

*During Vacation Bible School a teacher had an experience with her class that she says she will never forget. Her class was interrupted on Wednesday about an hour before dismissal when a new student was brought in. The little boy had one arm missing, and since the class was almost over, she had no opportunity to learn any of the details about the cause or his state of adjustment. She was very nervous and afraid that one of the other children would comment on his handicap and embarrass him. There was no opportunity to caution them, so she proceeded as carefully as possible. As the class time came to a close, she began to relax, and she asked the class to join her in their usual closing ceremony. “Let’s put our hands together and make our churches,” she said. “Here’s the church and here’s the steeple, open the doors and there’s...” The awful truth of her own actions struck her. The very thing she had feared that the children would do, she had done. As she stood there speechless, the little girl sitting next to the boy reached over with her left hand and placed it up to his right hand and said, “Davey, let’s make the church together.”*

“Let’s make the church together.” That’s what we are going to talk about this morning as Peter moves from his guidance in our special relationships, such as our relationships with our spouses to our relationships with one another in the church. In our passage this morning, Peter paints for us an ideal picture of church life – even while experiencing difficulties and hardship. If you remember, Peter was writing to believers in churches who were enduring through suffering and persecution in a hostile world, and he knew that sometimes these difficulties and hardships don’t bring out the best in people – even church people. So, let’s pick up where we left off from last week, and we will start with **1 Peter 3:8**.

**To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;**

Back in **Chapter 2:12**, Peter explained that we are an open book to a lost and dying world and our manner of life, our walk, our regular conduct should be characterized by Christ-like behavior because people are watching us. They see how we react to things. They observe how we talk to others. They watch how we deal with problems. They note how we treat our family – and this prompted, for example, some difficult commands by Peter regarding submission. If you recall, last week we talked specifically about husbands and wives submitting to one another – in their own way, as they put each other first in their marriage.

Now in **verse 8**, Peter expands his audience from these specific groups of people like husbands and wives, to now include everyone in the church, and he begins to

summarize his previous guidance with a list of God-honoring attitudes that should be reflected in all of our relationships as we *make the church together*.

Peter begins by telling us to be **harmonious**. As believers, we are to live in harmony with each other, which in Greek means we are to be “*like-minded*” and if we are honest – for most of us, being like-minded is what happens when people agree with us. If they agree with your views, if they accept your perspective, if their opinion is like yours, if they adopt your philosophy – then we are like-minded. That’s how we tend to think, everyone is right as long as they agree with me, but that’s not what Peter has in mind here. He’s not suggesting we all have to agree with one another, because “news flash” that’s not going to happen. People are very different, we come from different backgrounds, we come from different walks of life, we have different experiences, and as such, we will have differences in opinion. We are going to disagree on many things because we are different – that’s a given, but Peter’s focus is not on the differences – his focus is on how we handle our differences without creating division or conflict.

Peter is not asking for uniformity, where we think alike and act alike and agree on absolutely everything, rather he is asking for unity – for in spite of our differences, we should be following the same person – the Lord Jesus Christ and pursuing the same goals of serving Him and serving one another. Believers should live in harmony, being like-minded with the same purpose of honoring Christ, winning the lost, and building the church, and if that is the case, then our differences should not divide us, rather they should enrich us and add character to the church body.

*We could say that Christians should be like a good church choir. Each member sings with their own voice and some might even sing different parts, but everyone sings to the same music and in harmony with one another. Think about it, if members of a choir sang with the same pitch and the same range and the same tone, that would be a boring choir, but what stands out is when different members bring their own voices to the choir and harmonize with each other. Surely, it’s likely harder, but harmony makes the songs much sweeter.*

So, we need to be like-minded – we need to be harmonious with each another although we are different.

Second in this list, Peter says we are to be **sympathetic** with one another. The Greek word means to “*suffer together with*” or to say it a little differently – sympathy is “*your hurt in my heart.*” I like that. That’s what it means. It means to share in the sorrows of those around you.

At the end of each Sunday morning worship service, we sing a chorus of “*The Family of God*” by the Bill and Gloria Gaither, but there are other chorus’ to that song that you may not be familiar with, and here is one:

*You will notice we say brother  
And sister 'round here  
It's because we're a family  
And these folks are so near  
When one has a heartache  
We all share the tears  
And rejoice in each victory  
In this family so dear*

That chorus speaks about our connection with each other and how we are to sympathize with one another, and the Apostle Paul spoke about this as well. When explaining the parts of body of Christ and how they work together, Paul said in **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.***

That’s what Peter is saying to the churches. As believers, we are to sympathize with each other, and if one hurts, then we all hurt – “*your hurt will be in my heart.*”

The third attitude mentioned by Peter is our need to be **brotherly**, or we might say having brotherly love, and it has to do with affection for those who are close to us. The word “*brother*” in Greek means “*one born from the same womb,*” so we might say we are to have a special kind of love for our Christian brothers and sisters because we are all born from the same source.

Now, just like brothers and sisters in any normal family, there will be disagreements, there will be arguments, and there might even be one or two knock-down – drag out fights, at least that was the way it was with my brother and sister, but if someone outside the family picks a fight with your brother and sister, then they might as well have picked a fight with you because that is your brother or sister – and that’s the way it’s to be in the church. You don’t have to like every Christian you meet. Some people are hard to love and some even harder to like, but loving your brothers and sisters means to watch out for them, to care for them, and to stick up for them when they need your help.

So, Peter has said we need to be harmonious, sympathetic, and brotherly. He also tells us to be **kindhearted**, or we might say to be tenderhearted. The Greek word used by Peter literally means to have *good bowels* or *good intestines*, and that's because the Greeks believed the place of affection, the home of our deepest emotions such as love, and joy, and hate – came not from the heart, as we commonly say, but from an area much lower than the heart – the bowels. Luckily, we will stick with the heart because reading a Hallmark card that says, "*Honey, I love you with all of my bowels*" seems really wrong.

**What does it mean to be tenderhearted?** The dictionary defines it as being, "*easily moved to love, and pity, or sorrow*" and the idea behind the word "*tenderhearted*" is that our insides are easily touched. When our heart is tender, it's easily affected, it's easily and quickly moved by the suffering and the hurts of others, it feels the pain of others, and just as important, it carefully touches their wounds in a gentle and delicate way.

In these days, it's so easy to become numb to the suffering and the pain of others. There's just so much of it, we are bombarded with it, but we must fight against the tendency to become calloused and hard-hearted. It's always easy to make excuses, and it's even easier not to see hurting people at all and simply pass on by them – **but that's not being Christ-like, is it?** We all need to be tenderhearted – we need to have hearts that are easily touched and moved for those in need.

The last attitude given by Peter is **humility**, and this may be hardest of all. The Greek word means to have a mindset of "*not rising far from the ground,*" and that may seem odd until you remember that the Bible speaks of pride as being "*lifted up.*" Many people have misunderstood the meaning of humility, assuming it pertains to having a poor self-image, low self-esteem, or a lack of self-worth, but that's not humility. That's not what it's about.

In a nutshell, humility is not about thinking less of yourself, rather it's about thinking of yourself less. In other words – it's not all about you – and that's why humility is so hard because humility desires to put the interests of others ahead of your own self interests.

In making the church together, Peter says that believers are to be harmonious, and sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble with one another. I have a question for you: **do you have Christian brothers and sisters like this in your life?** If not – maybe the first thing you should do is look in a mirror, and then ask

yourself: “Am I that kind of person?” I say that because the answer to the second question might explain your answer to the first question.

So, Peter painted for us an ideal picture of life in the church with these attitudes on full display by believers, but it’s only ideal picture – not necessarily reflected in reality because in some cases the church can be the meanest place in town, and this bring us to **verse 9**. **How are we to respond when it’s not ideal?**

**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.**

This instruction by Peter is almost as hard as his commands to submit. This goes against the grain because when we are wronged, it is so natural for us to want to retaliate in some way. That’s what we are talking about here – retaliation. When someone has brought evil against us, when someone has harmed us, when someone has offended us – we want payback – we want to get even, **don’t we?** That’s the honest truth, but according to Peter, when wronged, Christians are not to payback a wrong with a wrong. Two wrongs don’t make a right as it is commonly said.

Now some may say, “*I wouldn’t respond that way – I wouldn’t return evil for evil, that’s not something I would do,*” but Peter’s instruction also includes retaliation with our speech, and many Christians have no problem slicing and dicing each other up with their sharp tongues – and that is just as wrong.

It’s hard not to retaliate, **isn’t it? What’s Peter thinking?** Well, he’s thinking the same thing that Jesus was thinking and the same thing that the Apostle Paul was thinking.

Jesus gave a lengthy sermon on the mount, and He said this in **Matthew 5:38-48**.

<sup>38</sup>“*You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’*

<sup>39</sup>*But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. <sup>40</sup>If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. <sup>41</sup>Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>42</sup>Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. <sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’*

<sup>44</sup>*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love*

*you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup>Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Without getting too deep into this, Jesus is not saying that we should not defend ourselves, and He's not saying we should be doormats either, but what He is saying we should not retaliate and payback evil with evil. In other words, we should set aside our desire to get even – the kind of desire that wants to punish others by returning a wrong with a wrong. Granted, this is not easy, but Jesus says when you do this, you look just like your heavenly Father – which might be the highest compliment one could receive.

That's from Jesus and Paul essentially gave a shorter version of the same message in **1 Thessalonians 5:15**, where he stated,

*See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.*

So, as Christians, we are not to trade evil for evil, a wrong for a wrong, a curse for a curse, verbal abuse for verbal abuse – we don't retaliate, rather we are to respond by doing the exact opposite – we are to pursue peace with our words, and yes, even graciously forgiving them.

I like what Warren Wiersbe says about this. *“As Christians, we can live on one of three levels. We can return evil for good, which is the satanic level. We can return good for good and evil for evil, which is the human level. Or, we can return good for evil, which is the divine level. Jesus is the perfect example of this latter approach. As God's loving children, we must do more than give “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”, which is the basis for justice. We must operate on the basis of mercy, for that is the way God deals with us.”*

C. S. Lewis said: *“To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”* That's gospel right there.

This is some hard stuff, but this is what we were called to as Christians – we are called to be holy; we are to be set apart, we are called to be different, we are to be a blessing to others – and that brings honor to God and favor with Him. Let's continue with **verses 10-12**.

<sup>10</sup>For, “The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. <sup>11</sup>“He must turn away from evil and do good; He must seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup>“For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

In some respects, Peter is resaying what he has already said, he’s presenting the same principle, but here he’s framing it in a very different and helpful context. He’s quoting a man who had experienced the highs and lows of retaliation and peace – the extremes of revenge and forgiveness.

These verses from Peter are quoted from **Psalm 34:12-16**, and they were written by David who learned how to love life and to see good days in very tough times – and they were very tough times. Consider this, at the time of this psalm, David was being hunted down by King Saul. David was running for his life, and he sought safety with the Philistines by acting crazy, but the king didn’t want David anywhere near him because he was acting too crazy, so he drove David away and it’s off to hiding in the mountains and the caves for David. In this psalm, David speaks of his fears, and his troubles, his afflictions, and even his broken heart – but in this same psalm, David also speaks about his answers to prayer, the goodness of God, and the nearness of God in his life. In this psalm, David makes it clear that a **good day** for the believer who **desires life** is not one in which he is pampered and sheltered, but one in which he experiences God in the midst of life’s problems and trials.

I think Peter quoted this passage from **Psalm 34** because he is writing to believers who were suffering, they were being persecuted – they were hated just like David. They were enduring through dark and difficult times, and just like us, they desired the good days where they might experience the fullness of life, and what Peter is telling these believers and us as well is this:

If we want to make the most out of every situation, if we want to experience life to the fullest, if we desire the good days in tough times – then we need to look in the mirror because it starts with you and me – it starts with our own attitudes.

Peter said we are to be **harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit**, and these God-honoring attitudes are especially needed when the church is experiencing difficulties and hardships. Hardships and difficulties can bring out the worst in people, but with God’s help, they can also bring out the best in us – that’s how we will make the church together.

*A man spoke with the Lord about heaven and hell. “I will show you hell,” said the Lord. And they went into a room which had a large pot of stew in the middle. The smell was delicious and around the pot sat people who were famished and desperate. All were holding spoons with very long handles which reached to the pot, but because the handles of the spoons were longer than their arms, it was impossible to get the stew into their mouths. Their suffering was terrible.*

*“Now I will show you heaven,” said the Lord, and they went into an identical room. There was a similar pot of stew and the people had the same identical spoons, but they were well nourished, talking and happy.*

*At first the man did not understand. Then the Lord said, “It’s simple – for you see, they have learned to serve and care and feed each other.”*

Source Material:

Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude – Max Anders, David Walls  
Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible – David Brown, A.R. Fausset, Bobby Jamieson  
James, 1, 2 Peter & Jude, The Randall House Bible Commentary – Robert E. Picirilli & Paul V. Harrison  
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe  
Good Days in Tough Times – Adrian Rogers  
Faithlife Study Bible - Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Bomar, D.  
Notes on the New Testament: James to Jude – Albert Barnes  
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck  
Enduring Word – David Guzik