

"Return Blessing for Evil" - 1 Peter 3:8-12

Tomorrow is the day we Americans celebrate the founding of our nation: Independence Day. Traditionally, it's been a day to demonstrate our patriotism. There are parades, picnics, and yes ... fireworks. Once again this year, Hungry Horse will most likely resemble a war zone.

But at the same time, we who have been rescued by Jesus have cause to be concerned. It seems like our country, our culture is getting farther and farther away from God. In fact, our culture is becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity. In one sense, it should grieve our souls. But we need to be sure that our response to a hostile culture is completely in line with what the Bible teaches. We need pray for our country and our culture. We need to pray for our leaders. We need to stand boldly for truth, but we must never adopt the tactics of the world in our attempt to reform culture. We must respond as Jesus Christ would have us respond. Nothing else will work. We must respond with love. When we are persecuted, denigrated, abused, made fun of, we must respond by blessing the very people who are being hard on us.

Well, that's not particularly easy. Our natural reaction is to push back when we are pushed. Our inherent tendency is to seek retribution, to get even, to get revenge, but that's not what Jesus did, is it?

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

While we were still sinners! While we were absolute traitors to the Sovereign of the universe. He loved us and blessed us, not because we deserved it; we deserved the exact opposite, but because we needed it. The only way we could be reconciled to God is if Jesus took the wrath of God upon Himself. The only sinless One willingly gave up His life as a ransom for the guilty and we're all guilty; every one of us.

But what an incredible blessing He has bestowed upon us!

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1a)

Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (1 John 3:1b)

The unsaved world will not understand. The world cannot understand. But we are to love them anyway. We are to return blessing for evil.

Well in our trek through the first epistle of Peter, we have arrived at Chapter 3, verse 8:

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; (1 Peter 3:8)

This looks like Peter's conclusion to his teaching about submission. It started back in chapter 2, verse 13 with:

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, (1 Peter 2:13)

And then he gave us a list of people and things we Christians are to submit ourselves to: Every ordinance of man started things out, the king, or supreme human ruler, governors.

We are to honor all people – even the unbelievers were made in the image of God. We're to love our fellow Christians. Of course, we're to fear God.

Servants are to be in submission to masters, or to put it in our modern cultural context, we are to be in submission to our employers, the good ones and the not so good ones, the kind ones and the harsh ones. We are to work as if we are working for Jesus, because we are! Wives are to be in submission to their husbands. Husbands are to serve their wives, because we are equals in the economy of God, although there is a division of roles.

And now Peter concludes by writing “Finally”. But actually, it's the very same Greek word that is translated “likewise” in verse 7. It means “similarly so”. Peter is continuing with the same message of submission, but he's giving us a few additional, practical ways we can perform our Christian duty.

He says all of you be of one mind; “all of you” means that he is addressing believers, Christians. He says we need to be on the same page. It's too bad when Christians are known by who or what they hate. It's especially bad when Christians demonstrate hate for one another.

Do you know what God hates? I mean really hates? Sin, you might say ... and that would be correct. But what are the sins he hates more than others? He gave us a list in Proverbs, Chapter 6:

*These six things the LORD hates, **Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.** (Proverbs 6:16-19)*

Church unity is really important. God hates people who sow discord, who do things to destroy the unity of the Church. It is important for us to find unity in purpose. We need to be of the same mind and it shouldn't be that hard. God has revealed His will in the pages of this Book. If we all diligently seek His will, by becoming saturated by the wisdom of scripture, we will have unity of purpose – His purpose.

As Christians, we're to have compassion for one another. That's one of the great things about our body of believers. You are a compassionate bunch. You go out of your way to offer a hand-up to one another. I'm so thankful for that. Yet I'm sure we can do even better.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:3-4)

Then, we are to love as brothers. Interestingly, Peter does not use *agapeo* here. This is *philadelphos*. While *agape* love is the sort of love that provides what is needed even when it is not deserved, *philadelphos* speaks of the affection we have for one another. You can *agapeo* somebody even if you don't like them, but *philadelphos* presupposes affection. Peter is saying “Hey, enjoy one another. Enjoy being around your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Be tenderhearted. Or to put it negatively, don't be calloused. It goes along with being compassionate. In the Greek, it carries a much deeper meaning than our English words can relate. It refers to a feeling that comes from deep within, from our inner parts,

literally from our intestines ... but I know that doesn't communicate to us at all. We are to have a compassion that is deeply felt. We are to be moved by our friends' distresses.

Verse 8 concludes with an exhortation to be courteous. Literally, friendly of mind. Christians should be pleasant to be around. We need to be good friends. You don't want to be one of those folks who is quite adept at emptying a room by just showing up!

It seems to me that verse 8 is all about enjoying the relationships you have in your local church, but verse 9 broadens the scope. It's pretty easy to be nice to people who are nice to you, isn't it? But when folks are indifferent, inconvenient, or downright nasty, it's a lot harder to remain compassionate, tenderhearted and courteous. We are to bless all people ... not just our fellow Christians. And oh by the way, indifferent, inconvenient and downright nasty folks can be found inside the Church too. Ever run into any of those?

We are to be people who are ...

... not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)

Now folks, this is where you're going to need some help. This runs contrary to our nature, so you need to engage the indwelling Holy Spirit. We are not to seek retribution by our own hand. We are, instead, to return blessing for evil.

Jesus clearly taught this principle:

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (Matthew 5:43-44)

Why in the world should we do that? Because that's what God does.

... that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:45)

That's what Jesus does. He didn't die for you because you were such a fine fellow. He didn't die for you because you were such a virtuous woman.

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, **the just for the unjust**, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, (1 Peter 3:18)*

It was while you were still His enemy that He went to the cross for you. So as Christians, we are to bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us, even those who persecute us.

Would you be willing to pray for the one who is about to put you to death for your faith? I know someone who did. His prayer went something like this: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*

When's the last time you prayed for somebody who treated you badly? Maybe there is someone in your life who makes fun of you for being a Christian. Maybe it's someone who just has a mean and nasty disposition and not very fun to be around. Maybe somebody who cut you off in traffic. Maybe it's a contractor who ripped you off. Maybe

someone you thought was a friend before they betrayed you. Maybe it's someone close by, or maybe it's someone you know only from the news.

Pick out someone right now, close your eyes and pray for that person. I'm going to give you just a moment so you can go to the Lord. Ask that the Lord would bless your enemy. Ask that the Lord would change your attitude toward that person. You know, the greatest blessing anyone can receive is to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, so as you are praying for your enemy, be sure to pray for their salvation. I know it's not a natural thing to do. You need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, so ask the Lord to help you. Let's just be silent for a moment and take these petitions to the Throne of Grace.

[Two minute pause in the sermon]

Amen.

Peter's exhortation to return blessing for evil is not his idea alone, so he underscores his section on submission with a quote from Psalm 34, vv. 12-16.

For "HE WHO WOULD LOVE LIFE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, LET HIM REFRAIN HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL, AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. LET HIM TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; LET HIM SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE ON THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ARE OPEN TO THEIR PRAYERS; BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL." (1 Peter 3:10-12)

Do you trust Jesus? Do you trust the promises of God? Well, there is a promise you can claim: *"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers."*

The trouble is, you can't be righteous on your own. The only way you can be righteous is by covering yourself with the blood of the Savior. Jesus took your sins to the cross. Jesus offers His righteousness to you in return. All you have to do is accept the gift.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent. As we celebrate Independence Day, let us also celebrate our **Dependence Day**. As Christians, let us acknowledge that we are completely dependent on God. It is by His grace we are saved, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. We are completely dependent on Him.

Yet ... if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8:36) Free from sin's dominion. Free from sin's penalty. Free to trust God for your vindication. Free to return blessing for evil.