

Growing In Brotherly Kindness

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In 189 BC, King Eumenes II of Pergamon (Pergamum or Pergamos) established a neighboring city that he named Philadelphia. He gave it that name because of the love he had for his brother, Attalus II, who was to be his successor. That's because the Greek word, *philadelphia*, means "love of family/kin/brothers" (from *philos*, "love", and *adelphos*, "brother"). This is the same Philadelphia that is one of the 7 churches of Asia in the book of Revelation.

Brotherly kindness/love was an important attribute to have in the ancient Greco-Roman world. To show affection and generosity to your kin was expected. Family ties were strong. With the ancients, this affection was restricted to family. The "brotherly" part of the word meant physical family, blood relations. *Philadelphia* didn't extend beyond kin; one was in competition with non-kin.

It's not much different today. With our physical family, there is a natural bond that transcends personality differences, various quirks or mannerisms, and individual preferences. That bond allows us to overlook or tolerate imperfections in family members and love them fiercely in spite of their foibles. But when it comes to people outside of our physical family, having that same attitude becomes harder. We're not naturally inclined to expend as much effort as we do with our physical families in expressing kindness or going out of our way to offer help. That's not to say we're not cordial with people outside of our family circle, but outsiders don't get the same level of treatment.

However, with the coming of Jesus' and the apostles' teaching, brotherly kindness was extended to those who were brethren, not by physical blood, but through the blood of Jesus Christ. It was this principle that drove William Penn to use the name Philadelphia for the city he established in 1682 as capital of the Pennsylvania colony. Being a Quaker, Penn had been subjected to much religious persecution and wanted Pennsylvania (and Philadelphia particularly) to be a place of religious freedom – a place where brotherly love could be practiced. William Penn was trying to live out that ideal by founding a city where *philadelphia* was practiced.

Brotherly kindness is among the various characteristics we are to grow in that will ensure our abundant entrance into the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:5-7). It's one of the key doctrines that is stressed repeatedly in the pages of the New Testament. It's so important to have brotherly kindness (love) that John said, "Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). In other words, it's not enough to just practice righteousness as we typically think of it (refraining from sexual immorality, foul language, evil behavior, etc.). If we don't practice brotherly kindness, we don't belong to God! That's how serious this is!

So what does brotherly kindness look like? Well, one example was on display in the last couple of weeks with many of this church as well as churches throughout the country. The call went out of brethren who had lost practically everything in the flood in Louisiana. The North Gardendale church sent \$10,000. Other churches and individuals also sent funds without hesitation. In just a matter of a week or two, brethren had sent over \$500,000 to the Christians in Gonzales, LA.

As wonderful as that is, sending money to someone may actually be an easier way of expressing brotherly kindness. That doesn't take your time, and it doesn't take much effort. But what if a brother or sister does in fact need your time? Time to go help them in some way, whether it be doing some yardwork or housework or help with some project? What if someone is sick? Do you call? Send a card? Prepare a meal? Go visit them? How often do you show hospitality? When's the last time you showed your brethren you loved them and cared for them by having them into your home?

With the above scenarios, showing brotherly kindness starts to become inconvenient. The battle of selfishness vs. brotherly kindness becomes more fervent at that point. But let's make it more difficult. What if your brother or sister has wronged you? How will you handle that? Brotherly kindness isn't so easy anymore. But it needs to be the ruling principle by which you decide your actions and thoughts.

True brotherly kindness always defers to others. It gives honor to others. It seeks the well-being of others. Paul said it this way: "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom. 12:10).

Are you growing in this crucial trait? What will you do this week to show brotherly kindness?