

Session 8

LIVING IN HARMONY

1 Peter 3:8-12

Memory Verse

Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing.

— 1 PETER 3:8-9, CSB



Living in Harmony

THEOLOGICAL THEME: We are called to live in harmony with others.

CALL TO ACTION: We pursue harmony with others as God has pursued peace with us.

In 2018, Botham Jean, a 26-year-old accountant, was sitting at home eating a bowl of ice cream on his couch when an off-duty police officer, thinking the apartment was her own, entered and fatally shot him. At worst, a terrible act of racial bias, and at best a horrific overreaction to a misunderstood scenario, this act rocked the nation, the community, and most deeply, Botham's loved ones.

It is awful to comprehend, but can you imagine how you would feel? How you would react? What you would say?

We might expect outrage. Anger. Hate. Our society embraces (even praises!) all these reactions, and maybe Botham's family experienced these too. But many were surprised by his brother, Brandt Jean's (18), reaction in court.

In his victim impact statement, he forgave his brother's murderer.

"If you are truly sorry, I know I can speak for myself: I forgive you," he said. "And I know if you go to God and ask Him, He will forgive you."

He forgave her. He said he loved her. He didn't wish anything bad on her. He encouraged her to take her guilt to God. He wanted the best for her, and the best would be that she would give her life to Christ.

"I think giving your life to Christ would be the best thing that Botham would want you to do."¹

Can you imagine?

In an unfathomably tragic and difficult situation, when the opposite reaction would have been understandable and even expected, Brandt chose to model Christ.

This is the idea in our reading today. Peter wrote we shouldn't pay evil back with evil, but repay evil with a blessing.



Why are reactions like Brandt Jean's shocking to the world?



Why is it important for Christians to show up this way?

Session Summary

In our reading today, Peter called believers to harmony with each other, living with unity, sympathy, love, compassion, and humility, and focusing their lives on following Christ. When we are wronged, Scripture tells us to repay evil with a blessing, rather than seeking retribution. We can trust that God sees everything and will bring justice at the final judgment.

These Spirit-formed traits strengthen the church's witness, protect it from division, enable God's people to faithfully point to Christ, and lead to the Lord's blessing. This blessing isn't only for the future, after a life faithfully lived, we are also blessed now in the form of true joy only available through the Holy Spirit.

1. Be Like-Minded and Sympathetic (1 Peter 3:8)



What words stand out to you in this verse? Why?



What does it mean to be like-minded? What does it look like for us to truly love one another?



Why is it important for Christians to live set apart from the world in this way?

Peter's previous writing dealt with certain groups of people in the church. This section, though, is for all believers. Peter tells us to be "like-minded," but what does that mean?

The Greek word that Peter used here was *homophrōn*², and it means to be harmonious, or united in spirit. The New Testament has a lot to say about unity in the body of Christ:

Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. —Ephesians 4:1-3

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.
—1 Corinthians 1:10-11

If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. —Philippians 2:1-2

Paul, as quoted above, often encouraged unity in the early church. Unity was especially important then as the young church was under great oppression (Peter spoke to this elsewhere in this letter). From the New Testament writers, we understand that unity is vital among the body. From Paul's writing above, we learn that unity involves an effort toward peace, alignment on conviction, and intently pursuing one purpose (following Christ Jesus).

Does this mean we will always agree on everything? Certainly not (remember, Paul had so great a disagreement with Barnabas that they parted ways to share the gospel separately; Acts 15:36-41). While we may not always agree on everything, it is important among the body that we agree on the important thing (the truth about Jesus and our dedication to following Him).

Peter also called for us to be sympathetic. A sympathetic heart posture considers another's position and empathizes with them. They show kindness even when others don't. This goes hand in hand with like-mindedness. When we are sympathetic, we promote peace and avoid unnecessary conflict.


In addition to being "like-minded and sympathetic," we are called to "love one another" (v. 8):


"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." —John 13:34–35

Love is central to our identity as disciples of Jesus. And not just any love, the full and sacrificial love of Jesus. Love promotes sympathy and unity, and compassion and humility. These things don't always come naturally to us as humans, but with the Holy Spirit's help, these characteristics are cultivated in us for the good of the body of Christ and to God's glory.

Unity (and all the attributes Peter mentioned here) are so important because of the greater glory this brings God. This type of counter-cultural behavior points to Christ. A united church is more effective in ministry. Unity (and a heart posture that is sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble) protects against the schemes of the enemy, who seeks to drive a wedge into the body of Christ and derail it from its purpose.

2. Pay Back Evil with Blessing (1 Peter 3:9)

 What does Peter advise to avoid here? What makes this challenging in daily life?

 How have you seen this type of counterintuitive living lead to greater unity?

Peter next addressed action we should avoid: paying back evil for evil. This is extremely relevant for today. Our culture jokes about “villain origin stories” and Hollywood invests in blockbusters about dramatically (and often violently) getting revenge after someone has been wronged. Even in small, petty ways this is central to our cultural moment (like the TikToker who hired a mariachi performer to follow his ex, who had cheated on him, around as she moved out³).

While our world laughs at and applauds such acts of revenge, Jesus taught us to respond differently:

You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. —Matthew 5:38-40

Despite being the only truly innocent person to ever live, Jesus didn’t seek His own revenge and we aren’t meant to either. Rather, we are to repay evil with blessing, like the story of Brandt Jean we began with today. This is extremely difficult, but we are to be set apart by the way we love others differently than the nonbelievers around us. This is a powerful witness for Christ!

In a Roman culture that valued order, this type of behavior for the church would have not only been a witness but may have also spared them from some persecution. Today, too, being unified, peaceful, and loving presents nonbelievers with less reason to criticize the church.

? What about living in this way makes it challenging for others to accuse Christians of wrongdoing? How does this serve to also point to Christ?

Living in unity, with a heart that is sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble in dealing with others leads to blessing. God's blessing is promised to all believers for living a faithful life, and the Lord sees everything—from the small, petty revenge we mete out, to the difficult kindness we show when we have been wronged—and He will ensure justice is done at His final judgment.

3. The Eyes of the Lord Are on the Righteous (1 Peter 3:10-12)

? Peter quoted Psalm 34. How is the context of this psalm pertinent to Peter's instruction in today's passage? (See 1 Samuel 21 for further context.)

? What else do you know about what the Bible teaches about pursuing peace with others? What does this teach us about God and His character?

This section of Peter's letter ends with a quotation from Psalm 34:12-16, a Psalm of David about when he pretended to be insane in front of Abimelech in 1 Samuel 21:10-15.

When we live in unity, with a heart that is sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble with others, not repaying evil for evil but repaying evil with blessing, not only will we receive blessing from the Lord for a faithful life, but we will also love life and see good days. This is something that bears itself out in our world. People who live God's way are more joyful. People who hold onto the need for revenge, refuse to forgive, and live in a divisive way are often miserable

in comparison. Avoiding an evil life isn't God stealing our fun (as is sometimes perceived by nonbelievers), it's actually for our best.

Peter quoted David's words that we should "turn away from evil and do what is good" (v. 11). David also mentioned peace, which we noted earlier when talking about being like-minded and united in spirit. Paul exhorted similarly in Romans:

If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
—Romans 12:18

When we see concepts like this repeated in Scripture, it's telling us something! (And also maybe showing us that we need a lot of reminders to counteract our own sinful human nature.)

? What makes it so difficult to pursue peace on an ongoing basis? How can we rely on Christ as we seek to do so?

God is watching, and sees everything we do, and everything that happens to us. His ears are open to our prayers (Praise God!), but God is against those who do evil. As we mentioned above, we can trust God to get justice on our behalf in the final judgment. He is just and right and sees everything!

Conclusion

? What are some ways we could work to be more unified with the body of Christ?

? Do you find it difficult to resist getting even when someone wrongs you? What are ways we could seek to respond in a more Christlike way in situations like this?



How does remembering that God sees, hears, and will judge everything justly help us respond with grace? Who do you need to tell about God's grace today?

Memorize

Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing.

- 1 Peter 3:8-9, CSB

References

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