

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

## COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION

ON

**PETER** AND **THE FIRST EPISTLE** THAT BEARS HIS NAME

**CONVERSATION STUDY PLAN #9 for Thursday –January 8, 2015**

**“HARMONY IN ALL SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS”<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 3:8-12**

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AN OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER

THE MUTUAL SHARING OF PEACE BETWEEN GOD’S PEOPLE

A LOOK AT OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

- ...even and especially in times of conflict, to understand the importance of promoting harmony in all social relationships;
- ... to focus on five (5) important qualities, first enunciated by Peter, to promote good internal relationships in the Church;
- ... to understand that these qualities are not natural, but are manifested only when Christians appropriate God’s grace in their relationships with each other;
- ... to understand Peter’s concern that his Christian friends also respond appropriately to the hostility directed against them as a result of their external relations with a hostile world; thereby serving as an evangelistic tool and example to non-Christians, however evil those persons may be.

**BIBLICAL TEXT: 1 Peter 3:8-12** (*.....using the Amplified Bible translation*)

<sup>8</sup> **Finally, all** [of you] **should be of one and the same mind** (united in spirit), **sympathizing** [with one another], **loving** [each other] **as brethren** [of one household], **compassionate and courteous** (tenderhearted and humble).

<sup>9</sup> **Never return evil for evil or insult for insult** (scolding, tongue-lashing, berating), **but on the contrary blessing** [praying for their welfare, happiness, and protection, and truly pitying and loving them]. **For know that to this you have been called, that you may yourselves inherit a blessing** [from God—that you may obtain a blessing as heirs, bringing welfare and happiness and protection].

**10 For let him who wants to enjoy life and see good days** [good—whether apparent or not] **keep his tongue free from evil and his lips from guile** (treachery, deceit).

**11 Let him turn away from wickedness and shun it, and let him do right. Let him search for peace** (harmony; undisturbedness from fears, agitating passions, and moral conflicts) **and seek it eagerly.** [Do not merely desire peaceful relations with God, with your fellowmen, and with yourself, but pursue, go after them!]

**12 For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous** (those who are upright and in right standing with God), **and His ears are attentive to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who practice evil** [to oppose them, to frustrate, and defeat them].

### **A) FIVE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES TO PROMOTE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE -**

**FACILITATOR'S COMMENT** –Remember, from our earlier studies, that Peter specifically dealt with a believer's relationship with the government; relationships between slaves and owners; relationships between husbands and wives; in this passage, he offers summary instructions that cover all relationships – especially those that involve Christians!

**Vs. 8** “**FINALLY**” (a proper translation could also read: “*the end of all this*” or “*the goal of all this*.” Thereupon, Peter uses five words that express, in various ways, the attitude that he believes must be developed if his readers/hearers are to have an impact for Christ on their world:

1. **all** [of you] **should be of one and the same mind** (*The Greek word literally says that they should be of the ‘same mindset’. Peter is not asking that all hold identical opinions; rather, that they set their minds on the same goal. To have one mind on the great points of faith. Like-mindedness in commitment enables believers to see through their differences in methods, ideas and interpretation in order to reach a common goal!*)

Other biblical translations frequently used express this thought in the following ways:

**you must all have the same attitude** (GNB)

**have unity of spirit** (NRSV)

**all of you be harmonious** (NET)

**be of one mind** (NKJV)

**be agreeable** (MSG)

2. **sympathetic** (*one interpreter points out that the word means, “the sharing not just of grief or pain, but of a whole range of emotions and experiences.” The ability to feel with another person in feelings and experiences you have not had, is a gift that can be developed.*) Other biblical translations express this thought thusly:

**the same feelings** (GNB)

**sympathy** (NRSV)

**Sympathetic** (NET)  
**having compassion for one another** (NKJV)  
**be sympathetic** (MSG)

Elsewhere in the New Testament, St. Paul expresses the same idea:

**Romans 12:15 - Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying**

**1 Corinthians 12:26 - If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it.**

3. **loving** [each other] **as brethren** (*The early church believed that all believers should and would love each other with the kind of affection and friendly relations enjoyed by brothers and sisters.*)

“**affectionate**” is used in NET

cf: **1 Thessalonians 4:9 - You don't need us to write about loving your brothers and sisters because God has already taught you to love each other.** (*Paul's comments on the matter of love; he implies that such love is not present in our life, or in the life of our church, we need to enroll in God's 'school' of love.*)

4. **compassionate** (*The original Greek word speaks of a good-hearted generosity that arises from deep, gut-level compassion.*) Thus compare with terms used in these translations:

**be kind** (GNB)

**a tender heart** (NRSV)

**be tenderhearted** (NKJV)

5. **courteous** (*Your facilitator's preference in translation is use of the word humble or, more precisely humble minded. The secular Greek culture considered this a bad character trait, but the Bible treats it as a most valuable virtue. This does not mean that a believer must consider everyone else better than self in every area of life. Scripture expects us to acknowledge and delight in our gifts and graces.*) Other translations do a better job of catching this intent:

**humble with one another** (GNB)

**a humble mind** (NRSV)

#### HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE FURTHER INFORM OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH?

Peter's words here are not unique; they reflect **Jesus teaching** recorded in the Gospels: **“Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you**

**are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.”** (John 13:34-35 – MSG translation)

- a) perhaps it's worth nothing that Jesus did not say, “People will know you by the bible you carry under your arm”.....or “People will know you by the pretty cross necklace you always wear” .... Or “People will know you by the cross tattooed on your \_\_?\_\_!”
- b) Jesus gives us the command to love one another. To be a Christian not only means that we accept Jesus as payment for our sins, but to accept the fact that Jesus is Lord (i.e. **HE IS IN CHARGE!**) of our lives. As our commanding officer, Jesus orders us to love fellow Christians; further – this is to be a **“SIGN” to others** that we're believers!
- c) What are the practical implications of practicing this desired quality? Is there a 'balance' to be struck? It seems to mean that other Christians become a priority over us; the needs of others take precedence over our own needs. How do we maintain proper balance?
- d) Someone has suggested to your facilitator that: An “outsider” looking at the Christian church should be moved to say, “I don't agree with your teachings and the way you worship, but I have to admire the way you help each other out all the time and support one another!” **IS THAT US?**

## **B) BE A BLESSING TO ALL PEOPLE**

**Vs. 9 “Never return evil for evil or insult for insult, but on the contrary blessing.”**

1. While the preceding verse (vs. 8) applies especially to Christians, this passage shows that Peter has non-believers in mind, too!
2. The urge not to retaliate is spoken in words very similar to Paul's admonition to the Romans: **“Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. 18 If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. 19 Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord.20 Instead, If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head.21 Don't be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.”** (Romans 12:17-21 - CEB)

3. The ideas expressed are also very similar to words spoken by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: **“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 that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. <sup>40</sup> When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. <sup>41</sup> When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. <sup>42</sup> Give to those who ask, and don’t refuse those who wish to borrow from you.** (Matthew 5:38-42 - CEB)
4. Peter (*and others*) here reflecting the message of **Proverbs 20:22 - Don’t say, “I’ll repay the evildoer!” Wait for the Lord, and he will save you.**
5. Paul, again, expresses it succinctly in **1 Thessalonians 5:15 - Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else.**
6. So, Peter, in this epistle urges his readers to this life of non-retaliation because they were called to this so that they could not only be a blessing, but inherit a **blessing**.
7. That **blessing** is the gracious mercy of God granted to us instead of justice. We deserve death; God gives us grace. In response, a believer can do no less to those who have insulted or wronged him/her!

#### HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE PRACTICALLY INFORM OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH?

- a) As Christians, we can choose to live on 1 of 3 levels:
  - i. **Satanic** level – when we return evil for good
  - ii. **Human** level – when we return good for good; evil for evil (*a basis for justice*)
  - iii. **Divine** level – when we return good for evil (*a basis of mercy*)
- b) Peter learned this lesson the hard way when he returned *“evil-for-evil”* whipping out and using his sword against Jesus’ captor in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- c) Moses learned the same lesson when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own brethren. So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exodus 2:12ff)
- d) Can you identify modern-day situations where, although reviled, Christians have demonstrated **“Divine level”** behaviors, and have thus been a blessing in society?

### C) USING AN ANCIENT PSALM TO MAKE THE POINT

**VERSES 10-12** - In closing this section, Peter, familiar with the writings of the Old Testament, uses a quotation from **Psalm 34:12-16**. First re-read today's textual material written by Peter; then, compare it with the Psalm text printed below:

**12 Do you love life; do you relish the chance to enjoy good things?**

**13 Then you must keep your tongue from evil and keep your lips from speaking lies!**

**14 Turn away from evil! Do good! Seek peace and go after it!**

**15 The Lord's eyes watch the righteous, his ears listen to their cries for help.**

**16 But the Lord's face is set against those who do evil, to eliminate even the memory of them from the earth.** (CEB)

- a) Remember that this section of Peter's letter is still primarily addressed to Christians about Christians. *(It would be much easier to assume that these words refer to non-believers; but, it's quite certain that the apostle is talking about us being "evil" at any given moment in our relationship to other Christians. We tend to think of evil as committing acts such as murder or other violent crimes. But Peter seems to be expanding that definition based on how Christians treat each other!)*
- b) The Psalm text speaks against retaliation; so do Peter's words.
- c) Peter is talking about turning from evil and doing good. The idea is that in the moments of pain and suffering caused by others, the proper focus is on God's love and not on who hurt us and how we can get even. Revenge does not make the pain go away; if anything it escalates the problem. This is a separate issue from resolution. Sometimes issues cannot be resolved. This is about our attitude when those moments come.
- d) By implication the Psalm promises long life and good days on earth to those who seek good rather than returning evil.
- e) Peter, however, reads the promise of long life and good days as a description of the heavenly blessing that will someday be enjoyed by those who discipline themselves to a life of harmonious relationships with the difficult people both in the church and with those who have not yet accepted Christ. **(1 Peter 3:10-11) For those who want to love life and see good days should keep their tongue from evil speaking and their lips from speaking lies. They should shun evil and do good; seek peace and chase after it.** (CEB)

- f) Again, by implication, the quoted psalm implies that if we're not motivated to be better people because God commands us, we should be motivated by the fact that ***it affects how God hears our prayers*** at any given moment.

**FOR FURTHER CONVERSATION:**

- Do 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, those of us belonging to the modern church, hold any responsibility for being a blessing to others in today's world? What might that be?
- What example of "**SOCIAL HARMONY**" are Christians who are living in the USA providing to the unchurched masses in light of reported statistics such as these assembled in a 2008 report – (*Christianity Today*)
  - .....20% to 25% of all churches face active conflict today?
  - .....84% of active pastors have experienced destructive conflicts within their churches?
  - .....68% report damaged or permanently destroyed relationships?
  - .....42 % report significant declines in church attendance
  - .....*only* 21% of active clergy feel confident that they can handle conflict?
- Conflict, whether in the church, or in wider society, is most often started by the angry actions of one person against another. Each of us has experienced such anger; and, each bears responsibility before God to share in today's **Closing Prayer of Confession**:

**LORD, I'M REALLY ANGRY AT** (*silently – fill-in-the-blank with the name of someone who has hurt you!*) **SOME HORRIBLE THINGS WERE DONE TO ME, AND IT REALLY HURTS!**

**RIGHT NOW, I'M NOT GOING TO FOCUS ON THAT PERSON, BUT ON HOW MUCH YOU LOVE ME. RIGHT NOW, I'M GOING TO REMEMBER THAT YOU COMMANDED ME TO LOVE FELLOW CHRISTIANS.**

**IF YOU HAVE GIVEN ME THIS COMMAND, THEN I WILL TRUST THAT YOU WILL PROVIDE THE STRENGTH AND THE ABILITY TO EXECUTE SUCH A COMMAND.**

**GUIDE ME AS I DEAL WITH THIS SITUATION. HELP ME TO SEE THAT PERSON I HAVE SECRETLY NAMED BEFORE YOU, AS SOMEONE WHO IS HURTING, TOO!**

**HELP ME TO BE COMPASSIONATE AND FILLED WITH YOUR LOVE. FOR JESUS' SAKE, HEAR MY PRAYER. AMEN.**

**OUR NEXT CONVERSATION: JAN. 15– suggested reading 1 PETER 3:13-22**

***"Suffering & Doing Good: The Example & Victory of Christ"***

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