*charity*,” according to the Bible? Well, the Greek word for “*charity*” is *agape*. The word *agape* refers to the deepest, purest kind of love. Sometimes, this word *agape* is translated as “love”; but it is often translated as “*charity*.” Why? Because the English word “*charity*” is the closest equivalent to the real meaning of the Greek word *agape*. You see, our English

word “love” can be used very carelessly. Oftentimes, we use the word “love” to refer to something as trivial as food! (For instance, we say, “I *love* watermelon.”) However, the word “charity” is not any old kind of love; it is a *deep, costly* love. It is the purest kind of love. It is a sacrificial love. In Scripture, it is defined as the kind of love that *God* possesses.

That is why “charity” is the very last quality in this list of spiritual qualities. “**Brotherly kindness**” is extremely important; but “**charity**” is even higher than brotherly kindness. Remember, “brotherly love” is the kind of love that brothers and sisters in Christ should exercise toward *each other*. However, charity is love toward *all* men; and it is not based upon the worthiness of the individual who is loved. “**Charity**” is love for those who are easy to love, as well as for people who are *not* easy to love. “Charity” is love even for those who do not *return* any love to you. Only God can place that kind of love in a person’s heart! Let’s see what Jesus said about this.

**Read Matthew 5:43-48.**

We, as children of God, should have a consuming desire to add “charity,” or *agape* love, to our lives. It is easy to flatter ourselves that we are loving people; but *do* we love as we should? Do *you* love as you should? An excellent litmus test of whether you have godly charity can be found in **1 Corinthians 13**. Let’s turn there.

**Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.**

In these verses, you will find something very interesting. If you look closely, you will notice that all eight of the spiritual qualities of **2 Peter 1:5-7** are included in these descriptions of charity! Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity—they’re all there, expressed in one form or other. The first seven spiritual qualities in Peter’s list are not merely a *part* of charity; they are the *very substance* of it! Remove faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness from “charity,” and you have nothing left. There *is* no true charity without these things. There is no “short-cut” by which you can arrive at charity in your life. You *must* begin with faith, and then add on all these other qualities, before you begin to develop real charity.

This is important stuff, folks! These are the issues of life. If you want to have true love in your life—if you long to have the peace that can come only with a loving relationship with God, and toward others—then you *must* heed these truths, and apply them to your heart and life. It will make all the difference in your marriage, in your family, and in your friendships, both inside and outside of church; and, most importantly, it will make all the difference in your relationship with the Lord.

Now, in the last part of this message, I would like to point out how *faith* (the foundational grace of the Christian life) is woven into the tapestry of charity. In next week’s message, I will show you how the other six qualities are woven into charity, as well; but for now, let’s start with “faith.”

“Faith” is a vital part of charity. It is the very foundation of it. Let’s read, once more, from **1 Corinthians 13**, and zoom in the microscope a little more. (**Read 1 Corinthians 13:2 again.**)

In this verse, Paul says something that is a bit disconcerting. He says that it is possible for a Christian to have faith *without* having much charity. In fact, he says that if he were to have the kind of faith that is necessary to *remove mountains*, yet have not charity, he would still be nothing.

That is a strong statement, brethren! Do you see how important it is that we be “adding” all these other spiritual qualities to our lives? You *cannot* have charity (godly love) without having the foundation of faith; but you *can* have the foundation of faith *without progressing on to charity*.

Christian, God wants you to believe and trust Him in every area of life; but He doesn't want you to trust Him merely to meet your needs, and to answer your personal requests. Yes, you *should* have complete trust and confidence that God will take care of you, and protect you, and do all the other things that He has promised; but He wants your faith in Him to be so intimate, that it affects your *heart*. He wants your trust and dependence on Him to be more than a mere mathematical calculation. He wants your faith to be more than a dry deduction that “God did such-and-such in the past, so I can be sure that He will do it again.” He wants your trust in Him to be the kind of trust that a child has in his daddy, because he *loves* his daddy. My children trust their daddy not only because I've kept my word in the past, but because they know that I *love* them, and that I would do only what is best for them. Therefore, they *love* me in return; and they *show* their love by trusting me intimately.

Christian, you cannot have real charity without having strong and growing faith in the Lord. Please look again at **verse 13**, at the end of the chapter. (**Read 1 Corinthians 13:13.**) Do you see that threefold bind—faith, hope, and charity? This is not the only place where this “trio” appears in Scripture, either. Let's look at some other Scriptures where they are found.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3.**

**Read Colossians 1:4-5.**

Did you notice that threefold bind of “faith, hope, and love” as we read these two passages? These three always go together. **Faith** in God produces **hope** in Him. (By “hope,” I mean a longing, yearning, certain expectation in God's promises.) And what does hope produce? Hope produces **charity** (*love* for Him). All the other spiritual qualities *between* faith and charity (virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness) are included in that middle cord of “hope.” Take virtue, for instance. Why would you exercise virtue (standing courageously for Christ) if you did not have the sure *hope* that Christ is worth standing for? Why would you exercise patience if Christ were not your *Hope*—the One for whom you are waiting and longing? All these spiritual qualities fit into the threefold bind of “faith, hope, and charity.”

*Yet*, important though faith and hope are, Paul says that “***the greatest of these is charity.***” Now, the fact that charity is the greatest of these does not mean that faith is unimportant. You *must* have faith! It is absolutely essential! However, *charity* should be the goal toward which faith *leads* you. It is the crowning virtue of the Christian life.

Before we close this morning, let's look at one more verse here in **1 Corinthians 13**. (**Read 1 Corinthians 13:7**.) What does Paul mean when he says that charity "*believeth all things*"? Does this mean that if you really love someone, you'll blindly believe everything he tells you? No, that is not what it means. The Bible says, "**Let God be true, and every man a liar.**" We *all* have lied; and, sadly, even people whom we dearly love will tell lies sometimes.

So, the meaning of this verse is *not* that you should "Believe everything people tell you, even if it looks as though they are lying." Our faith should *not* be in man. Rather, the "belief" that Paul is talking about here is *belief (or faith) in God*. True love is directed first toward *God*; and if you truly love God, then you will "believe *all things*" that *He* has told you in His Word. Your *faith* in Him will express itself in your *love* for Him. If you really believe what He has revealed about Himself in His Word, then your faith in Him will lead you to love Him.

Now, maybe you're thinking, "O.K., Pastor, I understand the 'love for God' part; but what about love toward *others*? How does having faith in God lead me to have godly charity toward *others*?" Well, here's the link. If you really *believe* all that God has said in His Word about loving others (if, for instance, you really believe that God can enable you to love even your enemies) then God *will* honour your faith, and *place* that kind of love in your heart. Christ says that it *is* possible to love your enemies--through His Spirit. God says that it *is* possible to have the kind of divine love that He has--through His Spirit. And what is God's love like? To answer that question, let us look at two more Scriptures.

**Read Luke 19:41-44.**

**Read Matthew 23:37-39.**

Think of this! Here is Jesus Christ, the God of Creation in human flesh, weeping and sobbing over Jerusalem—the very city that had killed so many of His prophets down through the centuries. These were the very people who had insulted and rejected Him throughout His earthly ministry, and who were about to nail Him to a cross. Yet, He tenderly *loved them*, and still yearned for them to repent and be reconciled to Him! *That* is godly love! If you will, in faith, ask God to fill your heart with *this* kind of love—the kind that keeps loving, even when you are insulted and hurt—He will give it to you.

Elisabeth Elliot had that kind of love. In and of *herself*, she did not have the power to produce this kind of love; but through Christ, she *was* able. She exercised *faith* to believe God's promise that she *could* love her enemies; and God gave her that love. Through Christ, she was able to go to the very people who had murdered her husband, and to live among them. Through Christ, she was able to give up the comforts of Western life, and to endure the hardships and privations of jungle living, just so that she could reach her husband's murderers. Through Christ, she was able to love them, and to pour herself into them, and to show them the way of salvation. *This* is "charity." *This* is the crowning grace of the Christian life.

**Conclusion:** How are you progressing in these areas, Christian? Do you need more brotherly kindness in your life? (That's just a rhetorical question, by the way. We *all* need more brotherly kindness!) How about charity? Is your love the pure, godly "charity" of **1 Corinthians 13**—the kind that God has? Is your love toward God and man what it should be? Are you endeavouring, through the Spirit, to increase in these spiritual qualities, so that you might bring forth spiritual fruit for God?

Perhaps you don't know for sure that these qualities are truly in your life, because you're not sure that you are truly a child of God. If so, please listen carefully! Jesus died for your sin in order to pay a price that you cannot pay. Salvation is a free gift of God, which Christ purchased in full on the cross, with His blood. If you will simply repent of your sin and trust in Christ alone, He will save you! The Scripture says, ***“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”***