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**Unity for the Gospel**

**1 Peter 3:8-12**

**Congregational Reading #1**

Psalm 111 *Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name! The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!*

This describes God! God does what He does, not in isolation, but in community. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are a community, in perfect unity. Each of them is committed to their unity.

God didn’t make us because He was lonely. God made us because He wanted us to enjoy what He enjoys, unity in community with Him and with each other. We were made for this.

So, when we’re unified in our church…we best reflect Who God Is

1 Peter 3:8-12 *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.”*

Peter first gives a synopsis of the quote from Psalm 34 in verses 8 and 9

And then he gives the direct quote in verses 10-12

1 Peter 3:8 *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind*

Peter tells us the best way to navigate suffering is to learn to be the Church!

Cultivate Christian love, evidenced by a “unity of mind”

 Cooperation in the midst of diversity

 We cannot deal with outside oppression well if we don’t first deal with

 differences and conflicts within the church

But, we have to work at unity. Unity with other people is not natural to us!

Richard Lovelace: While Christians know intellectually that their justification (acceptance by God) is the basis for their sanctification (their actual moral behavior), in their actual day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for their justification…drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience.

Tim Keller: the results of this inversion are smug self-satisfaction (if we feel we are living up to the standards) or insecurity, anxiety and self-hatred (if we feel we are failing to live up to the standards.) In either case, the results are defensiveness, a critical spirit, racial or cultural ethnocentricity to bolster a sense of righteousness, an allergy to change, and other forms of spiritual deadness, both individual and corporate.

Our truth-allergic, experience-addicted church populace wants transformation but doesn’t want the loss of freedom and control associated with submitting to authority within a committed church community. As a result, converts’ lives are often not visibly different from those in the culture around them.

Submission within the church is not ultimately about being under someone else’s authority; it’s about unity. It’s about loving Jesus more than we love ourselves, and therefore reflecting who God is

The Russian novelist Dostoevsky said “Hell is the punishment of being unable to love”

1 Peter 3:8 *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind*

In church, we may differ on how things are to be done, but we must be unified on what is to be done, and why it has to be done

Sympathy, or “Compassion” – feeling for and with the needs of others

 Our English word: sympathy

 Opposite of being hard-hearted

Brotherly love: this only happens when we see each other as family members

Tender heart: pity, thinking beyond ourselves

 Not a trait admired in the Roman Empire

Humility is the foundation for submission. A humble mind means you agree

What this is really saying is that a humble mind is submitting to each other, submitting to our church leaders, submitting our own opinions and preferences under the greater priority of unity in the church

No Paul includes both how we treat each other, and how we respond to persecution from non-believers

1 Peter 3:9 *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing*

evil for evil is actions, and reviling is words. Gossip is a form of reviling

Love our enemies? Three responses

 Return evil for good (Satanic level)

 Return evil for evil, and good for good (human level)

 Return good for evil (divine level)

 on the level of mercy, rather than the level of justice

Narcissists, even religious narcissists are less likely to forgive others:

 They see others’ transgressions against them as a debt to be paid, and

 want those debts repaid

 They are less willing to forgive God for problems or troubles in their own

 lives

Peter says the motivation is to “obtain a blessing”

Matthew 5:10-12 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

But what exactly is this “blessing” Peter is talking about?

Humility and gracious responses to persecution would potentially allow for church members to live longer, and for there to be more toleration to the Christian faith (?)

In the context of coming persecution, Peter is essentially saying that the church needs to be unified simply in order to survive

1 Peter 3:10-11 *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.*

Deliberately decide to love the life God gives us. Optimism, seeing the best, gratitude

 Opposite of Ecclesiastes 2:17 *So I hated life, because what is done under*

 *the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

1 Peter 3:10-11 *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.*

Our mouths reveal what’s in our hearts

James 3:7-12 *For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

1 Peter 3:10-11 *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.*

Do good…and hate evil in us

Romans 12:9-10 *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

Seek and pursue peace

Romans 12:17-18 *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

“as far as it depends on you” means you cannot control the outcome, only your attempts, your efforts to contribute to peace

Does not mean peace at all costs, but peace around what the gospel says and living our lives in obedience to Jesus

Truth is not sacrificed on the altar of church harmony, but personal feelings belong on that altar

I Peter 3:12 *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

God will provide His grace to strengthen and establish believers in the midst of suffering and in times of great need…because He wants us to be a people, a church that reflects Him…in how we each submit ourselves to unity.

If Psalm 111 was a picture of God, Psalm 112 is a picture of God’s people…why God’s people will be persecuted…and why we have can have hope in the midst of persecution…

**Congregational Reading #2**

Psalm 112 *Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments! His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor. The wicked man sees it and is angry; he gnashes his teeth and melts away; the desire of the wicked will perish!*