

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Before the Face of God 1 Peter 3:8-12

Follow along as I read our text for the morning – **1 Peter 3:8-12:**

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹ not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, "Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. ¹¹ "And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Scholars have long recognized the parallels between this passage and Romans 12:9-17 and I Thessalonians 5:15. I want to read these as well. Both are printed on the back of your outline. **Romans 12:9-17** *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good (1 Peter 3:11a). ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (1 Peter 3:8, brotherly); give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints,*

practicing hospitality. ¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not (1 Peter 3:9).*
¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (1 Peter 3:8,*
sympathetic). ¹⁶ *Be of the same mind toward one another (1 Peter 3:8, harmonious); do*
not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own
estimation (1 Peter 3:8, humble in spirit). ¹⁷ *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone (1*
Peter 3:9). *Respect what is right in the sight of all men.*

1 Thessalonians 5:15, *see that no one repays another with evil for evil (1 Peter 3:9),*
but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men (1 Peter 3:11).

On account of these similarities some have suggested that Peter was dependent upon Paul for much of the content of his letter. However, it seems more likely that Peter is simply using standard Christian teaching for his own particular purposes" (see Davids, p. 124). In other words, both Peter and Paul reflect a common dependence upon elements of early Christian tradition. One of these well-rooted traditions of early Christianity regards the practice of non-retaliation.

1 Peter 3:9a, *not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult.*

Romans 12:17, *never pay back evil for evil to anyone.*

1 Thessalonians 5:15, *see that no one repays another with evil for evil.*

Here is the point of these three verses and the big idea of my sermon: **we are not to answer sin with sin but with grace.** Let me express this in several other ways. When we ourselves are wronged we are not to retaliate in kind. We are not to seek revenge. We are to make no attempt to get even. We are not to make others

pay. We are not to punish others outright or by our childish, passive-aggressive behavior. And it is at this point that the sword of the Word penetrates deep and the blade is turned.

Some of you wives are in these days making your husbands pay for a wrong done to you. Some of you husbands are punishing your wives for having not met your expectations or for having disappointed you in some respect. Or you could be doing it because you are just an angry, disagreeable man. Some of you teenagers (and I could name names if I were so inclined) are making your parents pay for not allowing you to do all the things you want to do. Some of you grown children are getting even with your parents now for the way they treated you in your youth. Indeed, in some of our own homes the atmosphere of anger, resentment, discord, and retaliation is so thick you could cut it with a knife. My dear friends, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, in this regard we are all a mass of sin. Indeed, our hearts are dark with anger, grudges, ill-feelings, and revenge and, in our ignorance, we wonder why the comforting hand, the assuring presence, and the pleasing smile of God seem to have left us.

Now let's turn our attention to the text before us today. In verses 8 and 9 Peter argues that a life in which every sphere is marked by genuine submission will look a certain way. Peter supplies five characteristics in verse 8. The five graces Peter lists mark us as the family of God living according to the will of God.

1 Peter 3:8. The term **"to sum up"** marks the conclusion of the section of Peter's letter that was begun back in 2:12. You remember in this section he has stressed the importance of submission in specific relationships. The word for "all" suggests that Peter is no longer targeting specific groups like citizens (**2:13-17**),

servants (2:18-19), wives (3:1-6), or husbands (3:7). He is now addressing the entire covenant community; entire congregations. He says, **Let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.** These are “arranged [carefully] with *brotherly*, the love of those in the Christian community, in the center. The first and last adjectives speak of how one thinks, the second and fourth of how one feels” (Davids, p. 124). Let’s look at these five marks.

Harmonious. When we are in harmony with one another we are of one mind. We are not guided by individual selfish interests. We are united in a common purpose; a common goal. We share a oneness in attitude. Harmony springs from a common love of and focus on the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sympathetic. Unfortunately, far too many Christians are *truly* interested in only the things that affect them. Sympathy means that we share one another’s feelings. It means that our hearts go out to one another in love during times of both joy and sorrow.

Romans 12:15, *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*

1 Corinthians 12:26, *and if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

Brotherly. Sadly in some families the siblings are estranged from one another. When Peter calls us to brotherly love he assumes a spiritual family within which the siblings – all children of the heavenly Father - share a mutual affection.

Brotherly relationships are free of competition and full of mutual encouragement and sincere desire for one another's welfare.

Kindhearted. Kindhearted people care deeply for one another. When we are kindhearted we are tender and merciful in our dealings with one another.

Humble in spirit. A picture is worth a thousand words. Jesus actually showed His disciples what this meant.

John 13:3-5, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. ⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Now look over to **1 Peter 5:5. *Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.***

I wonder where Peter got that idea of clothing oneself with humility?

Now this sort of behavior is a breeze when one charitable person is dealing with another charitable person. How do we respond when we are wronged by others – whether by those within the church or by unbelievers outside of it? **1 Peter 3:9, not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult.** The true strength, the vitality of our life together is expressed in how we respond when we are wronged.

Beloved if we are to know the joy of fellowship, the joy of submission, the love of the brethren then we have to muzzle, like some yelping dog, evil and deception.

You have to check sin at some point. You do it at your own front door. You check sin at the point of your own response to it. You determine that you will **not answer sin with sin but with grace**. This is expressed clearly in the Old Testament Deuteronomy 32:35. Jesus clearly taught this principle in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43-44 and Luke 6:28). And Jesus actually lived it out in His experience (1 Peter 2:23).

Now when you first read verses 8 and 9 “it is difficult to determine whether Peter continues to address internal matters in verse 9 or shifts to address external matters” (Achteimeier, p. 225). I think his emphasis is on the internal relationships within the church even though the principle of non-retaliation certainly applies to our response to unbelievers who are antagonistic. Peter may be aiming to “prevent the hostility of the culture from creeping into the church and destroying both its life and its witness” (Achteimeier, p. 222). Indeed, some friction may have already crept into the fellowship.

Regardless of the specific circumstances believers have long been “admonished not to pursue the settlement of accounts: vengeance, when and where necessary, is the prerogative of God. In **Deuteronomy 32:35** God says, “*Vengeance is Mine.*” Basically we are not to throw back what is dished out to us by others.

Romans 12:17, *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.*

If you think this is easy or pretty just listen to Paul.

1 Corinthians 4:12-13, *when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world.*

We are not to answer sin with sin, but with grace. It is easy to strike back in kind. It is really not too difficult to “appear” to let an offense go only to silently boil inside, absolutely enraged. God is not impressed by the charade. But here we are called to something radical. **We are not to answer sin with sin, but with grace.** Indeed, Peter says we are to **give a blessing instead.**

There is more to this than merely speaking well of someone. Peter is talking about calling God’s grace upon someone. Listen to the words of Jesus. *“Bless those who curse you, **pray** for those who mistreat you” (Lu. 6:28).* Giving a blessing means seeking their highest good and, according to Jesus, this means intercession; lifting them up to God in prayer, asking Him to bring to pass in their lives what He sees is required (see Hillyer, p. 105). You say, “Pastor, no way. I can’t do this. It is asking entirely too much. I’ve been wronged and I cannot let it go. I can’t and I won’t. To not nurse this grudge would just kill me. Not blasting my brother is one thing. Blessing him is unthinkable.” Now watch this. It is at this point of defeat, despair, and defiance that the gospel of grace kicks in.

Whether or not the other person is totally undeserving is completely beside the point. Neither were you deserving when God poured out His saving mercies upon you. And I will assure you my friend that the disparity between you and God is far more profound than the gulf between you and another sinner. God

spoke peace; God spoke a blessing to you in the face of your evil deeds, dishonoring conduct, violation of His law, insults, and all the rest.

Romans 5: 6, *while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Romans 5:8, *while we were sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:10, *while we were enemies, we were reconciled through the death [of Christ].*

Even **1 Peter 3:18**, *Christ died for sins ... the just for the unjust.*

Indeed, God called you with the intent of blessing you; of doing you good. **For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.** A more literal translation is *because to **this** (touto) you were called in order that you might inherit blessing* (NASB Interlinear, p. 916). Why should you bless those who wound and injure you? Because you have been called to inherit a blessing. In other words, you exercise goodwill even to those who wound you because you have received boundless, unmerited mercy and goodwill from God in Christ.

“Following his practice of supporting teaching with Scripture, Peter backs up his warning not to retaliate by citing one of his favorite Psalms – Psalm 34 (see Hillyer, p. 102). He’s not supplying the theological basis for verses 8 and 9 but is using **Psalm 34:12-16** to confirm or strengthen verses 8 and 9.

Psalm 34:12-16...*Who is the man who desires life, and loves length of days that he may see good? ¹³ Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. ¹⁴ Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are toward the*

righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. ¹⁶ *The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*

1 Peter 3:10-12...*For, "Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.* ¹¹ *"And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.* ¹² *"For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

What is Peter, in **3:10-12**, confirming by his use of Psalm 34? I think he has three aims. First, he wants to confirm to us that God takes pleasure in the righteous conduct of His people. God is pleased when His people **refrain our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking guile** (or deceit), when we **turn away from evil and do good**, when we **seek peace and pursue it**. If you manifest these three characteristics of a righteous life the promise of God is that you will **love life and see good days**. When Peter says love life and see good days, he does not have a trouble-free existence in mind. In Psalm 34 life and good days refer to a man's earthly existence and the prosperity, good reputation, longevity, freedom from disaster that is generally enjoyed by the people of God who conduct themselves according to the will of God.

There is ample justification for understanding the use of Psalm 34:12 in 1 Peter as referring to eternal blessedness in heaven; that *salvation ready to be revealed in the last time* (**1:5**). At the same time we cannot deny that obedience has benefits for God's people in this life. Dr. Clowney, for example, says, "The blessing that they inherit reaches to eternal life, but it also fills this life with good days" (p. 142).

Second, Peter wants to confirm to us that those who answer sin with grace will know spiritual comfort. **For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer.**

Psalm 33:18-19, *Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness, to deliver their souls from death, and to keep them alive in famine.*

The righteous in 1 Peter are those who live *according to the will of God (4:2, 5:2)*; those who *do what is right (2:14, 15, 20; 3:6; 4:19)*. The point is that these shall know the comfort of the watchful and intimate care of God; His personal concern for His own. This anticipates **1 Peter 5:6-7**, *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God ... casting all your anxieties upon Him, because He cares for you.*

Third, he wants to confirm to us that the disobedient will know and suffer spiritual loss. **But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.** Hillyer explains, "The face of the Lord is an Old Testament phrase to express a relationship of God to people, either his gracious turning toward them or his disappointed turning away from them, the latter implying his withdrawal of grace and a refusal to hear any prayer they may offer" (p. 104). This was confirmed back in **verse 7** – *that your prayers may not be hindered*. Here in verse 12 we have a negative example (see also Lev. 17:10b; Is. 14:8). The most comforting positive example is **Numbers 6:24-26** - the great benediction of the Old Testament - *The LORD bless you, and keep you; ²⁵ The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; ²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'*

Beloved, consider your lives. It may seem that God's face is turned away from you. His good hand of blessing no longer rests upon your life and work. His eyes shut to your plight. His ears deaf to your prayers. Beloved, that condition can in fact exist. You may find that you have grieved your heavenly Father by disobeying Him, by dishonoring Him, by showing in your sinful conduct your ingratitude for all He has done for you in Christ. You have not refrained your tongue. You have not turned away from evil. You have not pursued peace but rather perpetuated conflict and disharmony. And you now know the sting of His discipline and the pain of disrupted communion with Him. Did you notice that in his use of Psalm 34 Peter did not quote the last half of **34:16**, *to cut off the memory of them from the earth*. His intention is not to cause us to despair but to leave us with hope – the hope of the gospel. And it is this gospel hope that we will press at the Lord's Table after the ensemble takes us to Psalm 51.

The LORD bless you, and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'

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to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not (1 Peter 3:9). ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (1 Peter 3:8, sympathetic). ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another (1 Peter 3:8, harmonious); do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation (1 Peter 3:8, humble in spirit). ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone (1 Peter 3:9). Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

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