

LIVING LIFE IN THE CHURCH

1 Peter 3:8-17

From some of the stories we hear or read about church splits, we might think that someone needs to write a book on how to get along with each other in the church. Well, someone has already made an excellent start on this. In fact, both Paul and Peter addressed the issue in their writings. Paul had the most comprehensive discussion on this because he was attempting to correct problems in the dysfunctional church at Corinth. Peter's writing on this is more in the genre of good advice that, if followed, would prevent conflicts in a local body of believers. In fact, these principles will work in most group settings.

⁸To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For, "THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. ¹¹"HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. ¹²"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL." ¹³Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, ¹⁵but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. 1 Peter 3:8-17 (NASB95)

In second part of Chapter two (See Living Life in a Fallen World) Peter described several situations in which we find ourselves and he advised those early Christians how to behave in such a way that God is glorified by what people observe us doing in these various situations. He addressed issues regarding how we should relate to various authorities we encounter in our daily walk. He also had some comments about our general conduct in any situation. In the summary we find here, he proceeds to sum up what he had further to say, in general rules; which regarded all sorts of Christians, magistrates and subjects, masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children, old and young, rich and poor, of whatsoever state, age, sex, or condition. Peter's "the sum of all is this" is the same remedy Paul applied to the church at Corinth. "Unity in the church" can be described as "harmony" or "be ye all of one mind." In this call for unity, he is not calling for us to be clones of each other and have the same jobs, interest, hobbies, dispositions; however, he did want sameness of judgment with respect to the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel. In these things the saints should be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment; for as the church is but one body, of which Christ is the head, there should be but one mind in it; even as there is but one Spirit of God. Since we all belong to the same family, there should be a unity of spirit and mind, and what we say with respect to the Gospel.

In terms that could be borrowed from the Sermon on the Mount and the Fruit of the Spirit, Peter listed desirable characteristics that should be descriptive of the Church of Jesus Christ (or any organization where Christians are involved). In verses 10-12, Peter backed up his instructions to these Christians with an extensive quote from Psalm 34 (verses 12-16) that addresses the proper relational conduct we should have as God's people.

If we do these things, then we should have little trouble in life. Sometimes there are problems even if we are doing all the right things and we need to be prepared to deal with such

situations in the proper way. The early church had many instances where Christians suffered for “righteousness sake.” The proper way to deal with such persecution is found in his quote from Isaiah 8:12 (do not fear their intimidation) but give Christ the proper place in our hearts as Lord of our lives and give witness of why we have hope even in the midst of troubles.

If we will always choose the “high road” in our relationship and interactions with people, then we will not have any regrets in the long run. Consistent, Christlike behavior will be vindicated and even those who are enemies of the Cross will one day conclude the rightness of such behavior.