

“Maintaining Holy Relationships”

Holiness

1 Peter 3:8-12

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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Bruce: Good morning, men, good morning!

Men: Good morning!

Bruce: Excuse my dress, but I’ve got another four hours of p. t. after I leave.

(Groans of sympathy.) They bend me, stretch me, turn me around and everything, and they say, “Doesn’t it feel so good after it stops?”

“Yes.” *(Laughter.)*

So thanks for putting up with me. I try to schedule this on Friday because it’s very convenient. Don, do you want to take us and set the mood for us as we be still and know that He is God? *(Music.)*

Merciful God, what a privilege it is for us to sit at Your feet today. We pray that Your character, Your attributes, your nature would be on display through You, and that we would see You more clearly. Open our eyes that we might behold You more clearly, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Continuing our study in the book of 1 Peter on this theme of holiness, let’s turn, please, to 1 Peter chapter 3. We’ll be looking at verses 8-12. 1 Peter chapter 3, verses 8-12. I’ll be reading from the English Standard Version of the Bible. 1 Peter chapter 3 beginning at verse 8.

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. 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. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. 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.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen, amen. Well, brothers, all of life is about relationships. That’s what Peter has been teaching us in the last several months. All of our life is about relationships. It has to do with the theme of holiness, holiness expressed in the way we live our lives in the holiness of God. The holiness is manifested by God’s grace in our lives, but the external expression of it, of our holiness, is demonstrated by our ability to have right relationships. There is power in right relationships.

About twenty years ago a close brother of mine in Christ was an assistant coach with one of the NFL teams. At mid-season, the head coach was dismissed, and my friend took over as the interim coach, which meant that he was not going to be the new head coach but he would be there for an interim period of time. He was interviewed in the paper and they said, “What is your priority as the interim coach?”

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He said, “Two things. I want to learn their names and I want to improve relationships. I want to learn the names of the players and I want to improve relationships.”

Within two years, that team was playing in the Super Bowl.

Participant: Wow!

Bruce: And when they asked the owner what was the change in this organization, he said, “We changed our relationships. We have much better relationships between the administration, the organization and our players.”

Brothers, there is power in relationships. Peter is teaching us that today in our relationships today with the outside world and with the inside world. Peter has been basically teaching us the same thing—that we function better when relationships are correct. We have more impact when relationships are correct.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: He has been describing for us how we live the life of the saved, how we have our pilgrim life as another worldling. In other words, we are in enemy territory. As another worldling, as a citizen of the kingdom, we are in enemy territory. And he has basically been teaching us over the past several weeks, how is it that you and I as holy men and women, how do we live as holy people in enemy territory? And he has basically taught us about the theme of submission. Submit as workers, submit as citizens, submit as husbands and submit as wives.

And now he teaches us how do we live inside? He taught us how to live as Christians in the outside world, but how is it that we’re to live in the inside world? And today he gives us a couple of insights on how we are to do that—the two things that we are to do in this passage, two insights he gives us that we will talk about over the next couple of weeks.

And the first one is this: that we are to love each other. Now he’s talking about relationships inside the body of Christ. Outside, in the world, in the enemy territory, we are to be submissive because we put God’s power on display. That’s where we demonstrate our meekness. Meekness is living according to the power of God. Meekness is not weakness. It’s living according to the power of God. And when we are submissive as citizens, submissive as workers, submissive as husbands and submissive as wives, we are putting God’s life on display because of His sovereign grace.

Now, he says, how is it that you relate with each other inside the body of Christ? He has talked about outside the body, in the world, but how is it that we relate to one another inside the body?

He gives us two insights. The first thing is that you need to learn how to love one another. And secondly, you need to learn how to love life. Love one another and love life. Inverses 8 and 9, we’ll see that we’re to love each other. In verses 10-12, we’ll see that we are to love life. Today we’ll probably just finish, or at least introduce, loving one another.

He gives us certain attitudes that we are to have as Christians living with each other as insiders. In other words, when we maintain these, these attitudes have already been given

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to us because we’re in Christ. But when you and I maintain them, we keep our relationships right.

He gives us five things to work on. Here are the five things that you and I need to work on. You’ll see it in verses 8 and 9. They are described in many different ways, but basically it’s these five things.

Harmony. We need to maintain harmony with one another inside the body of Christ.

Secondly, we need to have *sympathy* for one another in the body of Christ.

Thirdly, we need to have *brotherly love* for one another in the body of Christ.

Fourthly, we need to have *compassion* for one another in the body of Christ.

And lastly, we need to have *humility* among one another in the body of Christ. Those are the five things that Peter says this is how you learn to love one another. He doesn’t just say, “Go do it.” He says, in effect, “Let me tell you how to do it.” And the reason he tells us how to do it is because we don’t understand it that well, and he has got to give us some insights on how do we really love one another? How is that manifested and demonstrated to a world that is against everything that we stand for? And so he says that you need to learn these five things—harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion and humility. Let’s take a look at each of these as he teaches us how to get along with one another with the attitude of loving one another inside the body of Christ.

The first one is this. We maintain these attitudes because they’ve already been given to us in God’s grace. We don’t create these attitudes. They are given to us because they are grace functions of the Holy Spirit working in our lives at our regeneration. Things change. Behold, when you become a Christian a new thing begins, a whole new person. The old is gone; the new has come. You’ve got new things to work on. You don’t create these things. You’re not the resources of these five graces. God the Holy Spirit is, through the work of the gospel when He redeemed you from your own sin.

So these five attitudes we strive to maintain. The first one is *harmony*. Now harmony does not mean uniformity. Harmony means cooperation in the midst of diversity. Harmony is not uniformity. It means cooperation in the midst of diversity.

The basis of Christian unity are the words of Jesus found in John chapter 17. Would somebody read John chapter 17, verses 21 -23? Here is the basis of our harmony, the basis of our unity. It is not something we achieve. It’s something that we receive. We receive harmony and we maintain it. You and I don’t achieve it; we maintain it. Would somebody read John 17:21-23? Carl?

Carl: “That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them, that they may be one, even as We are one.”

Bruce: Now brothers, notice this. The degree to which the outside world sees the harmony that we have in the body of Christ gives them the right to reject the Deity of Christ. In other words, if you and I do not maintain that harmony that has been given to us, this unity in the body of Christ, the world has the right to reject the fact that God has sent Christ to save us from our sins. Do you see that? They have a right to reject the Deity of Christ because they do not see harmony. They do not see cooperation in the midst of diversity in the body of Christ. This is a tremendous witness, or a tremendous

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damage to our witness, when we do not maintain harmony as an expression of our loving one another.

So harmony does not mean uniformity. It means that we cooperate with one another because we've been given to maintain a unity and a harmony that's already been given to us because we are in Christ, the Father is in Christ and we are in the Father. You see, there's a unity there that has been given to us, and you and I fight to maintain unity and harmony. We don't create it. It has been given to us. Our responsibility is what? To maintain it! That's one of the expressions that Peter says. If you're going to love one another, you've got to understand this. You've got to learn to cooperate with each other in the midst of your diversity because that's a witness to the world that Christ was sent by the Father to redeem the lost.

So it's very, very important that we understand this concept. Let me give you some other cross references. In Romans chapter 12, in verses 4 and 16, we see that we are one body and have one mind. Now this is not talking about uniformity. This is talking about cooperation. You and I need to understand who we are and how we exist. We exist in an area of harmony with one another.

How about 1 Corinthians 12, verses 12-31? We have one body but differing gifts. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 10. We should not have any quarrels among us.

Now there is a difference between a quarrel and an argument. An argument is nothing more than the presentation of facts. I'm presenting my facts. She's presenting her facts. A quarrel is when you present your facts motivated by emotions, controlled by emotions. That's a quarrel. The Scripture says, “Don't have quarrels among you.” It doesn't say, “Don't have arguments.” An argument is nothing more than a conversation where two people are presenting their facts. That does not mean it's a quarrel. A quarrel occurs when you become guided by, restricted and overcome by emotions. That's when you have a quarrel. And because we're maintaining unity, we can have arguments—the presentation of facts—but we can have disagreement without disruption because of the harmony that we maintain.

How about 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 3? Strife and divisions among the body of Christ is living like an unsaved person. When we have strife and divisions in the body of Christ, we're telling the world that we're unsaved. That's how they view it. Because they have a right to reject the Deity of Christ because they don't see our harmony. They do not see our cooperation in the midst of diversity.

Now guys, I'm talking about something that is supernatural. This is not normal for us.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: This is something that only the Holy Spirit can produce. And we're going to find out how we do that in a few moments. But this is just not something that is normal for us. This is abnormal. This is supernatural. It's a function of God's grace that we maintain our cooperation in the midst of diversity. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, what kind of diversity do you have in mind?

Bruce: I don't have any at all. *(Laughter.)*

Don: Okay.

Bruce: I'll let you figure that out.

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Don: You pick out your own diversity. All I’m saying is that where there is diversity,--men versus women, preaching versus serving,--there are all sorts of ways in which we’re diversified. We have one body but many gifts. Not everybody stands up for us to teach.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Somebody might have the ministry of helps. There is diversity there. We need to honor the person who has the gift of helps just as much as the person who is the teacher. We need to honor both of those. So there are many ways in which the body of Christ is diverse. Not everybody is an ear. Not everybody is a foot. Not everybody is an arm. There is diversity in the unity of our gifts. But we maintain a cooperation in the midst of that diversity in recognizing that they are all equal. We don’t put one more above the other. So there are many ways in which we can express our diversity.

How about 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 17? We partake of one bread. We act like one body. 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 11. One mind; we live in peace.

Let me read something from one of our theologians from the past who talks about this harmony in the body of Christ. “The New Testament never treats agreeing in Christ as an unnecessary though highly desirable spiritual luxury, but as something that is essential to the true being of the church. Divisions, whether disagreements between individual members or the existence of factions in parties, constitute a calling into question of the gospel itself and a sign that those who are involved are living in a worldly style of life. The more seriously we take the New Testament, the more urgent and painful becomes our sense of the sinfulness of the divisions in the church, and the more earnest our prayers and strivings after the peace and unity that God has already given us that we must maintain. That does not mean that the like-mindedness we are to strive for is to be drab uniformity of the sort beloved by politicians. Rather, it is to be a unity in which powerful tensions are held together by an overmastering loyalty to the Person and work of Jesus Christ.”

Overmastering loyalty to the Person and work of Christ. Now what does that mean? That means that when you and I are in a discussion about some issue that we may have some disagreement, we both submit to whom?

Participant: Jesus.

Bruce: The Lord Jesus Christ. We have an overriding loyalty to Him. The issue is our loyalty to Him, not my proving my rightness or your wrongness. That’s what it means to be cooperative in the midst of diversity. We maintain harmony. That’s one of the ways in which we love one another. It’s to maintain the spirit of harmony.

Now we’ve got to be aware in this issue of harmony of two extremes which I think can be dangerous. The first one is this: captivity to custom.

Participant: Hmm!

Bruce: Captivity to custom. It’s always been done this way! You know how oftentimes you’ve heard that? I hear that in business all the time. It’s always been done this way. Therefore, we can’t change. We’ve got to be careful not to be captive by customs.

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And the second is not to be cultivated by the novel. Don't be cultivated by the novel. In other words, what's the latest gimmick? Let's be cultivated by the latest thing that's popular. It worked over here in this church; therefore we can do it in our church. Well, maybe the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish something different in your church than He did in this church. We have a tendency to be cultivated by the novel because it's popular. Be careful not to be cultivated by the novel or captive by the customs, of having always done it that way. Yes, Ted?

Ted: If you don't mind, Bruce, before we leave harmony—

Bruce: Sure.

Ted: It just strikes me, and I've been more and more convicted of this, of the enormous problem of disunity within the church.

Bruce: Amen.

Ted: We have a church here. Down the road there's another church. There's a Presbyterian church not far away. I don't know if all those churches have anything to do with one another, or even know that they exist. And I think that it's such a huge issue that we're totally blind to. And when we talk about unity, when we get a sermon on unity or harmony, it's always about what's happening in the congregation and it doesn't go beyond that. There's no sense of the body of Christ. It's almost like we're talking about bodies of Christ rather than the body of Christ.

Bruce: Amen.

Ted: And it disturbs me greatly. I think it's a big, big blind spot in modern-day evangelicalism.

Bruce: It's a single one body of Christ.

Participant: Just to bring a little bit of promise, our church has invited these other churches that worship here. *(Laughter.)*

Bruce: Well, Ted's point is very well spoken. Peter is writing to the body of Christ at large, not just an individual congregation or denomination. This is not denominational. This is the kingdom of God that he's talking about. He's saying that within the kingdom of God you've got to make sure that you maintain your harmony across the lines of diversity, and you maintain your harmony across those diversities.

Now that doesn't mean that you're going to do everything just like everybody else. That's not what we're saying. There is diversity in the midst of all of that, but you and I have to understand the bigger picture. The big picture in harmony is this. It's not about me proving my rightness, my dotting the t's and crossing the I's and all of that other stuff. It's really about an overmastering loyalty to the Person and work of Christ. Do I submit myself to the Lordship of Christ for His glory? That's what we're talking about when we're talking about the body of Christ at large. This is a Kingdom principle, folks, not a denominational one. It's a Kingdom principle, not a local church one, although we need to take that which we apply at the Kingdom level to apply at the local church level, certainly. But one must feed the other. This is not just an issue for your denomination or my denomination, or your church or my church. It's a bigger issue than that. The glory of God is on display by the unity we have and the harmony that we maintain. And the world has a right to reject the Deity of Christ when they don't see it.

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Now I can't make it any more plain than that. The consequences are severe! They're severe! The world has the right to say that Jesus is not God when they don't see us get along with each other in our local church or the body of Christ at large. We need to maintain this harmony and work at it through the Holy Spirit. That's why it's something that is supernatural. It's not something that you and I are going to achieve. It's something that you and I receive, and we maintain it. We work hard at maintaining that, and that's not something I can tell you how to do. I can't be your Holy Spirit. All I'm trying to do is put this principle in your mind, that you and I must maintain harmony for the sake of gospel clarity and the glory of God, because if the world doesn't see it, they have a right to say that Jesus is not God. And that is as severe an offense that we can have with the ministry of Christ as anything. Yes, Tom?

Tom: Aren't all these different churches really a demonstration of the power of sin?

Bruce: Well, I don't know about that. I don't know if I could say that. I don't know.

Participant: Denominations are manmade.

Tom: Which are?

Participant: All the separations.

Bruce: Let's not pick on denominations or local churches. Let's get the big picture. This is a Kingdom issue. Let's keep it at the Kingdom level. If we keep it at the Kingdom level, hopefully it will filter down into the local level. And when it feeds at the local level it will build up to the Kingdom level. Yes, please?

Participant: Can you go over one more time that if the world doesn't see it, they have a right to deny—

Bruce: The Deity of Christ.

Participant: Does anybody have the right to deny that, ultimately?

Bruce: Well, you can nitpick the words that I'm choosing. I mean, don't nitpick the word *right*. What I'm saying is, that's what they will do. If you don't like the word *right*, then say, "That's what they will do." They will reject the Deity of Christ.

Now go back to John 17, verses 21-23. Let's go back there to chapter 17. See, the world can't do anything other than that.

John 17, beginning at verse 21. Look at verse 20. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us,"—now notice—"so that the world may believe that You have sent Me." That's where you get it. "So that the world may believe that You have sent Me." When they don't see that we are in Him, they will reject the Deity of Christ, because they will say, "Why should I hook up with that when I can't see it in your life?" That's where you get it.

Participant: You can't blame them for that.

Bruce: You can't blame them for that. God will blame them for it, but I can't.

So first of all, we need to understand that this is a Kingdom issue, guys. Keep it at the big level and take it down to your church and work as hard at it as you can through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, because this is something that we've got to maintain. The consequences are so severe!

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Secondly, let's take a look at the second feature he says, of learning to love one another. How about the second thing that Peter says? Not only do we need to maintain harmony, but we need to maintain our *sympathy*. Sympathy is to have a fellow feeling. It's an interchange of fellow feelings in either joy or sorrow. Sympathy is relegated to joy or sorrow.

Look at Romans 12:15. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn.” That's sympathy. You either rejoice with them when they rejoice, or you mourn with them when they mourn. A cross reference would be 1 Corinthians 12:26.

This fellow feeling is a feeling of joy with them, and a feeling of sorrow with them. It takes as much grace sometimes to rejoice with another saint in the way God has blessed him or her as it does to sympathize with someone who is in sadness.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It's much easier for us to have sympathy for somebody when they're sad. But do we really rejoice with them when they are rejoicing? Or are we jealous? Sympathy says that you do it both ways. Scripture says this: that you rejoice when they rejoice. When God does something wonderful in someone's life, what do we normally say? “What am I? Am I next? How come I don't get that? What happened to me? What's wrong with me?” Scripture says, Don't do that. Rejoice with them. God has been pleased to do something merciful in their lives. It's wonderful to put His grace on display. So rejoice with them. That's part of sympathy! At the same time, we do it when they're in sorrow. It's much easier for us to do it when people are in sorrow than it is when people are rejoicing. We've got to be careful with that.

I want to warn you that sympathy and selfishness cannot coexist. Sympathy and selfishness cannot coexist. Sympathy depends upon a willingness to forget oneself and to give oneself to the joys or the sorrows of another. Can you really give yourself to the joys of someone? It's much easier for us to do it in their sorrows, isn't it, because it makes us feel good when we can help them? What about when they are rejoicing? We need to rejoice with them. Only when you die to self can we live holy lives with each other and express sympathy.

Now what is it when somebody is non-sympathetic, or the church is non-sympathetic, the body of Christ is non-sympathetic? It's basically saying this. I am more important than what you're going through. Non-sympathy is saying this. I am more important than what you're going through, rejoicing or sorrow. Sympathy comes to the heart when Christ rules the heart. Maintain harmony. Maintain sympathy.

The third one is this. Maintain your *brotherly love*. Literally it means “be brethren who are loving.” It means a fondness for one another as believers.

Notice the correlation of love for God and the love for man. Look at 1 John chapter 3. Go to your right, to the epistle of 1 John. 1 John chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.” Evidence of your passing from death into life is your relationships with the brothers in the body of Christ. See this in the next verse. “Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

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You see, there is a direct correlation between our brotherly love for one another and our love for God. The degree to which you love God is going to be the degree to which you express your love for a brother. And when you have a tough time in your relationship the first thing that you need to ask yourself is what? How much do I love God. Not how much do I dislike or disregard that person, but how much do I love God? Only when we die to self and we live holy lives with each other, have a brotherly affection for one another.

Look at 1 John chapter 4, verse 20. “If anyone says, “I love God,” “and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother who he has seen cannot love God who he has not seen”

How does the world see us treating each other? Do they see us treating each other with harmony? Do they see us treating each other with sympathy, rejoicing or in sorrow? Do they see us really loving one another because we’re expressing our love for God? That’s what the world needs to see, and Peter is telling us this. These are Kingdom principles. This is how we live with insiders. He taught us how to live with outsiders with the concept of submission. But now he’s reminding us of how to live with insiders.

If in the life of the church, whether in the local church or in the big body of the church, there is no love of each other, the point, certainly, is that in that person or that church there is no love for God. If there is no love for each other, there is no love for God.

How about 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 9 and 10? It urges us to do more and more to love each other. This is the gift of hospitality. Just be hospitable.

The ministry of fellowship is not just a break that we take in our worship service, but it’s a ministry of obedience. The ministry of fellowship is not just a break in our worship service. Let’s go have fellowship with each other, and have cookies and red punch. That’s not fellowship. Fellowship is ministry of obedience of loving one another.

Participant: What Thessalonians was that?

Bruce: 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 9 and 10. In other words, Peter is saying that we are to maintain being brethren who are loving.

One of the things I used to ask my people when visitors would come to our church, and I would go call on a visitor who had been there, was this. I would say, “How were you treated by our congregation and by our members? How were you treated?”

We got all kinds of answers from a to z. One of the things we began to work on is that we need to practice this on ourselves.

You see, that’s what Peter is saying. You practice harmony in the body. You practice sympathy in the body. You practice brotherly love in the body. And when you do that, you do what? You give it away to the outside world. Yes, Don?

Don: I think that sometimes when we read the passage in 1 John that you were referring to,--

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Don: Love and hate. We equate hate with hostility. But sometimes it could just be indifference.

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Bruce: Absolutely. That’s correct. Thank you. It can just mean indifference. It doesn’t mean vitriolic anger or retribution against somebody. It may just be indifference.

So work at being harmonious. Work at being sympathetic. Work at being compassionate and having brotherly love.

And let’s take a look at the next one. *Compassion*. Compassion means tenderhearted, full of pity. Compassion is the very essence of the gospel because compassion is the very essence of God. It is the very expression of Christ. He has a compassion so great that God sent His Son to die for the lost. You begin to see compassion just in the cross, a compassion so intense that it took Christ to the cross. If you ever want to see what compassion is like, take a look at the cross.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s our model. It’s not what I’m feeling towards somebody. It’s what I know about what Christ did for me at the cross. That’s the feeling that I have. You’ve got to focus on the cross. That’s where you see compassion.

You know, a lot of people argue about the doctrine of election. But honestly, folks, if you deny the doctrine of election, you’re basically saying that God has no compassion.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: He has no mercy. To deny election, you’re saying that God has no mercy. God has no compassion. And you see that in the cross. The real issue isn’t why doesn’t He save everybody? No, why did He save anyone, let alone me? Compassion, tenderhearted, full of pity for others.

There can be no Christianity without compassion, the Scripture will tell us. Look at Ephesians 4:32. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as God in Christ forgave you.” One of the ways in which we express our compassion is how? Forgiveness. If you have a tough time forgiving somebody, do you know what that really means? It means that you don’t know how much you’ve been forgiven. That’s the real issue. Don’t ask yourself the question, “Why did she do that? Why did he do that? Were they right or were they wrong? Why did they hurt me?” Ask yourself, “How much have I been forgiven?”, because the degree to which you understand how much you’ve been forgiven will be the degree to which you’ll be able to forgive.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And when you can’t forgive somebody, you’re basically saying, “I have lost sight of how much I have been forgiven.” Forgiveness ought to be one of the easiest things we do, as long as we are focused on the realization of how much we have been forgiven.

Participant: Would you say that one more time? (*Laughter.*) From the beginning.

Bruce: From the beginning.

Participant: The forgiven part.

Bruce: Let’s turn to 1 Peter chapter 3.

Participant: No, I’m checking with you. I’m just trying to get your wording. Forgiving. If you cannot forgive, the degree that you don’t understand—

Bruce: The degree to which you cannot forgive somebody is the degree to which you know you have not been forgiven. In other words, you’ve got to go back and look at the

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cross again and say, “How much have I been forgiven?” And your response is what? “I’m going to forgive her, right or wrong. I’m going to forgive him, right or wrong, “ because of what? I know how much I have been forgiven!

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I know how much I have been forgiven. Forgiveness is the ministry of giving away what God has given you. If you don’t understand what God has given you in the forgiveness of the cross, you’re going to have a tough time forgiving people. Yes, please?

Participant: The parable of the unforgiving servant.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: That’s an example.

Bruce: There are all kinds of examples of unforgiveness in the Scripture. Yes, Ted?

Ted: “Forgive us our trespasses, inasmuch as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Bruce: That’s right. You don’t do it for yourself. You do it for the glory of God. And what happens after that? You are set free. Bitterness is holding on to that.

I have a situation right now where a young couple very close to me is really struggling in their relationship. And they came to me the other night, and one of the two parties said, “We can’t come to you for counseling because I know you’re on the other person’s side.” (*Groans and sighs.*) He said, “I know you’re on her side.”

And I said, “I’ll tell you what. I’m not on her side or your side. I’m on your daughter’s side, because I’ll tell you what. You need to deal with the hardness of your heart and she needs to deal with the bitterness in her mouth. That’s what you need to know. We’ll talk about those two things if you want to talk about them. But I’m not on either one of your sides. I’m on your daughter’s side.”

And I don’t know what’s going to happen. But there’s hardness of the heart, because “I can’t forgive her because of what she said.”

And I said, “All that reveals is that you have not been forgiven of your own sin. You don’t know how much that is.” He doesn’t want to deal with that.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: Because, he said, “The pain is so deep!” The cross pain was more deep.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: The cross pain was more deep. If you cannot forgive, then you’re basically saying, “I don’t know how much I’ve been forgiven.” Compassion is the heart of Christianity because of the cross.

Participant: Amen.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: I think also that sometimes we limit compassion to just how we feel. It’s also what we do.

Bruce: That’s a good point. My next point is this. You just talked about it, Tom. (*Laughter.*) We must choose to be compassionate. Compassion is a choice that you and I make by God’s grace through the Holy Spirit. It’s a choice of being what?

Participant: Forgiven.

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Bruce: Obedient! Compassion is a function of obedience. I choose to be obedient because the Scripture says for us to be obedient. The Scripture says in 4:32 of Ephesians, “Be kind and compassionate to one another.”

Now how do you express that compassion to one another? Forgiving, “as God has forgiven you in Christ.” That’s how you express it. You express your compassion by forgiving one another as you have been forgiven in Christ, and so it’s an act of obedience. You and I must choose to do that. It’s a function of God’s grace through the Holy Spirit. It’s not something you naturally want to do. It’s a fight to do it, but it’s a choice you’ve got to make in God’s grace. God’s grace is sufficient for all things. He’ll give you the grace to do that. Remember, you need the grace at the moment of application, not contemplation.

Let me warn you about one thing here, men. Don’t become complacent with the conditions in your life.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Don’t become complacent with the conditions in your life.

Participant: What do you mean by that?

Bruce: There are human needs within our body that we need to recognize and express our compassion. There are human needs in the body of Christ that we need to be aware of. Don’t be so complacent in your life that you say, “I’m okay. That’s okay. They’re not okay. That’s okay.” In other words, you’ve got to recognize that there are human needs in the body of Christ and we need to be kindhearted and compassionate to one another. Complacency prevents compassion. When you and I become complacent in life—everything is okay!—I’m less sensitive to being compassionate to other people. Be careful, and don’t become complacent in the condition of your own life. Recognize that there are needs in the body of Christ that you and I must address because of our harmony, because of our sympathy, because of our brotherly love and now because of our compassion for one another in the body of Christ.

And the fifth characteristic Peter teaches us is this: *humility*, having a mindset of a modest opinion of oneself. Look at Philippians 2:6-8. This is the greatest example of humility.

Humility comes from two things—being aware of your own inadequacy and God’s total adequacy. Humility comes from being aware of your inadequacy and being aware of God’s total adequacy. We don’t make the difference.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this about humility. “I sometimes think that the very essence of the whole Christian position and the secret of a successful life is just to realize two things. I must have complete, absolute confidence in God and no confidence in myself.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I must have complete confidence in God and no confidence in myself. Now you won’t hear that with Dale Carnegie. (*Laughter.*) You won’t hear that at a Dale Carnegie lecture.

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Humility is a modest opinion of yourself. Thomas Watson says this. He is one of the great Puritans. “The manner of growth is to grow less in one’s own eyes.” That’s humility.

The second thing that Peter teaches us is that humility comes from not only being aware of our own inadequacy and God’s total adequacy, but also this: being aware of a holy standard of comparison. When you compare with others you will either create pride or discouragement. When you compare yourself to others, you’re going to create pride—I’m better than them!—or discouragement—They’re better than me! Comparison is not good for us either way. We have a holy comparison to a sinless perfection in Christ. Compare yourself with the sinless perfection of the incarnate love of Christ and you’ll always be in default.

Participant: Yes. Mm-hmm.

Bruce: You’ll always be in default. We always compare ourselves. My definition of humility is this: seeing that which is perfect—the sinless perfection and perfect work of Christ—and realizing that I can’t achieve it. That’s my definition of humility.

John Flavel, the Puritan, says this. “They that know God will be humble. They that know themselves cannot be proud.”

Participant: Would you kindly read your first one again, please, the first quote of your notes?

Bruce: Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this. “I sometimes think that the very essence of the Christian position and the secret of a successful life is just to realize two things. I must have complete, absolute confidence in God and no confidence in myself.”

Participant: Thank you.

Bruce: Thomas Watson, the Puritan, says this. “The right manner of growth is to grow less in one’s own eyes.” That’s humility. And the reason that you do that is that you compare yourself to the holy standard of the sinless perfection and the perfect obedience of Christ and then you realize that you can’t achieve it! And you’re absolutely dependent upon the almighty sovereignty of God.

John Flavel, another Puritan, says this. “They that know God will be humble. They that know themselves cannot be proud. God thinks most of men who think themselves least.”

When we remember our dependency upon God and keep before us the standard of God’s holy life in the Person and work of Christ, God will be pleased to keep us in the grace of humility.

Now let me warn you about this, brothers. Humility is the one grace that when you know you have it, you’ve lost it. (*Laughter.*) When you know you’ve got it, you’ve lost it.

Participant: Yeah!

Bruce: Boy, that cuts to the quick, doesn’t it? Humility.

Our relationships with each other are to be characterized by these five character qualities—harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion and humility. Notice, who is to initiate all of these among us?

Participant: Christ.

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Bruce: Christ does it, but who takes the mantle and says, “I’m going to do it?” You and I do. It’s an act of obedience. It’s an act of obedience that we do this. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, what Ted brought up before about unity?

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Don: I think that this group is a step in the right direction. I mean, look at all the different backgrounds that we come from—different churches, different life situations—and yet we’re one in Christ.

Bruce: Amen. That’s a good illustration, Don. Thank you. Did everybody hear what Don just said?

Participant: Yes. Mm-hmm.

Bruce: We’re a fledgling example of this, because look at our backgrounds denominationally, historically, theologically. But we’re all coming together with an overmastering loyalty to the Person and work of Christ. That’s what we’re striving to do. That’s how we maintain our harmony.

Notice. We don’t wait for someone to start these five characteristics. Who do they start with? They start with us.

Here’s what Augustine says. “You put all of these things together and it works out like this. If there is a thorn in the foot, the back bends, the eye searches, the hands are ready. And all the parts are quick and active to relieve the member that is grieved. The whole body feels the pain and needs of a suffering member or rejoices with them when they rejoice. That’s the body of Christ.”

May God be pleased to open our eyes, that we might behold these truths more clearly, so that the world will know this, that God sent His Son to redeem the world. May it be so, that we will realize this. The degree to which we have our relationships right will be the degree to which we are most effective for His glory.

Let’s pray. Father, we thank You for the clarity of Your word. Again, Father, if we said things that are inappropriate and inconsistent with Your revealed nature or glory or Your revealed word in the Scripture, would You be merciful to us and compassionate to us and remove it from us, and only cause us to remember the work of the Holy Spirit and those things which are consistent with Your glory and Your nature. And may it be so, for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.”

Next week, we’ll pick up with what it means to love life. Thank you, men.