

Consequences

1 Peter 3:8-12

8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. 10 For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep 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 prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:8-12 (ESV))

So often, as we read through these scriptures, we find that God gives us contrasts and comparisons, intended for our guidance that we might follow along the path of righteousness that He desires for us to follow, most often with very good consequences coming from our believing and doing things right, but also, difficult and painful consequences coming from our doing things that are wrong.

And that might seem just a bit “too simple” for our ordinary mind to process, because God is understood to be far more “high and lofty” in His plans and in His ways, and therefore, we figure that His instructions must be more complicated than they appear to be. And yes, He really is “high and lofty”, and His ways really are beyond our comprehension. But with that being said, the reality is, God also knows our frame. And He knows that we really do need for things to be said and demonstrated to us in very simple ways, else we won’t be able to understand.

And so here in these particular words of our text, God is being very straightforward and very simplistic so that we won’t misunderstand and needlessly suffer.

But why does God condescend to your and my level in such a way? And that too has a simple answer that I remind us about often. It is because these people that these words were addressed to here in this passage, and also you and me today, we are His beloved children, true sons of God. And He wants His beloved children to easily understand these things and be guided by them.

May I read this passage for us again and we’ll talk about it. Listen!

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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 prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:8-12 (ESV))

Note first that this passage is filled with instructions about the “doing” of things, how we should or should not “do” things. But notice first that our beloved teacher, the Holy Spirit, begins by giving us instructions about how we must “be” before He instructs us on what we should “do”. My thoughts harken back to the “Sermon on the Mount” and the Lord Jesus as He taught there about the “Be Attitudes”. Those words tell us of our need to “be” in Christ, before we can ever hope to “do” Christ-like things. And so it is here also. Here we are being told first to “be”, to “have” godly character before we attempt to do godly things, to have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

This is very clear and plain. Before we can step forward and “live out” these attributes in our daily lives, we must first “have” them as part of our character. Folks, we can no more do these things without first “having” them as part of who we are than we can do any other complicated thing without first “having” it as who we are, fly a jet plane, perform surgery, work a complicated algorithm. Just as with the “Be Attitudes” that Jesus spoke about, we truly do have to “be” before we can “do”.

And again, the question, how can such “holy” character traits become ours? There is only one way for someone to “have” holy and righteous character. It is by the righteousness of Christ coming to live within us, filling us and taking up residence within us, imputing His righteousness into our soul.

That truth is plainly given in 1 Corinthians 1:30 where we read, “It is of God that Christ Jesus has become in you, in me, wisdom, holiness, righteousness and redemption”. As the Spirit and the personality of Christ takes up residence within our spirit, and as we yield our “will” over to Him, His personality starts to rise to the surface within our soul, bringing with Him all sorts of Godly traits, among them these that we read about here, unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. But may I say again and again to us that we must be willing to do our part. And it must begin with “surrender” . . . “surrender”.

For believers to do the truly “righteous things” that God intends for us to do, we really must first be fully surrendered to His “righteous abiding presence” within us, else, though we be fully saved and fully assured of eternal life with Christ, we can still fall woefully short in all these efforts. And all we then accomplish is that we “mimic” or

“imitate” Christ; an unfortunate thing because as 2 Timothy 3:5 warns, we will “have a form of godliness but deny its power”. We become just “wanna-bes”.

But thanks be to God, as believers, we have only to take that next step of full “surrender” and then all of these things will begin to become ever-so real in all that we think and do and say. We are God’s sons and daughters, and He “rejoices over us with gladness” when His children fully surrender their hearts to Him!

A question before we move on to these next words . . . if these attributes, such as, unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender heart, and humble mind, come only through the righteousness of Christ, why is it that we are able to observe similar attitudes and responses within the personalities and the behaviors of unbelievers? It is because within the great love that God has for all men, believers and unbelievers alike, He has made provision for the thing we call “common grace”, grace that provides benefits and blessings for men and women regardless of whether they believe in Him or not, “common grace”. A simple example of “common grace” that God gives in these scriptures is that of the provision of “rain”. Rain falls on all men and women, righteous and unrighteous, the just and the unjust, benefiting all who receive it.

And so it is to varying degrees with such graces as these, unity, sympathy, brotherly love and a tender heart. They are forms of “common grace”, available to all men and women, but only with varying and limited success depending upon the people and the circumstances involved.

I can only think about how much more successful their efforts would be, if they would only add Christ into the equation.

A sad confession that I have is that even as a believer, and having the Holy Spirit deep within my soul, and earnestly desiring to be fully surrendered, I still often find myself having only measured amounts of some of these attributes, especially “sympathy” for the sufferings of others, especially in today’s climate as it regards reports that I might hear on the broadcast news, reports about bombings and shootings, and on and on. I have become so desensitized from hearing these reports day after day that I am often calloused to the sufferings of those involved. I wish it were not that way, but it is.

But with that being said, I do know that I have sympathy, and brotherly love and a tender heart towards most, and I accredit that to the presence of God’s Spirit within me. And as I draw up close to some of those that I know personally who are suffering, these godly attributes of sympathy, brotherly love and a tender heart manifest themselves more and more.

“Humility” is probably the most difficult of all of these Godly character traits that any person will ever try to mimic or imitate. Pride is so demanding! Self is so needy and so persistent in its requirements of us that we have very little heart left within us for anyone else. For that reason, true “humility” is almost impossible to have without the strength of Christ in us to enable it.

I have entitled this message “consequences” because “consequences” are the results that are sure to take place depending upon whether or not we “have” and “do” these Godly things, consequences that God has built into His laws. And just as assuredly as rain falls down and not up, consequences will take place. I am reminded of the words in Galatians 6 that warn,

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8 (ESV))

This is a strong warning to us to be very careful about the seeds we sow. Many of them will come back to haunt us.

But on the “good side” of this warning is the promise that love really will beget love, if we will first “have” and “do” loving things, then love will prosper. And so also it is that tenderness begets tenderness, unity begets unity, humility begets humility. And you and I can have and enjoy really good and righteous and happy relationships, if we will only join with Christ and “have” and “do” these and other “Godly” things.

But with all that being said, I would be remiss if I did not do as the Lord is doing here in these next words and also warn us there will be times and circumstances in which we will be tempted with distraction and other worldly diversions. The world, the flesh and the devil are clever and they are always at work in their efforts to derail God’s plan for us. And here in these next words of contrasts and comparisons and consequences, we read God’s loving words of warning about things that can take place as we go through our daily routine. Listen . . . verse 9,

⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep 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 prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:8-12 (ESV))

Here first is the warning, “do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling”. How simple, but how difficult this is as we react and respond in “real time”! Folks, looking back at myself, I can’t recall very many times in my life that I did this right. As the Apostle Paul lamented in Romans chapter 7, when I have been confronted with wrong behavior, though I really did know the right things to do and say, I almost always did and said the exact wrong things. Whenever evil has attacked me, whenever I have been reviled, my first response seems always to have been “an eye for an eye”. And I can quickly get aggressive, because I have always believed that the best defense is an offense.

And yes, thankfully, after a few moments of allowing God’s Spirit to get my attention and to settle me down, then more godly responses usually prevail. But oh, how I have wished that His “godliness” would have been my first response.

And may I say that the devil is so very clever in these matters. We really do “feel good” when we have returned evil for evil or reviling for reviling. A good “come back”, one that tops the one that was thrown at us, makes us feel so very good. And when we have put someone in their place, we almost “strut” as we walk away from them.

But then comes the “contrast”, the second part of this verse and following. If we were not a believer, we would probably never get to this next part that is so “sobering”. But we are believers, and this is where we must quickly come back to God’s reality.

9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but (Listen) on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

(1 Peter 3:9 (ESV))

This is the contrast! The thing that we “most want to do,” to tell someone off, we “must not do”. But instead, we must do the thing that God’s Spirit is whispering to us deep within our soul, “Bless that person Bill! Bless those that are reviling you, for to this you were called, that you may receive a blessing”.

How many times have we read similar words, words that tell us such things as these, like that when the Lord Jesus told us to forgive others, else He will not forgive us. Or as we studied recently, that we men are to be considerate of our wives and have respect for them, else our prayers will not be answered.

Folks, God is being very clear and plain here. We cannot expect Him to bless us unless we first bless Him with our Godly conduct. And then He tells us in verse 10

10 . . . “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep 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. (1 Peter 3:10-11 (ESV))

One of my favorite writers, A. W. Tozer, uses an expression for people like you and me, ordinary people with ordinary minds. He calls us a “plain man”, a “plain man”. And by that, he is saying that because we are a “plain man”, we are truly and genuinely able to understand the words God is saying to us in these scriptures. And that is so with these words. You and I are without excuse. We really can understand these words. And we must “have them” and “do them”.

10 . . . “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep 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. (1 Peter 3:10-11 (ESV)

These instructions will often require real discipline on our part. But though it be difficult at the moment, we must “turn away from evil and do good!”

One final thought before we close. Yes, God is present everywhere, all of the time. But here, He is speaking of a much more intimate presence, a “manifest presence”, a presence in which He is intimately involved in everything that is taking place at every moment. And here, He lovingly reminds us that yes, there are always consequences for our behavior, good ones when we do well, but also difficult and painful ones when we behave sinfully.

We have a choice to make! Do we want Him to turn His face against us, or do we want to receive His blessings? Our choice comes down to just one word, “surrender”. As for me, I want His blessings, and so I choose “surrender”. What about you? What about you?

Listen to those words as we close! Verse 12 . . .

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:12 (ESV)

Praise be to God!