

The Sixth Step: Brotherly Kindness



Progress to Perfection (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue to work our way systematically through our challenging but inspiring theme, "Progress to Perfection."

In our spirits we've been climbing together the seven successive upward steps that lead us from our initial faith in Christ to our goal of full spiritual development. As we have seen, these steps are clearly set out for us in 2 Peter 1:5–7.

> "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

There are the seven successive upward steps from faith. Goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. May I suggest that you would find it very helpful to memorize these seven steps? Just keep going over them to yourself until you can say them without hesitation and in their right order. Then you'll always have a spiritual yardstick with you which you can use from time to time to check on your own spiritual progress.

Yesterday I spoke about the fifth step up, godliness. And I defined godliness as a life that would be meaningless if there were no God. A life that continual confronts those around it with the reality of God. I illustrated it from 2 Corinthians 2:14 where Paul says:

> "But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ, and spreads abroad the fragrance of his knowledge by us in every place."

So, it's a life that's entered into Christ's victory and shares his victory. And out of that victory it spreads abroad continually something invisible but very permeating with a tremendous power of influence, the fragrance of Christ. So, that's godliness.

Today we're going to look at the sixth step up, brotherly kindness. We need, first of all, to understand what that means. The commonest description for our fellow Christians in the New Testament is not believers or saints but brothers. And so, when it speaks about brotherly kindness or love for our brothers, it's not talking primarily about natural family relationships but it's talking about our relationships with the other members of the family of Christ. Our brothers and, of course, our sisters also in Christ. And before we can attain to the final seventh step of love which I'll be speaking about tomorrow, we have to get up to this step of love for our fellow Christians. Being able to relate to them, being able to get on with them, being able to accept them. And I want to say frankly out of my own experience, out of observations of many lives, this is not always easy. Christians are not always easy people to relate to. And remember, when you say, "Sure that's true," it probably applies to you, too.

Let me say this. At some point it will always be our fellow believers who cause us our greatest difficulty. This is very hard for some Christians to understand. They say, "Well, if it happened to me from a person that wasn't a believer, I could take it. But it's a believer that's treated me like this, that's betrayed me, that's deceived me." Well, that's part of what we have to go through in the upward progress, learning to relate to our brothers and sisters even when they're not right in their relationship with us.

Listen to what the psalmist says in Psalm 55. I think it's the psalmist David. He's been through this. Listen to his words in verses 12–14.

> "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God."

See, David had had the experience of being betrayed by a man with whom he'd enjoyed close, sweet, intimate fellowship, a man with whom he's shared in the worship in the house of God. This was the very man, apparently, who had betrayed him. He said that's what makes it so hard. I want to tell you it's not only David that has to go through that. You and I, sometime or other, will probably face a similar situation.

There are two things to remember when we are confronted by such a situation. The first is we cannot say to these people who've treated us wrong, our fellow believers, "I don't need you." Paul's very clear about that in 1 Corinthians 12:21. He says we're all members of one body. And as members of the same body we cannot say to one another "I don't need you." Paul says it in this way:

> "The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you. And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you."

Often that's our first reaction when a fellow believer treats us wrong, betrays us, lets us down, disappoints us. We just kind of write him off. We say, "Well, I don't need you. I can get on all right without you." The Bible says you do need him. We need one another. God has so arranged our lives that we cannot get on without one another. And that's not a valid way of escape from your problems to say, "I don't need you."

The second thing you need to remember is that God uses our fellow believers to change us and he uses us to change our fellow believers. I always think about the picture of David's five smooth stones. You remember that when David was on his way to fight Goliath he declines to use Saul's armor and weapons, but instead he took his sling and went down to the brook and he took five smooth pebbles or stones out of the brook and he used them in his sling. And I've always sort of thought to myself, "How did those pebbles get smooth and usable?" Because if they had been smooth they would have been reliable. They would have flown true through the air. Because, in my mind's eye I always see those stones, the brook is running over them with its pure water, and that's shaping them all the time. And, as the brook runs over them it rattles the stones against one another and they're knocking the sharp edges off each other until they are rounded and ready to use.

And that's how it is in the Christian life. We have to stay in the brook. We have to stay in the place of fellowship, the place where God's pure water of his word is flowing over us and changing and washing us. And we have to be prepared to be jostled against our fellow believers and let them knock some of the rough edges off us—that is if we want to be usable to God. David didn't go to the top of the mountain and pick out some striking angular rock. He went down to the valley, the place of humility, and he took a stone that had been through God's dealings to be the kind of stone he needed. And our heavenly David, Jesus, chooses the same kind of people when he wants to use them.

Look at the example of Jesus himself in Hebrews 2:11–12.

> "For both he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father…"

Jesus is he who sanctifies, those who are sanctified are we believers, we're all from one Father.

> "...for which reason he [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing thy praise."

I hope you see the point. Because God is willing to call us his children, Jesus calls us his brothers. He cannot deny us the name of brothers though we may be very unworthy at times because God has given us the name of his children. And the same applies to you and me. If God has called those fellow believers of ours his children, we have to call them brothers. If God has accepted them we cannot reject them. We cannot call God our Father and at the same time reject God's children.

Here's a thought for you. We can choose our friends but not our brothers and sisters.

Now, let's look at the new commandment that Jesus gives us in John 13:34–35. Jesus says this to His disciples:

> "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

Notice, first of all, that love is not an option, it's a commandment. He says clearly, "A new commandment I give you, Love one another." In a certain sense, you could say it sums up all the previous commandments. They're all summed up in this one commandment, love one another. If we keep this commandment we're all right. If we break this commandment we're far from all right. We have no option. We have to love one another.

Then Jesus says what will be the result of our loving one another? He says, "All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." That's very important. We really only have two alternatives. We can obey the commandment of Jesus and love one another and our testimony will read all men, all men will know that we are his disciples. But if we disobey the commandment and fail to love one another, we invalidate our own testimony. It doesn't matter how much preaching we do, the world will look at us and say, "But these Christians, they can't get on with one another. They quarrel, they fight, they attack one another, they separate, they split. Their religion doesn't work. Their words may sound good but it doesn't produce the right results." And so, no matter how much preaching we may do, if we do not demonstrate to the world as Christians that we love one another it's questionable how much good our preaching will do. We are obligated to make it work. Start where we are in the household of faith. Love our fellow believers.

I've said to people many times, if it doesn't work at home don't export it. Don't ask people to believe something which isn't working for us. We are obligated to love our fellow believers. It's a commandment. Let's accept it and obey it.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be sharing with you on this week's challenging theme, "Progress to Perfection."

Radio Program

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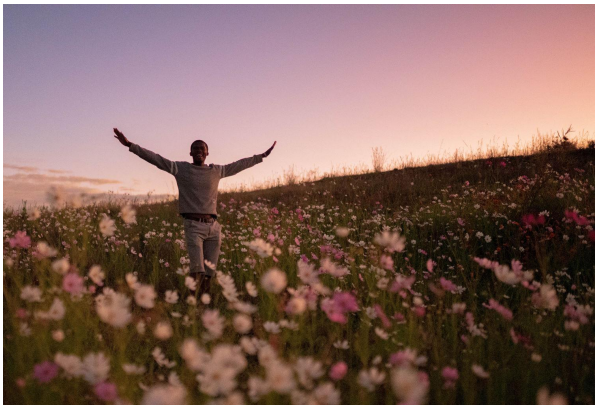

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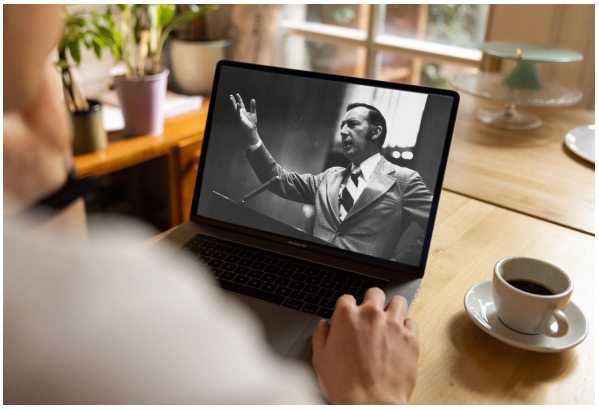

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