

Jesus said:

- **Matt5:44** “**Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you**”
- **Matthew 5:39** **Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.**
- **Luke 6:28** **bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.**
- **Luke 6:27** **do good to those who hate you,**

And I reckon Peter’s probably remembering the teaching of Jesus, when he got to this part of his letter...

But as I read this, for a while I couldn’t work out “Is Peter talking about relationships in the church? Or, is he was talking about how we deal with people who hate us because we’re Christians and who hate the church...

Because:

- when he starts out in V8, he’s talking about having a “**unity of mind**” and “**brotherly love**”, and so he’s **got** to be talking about relationships in the church
- but by V12, he’s talking about how **the face of the Lord is against those who do evil**, which leads in to V13 & onwards (which we’ll study after Christmas), where he’s talking about Christian persecution, and suffering for Christ...

And so, I realised, “He’s actually talking about both”...

As brothers and sisters in Christ, the Holy Spirit in us, helps us to 'get our act into gear', as we begin to love one another, and we don't retaliate against one another (in the church)... We begin to love one another, with the same love that Jesus has given to us... Alright, I love you, with the love that God has given me. And you love me, with the love that God has given you... And so, in the Christian church, we begin to experience the love of God, as we share it with each other... Are you with me???

Now, the thing is, the love of God that we experience in the company of each other, isn't something we can keep to ourselves,, because the love of God increases and increases, and it's just got to overflow.

And so, the next thing, is for us to begin to love like God loves, and to love so graciously, that we give our love to those who don't deserve it, and even to those who hate us... Because this is the way of Jesus, and this is the example of Jesus, and therefore, it's the way of those who follow Jesus....

But this love – this perfect love, begins in the church. And so if you're not part of a church – if you're not part of a church that's filled with love, you've got no hope of loving like God loves.

Now, from my experience, Christians aren't always very good at this. In fact, between some Christians, there's:

- broken relationships;
- bitterness;
- animosity;

- self-serving pride;
- insults;
- abuse;
- even seething hatred...

And then they try to serve as a church, by loving the world...
And their mission **misfires**, and they wonder why... How can we love the world, if we don't love our brother? Love has to begin in the church.

Jesus said: **John 13:35 (ESV) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Love between Christians, is the primary evidence that we're disciples of Jesus,,, and yet some people are really quick to give up on their brothers and sisters in Christ, and they don't love them at all...

But that's where love begins — in the church.

Now, Peter commands 5 things, that **all** of us in the church (all Christians) should have. And there's an order to his list.

- At the centre of the list, is Brotherly Love;
- Bookending the list (first and last), is how we think – what we do with our mind; and
- The 2nd and 4th on the list, is about how we feel – our emotions.

And so he says: ⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

1. Let's start at the beginning – **unity of mind**.

unity of mind in a church, is critical. And yet many people would argue against that... You see, our culture has become so individualistic, that our society likes to believe that truth is subjective – what's true for me, might not be true for you...

And some churches function on the premise “It doesn't matter what you believe (theologically) – we just come together with a common purpose/passion/mission...” “So, you can believe what you want to believe (about God), and I'll believe what I want to believe about God, but as long as we have a common passion:

- Housing the homeless; or
- Running an orphanage; or
- Feeding the hungry; or
- Whatever....

As long as we have a common passion, that's all that matters... You know what??? That's a lie of the Devil. It's not on what we do, that we come together – It's about what Jesus has done.

unity of mind tops the list... It's about having a 'like' understanding – we're unified in our minds – It's what we believe about Christ... You see, Jesus is the primary basis of our unity, and if we come together on something other than our faith in Christ, then we're not the church. This is the only thing that brings us together...

Something that always perplexes me, is when someone decides to join a church, and they **know** that the teaching is wrong... But:

- they like the excitement;
- 'vision'; or
- it might just be where their friends are...

And they convince themselves, "It doesn't really matter what we're taught – I know what's wrong, and I can just discard those bits..." ("Keep the meat, spit out the bones...")

There is no **unity of mind** (Top of the list)

2. Secondly, he moves from the mind, to the gut – how we feel. Have **sympathy**. Sympathy, is where we enter into, and experience the feelings of the other person...

You know, when I was training for the ministry, we were getting told that:

- *ministry is a profession;*
- *you've got to put in boundaries;*
- *you can't let yourself get too close to people;*
- *you don't want to take on the burdens that they're carrying;*
- *we even got told that we couldn't have any close friends in the church, because you're the professional, and you've gotta keep your distance...*

I'm not very good at being a professional, and neither was Peter... And that's something I really like about Bush Disciples – you guys don't expect me to be a professional –

As Peter's already told us, we're all ministers – we're all part of the royal priesthood, and there's nothing professional about it. And to engage in the feelings of each other is an expression of the love we have for each other.

The Apostle Paul described this sort of sympathy, when he said

Romans 12: (ESV) ¹⁵ **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**

And yet, there's a lot of people out there in 'church world', who won't keep the second part of that command, because they see it as their duty to try and 'cheer you up'... You see, for some reason they get it into their head, that no Christian should ever be sad. And if you are feeling sad, pretend that you're happy, and you'll be happy... That's just falsehood...

In the church, we are to feel sympathy for one another, where we enter into, and experience the feelings of the other person.

What do you do, when there's someone in the church, who is filled with grief? They might've just heard:

- that a loved-one has died; or
- diagnosed with cancer; or
- business has gone belly-up, and they've lost everything
 - business;
 - home;
 - livelihood;
 - dream...
- miscarriage...

What do **you** do when there's someone in the church who is filled with grief??? I'll tell you what a lot of us do – nothing. Do you know why?– it's because we're too scared. We're afraid that if we go to visit them, we might say the wrong thing...

But, something I learned a long time ago, is when somebody's grieving, they're not usually looking for a well-prepared theological dissertation that's going to address their situation... They just want someone to put their arms around them, or to put your hand on their shoulder, and to cry with them...

Rom 12: (ESV) ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Let's not practice falsehood by denying the pain. Let's have genuine sympathy, and experience the pain with them. And they'll really appreciate that, more than we'll ever know... Even if you sit with them, and don't say a word for an hour – what they need, is someone to grieve with them – Sympathy...

3. Thirdly, we come to the centre-piece – **brotherly love**. Have brotherly love. Genuinely care for each other. We have a common Heavenly Father, and it's our Father, who binds us together with this special bond of love...

And yet, I've seen some people, who claim to be disciples of Jesus, and yet they don't love other disciples of Jesus... Let me tell you, "That's an impossibility". And the apostle John was pretty blunt about that – he said: "*If you reckon you love*

God, but hate your brother, you don't love God at allⁱ."...
That's pretty blunt, isn't it...

I mean in the church, this is bread-&-butter stuff... This is basic Christianity Discipleship 101 – have a brotherly love...

4. Fourthly, have a tender heart...

Don't be afraid to be 'a softie'... Having a tender heart isn't a weakness – it's Godliness.

5. And fifthly, have a humble mind.

How we feel, and how we think, can be 2 different things... A lot of the time, even those who have a tender heart, tend to stifle the tenderness they have, with their mind... But to express brotherly love in all of its fullness, requires a humble mind.

But, what is a humble mind?

Well, let me tell you what it's **not**. Humility isn't about having a poor self-image, and wishing I could be better... (that's pretty-much the opposite of humility). Do you know what I mean by that? I'm talking about feelings of self-loathing, or inadequacy that says, "I'm not good enough." And so we feel that we're not good enough, but we greatly

desire to **be** good enough – We know we're not top-of-the-pack, but we **want** to be top-of-the-pack — That's not humility...

Having a humble mind, is having a willingness to take the lower place, and to put others first.

And so Peter says:

all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

Do you know what he's describing? It's really elements of the fruit of the Spirit:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness;
- Goodness;
- Faithfulness;
- Gentleness;
- Self-control

It's the character of God. And if we are filled with the Spirit, this is the fruit that we will display... You know, there's a lot of preachers who will tell you, "The proof that you're filled with the Holy Spirit, is the Spiritual gifts and signs & wonders in the church"... **Rubbish**... Those things can be faked, and those things can be mimicked by the Devil...

The evidence of the Holy Spirit in the church, is the fruit of the Spirit... And so, you show me a church that's filled with brotherly love, with:

- A unity of mind;
- Sympathy;
- tender hearts; and
- humble minds

and I'll show you a church that's filled with the Holy Spirit.

And you know what? I'm really encouraged, that in our little church here, I see:

- A unity of mind;
- Sympathy;
- brotherly love;
- tender hearts; and
- humble minds

And I praise God...

And when this is where we're at – when we're loving each other, with the love that God has given us, that love's just got to overflow. And so, the next step is to love graciously, as God loved us graciously. This is about "undeserved love".

And believe it or not, this is something we have to practice in the church too... I am evidence, that not everybody in the church is easy to love. And you can probably think of a few other people, who aren't that easy to love...

You see, the Christian church is like a family, and I think we all know, that every family – at times they:

- hurt each other;
- lash-out;

- say horrible/hurtful things;

And we know that in a family, if it becomes all about 'payback', it'll very quickly become a dysfunctional family... And it's the same in the church...

This is what Peter says:

9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

Have you ever noticed that "payback" always seems to escalate?

- *Little Johnny bumps into Freddy;*
- *Freddy pushes Johnny;*
- *Johnny pushes Freddy over;*
- *Freddy jumps up and punches Johnny;*
- *And then it's on for young and old....*

If somebody does the wrong thing to you, don't pay them back by doing a bad thing in return. And don't repay **reviling for reviling**.

"Reviling", is "insults" or "abuse"...

We Australians, we're pretty good at 'insulting', aren't we? It's a bit of a sport really. And, it's a way we have a bit of fun with each other...

But you know what, there's been times when I thought I was having good-natured-fun with someone (by trading insults),

but I found out later, that person was deeply scarred, by what I'd said...

Let's get away from insults and abuse. **but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.**

Now, at this point, I think I need to explain something. There's a very popular teaching around at the moment (and you've probably come across it), about "The power of our words", and about "blessings and curses"... And this teaching has some elements of truth, but then made up into a formulae, that elevates us to the position of God...

So, for example, I was having a conversation with somebody once, about a certain person's business model, and their business practices, and I said, "If they keep heading the way they are, they're going to go broke." And the person I was talking to, straight away said "I negate those words in the Name of Jesus"... What???

You see, this was someone who'd taken on the popular teaching of the power of words and blessings and curses... *And in their eyes, because I had spoken that they were heading towards bankruptcy, I'd spoken a curse over them, that was sure-as-eggs, going to happen.*

And they say "You can only ever say good things about people, because that'll bless them, and never say anything bad might happen to a person because that's speaking a curse. And if you say it, it'll happen... Rubbish.

Using that logic, probably half the Proverbs could be counted as “speaking curses”.

Proverbs 20:4 (ESV) ⁴ The sluggard does not plough in the autumn;

he will seek at harvest and have nothing.

Oww, that's speaking a curse... But the thing is, they're not curses – they're truth, and they're wisdom.

And God always wants us to speak truth, and let's never speak falsely, especially if we think that's some kind of magic formulae to bring into being, the things that we've said... If you believe that your words carry the power of God's words, I'm sorry, but somebody's messed with your head... I don't have the power to create with the spoken word, but God does...

But the reason this teaching is so widely accepted, is because there are some elements of truth to it...

Words **are** powerful. They can be very hurtful. And a few harsh/hurtful words, can cause great trouble. James spoke of words being like:

- A small bit, that can control a powerful horse;
- Small rudder, that can turn a large ship;
- A small fire, that can set a whole forest ablaze...

And now Peter is saying: Be careful with how you use your words. Don't pay back insults with more insults. Don't pay back abuse with more abuse... What he's saying, is: Be a people of grace, and give good in return for evil.

As Christians/DOJ, we have been called to be a people who bless others, and when I use that word “bless”, it’s not merely a matter of words. We’ve been blessed by God, so let’s us, be a blessing to others.

At this point, Peter’s reminded of Psalm 34. He says:

“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,

let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;

¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do
evil.”

Now, the thing is, a worldly person might look at the promises in that psalm, and claim the promises for today – a good life – a long life – marvellous days (health; wealth & Prosperity)....

But Peter and the people he’s writing to, know very well, that our reward of “life” and “good days” aren’t about long life and prosperity on earth – it’s about our **eternal** inheritance – It’s so much better than a short-lived worldly prosperity. It’s about “eternal life” and “good days with God”.

But what jumps out at me here, is that as DOJ we have a choice to make, every day... To choose the ways of the Spirit,

or to choose the ways of the flesh. The flesh wants to retaliate, but we are to:

- keep our tongue from evil;
- keep our lips from speaking deceit
– BTW “deceit” is more than telling an outright lie... Do you know how sometimes we don't technically tell a lie, but we do intentionally mislead somebody with our answer – that's deceit;

We've got the choice to:

- Turn from evil, and do good; and
- to not only **seek** peace, but to **pursue** peace.

And the choice we make's important, because God sees. He sees when we do right, and He loves it when we do what's right. And He's quick to hear the prayers of the righteous. But his face is against those who do wrong...

Isn't it interesting where Peter's brought us – to be a church of:

- One mind;
 - sympathy;
 - brotherly love;
 - a tender heart; and
 - a humble mind
-
- To love graciously; and
 - Not retaliate
 - To do good and not evil

If we take seriously the teaching of Jesus, this has gotta be basic Christian discipleship 1.0.1, but it's also a lesson on prayer... The Lord's ears are open when we are a people who love like this...

Let's pray now:

Heavenly Father,

We want to thank You for the love that you've given to us.

You have been so gracious to us – you loved us, even though we didn't deserve it.

And Lord, we want to thank You, for our Christian family.

Thank you for the brotherly love that we have.

And Lord, I'm aware, that there's probably people listening to this today, who are grieved/hurting/frustrated, because their experience of church, has not been a place of brotherly love.

Lord, I pray for them. I pray for their church.

As Peter presented these points as a command, Lord I ask that You would place in the hearts of those who hear this, a resolve to obey you...

To have:

- One mind;
- sympathy;
- brotherly love;

- a tender heart; and
- a humble mind

- To love graciously; and
- Not retaliate (insults & abuse)
- To do good and not evil

Oh Lord, I pray for healing and reconciliation in Your church.

May we share Your love with each other, that love would begin in the church, and spread to the world,

Amen.

ⁱ 1 John 4:20