

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, "Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. And let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." 1 Peter 3:8-12

What Peter has been doing since 2:13 is to give special words of guidance and teaching and encouragement to various groups of Christians in the churches of Asia Minor. In 2:13-17 he addressed Christians as citizens and told us how to relate to those in authority. In 2:18-25 he spoke to servants and told them how to relate to their masters. In 3:1-6 he spoke to Christian wives of unbelievers and possibly disobedient believing husbands and showed them a way toward winning their husbands. And in 3:7 he spoke to husbands about living wisely and considerately with their wives and as we added the Ephesians passages to our study we can add loving them.

Now in today's text (3:8-12) Peter speaks to us as members of the church. This is teaching that applies to each and every one of us along with the specific teaching given to the aforementioned groups in the body of Christ.

We can see that in verse 8: "To sum up, let all be harmonious . . . etc." The "all" here means "all of you." Not: "all things," but all you Christians as you live together. As the NIV and RSV say, "Finally, all of you . . ." The issue here is not how to relate to civil authorities, or masters, or husbands, or wives. The main concern now is how to relate to each other in our life together as Christians.

This a very critical part of Peter's teaching. Anytime instruction is given by the writers of the New Testament concerning how we are to live with one another in and before a hostile world always makes me go back to Jesus' prayer for us in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jn.17:20"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.

22"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

Jesus is praying for us to be a certain kind of people, a people who are different than all the others in the world and it is evidenced in the fact of their unity that demonstrates the love of God.

Now of all the things Peter might say to us about our relationships in life together as Christians, what does he say? The answer is that he calls us first to be a kind of people, not just to do a list of things, but to be a kind of people. And it is not a kind of people that you can be on your own. Jesus was talking about a people of unity and that is what Peter is saying. It is so opposed to the self gratifying human nature that it is virtually impossible without the work of God's mercy called "new birth" referred to back in 1Peter 1:3.

Let's examine the five traits of this new kind of personhood that makes us a people. Beginning with verse 8. He says first, All of you be "harmonious," that is, having a common mindset, not necessarily all the same tastes or gifts or habits, but the same thoughts and assessments of the essentials of life—God, salvation, Christlikeness or we could say virtues or qualities.

Next all of you be "sympathetic," that is, feeling what others feel so that you can respond with sensitivity to the need. People who have true "sympathy" generally do not say, "I know how you feel." Because since they know how you feel, they also know how unhelpful it is to hear someone say, "I know how you feel." True sympathy is a fairly quiet giving of yourself to another way of being.

Next, all of you be "brotherly," that is, don't view each other as strangers, or as mere acquaintances, or as distant relatives. View each other as close family. Family can have some pretty serious disagreements and exchange some very harsh words, but only in the rarest cases does the family break up over it.

Next, all of you be "kindhearted." This not a word about conduct but a word that describes an inner quality ie. be well-disposed to each other in your deepest inward

parts literally your belly or liver. In ancient languages this was a way of describing the inner most you. It's exactly the opposite of hypocrisy that acts tender and feels malice.

Next, all of you be "humble in spirit." Again, it's not just that we are to act the role of a servant, but that inside, with all authenticity, we are to have a lowly spirit. We feel that we are utterly dependent on God for life and breath and intelligence and emotional stability and faith and safety and the use of our senses; and we feel utterly fragile and vulnerable in ourselves. On top of that we feel sinful and unworthy as we look at ourselves apart from the free grace of God. And this grace makes us wonder-struck that we are loved, not pushy and self-assertive.

All five of those words are descriptions of what we are on the inside, not primarily how we act. A common mindset, sympathetic in feeling, a family love, kindly disposed in the depths of our innards, humble in spirit. That's an unusual human being. This is Peter's call to us is not possible without the miraculous new birth by the mercy of God described in 1Peter1:3.

We can imagine saying, "But Peter that's not the way I am. You're asking me to be something I'm not."

He would answer: if you are born again, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you, if you are the children of God by adoption, if Christ is now your treasure, and God is your hope, then the seed of all these traits is in you, and they will flourish if you go on trusting in God's continual working of grace in your life.

In other words, go on trusting God for his future in you and his church, to meet all your needs (physical, moral, spiritual); and the Spirit will be released in you to work these utterly unnatural and wonderful traits.

According to 1 Peter 1:3 the mark of the person who is born again by the mercy of God is a "living hope" in God—an ongoing, vital trust in the future grace of God.

There can be no doubt that Peter and those to whom he was writing understood that being born again is a matter of the grace of God and that being so they could be encouraged that even their present circumstances and the oncoming persecution were also in the sovereign purposes of God for them by His grace.

But Peter is not just rejoicing in the fact of being born again. Being born again brings along a hope for these aliens who are facing persecution. Paul taught the early church that all men were once alienated from God, separated from God without hope and without help in this present world. But now as aliens in the world who are joined to God by adoption, in Christ, we have hope. We have a hope that is absolute and certain, a hope that is the blessed hope, a hope that is grounded in the person of Christ and it is the promise of everlasting life in the kingdom of God. No longer do we have to muse about what the purpose of life is, no longer do we have to search for meaning about life where there is none.

We have the blessed hope, we have the promise of God in Christ that we are His and He is ours and that Christ is coming again to consummate His kingdom, to bring the kingdom to its completion and fullness for eternity and we are the members of that kingdom if we have been born again to this hope. But not just a hope, but a living hope through the resurrection of Christ.

Our Christ lived as the God-man and suffered and died but He rose again and all of our hope is alive in Him, the breathing living Redeemer of our souls, our Savior, our precious New Covenant, our Lord and the King of our lives Jesus Christ.

He lives He lives Christ Jesus lives today and because He lives we can face tomorrow and all the seeming uncertainties it will bring. But they are only uncertain for us, they are not uncertain for our all wise and omniscient God who has, according to his foreknowledge, chosen us for the purpose of obedience unto Christ.

Verse nine helps us to see how this works. It says, out of all this inner transformation in verse 8 (oneness of mind, sympathy, brotherliness, kindheartedness, lowliness)—out of all that inner transformation—now act a certain way, namely, "not

returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."

Look carefully at verse 9. There is a crucial question to answer before we can apply this verse to ourselves as a body of believers. Does the "calling" in verse 9 refer to our act of blessing those who insult us? Are we called to do this? Or does it refer to our inheriting a blessing? Both are grammatically possible.

Does the verse mean, "Bless those who insult you, because you were called to live this way; fulfill that calling so that you will inherit a blessing"? Or does the verse mean, "Bless those who insult you, because you were called to inherit a blessing"? Does the "calling" refer to what comes before (giving blessings to others) or to what comes after (inheriting a blessing)?

Why does this matter? Does it make any difference, since in both cases we are supposed to bless and in both cases we are to inherit a blessing? The difference is the relationship between our blessing others and the promise that we will receive a blessing. And this is utterly crucial.

If our calling is to bless others, then verse nine teaches that this is a condition we meet in order to obtain our future inheritance. The verse means that our future blessing is conditional upon our blessing others. "You were called to bless so that you might inherit a blessing." If our calling in this verse is to inherit the blessing, then the verse does not teach this. There is no mention of conditionality. "Bless because you've been called to inherit a blessing."

My answer is that the calling in verse 9 refers to our blessing those who insult us. We are called to live this way. The reason I think this is because of the close parallel in 1 Peter 2:21. Verse 20 says that it finds favor with God when we suffer for doing right and endure it patiently. In other words it's good not to return evil for evil or insult for insult, as 3:9 says.

Why? Verse 21 gives the reason: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ suffered for you." There's the key word "called" and it unmistakably refers

back to verse 21 and says that our calling is not to return evil for evil but to bear it patiently, and, as verse 9 says, to bless those who insult us.

If you want to know your calling in life here it is in two texts of 1 Peter (2:21 and 3:9)—to endure unjust suffering patiently and to bless those who do you evil and revile you. That's our calling and we need to nurture that and help each other become a people who live that way for the glory of Christ who lived and died that way.

But now we see how the last part of verse 9 fits in—that crucial last phrase. When Peter says, "You were called for the purpose (namely, the purpose of blessing others), he adds, "that you might inherit a blessing,"—when he says that, he shows that our blessing others is one of the conditions we fulfill so that we inherit our blessing in the age to come. Once more Peter echoes Christ's own words in the Beatiudes, where he says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Showing mercy to others is a condition for the great final receiving of mercy from God.

This is not teaching that our future blessing is something we earn by doing meritorious works. Our blessing those who insult us does not earn our blessing from God. Peter says in 1Peter 1:13 that the blessing that is coming to us at the revelation of Jesus is grace, not payment for works, but free grace. He says in 1:5 that we are "being protected by the power of God through faith (not works) for the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The blessing will be "inherited", not earned (3:9). It is graciously given, not merited.

But—and here many go astray, take heed—that blessing will be graciously inherited by those who are born of God. And the evidence of being born of God is a lively, vital hope in that future blessing. The evidence of being born again is faith in future grace. And the essence of this faith is that we embrace that promise of blessing as our treasure, and rest our hope on it, find our satisfaction in it.

And the evidence that this is happening in your life is that your life becomes a foretaste of the promised future that you cherish. If you cherish the future of God's

promised grace above all things, then your life becomes a foretaste of glory divine because of the work of God's grace in our lives. You will not return evil for evil because the greatest hope of your life is that God will not return evil for evil to you. But you will bless those who insult you because the future blessing that you embrace as your treasure and rest on as your hope and find satisfaction in is precisely that kind of gracious blessing. The evidence that we are born of God and will inherit a future blessing is that our lives become a foretaste of the future we so earnestly desire to see and know.

Therefore when Peter says that blessing those who insult us is our divine calling, and that this calling is a condition of inheriting our future blessing, he's not saying that we earn our future blessing with meritorious works; he is saying you must truly be born again; you must put your hope and your faith so genuinely in that blessing that the quality of that gracious blessing is absorbed from the future into the present and shows in your life.

God's favor is not given to the unrighteous. Only those who by grace are the righteousness of God in Christ will be delivered from the wrath of God. His face is toward the righteous but is turned from those who do evil.

Because we are in Christ, God cannot direct his final anger and fury against us.

We need to be constantly reminded of this, not because it provides an escape for us but because as a people with a new heart and a love for God as a result of that new heart, we have a motive, to be Christ like and a motivator, the Holy Spirit and the Word of god to continue to reveal to each us how we should live because God has made us to be a different kind of people. That is how we began our message this morning. We are called to be a different kind of people a certain kind of people, a people that Jesus prayed for particularly and that as this certain kind of people we would demonstrate to the world that we are different because of the saving grace of God.

When people say I have no motivation to strive to be what Christ commands then I

have to ask the question, "Has Christ changed your heart? Have you really been born again to a living hope?"

Our lives are meant to be moving forward with the anticipation and the expectation of the glorious end of all things because of the resurrection of Christ and the victory it brings us as His kingdom people. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous.

We have the blessed hope, we have the promise of God in Christ that we are His and He is ours and that Christ is coming again to consummate His kingdom, to bring the kingdom to its completion and fullness for eternity and we are the members of that kingdom if we have been born again to this hope. But not just a hope, but a living hope through the resurrection of Christ.

We can live according to the calling Peter has described. We can be what the Scripture has spoken to us this morning because our Christ lived as the God-man and suffered and died but He rose again and all of our hope is alive in Him, the breathing living Redeemer of our souls, our Savior, our precious New Covenant, our Lord and the King of our lives Jesus Christ.