

The Seventh Step: Love



Progress to Perfection (Part 10)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we draw near to the close of another week.

Today we come to the last of the seven upward steps in the Christian life that are set before 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."

Let me just enumerate those seven steps for the last time in this series of talks. From faith we move up to goodness; from goodness to knowledge, from knowledge to self-control, from self-control to perseverance, from perseverance to godliness, and from godliness to brotherly kindness, and from brotherly kindness to love.

Let me also repeat the suggestion I made yesterday that you commit the seven steps to memory. Just keep going over them to yourself until you can say them without hesitation and in the 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 brotherly love, our love for our fellow believers. Today I'm going to deal with the seventh and the final step up, that is, love.

First of all, we need to understand that there are a number of different Greek words in the New Testament, all of which could be and sometimes are, translated love. I will just mention the four main ones.

The first is eros from which we get, amongst other words, the English word erotic. Eros is essentially physical passion, sexual love.

The second in Greek is storge which means, more or less, natural affection. It's translated like that in the King James Version, the kind of affection that exists between members of a family: brother for sister or father for son, or mother for

daughter, and so on.

The third is philia which is normally translated friendship.

The fourth, the one that we're speaking about today, the climax of our upward progress, is agape. Agape is a word which is normally, in some way or other, associated with God himself. I believe it would be accurate to say that ultimate the only source of agape is God himself. And so, wherever we're going to have agape it must proceed from God.

The divine demonstration of agape, of God's love, is given us in Romans 5:6–8 where Paul says this:

> "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

So, you see, the object of God's love demonstrated in Christ through the death of Christ. There are three words that are used to describe the kind of people for whom Christ died. Powerless, ungodly and sinners.

Powerless means we were the kind of people who couldn't help ourselves. We had nothing positive to offer. We were totally dependent.

Ungodly means that we were, in our whole character and way of life, something alien to God; something that was unattractive and unappealing to God. Something from which it would have been natural to God to avert his eyes and turn away.

Thirdly, we were sinners. We were rebels. We were at war with God. And it was for such persons: the powerless, the ungodly and sinners that God gave Christ and that Christ died. That's the love of God. It's love on a plane higher than we can ever achieve out of our own fallen human nature. The expression of that love is total self giving. God gave Christ. Christ gave himself. He held nothing back. He went all the way to death. The scripture says "...and that, the death of the cross." He didn't turn back, he poured out the very last drop of his life blood. It was a total self giving, and that's the expression of God's love—agape. We're all familiar, I suppose, with John 3:16:

> "For God so loved the world that..."

That what?

> "...that he gave..."

Divine love is a giving love. It's not demanding, it's not possessive, it's not self-seeking; it's self-giving.

This is truly the climax of spiritual development. Of course, in the grace and mercy of God we experience this kind of love many times along the way. Every now and then we really feel our hearts filled with the love of God. We can love the unlovable. We can give of ourselves. We cease to be self centered and self seeking. All true Christians experience this from time to time along the Christian way but when we arrive at this seventh step we've arrived at something that's not just temporary, it doesn't just come and go, but it's something that's stable. It's full rounded. It's the completed circle. We've come back to that picture that I used when I spoke about the commandment of Jesus, "Be perfect," the example of the circle. This is the full circle. It's God's love demonstrated in every direction. Let's look at what Peter says just a little earlier than the passage we read. 2 Peter 1:4:

> "God has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them we may participate in the divine nature, and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

That's the objective. It's participating in the divine nature, and the divine nature is love. You see, they come together. 1 John 4:16 says this:

> "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."

So, if our objective is the divine nature it's fulfilled when we achieve divine love. Not just as a temporary feeling that comes and goes but as something that's become our very nature, our personality. The circle is full rounded and complete.

Following these seven upward steps in 2 Peter 1 has brought us back, as I pointed out, to our starting point. The starting point at the beginning of this series of talks was Matthew 5:48, the commandment of Jesus:

> "Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Be complete, be mature, be full rounded. Be a real circle. God is that vast measureless circle that comprehends the

universe. Of course, in quantity we cannot equal God but in quality each of us can be a circle, fully round, complete, mature, exhibiting the love of God in all directions, to all people on all sides. To the righteous, to the unrighteous, to the thankful, to the unthankful. That's God's nature. Evil never changes God, and when we come to this point of maturity we do not let evil change us. No matter what we encounter we demonstrate the love of God in action.

Now let's look and see how Peter sums this up. This is very important. We need t come to a practical conclusion. Going on in that same first chapter of 2 Peter, verses 8–9. Peter says this and he's talking about he seven qualities that we've spoken about as the upward steps. He says:

> "If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective an unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins."

You see, there's really only two alternatives. Either we're going to fail to see what God is saying to us and we are classified nearsighted and blind, forgetting what God has done for us. Or, we're going to possess these qualities in increasing measure and they will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of the lord Jesus Christ. I'm sure you don't want to be ineffective an unproductive. Well, here is the way to avoid it. Possess these qualities that we've been speaking about in ever increasing measure. They'll keep you from being ineffective and unproductive. But, if you don't possess these qualities you're going to be dismissed as blind, short sighted, forgetting what you've been delivered from.

And so, Peter comes to the practical application. With this I'm going to close. Verses 10–11:

> "Therefore,my brothers, in the light of all this be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

So, we have to be eager, we have to be diligent. We've got to make our calling by God sure. The way to make it sure, the way to make sure that we will never fall, that we'll have a rich welcome into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is steadfastly to pursue these even upward steps. To work at them, to develop them, to apply them, until they become real in our lives. And then we have the assurance of a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at this same time.

Next week I'll be sharing with you on another theme that will both challenge you and help you.

If you'd like to study this theme of "Progress to Perfection" more fully in a time and place of your own choosing, with opportunity to play back passages of special interest to you, all my five talks this week on "Progress to Perfection" are available in a single, carefully-edited, 60-minute cassette.

Also, I'm making a special offer this week of my book, Faith to Live By. This book explains what faith is, how it comes, what it will do for you. It will open the door for you into new realms of Christian living.

The announcement that follows will tell you how to obtain both the cassettes and also the book.

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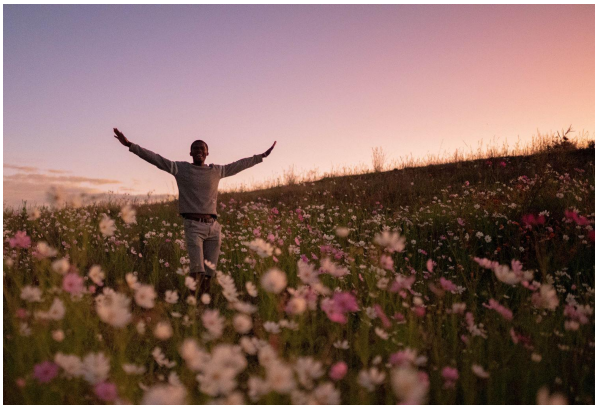

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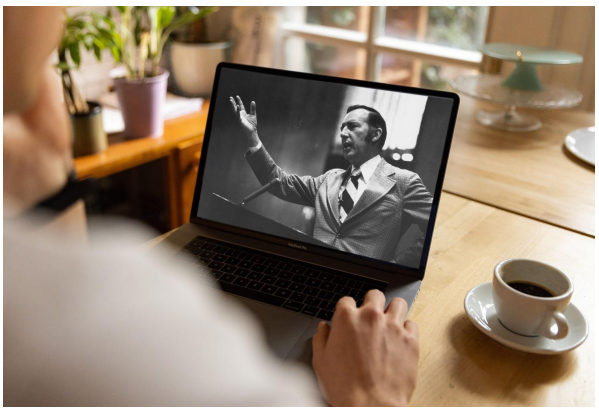

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