

# "Unity in the Community"

## 1 Peter 3:8-17

Pastor Tim Dodson at *Jesus Fellowship of Believers*  
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1 Peter 3:8-17 *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; (9) not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. (10) For "He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. (11) Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. (12) For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil." (13) And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? (14) But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." (15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; (16) having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. (17) For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

Peter begins this section with the word "finally." But he says this not to signal an impending end to his letter, but in attempt to put an ultimate "period at the end of the sentence"...to reach that crescendo coming out of the past 2 plus chapters of text. Where he has been going and essentially giving a "why?" concerning all that he had asked of us thus far. Peter had been attacking this issue of submission from several angles. He has been leading the reader toward a practiced heart of submission. One that is to be carried out of the church and into the world at large...a.k.a submission to *law and authorities*, submission in *our workplaces*...then to our *spouses*, and now finally, ... "*finally*."

Peter comes to summit now...calling us to live peacefully with **all** men. A personal submission to even those around us. Throughout this letter there is an overriding goal and discipline...to actively seek after peace! If peace is a character aspect of Christ, then it would seem natural that He would want us to reflect the same from our living. Peace is a fruit of the spirit according to Galatians 5, so if there is a lack of peace there is a lack of the Spirit's presence.

We are given the call to seek peace with all men whenever possible. The easy way out of this is to say "well, it's just *not* possible...." But let us be careful here...for God is no fool. He knows our hearts and every aspect of our situations. Peter was not just laying out some further instructional/spiritual caveats that the people would thereby be expected to add to their religious repertoire. He was giving crucial spiritual direction but furthermore he was asking that such be carried out literally in the midst of the storm!

I realize that many of you 'checked out' at the beginning of this series because you quite simply are not going to take a submissive position to anyone. After all, this is an attribute that can only be manifested from a life filled with the Holy Spirit, and that is still an alien state of being for many of you. But truth is not dependent upon

one's adherence to it. Thus Peter moves to teach and those "with ears to hear" will receive it and move further into Christian maturity.

In our day, it seems our adherence and obedience to matters of faith and scripture seem to directly correlate to our level of current pressures and passions. Our compliance to the ideals and instructions of Christianity ebb and flow...*sometimes quite erratically*, because there are "bumps in the road" in life, and we tend to feel that such exonerates us when we reject obedience in such times. Yet such was clearly no excuse for Peter. He was not speaking from the position of a prima donna. Peter certainly knew what it meant to step up in the midst of the storm, yet we know he often learned to do so through personal failure. But he DID learn to do so, for in the latter years of his life it seemed he had a way of running *into* burning buildings instead of away!

Paul also calls us to this peace in 1 Thess 5:13 "*be at peace among yourselves*," 2Corinthians 13:11 "*be of one mind, live in peace*," and in Romans 12:18 "*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men*." Jesus too in Matthew 5:9 "*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*." And James in James 3:18 "*And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*." Even David in the Psalms (34:14) "*...seek peace, and pursue it*." Clearly this is not some isolated 'hobby horse' ...just a passionate issue for one apostle... but in fact this issue presents itself on the pages of scripture repeatedly! Ironically, this rather simple yet emphatic concept is so quickly and so easily disregarded in our Christian walk.

The world around us seems incapable of getting along today. Countries are breaking up into smaller and smaller units, and those who are not seem to be trying to do so. Neighbor against neighbor, spouse against spouse, red states and blue states, republicans verses democrats, and countries entrenched against others over who owns a piece of rock or a mile of ocean. Peace is an elusive commodity today, and sadly the greater church so often doesn't do much better than the world at large.

But know this: it's not God's fault nor is it a failure of sound doctrine. We started out well, just as so many do today. The early church in Acts rolled out well. We read of the people "*who believed were together, and had all things in common*," they "*...sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need*" and "*continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people*." And in that environment "*...the Lord added to the church daily...*"

We are hardpressed to find such a peaceful faith community as that early church today. But by the time we get to Acts chapter 6, there was already strife and division that had to be dealt with! We frankly have allowed ourselves much too much latitude in this matter as believers! Look, anyone can start this race...many many do. But it's a whole other battle to actually finish. There are those who were loved in this fellowship, invested in, given great opportunities and at first we were the Cat's Meow. But eventually we were looked upon with disdain and kicked to the curb. Ironically we are the same as we always have been, and yet somewhere we fell out of favor. Finishing this Christian race is a whole other fight. Thus if Peter's instruction herein rubs you the wrong way, bear in mind that the people to whom Peter originally sent this letter to were under intense persecution! It would certainly have been hard to receive his direction under the heat they were experiencing. So we are certainly without excuse in the benign environment in which we are living here in rural America. And yet...

The fact is, the preaching we hear from scripture or from the pulpit is often given "amens" and tacit lip-service while failing to ever reach the real living out in our lives. Certainly it goes without saying that we are not to just give an *acknowledgment* of its truth towards us, but actually in turn live that truth out! Ezekiel 33 speaks of

such a phenomena as this, saying

*“Son of man, your people talk about you in their houses and whisper about you at the doors. They say to each other, ‘Come on, let’s go hear the prophet tell us what the LORD is saying!’ So my people come pretending to be sincere and sit before you. They listen to your words, but they have no intention of doing what you say. Their mouths are full of lustful words, and their hearts seek only after money. You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings love songs with a beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument. They hear what you say, but they don’t act on it! But when all these terrible things happen to them—as they certainly will—then they will know a prophet has been among them.” (Ezek 33:30 – 33)*

James 1:22 says *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”* Matthew 7:26 also points out that *“...everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand...”* and yes, we know the rest of the story! Our houses are sure to “come tumbling down!” When we fail to *act* upon what we hear, we are doomed to become those spoken of in 2 Timothy 3:5, those who hold ... *“a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof.”* (2Tim 3:5)

We are herein called to be of “one mind.” That’s a powerful ideal! Such speaks firstly of a unity with the rest of the body of Christ within the context and concrete truths of scripture. But this is more than just overt ecumenicalism; it is about real *agape love in Christ*. We are called to *“have a **compassion** one for another.”* This phrase means to literally “feel another’s pain and suffering.” But instead, we so often are guilty of venting out in attempt to bolster the “I, Me, and Mine.” Thus we are caught “red-handed” feeding the selfish flesh of what the apostle John says is in fact simply an unredeemed man. 1John 3:10 *“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, **nor is he who does not love his brother.**”*

I have witnessed...*and even received*, some of the most scathing and wicked outpouring of wrath and vindictive actions of my lifetime since coming into the pulpit. Expletive laced tirades that would make a sailor blush. A pastor friend of mine once remarked that he has never been lied to more than since he has become a pastor! There have been times that we were nearly compelled to seek restraining orders against people who claimed to be of the faith, but factually appeared to be endangering the very flock...if not the staff here, that they once claimed to love and be a part of.

Certainly many others have gone on to exemplify the idea of “throwing someone under the bus” only after first sucking up all the love, blessing and care this church had to offer. Those who have spewed venomous lies designed only to hurt and distract, often doing so under the cover of some other pew in some other church. Such can only be seen as embodying the most evil of actions, and nowhere ever found in the realm of Christ-centric living.

Our human response to such confrontation as this usually involves statements like “ya, but they started it!” Or “they did it to me first!” Neither of which holds up to verse 9 of our text, which tells us rather to *“not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary (give) blessing...”* We are to love each other as if they are truly your own flesh and blood. In John 13:34-35 Jesus Himself said *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

We must know that such a love and relationship requires a very real sacrifice at times. To *“be tenderhearted”* speaks to a *“deep inner state of being.”* Not a shallow “fellow church member” mentality, but a *sacrificial love*

*in action*. An “*other-centered*” heart that actually *moves* in scriptural truth ...not just *believes* in it! Verse 9 says we are called to bless others...even when they seek to hurt us, and in doing so we receive a blessing ourselves. Such calls are difficult to embrace because they require a serious setting down of our own fleshly spirits to do it. It absolutely requires a holy spirit infilling to pull this off.

If we desire to love life and see good days, then we must learn to keep our mouths shut when we desire rather to retaliate for the actions and words of others. It therefore goes without saying, that when we do *not* do this, we will *not* see good days! That fact I have seen repeatedly manifested in many lives, so the truth in this is not merely textual warning but visually witnessed.

Few things have the toxic effect that bitterness has inside us. It stops our fellowship with God, and it ceases our joy. By allowing it, we hurt ourselves, hurt others, and hurt our Lord Jesus Christ, who forgave **us** of every sin we have ever committed! We have in fact experienced a redeemed life and a 'life abundant.' But how now will we respond to that gift? God actually expects that such an awesome gift will have a deep and unbridled response from us. Yet we want eternal life and blessing, but we don't want to give back in return. I have always felt that such a tacit response should truthfully cause us great concern because I can't help but think that a real understanding and embrace of the gospel would elicit a profound response from us. We would desire to respond to Christ to the greatest degree! He would and should be our greatest passion!

All of these directives in verses 10-11 are words of *action*. God wants us to actually do these things! "*Love, see, refrain, turn, do, seek, pursue...*" None of these things are passive couch potato responses. Verse 10 tells us clearly that God is watching. He didn't come, create, and leave to go and do something else! He is here and intimately participatory. He wants us actually *experience* this blessed life of a child of God but we must step up to the plate of obedience!

Let us forever be cognizant of the fact that Christianity is a *walk*. We thus have to *move*! He is calling us to truly *act*! God is more than a mental ascent. He is more than just heady acknowledgment. Real faith, real salvation, and real Christianity is nothing less than an all out giving of self. Everything we are, with nothing reserved. Because Christianity without teeth is just religion. The religion of the comfortable and powerless! Peter is calling us out of that lethargic and passive pew-sitting and into the fray.

These believers to whom Peter writes were sure to be looking for an 'out' to avoid the pain and suffering that they had found themselves living in. Yet Peter was not cutting them any slack. He was instead calling them forward, always forward... despite the trials, into a more disciplined walk and committed relationship with Christ. Such times as this will test us. Many will “pack it in”...throw in the towel. Will this be your story or will you trust Christ and *lean in*?

As long as we remain faithful to God, come what may, God has got us. If we die, God allowed it. If we live, then He provided it. And the one to fear is not emperor Nero...not any *man*...but a God who can condemn us to an eternity away from him, where our time suffering under the Nero's of this world will seem like a cake walk! Matthew 10:28 reminds us: "*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" No one can truly harm you if you are doing right and pursuing God...no matter how they might try or what they might say.

Verse 15 calls upon us to "sanctify our hearts." That directive represents one of hundreds of such passages that call upon us to actually *participate* in the sanctification process! There will always be those who will try to lie to you and tell you that you play no part in your sanctification...that it is “all God.” But that is a 'couch-potato' spiritual pacifist, that is actually looking for an excuse for *not* walking in holiness. Just an excuse to sin.

Afterall, if it is "all God" then if I am not living holy, in essence it is *His* fault!

Sanctify means "*to cleanse, purify, and dedicate our lives in holiness to God.*" We are in truth called to set apart our very hearts and lives, filled with the Holy Spirit of God, to live in the loving of God and to further the kingdom of God. This verse...this issue, is the "fork in the road" of Christianity. It is the "manifest proof" of our salvation. Certainly, alot of folks will desire the blessing and benefits of redemption by Christ, while at the same time are unwilling to actually step up to the plate. They want salvation, but not sanctification. And what a mess that heart causes! No peace. No lasting joy. No strength. No continuance. This is the fella who fails to "finish well."

Real faith overflows. When someone asks us about our lives, we have the answer. It may not be in Greek or with long theological terms. But we know why we are saved and what that means to our lives! And we show that even with our very living when the trials come and the nay-sayers attack. And they *will* come. We can jump to defend our reputation, or we can live our lives in such a way that says that their words are lies and that Christ is indeed real within us. A pastor once told me "you worry about your character, and let God worry about your reputation."