

SUBMISSION AND REAL LIFE

1 Peter 3:8-12

Introduction

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Driving down a country road, I came to a very narrow bridge. In front of the bridge, a sign was posted: "YIELD." Seeing no oncoming cars, I continued across the bridge and to my destination. On my way back, I came to the same one-lane bridge, now from the other direction. To my surprise, I saw another YIELD sign posted. CURIOUS, I thought, I'M SURE THERE WAS ONE POSITIONED ON THE OTHER SIDE. When I reached the other side of the bridge I looked back. Sure enough, yield signs had been placed at both ends of the bridge. Drivers from both directions were requested to give right of way. It was a reasonable and gracious way of preventing a head-on collision. When the Bible commands Christians to "be subject to one another" (Eph. 5:21) it is simply a reasonable and gracious command to let the other have the right of way and avoid interpersonal head-on collisions.

In our text today Peter gives us some important principles to avoid those head-on collisions in our personal and interpersonal relationships.

"Finally..." this is the beginning of his summary of this whole section on submission. *Briefly review ch. 2:13-3:7.* Peter's emphasis is on submission in all our relationships:

- submission to human authorities/fear of God (2:13-17)
- submission to employers and masters, even those who are harsh and unreasonable (2:18-20)
- the example of Christ in suffering (2:21-25)
- submission in the relationship between husbands and wives (3:1-7)

Today – vv. 8-12. Here we see, in v. 8 some attitudes which are important for positive, peaceful relationships, then in vv. 9-12 he shows us the principle of receiving a blessing by giving or being a blessing.

Attitudes for Positive Relationships v. 8

A. Harmony

Christians are called to be harmonious—unity of mind—in their relationships with one another and with all men. Rom. 12:18 tells us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

But even beyond this, in this area of submission and suffering, I think Peter is calling us to do more than just obey those who are over us. Living in harmony and submission means not only doing what is required, but also seeking to understand the mind and desire of those in authority in order to do what pleases them. As one preacher put it:

... a submissive employee should endeavor to determine how his employer wants things done and then seek to do it that way. A child should seek not only "to mind" a parent but to learn "the mind" of his parent and act accordingly. If such were the case, far fewer rules would be required. Rules are required when we are not of one mind.

Having unity of mind, being in harmony does not mean unanimity. When everyone in a group is required to think the same way, the result is what we call a cult, where the leader does the thinking, and everyone is expected to conform. But in true Christianity the key is not unanimity, but rather harmony.

Perhaps the best illustration of this would be an orchestra. It consists of many musicians, playing many different instruments. Different people are even playing different notes, but all are playing the same song. And when all the different parts and instruments play together the result is beautiful harmony, as they all follow one conductor. That is the way it should work in the church—different gifts and ministries, but all following the same Spirit and the same Word, resulting in harmony.

B. Sympathy

The word that is translated as "sympathetic" in the NIV (sympathy in the ESV) is actually a compound word made up from the root word "suffer" and the prefix "with" or "beside." The word really means "to suffer with." This particular word is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Albert Barnes, in his commentary says this, "It describes that state of mind which exists when we enter into the feelings of others as if they were our own, as the different parts of the body are affected by that which affects one."

The Apostle Paul captures this thought in Romans 12:15 – "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep"

C. **Brotherly Love**

The third requirement Peter gives for the Christian's relationship with others is "brotherly love." This is literally the word, "philadelphia," a compound word referring to the affection of a brother. It refers to the love believers should have one to another (see 1 Peter 1:22). This is the same love Jesus demanded of His disciples.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35 ESV)

D. **Compassion (A Tender Heart)**

This word that is used here literally refers to the intestines ("bowels") or the hidden vital organs of the body as it was believed that deep and intense emotions come from deep within a person. One commentary made this statement: "The bowels were regarded as the seat of the more violent passions, such as anger and love; but by the Hebrews as the seat of the tenderer affections, esp. kindness, benevolence, compassion; hence our heart (tender mercies, affections, etc.)"

Peter uses the term to refer to the deep concern—the compassion or tender heart—that we should have toward others.

Sympathy is the feeling of sorrow we have over another's pain or hurts. Empathy is the ability to suffer with another in their pain. Compassion is the desire and willingness to do something to carry someone else's pain, to help relieve them of the burden they carry.

E. **Humility (A humble mind)**

Humility is at the very heart of the Christian life. The apostle Paul calls us to humility in Philippians 2, where he associates it with submission and suffering as it is demonstrated in the life of Jesus himself. *Turn to this passage and briefly go through it.*

Humility – the willingness to accept others and put them and their interests ahead of my own.

These are the qualities which Peter has called us to as believers in Christ. They are the qualities and characteristics of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and if we are to be like Him, then they must also be seen in us.

They are attitudes which characterize true submission, and which, if followed by all believers, would revolutionize our relationships and ultimately change the world for Christ.

Being Blessed by Blessing Others vv. 9-12

There is another principle in this passage which I want to look at briefly. *Read v. 9*

A. **The Principle of Blessing**

The Scriptures are very clear about the truth that we are to be people of grace. Holding a grudge against those who have wronged us is never considered for the Christian.

In this text, Peter gives us an important reason for this. He reminds us that this is our calling – *"...for to this you were called..."*

His logic is this: We have been called to inherit a blessing. If we are to live consistently with our calling, then we should be characterized by the fact that we bless others.

This principle is seen as far back as the life of Abraham:

"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Gen. 12:1-3 ESV)

God told Abraham "I will bless you, but you are to bless others." So the principle really is this – Get a blessing by giving a blessing.

B. **Support from the OT – vv. 10-12 – Psalm 34:12-16**

Go through these verses showing how ultimately, they tell us that if we want to know the Lord's blessing on our lives we must live our life in such a way as to be a blessing to others.

The problem we face as sinful human beings is that we so easily forget this principle. We begin to think that we deserve God's blessing because of who we are. It is easy to think that "sinners" rightly deserve to

be punished, while we deserve to be blessed. Sometimes we feel little or no obligation to be a blessing to the ungodly. But God says that we have been called to be a blessing to others, so that we may inherit a blessing.

Conclusion

What Peter is really saying in this passage is this: When we suffer for Christ's sake, we should respond with blessing, not only because we will be blessed eternally, but because we are being blessed in time as well.

The reason Jesus came to the earth was to bring God's blessing of salvation to us as sinful people. The question I need to ask you is this: "Have you accepted his gift and entered into the blessings God has provided in Christ?" Unfortunately, rejecting God's blessings, that were provided in Christ at His first coming, will mean facing the judgment of God when Jesus Christ comes the second time to judge the world.

As Christians we are called to a high standard. It is only by his grace that we can ever live out the kind of qualities and attitudes Peter puts before us in v. 8. And it is only by God's grace that we can bless others, even those who seek to harm us. Yet we are called to do so, knowing that it is to this we have been called because we, in turn, are to receive God's eternal blessing.

May God give us the grace to live out these principles.