

Live in Harmony With Each Other

1 Peter 3:1-12 • 2022-07-10 • 1 Peter Series "From Cross to Crown"



Martin Luther King Jr once said, "Violence begets violence." And he was right. This world is a terrible mess of violence and discord. And it is a vicious cycle that seems impossible to stop. When someone is hurt or offended, they will fight back. After all, what do you often find yourself doing when someone offends you? Do you respond with kindness or with hatred? The automatic response to fight back can escalate even in what should be the most loving relationships. But today, as we continue our series looking at 1 Peter, we see how the Christian is called to a whole different response towards hatred and discord. As we saw last week we are not like the rest of this world. We have been called to follow Christ. How are we different? And as those called to follow Christ Peter instructs wives, husbands, and all believers to turn aside from the cycle of payback and attack. *"Live in harmony with one another...Do not repay evil with evil."* We'll consider how we are called to live in harmony with each other as we look at the first half of 1 Peter 3.

Peter is still speaking to us as if we are foreigners and exiles in this world. That doesn't just mean that we are looking forward to a new home in heaven. It means that right now we have a very different way of life. Peter has already addressed how that way of life affects our attitudes towards authority. Now he is going to speak about how our different way of life is seen in the Christian family and among one another.

He starts by addressing Christian wives. What he instructs is just as counter-cultural as his previous instruction to respect and honor everyone in authority. Here he instructs wives to submit to their husbands as the head. At the very beginning of time God established the order of creation. He did not make women inferior to men. But in fact he created Eve out of Adam's side. However, her title is that of helper. He was to be the head. They had a perfect loving relationship in which he loved her more than himself and she respected him even though he would give her anything. But that perfect loving relationship was ruined. Ever since then there has been strife between men and women, even in the closest bond of marriage.

But God in his wisdom designed that man and women might get along in marriage. Not by continual contending or fighting, but by the husband serving as the loving head and the wife yielding to his headship. And even though sin has ruined what God gave to the first man and women, his design of head and helper has not changed. So, Peter instructs believing wives to stand out as foreigners and exiles as they are submissive to their husbands. And before you might say that a Christian woman only has to submit insofar as her husband is godly, look at what Peter adds. He instructs Christian women to submit to their own husbands even if they don't believe God's Word. How far do you think the Christian faith would have spread in the homes of Christian women if the first thing they did was turn against their unbelieving husbands in everything? Instead, unbelieving men in the ancient world found their wives who came to faith in Christ were modeling a Christ-like submission in love. To be sure, Peter isn't asking them to go against God's Word. But in all other matters he asks them to submit to their husbands. By their holy and respectful behavior, they would send a message to their husbands even without saying a word.

He gives further instructions for wives regarding where they place value. This world wrongly places value on women as mere objects to be decorated and put on display. It judges the worth of women by their appearances. Some users of a popular social media platform were complaining a year ago that the videos they were capturing were automatically edited without their consent. That means that the videos had an automatic filter to change their faces to match certain beauty standards. It would literally distort their cheeks, eyes, and face contours to make them look more like a Barbie doll. Some women were complaining because it was ruining their self-image and self-esteem. Imagine the pressures on young women today to put on the correct make-up, have the correct trend in hairstyles, and wear revealing clothes to impress others. That is how the world -even the so-called women's rights advocates - allow women to be portrayed. But Peter says, *"Don't let your beauty be something outward."* He isn't saying it is wrong to have braided hair or wear jewelry. But it is wrong to let that be your source of beauty. And before you think Peter is legislating some divinely mandated dress code look at what he focuses on: inner beauty and the heart. He urges women to let their beauty be *"the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit."* This gentleness is the same thing which Christ displayed as he was "gentle and humble." And the quiet spirit is indeed one which all godly people will strive after with the Holy Spirit removing all envy, jealousy, hate, and selfish ambition. All the costly jewelry and expensive clothes of this world can't compare to being dressed in the humility of Christ. Peter says it is "precious in God's sight."

Now at this point some mistakenly object that Peter was speaking to an ancient culture and our culture is different. But Peter is speaking to Christians. And they are always different from the world. He, in fact, compares the beauty of a woman who lived two thousand years before his time in a very different culture, Sarah. He says that she adorned herself with the inner beauty of submission and gentleness. *"You are her daughters if you do what is good and do not fear anything that is intimidating."* Don't think the insults of the world can remove your true beauty in Christ.

Men are also called to stand out from this world. So many men in this world intimidate women and push them around in lovelessness. It is primarily men who treat women as objects and support the sex-trade industry. It is men who demand women degrade their bodies and rely on their outward beauty to advance anywhere. It is men who look at women and judge them according to their appearances. But Peter tells Christian men to stand out from this world. He gives Christian husbands three reasons to stand out in their role as a Christian husband. He indicates that men ought to recognize their wives are the weaker vessel. The word for "vessel" here refers to the physical body. Certainly, any woman who has given birth, raised children, and done what many women must do could never be regarded as a weaker vessel in their endurance and fortitude. But there is a reason that many are upset today when people born as biological men try to act like women and compete in women's athletics. There are indeed some very weak men and very strong women. But generally speaking, women lack the physical strength of men. Peter, who was married, was also no doubt aware of the other physical challenges women must face on a regular basis because they are the sex that is able to bear children. Men simply don't face those same challenges. Throughout history men have used this to abuse their wives and to put women down. Peter makes a point not to emphasize women as lacking testosterone, but to indicate husband's ought to treat their wives with consideration.

And the reason for treating women with loving consideration is greater than that. Peter elevates women in a way that most of the ancient world never did, "Accord them honor as fellow heirs with you of the gracious gift of life." That is why Paul could say in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female..." All believers have a new status before God. We together inherit the gift of eternal life. The idea that a woman would inherit anything was a foreign idea in ancient Asia minor. But the idea that she is just as holy, loved, and blessed by God as men stood out. Christians still follow the head and helper roles given at Creation. But they accord women with the same honor as men.

Christian men who think they are better than their wives need to hear Peter's instructions here. Christian husbands, do you show honor to your Christian wife as someone who will sit right next to you at God's table in heaven? How can you argue over dinner and fight with your wife today if you know she will sit right between you and Jesus in eternity?

Finally, Peter warns husbands who do not love and honor their wives that their prayer life will suffer. How can a Christian husband and father even begin to have family devotions and pray with his wife if he can't treat her with honor? And how can anyone expect God to listen to them if they won't even listen to their own wife?

But Peter is concerned about more than the Christian home. He is concerned about the entire Christian family. *"All of you, live in harmony with one another. Show sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility."* Just as a musical piece operates with each part complementing another, the Christian community is supposed to get along in harmony with each other. This isn't just a command for husbands and wives, children, and siblings. This is a command for you as part of the body of believers. When someone is suffering do you have sympathy? Or do you reason, "They wouldn't be suffering if they hadn't made so many mistakes." If you see a young single mother sitting across from you or behind you for worship, do you sympathize? Or do you reason she deserves a hard time and needs no help? Brotherly love means that we would help and serve one another as if helping our own family. Do we, or are we just sometimes too busy helping ourselves? Compassion comes when we start seeing the needs of others. Do you see a person who has lost their spouse or friend? Do you see someone who is struggling through sickness? What does compassion lead you to do for them? Next Peter lists humility. That means putting ourselves last. It means letting the needs of others go first. It means giving up our own rights.

Peter then closes with instructions to cease the cycle of payback. *"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Instead, speak a blessing because you were called for the purpose of inheriting a blessing."*

He concludes with the reason we do all this. We were called to it. Christ called us out of the darkness of sin and the endless spiral of fighting back against evil with evil. It is the devil's trap to let evil acts be a solution for the evil that confronts us. We are born in this trap, and it leads to death and hell. But we were called to live under Christ and in his kingdom. We were called to inherit a blessing.

"Violence begets violence; hate begets hate; and toughness begets a greater toughness. It is all a descending spiral, and the end is destruction — for everybody. Along the way of life, someone must have enough sense and morality to cut off the chain of hate." -Martin Luther King Jr. The truth is humankind never has enough sense. The hatred continues. The message taught by King was a message taught by man who had his own sins, but who understood the one man who had the sense to return hate and violence with his sacrificial love. King knew Jesus.

So that we might inherit a blessing he did not return our evil with evil. Instead, he bore the evil himself. He did not retaliate but humbled himself. He started the first chord of harmony between us and our God by taking our sins away and covering the cost. In return for all our sins we have his free gift of life. We lay our sins at the cross and leave it humbled and with a new life of faith.

We follow Christ from cross to crown as our mouths no longer speak insult or deceit, but blessing. Christ came to seek peace and pursued it. Now we, his own, seek peace and pursue it until we see him again.