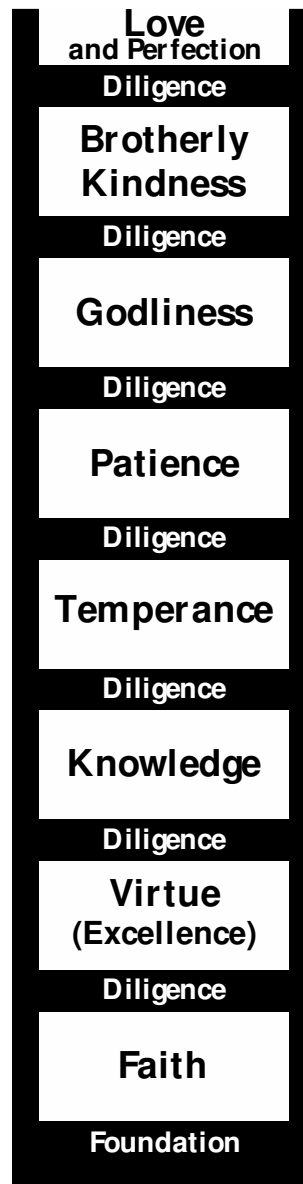


The Ladder To Love And Perfection



Matthew 5:48 [NIV] *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

The statement by our Saviour Jesus Christ was the summary of a list of what humanly speaking were impossible commands, and a total reversal of natural human reactions and responses.

Note also that this statement was not a suggestion but a command!

Jesus Christ did **not** say **try** to be perfect, if we were having a good day and life was flowing easily for us, He said be perfect.

I am very glad to know that with this command we have promises that tell us we can accomplish what may seem at first to be an impossible task.

Philippians 4:13 [NIV] *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

God never commands us to do anything or to become anything that we cannot be empowered to accomplish if we seek that support from the right source.

All the commands of Jesus Christ for us as His disciples are based on the Grace that God offers us.

If we try to obey using only our own strength we are bound to fail.

There are goals we can attain using only our own human strength, wisdom and skills, in such tasks we don't need God's Grace.

But when we are faced with a commanded goal as to become perfect our human abilities will very soon be exhausted.

When in such circumstances we come to the end of the best we can do, we arrive at the time when God's Grace takes over, and empowers us to accomplish the humanly impossible goal.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 [NIV] *“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**”*

God's Grace begins where human ability ends.

This is a promise from God that we must believe and live our lives by.

God's Grace is sufficient for us to accomplish all God commands of us.

Matthew 5:43-48 [NIV] *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: **Love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**”*

The context of the command to be perfect shows us that perfection is to encompass two aspects of life.

a) Perfection means dealing righteously with everyone not just a selected few.

b) Perfection is summed up in just one word, love!

But this is a love that is beyond the human ability to love.

The word used in the Greek is “*agapé*” which is an unconditional love, a love that is not dependent on the response of the person who is the object of that love.

Perfection and love cannot be separated – one cannot exist without the other.

The word perfect [Greek “*teleios*”] **combines two thoughts.**

a) Full grown maturity.

b) Completeness as when an end goal is reached.

Both maturity and completeness demand a process and the passing of time.

Romans 8:9 [Living Bible] *“You are controlled by your new nature if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And remember that if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of God living in him, he is not a Christian at all.”*

At our “*new birth*” when we repent and accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we receive the nature of Christ, the Holy Spirit to work with us or to dwell in us as Director of our life.

This new nature then must be matured into character and we do this by the “*out working*” of the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:12-13 [NIV] *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, **continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

God’s Holy Spirit “*works in*” us but we have to “*work out*” the same Spirit to mature into the character of our Creator.

If we do not “*work out*” God’s Holy Spirit, God cannot “*work in*” more of His Spirit into us, we are resisting the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to maturity.

Hebrews 5:8-9 [NIV] *“Although he was a son, he **learned obedience** from what he **suffered** and, **once made perfect**, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”*

Even Jesus Christ, the Son of Man who was perfect in the context of never committing any sin, had to be made perfect in character through obedience and suffering.

Jesus Christ was both human and God, it was in His human nature that He developed perfect character by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The indwelling of the same Holy Spirit can produce the “*fruits*” of perfect mature character in us.

If we are suffering trials in our lives we need to remember that this is the only way in which we can be perfected.

God is building character in us by our having to learn obedience through suffering and thus perfecting the Love of God, the Nature of God in us.

1 John 2:5 [NIV] *“But if anyone obeys His Word, God’s love is truly made complete in Him. This is how we know we are in Him:”*

Obedience to God’s Word can accomplish two goals in us:

- a) Provide evidence of God’s Love in us.
- b) Perfect this love of God and our love for God in us.

In other words, the nature of God is matured, made perfect in us.

Love is not an emotion.

True Godly love is a nature that is deep inside of us that expresses itself in the way we conduct our lives.

Philippians 2:5 [NIV] *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:”*

We develop the attitude or mind of Jesus Christ. We don’t try to feel loving, we obey the Word of God and allow the Love of God to flow through us, out to others in service and sacrifice.

The mind or attitude of the human Jesus Christ was the mind of a servant who was willing to sacrifice himself for the welfare of others.

An illustration that will help us to understand perfection is a circle.

The size of a circle does not detract from it being a perfect circle.

A perfect circle can be big or small.

I see God as the perfect circle that encompasses the whole universe and more.

Each of us can be a very small, yet perfect, circle that can grow as we mature and become more like God.

As we continue to fulfil what God expects of us, by allowing the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and be Director of our lives, our circle can increase in size.

At first our circle only encompasses our own selves, then as we mature the influence of this circle of perfection that God is creating in us can grow to encompass and influence our family, our neighbourhood, our church fellowship.

There is no limit to how God can use the maturity that He is creating in us to influence other people, if we continue to submit to the influence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Hebrews 6:1 [NIV] *“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,”*

The word “*therefore*” demands that we read what has been written before so we can fully understand what is about to be said. [When we see “*therefore*” we should always seek to know what it is “*there for*”!!]

What is being presented in chapters 3-5 is the work of our Saviour and His present position as High Priest and our calling from God.

So as a result of what God has done we are to “*go on to maturity*”, having already received repentance and faith as a springboard or the first step to greater maturity.

Hebrews 6:10 [NIV] *“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”*

Paul calls this a labour of love in serving others, as our maturity encompasses and influences others’ lives.

Hebrews 6:11-13 [NIV] *“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through **faith** and **patience** inherit what has been promised. When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,”*

Other virtues are mentioned as a part of this maturing process: diligence, faith and patience; these are something we inherit through the promises made by God.

The Christian Bible is a perfect book: it not only tells us to become perfect but gives us a programme on how this will be accomplished.

Let us now study this spiritual ladder to love and perfection.

2 Peter 1:1 [NIV] *“Simon Peter, a **servant** and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the **righteousness** of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a **faith** as precious as ours:”*

Peter tells us from the start things that have to govern our attitude as we approach this ladder to perfection.

a) **Servant**:- Our mind and attitude has to be that of a servant: one who is under authority of the master.

- b) **Righteousness**:- One who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and been accounted as righteous through faith in Him.
- c) **Faith**:- Receive this as a gift and the fruit of our close association with the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:2 [King James] *“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”*

The word “grace” lifts what we are about to read out of the reach of human endeavour to something that God does through and to us.

As a result and proof of this happening we will experience peace.

The word “multiplied” indicates a growth pattern as another virtue is added to what we already possess.

These two words sum up the totality of an active Christian life.

As God confronts us with many things that are beyond our ability to accomplish, we tend to respond in one of two ways:

- a) We reduce the level of God’s requirement down to a level we can accomplish in our own strength.
- b) We open up to God’s Grace and totally depend on Him accomplishing the task set.

This scripture confirms that the end product in mind, maturity, will come as a result of increased knowledge of God, also by what Christ has already done for us, and our accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord [Master].

Jesus Christ becomes our Lord [Master] by our requesting and inviting the Holy Spirit to become Director of our lives.

2 Peter 1:3 [NIV] *“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”*

The Holy Spirit will empower us with all we need for a maturing Christian life.

2 Peter 1:4 [NIV] *“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”*

The power to become perfect is found in the promises that God has made and we can boldly claim.

Proverbs 29:18 [NIV] *“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.”*

To be motivated to grow in Christian character we need to have a clear vision of what we can become, what God has promised to make us.

This clear vision comes from what God has revealed in His Word.

On a physical level, dieting never succeeds unless we have a personal desire to lose weight and have a clear mental vision of our being a slimmer and more healthy person.

Romans 6:3-6 [NIV] *“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new*

life. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

Here we have one of those major promises from God.

Through what Christ has done we can become a new person.

The old self-centred nature can die.

2 Peter 1:5 [RAV] *“But also for this very reason giving all **diligence**...”*

Here we have a key to success; “diligence”.

Every “step” of this “ladder” to love and perfection must involve “diligence”.

Throughout scripture the lazy person is always condemned and is doomed to fail, while the diligent person is the one who is successful in life.

Matthew 6:33 [NIV] *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

When we have a clear vision of what God is offering to us, seeking fulfilment of His promises in our lives will have top priority.

Step Number One

2 Peter 1:5 [RAV] *“... add to your faith ...”*

Faith is the first step we take towards perfection and the foundation of every maturing Christian life.

Faith is both a gift and a fruit

Saving faith:-

Ephesians 2:8 [NIV] *“For it is **by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...**”*

Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is given to us by God, it is not something we “work up” ourselves.

Romans 4:4-5 [NIV] *“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. **However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.**”*

This gift of faith is credited to us as righteousness; we receive the righteousness of Christ as a gift not from any good works we may have performed.

This faith that has led us to repentance and conversion is saving faith.

Living faith:-

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, **faithfulness,**”*

Faith is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

As the Holy Spirit dwells in us and is the Director of our lives, this close fellowship causes some of His characteristics to “rub off” on us, one of these is His faithfulness.

This is living faith.

James 2:20-22 [NIV] *“You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”*

Abraham is an example for us to follow.

It was the living faith in him that compelled him to perform works of faith, relying totally on God to empower him, claiming from God what He had promised.

James 2:23 [NIV] *“And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.”*

Note scripture did **not** say Abraham believed in God **but** that he believed God.

Abraham believed in the faithfulness of God and relied totally on all God had promised, even to the extent of sacrificing his own son.

This is the living faith that is pleasing to God.

Hebrews 11:6 [NIV] *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

Living faith goes beyond the belief in the existence of God to faith in all the Promises God has made in His Word.

This living faith in God is then reflected in our own lives; we are trustworthy in both words and performance.

Luke 18:7-8 [NIV] *“And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, **who cry out to Him day and night?** Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, **when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?**”*

Answered prayer and faith are often linked in scripture.

But the question asked in this scripture is ‘will Jesus Christ on His return find living faith among His chosen ones?’

The answer to that question is dependent upon us, we need to ask ourselves, ‘am I living by faith day by day?’

Proverbs 20:6 [NIV] *“Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?”*

Lack of faithfulness is not a new thing. Solomon’s wisdom and experience came to the sad conclusion that people with living faith were few and far between.

Yet without living faith in our lives we are not even starting to climb the ladder to maturity and Godly love, for faith is the foundation and the first step.

Step Number Two

2 Peter 1:5 [RAV] “... *add to your faith virtue ...*”

The Greek word translated “*virtue*” or “*goodness*” in the NIV is “*arete*” which can be translated “*excellence*”.

The use of this word is **not** limited to the moral or spiritual realm, for example, the “*arete*” of a horse is to run fast.

I believe that what we are being told to add to our faith is excellence in every aspect of our lives.

If we are by profession a doctor we should seek to be the best doctor we can; if we are a secretary we should with all diligence be the best secretary possible.

James 2:18 [NIV] “*But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*”

An expression of our active faith is to use all the talents we have been given by God to the fullest extent possible.

Matthew 5:13-16 [NIV] “*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*”

Seeking such excellence in our day to day life is a powerful way for us to be light to this darkened world and salt to savour this godless society.

The Greek word “*arete*” can also be translated “*courage*”.

2 Timothy 1:7 [Amplified Bible] “*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear. But He has given us a spirit of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control.*”

Active faith that is a fruit of our fellowship with the Holy Spirit is expressed in a life that is effective in the service of God and man.

Matthew 10:32-33 [NIV] “*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.*”

This active faith must have the courage to acknowledge what we are and Who we serve.

Remember the light is to be on a hill for all to see.

I believe that God has created the moon to remind us of what we should be as Christians who are living by faith.

The moon does not generate any light by its own power, it just reflects the light generated by the sun [Son], and reflects that light onto a darkened world.

Whenever we see the moon we should ask ourselves the question: what phase of the moon am I?

Do I reflect God's way of life like a barely seen new moon or am I a full moon that is reflecting enough light for people to walk by and not stumble?

I would like to bring out one very interesting point about the literal translation of the Greek throughout the passage of scripture, [2 Peter 1:5].

The literal translation is:-

*“Also for this very reason but diligence all having brought in besides supply you **in** your faith, virtue and **in** virtue knowledge and **in** knowledge self-control and **in** self-control endurance and **in** endurance piety and **in** piety brotherly love and **in** brotherly kindness, love.”*

Note: The next progressive step is found “**in**” the previous step.

The Greek preposition used is “*ov*” denoting a remaining within, with the idea of rest and continuation.

What is being indicated is that as we continue to practice one step we are preparing ourselves to advance to the next, in our climb up to love and perfection.

Step Number Three

2 Peter 1:5 [RAV] “... to virtue knowledge ...”

The Greek word translated “*knowledge*” is “*gnosis*” knowledge acquired by learning effort or experience.

The use of this word “*gnosis*” in the New Testament indicates a relation between the person knowing and the object known, in this respect, what is known is of value or importance to the one who knows, and hence the establishment of a relationship.

1 Corinthians 8:3 [NIV] “*But the man who loves God is known by God.*”

Galatians 4:9 [NIV] “*But now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*”

John 8:32 [NIV] “*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*”

The underlying principle is that this knowledge is obtained not by mere intellectual activity, but by active relationship with the Holy Spirit as a consequence of accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

We have to ask the question, do we know God's Word, the written Word of God and the Personal Word of God [Jesus Christ] to the extent of placing its value first in our life?

Many statements in the letters of Paul, Peter, James and John seek to counter a lack of knowledge in the Church in their day.

I feel there is an even greater lack of knowledge of God's Word in the Church in this era.

I mean a practical working knowledge that we can apply to the events we encounter in our lives on a day to day basis.

John 10:10 [NIV] “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*”

God's Word, the Christian Bible, is our handbook for an abundant fulfilled life.

Knowledge of God's Word is an essential step of the ladder towards love and perfection.

All too often we do not "know" to the extent of being motivated by that knowledge to live our lives by that knowledge.

Step Number Four

2 Peter 1:6 [NIV] *"... and to knowledge, self-control."*

By experiencing the knowledge of God's Word, especially the power found in the promises that God makes in His Word, we can develop self-control.

The various passions that God has created in us can be abused, the right use of these passions demand the controlling power of will

The Christian ethic does **not** contemplate a situation where a person is void of all passion, completely drained of vitality.

The Christian ethic envisages a situation in which a person's instincts and passion remain, but remained under perfect control and mastery, they become our servants and not our tyrants.

John 15:4-5 [NIV] *"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."*

Since God alone can give us the power to control self, self-control will be acquired only as our knowledge of Him increases.

Galatians 5:23 [NIV] *"...gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."*

Self-control is one of the "fruits" of the Spirit, obtained only from God through a close relationship with the Holy Spirit, in which God's attribute of self-control "rubs off" on us.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 [NIV] *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."*

Paul uses the example of an athlete to illustrate the needed self-control in our lives.

This passage of scripture is an attack on the ignorance in the Church of what is involved in a Christian life.

A Christian life is not just head knowledge, the heart, will and body are involved, it is a total lifestyle.

Where do we obtain the power to make this changed lifestyle happen?

Philippians 2:13 [NIV] *"...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."*

God [the Holy Spirit] working in us gives us the willpower.

But we have to let this happen.

The Holy Spirit will only enter into our life by invitation and on His terms.

Philippians 2:5-7 [NIV] *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself **nothing**, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*

Humbling ourselves is essential to Holy Spirit working in us.

I believe that self-control and the next step, patience or perseverance, are like a “bottleneck”, we will be unable to rise to the higher realms of godliness, brotherly kindness and love until we have self-control and patience.

Step Number Five

2 Peter 1:6 [NIV] *“...and to self-control perseverance...”*

The Greek word translated “*perseverance*” [NIV] or “*patience*” [King James] is “*hupomuné*” which literally means “*an abiding under*”.

Perseverance or patience which grows only in trial.

Exercising self-control develops perseverance but perseverance needs time to develop.

It is no use praying “*Lord grant me patience but please do it now!!!*”

Again we see that it is only the power of the promises that God has made that will enable us to endure to the end.

Hebrews 6:12 [NIV] *“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through **faith and patience inherit what has been promised.**”*

There is always a time gap between being given the promises by God and receiving the promises.

It is during this time gap that we develop perseverance.

Hebrews 6:13-15 [NIV] *“When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” And so **after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.**”*

Abraham had to wait 25 years before Isaac was born, and it was to be through Isaac that the promises were going to be fulfilled.

Hebrews 11:13 [NIV] *“**All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.**”*

Abraham died in faith, not having received the promises, but through total faith in God’s promises, clearly saw them being fulfilled in vision.

James 5:14-15 [NIV] *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”*

We have in this scripture a sure promise that God will heal, made by a God who cannot lie.

But faith and perseverance is involved on our part.

I believe that everyone who is anointed in faith will be healed as long as they “*keep the power plug in the socket*”: by this I mean that they continually day by day thank God for the healing that **is** taking place in their bodies [faith], even if there are no physical signs of that healing [perseverance being learnt].

Hebrews 12:1 [NIV] “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*”

Life is not a sprint, it is a marathon where perseverance is the major factor for any success.

As we have seen all these “*steps*” are accumulative, we cannot jump straight to our goal of love.

Each new step is reached through exercising the ones that came before it.

The “*bottleneck*” is now passed and we are close to the mature goal we are seeking.

Step Number Six

2 Peter 1:6 [NIV] “*...and to perseverance, godliness...*”

The Greek word translated “*godliness*” is “*ēusēbēia*”.

This is a word that expresses true religion, which is a right relationship with our Creator God and also with other human beings.

2 Peter 1:3 [NIV] “*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*”

We all need to be actively using the divine power [our fellowship with the Holy Spirit] to live godly lives.

This opportunity to receive such powerful help only comes as a result of our accepting what God has done for us through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

1 Timothy 3:16 [NIV] “*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.*”

In the ancient world a mystery was **not** something that was mysterious in the sense of being hard to understand.

A mystery was something unintelligible to the uninitiated but crystal clear to those who had been initiated and who had learnt to understand.

1 Corinthians 2:9-14 [NIV] “*However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him,” but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual*

words. *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*"

A mystery was a divine secret, unintelligible to the outsider, but open and precious to the true worshipper.

So Jesus brought to us the secret of true religion, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us, Christ in us.

We learn about God, His desired way of life and how to worship Him as our Creator.

1 Timothy 4:7 [NIV] *"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly."*

Although godliness comes as a gift from God we have to train ourselves to be godly, God like.

There are muscles of godliness that are strengthened by exercise, examples are (a) prayer; (b) scripture memorisation; (c) meditation on scriptures memorised; (d) self-denial through fasting.

Consider these as spiritual fitness training programmes for godliness.

1 Timothy 6:11 [NIV] *"But you, man of God, flee from all this, and **pursue** righteousness, **godliness**, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."*

Godliness is something we are to pursue with great energy.

Paul uses the example of an athlete and soldier to show the dauntless and tireless struggle we have in pursuing godliness.

2 Timothy 3:12 [NIV] *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,"*

Added to our struggle and pursuit of godliness will be persecutions from this society.

Acts 3:12 [NIV] *"When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"*

Godliness and power combine to fulfil God's will.

God will never give anyone a task without also giving them the power to perform.

John 9:31 [NIV] *"We know that God does not listen to sinners. **He listens to the godly man who does his will.**"*

Godliness opens up a continual pathway of prayer to the throne of God.

1 Timothy 2:2 [NIV] *"...for kings and all those in authority, **that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.**"*

Godliness is the hallmark of the Christian life, and the duty of a Christian.

A Christian who is living a godly life is someone who makes it easier for others to believe in God; they bring others to God.

1 Timothy 6:3 [NIV] *"If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to **godly teaching,**"*

Titus 1:1 [NIV] *“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—”*

Godliness is the origin of all true theology and of all godly wisdom.

God can only tell a person what they are capable of receiving and understanding.

The closer a person lives to God, the more God can reveal to them.

To learn about God we must first obey God.

It may well be true that a person who says they cannot understand the Christian faith does not want to understand it, or may even be afraid to understand it.

1 Timothy 6:5-6 [NIV] *“...and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain.”*

Godliness must never be confused with material prosperity.

1 Timothy 4:8 [NIV] *“For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”*

True happiness and success lies entirely in good relationships with God and other human beings.

If a person has love in their lives they have everything.

If our relationship with God is right, then life has found true happiness and contentment lasting beyond time into eternal life.

2 Peter 3:11-12 [NIV] *“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.”*

Godliness in our lives is urged upon us to prepare for the return of Jesus Christ.

No person knows when they must leave time and begin eternity.

A godly life is a life that is constantly prepared for God's summons to judgement.

2 Peter 1:7 [NIV] *“... and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.”*

Godliness leads us to brotherly love, it must **not** separate us from other people.

John 17:15 [NIV] *“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”*

The desire of Jesus Christ was not to take His disciples out of the world but to protect them in society.

A hermit style of life composed of contemplation, meditation and prayer is imperfect and even unchristian, for it is not linked with Christ-like action in the service of others.

Mark 6:31-34 [NIV] *“Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed*

and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”

A regular “quiet time” apart from society is valuable only when it prepares us to face society and be the “salt” and “light” in this world.

1 Timothy 5:4 [NIV] *“But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.”*

Godliness begins in the home.

If a person’s church work involves neglect of their family it is not expressing godliness.

Every Christian church is founded on Christian homes.

The most important godly work is **not** done in public but in our own homes, among those who should be most precious.

Matthew 18:20 [NIV] *“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”*

It has been suggested that this refers to father, mother and child.

Whether or not this is true, it is certainly true that godliness begins in the home and then extends out to the wider sphere of the church and community.

Step Number Seven

2 Peter 1:7 [NIV] *“... to godliness brotherly kindness...”*

The Greek word used is “*philadêlphia*”.

The commonest words for love in Greek are the noun “*philia*” and the verb “*philein*”.

There is a lovely warmth about these words, they mean, to look on someone with affectionate regard.

“*Philein*” is best translated “*to cherish*”.

Matthew 10:37 [NIV] *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;”*

The natural affection of family members one for another.

John 11:3, 36 [NIV] *“So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” ... “Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!””*

The brotherly love that Jesus had for Lazarus.

John 20:2 [NIV] *“So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!””*

The affection between close friends.

What we are considering is the warm and close relationships between family and friends.

Galatians 6:10 [NIV] *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

This warm affection should be the yardstick that measures our relationship with other Christians.

But it is **not** always easy to have brotherly love between Christians.

We assume that we all love our fellow Christians but it is **not** always true.

One of the hardest trials young Christians, either physically or spiritually young, have to face is the way they are treated by fellow Christians.

Those young in the faith think they are always going to be treated fairly and with affection and not spoken against behind their backs, but find it is not always their experiences.

Psalms 55:12-14 [NIV] *“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, a 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.”*

David’s experience was the same as some young people and young believers who are struggling with the way they have been treated by older Christians.

Romans 12:18 [NIV] *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

Paul, possibly through personal experience, acknowledges that it is not always possible to have a loving relationship with other people, this includes other Christians.

1 Peter 1:22 [NIV] *“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you **have sincere love for your brothers**, love one another deeply, from the heart.”*

God, through our new birth, makes love for brethren possible but still it is not easy.

John 13:34-35 [NIV] *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

We need to seek for a loving relationship with other Christians for such an example is the most powerful tool for evangelism in this society.

We truly will be a beacon on a hill for all to see and be attracted towards.

Step Number Eight

2 Peter 1:7 [NIV] *“... and to brotherly kindness, love.”*

The Greek word used for “love” is “agapé”.

The noun “agapé” occurs 120 times and the verb “agapan” occurs 130 times in the New Testament, making them the most used words by far when considering Christian love.

There are other words for love in the Greek language but these are **not** chosen when referring to Christian love.

“Eros” has more to do with physical passion than with Christian love.

“Storge” is used for family affection, the love between parents and children also love between siblings. This love does not have the depth that is demanded by Christian love.

“*Philia*” as we have seen is a lovely word, full of warmth, closeness and affection, but Christian love needs to be more inclusive.

“*Agapé*” is the top of the ladder, the pinnacle of perfection [maturity], the goal that we aim for.

“*Agapé*” demands exercising the whole person, our body, soul [mind] and human spirit.

“*Agapé*” – Christian love, must not only extend to our nearest and dearest, our family, our friends and those who love us.

“*Agapé*” – Christian love, must extend to our fellowship with our neighbours, all we meet in life, even our enemies, those who hate and hurt us.

“*Agapé*” is **not an emotion**.

“*Agapé*” is **the exercising of the mind and will to overcome our natural desires**.

To love our enemies is **not** a natural desire.

To love our enemies is a victory.

It is the conquest of our natural inclinations and emotions.

“*Agapé*” is a deliberate principle in the mind, that leads to a deliberate conquest and achievement of our will that ends in a loving action through our bodies.

“*Agapé*” – **Christian love, is the power to love the unlovable, to love people we do not like.**

Such love cannot be generated by human means, our mind and will are unable to attain such a goal, what we are discussing is super human love.

Matthew 5:43-44 [NIV] “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*”

The word used for love is “*agapé*”.

This does **not** say “*try to love your enemies*”, this is a command.

Why should we love our enemies?

Matthew 5:45 [NIV] “*...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*”

To love our enemies is how we become like our Heavenly Father, how we become His children.

No matter how evil people are God’s Love demands that He seeks nothing but their best welfare.

Romans 5:6-10 [NIV] “*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. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*”

God has given us the perfect illustration of this love through the life and death of His Son Jesus Christ.

“Agapé” – Christian love, is the spirit which says “No matter what anyone does to me, I will never seek to do harm to them, I will never set out for revenge, I will always seek to provide the best for their welfare.”

“Agapé” is a deliberate conviction of the mind issuing in a deliberate policy for life.

The New Testament is quite clear that “agapé” is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] “But the fruit of the Spirit is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,...*”

“Agapé” is a result of a close relationship with the Holy Spirit, the major “fruit” of that relationship.

Romans 15:30 [NIV] “I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by *the love of the Spirit*, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.”

“Agapé” is what we can receive from the Holy Spirit, it belongs to Him for He is “agapé”.

1 John 4:16 [NIV] “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. **God is love.** Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

God doesn’t just love, God is love!!

We receive this love through our accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

This is the only condition that God places on this gift.

Colossians 1:8 [Living Bible] “And He is the one who has told us about the *great love for others which the Holy Spirit has given you.*”

“Agapé” is the basis of the perfect relationship between God and us, and our relationship with other human beings.

Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship, the ultimate loving relationship with our Creator and His Creation, other human beings.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”

As a result of the great “love gift” we have received from God, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The least we can do is to surrender our lives to God as a “living sacrifice”.

How do we do this? Through the gift of “agapé”!

Romans 12:9-20 [NIV] “**Love must be sincere.** Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “**If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.**”

Such “*agapé*” love from God through us will melt the hardest metal-like attitude that any person may have [this is what to “*heap burning coals on his head*” refers to, hard metal being softened to make it pliable in the loving hands of our God.]

Romans 12:21 [NIV] “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*”

We overcome evil with “*agapé*”.

We meet hatred with love.

We meet criticism with praise.

We meet bitterness with kindness.

We meet doubt with faith.

We meet violence with peace.

We meet impatience with patience.

We meet sadness with joy.

We meet immorality with self-control.

We meet selfishness with goodness.

Revelation 12:11 [Living Bible] “*They [Christians] defeated him [Satan the source of evil] by the blood of the lamb [Jesus Christ, God’s “agapé” gift to us] and by their testimony, for they did not love their lives but laid them down for Him [their Saviour].*”

When we lay down our lives for God to use as He wills, the Holy Spirit will generate “agapé” in us that we may then be the testimony that will overcome the evil in this world.

Remember God’s greatest reward is for those who are “*overcomers*”, those who with God’s powerful help overcome the evil in this world with love.

Matthew 5:48 [NIV] “*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*”

Now we know how with God’s help we can fulfil this command, but remember each step of the way will need diligence on our part.