

A Call to Radical Love

- 1 Peter 3:8-12
- Peter has just touched on the theme of suffering in chapters 1 and 2. Now he prepares to cover that issue more thoroughly that is central to the message of his letter: Christian suffering for the glory of God. Before he does, though, he wraps up the previous theme of how we as Christians display our freedom in Christ through submission to authority. He says, “Finally,” all of you, pursue these five things so that you might be a blessing to others, as you have been called to do, and that you may obtain a blessing from God, which you have been called to as well. Let’s look at this passage then under two main points: Five-fold ministry and Getting even.
- **Five-fold ministry (verse 8)**
- Ok, this is not the five-fold ministry that some of you who grew up in Pentecostal churches are used to hearing about. But Peter calls all of us, “all of you,” he says, to operate in these five virtues that pack a powerful punch and bring great blessing, not just to those in the church but also to those outside, even to our enemies. Think of these as the five fingers of your hand with the power of grace radiating from the center. It is by the grace of God, freely given to us in Christ, that we can live this way, as Christ has demonstrated in his own life. Let’s look at these.
- **First, we are to have unity of mind.** It is another way of saying that we are to walk together as those who agree, to live in harmony with one another, as Paul wrote in Romans 12:16. I remember my early mentor Pastor Howard Thompson, who grew up in Oklahoma, saying to me 35 years ago that if there are people in the church who just don’t agree with the church, not because it’s unbiblical but because they are not agreeable people, it’s like someone sitting on the back of a wagon that the horse is pulling down the road and letting their feet drag on the ground. It won’t stop the wagon from moving forward but it makes a difference in how efficiently the wagon moves. Peter will cover this point in more depth in chapter 4, but this call to unity in the church was clear apostolic teaching that came from Christ. Peter may be thinking back to the time he basically told Jesus not to talk about the cross and Jesus rebuked him. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said to Peter. “You are a hindrance (or stumbling block) to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Mt. 16:23). We can disagree, saints, about the things of man. But we must walk in harmony on the things of God, especially when it comes to the cross!
- **Second, we are to have sympathy for one another.** Like Jesus does for us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.” (Hebrews 4:15) The word in Greek simply means to “feel together.” Paul said it like this in Romans 12: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” We can only enter into others’ hurts and joys if we know and love them.
- **Third, we are to have brotherly love.** We walk in that to the same degree that we remember and we celebrate the fact that we *are* family! Again, Hebrews helps us with this: “...he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.” (Hebrews 2:10-11) Remember when Jesus was interrupted by someone in the crowd as he was teaching in a house in Capernaum? That person said, “Hey, Jesus, your mother and your brothers are outside, looking for you.” He said, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Then he looked at the people sitting in front of him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35). Because of our new birth, we are brothers and sisters. We walk in love as a gospel community.
- **Fourth, we are to have a tender heart toward one another.** This is a word that speaks of the inner organs, because it means compassion, mercy, concern for others. Jesus again is our model for us in this. I love the verse in Matthew, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Mt. 9:36) His compassion for the spiritually poor, the sick, the weak and the infirmed was extraordinary. He told a story to illustrate this type of compassion, about a man who was beaten and robbed and left to die on the side of the road. A

priest passed by him, making sure he didn't even get close, but walked on the other side of the road. Then a Levite did the same. These two "men of God" did not care, but a Samaritan of all people, an outcast to the Jews, came along and Jesus said this man "had compassion." "Which of the three," Jesus asked, "proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?" "The one who showed him mercy," came the reply. And Jesus said, "You go, and do likewise." We may not pass by many beaten and bloody people by the side of the road. But Paul brings it home to all of us when he says, "Be kind to one another, *tender-hearted*, (same word) forgiving one another, as Christ forgave you." (Eph. 4:32) Our compassion for others looks a lot like not holding onto a hurt, but forgiving the one who hurt us, just as Christ has forgiven us.

- **Fifth, we are to have a humble mind.** A tender heart and a humble mind is a powerful one-two punch! And if the first point, unity of mind, is to be likeminded, this fifth virtue is to be lowly-minded. Again our example is Jesus, as Paul wrote in that beautiful passage in Philippians: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:5-8) Last week in our first home group, one of the ice breaker questions I asked was, "Which character in the Bible do you like or do you most identify with?" Half of the people said Peter. Because he, like many of us, had to learn humility the hard way. But oh what a transformation when Peter completely surrendered his life to Jesus and lived for him. Will this be easy for us? Oh no. Edmund Clowney writes, "Christian humility will be mocked, as Jesus' humiliation on the cross was. But it will be honored by God in the triumph of the returning Lord." Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Mt. 23:12) That day is coming but not yet.
- I love the story of a missionary couple that was returning to the United States from Africa in the early 1900s, after being there for 40 years. Aboard the same ship was President Theodore Roosevelt, who was returning from a two-week hunting trip in Africa. As the ship approached the dock, the missionary noticed all the fanfare for the return of the President. There was a large crowd with banners and flags as well as a marching band. The missionary found himself a little discouraged because he and his wife had served God for 40 years in a third-world country. Their bodies were tired, worn down and not in the best of health. He watched as the crowd made much about the return of the President, and he couldn't help but feel discouraged and unappreciated. The closer they got to the dock, the more profoundly the discouragement compounded his sorrow. He shared his thoughts with his wife as they slowly approached the dock. "We have been gone 40 years, and the President, two weeks," he said. "We have been serving the Lord, and he, on a leisurely hunting trip, yet there is no one here to greet us. There is no band or cheers or banners welcoming us home." The words of his faithful wife changed his attitude immediately. She said, "My dear, you must remember, we are not home yet." That leads us to...
- **Getting even (verse 9)**
- Peter goes right from the five-fold ministry to the place where it will be tested. When others do evil against us, attack us, or revile us, Peter says, here is how we get even. When they do evil against us, we pay them back by blessing them with good. When they attack us, we pull out the big guns and bless them with mercy. When they revile us, we hit that scud missile by blessing them with kindness. I tell you, this Christian lifestyle is unworldly, isn't it? Exactly! It is completely unlike the world. I remember the first time I experienced something like this as a Christian just one year old in the faith. I had been reading through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and was wondering about Jesus' teaching that I should love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me. I thought how does anyone even do that? The next day I had just competed in a swim meet and was walking to my car when a guy I knew from high school blocked my path and said something like, "Fox, I heard you are a Christian now, well that's just pathetic. You are such a loser." I was completely shocked at what came out of my

mouth. I smiled and said, "Hey man, there's nothing like the love of Jesus. He loves you and so do I." Not exactly deep truth, right? But what shocked me was what didn't come out of my mouth that would have before Jesus got a hold on my heart.

- When you are reviled, do not revile in return. I heard a great example of how we can put this into practice in our own marriages. Dr. Mike Garrett is a Christian Counselor in Raleigh who several of us in the church have been to see on Zoom, and he teaches about something he calls the Trigger/Emotion/Reaction spiral. And I would almost guarantee we have all been there and many of us have spent time going around and around on it for days, weeks, sometimes even months. The trigger is something one spouse says or doesn't say or does or doesn't do. A husband might walk into the house after work and say, "Why isn't supper on the table yet?" Or he might come home an hour late and never call his wife to let her know he would be late. In either case, she probably has an emotional reaction. She feels unloved, or taken for granted, or just...alone. She might react by saying, "You are so selfish!" That triggers him and provokes an emotion in him. He feels angry or disrespected. He reacts with something like, "I'm selfish! Well, let me talk to you about selfishness..." And on it goes, spiraling out of control. This can lead to a cold war, silent treatment, living like two roommates who don't like each other, or worse. Each one is repaying the other evil for evil, reviling for reviling. Dr. Mike says the key is to stop at the first emotion, after the trigger. Instead of reacting, she could say, "I need to take 30 minutes to go process what just happened, and then we can talk, if that's OK." She takes a walk or goes into another room, acknowledges her feelings at that moment, gets calmed down, and then comes back to talk about it in two ways: "I feel," and "I need." She doesn't attack with "You did" or "You said," but instead says "I felt unloved," and "I need your kindness and your understanding." The same goes for him. If she reacts instead of taking that walk, and he is triggered and feels angry, *he* can stop the cycle and say, "I need to take a break and think and pray before we continue this conversation, if that's ok." The goal in any marriage and any relationship between people who love each other is not to use or manipulate or to win or come out on top. It is to encourage and bless and show the love of Christ in every circumstance, including when there is conflict. I share this, again, not as someone who has conquered this but someone who is a student, learning day by day how to manage conflict in a godly way.
- Peter ends this section with an appeal as I have said before to what may have been his favorite Psalm. David wrote in Psalm 34 that if we desire to love life and see good days, then we will do the very things Peter prescribed in verses 8 and 9. Guard our tongues. Run *from* evil and run toward good. Seek peace and pursue it. And when we do those things, the Lord will be glorified and will bless. That's a good day, and a good life!
- Prayer
- Greet one another