

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 11 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.

The Tapestry of Love

2 Peter 1:7

Around the turn of the 20th century, a famous American author named William Sydney Porter (who was called by the pen name “O. Henry”) wrote a short story entitled “The Last Leaf.” In this story, two young women named Johnsy and Sue had moved to New York City to find work; and they were sharing the rent of a flat, while studying art at a university. They both worked menial jobs to make ends meet; but it was a struggle to eat, and to stay warm.

Now, during the rainy autumn season that year, Johnsy became deathly sick with pneumonia. In her dazed state of mind, she began to lose her will to live. In fact, she began to develop a morbid fancy about the ivy vine outside their window. She took it into her head that when the last leaf would fall off the vine, she would die. Despite all Sue’s attempts to encourage her flatmate, Johnsy would not be comforted.

Well, the rough wind and rain continued to blow for the next three days; and all the leaves fell off the vine, one by one. As each leaf fell, Johnsy became weaker and weaker, and more determined that she would soon die. However, there was one leaf that would not fall. No matter how hard the wind blew, that one leaf held tenaciously to the alley wall. Gradually, Johnsy began to be encouraged by this strange phenomenon. If that one leaf could hang on, then perhaps she could hang on, too. Slowly, her health began to improve, until she was on her way to recovery.

Well, one morning, Sue came to Johnsy with some sad news. Mr. Behrman, an old German neighbour in their apartment building, had just died of pneumonia. Shocked by this news, Johnsy asked Sue how Mr. Behrman had come down with pneumonia. She learned that Mr. Behrman, having heard of her strange fancy about the ivy vine, had gone out into the alley outside her window one night, in the bone-chilling rain, and had painted that last, realistic-looking leaf onto the wall. Mr. Behrman was, himself, an able artist; and he had always said that one day he would paint his masterpiece. At last, he had painted it.

Now, keep this story in mind. Later in this message, we will return to it. But for now, we will turn our focus to **2 Peter 1:5-7**. In this passage, we have been learning about eight spiritual qualities that God commands Christians to have. These qualities are **faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity** (love). As we have seen, **faith** is listed first in this list because it is the foundation of every other spiritual quality. In order to have all these other qualities in your life, you must first place your **faith** in the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive God’s gift of eternal life. Then, after you have placed your faith in Christ, you must continue to grow in faith. As a Christian increases in faith day by day, God then enables that Christian to add to his faith **virtue**, and then **knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (love)**.

Now, just as there is a reason why faith is listed first, there is also a reason why charity is listed last. Charity is listed last because it is the “crowning virtue” of the Christian life. It is the ultimate mark of spiritual maturity. Every other spiritual quality leads up to charity, and is part of its very substance. God wants us to have selfless, sacrificial love, just like His love; but we cannot have this kind of love if we do

not first have all the *other* spiritual qualities that Peter listed. If you do not have faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness, then you cannot possibly have charity. All these qualities working together are what make charity “charity”!

Real love is like a tapestry, with seven spiritual “fabrics” woven throughout it. We’ve already looked at how **faith** is woven into the tapestry of charity; but now, we will see how **virtue, knowledge, and temperance** are woven into “charity.” The title of this message is *The Tapestry of Love*.

Read 2 Peter 1:5-7.

I. Virtue is part of charity.

If you have been here for some of the past sermons on **2 Peter 1:5-7**, you already have a good idea of what “virtue” is. The Greek word for “virtue” refers to “courage,” “valour,” or “manliness.” To have “virtue” means to stand for what is right, no matter what. A Christian with virtue stands for what is right, even when he is the *only one* standing. Let’s look at an example in the Bible of someone who had virtue. That man’s name is **Joseph**.

Read Genesis 39:7-20.

One of the most notable characteristics of Joseph is that he was an intelligent young man. He was no dummy. Thus, being as sagacious as he was, he surely realised the precariousness of his situation. Joseph had been granted a lot of power in Potiphar’s household; but this did not change the fact that he was still just a slave. All the power was on the side of Potiphar’s wife; and she was a wicked, unscrupulous woman. Joseph surely realised that if Potiphar’s wife was treacherous enough to cheat on her husband, then she was also treacherous enough to turn on *him*, and to make up a terrible lie about *him*, if he did not comply with her wishes. Joseph surely knew that if he didn’t commit immorality with Potiphar’s wife, she could have him put into prison, or put to death. Yet, he stood for what was right, regardless of the consequences.

Now, what motivated Joseph to take this stand? It certainly wasn’t the moral support of his family, because he *had* no family! His brothers, who *professed* to worship the true God, had hated him, and had attempted to murder him, and had finally betrayed him, and sold him as a slave. His father Jacob loved him very much; but he was hundreds of miles away, back in Canaan, and didn’t even know that Joseph was still alive. In the land where he now lived, there was *no one* who knew or worshipped Jehovah. He was surrounded by pagan idolatry. In Egypt, there were no reminders of the worship of the true God. There was nothing in Egypt to keep his memory of the true God alive; and there was no one to encourage him to stay true to Jehovah. Yet, Joseph was motivated to take a courageous, virtuous stand for what was right, even though there was no one else on earth to support him. Why? Because Joseph’s virtue was grounded upon true *faith* in God; and it was motivated by *love* for God (as well as love for Potiphar, whom he refused to sin against)!

This is how virtue is woven into the tapestry of love. Real love is committed to do what is right, simply because it pleases God. Virtue is *part and parcel* of love, and cannot be separated from it. You can’t have love *without* having virtue. And what *is* virtue, exactly? It certainly isn’t “stoicism,” or “stubbornness,” or “hard-headedness,” because stoicism, stubbornness, and hard-headedness are all based upon *self-will*. Real virtue is *faith in God* put

to action; and its fruit is loyal obedience. **“Charity never faileth.”** It is always loyal and faithful, because it is motivated by love for God.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8.

What motivated Joseph to take his virtuous stand for the LORD? Did he get some strange joy out of being falsely accused of a crime he did not commit? Did he enjoy suffering in prison? No. He did what he did out of *charity*—love for God, and love for others. Brethren, you can’t have charity without having virtue!

II. Knowledge is part of charity.

(Read 2 Peter 1:5.) You cannot have charity without having virtue; and you also cannot have charity without having *knowledge*. Peter says, “Add to virtue knowledge.”

Now, what ‘knowledge’ is Peter talking about? He isn’t talking about mere *human* knowledge: he’s talking about *divine* knowledge. He’s talking about the knowledge of *God’s Word*. Now, please don’t misunderstand: human knowledge is important. We do need to know how to work an honest trade, and how to make things, and build things, and calculate things. We need the knowledge of mathematics, and mechanics, and medicine, and agriculture, and so on. God has given man the intelligence to discover and create things, and how to subdue the earth; and we need to know these things in order to get on in this world. Yet, as important as these fields of knowledge are, they are not nearly as important as the knowledge of God’s Word. Jesus said, **“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).** Though we need human knowledge in order to meet material and physical needs, human knowledge is not the *authority* for our lives. Human knowledge may help us to live; but it cannot tell us *how* to live. Only God’s Word is the authority for living. Only God’s Word can restore us to a relationship with our Creator, and fill that emptiness in our hearts. Only God’s Word can quench the thirsty soul. Only God’s Word can teach us how to *love* God, and *live* for Him.

Now, as for *worldly wisdom* (man’s ideas about *how* life should be lived), it should *always* be shunned by God’s people. The world’s philosophies of how man got here, and *why* we are here, and how to live life, will *always* turn our hearts away from God. The world’s philosophies (such as evolution, psychology, feminism, Marxism, and humanism) will *always* lead us to doubt and reject God, instead of trust and love Him. This is why Paul warns us that **“the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Corinthians 3:19).** He also warned us, **“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).** Resist the godless wisdom of this world with all your heart! Don’t allow yourself to accept the idea that the world’s wisdom is somehow authoritative (even if it be called “science”). Any “knowledge” that defies the knowledge of God is foolishness. It is what Paul referred to as **“science falsely so-called.”** As God’s people, we are commanded to **“cast down”** such false knowledge **(2 Corinthians 10:5).**

When Peter says “add *knowledge* to virtue,” he is talking about the knowledge of *God’s Word*. You cannot have godly charity without having knowledge of the Scriptures. Let’s go back to **1 Corinthians 13**, and see how knowledge is woven into the tapestry of charity.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:6.

What did Paul say about charity? Charity rejoices in what? It rejoices in the *truth*. And how do we know what “truth” is? We know what truth is by reading God’s Word! The Bible is the *only* Source of pure, spotless truth; and it is the only Source of knowledge that can lead us to a *personal* knowledge of God! When Paul says that charity “rejoices in the truth,” he is saying that charity rejoices **in the knowledge of God’s Word**--because God’s Word is Truth!

Now, at this point, I would like to return to the story that I told at the beginning of this message. On the surface, William Sydney Porter’s story about Johnsy and Mr. Behrman sounds heart-warming. It’s one of those stories that gives you a “warm and fuzzy feeling inside.” To be sure, Mr. Behrman sacrificed himself in the best way that he knew how in order to save Johnsy’s life. However, for Bible-believing Christians, this story raises some nagging questions. First of all, was not Johnsy’s will to live based on a *false* knowledge? Wasn’t her sense of hope based upon an illusion--the illusion that there was still one ivy leaf hanging on the alley wall? Wasn’t her faith based upon an empty lie? What kind of “hope” is that? Also, what of Mr. Behrman? By painting a fake leaf, wasn’t he telling Johnsy a lie? Virtuous though his deed seemed to be, was it *godly* virtue? Was his *love* godly love? The answer is, “Yes, he was telling a lie”; and, “No, this is not godly virtue, or godly love.” True love--godly love--rejoices in the truth. Well-intentioned “little white lies” are not of God. *Worldly* people flatter themselves that they love others, even though they tell them lies. William Sydney Porter himself certainly thought this way. He spent 5 years in a federal penitentiary for embezzling \$854.08 from the First National Bank of Austin. Not surprisingly, the “good” characters in his stories often had the same kind of duplicity and dishonesty that he had. (In fact, some of them were actually burglars or bank robbers!) Yet, somehow, he made them look likable, and lovable. However, their “love” was not real love, because it did not rejoice in the knowledge of the truth: instead, it rejoiced in lies. *Real* love would have compelled Mr. Behrman to tell Johnsy the truth--the truth that Jesus could give her a *true* hope for living, if she would only turn her heart over to Him, and receive His gift of salvation!

You cannot separate love from the knowledge of God’s Word. You must have the one in order to have the other. You cannot have love toward God without seeking to *know* what pleases Him. By the way, it’s the same way in a marriage. If you love your husband, you will seek to know his likes and dislikes, so that you can *please* him. If you love your wife, you won’t purposely do things that you know irritate her. Likewise, if you love God, you will seek to *know* what pleases Him, and what offends Him; and the only way to know this is by reading God’s Word. If you do *not* read God’s Word much, it’s probably because you don’t *want* to know whether you are offending God, and you don’t *want* to make any changes in your life. Brethren, this is *not* true love! Paul says that charity “**rejoiceth not in iniquity.**” A Christian who is exercising true love toward God wants to know if there be any sin in his life, so that he may abandon it, and thus please His Saviour. As a Christian practices this kind of love toward God, it will spill over into his relationships with others, as well.

Let’s look at a specific example. The ninth commandment is, “**Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.**” Yet, what is the spirit of this command? Is the *spirit* of this command, “Tell the truth, because life will go better for you this way”? No! God didn’t give us the ninth commandment merely so that our lives will go better. (Even a *lost* person is able

to realise that telling the truth makes life a lot less complex, and relationships a lot better.) Yes, life does go better when you tell the truth; but the *real* reason why we should obey the ninth commandment is that **God is a God of truth!** If you *love* Him, and want to have a close relationship with Him, you will seek to imitate His character, and not tell lies. The *knowledge* of the fact that God hates deceit is necessary in order for you to show your *love* for Him. If you tell lies, then you are not showing love for God; you are *offending* Him! If, on the other hand, you tell the truth--and you do so because you want to please God--then you are fulfilling the whole purpose of the Law, which is love.

Read Romans 13:8-10.

Let's look at another example. In the Scriptures, God gives us the knowledge of how to pray. However, what is the *purpose* of prayer? Does God give us the knowledge of how to pray so that we can ask for things that we need, such as money and food? In *part*, yes. God does want us to rely on Him for our needs. However, that is *not* the ultimate purpose of prayer. God wants us to pray so that we might express our *love* for Him! This is a biblical truth that we all need to know! When you pray, your heart should be drawn in *love* to God. Otherwise, you are missing the whole point of prayer. Everything we do--including our prayers--should be directed to God out of a heart of love. When asked what the greatest commandment of the Law is, Jesus said, "***Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.***" Let's see how Paul put it.

Read Romans 15:30-32.

You'll notice that in **verse 30**, Paul asked the Roman Christians, for the sake of their "***love of the Spirit,***" to pray for Him. Let that thought sink in! Paul says that we show our love for other believers by *praying* for them. As Christians, we should take the *knowledge* of how to pray, and use that knowledge to exercise our love toward others--by praying for them!

Every spiritual virtue leads us toward the practice of godly love. The whole point of knowledge is that we might ultimately practice *charity*. This "knowledge" is not merely an intellectual knowledge; it is a *heart* knowledge. Merely having *intellectual* knowledge of God's Word is not enough. You can have all the intellectual knowledge of Scripture in the world, and not even *know* God in a personal way at all (in other words, not be saved). A person may have a whole string of M. Div's and Doctorate of Divinities, and know the Biblical languages backward and forward, and still have no true understanding of God's Word, because he has never entered into a trusting, loving relationship with God by faith! Even genuine Christians can have *knowledge* of God's Word, yet use it for the wrong reason.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.

What is Paul saying here? He's saying, "There is no clear mandate on what to do in regard to meat that has been offered to idols in pagan temples; yet, we all have knowledge of scriptural principles, which we can apply to the issue. With our knowledge, we may come to varying conclusions; but whatever conclusion you come to, use your knowledge to build others up in love, and not to boast yourself in pride, because '*I have the right position.*'" Now, to those who

went so far as to *eat inside the pagan temples*, Paul basically said, “Shame on you!” This was clearly wrong, and was a terrible testimony to the lost. However, aside from this, there was some room for liberty--as long as they were not *knowingly* eating meat that had been offered to idols. Some of them had decided not to eat any meat at all, *just in case* it had been ‘blessed’ by a pagan priest in a pagan temple before being sold in the marketplace. Some of them purchased the meat in the marketplace, but didn’t ask questions about where it had come from. Some went so far as to eat meat at an unsaved friend’s house, but didn’t ask any questions about where the meat had come from. Who was right? The answer is: All of them.

The point Paul is making is: Knowledge “puffs up” (fills people with pride) *if* it be not used for the purpose of building up others spiritually. To those who didn’t eat any meat at all, and to those who ate meat from the market, or at a friend’s house, but didn’t ask questions, Paul is saying: “Use your knowledge to build people up, and not to cause divisions in the church. If you be fully persuaded that you shouldn’t eat any meat at all, then follow your persuasion; but don’t get the big-head, and tear others down who might have come to a different conclusion.”

Knowledge of Scripture is not the enemy of love: it is part of the very *substance* of love. However, it must be applied and used in the right way, and for the right purpose--which is love! Christian, are you adding knowledge of God’s Word to your life, so that you may know how to please God, and how to strengthen others in the Lord?

III. Temperance is part of charity.

We’ve seen that virtue is part of charity; and we’ve also seen that knowledge is part of charity. Now, let’s go back to **1 Corinthians 13** once more, and see how *temperance* is part of charity.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4.

Please notice what Paul says there in **verse 4**. He says, “*Charity envieth not.*” The Greek word for “envy” also means “to covet” or “to be jealous over.” Now, this word can be used in a *good* way. It can mean “to covet after godliness,” or to “covet for the salvation of souls,” or “to covet a closer relationship with God.” These are things we *should* covet after. Even *God* is “jealous” of us! (He desires our whole heart and soul, because he loves us.) However, this is not the kind of “coveting” that Paul is talking about here in **verse 4**. He is talking about coveting (or envying after) after *things of this world*.

So, if “envying” means “coveting after things of this world,” then what is the opposite of envy? Temperance! A Christian who has true love will also have a temperate view of things of this life. A Christian who is filled with godly love will view earthly possessions not as things to be clutched onto, but as tools that can be used to glorify God. If you have this perspective, you will be able to have pure love for God, and for *others*. Take marriage, for example. For as long as studies on marriage have been done, statistics have always shown that quarrels over *money* are the number one cause of divorce! Why is that? Does it *have* to be this way? Is it inevitable that if a family be having financial struggles, the husband and wife won’t be able to love each other anymore? Not according to the Bible!

Read Proverbs 15:17.

It is possible to have little in this world, yet to have a heart of love for God, and a heart of love for others (including those who live under your own roof)! Earthly possessions cannot affect a person's relationship with God, nor his relationship with others, **if** that person have a heart love for God, and not for things of this world. Christians who practice temperance have the mindset that "Whether I have little or much in this life, I will love my God, and I will thank Him for what He *has* given me, and use whatever possessions that I have to glorify God, and to help others." If you regard things of this life as most important, and God as secondary, you will have strife and trouble. But if you will set your affections on things above, and not on things of the earth, then you will be able to practice *charity*.

Conclusion: In closing, I would challenge every Christian with this question: "Are you adding virtue, knowledge, and temperance to your faith?" Perhaps you can see that you are lacking in these things. If so, charity is not as perfected in your life as it should be. Ask the Lord to help you to develop these qualities in your life more and more, so that godly love may be made perfect in your life!

Perhaps you're not sure that you really know God, because you can't say that you have ever really loved Him. If so, you need to be saved! Love for God is one of the marks of a true child of God. The question is not, "Do you think you have a *feeling* of love?" Feelings can deceive. The question is, "Have you repented of your sin, stopped trusting in your own imagined good works, and placed your faith entirely in what Christ did for you on the cross?" If not, you do not have true, saving faith; and you need to be saved. Why don't you trust Him today, so that He can begin to show you how to love as He loves?