

Have Unity

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))

As we begin our study of these precious words, note that once again our passage begins with a special “connecting” word, “finally”, a word that serves much in the same way as did the word “likewise” in the previous two portions, portions having to do with the righteous responses that men are to have towards authority and also the behaviors that husbands and wives are to have towards one another.

I want to remind us of this because too often we tend to separate out certain of these scriptures for purposes that suit our own designs, when they should instead be taken together with other scriptures as part of a more broad concept. That is why we are admonished to always lay “precept upon precept, line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10).

And so, as we examine these words today, we can know that this word “finally” is carefully pointing us back and requiring us to include as part of our consideration all of these instructions and exhortations given to us in chapters 2 and 3 regarding how we are to respond towards all those who represent authority within our daily life, our employers, our government and others, even and especially extending also on into our home and family life.

And the instructions that we have read about here, both in chapter 2 and also here in chapter 3, give us resolute exhortations and warnings that aside from a few and rare exceptional times and circumstances, our usual, our common, our only “acceptable” manner of conduct and behavior towards authority is to be humble obedience . . . “humble obedience”.

But also beyond our responses to those earthbound authorities, we also are admonished here that even though most all of our daily interactions will have to do with people, it truly is the “Lord Christ” whom we are ultimately serving and to whom we are ultimately accountable.

And folks, that is such an important concept for us to understand and to accept, because with so many of the attitudes and behaviors and responses that we display as we go throughout our day, there is often no immediate or direct consequences, such as one might receive for the breaking of a law or, where an employer objects to our behavior so as to upset our employment.

But though our attitudes and our behaviors may not always bring about immediate consequences, they still do have an impact, sometimes a very serious one, especially as they have to do with ongoing relationships, relationships within the family, relationships within the church, relationships within the workplace and relationships within the community.

Simply put, wrong responses and poor attitudes and behaviors are almost always impactful and cumulative in their effect, eventually causing serious consequences to take place. And while that is most seen within family relationships, the same is especially true in the broader community of believers, offenses taken and not immediately acted upon, but instead are kept and pondered within the hearts and minds of the ones offended. There will surely come a time of accounting.

But may I say that the same concept is also true for good responses and godly behaviors. Loving kindness, sympathy and empathy can bring about pleasant days and warm relationships within a family, within a church, within a workplace and within a community.

And that is the context that is being spoken about here in these next few verses. Listen again to these words! Verse 8,

8 Finally, all of you, whether you be husband, wife, family member, fellow church member, an employer, employee, co-worker or community member, 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))

Here in verse 8 are some of the most necessary relational attributes that any group of people would ever need to sustain them as friends and allies, whether it be in the family,

in the workplace, in the church, or in the community, unity, sympathy, brotherly love, tenderness, and humility.

As I look at this list, one of the first thoughts that comes to my mind is, “are these words in a special order, to be taken chronologically, one building upon the next?” And yes, in one sense, they are chronological with “unity” needing to come first, because it is so foundational; but in another sense they are all absolutely necessary and all of them really need to be done all at the same time. And yes, some people within a group will need to work harder at one of these than they will another, but all of these are required of every person who is in relationship with another person, and again, whether that relationship be with a husband, a wife, another family member, a fellow church member, or as an employer, or an employee, or a co-worker, or a community member, these are all essential to the life and health of all good relationships.

But may we take them in the order they are given to us, beginning with “unity”. Few dynamics and influences are more foundational to the success of a group than that of unity, everyone moving in the same direction, with the same desires and purposes. My imagination takes me to the thought of six people, each with one leg bound together with the others in the group, but all of them trying to move in a different direction; chaos, anger and frustration are sure to rule them.

Unity is a simple word with a simple definition. It is a state of being “one”, joined or united together as a “whole”.

As I have said to you on other occasions, my thought processes are most often very visual in nature and practical in their handling of a matter. And such is so with this concept of “unity” that the Apostle Peter is exhorting these believers on to have with one another. And yes, these exhortations are primarily “spiritual” in context, but as they are being “worked out” within the matters of daily life within a group, the “spiritual” responses are also often very simple and “practical”, else otherwise even the most mundane of matters can bring on under-currents of discord and “lack of unity”.

These dear ones that the Apostle Peter was addressing were probably closely related in several ways. Some were most likely family members, and others co-workers. And others were fellow community members. And the intent of these words was to exhort these folks to incorporate their “spiritual” discernment and behavior into every aspect of their ordinary daily existence, whether it be in the church, in the family, in the workplace or in the community. They were to live and move and have their being as “one”, one in thought, one in purpose and one in matters of behavior.

And that is not an easy thing to accomplish when you live within a diverse community of people! Everyone has differing interests, differing desires and goals. And with that being so, where would each of them need to begin in their efforts toward “unity”? They would need to begin with “humility”, “humility! Recall those words in Philippians 2,

¹ . . . if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:1-5 (ESV)

These words bring to my mind all my many years of working, most of them in positions of management, both as a banker and also afterwards in the ministry at French Camp. And those two experiences were vastly different as it regards this matter of relationship and the unity that is required. Within the banks where I was employed, “spiritual” considerations were seldom even mentioned. Yes, there were some Christians working there. I became a Christian during those years. But the “spiritual” handling of banking matters, and especially the handling of the relationships within the workday was not mentioned. Yes, there were many seminars and training sessions on leadership and management, but none of them addressed the “spiritual” responses and behaviors that should be present.

But with that being said, I was not exempt from handling those secular employment matters in a “spiritual” way. And that was especially so after I became a Christian. Folks, there were some very dramatic changes that took place within my personality after I received Christ as my Savior. I began to think very differently from my days of unbelief. And almost without realizing it, I really did begin to care about and to esteem others ahead of myself. My moral value system began to move to a higher level. I wanted other people to succeed and I wanted my bank to succeed in its business. It was no longer just “me” and my desires that were important. I began to consider other people and their needs.

Thinking back on those days, it was obvious that it was the workings of Philippians 2:12 that were taking place in my soul, that of “working out my salvation with fear and trembling, for it was God, His Holy Spirit, at work in me to live and to do according to His good pleasure”.

May I reiterate that while yes, these words of this passage are specifically urging these dear saints on to “love and good works” within their church group, these words are also

very much intended to guide and to direct them, and us, in every venue of life, the family, the work place and in the communities,

8 . . . unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.
(1 Peter 3:8 (ESV))

And again, where two or more are gathered together in any venue of life, “unity” is absolutely essential to the good health of their relationship.

One other thought comes to mind as I consider these words and their vital importance to any group. I came to value the “happiness” of those around me as being so very important. In other words, I really wanted my family to have happy days. And I also wanted my co-workers, and especially those that I was responsible for as a manager to actually enjoy their daily work experience. And I also wanted my neighbors, whether within the community, or within the church family, to experience happy days.

That’s a tall order that does not always work out, but I still felt it right to have their “happiness” as a goal that I would diligently work towards. And for the most part, it worked out well, far better than it would have been for those folks if I had not cared about them and their happiness.

Relationships require an investment of love and of time. And each of these involvements here in verse 8 are a form of love and require time.

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(1 Peter 3:8 (ESV))

In the hours just before His death, in His parting words, Jesus prayed to God the Father pleading for “unity” within the hearts of His disciples, that they would be “one” as they headed off into the uncharted waters that lay ahead of them. Listen!

²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20-23 (ESV))

I hope next week to continue with these precious words here in this passage, but may we close by simply asking, are you “working this out” in your daily Christian life? Are you being willing to “die to self” and to endure suffering so that others might gain? How

committed, how fervent are you in your desire to have unity, “oneness” with those that you should be “one” with, your family members, your friends, your church family, your co-workers? Allow these words from scripture to guide your daily behaviors.

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