

11. I am better than you!

4/22/2004

Before we get into tonight's teaching, we should go over what we have learned so far.

We started the book of 1 Peter with praising God for a Living Hope, Jesus Christ in chapter 1:3-12; Peter teaches us to be holy in 1:13-2:3. Then Peter reminds us that we are God's chosen people in 2:4-12. Peter set the stage for us to understand the practical application in our lives from chapter 2:13. From 2:13 to 25, he talks about submission to rulers and authorities over us, wives' submission to husbands and husbands' duty for their wives and a warning to themselves in 3:1-7. Then Peter brings this teaching to the area of getting along with others.

The title of tonight's teaching sounds like a children's heckling. Indeed as children of God, we should be better than the worldly people.

How are we going to be better than the worldly people? Should we have bigger and better homes and shiner cars or fatter banking accounts? No, we should be better than them in our words and actions in the midst of the time of difficulties as the world around us watch us for our reactions. Men and women's true heart and bottom line language come out in the time of devastations or stress. Some of us may be able to hold their holy masks for so long. But when things go haywire, the holy-looking composure starts to crack and leak the true color inside. That is what the world will see and judge us.

It is not that difficult to be nice when everything goes our ways and in our favors. But when our backs end up against the wall and the things flying into our faces, the world will stop and watch us. Then what are we going to do?

Peter wastes no time to tell us how we should prepare ourselves, so that when the times of difficulty come, we will instinctively behave like the children of Holy God.

We are going to learn eight elements of maturity checklist as Christians from v8-12. I am not going to make 'Applications' as I usually do at the end of teaching. Because these eight elements are the applications themselves.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you A) be of one mind, B) having compassion for one another; C) love as brothers, D) be tenderhearted, E) be courteous;

A. BE OF ONE MIND

This refers to a oneness of heart, an agreement on major points of doctrine. The words 'One Mind' is 'homophon' in Greek. We get the word 'harmony' from that. Most of us are willing to have one mind. That is, we want other people to have our mind! Instead of that, we should have the mind of Christ.

A man criticized D.L. Moody's methods of evangelism, and Moody said, "Well, I'm always ready for improvement. What are your methods?" The man confessed that he had none! "Then I'll stick to my own," said Moody. Whatever methods we may use, we must seek to honor Christ, win the lost, and build the church. There should be a plenty of room for variety in the church within the boundary of the Scripture.

It is not about “uniformity” where there is similarity in appearance or in thinking. It is not about “unanimity” where there is 100 percent agreement. It is not about “union” where there is an affiliation with others. We are one. But we are not all the same. So much troubles come to us in the body of Christ because we expect everyone to be like us. Christians are to be like a choir - all singing with their own voice, and some singing different parts, but all singing to the same music and with harmony. Having each of own characters, yet agreeing with what is important in Christ, that is what Peter wants to tell us.

B. HAVING COMPASSION FOR ONE ANOTHER

The word ‘compassion’ comes from a Greek word, “sumpathes” [soom-path-ace’]. Of course, we get a word ‘sympathetic’ from it. It means having compassion for one another, suffering or feeling the like with another.

This means that when others weep, we weep not preaching. When they rejoice, we rejoice not scolding.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

C. LOVE AS BROTHERS

We have noted that love is one of the recurring themes in Peter’s letters, not only God’s love for us, but also our love for others.

This is about friendship and affection. The word translated here as “as brothers” is from the Greek word ‘philadelphnos.’ It has in mind the love of an affectionate friend.

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

D. BE TENDERHEARTED

The Greek word, eusplagchnos, [yoo’-splingkh-nos] - having strong bowels. To our surprise, Greek people use the word ‘bowel’ instead of ‘heart’ to express love for someone. So, if you are a Greek person and you could say, “I love you with all my bowel.” This is even better: “Whenever I see you, my bowel pounds.” I say, “Go to bathroom. Spare me from too much personal information!”

Here it means that we have big and gentle hearts to feel their pains and be tender hearted. The same Greek word often describes Jesus in the Gospels.

E. BE COURTEOUS

“Be courteous” involves much more than acting like a lady or gentleman. “Be humble-minded” is a good translation. After all, humility is the foundation for courtesy, because the humble person puts others ahead of himself.

The humility is an internal attitude rather than external appearance, meaning “lowly.” In our day of spotlighting celebrities and magnifying the flesh, this quality is rare commodity and is greatly valued by the Lord Jesus.

So far, we learn that how we should think and feel. In verses 9 through 11, Peter writes about what we should do and say, especially when we are in the tight corner.

F. FORGIVENESS

1 Peter 3:9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

We all heard, “Don’t get mad, get even!” It is a great line for our flesh. But Jesus says, “Be angry, but don’t sin. Love your enemy.” Anyone can get mad and lash out our attitudes to the person who wronged to us. But it takes a self-controlled and godly man to hold our ‘get-even-with-that-sucker’ mindset and being nice to the person. When someone wrongs to us, that person expects two things from us: buckle under the wrong doer’s power or throw an attitude back to him. Either way, he gets what he wants. Because if we buckle under his bully attitude, it fans his ego to do all the more. If we try to get even with him, his sinister heart gets reverse satisfaction. But the last thing he would expect from us is not getting even with him, and being nice to him with sincere heart. It sure will catch him off guard.

As Christians, we can live on one of three levels. First, we can return evil for good, which is the satanic level. Second, we can return good for good and evil for evil, which is the human level. Third, we can return good for evil, which is the divine level. Jesus is the perfect example of this latter approach. As God’s loving children, we must do more than give “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (Matt. 5:38–48), which is the basis for justice. We must operate on the basis of mercy, for that is the way God deals with us.

That reminds me a tugboat story from Mississippi: Way down upon the Mississippi, two tugboat captains who had been friends for years, would always cry, “Aye!” and blow their whistles whenever they passed each other. A new crewman asked his ship’s first mate, “What do they do that for?” The mate looked surprised and replied, “You mean that you’ve never read in the Bible where it says an aye for an aye and a toot for a toot?”

This important OT law from Ex 21:24-25, Lev 24:20 and Deut 19:21 is known as “Lex Talionis” which means the law of retaliation. It covers what type of punishment should be sentenced out to transgressors by the judges, not by individuals. In other words, God was not condoning vigilante attitude. It was punishment by law and God was telling the judges how to deal with those who committed crimes.

G. CONTROLLED TONGUE

1 Peter 3:10 For “He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.

We must deliberately decide to love life that God allowed us to have. It is an attitude of faith that sees the best in every situation. It is the opposite of the pessimistic attitude expressed in Ecclesiastes 2:17.

Ecclesiastes 2:17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

It is when the hard times come that we need to watch our tongues. It’s very easy to begin complaining, “Why me? Why this? Why now?” Peter tells us that if we want to love life and see good days, we are to refrain our tongue from evil—literally to keep from complaining.

Many of the problems of life are caused by the wrong words, spoken in the wrong spirit. How well Peter knew the sad consequences of hasty speech! We must control our tongues.

Peter is quoting from Psalm 34:12-16. It describes in a very graphic way, "must keep his tongue from evil." The idea is to get control of it.

James 3:5-8 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

While speaking evil implies speaking against God, "speaking deceit" means manipulating situations to make it easier on oneself. This happens most easily when times get tough, as we begin to twist the truth, saying things that put us in a better light. We manipulate the situation to our own advantage.

I am going to go on a side track regarding "Twisting the Truth" within Christianity. Many churches across America have been adopting "Seeker sensitive movement" that started from Willow Creek Church, IL. To accommodate the crowd who want to be religious and appease their religious mindsets, they don't call 'sin' sin, but 'mistake.' They tell them about the love of God and how much He loves them. But they don't talk about repentance from our sins and the holiness, righteousness and justice of God. Out of that kind of movement, many popular pastors emerged out and wrote books about it and more than a half of American pastors are grabbing this concept without seeking God's Word. Those popular pastors are Robert Schuller of Crystal Cathedral, Rick Warren who wrote Purpose Drive Church, Purpose Drive Life, 40 Days of Purpose Driven Life, and Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church.

If a pastor does not share the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth from the pulpit in order to have more people to come to his church, we have a major problem. He might appease men, but he is offending God. If I dilute or subtract anything from the Word of God, I not only tell lies, but also I am asking for damnation from God.

If you'd like to read more about this, you can visit our web site at www.ccos.org, then go to Awareness page to view "Seeker sensitive churches" article that was published by the Berean Call. It is very informative and will make you to realize how deceitful the enemy's attack is.

H. PURITY AND PEACE

1 Peter 3:11-12 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 prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

If we go out and seek trouble, we will find it. But if we seek peace, we can find it as well. This does not mean "peace at any price," because righteousness must always be the basis for peace.

Matt 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

This is quite a checklist for all of us. Eight distinct marks to measure our Christian spiritual maturity. How do we measure up when we stand under that list?