

Living in Harmony

March 1, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

1 Peter 3:8-12

Session Outline

1. Be Like-Minded and Sympathetic (1 Peter 3:8)
2. Pay Back Evil with Blessing (1 Peter 3:9)
3. The Eyes of the Lord Are on the Righteous (1 Peter 3:10-12)

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.



Leader Guide

Living in Harmony

Introduction

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

All of You

These verses present an ideal picture of the life of a church. The target audience (all of you) has expanded beyond husbands and wives to include everyone in the church. Harmonious living is displayed in the life of the church. Live in harmony translates a single word in the original text and means "to be like-minded." It describes an inner unity of attitude that makes division and mutiny within the body of Christ unthinkable.

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)

- ① 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.)
- ② 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?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the joy, peace, and “good days” that come from living in unity, with compassion, humility, and forgiveness, and for His promise to see, hear, and care for His people with perfect justice. Ask Him to point out areas where you need growth, and to show you the next steps you should take. Ask Him for help as you work to do the right thing, even when it’s hard.

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

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in 1 Peter* by Daniel Akin
- *The Message of 1 Peter* by Edmund Clowney
- *1 Peter* by Daniel Doriani



Historical Context of 1 Peter

Purpose

First Peter emphasizes that suffering is normal for believers because they are temporary residents in this world. As such, they lack rights and receive no justice in this foreign land. Though suffering occurs on earth for temporary residents, their inheritance and exaltation await them in their eternal homeland.

Author

The author of 1 Peter identified himself as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). He viewed himself as a divinely ordained, directly commissioned, authoritative representative of the Lord Jesus himself. Several statements in the letter indicate that the Peter who plays a prominent role in the Gospels is the author. For example, he called himself an “elder and witness” to Christ’s sufferings (5:1). Further, he described Christ’s crucifixion with an intimate knowledge that only a disciple would have of that event (2:21–24).

Setting

The recipients of 1 Peter are identified in 1:1. Peter wrote to the “exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” These were Roman provinces located in the northern part of what is now modern Turkey, unless Galatia includes the Galatia in the southern region of Asia Minor. These people were likely persecuted Gentile Christians. They had earlier been involved in idolatry (4:3), were ignorant (1:14) and “empty” (1:18) before they came to Christ, and formerly were “not a people” but now were “God’s people” (2:9–10).

Special Features

First Peter provided encouragement to suffering believers living in northern Asia Minor who faced intense persecution. The letter encourages faithfulness while under oppression. Specifically, God’s holy people should lead distinctive lifestyles as temporary residents in a foreign land. Although they will suffer for Christ while in this non-Christian world, they should remember that heaven is their future homeland.

Extended Commentary

1 Peter 3:8-12

3:8, 11. The variety of gifts and talents God has given his people mean differences of opinion are bound to occur. The key is not the differences; the issue is how those differences are handled.

Believers should live and minister together so that the differences do not divide the church but serve to enrich its life and work. To live in harmony means Christians should pursue the same primary purpose of serving God and extending love to one another, instead of being fueled by individual and selfish interests.

This emphasis on loving one another as brothers was introduced in 1 Peter 1:22. Its repetition here suggests that practical harmony within the body of Christ will not occur without a concerted effort by individual believers to approach their relationships within the body of Christ with a familial love. Marshall observes, “The ideal Christian community is one which produces between people who have no blood ties the same bonds of affection as are expected between brothers (and sisters)” (Marshall, 106).

Verses 10–12 borrow from the pen of David in Psalm 34:12–16 to cement this emphasis. Verse 11 directs us to seek peace and pursue it. Peace means “agreement between people.” That is what harmony is all about. Such harmony does not happen naturally. Believers must “pursue it.” The verb is a hunting term, meaning “to pursue with intensity, determination and persistence.” Believers have as their goal and calling the assignment to pursue peace.

Verse 8 adds a trio of virtues that reflect the active working elements of a harmonious group of people: sympathy, compassion, and humility. Be compassionate simply means “a tender heart.” It underlines feelings that come from deep inside a person, especially when one observes the suffering and pain that another person is enduring. Be sympathetic goes beyond compassion in that it attaches action to a tender heart reaction. This word has a distinctly practical bent. Not only do believers understand the feelings of another; they act appropriately to assist that person.

Sometimes in the body of Christ people find it difficult to receive help from others. Something inside of us recoils from the need to be assisted. At other times, those who do the helping approach this action with a superior attitude. That’s why humility is added. Humility is not a poor self-concept that shouts, “I’m no good! I am not worth anything to anyone. I don’t deserve a thing!” Humility is an awareness of strengths and gifts as provided by God and a grateful attitude for them. It is also an awareness of areas of weakness and need and a desire to grow in these areas and the willingness to receive assistance with these needs. Furthermore, humility is the attitude that is content to minister in the background, away from the spotlight. Humility desires to put the interests of other people ahead of self-interest.

3:9–12. Verse 8 deals with teamwork (live in harmony, love as brothers) and team spirit (be sympathetic, compassionate, humble). Verses 9–12 emphasize team speech. Evil and insult in verse 9 refer to abusive speech. This is speech with a snarl attached. Verse 10 adds to this conversations that embrace evil or deceitful speech. This refers to things like slander, lying, gossip—any kind of

speech that twists information and is designed to tear down. Obviously, evil and insulting words can achieve a temporary victory, but they inflict pain and destroy relationships and the believer's testimony for Jesus Christ.

Revenge is not part of the path a believer is to follow. This is quite an exhortation, since it comes from a man who chopped off a person's ear in an act of retaliation at one point in his life. That was a long time before these words were written. In his own spiritual growth, Peter came to realize there is a better way.

When believers receive insults and evil, they should not retaliate, but repay with blessing. This means several things: (1) You are to pray for those people who come after you verbally; (2) you are to treat them kindly, even with sympathy; and (3) you are to forgive them even when they have hurt you deeply.

Peter linked this response to the "calling" of a believer. His language was familiar (see 2:9, 21) but intensely practical. God calls the believer to model right living within the church, with special emphasis on harmony in relationships with one another. When this happens, the believer may inherit a blessing (v. 9) and will see good days (v. 10). God directs his hand of blessing toward those who model this loving, humble behavior.

One motive for righteous living is the knowledge that such conduct will bring blessings from God. The blessings of the New Testament are not primarily material or physical; they are spiritual and relational. Verse 12 defines, in part, what some of these blessings look like. Living in harmony assures believers of God's listening ear when they pray (see 3:7). They are God's righteous people whom he regards with favor.⁴

References

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