

Sermon: The New Way of Life

Text: 1 Peter 3:8-16

Discussion Questions:

OK—so you are a part of a church family. You attend as often as you're able. You call it your "church home." You think of the pastors as "your pastors." You agree with the doctrine and the things that the church believes and teaches. You appreciate that the church preaches from the Bible, and has excellent programs for your kids.

But—you haven't really done much to get connected with other people in the church. You're not in a Sunday school class or a community group. There's a few people that you know and feel connected to when you attend, but other than that you don't really reach out and know other people in the church.

Here's the question: Is that enough? Is that God's design for the church? Or—does God deeply desire (perhaps even call!) us to push through and make personal connections with others on a deeper and more spiritual level?

The first two verses of our text today addresses this question. In **1 Peter 3:8-9**, Peter talks directly to the question of how we are to relate to other believers—those who are in our church family. And just to say—these are things that **WE** are to take the initiative on. Peter is telling **ME** to do this, as opposed to judging others if they don't.

Take some time to discuss and think about this list of imperatives:

Be like-minded. What does this mean? What if I disagree with them? Does this mean that if I disagree, I should just leave and find another church that I'm at least a little "closer-minded" with? Do I need to adjust MY mindset—or go in search of a church that lines up with everything that I already think?

Be sympathetic. This involves compassion—and listening. Truly caring about the needs of others at a heart-engaged level. How difficult is this to do?

Love one another. The "one another" that Peter is talking about here is other believers—people in our spiritual family. Our church. Where does this kind of love come from? What does it look like? What has to happen first? How easy is it to judge others for not loving me—but make no efforts whatsoever to reach out in love to them?

Be compassionate and humble. A great definition of compassion is to feel other people's pain and struggles as though they are my own. OK—be honest. If all you do is go to the worship service, is there ANY way that this could possibly happen? There is absolutely **NO WAY** to be compassionate to others in my church family if I don't make any effort to get to know them. Is this something you're willing to do?

Don't repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Why would Peter mention this? Do you suppose this was a problem 2,000 years ago? Is it a problem now? What has to happen in our hearts to keep this from happening?

Examination:

- Read **1 Peter 3:8-16**
 - In the middle of verse 9, Peter says “on the contrary...” And he goes on to state that instead of repaying evil with evil, we are to “repay evil with blessing.” This is not a verse we can easily read and just move on. Peter isn’t just saying that we are to ignore and walk away from someone who isn’t nice to you (in an act of great restraint and worthy of a big pat on the back). No—he’s talking here about our response in the face of evil. “Evil” involves hatred. It involves malice, and an intent to inflict harm. How is this even possible? Peter isn’t just telling us to walk away from or ignore someone who is treating you with evil in their hearts—he’s telling us to REPAY their evil with blessing. With kindness. There’s a lot to think about and talk about here.
 - Is this something you ever seen lived out in the life of someone you know?
 - Is there a story you know of that illustrates this?
 - What are some practical ways that we can repay evil with a blessing?
 - Why would Peter (and God!) be calling us to respond this way? Why is God requiring us to do something that is in some respects not humanly possible?
 - Peter next states two reasons for repaying evil with blessing:
 - One: Because to this we are called. This is a “cost” of discipleship. It’s part of what it means to be a Christian. Is this something you were told when you made the decision to follow Christ? Is this we should be more clear about when asking others to follow Jesus?
 - Two: Because by doing so, we will inherit a blessing. What kind of blessing? When? Is this really something we should have in mind when someone is treating us in an evil way?
 - Peter quotes **Psalm 34:12-16** in verses 10-12. Take some time to think closely about what this Psalm is saying—and why it is that Peter would quote it.
 - Do you “love life”, and want to see “good days”?
 - What does this say about the words we use?
 - How do we “seek peace” and “pursue it”?
 - What is God’s response to us when we live this way?
 - Peter addresses the issue of fear in verse 14. How much does fear play into our avoidance of suffering and ridicule? What are some practical ways to avoid fear, or overcome it?
 - Take some time to think through and discuss verses 15–17. How does all of this begin with what’s happening in our heart? What would cause someone to ask you about the hope that you have? What kind of answer is appropriate? How does gentleness and respect play into all of this? Is it God’s will that you suffer?

Application:

There are so many applications to these verses. Two that stand out are: 1) It isn’t enough just to come and go from church, and not build intentional relationships. Make the effort to reach out to others; 2) Know that how we respond in the face of evil or push-back is crucial—and it opens opportunities to tell others HOW we’re able to do so. Be ready to give an answer when they ask!