

PRACTICE THE CHRIST-LIKE LIFE

3 ⁸Finally, may all of you live in harmony. Be sympathetic, love one another as brothers, be compassionate, be humble-minded. ⁹Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult; on the contrary, bless each other; for this is [part of your] calling, so that you may inherit blessing. ¹⁰[Just as it is written,] “Whoever would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from [speaking] evil and let not his lips utter deceit. ¹¹Let him turn away from evil and do what is good; let him seek peace and pursue it;” ¹²because “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayers; but the LORD’s face is set against those who do evil.” (1 Pet. 3:8-12)

Introduction

There were three churches, located on different corners of the same intersection, which did not get along with one another.

One Sunday morning each of them opened their worship with a rousing song service. Since it was a warm spring day, all their doors and windows were wide open. The first congregation began singing the old hymn, *Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown?* The strains of that hymn had barely faded away when the congregation across the street started to sing another old hymn, *No, Not One; No, Not, One!* They had scarcely finished when the third congregation began to sing yet another old hymn, *Oh, That Will Be Glory for Me!* This is just a humorous story, but it does remind us of the divisiveness that may exist between some churches or within some congregations. (*Our Daily Bread*, 3/13/94)

As Christians, our attitude and conduct towards one another should be characterized by the practice of Christ-like virtues. Let us see to it that the Christ-like life characterizes our relationship to one another, because this is our calling and it is the way to blessing.

I. Practice the Christ-like Life, ...In Order to Minister Blessing

Summing up this section of his epistle in which he has been dealing with relationships—the Christian’s relationship to the governing authorities (2:13-17); the Christian’s relationship to the working world (2:18-25); and the Christian’s relationships within marriage (3:1-7)—Peter finally addresses relationships within the church.

In the name of the Lord Jesus, Peter exhorts us to practice a Christ-like attitude towards one another. He begins by expressing his desire for the Christian community: *“May all of you live in harmony.”* Here we may also take into account the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to the church: *“Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus; ⁶so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus*

Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6.) Paul tells us that, as Christians, we are to be focused on the one great goal of "*glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The Apostle James points out the consequences of entertaining and exhibiting self-centered goals, as opposed to the one unified Christian goal of glorifying God: "*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Does it not come from your desires that battle within you?*" (Jas. 4:1.) Self-seeking ambitions are a major cause of strife within the church. Our Lord Jesus presents us with the orientation that is pleasing to God and His purpose for the whole Christian community: "*seek first his kingdom and its righteousness*" (Matt. 6:33.) As we each seek to promote the kingdom of God and live by its standard it results in unity within the church of Christ.

In his exhortation found in Romans 15, the Apostle Paul instructs us to look to the example of Christ in our endeavors to promote and preserve the spiritual unity of Christ's body: "*Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up; ³for even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me*" (Rom. 15:2-3.) Furthermore, we must look to "*the God of patience and of comfort*" for grace to practice Christian unity (Rom. 15:5a.) He will supply the patience to bear with one another. He will comfort us when, for His sake, we have yielded our rights or have suffered wrong.

Returning to the Apostle Peter's epistle, he exhorts Christians to "*be sympathetic*" towards one another. The Greek term he uses (συμπαθέω) means to share an experience or feeling, to enter into a brother's life, understanding what he is thinking and feeling. As the Apostle Paul expresses it: "*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn*" (Rom. 12:15.) As Christians we must seek to be sympathetic with one another because we share a common spiritual life and identity: "*When one part [of the body] suffers, all the [other] parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the [other] parts rejoice with it. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*" (1 Cor. 12:26-27.)

Peter goes on to write, "*love one another as brothers.*" This is the commandment of Christ our Lord: "*I give you a new commandment, Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another*" (Jn. 13:34.) The love to which our Lord refers involves loyalty and commitment, as the Book of Proverbs indicates, "*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*" (Prov. 17:17.) Then, too, love to which our Lord refers involves self-sacrifice, as evidenced by our Lord's own love for us: "*No one has any greater love than to lay down his life for his friends*" (Jn. 15:13.) According to Peter, this love for the brethren is one of the great purposes for which we have been redeemed: "*Since you have, by obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere love of your brothers, earnestly love one another from the heart, ²³having been born again*" (1 Pet. 1:22-23a.)

Next, Peter exhorts us to "*be compassionate.*" That is to say, we are to be kind and openhearted; as opposed to being cold, callous, uncaring and unfeeling. The Apostle Paul writes: "*Get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and clamor and*

slander, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God by Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:31-32.)

Then, Peter continues, *"be humble-minded."* This is the mind of Christ our Savior, which He calls us to imitate: *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29.)* This was the attitude our Lord exhibited in His relationship to His disciples. In the upper room on the night when He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus assumed the role of a menial servant in ministering to His disciples out of love for them:

Knowing that the Father had put all things under his authority, and that he had come forth from God and was returning to God, ⁴[Jesus] got up from [the] supper [table] and laid aside his robe. He took a towel and wrapped it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (Jn. 13:3-5)

Again, this is the attitude He expects to see reproduced in us:

After he had washed their feet and put back on his robe, he sat down again. Then he asked them, Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³You call me, Teacher, and, Lord: and you speak correctly; that is what I am. ¹⁴If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have given you an example, you also should do as I have done to you. (Jn. 13:12-15)

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter exhorts us to practice a Christ-like behavior towards one another: *"Do not repay evil for evil, or insult for insult."* To retaliate for personal injury is not the example of Christ our Savior, as Peter has previously noted:

... Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example with the intention that you should follow in his footsteps. ²²He "committed no sin, neither was [any] deceit found in his mouth." ²³When they insulted him, he did not insult them; when he suffered, he did not threaten; rather, he committed himself to him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:21-23)

An attitude that seeks revenge and retaliation is contrary to our calling. Consider Romans 12:17,21, *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone ... ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

"Do not repay evil for evil, or insult for insult. On the contrary," Peter continues, *"bless each other."* This was the purpose of Christ's coming, namely, to provide blessing in the form of forgiveness and reconciliation to God, as opposed to executing judgment: *"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but [rather], that the world might be saved through him" (Jn. 3:17.)* This is

how Christ instructs us to live among men, (and certainly among our brethren as fellow members of His spiritual body, the church):

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you ... ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that ... ³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Lk. 6:27-28,31-33,35-36)

Let us practice the Christ-like life, in order to minister blessing—especially to our Christian brethren. Note the thrust of Peter's words: *"Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult; on the contrary, **bless each other; for this is [part of] your calling**"* (3:9a.) As Christians, it is our God-given calling to demonstrate and exhibit the grace and goodness of God to men and to minister that grace and goodness to them; and to do so especially to our brethren in Christ.

II. Practice the Christ-like Life, ...In Order to Inherit God's Blessing

Take another look at Peter's words: *"Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult; on the contrary, **bless each other; for this is [part of your] calling, so that you may inherit blessing**"* (3:9.)

Scripture teaches that it is the Christ-like life that receives the blessing of God. Speaking with regard to Christ, the writer to the Hebrews testifies: *"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; **therefore** God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy"* (Heb. 1:9.)

The purpose of our redemption is that the life of Christ may be reproduced in us: *"those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers"* (Rom. 8:29.) The Christ-like life is not an option; it is the natural result of the new birth, as the Apostle John writes: *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love"* (1 Jn. 4:7-8.) Furthermore, the Christ-like life is the necessary requirement if we are to receive *"the blessing [of God]."*

The Apostle Peter reinforces his teaching by appealing to the Old Testament Scriptures, quoting from Psalm 34:12-16a,

Whoever loves life and desires to see many good days, ¹³let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking lies; ¹⁴let him turn away from evil and do

good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹⁵The eyes of Jehovah are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; ¹⁶the face of Jehovah is against those who do evil. (Psl. 34:12-16a)

The Psalmist is teaching us how we may enjoy the blessing of God—how we may “*see good days.*” He informs us that the way to receive the divine blessing is to practice the Christ-like life: have a tongue that refrains from evil; live a life that rejects evil in favor of what is morally good; and exhibit a diligent pursuit of peace with God and man. The Psalmist concludes that the LORD’s favor (His blessing) rests upon the righteous—but He sets Himself against the wicked, (those who practice sin and refuse to practice the Christ-like life.)

Note: Peter speaks of “inheriting” the blessing; he does not speak of “earning” the divine blessing. The Christ-like life is not the result of our personal efforts and endeavors to conform our lives to the life of Christ. On the contrary, the Christ-like life is the result of the grace of God operating in us, transforming us into the likeness of Christ our Savior, as the Apostle Paul testifies: “*we ... beholding ... the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from [one degree of] glory to [a greater degree of] glory, which comes from the Lord, [namely,] the Spirit*” (2 Cor. 3:18.) It is not a matter of Christ merely being our example or role model, and the exhortation for us to try hard to become like Him. On the contrary, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, is dwelling in His people, and we must yield ourselves to Him, allowing Him to re-shape us into His image, just as Paul describes it in Ephesians 5:25b-27,

... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water by the word—²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in glory, without blemish or wrinkle or any [other] such thing, but being holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25b-27)

It is also important to appreciate the fact that this whole matter of becoming like Christ is a process that the Holy Spirit continues to carry out in the Christian’s life until the day of glory. Note, again, 2 Corinthians 3:18, “*we ... beholding ... the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from [one degree of] glory to [a greater degree of] glory, which comes from the Lord, [namely,] the Spirit.*” The Greek present active participle, best translated, we “*are being transformed,*” indicates an ongoing, continuing activity.

Let us practice the Christ-like life, in order that we may inherit the blessing of God. The Christ-like life is the final product of the new birth. The Christ-like life is a progressive process that takes place throughout the Christian’s earthly life. The Christ-like life is produced, not by resorting to our own efforts, but by relying upon Christ—yielding to His Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

As Christians, our attitude and conduct towards one another, and towards our neighbor, should be characterized by the practice of Christ-like virtues. By the grace of God, may the Christ-like life characterize our relationships, so that we may minister blessing and inherit the blessing of God.