



1 Peter 3:8-12

Shine as Lights in the World

8 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."

For more than two centuries following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Roman Empire did all that it could to exterminate his followers from the earth. They were crucified, thrown to the lions, burned, beheaded, drowned, frozen, and starved to death. Every evil that the empire could dream up was used against them, and yet through it all, even their persecutors had to admit that there was something very different about these Christians. They definitely weren't your typical rebels.

There was a great difference in the way they treated each other that was different from the way other citizens of the empire acted. They called each other brothers and sisters, they freely shared what they had with one another, they bore each others burdens, and treated each other with an uncommon deference and respect.

In doing that they were following the command and the example of Jesus who while he was still on earth had said:

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

And so it was fitting that even their enemies would recognize that in a world filled with hate and fear these Christians really loved each other.

But it wasn't just the way that they treated other believers that made an impression on their persecutors, Christian apologists like Justin Martyr were actually able to defend the Christian faith by appealing to the way Christians treated their neighbors and even their enemies. He could say things to critics of Christianity like you yourselves know how honest they are in their business dealings, how they patiently bear injuries, how instead of repaying evil for evil repaid evil with good. In essence to paraphrase Paul he said that "***in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, these Christians shone as lights in the world***"

That more than even their love for one another, caught the attention of their enemies. Because they could understand how a man could love his friends and his family, but they couldn't understand how a man could love his enemies or repay curses with blessings. That didn't seem natural to them.

And you know why it didn't seem natural? ***Because in a very real sense it isn't!*** I don't know about you but loving my enemies doesn't come naturally to me. In fact this is one of the hardest parts of the Christian faith for me. I often say, I'm preaching to myself as I stand up here, well today I am. Because somebody says something nasty to me, and my mind is already working overtime coming up with biting responses and then justifications for actually using them. I want to revenge myself, I want to get even. We read about the persecution of the church, and the way that our brothers and sisters are made to suffer, and sometimes it requires a great deal of effort to remember to "pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" and not "carpet bomb the lot of them."

The natural man just doesn't love his enemies, he has difficulty even loving his friends and family members. Turn on the news or go to family court and you'll see that men have great difficulty showing compassion or courtesy, and while we hear a lot of talk about love and unity we don't see it much. You remember when the flags came out after 9/11 and the we're in this together spirit? I remember saying to my wife, "this won't last" and that wasn't because of politics, but because fallen men can't do it.

So why can Peter here tell you Christians, to do something that men can't normal do. To love one another as brothers, and bless those who curse you, and why can Paul tell you to do the same thing in Romans 12? Because, Brothers and Sisters because of what Christ did for you and in you. The anchor verses to all that he has been commanding Christians to do, Christian slaves submitting to their masters, Christian wives obeying their husbands even if they were unbelievers, Christian husbands serving their wives selflessly; Christians loving each other and blessing those who curse them are in chapter 2:21

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed.

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

You say, you cannot love your enemies, you cannot bless those who revile you? Well Christians that is precisely what Christ did. You know how greatly Jesus blessed his enemies? He died for them. Because that is precisely what you and I were.

Don't believe me? Well then turn in your Bibles to Romans 5:6 ***For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.***

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

What did you give to Him? You gave him your cursings. You gave to him your sins, and he bore them on the cross for you, soaking up all the punishment that was rightly due to you. And what did he give to you? He gave you his blessings! He gave you all the things he had merited by his obedience. He gave you forgive of sins, he gave you eternal life, he gave you the holy spirit to indwell you and change you, to bind you together into his body the church, and make it possible for you to die to self and follow him. That is why you are different. And as you do die to self, and become more like Him you will find that these things that seem so difficult become easier.

So what is it that Peter is saying that you must become? And these will be my applications:
In a sense these applications answer the questions, What should I look like? What should our church look like?

1) Unified: having one mind, hatred arises out of differences between men, but for Christians our objective is the same, to glorify and serve Christ, not ourselves. Therefore your objective should not be to dominate your brothers and sisters, but rather you will be willing to take the lower place and be eager to serve rather than to be served.

2) Compassionate: Technically the word is sympathetic, having a fellow feeling. You know the author of Hebrews tells us that one of the things that should inspire our Love for Christ is that He sympathizes with our weaknesses. He knows what it is to be tempted and to suffer. He knows our suffering. Well if you care about your brothers and sisters, you will have compassion for them, compassion means to suffer with them. To rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Friends, there is nothing so unnatural as a cold hearted Christian, how can a part of the body not suffer or rejoice with the rest of the body. If a part of your body doesn't have feeling, something is very wrong.

3) Having Fraternity: It's a shame what college fraternities have done to that word. The word here is the Greek philadelphoi – the love of Christians for one another is a familial love, but it is stronger than that between natural brothers – we remember that the first set of natural brothers were Cain and Abel – it is the love of brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a family that lasts forever.

4) Tenderhearted: Showing kindness to one another, and that means being willing to forgive, and not holding a grudge. Never as Peter puts it in his quote from Psalm 34, speaking deceitfully of our brothers, blessing them to their faces and then speaking evil of them behind their backs.

5) Humble in Spirit: Willing to put your brothers and sisters first. Brothers and sisters the most noble of men are those who are willing to set aside all worldly status and rank to humble themselves and simply serve. If that comes hard, remember that the Prince of Princes and King of Kings was willing to humble himself to the point of becoming a slave – become a slave for your sake.

6) Repaying Cursing with Blessing: Brothers A'Brakel puts it simply, *To render evil for evil is carnal, to reward good with evil is devilish, but to reward evil with good is Christian.* Your calling is to be a source of blessing to those heaping contempt on you.

Now you may say wait a *minute if I give “Blessings” to someone cursing me, I am blessing someone who doesn’t deserve it!* Well what do you think Grace and Mercy are? They are unmerited blessings, and if you have been saved, it is not because you earned that salvation. It was because Christ took your curse and rewarded you with unearned blessings. Christ did all the work, you receive all the benefits. Don’t think you want strict justice – strict justice is you get the fair wages of you sins.

Also, please note, I have seen the effect that this can have, the singularity of being someone who blesses in response to evil. {Apologetics} Even if men are not converted by our blessing them, their rejection of our gracious response just heaps coals on their own heads and we will receive the blessings of obedience. You will maintain your communion with God and be truly living the Psalm 34 life that Peter quotes in verses 10-12

What will this look like?

Acts 6:59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

“After the bloody repulse of the Federals at Fredericksburg, near the foot of Marye's hill, they left their many killed and wounded lying between the lines, and the piteous cries of the brave men on account of pain and thirst appealed to the sympathies of the soldiers of both armies. Kirkland went to General Kershaw, who was then in command of the Confederates at that point, and said with deep emotion: "General, I can't stand this." "What is the matter, Sergeant?" asked the general. He replied: "All day I have heard those poor people crying for water and I can stand it no longer. I come to ask permission to go and give them water." The general regarded him for a moment with feelings of profound admiration, and said: "Kirkland, don't you know that you would get a bullet through your head the moment you stepped over the wall? Yes," he said, "I know that I may, but if you will let me, I am willing to try it." After a pause the general said: "Kirkland, I ought not to allow you to run such a risk, but the sentiment which actuates you is so noble that I will not refuse your request, trusting that God may protect you. You may go." With light heart and buoyant step the humane hero, armed with all of the canteens he could carry filled with water, crossed the wall, went unharmed through the shower of bullets which at first greeted him, and reached and relieved the nearest sufferer, pouring down his parched throat the life-giving fluid, putting him in a more comfortable position, and leaving him a canteen filled with water. His purpose now being apparent, the Federals ceased to fire on him, and for an hour and a half, amid the plaudits of both armies, this angel of mercy went on his mission from man to man of the wounded enemy--his comrades gladly filling his canteens for him and being prevented from joining him in his labor of love only by the orders against their crossing the line--until all on that part of the field were relieved. It needs only to be added--since "the bravest are the tenderest and the loving are the daring"--that Sergeant Kirkland so greatly distinguished himself at Gettysburg that he was promoted for "conspicuous gallantry," and that he fell on the victorious field of Chickamauga, bravely doing his duty.”

Why was Kirkland able to do that: “he had but a short time before found "Christ in the camp," I doubt not that he wears now a bright crown bestowed by Him who promises that a cup of cold water given in the right spirit shall not lose its reward.” – *Confederate Military History*

Finally a warning to those of you who still say, I cannot do that kind of thing I cannot bless my enemies, I cannot help holding grudges, speaking evil of others, cursing when cursed -

“Every man should give away according to what he has. He who gives curses probably gives them because he has so much cursing in him. You can always tell what a man is like by noticing what comes from him. If he curses, it is because curses abound in him.

But you are to give blessing to others because you have inherited so much blessing from Christ; your whole tone, temper, spirit, language, action should be the means of blessing to others.” - Spurgeon