

Merry Christmas. We are getting closer to our time of celebrating the coming of Jesus Christ to this earth, and it is amazing how prolific this celebration is. Christian hymns that celebrate the Christmas season are sung by so many, even in this pagan culture. But we also see so much animosity towards any recognition of the life of Christ. **Isn't that telling?** Jesus never commanded his disciples to violence, only to love and good works. This is not the kind of person we should hate, even if we disagree with his perspective. He is the kind of person to be revered. Even in his crucifixion, which is attested to in biblical and non-biblical and non-Christian sources, underscore his execution as being uneventful. There was no reciprocation of evil done to those who did evil to him. As He is being led to the high priests by the Temple Guards Jesus rebuked Peter for wanting to war against those who would take Christ. Jesus demanded that His disciples not cause bloodshed in order that He might fulfill the calling and purpose of His coming. He did nothing deserving of rebuke, and especially nothing deserving of death. And this kind of disposition to which Peter is calling us to. As he moves through the text and calls us to display certain characteristics, and avoid others, *he is simply calling us to what Jesus lived out in His earthly life. He will even go far as to say that in 3:18, and Jesus displays these dispositions that occasioned his death so that He might reconcile us to God.*

As we enter into the content of this message again, it is imperative that we remind ourselves of the reasons that we are to live this kind of Christ-like dispositions in this life. We've considered the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in previous messages, and what that does for us. In chapter 3 Peter brings out three more things. Jesus Christ is to be revered, **regarded as holy** – distinct and uplifted, in our lives, 3:15. Consequently, we are about the **same goals** that Jesus sought to accomplish, the rectification of sinful man to God and the resulting eternal enjoyment of God, 3:18. This is the only **path to true harmony** in the physical and spiritual worlds, 3:22.

If you remember what we said the last time we were in this passage, Peter reminds us that this kind of life doesn't just promise blessing in heaven, this kind of life turns the face of God towards us for good and for real current blessings now, 3:10, 12. This is **not prosperity gospel preaching** that ignores that the Christian is not out of the will of God, or even lacks faith, if they are going through a season of hardship. This is not prosperity gospel preaching that defines the level of success as those material provisions that we deem appropriate. How many preachers have appropriately caught the unamused attention of non-believing people who look at a preacher's mansion, and planes, and sports cars, and know that Jesus had nowhere to lay his head? Wealth may be part of God's provision for faithfulness, but in the Christian economy, wealth is not only a gift but a responsibility; a tool through which we can manifest God's generosity and support the Christian mandate of the gospel and discipleship, **Matthew 28:18-20**. All that being said, there is not a Christian alive who cannot sing that same hymn that filled the soul of other generations, that we can count our blessings one by one, and it really will surprise us what God has done!

These dispositions that we are to model are set in positive and negative admonitions. I would remind us again that these are the characteristics which Jesus wants displayed in every Christian's life regardless of your personality type, and I proposed the last time that we considered this that the restoration of humanity reveals the characteristics of God, which are **all** these dispositions. Peter begins with his positive admonitions. As we considered last time we met, we are to have **unity of mind**, which we distilled to a harmonious spirit, and we are to have **sympathy**, which we understood ultimately as the kind of life that makes me feel life with other believers. **Today** we want to set our sights on the remaining **three positive admonitions**, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

**First**, we begin with the admonishment towards **brotherly love**. The phrasing is a hint to all of us who have studied the common words for love that are used in ancient Biblical Greek. We have a city named after this, Philadelphia, which is said to be the city of brotherly love. There may be some modicum of truth to this since Philadelphia didn't find itself in the top 25 most dangerous cities in the US in 2019. But what exactly is brotherly love? Well, the root part of the word for love that is transferred to several other Greek words is "**phila**." We derive several English words from this, like philanthropy, which is a benevolent interest in humanity. We are all benefactors of other people's philanthropic work in the past, be it a safer cleaner neighborhood, or a public space that was paid for by some benefactor, or a hospital, or something like this. It does give us a sense as to the *generosity with which we are to*

*govern ourselves, especially towards our Christian family.* Remember these admonition are given to the church, which is comprised of God's people who were purchased by the sacrifice of Christ, and given hope of eternal life through his resurrection. We are brothers and sisters in Christ!

But I think we can look a little deeper, especially as other cultures display this, and see that there is something about family which is deeper, and which calls us to more sacrificial action. Proverbs tells us that **"a friend loves at all times and that a brother is born for adversity," Proverbs 17:7.** We see that and think, yeah that's right, I always fight with my sibling. The problem is that we forget that Hebrew poetry uses repetition to underscore its point and to clarify it. A brother is a friend that loves at all times, especially in adversity. That is the intent of that passage. At the end of the day, whatever the issues, this is family. We have responsibility to family, and it is God given. It is **brotherly** love.

Perhaps nowhere is this seen more starkly than in Paul's direction to Timothy of how to help widows within the Christian community who are in need. **"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever," 1 Timothy 5:8.**

Peter admonishes the Christian church that this is the kind of disposition that we should have. So, the application is quite simple, really. Would the people in our own household describe us as being this loving towards them? Paul underscores in **1 Timothy 3**, that the man who does not rule his own household well is not to have a position of authority over God's church. Our private world at home is a tell-tale sign of who we really are. Our home lives are where we need to start. Are we truly loving towards our brothers and sisters, our parents and grandparents, and our children and grandchildren? Are we philanthropic towards them, not only in word, but in deed, in action? That assumes a disposition of grace and mercy when we are sinned against at home, and of repentance when we have sinned against others in our home. We should never hear the words from our family that they never heard us say they were sorry. We should never hear the words from our family that they often said sorry but never changed. We should never hear the words from our family that we were unforgiving. And my friend, as Peter makes it clear here, **if it is a true disposition at home it must also be at church, with members of the household of faith. Let us strive to make this a place rich in philanthropy towards one another!**

Peter moves to the fourth admonition in the text, and our **second** in our sermon today. We are to be **tender hearted**. This is really quite humorous for our English way of framing things. The word literally means, to have healthy intestines. There are so many ways we could have fun with that...but I'll stay on point. It is used **metaphorically** to describe being **compassionate**. We might say something like, I've got a gut feeling. Paul uses this word in **Ephesians 4:32**, and it is in the context of telling people to **live as they have learned of Christ**. Jesus was compassionate. Jesus showed compassion to the woman caught in adultery, "neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more," said Christ. He had compassion on parents and raised the dead to life or healed their loved ones. Matthew and Mark recount the compassion that Jesus had on the crowds that followed Him because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Specifically, that they were confused and helpless. The result is that Jesus taught them, provided for them, and healed those that needed healing. Jesus healed their minds and bodies.

When we consider it like this, it is not out of reach for us. **The need to engage in a gracious and uplifting way should be a gut reaction.** How can we speak in ways that will be an encouragement to other people? How can we help them think rightly so that they are not left in confusion, desperation, or robbed of joy that God intends for those that love Him? How can we seek their betterment? I remember when Marjorie had surgery for cancer several years ago. Our church family sent words of encouragement, came and mowed our yard, made food, prayed for us, sent us fall sort of little gifts as the Lord led them, just to show their affection and empathy for us in that time. These were blessings of indescribable proportion. I've heard of God's people here leaving notes for one another to encourage them, of fixing cars or houses for those who are not able. I've heard of others receiving medical aid from those that have those gifts, and of receiving anonymous funds for necessary medical equipment. That is compassion in action, and Westwood, I want to commend you for your faithfulness. You are functioning well. But let us be zealous for good works. Let us be striving to outdo one another in love and good works. 2020 and going into 2021 are opportunities for the church as the culture seeks some healing for the social, political, physical, mental, and

financial distress it has experienced. We can display towards one another the kind of affection that Peter is describing here as normal and expected conduct of those who are sons and daughters of God through Christ! That kind of affection towards one another is infectious. It is desirable. It is necessary. It overflows from our circles into the lives of those without Christ. Through that display of good works, those that do not believe will glorify God because of us, whether in this life or the next. Ostensibly, if we see what Christ did, we can say that to have compassion is to properly assess a person's state of being, they were confused and helpless, and after assessing that state of being we employ whatever means we have at our disposal to help them, because that is what Jesus did. **John 13:15, "for I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."**

From unity of mind, to sympathy, to brotherly love, to compassion, to the fifth positive admonition given by Peter, and our **third** point for today's message, and that is that we are to be of **humble mind**. This particular word has the same root in Greek, but different manuscripts use a prefix that underscores the idea of humility, while others the idea of being friendly, kind, or well disposed towards others. They seem to be somewhat interchangeable words that spin on the same ideas. Strong's actually assigns them the same number.

For those of you unfamiliar with Strong's Concordance, let me just spend a moment to explain it. In 1890 a man named James Strong published a dictionary for biblical words. He assigned numbers to the English words in the Bible he was using, which at the time was the King James Bible. Each number represented a Hebrew or Greek word. It helped the layman who didn't have Greek and Hebrew exposure to be able to do a more efficient word study by tracing the numbers instead of the words. We can use different words to translate ideas, but sometimes the words don't communicate the same way to us as they would have in the native language of the author. This was Strong's way of bridging that gap for us. It is a tremendous tool for your personal study, and even though I have training in biblical languages, I still reach for this work while I prepare messages, as it is an invaluable gift and resource.

If we come back to our word, however, friendliness and humility are really conjoined virtues. If we think too much of ourselves, we are unapproachable, cold, and even condescending towards other people. There certainly are characteristics that make us less enjoyable to be around, and a good friend will certainly be willing to help us with those things, but we must not have an attitude of superiority. God knows that this country does not need any more elitism to fill its corridors, but we must remember that people don't become elitists because their affiliations made them that way, it is that some environments are better at revealing what is in our hearts already! So, biblically speaking, saying that power corrupts is a false statement. We are corrupt, and when given power we use it to satisfy our corruption, if we are not checked. We are proud and arrogant people by nature, but the nature of the Christian, as mandated and directed by God through His redemptive power, is one of humility and kindness towards others. How much better do you think yourself than other Christians around you here? We will not manifest the disposition of Christ so long as we see ourselves as better than God's people.

Perhaps we ought to consider the kinds of ways that a proud and unfriendly heart displays itself. Thinking ourselves better because we have more education, are better spoken, better connected in social and business worlds, better looking, more influential, better mannered. The list of things that make us feel superior to others is incredible. But think of how Christ lets us see the power of a humble life. He forgave people their sins, meaning the sin needed to be brought to light so that it might be confessed. So is the conversion of the woman at the well. Jesus makes sure she understands not only her life pattern of sin, but the fuel for her sin. Do you remember how she beckons her friends to come meet Jesus? She goes to them and says, "come and see a man who told me everything I ever did." True humility and friendliness allowed Jesus to speak to the heart issues without people feeling like they were being reduced, or feeling like the person speaking is superior. **Christ, who is God and there is no one higher, did not give an air of superiority when dealing with others, especially in their sin. That my friends, is amazing!** Every single person has dignity because they bear the image of God. Humility allows us to engage in a way that lets people see the joy of life with Him, without being diminished by someone in as much need of Christ as they are.

You know I can just see Peter having to stop and meditate on this as he thought back on his time with Jesus. How often did Jesus have to rebuke the disciples, even Peter, for thinking themselves better, for being unapproachable.

Just think of the time Jesus rebuked them for running kids off that wanted to be with Jesus. Just think about the time that Jesus rebuked the twelve for getting put out that Mary used up perfume that cost a year's salary, by the common worker's salary, simply to worship her Lord. Jesus says that Mary anointed Him for His burial, and in the presence of these brutish men declared that her act of kindness and humility would be told everywhere the gospel was told! What an honor for those that are so humble. But that is the point isn't it. God promises to bless those who display these dispositions of divine character.

We are surging forward towards Christmas, whether it be quarantined or in a celebration with others. It is a day where we remember that the friendliest of all human beings was the humblest of people. He had a humble birth. His mother and father would be disdained by the religious hypocrites of their day because they presumed that Mary and Joseph had conceived Jesus before they were married, [John 8:41](#). His birth was declared to humble people. It was shepherds who were out in the field who heard the chorus of angels. He came from a humble town. Can anything good rise out of Nazareth, [John 1:46](#), [7:52](#)? He led a humble life, [Matthew 8:23](#). He died a humble death, [Matthew 27:28](#). But all this humility led to His glory as we are told that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead. And God now has put all things under His feet so that all is in subjection to Him, [Ephesians 1:22](#), [Psalm 8:6](#), [1 Corinthians 15:27](#), [Philippians 2:9-11](#).

This Christmas the **best gift** we can give to ourselves, and to others, is to **be the people that God has called us to be**. It will turn the face of God towards us for blessing. What greater gift can we ask for as Christians that to experience the vigilant care of our Father in the midst of such a broken world. May God help us to live as our Savior that we might live in the joy of the Lord. Amen.