



People often ask me if I like being a pastor and working for a church. And what I often say is this: What I love about church is the people. What I dislike about church is the people. Wherever two or three are gathered, yes, God is with them, but in my experience, conflict is also not far away.

John Stott talks about the beautiful mess called the church in his book, *The Contemporary Christian*: “The problem we experience, whenever we think about the church, concerns the tension between the ideal and the reality. The ideal is beautiful. The church is the chosen and beloved people of God, his own special treasure, the covenant community to whom he has committed himself forever, engaged in continuous worship of God and in compassionate outreach to the world, a haven of love and peace, and a pilgrim people headed to the eternal city. But in reality we who claim to be the church are often a motley rabble of rather scruffy individuals, half-educated and half-saved, uninspired in our worship, constantly bickering with each other, concerned more for our maintenance than our mission, struggling and stumbling along the road, needing constant rebuke and exhortation, which are readily available from both Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles.” *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World*, pp. 219-220.

Do you ever struggle with the “ideal vs the reality of church”? We all have idealistic views of the church and it doesn’t take long before reality sets in and you realize the church is beautiful and messy at the same time. It doesn’t take long for you to say I love the church and its people and there are times I’m annoyed by the church and its people.

Today we continue our series in a book of the New Testament called 1 Peter. It’s a letter written over 2000 years ago to a group of early followers of Jesus who were scattered all over Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. He’s writing this letter to the church and for the church who were beginning to experience persecution and suffering.

Apostle Peter began the letter talking about our identity as a follower of Christ, an elect exile. We are exiles, foreigners, strangers and aliens in this world because of our commitment to Jesus Christ. He then moves from identity—who you are—to ethics—how you live—because behavior flows from identity. What you do is who you are. All throughout the letter, Peter is answering a single question in multiple ways, one that is incredibly practical today: How do Christians live in a non-Christian society? How do

we respond to a world that thinks we are irrelevant and extreme? How do we live out our faith in a way that both honors God and blesses our neighbors?

In the past few weeks we’ve looked at how the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, impacts our horizontal relationships. Peter has just addressed the household which included slaves, masters, husbands and wives. And today, Peter is speaking to **everyone**. He says, “all of you” or in southern dialect it’s, “ya’ll.” What he says in our text is incredibly important. It’s important to every single relationship you have. Even if you are not a Christian, these principles are timeless and true.

For those of you who consider CPC your church family, the stakes are even higher. If we don’t listen to Peter’s counsel, or if we choose to ignore it, we will not only hurt our relationships to those closest to us, but those within the church as well. Ignoring Peter’s counsel here, I believe, can destroy a church. That’s why these verses are pretty straightforward. You don’t need a theological degree to understand them. What Peter says is very simple. He doesn’t want anyone to misunderstand him. There’s very little interpretation needed. But, in my experience, what he says is painfully hard to do.

In these verses Peter is going to tell us to do two things:

- Think about what you say
- Think about what you do

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For,

**“Whoever would love life
and see good days**

must keep their tongue from evil

and their lips from deceitful speech.

They must turn from evil and do good;

they must seek peace and pursue it.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous

and his ears are attentive to their prayer,

but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:8-12).

Think About What You Say

Earlier in his letter, in the passage almost before this one, Peter reminded us how Jesus responded to mistreatment. In 1 Peter 2:21-25, we see how Jesus set the example for us: ***“No deceit was found in his mouth.”*** When they insulted him, he didn't retaliate. In the face of torture and crucifixion, Jesus was careful about what he said. A few weeks ago, my big idea was, “Shut up and trust God.” Peter has not left this train of thought. Think about what you say.

Did you know we will spend the majority of our lives talking? On average we speak about twenty-five thousand words per day. That's about fifty pages in print, which means that every week you speak the equivalent of a John Grisham novel. If all your words were put onto paper, each year you would have a library of about 50 books. Speaking takes up about one-fifth of your life. If you'll spend 20% of your life speaking, doesn't it deserve your careful attention? Isn't it worth doing it right? If you want to love your life and see good days, Peter says, think about what you say. The tongue, is one of the most dangerous weapons we have. When I was a High School Pastor, I would teach about the power of the tongue. I would go down to the local Carniceria and buy a large cow's tongue as a prop. High school boys loved it!

Listen to a few of these Proverbs:

“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” 18:21

“Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.” 13:3

“The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” 12:18

“Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.” 12:18

If God has been teaching me anything lately, it's been about the importance of watching what I say. My words, your words, carry weight and they come with consequences. Peter says: ***“Do not repay...insult with insult”*** (v. 9). ***“Repay evil with blessing”*** (v. 9b). ***“You must keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech”*** (v. 10). Instead of insults, evil and deceit, we bless and we pray.

The word “blessing” means to pronounce a good word upon someone. It means to speak well of someone publicly. Peter says we are free to bless others because we've inherited a blessing. In fact, it's part of our calling; we've been blessed to be a blessing. Not only do we bless people, we pray for them. Why? Because in verse 12 it says that God is watching us and he is the one listening to our prayers. ***“His ears are attention to their prayer”*** (v. 12). In other words, if you have anything bad to say, say it to God in prayer.

What does this look like in real life? How do we bless and not curse? How do we watch what we say? I've shared this story before, but it powerfully illustrates the point Peter is making. It's a story about a Christian soldier living in a barracks with his unit. Each evening, when he would read his Bible and pray before going to bed, he was mocked and insulted by the soldier across the aisle. One night a pair of muddy combat boots came flying at this Christian soldier. The next morning, the hostile soldier found his boots at the foot of his bed, cleaned and polished and ready for inspection. Several soldiers in this company eventually became Christians as a result of the inner strength of one who could return blessing for insult.

Think about what you say. Talk less. Bless people. Pray more. Not only should we think about what we say, the next key to living the good life is....

Think About What You Do

Peter says, “If you want a happy life and good days...turn from evil and do good.” It's not enough to think carefully about what you say, you need to think about what you do.

Sometimes though, Christians have the bad habit of defining their faith by what they **don't** do: I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't listen to secular music, I don't wear certain kinds of clothes, I don't let my children watch the Disney Channel, I don't let my family root for the Dodgers. I'm not making a statement about any of those things; all I am trying to say is that in addition to turning away from doing bad things, we also need to put some energy into doing good things. We need to seek out opportunities to do good. And to back up what he is saying, Peter gives us five adjectives that should characterize followers of Jesus. They are all opportunities to do good:

Be like-minded

The phrase means harmony, unity of mind, of one mind, literally: “same think.” This is a call for unity, not uniformity. Peter is not addressing all of our human preferences and saying you need to be like-minded in where you live, where you work, and what you do in your free time. He's talking about unity in our spiritual priorities.

The church is an incredible mix of people with different ethnicities, ages, demographics, and backgrounds and yet we all come together to worship and follow Jesus Christ. We are united in the gospel. We are united in the essentials of the Christian faith. And in those we need to be like-minded. Think about what you do.

Be sympathetic

Be understanding, care deeply about the needs, joys, and sorrows of others. This means being responsive to the needs of others. It means feeling what others feel so you can be sensitive to the need. I'll be honest with you, I struggle with this. I'm not a very sympathetic guy. Some of that is because of how I was

raised. With no father in the house and a mother in and out of rehab, I was forced to grow up and be independent at a very young age. I was cooking, cleaning, working outside the house, doing homework, and taking myself to school and to baseball practice as early as eight years old. In high school I graduated at the top of my class, was the student body vice president, co-captain of the football team, all while holding down a part-time job at the mall. All through college I worked part-time, paid all my bills and was completely on my own. The downside of all that is today, I often struggle to have sympathy for people who can't do it all, like I did. This shows up in my marriage, my parenting and my leadership. But, by God's grace, he is helping me to be sympathetic. Think about what you do.

Love one another

This is brotherly love (*philadelphoi*) and mutual affection. Brotherly love is the middle of the five adjectives, and that was done on purpose to show how it is the most important of the five virtues. No matter what, love fellow believers like a brother or sister. For instance, consider my twin brother Chris. Growing up we were always together. We went through a lot together, but in high school we drifted apart because we had a different group of friends. But, he always knew and I always knew, we had each other's backs.

If our church is really a community of faith, hope and love, if our church truly is a family, Peter says, have that same kind of love for your brothers and sisters in the church. Do you have each other's back around here? Think about what you do.

Be compassionate

The word means to be tenderhearted, a feeling deep within your gut. It means being sensitive and caring towards others, especially those who are dealing with pain. Biblical compassion always led to action. In Jesus's ministry compassion led to the blind seeing, to thousands of hungry people getting fed, and to dead people being raised to life. Remember, Peter was writing this to people in the Roman world and the Roman world was cruel! Be compassionate. Think about what you do.

Be humble

Humility means that we consider others more important than ourselves. It's not just something you do, but it's how you think. Like compassion, humility was considered a weakness in the Roman world. It was actually used as a derogatory term!

Jesus once again is our supreme example. Jesus claimed to be God (highest you can go) and yet claimed to be humble (lowest). In his ministry, Jesus showed humility all the time. On the night he was betrayed, before they sat down for the Passover meal, Jesus washed his disciple's feet. Jesus did what no one else wanted to do. It was actually a job for a household slave. Jesus,

the king, came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

Think about what you do. Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and be humble. Why is this important? NT theologian Thomas Schreiner writes, "Peter believed that those who have received new life from God will live transformed lives and that such lives provide evidence (necessary evidence!) that they have been converted." To put it another way, living a godly life does not earn salvation, but it is an evidence of salvation.

We can watch what we eat and watch what we do, but our hearts aren't in it. You know what I'm talking about? It all comes down to the right attitude. A married couple had a quarrel and ended up giving each other the silent treatment. A week into their mute argument, the man realized he needed his wife's help. In order to catch a flight to Chicago for a business meeting, he had to get up at 5 a.m. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5 a.m." The next morning the man woke up only to discover his wife was already out of bed; it was 9 a.m. and his flight had long since departed. He was about to find his wife and demand an answer for her failings when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. He read, "It's 5 a.m. Wake up." It is not easy to live at peace with others!

Honestly, you probably have a good reason to hold a grudge against every person you know. I bet everyone here has at least one reason to resent one of our staff members, elders or deacons. I bet this is true for your co-workers, your employers, and even your family members as well.

Peter is calling followers of Christ to get over it, to rise above it, and let it go. Why? Because, Peter says, when you make an effort to get along with others, God takes notice, "***For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous...***" (3:12). And what you say and what you do tells the world who you really are.

So, your calling as a follower of Jesus is to bless God in all you say and do. You are God's people. You have been saved through the power of his blood and resurrection. You have experienced his love, forgiveness, and mercy. You have been given eternal life through his Son Jesus Christ.

How can you respond? By treating others the way God treated us. Think about what you say. By following the example of Jesus, you have the power to be slow to speak and slow to anger. Think about what you do. Every day you have the choice between life or death. Between blessing or curse. Between good or evil. Your calling is to bless God in all you say and do.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2017 Central Peninsula Church North, San Bruno, CA
Catalog No.1427-10N

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, March 19, 2017 at Central Peninsula Church North
300 Piedmont Avenue | San Bruno, CA 94066 | 650 349.1278 | www.cpcweb.org. Additional copies available on request.