

Relational Harmony in the Church

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[0:00] Our first scripture reading will be located on page 464.! I'll give you a moment to locate it!
Psalm 34, verses 11 to 22.

Come, O children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. But man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good.

Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good.

Seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears towards their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

To cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them of all their troubles.

[1: 12] The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

He keeps all his bones. Not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

The Lord redeems the life of his servants. None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Our second reading, 1 Peter 3, 8-12, can be located on page 1015.

Finally, all of you have unity of mind.

Sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling.

[2:20] But on the contrary, bless for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For whoever desires to love life and to see good days, let him keep 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 at the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Thank you very much, Cleo, for reading for us this morning. Well, this morning, as we continue our sermon series in the letter of 1 Peter, we come to a section of the letter that calls those of us who belong to Christ to live in Christian community in particular ways.

It's a call for those who belong to Christ to put on display the redemption and the reconciliation that he has worked in our lives.

And so, brothers and sisters, I pray that for the Lord's sake and our own sake, that we will hear and heed these words this morning about what it looks like to live in Christian community in the context of the local church.

[3:54] So let me pray for us before we look to God's word. Heavenly Father, we come this morning...

with thirsty hearts... and with a great need... for you to draw near to us and speak as only you can.
Lord, I ask that above my voice, your voice will be heard.

I pray you would draw near to us... in the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would grant me unction as I proclaim your word and...

grant to all of us... the ability to hear and to respond as you... would have us to. We ask, Lord, this morning that you would use the...

[illegible]

[11:14] On the opposite sides of those hostilities, and he brings them together in the context of a local church. And he says that he will have a people from every tribe and nation and kindred and people.

And that doesn't just start in heaven. That starts on earth. And how does he do it? He does it by putting us in this context and calling us to live in these particular ways.

Because of his work among us. Because of his work in our hearts. Because he has saved us.

Because of what we just recited in our memory verse 4 this month.

Because he has saved us from our former ignorance. And he has put us in the family of God. Now, it should be clear to us that Peter obviously does not give us an exhaustive list in these five Christlike virtues.

These are more representative. Because I know that we can think of other essential Christlike virtues that we need in Christian communities, like patience and forgiveness and kindness and gentleness.

[12:31] So, Peter's not giving us an exhaustive list. But he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, lays before us in his letter, these five. We can find the others in the other letters.

But let's take to heart where we find ourselves this morning in Peter's letter. But let's understand that what Peter's addressing is he's speaking to us about Christian virtues and character in a broad sense.

We shouldn't narrow it down just to these five. He's speaking to us in a broad sense. We who are God's people are called to cultivate Christlike character.

So, let's consider, in turn, each of these virtues that the Apostle Peter says that we are to have.

The first one is unity of mind. When we think of unity of mind, first and foremost, I think what unity of mind should call us to is to embrace a shared belief and understanding about God's Word.

[13:42] I think that is foundational in a local church. That's essential in a local church. God's Word is to be the foundation of our unity of mind.

But unity of mind also speaks about being united in purpose and direction as a body of believers. It is a call away from individualism.

A call away from individualistic thinking and living and pursuing what is in our eyes our best interests.

It is the place where we get to prefer one another. We get to think about one another in terms of how can we have a unity of mind.

It is quite interesting. When you look at the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul writes to the church of Corinth, and there were issues among them.

[14:45] And Paul knew he was writing to a divided church. And one of the first things he says to them, he says, I urge you to be of the same mind. He doesn't get into who's writing.

He just says, be of the same mind. Be of the same mind. We are called, brothers and sisters, to a unity of mind.

I like the way the New International Version fleshes out this unity of mind. And what it says is, we are to live in harmony with one another.

That's what it means to have a unity of mind. Unity of mind addresses relational harmony. And brothers and sisters, we are called to this.

The second aspect of Christlike character that Peter calls us to cultivate is sympathy. Sympathy is the virtue of identifying with the sorrows of one another in community.

[15:43] And it's a much-needed virtue because we live in a fallen world. And in a fallen world, we will encounter sorrows and trials in an ongoing way, whether it's through sickness or death or other forms of loss and grief.

And we are called to exhibit this Christlike virtue of sympathy. And the reason is that it's so easy to be busy.

It's so easy to become distracted. It's so easy to be self-focused. So much that we overlook or we ignore those who are in need of our sympathetic care.

We live in a community where we have opportunities in an ongoing way, brothers and sisters, to show sympathy. We hear it in the prayer needs oftentimes that are shared.

We hear it in the, sometimes the conversations that we engage in with people. Sometimes we see it in the demeanor of brothers and sisters.

[17:02] And we are to show sympathy. We are to be sympathetic towards one another in community. Yes, we should pray. But we should also reach out.

We should also reach out with a phone call or with an encouraging note. Maybe a face-to-face conversation. And show sympathetic care to one another.

And so, brothers and sisters, in an ongoing way, let us do this. Let us slow down as we engage one another. And let us show sympathy towards one another, walking through the various trials and difficulties of life.

The third aspect of Christlike character that Peter calls us to cultivate is brotherly love. This term brotherly love is used for affection in natural families.

And here and elsewhere in Scripture, it's used to refer to the affection that is to be shared with brothers and sisters in the local church, with the family of God.

[18:18] It's called brotherly affection. Peter wrote this letter, as the rest of the New Testament is, in Greek. And the word that he used that is translated into our English words, brotherly love, it comes from the root of the word in Greek, is where we get our word Philadelphia from.

And I think many of us know that the city of Philadelphia is called the city of brotherly love. But if we know anything about Philadelphia, we will know that that's a contradiction.

Philadelphia is not a place where you will go to find brotherly love. It is among the largest, the 50 largest cities in the United States.

It ranks number eight in terms of crime. And most of those crimes are crimes against the person.

But brothers and sisters, the place that should be the city of brotherly love is local churches.

And it's an amazing place. Because people who in the world are hostile to one another can find those same people in the local church who show brotherly love to one another.

[19:47] And this is what we're called to. We're called to brotherly love. And sisterly love. We're called to exhibit this in the community of the saints, to put it on display.

You'll notice that this Christlike virtue of brotherly love is the center virtue. It's in the middle of the five virtues that we are called to.

And I don't think that's by accident. And I think it is reminding us that love is to have the central place. Brotherly love is to have the central place. Scripture tells us that we can have the greatest gifts.

But if we don't have love, we're just noisy. We are irrelevant. And we should be ignored. Lord, may our love for one another in the context of this local church, above all the virtues that we are called to cultivate, may it stand paramount.

And not just because it is something good in and of itself. It is good because it points to God's love, who is the one who loved us, and who taught us that we are to love one another.

[21:16] And then fourth, the fourth aspect of Christlike character that Peter calls us to is to cultivate a tender heart. A tender heart can be defined in one word, and it is the word compassion.

It's to have a compassionate heart. It's to be conscious and sensitive to the distress of others and having a desire to alleviate it.

You know, one of the realities about life is oftentimes, we have desire without ability. But desire doesn't cost us anything. What we are called to in the area of compassion, having a tender heart, is a desire to alleviate the distress that we see others are in.

Now, the opposite of a tender heart is a tough heart. It's the kind of heart that's predominant in the world where people are focused on themselves overwhelmingly and not others.

But God's church is the alternate society. This is the new society. God has saved us out of that society, brought us into this society, and he calls us to live in particular ways.

[22:45] God's church not in a vacuum, but as a result of his redeeming, reconciling work in our lives, transforming our hearts, and joining us to brothers and sisters who together call God Father.

and so we're to cultivate tender hearts. We're to be touched by the pain of others.

We're to have a desire to help. And then the fifth and final aspect of Christ's character that Peter calls us to is a humble mind.

In the Greco-Roman society that Peter wrote his original letter, humility was one of the disdained and rejected virtues in that society.

Humility was seen as weakness and it was seen as shameful. And in Peter's day, the only people who were humble were those who had to be humble.

[24:04] The weak, the needy, the downtrodden, the marginalized, those who lived on the edges of society and lived in the mercy of people, they had to be humble.

But brothers and sisters, little has changed. The world is the same way. To be humble in this world, to be seen as humble in this world, to be thought as humble in this world, oftentimes is to be seen as weak and puts us in a position of being taken advantage of.

And so it's not something that's attractive. It's not something that we naturally want to gravitate towards. But brothers and sisters, we have Christ's example.

We have an example that tells us that humility is not weakness and it is not shameful. Christ taught us that humility is really a show of strength.

Christ, even though he was God, he made himself of no reputation, he humbled himself, he became obedient to death, death on a cross, a shameful Roman cross, exposed for the whole world to see.

[25:29] He humbled himself in that way so that sinners like you and me can be reconciled to God, forgiven of our sins. And we're called to follow in his example of humility.

We're called to do that even when the world around us misunderstands it. the call to follow in Christ's example of humility because humility of mind is essential for us to live harmoniously in community.

You know it is said that the mother of all sins is pride. The pride is the mother of all sins. And so often many of the sinful manifestations that we see in our relationships they're rooted in pride.

They're rooted in pride. They're the opposite of what John said concerning Jesus when he said I must decrease that Christ might increase that he might increase.

But brothers and sisters we're going to live harmoniously together in Christian community. We need humility of mind.

[27:01] To have a humble mind means to think less highly of ourselves and more highly of others. to have humility of mind means that we don't think of ourselves as important or better than others because of what we possess or what we've accomplished.

When we consider what we possess or what we've accomplished rather than producing pride in us it should produce more humility in us. we would thank the Lord because he is the giver of all good gifts.

He is the giver of all that we have. We should give him glory and praise and we as a result should be humble. Brothers and sisters we should not miss the fact that by calling us to cultivate these virtues the apostle Peter is calling us away from the opposite of these virtues.

He doesn't spell it out but he calls us away from the opposite of these virtues. Well that's the first point.

We can only live harmoniously in Christian community in the context of the local church by cultivating Christlike character in an ongoing way.

[28:35] Not one and done. Every single day we are called to do this until the day the Lord calls us home until the day that he returns.

And you know what? By the grace of God we should be growing in these virtues. We should be growing in Christlike character. And this Christlike character is essential for us to cultivate because it is the Christlike character that produces Christlike conduct.

Which brings me to my second and final point. Exhibiting Christlike character. Conduct, sorry. The first aspect of Christlike conduct that we are called to exhibit in Christian communities in verse nine. Look again at what it says. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless. For to this you were called that you may obtain a blessing. these words remind us of the sad and sobering truth that sometimes we who belong to Christ engage in evil conduct and we are the victims of evil conduct.

[30:14] The sobering truth to allow to sink in our souls. It's a reminder that we are both saint and sinner at the same time.

It is a reminder that we have been saved but we are being saved. And one day when the Lord returns our salvation will be complete and perfected.

And I say that Peter is addressing believers at this point in the letter and addressing the evil that we sometimes commit against one another because he's already addressed how we are to relate to unbelievers in chapter 2 in verse 12 where he instructed us how we are to conduct ourselves towards unbelievers whom he refers to as Gentiles.

He says we are to conduct ourselves in an honorable way. So he's already addressed our dealings with them. He's now addressing our dealings with one another.

It's interesting when you look at these five verses the most repeated word setting aside the words the and for the most repeated word in these five verses is evil.

[31:50] It's the word evil. And the word evil is a broad word for whatever is bad or wrong or harmful.

The word reviling means to engage in harsh abusive insulting language that's intentional to inflict pain or degradation on another person whether to their face or behind their back.

But whether we've been the victim of evil or reviling as we live in Christian community we are commanded do not repay evil with evil or reviling for reviling.

Instead we are called to live out our Christlike character by exhibiting Christlike conduct and blessing those who commit evil against us and who revile us.

I think brothers and sisters if we were honest this morning we would conclude that this is a difficult command. It's a difficult command because we're sinners.

[33:27] Yes we have been saved we are being saved but we still sin. And this command of Peter in this letter it is not just the most difficult command I think in this letter it is perhaps one of the most difficult commands in all of scripture.

Peter and it's not unique with Peter the Lord Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount has called us to do the same thing.

You know what's interesting even with the promised blessing at the end of the verse we are promised that if we bless when we are cursed that we will receive a blessing.

Even that promise of blessing doesn't make it easier for us to bless when evil is done against us or when we are reviled.

And I think to see the difficulty we have to understand that we're not just called to restrain doing evil against someone who has done evil to us or restrain from reviling someone who has reviled us.

[34:50] We're not called just to restrain it. It doesn't just mean doing them no wrong.

Instead, it is blessing them. It is doing them good instead. And not just in word, but also in deed. I think many of us have heard people say things, well, God bless you.

You know, and that's kind of like, I wish I could say something else to you, but I'll say God bless you. But it is not just empty words.

It is to bless. And sometimes to bless is indeed it is to do good to those who do evil to us and who revile us.

And whatever we do, whatever good we do, it is a blessing. And what Peter tells us at the end of the verse, this is why we do it.

[36:04] This is why we do it. We do it first and foremost because we have been called to this. For to this you were called. Peter is echoing in chapter 3 what he said earlier in chapter 2 about Christ's example, that he has left for us an example of how we are to suffer.

And on the cross as Jesus was being crucified, he prayed for those who were crucifying him. He's left for us an example of doing good and blessing in the face of evil, in the face of reviling.

Now, does it mean that when we are reviled, for example, and others speak evil of us, does it mean that we can't say anything?

Is that what it means? I don't think it means that although quite often it's wise to say nothing.

But when appropriate, we can rebuke without reviling, we can correct without cursing, but I think we all know that we need much grace to do it in a way that honors the Lord.

[37:43] And oftentimes we've talked about having righteous anger, and I think if the record was shown in all of human history, few people have truly had righteous anger away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not something that we should play with. It's not something that we should try to exercise ourselves with to think that we can do that. Brothers and sisters, we're far weaker than we know.

We're far more sinful than we know. And these things that we are called to, we can only do by the grace of God. We can only do not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord.

As a matter of fact, without God's grace, we wouldn't even desire to do it, much less be able to do it. and this is a wonderful thing.

When in the face of evil, in the face of reviling, that we find ourselves in a disposition of blessing rather than repaying with evil or with reviling.

[39:00] That's an evidence of the grace of God at work in our lives. Peter elaborates on this command not to repay evil with evil and reviling with reviling by quoting from Psalm 34, which is the first reading this morning.

He quotes from a section of Psalm 34 that we read. And the context of Psalm 34 is that David was running for his life from Saul who had threatened to kill him and was making good on his promise with many attempts.

Look again at the quote from Psalm 34 starting in verse 10. 1 Peter chapter 3. Quoting from Psalm 34, Peter writes, For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep 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 heirs are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

Brothers and sisters, in these concluding verses of our text for this morning, Peter gives wise counsel for loving the lives we live and seeing good days.

[40:45] He says, whoever desires to love life and see good days, and truly that's all of us, all of us desire to love the life that we have and to see good days.

Peter says that that's your desire, that's what you want. There's a particular way that you need to live to see that. And notice that it's not dependent on what other people do.

What other people do is irrelevant to us loving the lives that we have and seeing good days as we live our lives on this earth.

But Peter tells us it is dependent on exhibiting Christ-like conduct in three specific ways. Three times his counsel begins with the words, let him.

Notice how he says that. Let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good.

[41:54] Let him seek peace and continue to pursue it. This is wise, godly counsel. If we want to love the lives that we have and we want to see good days, we need to exhibit Christ-like conduct.

Notice that the first line counsel that Peter gives has to do with speech. It has to do with us governing our tongues, governing our words.

And brothers and sisters, I think you would agree with me that more than any other sin, the sin of sinful speech has destroyed relationships in the church and beyond.

the whole sphere of human relationships, the sin that has been more destructive than any other sin has been the sin of unguarded speech, sinful speech, using our tongues in ways that inflict harm and destruction on relationships.

And so by God's grace, if we will love the lives that we live and we are going to see good days, we must govern our speech. We must learn not to speak evil of anyone.

[43:34] We must learn not to speak deceit, with anyone and especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And notice the intentional effort that is needed.

We are to turn from evil and we are to do good. Intentionally turn from evil, intentionally do good.

We're not just to hope for peace, we're to seek it.

we're not just, not mind if we could be at peace with this person, but we need to seek it. And what Scripture says, as much as it lies within you, be at peace with all men.

We're not responsible for the other person's side of the bridge. We're responsible for our side of the bridge, we are to seek peace, we are to pursue it.

And what does this require? It requires humility. It requires us sometimes to suffer the wrong. It requires us sometimes to take the short end of the stick.

[44:50] This is what we must do if we are going to love the lives that we live, and we desire to see good days.

This is what the Lord calls us to. And you know, brothers and sisters, one of the reasons that we have a difficulty doing this is we're more mindful of the eyes of the world on us and what they may think about us than we are about the Lord and his eyes upon us and what he thinks about us.

That's the reason reason that we would fight for our rights rather than just turning them over.

I pray that you not hearing me this morning make light of this most difficult call that we have been called to. I don't want to make light of it because if I make light of it, then it may either discourage us or it might cause us to think that we can do this in our own strength.

My only intention this morning is to help us to see how desperately we need the Lord. If we are going to do what he's called us to do, brothers and sisters, we need the Lord's help.

[46:20] Verse 12 is the most encouraging verse. Verse 12, we find the encouragement that we should all take to heart as we seek to exhibit Christ-like conduct in the face of evil conduct.

We're reminded of a truth that we could forget in the midst of being treated in the evil way and being reviled. Here's the truth.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his heirs are open to their prayer. God's eyes of care and his concern are always upon the righteous to those who belong to him.

and we must especially remember this when we find ourselves being faced with evil against us, being faced with reviling against us.

We must remember that God's eyes are on us and God's seats and God knows. And it tells us that his heirs are open to our prayer. And it's an invitation for us to take those burdens to the Lord and pray.

[47:45] Rather than taking the evil in our hands and inflicting it against those who commit evil, we take the evil to the Lord and we leave it there and we bear our souls before the Lord.

And brothers and sisters in this is great comfort. We sing the song, oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pains we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Brothers and sisters, there is great comfort in these words. Not only are God's eyes upon us, but his heirs are open to our prayers.

And so again, let us pray. There is also a comfort to know that God does not overlook evil. evil.

We're told that his face is against those who do evil.

God is not pleased with evil, he is not pleased with those who do evil, and he doesn't overlook it. He doesn't overlook it.

[49:03] And brothers and sisters, let us hear this this morning because God's face is against all those who do evil, including when we, his children, do evil.

His face is against us when we do evil. evil. And that shouldn't surprise us.

It should surprise us if God's face were not against evil. There's no parent this morning when a child does something that is wrong and displeasing who would have the same disposition towards that child as when they didn't do that.

Even more so, I heavenly father, his face is against all those who do evil. And you know what? I think it is of a greater consequence when we who have been called from evil commit evil.

Evil should be what we shun. We are to turn away from evil, not to bring it to our bosoms and not to see it as something that we should hold in our hands.

[50:18] And God's face being against evil, we can trust him in his way and in his time to address the evil that sometimes comes our way.

You know, the Bible is filled with similar instructions like this that we find in 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 8 to 12, filled with instructions like that.

Paul in Ephesians chapter 4 gives very similar instructions where he calls the church to endeavor to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace by being humble and living in a way that's harmonious with brothers and sisters.

But you know what, brothers and sisters, this is enough. What we find here in these five verses is enough to help us to live harmoniously in Christian community with brothers and sisters.

This is enough for us when we find ourselves wronged in any way. And why are we called to live like this?

[51:39] Why does the Lord call us to live in this way? Is it because he wants to protect our rights and our reputations? Well, as important as our rights and reputations are, that's not the ultimate reason.

God calls us to live this way ultimately because of his name and his glory. And because we are his people.

and because in his kindness he has put his name upon us. And we get to call him father and we are his children and we represent him and we reflect him.

And so ultimately the way we are called to live is about him and not about us. We should take the view that again John took, I must decrease that Christ might increase.

That is what is at stake, brothers and sisters, as we are called to live in Christian community by cultivating Christ-like character and exhibiting Christ-like conduct.

[53:00] Again, it should be clear to all of us this morning that we cannot do this on our own. We need the Lord every moment of every hour. we need his grace to help us in the face of evil, in the

face of reviling.

We need his grace to help us, to bless and to do that which is right and pleasing in his sight.

God will not be perfect. But our best efforts, brothers and sisters, will not be perfect. None of us, none of us can perfectly in the face of evil bless.

us. But the good news is that there is one who is our substitute, who was not just our substitute in dying on the cross, but he was our substitute in living a perfect life that none of us could live.

And that perfect life that Jesus lived, even when he was on the cross, and he was being reviled and crucified, and he blessed, instead of cursing, God credits that to us as well.

[54:33] We not only get the benefit of Christ's death, we get the benefits of his life. He's our substitute in both directions. And when we fall short, and we will, Christ, our substitute, has perfectly fulfilled for us this call to bless when we are cursed.

It doesn't mean that we just throw up our hands and say, well, whatever goes, goes, no. We need to make every effort to seek to fulfill and obey what Scripture calls us to, but we must do so knowing that we have a substitute in whom we are trusting.

We're not hoping, and I trust none of us is hoping, that God will look on our works, He will look on our character, He will look on our conduct, and then give us a perfect score to be accepted in the sight.

I pray that we all pray and hope that the Lord is looking at the righteousness of Christ that God has given to us, and He's accepting that on our behalf.

And so, brothers and sisters, let us do this. Let us seek to be faithful. Let us take seriously these five verses, and let us look to Christ as we do.

[56:04] He's our confidence. He's our only hope when we fall short. And so, let us look to Him. If you hear this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ, I suspect that you have difficult relationships in your life.

And your greatest need this morning is not how to get those relationships restored and repaired.

The greatest need is your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And what the Bible says about every person who is away from Jesus is that you are the object of God's wrath.

And the Bible says that one day God's wrath is going to be poured out on all the ungodly. And so, your greatest need this morning is to be reconciled to God.

the greatest need this morning is to turn to him. And he promises that all who come to him, he will turn none of them away.

And so, I pray that you come to Jesus, I pray that you turn to him from your sin, and you will receive forgiveness and reconciliation with God the Father.

[57:26] Let's pray. Father, we bow our hearts this morning and we are humbled that you've saved us, you've reconciled us to yourself and joined us to one another in the context of the local church.

Lord, would you help us to cultivate Christ-like character, would you help us to exhibit Christ-like conduct in the face of evil, in the face of ill treatment, may we do it looking to you and trusting you for the grace to bless rather than to repay evil with evil and reviling with reviling.

Lord, would you glorify in us and through us your great name. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.