



Message Transcript

Responding to Injustice

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So, today I want to talk to you about responding to injustice. If you're a Christian and you live in this world, you are going to face difficulty at some point in time. The Bible says that anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Now, by admission, clearly, we don't live in a persecuted culture like other cultures live in. As a matter of fact, there are places around the world, when they gather, we find that they gathered this week but their husbands aren't with them any longer because they were beheaded for their faith earlier in the week. Or, their church where they met as a small group got burned to the ground or all sorts of horrific persecution like that.

We don't live in a culture that has that level of escalated persecution but what we do have is the more and more we walk in our faith and the more and more we live for Jesus and His glory and all He is doing, persecution does become a part of the norm of what it means to be a Christian and how is it we're supposed to respond. Because what God has been telling us through His servant Peter has been that, as Christians, when we live it out to the full, we will be in a position from time to time where we go through a crisis.

And so, we've taken a look at how is it we respond to civil government? And how is it respond to leadership in the workplace? And how is it we handle conflict within a marriage? Today, we're going to take a look at how do we all respond because regardless of our lot in life, at some point in time, you are going to say, "That's not fair. That's not right. Did anybody see that? Is anybody going to make that better?" And when that happens, how are you going to respond? Because all of us come out of the womb seeking one thing and one thing only, we want justice and we want it now. As

kids, we want justice. My kids will come to me, they want justice. "Dad, did you see what so and so did? Did you see what they're acting like? We want that."

How do we respond when we're mistreated? How do we respond when we're treated unjustly for no other reason than simply being Christian? And so, today, that's what we're going to look at. So, if you open your Bible up to First Peter chapter three. If you don't have a copy of the Scriptures, there's one under every other chair, use it, take it home if you don't have one. First Peter chapter three verses eight through 12. And because there are so few verses we're going to take a look at today, I'll read them and then we'll unpack them together as we take it for ways that God wants us to respond when injustice happens.

Hear the word of the Lord. He says, "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted and humble in spirit. Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead for you are called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For the one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good, he must seek peace and pursue it. Why? For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

And here in this text, what we see is how is it that we, as a community, can respond when injustice happens because we can't control when it's going to happen. Some of you are experiencing it presently, some of you who aren't, I'm encouraging

you today, take really good notes because, if you keep breathing, at some point in time, you're going to be wronged in an unfair manner. And how is it we're supposed to respond? Our flesh tells us something exactly opposite of what God's Word is going to tell us today. And in church, just so you know, when I'm painting this picture, it's really easy to sit here on a Sunday morning and say, "Yeah, when I'm wrong, this is what I'm going to do." I want you to think about those gut wrenching times when somebody has maligned your character only because you're doing the very right thing and here's what Peter tells us this morning.

When we respond to injustice, believers are called to unite in a sincere and demonstrable love for each other. We're to unite in a sincere and demonstrable love for each other, a genuine love for the body. Notice what he says, "To sum up." Now, what he's summing up is our example of Christ and how in this world we're to submit to authority, we're to submit to Jesus in every different area that we have and he sums it up by saying, "All of you," and he gives us five commands, "Be harmonious, be sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted and humble in spirit."

Now, notice what he says, he doesn't say do these things, he says, be these things. When you see these in the Bible, that's part of who your identity is in Christ, this is who God wants you to be and the reason he's calling you to be that is because, as a believer, Christ is in you so He's wanting to live this character in and through your life. And the first thing he says is be harmonious. Now, harmonious is literally translated same think, okay? You'll see this in the book of Philippians when he talks about having the same mind.

In Philippians chapter one and verse 27, as Paul is writing the church, he says it like this. He says, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that, whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear that you are standing firm and one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Same think doesn't mean that we all think identically about every single thing, that's called uniformity.

Unity means, for the sake of the glory of God and because of our love for Him, we genuinely love one another so that we represent this gospel that we say we so desperately believe. That's what it means. That's what it means to be harmonious. When you experience injustice, the one place that you should experience harmony and unity is in the body of Christ, that we should rally together as a body in our great love for God and our great love for one another because Jesus died for us. That's what he says.

And isn't it true that Jesus, in His high priestly prayer the night that He was betrayed before He was arrested and ended up going to the cross, as He was praying for His disciples and His future disciples in John 17, He prays for oneness three different times and, in John 17:23 He prays this, "I am them and You and Me that they may be perfected in unity so that the world may know that you sent Me and loved to them even as You have loved Me." All right? What was Jesus saying? Jesus and His father were perfect in unity. I and the Father are one, if you've seen Me, you've seen my Father. What was Jesus praying for His future disciples?

That His future disciples would have the same oneness that He had with His Father and that, when they did, the world would know that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now, it's one thing to talk about this in generalities and say, "Wouldn't it be great if we all just got along? Wouldn't it be great to have oneness?" It's a very another thing when we're being persecuted for the very things that we hold so foundational and dear. How do we link arms and how do we be harmonized? How do we be same think? How do we be unified with one another in the body for the sake of the glory of God, the love for one another in the advancement of His kingdom?

This is what Peter tells us. Be harmonious. This is where you hear this sometimes, it's a very familiar statement in the fundamentals, unity, in nonessentials, liberty, but in everything, love. We are called as a body of people to be in harmony and unity with one another over the gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, he says this, "Be sympathetic." Be sympathetic. Sympathetic means to sympathize with another's pain, it means that you suffer with them. We're called to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

It means that we're not insensitive nor are we indifferent. And this may be hard to understand in our culture because we hear about persecution but, normally, when we hear about severe persecution, it's usually in a different country or on another side of the globe and we hear it and it troubles us in our spirit and maybe we pray for them but it's hard to sympathize with them because we're not experiencing the same kind of torment.

But I want to tell you something, all of us who are Christians are part of the same body of Christ. We're all part of what goes on and, when the body is mistreated, the body of Christ is mistreated, we are called to sympathize with what they're going through. When a church gets burned to the ground in Africa because they stood up and said, "We believe in Jesus Christ and in Him alone," we don't just say, "Oh, I'm sorry, we'll pray you get a new building but we have a great building in Denver." No, we sympathize and we hurt because other brothers and sisters in Christ that are trying to live out the same gospel that we are, are being persecuted for what they believe.

It means we don't turn cold, it means we don't turn calloused, it means we have our antenna up to sympathize with others in the body of Christ that are being persecuted. If you read the newspaper or social media, you'll hear about people that because of their Christian faith in the business world, how they get persecuted. We're called to sympathize, we're called to come alongside, we're called to care for the body of Christ.

And then he says this. Be brotherly. Brotherly is literally translated from the word phileo which is where we get the word Philadelphia, it's love. Phileo is one of the words for brotherly love. It means we're to love one another. This is how we're to be marked as a church, is in our sincere devotion to one another. Even Jesus, when He's with His disciples in John chapter 13 verses 34 and 35 says it like this. He says, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another even as I have loved You, that you also love one another. By this," that's the love we have for one another, "All men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." How's the church

supposed to be known? Being unified, being sympathetic towards other believers and when people look on and see the church, the one distinguishing mark of the church would be look at the way that they love one another.

Now, when I say love one another, most of us would say, "Yeah, that's good. That's what we're supposed to do. I love Jesus, I love other people." This is not just any kind of love, this is a demonstrable love, this is demonstrating it in such a way that the person that you're demonstrating the love to feels it and receives it. It's not lip service love, it is actionable love, it is I'm brotherly towards you, I'm coming alongside of you like a brother would, I care about you, I'm showing you that I care about you. That's how we respond to injustice in the body of Christ. When the body of Christ is wounded, the body of Christ is to band together.

By the way, just so you know, because we live in North America and everybody fears persecution, persecution never stops the church. As a matter of fact, oftentimes, it advances it because it forces it to sift out who's really playing games and who really wants to be committed to one another. And while I'm not praying for persecution to come, I'm not afraid of persecution to come because I know if persecution ever comes, it doesn't change the fact that Jesus Christ sits on his throne and, if we do the things that God wants and we're harmonious and we're sympathetic and we brotherly love one another, that God is still honored and God will still advance His kingdom.

And then he tells us this. Because if you're tracking with the first three, you might say, "Well, this is really hard." And I would argue it's not hard, I would argue it's

impossible apart from the Spirit of God because notice what he says next. He says be kind-hearted. Kind-hearted is staying emotionally sensitive with our feelings. Staying emotionally sensitive with our feelings. Picture this. When somebody else wrongs you, you're called to love them back, you're going to see that in a minute in the text. It's not natural, it's unnatural unless you're empowered and filled by the Spirit of God. And here's what he also says, "And don't lose your feeling for another." Think about when you've been wronged by another person, really wronged by another person, it's been unjust, there's no doubt it's unjust and you come and you hear a sermon and you're called, "Hey, love that person." "Okay, I'll love him. Never going to talk to him, never going to spend time with him, never going to look at him again but I'll love them."

No, kind-hearted means you don't get that option. It means you pray that God will give you the same love for them in your feelings as in your actions. You don't get the option of going cold towards them. You get the option of saying, "Jesus, because You died for me, show me the emotion You had for me when I was rebelling against You, show me how much You love this person or group of people who have wronged me so that I can show them, not only in my actions but from my heart and feel the love that You have for them." Difficult? No. Impossible? Absolutely, apart from the Spirit of God. That's what it means to be kind-hearted. It's easy to pick who we're going to be kind-hearted to, we're talking about when you're enduring persecution.

And then finally, he says this, and be humble in spirit. Humility may be the greatest virtue of the Christian faith because humility is putting other people first, it's putting their needs first which, in a general sense, maybe because we understand that

that's what Christ did for us that we can do but we don't usually think of our enemies when we think that way. But Paul says in Philippians two, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but, with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves." Do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others. And here's our problem with the gospel, here's how most of us falsely think about the gospel. Yes, Jesus saved me and He still died for all those bad people out there, too, but I'm glad I'm in and I'm a pretty good person. That's how we think of the gospel.

Now, here's what the gospel is, in your flesh, in your nature, you are wicked and you depraved and you are rebellious in every possible way. And God, in His mercy, God the Father sent His son to be the Savior of the world. And, no matter how anybody else or any group of people treat you, it pales in comparison to how you individually have treated a perfect, holy and righteous God. And yet, God in His love, what was He? God was unified in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, harmonious in their same think that God the Father was going to send the Son to be the Savior of the world. What else do we see? We see the fact that God Himself was sympathetic and, even though we were wandering our own way, God went after us, He was brotherly and that He was loving towards us, He was kind-hearted. And then, was He humble? Absolutely, He was.

Philippians tells us how we can do what God asked us to do by putting other people first. He says in Philippians 2:5, "Have the same mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus." Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard a quality

with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant and be made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Did Jesus model all five of these things for you in the Gospel? 100%, He did and, therefore, because Christ is in you, this is what He wants you and what He wants us, collectively, as a body of people, to model to the world when individuals and groups of people persecute us. He wants us to act in the same fashion and this goes against the grain of everything that we want to do.

Most of us live in a culture, we live in a culture, just watch TV, we live in a culture when we're wrong, what do we want to do? Call our attorney, get justice. If you've ever taken this pill, if you've ever taken this drug, if you ever done this, if you've ever done this, call your attorney right now. We live in that society. If your coffee's too hot in the drive thru and you spill it on yourself, you may be a future millionaire. That's the world we live in. You've been taught from the time you're young, nobody can wrong you and, if they do, get them back, retaliate, go after them.

Nowhere in the world are you going to get this teaching. To be harmonious and sympathetic and brotherly and kind-hearted and humble in spirit when somebody else has intentionally done you wrong. That's what God says we do. If Christ is in us, the hope of glory, then we respond the same way that Jesus Christ did. We unite in a sincere and demonstrable love for one another. Second we do this, we respond to the attack under the control of the Holy Spirit. We respond to attack under the control of the Holy Spirit. Notice what he says, not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but

giving a blessing instead. Now what's evil? Evil is genuinely bad stuff. That's evil. We live in a world where we're afraid to call evil, evil. There's a lot of things in this world that are evil. There can be evil that come upon your life. When evil comes upon your life, He says don't return evil for evil. Don't return insult, for insult.

When someone verbally attacks you, an insult is abusive or railing or cursing at you, don't match it. We tend to want to match it. If somebody insults us, says things about us, does evil to us, we want to return it in kind or, "I'm not going to do it right now but wait till I get my friends." "Hey, wait till I get home and you see the picture I post on social media about you." "Wait till you see what I say about you. You do this to me. I'm going to come get you, I'm going to destroy you." That tends to be our flesh. Our flesh wants to get back. Our flesh, the more amped up you become, the more amped up I become, the more you're going to holler at me, the more I'm going to holler back at you. That's just the way our flesh does it. Here's what the Bible says, When people amp up their evil, don't return evil. When people amp up their insults, don't return their insults.

You say, "Well, who in the world ever acted like that?" Glad you asked. Jesus did. In First Peter chapter two, just the chapter before, we looked at this in verse 21 and following, for you have been called for this purpose. What's the purpose? Since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in His steps. Now, when you hear the message of the gospel, here's how most of us think of the gospel, "Just tell me I'm saved. Tell me God loves me, tell me I'm filled with His Spirit, tell me

He's never going to change His mind about me." And I can tell you, all those things are true but it doesn't just end there because God doesn't just want you to know the gospel and own the gospel, God wants to live out the Gospel in and through your life. And Jesus, not only died for you so you could have relationship with the Father, but now He becomes the example for how you're going to tolerate it when people abuse you.

Was Jesus ever treated in an evil way? Yeah, He was. He was falsely accused, He was falsely tried, He was beaten, He was mocked, He was spit on, He was abused, He was nailed to a cross, He hung in shame, people hollered at Him, insulted Him. Did anybody ever experience more of that than Jesus? Probably not. And, on top of that, Jesus Christ was taking on all the sins of the world. And what did He do when all those things were happening? Could He have reviled back? Could He have insulted back? Was He smart enough to do that? Was He powerful enough to do that? You bet He was and yet, the one who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in His mouth and while being reviled, He did not revile in return and while suffering He uttered no threats but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.

Jesus was not on the cross uttering threats. Jesus was not on the cross saying, "Some of you are going to believe in Me, but for the rest of you, mock Me now but you wait, one day I'm going to come take you out. I'm the king of the world." He didn't do that. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. What was He doing? He was modeling and living out everything Jesus wants us to live out when we're reviled, when we're abused, when we're mistreated, when we're treated unjustly. How do we

respond? The same way Jesus did on the cross. And how did He do that? He did it on the cross because all of us, in our nature, are rebellious. All of us in our nature have gone our own way and yet God demonstrated love for us and that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And it's not just Jesus that says this, it's all over the Bible.

I think about this story, I've watched a lot of movies in my day but there's a movie of the Untouchables where Eliot Ness played by Kevin Costner is talking to Sean Connery who's a beat cop and both these guys want to go get Al Capone. And Eliot Ness is asking him, "Where's the alcohol?" It's during the time of prohibition, he's like, "We're going to go take out Capone," he goes, "Everybody knows where the alcohol is because everybody knows what's going on. You just got to ask yourself how far are you willing to go." He goes, "I'm willing to do whatever it takes." And Sean Connery, the cop tells him, he goes, "When they send one of yours to the hospital, you send one of theirs to the morgue. That's the Chicago way. And if you're not willing to do that, don't go open that door." He's like, "I'm ready to do whatever."

Let me tell you, that's not the Bible way. Okay? They send one of yours to the hospital, you can't respond in kind. You don't get to kill somebody else, you don't get to wish ill upon somebody else, you don't get those options. You don't get to respond to evil with evil, you don't get to respond to insult with insult, that's not being Christ like. Notice what he says, "But give a blessing instead." Say what? When people intentionally hurt you, here's your response, you get to bless them. You get to verbally praise who they are, you get to ask for God to give them abundant favor in their life for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. Do you know

what you're called to as a Christian? Not only have you been saved from all of your sins, completely forgiven, empowered by the Holy Spirit and going to experience grace upon grace, but the moment you die and breathe your last breath, you're going to be co-heir with Jesus Christ in all of his riches and you did nothing to earn it and He freely gave it to all of you, you're destined for blessing.

Now, the thing I love about this text and the reason I love God is that the Holy Spirit pin the words through Peter. If there's anybody that knew how to return evil for evil and insult for insult in his flesh, it was Peter. Amen? Peter knew how to do that. In the night that Jesus was betrayed and all the Roman soldiers came to take Jesus and all the evil was coming upon Jesus, did Peter just stand by? No, Peter pulled out his sword to cut the head off of Malchus and remember what happened? He ducked and Peter cut off his ear. Peter wasn't standing by. You want to bring evil? We'll kill you. That was Peter. And Jesus was like, "No, no, no, that's not what we're going to do," and He picked up the ear and put it back on Malchus.

And then, just hours later, Peter standing by the fire to warm himself and, three different times, people are coming to him and was like, "You're one of those guys with Jesus, you're a Galilean, I recognize your accent." And he called down curses in the name of the Lord like I've never met the man. If there's anybody that knew how to curse and insult, it was Peter. He was a master at it until Jesus rose from the dead and he was filled by the Spirit and now he's saying this. Not only don't do this but guess what? I used to live like this and it's wrong and I don't live this way anymore. Don't return evil with evil and don't return insult with insult but return it with a blessing.

And, by the way, Peter is not the only one who's saying these things. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we see this all throughout the New Testament.

Notice what Paul says in First Corinthians chapter four. First Corinthians chapter four and verse 12 he says, "We toil, we work with our own hands and, when we are reviled, we bless. And when we're persecuted, we endure. When we're slandered, we try to conciliate. We have become the scum of the world, the dregs of all things even until now." Paul says the same thing in Romans chapter 12 and verse 14. "Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse." In our flesh, let's just be honest, I'm a pastor, I know this. It's way easier to curse someone else. It's the restraining power of the Holy Spirit that will not allow it. And even Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain, you can look in both Matthew five through seven or I'm just going to take this from Luke six. Luke 6:27 and 28 says this, "But I say to you," he's talking about his enemies, "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Bless and do not curse, pray for those who mistreat you."

How about this? Here's some responses that you can have when people intentionally bring insult and evil into your life. You ready? Love them. Demonstrably love them. Bless them. Praise them. Pray for them. When you're praying for them, you're not praying that they die by a car wreck, you're praying for them that they receive God's blessing. That's what you get to do. Love them, bless them, pray for them and how about this one? Do good to them. Do good to them. Real easy in a church service to say, "Okay, that's great. I wrote them all down." No, no, no. It's

really, really hard. When somebody intentionally is coming after your character for the sole purpose of you living on mission for Jesus Christ and attacking you for you to say, in response to that, "I'm going to love you, I'm going to bless you, I'm going to do good for you and I'm going to pray God's favor on your life."

And here's what I'm praying for you, that you would know God and, if you do know God, that you would live for Him and that He would bless your life in a way that would be so tangible that everybody would see it. And then I'll give you a fifth one because this is all over the scripture too. You get to forgive people. You get to forgive them when they wronged you. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. They knew exactly what they were doing. What was Jesus modeling? Jesus was modeling on the cross I'm not holding this sin against you. This will not keep you out of heaven. No sin will keep you out of heaven. Well, forgive. And isn't it true that that's what we're called to do? Love, bless, do good, pray for and forgive.

Now, who's this good for because it doesn't feel good, it doesn't sound good? It's good for you. When you walk this way, here's what happens. You begin to see how Jesus was when sinners were coming against him and you are one of them and yet guess what? By you loving the unlovable people, praying for unlovable people, asking God to bless unlovable people, you're getting to live out exactly what Jesus Christ did and is continuing to do. And oh, by the way, if you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus Christ, He's still harmonious, He's still sympathetic, He's still loving, He's still humble, He's still wanting to draw you into a relationship with Himself and He's completely kind-hearted and it's the kindness of the Lord that leads to repentance and

God has an incredible love for you drawing you home no matter what you've done, that's who our God is. And if you know Him, then He says, "Yeah, I'm in you now I want to live that out through your life," which means this.

I meet Christians, because I'm a pastor, I have to, I guess. I talk to Christians all the time who love God but have unforgiveness in their heart. And when you talk to them, you'll hear the bitterness or the callous come in because, at some point in the conversation, they'll say something like this. "Yeah, but my mom did this when I was this age," or, "My dad was never around," or, "My coach in high school such and such," or, "I had this teacher one time that spoke to me in this way," or, "There was a person in that last church we were in that blah, blah, blah," or, "You don't understand my wife, you don't understand my husband, and you don't know what they..." You know what? It's called unforgiveness because if you can't get to a place that you're praying for the blessing and the person that hurt you and genuinely desire to see that, you're the one that's in sin. That's what Jesus did. He's our model. Difficult to do? Mm-mm (negative). Impossible apart from the Spirit of God but very possible with His Spirit. And this is how God grows us, this is what God wants us to do.

Now, if you're checking out on this message, I'd encourage you not to. Take good notes because injustice will come your way, I promise you. In this world, you will have tribulation, there's a no doubt guarantee about that. But isn't it interesting because Peter is also the one that would ask the question that you're asking. Well, how much do I have to do this? Jesus was the one that came to Peter and said, "Lord, I get the whole forgiveness thing but how many times do I have to forgive people? Up to seven

times? Would that be good enough?" And remember what Jesus responded? "No, how about this Peter? Seventy times seven." Now, if you just do the simple math, that's 490 times. Jesus wasn't saying, "At 491, cut him off." Here's what He was saying. You keep forgiving but, every time you forgive, it goes back to ground zero which means you consistently forgive for the rest of your life no matter how many times that they wrong you because you're in Me now and because I'm in you and we're doing something together that you weren't doing before.

I'm telling you, many Christians stunt their growth with Christ because of unforgiveness. They won't call it unforgiveness, they'll call it, "I was hurt. I'm a little bit bitter. I'm a little bit resentful." All those are buzz terms for I have unforgiveness in my heart and I can't forgive them. Jesus goes on to tell Peter a story after that time when he asked how many times about this king that forgave an insurmountable debt of a servant and the servant was so excited he left, he was set free because he got paid for a debt that he could never pay and then went out and there was a guy that owed him some chump change and he ended up choking the guy.

And Jesus was like, "What are you doing?" The master is like, "I just forgave all of your debt. How can you treat somebody like this?" Here's the point of the parable. The point of the parable is, as a Christian, it's incongruent to not forgive somebody else. Said another way, you can't call yourself a Christian and have unforgiveness in your heart. Impossible. You can call yourself whatever you want but you're not acting Christ like if you have unforgiveness in your heart, it's an impossibility.

Lord, forgive us our sins in the same way that we forgive others. That's the Lord's Prayer. As Christians, we're called to forgive who? Everybody. How often? All the time. For how long? Till we meet Jesus face to face. Christians, don't stunt your growth because of somebody that did something wrong to you, forgive them. As I've said from this pulpit, harboring unforgiveness is like drinking poison consistently hoping the other person dies, it will never work. God wants you, and here's the solution to do this, bless them, pray for them, do good for them, honor them, speak well of them, forgive them. By doing that, you release the sting of what happened in your life and, by God's Spirit, all these things are possible. I find the more that I walk with Christ, the longer I'm a pastor and the longer I live, the more opportunity I have to put this into practice.

For me, this is not a sermon that says, "Oh, this is going to be good for our people." For me, as I'm studying the Word of God this week, I'm like, "God, I needed to hear this all over again. This is good for me." Here's what God tells us to do. God tells us to unite in a sincere and demonstrable love, respond to attack under the control of the Holy Spirit and then He tells us this, to submit our hearts and our steps to the Lord Jesus Christ. Submit our hearts and steps to the Lord Jesus Christ. What Peter is going to do next in verse 10 as quote, Psalm 34 verses 12 through 16, and he's going to say this, "For the one who desires life to love and see good days." In other words, if you want to live the good life with Jesus, if you want to experience more Jesus in your life, more of the Holy Spirit in your life, here's what you must do. "He must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit."

Not taking anatomy classes, I understand, anatomically, the heart is not connected to the tongue. But as a theologian, I'll tell you, that's exactly the connection that's made. Your heart is connected to your tongue. When you are hurt and when you are wounded, know this, whatever comes out of your mouth is really what's going on in your heart. For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. You ever had a situation where things have come out of your mouth, that maybe they felt good while they were coming out but, after they landed, you would say, "I wish I had that one back. I wish I hadn't said that one. That didn't have the intent I wanted it to have." Are there any married couples in here? Can I please get an amen?

Amen.

Okay. Where it comes out because you've been hurt and it comes out of your mouth. And what comes out of your mouth is really expressing the pain that you have in your heart and you're matching insult for insult or evil for evil. And here's what he says, "Submit your heart to the Lord. For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." Now, for those of us who are extroverts like me and who verbally process like me, this is exceptionally hard. Proverbs 10:19. Proverbs 10:19 says this, "Where there are many words, transgression is unavoidable."

Sin is unavoidable where you speak a lot but he who restrains his lips is wise. Can I just give you a word of advice from God's word? When you get hurt, it's a great time to do this. Ssshh, don't talk. Just don't talk. It's not the time to talk when you've been hurt. I'm telling you from God's Word and I'm telling you from many years of

experience, not a good time to talk. Where there are many words, sin is not absent. When you're hurt, it's not absent. What are we called to do? Go back and submit your heart to the Lord.

Lord, this was unjust. Lord, the way that she said, Lord, the way that he said, Lord, what they did, I didn't like it, it was wrong. So, Lord, you going to have to change my heart because, Lord, I want to love them but I don't feel like loving them. And Lord, you need to give me your love for them because I don't have that right now. And Lord, until I do, I need to keep my mouth shut. That's what he's telling us to do. You must restrain your tongue and you can't do it on your own apart from being filled by the Holy Spirit. That's why James chapter three verses one through 12 devote almost an entire chapter to the taming of the tongue because it's important for us to know that, when these things happen, that we, sssh, just don't speak out. We must keep our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking deceit. And then notice, he goes four commands in verse 11, to turn away from evil and do good, he must seek peace and pursue it. To turn away from evil means that you don't just participate in it, you don't think about how am I going to get you back, you don't think about look what they did wrong to me. It means I've turned my back on that, I've forgiven that and I'm going to start doing good, I'm going down a different path, I'm not harboring this.

Christian, listen to me. When somebody wronged you and they wronged you severely, you can always find another Christian and plead your case and they will feel sorry for you no matter what it was. You can always find someone who will agree. You can always find someone who will say, "Man, I would have never put up with that. Man,

I'm so sorry that happened to you." You can always find somebody to do that, don't do that. Turn your back on that by forgiving them and then by walking in a way where that person that hurt me, my goal, because I'm a Christ follower is I'm going to do good to them, I'm going to bless them, I'm going to love them, that's what I'm going to do. That's how I'm going to handle the relationship. And then he gives us these final two, he must seek peace and pursue it. Now, most of us don't understand what peace is. For most of us, peace is a place. It's a place in the mountains or when I'm on vacation or a place of prosperity or financial gain or popularity or power that will bring peace.

Can I just assure you none of those things ever bring peace because peace is not a place, peace is a person. Peace is the person of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. And the truth is, no matter who insults you and no matter where you go, He and He alone are the only one, He's the only one that can bring you peace in your heart. Your spouse will never bring you deep peace, complete peace. Your kids can't bring you peace, your parents can't bring you peace, your coach, even your pastor cannot bring you peace. Only Jesus Christ, the God man, can bring you peace. When you've been wronged, you can go to whoever you want, you can call whoever you want, you can talk to whoever you want, it doesn't bring peace.

Only by going to Jesus, the one who fully understands what it's like to be insulted and treated evil and mistreated in every way can tell you, "Oh, yeah, I get it. I totally get it. That was so wrong. The way they treated you is awful but I want you know something, I understand and here's how I'm asking you to respond. Seek me." And then He says this, pursue me. Seek and pursue are both active words. Now, most of

us in church, we like to talk about the religious duties that we do. So, if I asked you if you spent time with the Lord before you came to church, you would tell me that you read your Bible or that you prayed or that you put worship music on in the car. What you did, what you did, what you did and you can do a lot of things while not being pursuing the Lord.

I'm asking you this. Are you pursuing Jesus? Because if you're really hurt, just reading your Bible for the sake of reading or just praying for the sake of praying are different than when you're crying out to the Lord saying, 'Lord, I am so hurt right now. I need you and I'm worshipping you because I need you. And I'm praying to you because I need you. And I'm reading your word because you need to show me in Your word what I have to do and who I need to be because I need you.' There's a pursuit of Jesus. Do you have that in your life? Are you seeking Him and pursuing Him? Because it's in Jesus that we have peace. Paul writes this in Romans chapter five and verse one what true peace looks like. He says this. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And here's the truth about seeking the peace in the person of Jesus. It means everywhere you go, no matter what the conflict is, you can experience peace in that moment no matter what. You can have peace. That's who our God is. Even under the worst trials and under the worst circumstances, you can have peace. And we can stand up here and tell stories, I can tell personal ones, we can read extreme ones of people who have been severely hurt and severely mistreated. I think oftentimes of Corrie Ten Boom during the Nazi regime and how her and her family suffered

massively under the weight of the Nazi regime and people who are murderous and insensitive to her and her family and all those things.

And, post-World War Two, when she was out speaking on behalf of Jesus, having to meet other soldiers who are abusive to her family and tell them about the love of Jesus and personally tell them that the very person that was abusive to her family, that God would forgive because of the cross of Jesus Christ. It's hard for me to read those stories without weeping because I see Jesus all up in and through her when she was doing that.

Impossible? No, possible with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And here's two things that God will do, God will do one of these two things. When you respond the way God wants you to respond or when we, collectively as a church, respond the way God wants us to respond, here's what will happen. Number one, He'll use our testimony or use your testimony to win people to Christ. Which, for all eternity means this, God will take those who are abusive to you and He'll use your testimony to draw people to Himself. Or, number two, you can be assured of this.

God is a God of justice and He will take care of it and He will wipe every tear from your eye. That's a promise from His word. And that's why he tells us how do we respond and this last one is so important. That the way that we respond is that we focus on God's protection and His perfect judgment. We focus on his protection and His perfect judgment. Look at verse 12. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer. The eyes of the Lord is an Old

Testament statement, it means He's looking around and who's He looking toward? He's looking toward the righteous. Why? Because He protects those who are His.

Now, I have three children 12, 10 and soon to be six. And, every now and again, when my kids are outside and they're playing, I'll just happen to step outside and I'll happen to figure out where they're jumping on the trampoline or who they're hanging out with or if they're with older kids because I want to know what's going on with my kids. Why? Because my eyes are towards my kids. I'm watching my kids and I don't intervene very often at all but I know, if something were happening to one of my kids that they couldn't handle themselves or they were getting hurt or abused or something like that, I can intervene. Do you know why? Because I can take every 12, 10 and six-year-old in my neighborhood. I'm that good.

Let me tell you about the almighty, eternal God of the universe, He can handle anything that's coming your way. He's a protector and He's a lover. I know what some of you are thinking, "Then why are some people martyred?" Here's my answer. I don't know, God's ways are higher than our ways. But here's what I would tell you. What I would tell you is God is involved in that and God is so gracious and God is so good that He never gives anybody any more than they can handle. And, while we only see part of the equation, let me tell you this, this life is not the end, it's only the beginning, it's just a little blip on the radar screen.

And I can tell you that those who have been martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ are experiencing glory in immeasurable ways that we'll never even imagine. And those who have been martyred and now up in heaven, bemoaning the fact that they

were martyred, they're with Jesus celebrating who He is. Here's the truth. God will always protect you to the length that He wants to. That's just who our God is. His eyes are towards the righteous and His ears attentive to their prayers.

We talked about last week that in a marriage, when a husband and wife are off and when a husband and wife aren't loving each other the way God wants us to, the prayers are hindered. Your prayers are hindered if you're not walking righteously, if you're not doing what God wants. And yes, you're saved and, yes, you're loved and, yes, you're eternally secure and, yes, you'll spend eternity with God but when you're praying, your prayers are hindered. Because what does God want? God wants to show you love to unlovable people because that's what the whole Gospel is about. That's what he did for you.

So, when we're praying righteous prayers, we're praying for unlovable, sometimes evil, sometimes insulting people that they would experience the love of God through us. God is a protector but He's also perfect in his judgment. Notice the back end of that verse, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. It's against those who do evil. Now, we look at this sometimes and we ask the same question they ask in the Psalms, why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? What's going on here? It seems like in our world, it's wicked people do better and righteous people aren't doing as good, that's not totally true. Here's the truth. Eternity is a really, really, really long time and God is incredibly fair and just. And here's the truth. In this dispensation, what does God want for wicked people? God wants all wicked people to come to know who He is. God has extended a call so that the most vile sinner, no

matter where he or she may be, can come into relationship with Him.

I believe that's why Peter doesn't quote the back half of Psalm 34 verse 16, because if you turn your Bible to Psalm 34, you'll see this exact verse being quoted but Psalm 34 and verse 16 says this. "The face of the Lord is against evildoers," but he doesn't put the second part in, the Holy Spirit doesn't have him put the second part in. "To cut off the memory of them from the earth." Why? Because we're in the dispensation of grace. God's purpose in this dispensation, no matter how far you traveled, no matter what you've done, no matter how evil you've been, how insulting you've been, here's what God wants you to know.

I love you with an unconditional love and there's still time for you to have a relationship with Me. I want to be in a relationship with you. I traveled across the spans of eternity to get to you and demonstrate to you that I love you. That's who our God is. He's an awesome, incredible God. Which means, if you've never trusted in Him, you can trust in Him right now for the forgiveness of your sins knowing that, through His death and His burial and His resurrection, He'll take you as His very own and when you confess Him as your Lord.

And, for those of us who have trusted Jesus Christ as our own personal Lord and Savior, I realize this is a hard message. I realize it's tough to preach and I realize it's even harder to live out. Because every part of us says, "I love that Jesus did it for me, I just don't want to do it for anybody else." Or, "I'll do it for good people but I don't want to do it for those wicked people." This is a message for you to treat the most vile

offenders towards you the way that Christ treated the most vile offenders towards Him. And I'm telling you, on the authority of God's word, if you continue living and breathing, you will have opportunity to put this into practice and it's only possible by the Spirit of God. That's why we submit our hearts to Him, we trust God and we don't take judgment into our own hands. We don't have to call our attorney every single time somebody wrongs us, we don't have to fight every little thing, we as Christians, as a church.

Most people outside in the world, they hear everything that we're against and nothing that we're for. If we spent the majority of our time focused on these things of what we're for and the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace and our love for each other and the glory of Jesus in the advancement of His gospel and blessing and asking forgiveness and loving unlovable people and that's what we were known for, I tell you what would happen. It happened just like what Jesus said. When you're one, when we're one, then the world would know that you sent me. What's the world looking to see? A united church responding to injustice the way that He would want. And guess what? We all have a role to play in that because, at some point or another, every single one of us is going to experience some measure of injustice and God gives us His way to do that. So, would you stand with me today as we close?

Lord Jesus, we give You praise for who You are. Lord, we love You. If you're here today and you've never responded to God's love, here's how you can pray. Lord Jesus, I recognize today I'm one of those sinners that don't have a relationship with you but I believe You died on the cross for my sin and rose from the dead and, right

now, I confess You as Lord, come into my life and, Lord, let me live for You. And Lord, for those of us who are believers, we love You, Lord. We love how You did this for us. Lord, teach our hearts and teach our minds to love others the way that You did so that we represent You well. We give You all the praise and honor in Jesus' name, amen.

Amen.