

Some Assembly Required – Part 7, Love

A mile upstream from Niagara Falls, the Welland River joins the Niagara River. Right where they meet, a passenger bridge arches across the Welland. Boaters can navigate beneath it and enter the wide flow of the Niagara. But before they do, they pass under a large sign posted on the bridge's pylon. It asks them two questions (do you remember them from last week?): **Do you have an anchor? Do you know how to use it?**

So many Christians commend to others a life they don't seem to live themselves, posing as tour guides to territory on which they've never set foot. The life they actually live seems to be only a cruel parody of the dreams they've dreamed. They've told themselves a thousand times that it won't happen again. They've repented so many times that it's beyond counting. They struggle often ... regularly ... constantly ... and they ask themselves "why isn't my faith in God enough?"

Over the last four weeks, we have examined Peter's simple yet irritating claim that he knew the answer to this dilemma: "You already have everything you need for life and godliness!" You already have the anchor, you just need to know how to use it. You already have faith, now here's the secret – **"GIVING ALL DILIGENCE, ADD TO YOUR FAITH."** Some assembly is required. You have all the pieces you need, and all the necessary instructions – now, just put them together!

2 Peter 1:1-11 ¹ Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: ² Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ³ **According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,** through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: ⁴ Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. ⁵ **And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; ⁶ And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; ⁷ And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.** ⁸ 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. ⁹ But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. ¹⁰ Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: ¹¹ For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We have already discussed adding **GOODNESS** (not DOING good, but BEING good), adding **KNOWLEDGE** (not WHAT do I know, but WHO do I need to know), adding **SELF-CONTROL** (disciplined ALERTNESS, or paying attention to God and acting in light of His wisdom), adding **PERSEVERANCE** (maintaining your position regardless of what is happening on the battlefield), adding **GODLINESS** (living a God-centered life, giving precedence to Jesus' preferences in everything), and adding **BROTHERLY KINDNESS** (not detached kindness at a distance, but kindness that is expressed in PERSONAL and PRACTICAL ways).

The final, crowning virtue on Peter's list is **LOVE** ("charity" in the KJV). Even if are only vaguely familiar with the Bible, you know that love literally drenches the pages of Scripture. Paul says (1 Corinthians 13) that if we possess all spiritual knowledge and power but don't have love we are nothing. Peter says that above all else we must love each other deeply. John says that love is the sign that we are born again, that we've crossed from death into life – he even declares that **GOD IS LOVE**.

The word Peter (and other NT writers) uses for LOVE is famous – AGAPE. We often define it as "unconditional love" which is accurate. The common, conditional love that we encounter so often in human life takes an **"if ... then"** form. With conditional love, decision follows emotion. But AGAPE works exactly the opposite – **EMOTION FOLLOWS DECISION**.

But AGAPE is even more stubborn than that – it is a love that wills itself to work even in the face of fierce resistance. AGAPE chooses to love, not just BEFORE there is emotion, but sometimes IN SPITE of opposing emotions. It loves even in the face of betrayal and rejection.

AGAPE is not a "BECAUSE OF" love, but an "IN SPITE OF" love ... and even more than that, it is an "UNPROVOKED" love. AGAPE exists without any reason – it seeks those who never saw it coming, who never had it coming. It shows up unannounced, unexpected and undeserved. It is not dependent on our beauty, popularity, or worthiness ... and it doesn't back off because of our homeliness, clumsiness, or sin. It pursues us even when we run from it. It is an unprovoked love.

You can't "fall into" (or "out of") AGAPE love – it is a CHOICE. And that is why LOVE is the crowning virtue on Peter's list – this is the way God loves us, and it is the way He wants us to love each other.

PHILADELPHIA (brotherly kindness) is loving **WHAT** God loves. **AGAPE** (unprovoked love) is loving **AS** God loves.

AGAPE is needed most among three kinds of people ... **the LEAST of these** (losers), **the MOST of these** (winners), and **the WORST of these** (enemies).

The LEAST of these (losers) is that person you're most likely not to notice in your business ... the forgotten, the despised, the marginalized.

But AGAPE overturns our natural inclinations of haste, disdain, disgust, indifference and superiority. It pushes us beyond ourselves and our tidy little worlds. AGAPE breaks down all barriers!

The MOST of these (winners) is that person who does so much better than you ... the person you (and everyone else) are most likely to notice, compete with, and resent. The one who threatens to eclipse you, because their presence makes you basically invisible. It really is harder to love the MOST of these than the LEAST of these for most of us. It's David to Saul, Abel to Cain, Joseph to his brothers.

But AGAPE overturns our natural inclinations of jealousy, resentment, inferiority and insecurity. It allows us to cheer instead of jeer, to become a fan instead of a critic. Like Jonathan did when David came along and took his place.

The WORST of these (enemies) is that person you have least reason to like and most reason to hate ... the person who has betrayed you, hurt you, willfully misunderstood you, callously embarrassed you, or taken something precious from you.

But AGAPE exerts a power stronger than our hankering for justice and our lust for vengeance – it causes us to truly FORGIVE. And only God working in us can accomplish that.

Matthew 5:43-48 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Illustration: Little child writing in crayon on the wall – “Love won another”

GUARANTEE: IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL.

God has already given us all the pieces and all the instructions for the Christian life, but there is “SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED.”