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Living with All People

There was a student living in the dorm who rarely went to class or studied! He spent most of his time at the arcade consoles that were in the main room at the entry of the dorm. Yet, he wasn't flunking. In fact, he was a Literature Major carrying a high "C" average. When asked about how he was able to stay in school and get average grades, he always gave credit to the campus tutor named Clifford.

This of course raised all manner of curiosity until one day a couple of students confronted him in his room refusing to leave until he gave them Clifford's contact information. In response, he said, "Repeat after me, 'Clifford Notes'!" At that point the students realized that he was talking about *CliffsNotes*.



What are *CliffsNotes*? *CliffsNotes* is a study guide on a piece of literature, typically a book. It will summarize the story, the characters, and address such things as the protagonist and antagonist, the plot and plot complications, theme, and a whole lot more.

1 Peter 3 is the *CliffsNotes* to Peter's work in 1 Peter 2:11-3:7. In this portion of Scripture, Peter addresses what godly living looks like in a hostile world.

1 Peter was penned at the start of the Neronian persecution of AD 64. At this time, Nero made Christianity an outlawed religion which made it "open season" for attacking, persecuting, tormenting, and even killing Christians. In fact, it was during this persecution that both Peter and Paul lost their lives! Accordingly, Peter endeavored to encourage his Christian brethren as they faced opposition and attack from:

- The Civil Government, 1 Peter 2:13-17.
- Masters/Officials at work, 1 Peter 2:18-20.
- The Military or anyone who would seek to attack and/or torture the Christian, 1 Peter 2:21-25.
- The Non-Christian or Rebellious Spouse, 1 Peter 3:1-7.

In 1 Peter 3:8-12, Peter gives a summary treatment — the *CliffsNotes* version — of how the child of God was to live in each of the preceding scenarios and still honor Christ. Notice how he began by addressing our attitude as it relates to the family of God.

1 Peter 3:8, "To sum up [by this, Peter is NOT closing out this epistle, BUT is arriving at a mini-climax based on his previous teaching in 2:12-3:7], let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit."

When it comes to our interaction with one another first, and then this world, Peter calls us to five overarching virtues which are particularly relevant in a world of conflict.¹ He says, "let all be harmonious" ὁμόφρων (*homophrōn*); this is a compound word which literally means "same think." The idea is that believers are to live in a harmony with one another — a "harmony" which comes from an individual commitment to the truth of God's word which then produces a unity of heart amongst God's people. Listen to what Paul wrote.

1 Corinthians 1:10, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that

you all agree, and there be no divisions among you [Paul here is arguing for the Corinthians to ‘be harmonious.’ And how were they to do this?], but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

There is no question in Scripture. A “common” understanding of truth produces like-mindedness in one’s actions, judgments, and commitments! This is the “harmony” which Peter is exhorting here.

Secondly, Peter says “let all be... sympathetic.” This virtually is a transliteration of the Greek, συμπαθής (*sumpathēs*). The word means “sharing the same feeling.” From this we see that Christians NOT ONLY are to be united in the Truth, BUT they also must be ready to sympathize with the pain of others- for that is the way of the Master.

Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin.”

In order for Christ to “sympathize” with us, He was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

From this we conclude that “sympathy” comes when you and I “come down from our high horse” and truthfully examine our lives — NOT glossing over our weaknesses, embarrassments, or sin. BUT, with the safety of Christ’s love and forgiveness, we embrace what it means to be a sinner! When we do that — when we understand that we are no different from the greatest of sinners — “sympathy” for the struggles and difficulty of another sinner will NOT be a problem!

Thirdly, Peter says, “let all be... brotherly: φιλάδελφος (*philadelphos*).” This likewise is a compound of two Greek words: φιλέω (*phileō*) which generally refers to human love and ἀδελφός (*adelphos*) which is the word for “brother.” Combined, the word denotes the kind of love that is found amongst siblings.

It amazes me the commitment that exists amongst siblings. Very few of us would allow someone to talk to us, conflict with us, or ignore us the way a family member has and does. And yet, if that very same family member were in trouble, we’d come to their rescue in a moment! It is this seemingly impervious bond that is being spoken about here.

Fourth, “let all be... kindhearted”: εὐσπλαγχνος (*eusplagchnos*). The root of this word, σπλάγχνον (*splagchnon*), refers to one’s internal organs and so is translated “bowels” or “intestines” (e.g., Acts 1:18). Think of the Vagus Nerve which goes from the belly to the eye. When we see something that is visually disturbing, what often happens? We feel sick to our stomachs! In this regard, “kindhearted” is to be moved by someone’s plight or condition. It speaks of genuine care and concern!

Fifth, “let all be... humble in spirit”: ταπεινόφρων (*tapeinophrōn*). This likewise is a

compound word taken from ταπεινός (*tapeinos*) which speaks of humility/the viewing of others as more important than ourselves and φρήν (*phrēn*) which refers to the seat of one's thinking.² Combined, the idea is that of a conviction that flows from the seat of our being, specifically that (1) Christ is awesome, (2) we are nothing, and (3) everyone else is more important than us.

When it comes to interacting with the world in which we live, these five attitudes are that which we must endeavor to possess from the core of our being to avoid conflict.

Now if you say, *"But very few of these are me! How do I cultivate them?"* They come NOT from focusing on them, BUT by being real with Christ, accepting the reality of your own sinfulness, and then basking in the light of Christ's love and forgiveness! Utilizing the same concepts as in our text, Paul wrote this:

Ephesians 4:32, "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other [How?], just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

When we are cold toward people, rigid, and unforgiving, it is NOT because the people around you are so wretched. RATHER, it is because you don't see that you are wretched, and God has forgiven you! Think of the parable of the unrighteous steward.

In Matthew 18:21-35 we read the parable of the unrighteous steward where the story begins with a servant owing a landlord 10,000 talents. Recall that a "talent" is NOT the language of money, BUT of a weight of gold, silver, or any other item of exchange. For example, from the Old Testament we are told that the total amount of gold given for use in the Temple was just over 8,000 talents (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:4, 7). The weight of the gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold (cf. 1 Kings 10:14). The total annual revenue collected by the Roman government in the second century A.D. from Idumea, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee was about 900 talents — the governor here owed 10,000 Talents.

The Attic talent, which probably is the weight mentioned here, amounted to no less than 6,000 denarii or 16 1/2 years' worth of labor for the common man. In fact, if we measured 10,000 talents against the Attic talent, it would have taken the common man 166,667 years to amass this much wealth. Or assuming an average life span of 60 years, it would have taken 2,777 lifetimes to accumulate 10,000 talents! That is over 456,000 times more than a debt of 100 denarii!

Translated to where we live, I want you to think of a fellow Christian in your life who has hurt you... your nemesis, so to speak. I challenge you to list 100 of his/her sins on a piece of paper. I don't think you can. Yet let's say you could... do you understand that while you just had a hard time counting 100 of sins of the one in Christ who has hurt you so greatly, nevertheless you are guilty of 456,000 times more sins against Christ, and He has forgiven you!

If you will come to grips with this, you most certainly will be a Christian who loves much! In this regard, consider the words of Christ to the Pharisee who looked with arrogance upon the sinful woman in his presence:

Luke 7:47: "...he who is forgiven little, loves little."

In our interaction with one another, a growing faith will result in a tenderness, kindness, and compassion toward all men! If we are to enjoy a blessed life on this side of the grave, these Attitudes must be cultivated and so developed in our lives! Yet there is more. Peter next set his focus on our conduct as it relates to the world.

1 Peter 3:9a, "Not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead..."

Truly, you can't be in this world without the world conflicting with us. When that happens, what are we to do?

"Not returning evil for evil [the word for 'evil' denotes the inherent quality of badness, not just bad words or actions] or insult for insult [the word for 'insult' references 'an abusive railing against' and so cursing]."

In this regard it is important to note that the exhortation here is a present participle, expressing a negative command. As such, it could be translated as "stop returning." In other words, if a believer is not retaliating to evil with more evil, he must not start. But if he is, he must stop!

Truly, our role in this world is NOT judge or executioner. God is the Judge (cf. Leviticus 19:18; Romans 12:19)! And so, instead of taking vengeance, we are called to give something that is completely the opposite – specifically – but giving a blessing instead: the word for "blessing" comes from εὐλογέω (*eulogeō*) from which we get the word "eulogy." Here it denotes the idea of being a conduit for the blessings that accompany Kingdom Living!

In this regard, do you remember a couple weeks back how we discussed the two sides of justice? What are they? Punishment and the giving of grace! For example, it is the expressed duty of Civil Authority (1) to dole out punishment, as well as (2) to bless its citizens.

Romans 13:3-4, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."

From this text we derived a theology of authority and so what our response ought to be when it comes to being mistreated on this earth. Now as we are NOT in positions of authority – we are not a King, a Cop, a Pastor, a Parent, a Soldier, of Judge – we saw that there is a "division of labor" if you will when it comes to justice and a persecutor.

- As to vengeance, that facet of justice belongs exclusively with God (Hebrews 10:3).
- As that is the case, when it comes to our interaction with this world, all that is left when

it comes to “personal” justice is blessing. Accordingly, our role in this world when it comes to the one who offends us is to endeavor to bless them!

Now this does NOT mean that if we are in positions of authority we don’t punish; that would be a neglect of our duty.³ RATHER it means that as we individually live out the life of Christ toward mankind in general, our focus and calling is the bringing of blessing!

And so, when “evil” men do “evil” against us... when we are “insulted” ... the call is to leave judgment with God and so endeavor to “give a blessing instead.”

Naturally at this point we assume the reason... it is that we might demonstrate Christ’s face and affections to a lost and dying world and thereby be used by God to bring His children home! And there is nothing wrong with that. However, Peter here gives us another reason for living as he here exhorts... a reason we’ll get to next time!

References

Dauids, P. H. (1990). *The First Epistle of Peter (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Grudem, W. A. (2009). *1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP Numbered))*. Chicago: IVP Academic.

End Note(s)

¹ “Peter encapsulates his summary in five imperatival adjectives arranged artfully with *philadelphoi*, the love of those in the Christian community, in the center. The first and last adjectives speak of how one thinks, the second and fourth of how one feels.” (Dauids, 1990, p. 124).

² In the Greek world, this was the area of the body from the chest to the gut and hence the word φρήν (*phrēn*) which refers to this region.

³ Wayne Grudem wrote, “It should be noted here, however, that the responsibility of government to punish evildoers in 2:14 means that there will be times when not for personal revenge but as a representative of the civil government a Christian will forcefully retaliate against evil; note the same distinction between the prohibition of personal revenge and the endorsement of forceful retribution by government in Romans 12:14, 17–21 with Romans 13:1–5.” (Grudem, 2009, p. 155)