

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

November 24, 2019

Kindness and Love

2 Peter 1:5-7

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for the gift of your Son, we thank you for the gift of this church, and the gift of your word and as well as the gift of your Holy Spirit. Lord, we are about to unpack that gift this morning and so we pray for your Spirit's presence, we pray that you would guide us, accompany us. Take these words, Lord, make them more than just words, make them of permanent value, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, the gospel contains gifts that every believer gets. I've said that we can think of this gospel as a fantastically orchestrated CD, and that you can play the CD through a cheap boombox and it's going to sound cheap and it's going to sound flimsy or you can take the very same CD and play it through a theater quality sound system and the sound will be entirely different. The very same CD that sounds barely audible on a boombox can send chills on your spine when it's played on fine equipment. We've added nothing whatsoever to the CD, we've just

played it on far better equipment. Well the gospel is actually the very same way. The very same gospel is given to every one of us. According to *Colossians 2*, it says, speaking of the gift of Christ, God says: *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.* Now some of us play our own gospel CD on cheap boomboxes which can reduce the gospel to a distorted squawk that people really don't enjoy hearing, while others allow the full power of the gospel to come through with no distortion, with nothing added and nothing taken away. And much of the difference between a gospel squawk and a gospel symphony comes down to something that we evangelicals are very uncomfortable with and that is effort. Peter tells us to make every effort to add to our faith. And we really don't know what to do with that, I mean, aren't we just supposed to let go and let God? I mean isn't God the one who's supposed to be doing all of the work and where does God's word end and our work begin? And again we're not just talking about working hard here, I mean, how many times have you ever heard of folks trying to live out their Christian lives by the flesh and just kind of running out of gas? People who struggle in their own power to live the Christian life and you realize they inevitably fail because you can't live this life on your own power, it is simply too hard. Jesus himself set the standard. He made it very clear in *Matthew 5:48*. This what he said: *You therefore must*

be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Try being perfect on your own. I mean you will be doomed to failure because nobody outside of Jesus is perfect. And the only one who is perfect is God and it is he who promises us the power to do the impossible.

So we make every effort to add to our faith, not by gritting our teeth and plodding forward but by actively seeking to invite God's Holy Spirit into our efforts to live out his commands. So basically what we do is we work out what God has worked in in our lives. On the other hand, you cannot work out what God has not worked in. I find it absolutely mystifying when people claim that you can be anything you want to be as long as you put your mind to it. I mean, hey, I'd like to be a Super Bowl winning quarterback who also happens to be a nuclear physicist. I can tell you right now that there's no amount of effort on my part that's going to make that happen, and that's okay. God has not gifted me that way. Paul tells us in *Philippians 2: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* And that work, that work takes effort. You know, Handel worked out the musical genius that God had worked into him and that doesn't mean that he woke up one morning and just popped out Handel's Messiah. He had to work out what God had worked in. Billy Graham had to work out the evangelistic skills and gifts that God had

worked into him. And you and I all have unique gifts that God has worked into us that he calls us to work out. *Romans 12* says: *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.* So the bad news is that you cannot be anything you choose to be but you can be the very best at what God has chosen for you.

And along with all of your unique individual gifts God has given all of us a whole array of giftedness that come exclusively with the gospel. You see scripture tells us that all of us believers have goodness and knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love worked into us at salvation by God's Holy Spirit. God says we are to make every effort to work them out. And we're working our way through *2 Peter 1:5-7* which says those exact words. It says this: *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, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.* The Holy Spirit through Peter has given us this list of seven items that we are to strive to add to our faith. And so far we've looked at godliness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, and goodness. And at the risk of being repetitious, let me just briefly reprise them.

The first thing that we looked at was goodness. It's what we call "the right stuff." It's this combination of passion and courage and energy that sets you apart as a kingdom citizen. Next we looked at knowledge, which is really living your life tuned into God's logic, which is a much higher logic than we're used to; and next was self-control which is really the act of taking control away from self and putting it under the Holy Spirit's control. Next was perseverance or patience which is the ability to abide under difficulties and hard times, and it's also the ability to trust God with his framework of time rather than our Western understanding of hours, minutes and seconds. And last time out we looked at godliness. We said that godliness is having a head and a heart for God and his kingdom. I said the most important thing that a mom or dad could ever impart to their children is godliness and that it cannot be taught. It has to be caught. I said if God and his kingdom is not real for mom and dad, then it's not going to be real, period, for the kids.

Well, this morning I want to tackle the last two qualities that Peter lists for us and they are brotherly kindness and love. You probably heard the Greek terms for them: phileo and agape. You hear phileo and it reminds us of Philadelphia. It's the city of brotherly love and literally that's what the word is, it's love of the brethren. Agape is unconditional love that comes from God

alone. And together they make up the love that is worked into our lives by the Holy Spirit at salvation that Peter says we are to work out in our daily living. We are to make every effort to add to our faith phileo and agape love. And rather than separate them out as different entities, I like to look at them as I believe Peter intended and that is that we add to our faith two different kinds of love for two different objects of that love. One kind is for love within the Christian community and the other is for love outside of those borders. Today we're going to look at how we are to love our fellow believers within the context of the local body and next week we'll look at how we are to love those outside the kingdom.

So how are we supposed to express love within the local body of Christ? I mean what do you mean when you say this term "brotherly love" or "brotherly kindness"? Well, as we've seen over and over again, we struggle with these terms that Peter speaks of and we particularly struggle with this idea of love because any term that involves the word "love" tends to play into this mistaken notion that phileo or brotherly love is all about being nice. You know we went to such-and-such a church and they were so nice there, they're so loving and so kind. Have you ever heard those kind of statements? Well, that's not really what Peter has in mind here, I mean, there's nothing wrong with being warm and friendly, but

phileo goes much, much deeper than that. You see the love that we are supposed to have for one another is supposed to be like no other love on earth. It is supposed to be a love so unique, so powerful, so supernatural that it can't help but point us to Jesus Christ. Jesus said so in *John 13*, he says: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" This morning I want to look at three aspects of love for the brethren that make this love unique and it also makes this love impossible to give on our own. This love is, first of all, compulsory; second of all it is sometimes confrontational; and thirdly, it is conformational.

So let me just tackle the first one: It is compulsory. Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you.*" You notice this is a command. This is not an option. We are under orders to love one another, and because we so thoroughly identify with love as an emotion, we think we have the option of loving those we find loveable and just kind of avoiding those who we don't. People who frighten us, people that anger or annoy us, people that, truth be told, we just can't stand. Surely we don't have to really love them. Well, Jesus said this in *Matthew 5*, he said, "*If you love those who love you, what*

reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" And in Luke 6 Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount." See, a true mark of a loving church is not how well she loves the lovely and the loveable, Jesus is absolutely unimpressed with that. It's how well she loves those who cannot or will not love her back. Now this applies to those outside of the church and it applies especially to those inside. Love the brethren is not an option.

One of the most important functions of the local body of Christ is to compel folks to learn how to make every effort to love. And God does that by taking people with great differences, throwing them together to show that Jesus Christ, through the power of his Holy Spirit, can conquer those differences and demonstrate the true power of God, and it's that power that is the love of God. You see, a local body is supposed to showcase that love by demonstrating a supernatural ability to love those who don't love them back, and the part that we don't seem to understand, this love

is compulsory, it's not optional. Christ said you must love one another. And I think we have a very confused idea of what love is, I mean, we think of love, it's a feeling, it's an emotion, it's something that arises from our gut. So we wonder how in the world can God demand a gut reaction if we simply can't muster it? Well, the fact is that's not what God demands of us in the first place. I've said it before, love is not something you feel, love is something you do. It's not a matter of emotion as much as it is a matter of obedience. We think of love as the end product of a process that starts with acquaintance and then it kind of moves on to friendship and then it finally blossoms into love, and we wonder how in the world am I supposed to love somebody that I don't even like? Well, nothing could be further from God's idea. In fact God expects us to love people we don't necessarily like. Again, we have an example in scripture. I mean the greatest example in the New Testament of what love is is the good Samaritan. It's the story that Jesus told. It's in *Luke 10*. Let me just read it to you. It says: *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him -- that's Jesus -- he said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL OF YOUR HEART, WITH ALL OF YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL OF YOUR STRENGTH, WITH ALL OF YOUR MIND AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,'" and He, that is Jesus, said to him,*

"You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at that place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he sat him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Well, Jesus here defines two very important things. The first thing he does is he defines love not as something you feel but as something you do, and then he defines what a neighbor is. He says that a neighbor is not somebody who lives in close proximity to you but a neighbor is someone who is identified to you as a person in

need. Remember what Jesus said to the lawyer, at the very end of the story, he says, *"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"* I mean your neighbor can live down the street or he can live on the other side of the world. What makes him a neighbor is not his location, it is his need. When God places someone with a need on your heart or into your life, he's asking you if you are willing to become his neighbor. In other words Mr. Rogers was on to something when he said, *"Won't you be my neighbor?"* And notice the way the Samaritan loved his neighbor, I mean, it was not with what he felt. Instead it was with what he did. I mean his love was poured out on a man who was completely unconscious. There's absolutely no place in the parable for feelings to have anything whatsoever to do with what took place. In fact how the Samaritan or the victim felt was completely immaterial. We could look at this as a modern equivalent might be a volunteer EMT treating an accident victim who's drunk and belligerent. Well, does he like that person who's cursing and screaming at him? No. Can he love that person that he is not liking? Of course. Absolutely. How does he love him, by drumming up warm fuzzies for him or by binding his wounds in spite of the abuse? See, love is not what you feel, it's what you do. And when Jesus demands of us to love one another, he is demanding action, not feeling. And when feelings cause us to confine our love solely to those people that we find lovely, we're no different

than pagans. And God says, hey, big deal.

I mean, there's a place, there's a place that God has designed where people themselves can become God's primary resource for developing our ability to love people we might not like, and that place is the church. And that ability usually grows through conflict and struggle. I mean after all, if you only love those who love you, what credit is that to you? If you only pursue those relationships that are safe and usefully protective, then don't expect to grow. Jesus said even the pagans do that. But if you're willing to let God grow your capacity to love, then the church is the perfect place for that to happen, and you'll find that God is right there at the center of those conflicts, if you let him, because that's where real growth takes place. You see, the worst reason to leave a church is that you are engaged in a conflict with a fellow believer. That's one of the main reasons why people leave churches. I get it, sometimes it's unavoidable. *Romans 12* says: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* But more often than not people leave because they have the wrong idea, they have this idea that the church is supposed to be a place where no conflicts ever take place. Well, the fact is the church should be a place where no conflict goes unresolved. And that's different.

And that leads me to a second point. Love for the brethren must be willing to be, if necessary, confrontational. Now I want to illustrate this by telling you a story about my granddaughter Leah. I didn't know she was going to be here today. She's now a junior in college, but I'm going to talk about when she was a very tiny child. She was about 18 months old. And her mom and dad had bought a house and so they were living with us while their house was being prepared. And I just want to paint the scene. Luke -- I don't think Luke is here, 'cause Luke's part of this -- Luke was in high school at that point and it's early in the morning and I'm sitting at my kitchen table with Leah, who's barely speaking, she's got some English down but she's just learning. And like I said, she was a very serious child and we're sitting there mostly in silence as she's eating her breakfast. And down comes Luke who's feeling very good this morning and he's acting a little more chipper than Leah appreciates. So he comes down, he gets right in her face and he goes, "Good morning, Leah!" And he gets up and he walks out of the room. And Leah, this size, she turned around, she looks at me, and she says, "Idiot." I mean, I was so astounded, I said, "What was that? What did you say?" She looks at me again, she says, "Idiot." But this time her mom heard, and mom was not particularly happy at that. But here's my point. You see, Leah's mistake was that she said out loud what she was thinking. See, we often don't make that mistake. We just think it. You see, we

learn to never ever say out loud what we are really thinking, no matter how desperately our brother or sister might need to hear it because we, too, are products of our culture. You see, our culture loathes to pass judgment on anything, even if it's destructive and evil. *"Judge not lest you be judged."* I mean how many times have you heard that scripture? It's probably the most quoted scripture in the entire Bible. *"Judge not lest you be judged,"* said the Lord Jesus Christ in *Matthew 7:1*. Well, five verses later in *Matthew 7:6* Jesus also said, *"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."* Okay. Question: How do you determine what a dog or a swine is without doing some type of judging? We're not talking here about puppies and pigs, we're talking about people. I mean eight verses later it gets even worse. Jesus said there: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."* Well, how do you judge them? You see, we have misinterpreted *Matthew 7* to say it's wrong to exercise any judgment when Jesus explicitly meant that it's wrong for fallen, saved-by-grace sinners to pass judgment on anyone. See when we pass judgment on a person we run into the serious problem of the pot calling the kettle black. And *Romans 2* says: *Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.* But understand what God is condemning

here, he's not condemning judgment or discernment, he's condemning us condemning through judgment. God expects us to judge and discern. He forbids us from judging to condemn. And Paul says in *1 Corinthians 2:15: The spiritual person judges all things*. See we have rewritten Matthew 7 to say: Stay out of everyone's life lest they refuse to stay out of yours. So we ask, is that really what God intends for his church?

I spoke with a woman awhile back and she's not from this church and she mentioned a friend of hers who has a real struggle with serious sin, to the point where the friend can't stand to be around her. We talked for a while and it became very obvious, and I said, "Well, you really do need to confront her." She said, "Well, she'd never speak to me again." And I just said, "You just said you can't stand to be around her. She doesn't speak to you, problem solved." I mean how many times have you known in your heart of hearts that God is prompting you to lovingly confront someone and you simply refused because it's too scary? How many times have you shared something about a brother or sister with a spouse or a friend that you knew you should have said directly to that person? God says what we whisper in silence is one day going to be shouted from the rooftops and don't you want to tell them first? I mean, I realize this is a very delicate place and it's a place where the enemy can come in and make great mischief. And again, I'm not

talking about Matthew 18 which gives us very specific instructions as to what to do if someone sins against you. I'm just talking about lovingly confronting destructive behavior, I'm talking about speaking the truth in love. And I said that my second point is that loving the brethren might even need to be confrontational. There's another term that I've coined for that situation. I haven't coined it, someone else did. It's even more appropriate. The term is not "confrontational," it's "care-frontational." And it's really a technical term coined by Dr. Davis Augsberger some three decades ago when he wrote this important little book entitled *"Caring Enough to Confront."* And in it he describes how we are to supposed obey a biblical mandate to speak the truth in love with one another. And so he used this term "care-fronting" which literally combines caring and confronting, and this is what he says. He says:

"To confront effectively is to offer the maximum of useful information with the minimum of threat and stress." He says, "Care-fronting is offering genuine caring that lifts, supports and encourages the other. Care-fronting is being up front with important facts that can call out new awareness, insight and understanding. Care-fronting is loving and level conversation. It unites the love one has for the other with the honest truth that I am able to see about the two of us. Care-fronting unifies concern

for relationship with concerns for goals -- my goals, your goals, our goals. So one can have something to stand for (goals) as well as someone to stand with (relationship) without sacrificing one for the other or collapsing one into the other. This allows each of us to be genuinely loving without giving away one's power to think, choose and act. In such honesty, one can love powerfully and be powerfully loving."

So as he says, care-fronting is neither easy nor safe but it is biblical. *Ephesians 4* says: *Therefore, putting away lying, "LET EACH ONE OF YOU SPEAK TRUTH WITH HIS NEIGHBOR," for we are members of one another.* You say what about taking the log out of my eye to see the speck in my brother's? Isn't that a real danger? Couldn't you be encouraging that? And yes, that is a real danger. But the other side is literally the blind leading the blind, and on that side both go into a ditch. I mean if the person we should confront is someone who is blinded by sin and if we are also blinded by a fear of offending, we become the blind leading the blind, and what we need in this is balance. And listen to the balance that God provides in *Galatians 6*. He says this: *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is*

nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.

And again, this leads to my third point, I mean, love for the brethren is, number one, it's compulsory; number two, it may just be confrontational; and number three, it is also conformational, that is there's a purpose to it and it's purpose is to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. Confronting one another is just one means of carrying one another's burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ. And the other side of that equation is encouragement. You know *James 1* says this: *Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.* I just want to focus on this first quality. Are you quick to hear? You see, it's critically important that when we ask somebody "how are you doing," that we're actually listening not just to what they are saying in response but how they are saying it. I mean many is a time I've asked somebody how they're doing and then instantly notice that their body language is telling me something very different than what their actual words are communicating. That's an invitation to be quick to hear. It's not rocket science. You've all been in those situations where you can tell somebody's not really buying into what they're saying. It's a matter of asking how are you doing that actually communicates that

you actually want to know. See, adding to our faith phileo or a love for the brethren means more than just loving your brothers and sisters in Christ. It means recognizing how desperately we each need each other, how critical community is in the body of Christ.

Mark Dever is a famous pastor, author. He once made a pretty outrageous statement. He said this, he said, "If you're not a member of the church you regularly attend, you may well be going to hell." Now, as he said that obviously there was a whole bunch of raised eyebrows at that statement and he went on to qualify what he was saying. He said, "I don't mean for a second that you literally have to have your name on a membership card in a church somewhere to go to heaven. I believe in justification by faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone. At the same time in the New Testament it seems that the local church is there to verify or falsify our claims to be Christians. The man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was sleeping with his father's wife thought of himself as a Christian." See, the critical role that the local body of Christ has is in loving you enough to say you can't possibly be a Christian if you're sleeping with your father's wife. I mean there's a reason why church attendance is critical. It's because you cannot develop relationships with people you don't know, and being part of the body of Christ means that you are committed to knowing and being known by other people, by other brothers and

sisters. I mean think about the level of intimacy that Christ expects within the body of Christ when James says in *James 5: Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* I'm not about to confess my sins to people I regard as strangers, but I have confessed them to people I regard as brothers. If you don't have a body of believers that interact with you enough to know what is really going on your life, you may well be as far gone as that Corinthian sleeping with his father's wife and not even realize it. The body of Christ is there, as Dever says, to verify or falsify your claim to be a Christian. And again, that can be dangerous. I mean one of the reasons why so many people abandon the idea of church is because they've been hurt desperately by churches. I mean I know a number of people who have not darkened the door of a church for decades because of the hurts they sustained from other Christians. And they genuinely think that they can get church by flipping on the TV on a Sunday morning and watching TBN. You cannot. *Hebrews 10* tells us why. It says: *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as it is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* You see, we are here to be shaped and molded into unique images of the Lord Jesus Christ, and those are not just fancy religious words. They define our purpose. They define our existence. *Romans 8* tells us that God chose us

before the foundations of the world to uniquely bear the image of his Son, and each one of us bears that image differently. I can't bare your image of Christ and you cannot bare mine, but both of us can labor for all of us to bear that image well. Each should carry his own load.

And the point of making every effort to add to our faith phileo and agape is that they require effort. You have to work at them. And they're different from goodness and knowledge and self-control, patience and godliness but they all take effort to work out what God has worked in. And part of that working out process takes place in a local church. It was designed by God to be much more than a place where you go each week and listen to some songs and hear a talk. That's not what church is about. It is supposed to be a living expression of God's physical presence on earth. And a large part of its mission is to help to conform you into the image of Christ that you, specifically, were created to bear. Jesus demonstrated to us exactly what God's love is by becoming one of us, by living his life perfectly, and then offering up that life for us on a cross, so that by faith in his perfect sacrifice, we can now stand before God worthy of heaven because we by faith claim his righteousness as our own, and not on our own. Thank God we don't have to rely on our righteousness, but we have his. I mean we love because he first loved us. That's our mandate.

So let me leave you with some questions this morning. Question number one: Do you see the love of God in the body of Christ as something compulsory? Do you see it as a lofty goal to aim for or is it a direct command to be obeyed? You see, if you see it merely as a goal and not a command, you're not going to be prepared to work through the conflict that God allows in churches, and those conflicts are there for a purpose. I know, I mean I've seen that purpose met, I've sat down with people in conflict and I have seen their love of God overcome their love for themselves or their dislike for their adversaries. I've seen the power of the Holy Spirit transform deep conflict into areas of great growth for both parties. I've seen conflict produce grace, I've seen grace produce growth, and I've seen growth produce glory and honor to God and that's how it's supposed to work.

Again, what I want to ask is: Are you willing to -- quote -- "speak the truth" with your neighbor? And if you ever let fear keep you from speaking the truth in love with your brother or sister, that unwillingness is actually sin and it needs to be confessed because each one of us needs to carry our own load. Sometimes it's painful and it's frightening to confront and it's remarkably easy to let it pass, but if the Holy Spirit has placed a burden in you for someone, you must not ignore it. I mean some of the greatest blessings I've ever had in my Christian life has come

from people who are willing to lovingly confront me about sin in my life. Nobody said such confrontation is easy, because it's not easy, but it's right. Well, how do I know if it's the log in my eye or the speck in my brother's eye? How do you know? You pray about it. You ask God for his wisdom. You ask for God's Holy Spirit to help you. You take a risk. Just as important as the need to confront is, so is the need to really listen and -- quote -- *"encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."*

Secondly, another question is is your relationship with the church conforming you to the image of Christ? To put it bluntly, have you grown more Christ-like by coming to this church? And if the answer is no, then we are at fault and you need to confront us. Have you made every effort to add to your faith brotherly kindness? Are you working out what God has worked in? Is your gospel CD a squawk or a symphony? See, God tells us he has gifted us with a supernatural power to love. And he says: *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith brotherly kindness.* Next week we'll look at how we work out the love of God to those outside the church. Let's pray.

Father, we just thank you for who you are. We thank you for what you have done. We thank you for the gift that we have been given

of new life, the power of your Holy Spirit. And we recognize, Lord, that you have given us new commandments and this new commandment that you gave us is to love others as you have loved us. Lord, that's not optional for us. I pray you would give us the grace, the strength, the peace, the power, and the wisdom to do what you have commanded, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.