

## **This Exiled Life – Part 3**

### Godly Virtues in an Ungodly World

1 Peter 3:8-12

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<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; <sup>11</sup> let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup> 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." 1 Peter 3:8–12 (ESV)

In 2004 *First Things* Magazine ran a reflective article written by Robert Wilken, a leading American historian on early Christianity, about the state of Christianity in the West. Wilken had recently completed a tour of Europe, and he made the following statement:

*Nothing is more needful today than the survival of Christian culture because in recent generations this culture has become dangerously thin. At this moment in the Church's history . . . it is less urgent to convince the alternative culture in which we live of the truth of Christ than it is for the church to tell itself its own story and to nurture its own life, the culture of the City of God, the Christian republic.<sup>1</sup>*

That quotation made me think. It is in chapter 5 of the book, *Benedict Option*, that I referenced two weeks ago. Do you know what Wilken was saying thirteen years ago? He was attempting to help the church wake-up to the fact that if there is nothing uniquely Christian about the culture of the church, then we really have no credible gospel witness to share.

Rod Dreher, the author of *The Benedict Option*, then quotes from Russell Moore's book *Onward* and draws an important conclusion that relates to our text this morning: "We will be speaking not primarily to baptized pagans on someone's church roll, but to those who are hearing something new, maybe for the first time. We will hardly be normal, but we should have never tried to be." He offers this helpful conclusion: "*The best witness the church can offer to post-Christian America is to be the church, as fiercely and creatively a minority as we can manage.*"

### **Exiled Living Inside and Out**

These three authors are trying to figure out the same thing that we are trying to work through as we study the book of 1 Peter. There are critical questions on the table that relate to how the church is to

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<sup>1</sup> Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, (Sentinel: New York, New York, 2017), 100.

respond to the culture outside the church and what is the culture to be like inside the church. To be an effective Christian exile means that you must think about both.

If you only think about how to respond to the changing or hostile culture but neglect the “home-front,” Christianity will not be credible. Who wants to believe in something that doesn’t work in people’s lives, homes, marriages, and relationships? And if you only think about your internal culture (i.e., the church, the home, the marriage, etc.), Christianity will not be relevant and applicable to a world that has lost its way. Who wants to listen to the gospel when it doesn’t address the real issues that non-Christians are facing?

To be a Christian requires that we are constantly concerned about and responding to two cultures. We are trying to build a robust, godly, and biblical culture with other believers, and we are figuring out how to respond and live in an ungodly culture in a way that is biblical, wise, and faithful.

Whether you are a student, single, married, or retired, you need to have a group of Christian friends that are helping you grow, holding you accountable, and pouring into you spiritually. But you also need to have non-Christian friends where you are demonstrating what it means to live out the gospel. You need to remember that our time together on Sunday mornings and in Small Groups needs to be robust and deep so that you know how to engage the culture the rest of the week.

Christian exiles are called to navigate the outside culture while creating a healthy internal culture. We have to do both.

Our journey through 1 Peter has caused us to think about both our heavenly inheritance, how to respect human institutions, and how to embrace our status as a people of God’s own possession while being submissive to earthly authorities.

Our text today, 1 Peter 3:8-12, helps us see the calling of living in both cultures. It gives us a list of virtues and behaviors that should characterize gospel-loving people as they live in both cultures – one inside the church and one outside the church. How do we “be the church” both inside and out? How do Christians live as “sojourners and exiles”? (1 Peter 2:11)

### **Five Virtues for Inside the Church**

Verse eight is a wonderfully loaded passage, and it is designed to mark a broader transition in our study of 1 Peter. From 3:9-4:19 Peter is going to talk extensively about the way that believers live in the midst of suffering.

This verse (3:8) starts with the word “finally,” and it is addressed to “all of you.” Peter is bringing his specific applications of exile living to a summary statement while broadening the application to everyone in the church. Instead of addressing people dealing with governmental opposition, unkind employers, disobedient husbands, or a misunderstanding of the role of a husband, Peter now wants everyone in the church to listen and pay attention.

He lists five virtues or characteristics that should mark a godly and healthy community of believers. This should be the fragrance of a church in general but also that of a small group, a youth ministry, a women's Bible study, a men's group, or any expression – large or small – of the body of Christ.

## 1. Unity

The first adjective and virtue is expressed as “unity of mind.” In the original language, there is only one Greek word (*homophrones*) which is a combination of two words meaning *same* and *understanding*. It means that share a common mindset. Other translations render this “one mind,” “like-minded,” or “harmonious.”

Throughout the New Testament, the Bible place a very high value on unity and harmony. A few examples:

*<sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5–6 (ESV)*

*<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 1 Corinthians 1:10–11 (ESV)*

*<sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV)*

Wherever there are people, there is a real possibility of division and dissension. For many reasons, humans are prone to tribalism and an “us-versus-them” mindset. Our present culture has made this even worse with social media and cable news “echo chambers” of people who think like us and reinforce how right and loud we should be.

Peter is not saying that every Christian thinks exactly the same, but he is highlighting that a Christian community should be marked by a common understanding of what is really important, what we are striving toward, and what life is all about. That is one reason why we have a church covenant, because it identifies what it means to be a part of the church, this church.

I've been around the church long enough to know that very few people ever set out to be blatantly divisive. Instead, what I've observed is that our emotions, frustrations, or fears get the best of us, and we forget about the bigger picture. Words come out, a post is published, an email is sent, and we don't consider the cost on unity. Our world is filled with division, and the gospel looks powerful when it creates unity. The inside culture of a church should value unity.

## 2. Sympathy

The next three words are similar but express the kind of affections that believers should have for one another. The word *sympathy* simply means a sharing of concern for other people.

Believers are to look out for one another and walk with one another through the needs, joys, and sorrows of life.<sup>2</sup> On a practical level, we are to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). A Christian community is to be marked by concern for others. There is to be a realization that life is not all about me.

Have you ever wondered why with a church our size we pray for a few people by name on Sundays? It is not just because they need prayer. It is also because we need to be reminded about the real needs of real people who are a part of our church. So, who are you praying for right now? How long has it been since you’ve asked someone how you can pray for them? A concern for others is what makes the church a special and gospel-platforming place.

### **3. Brotherly Love**

Peter really emphasizes the family-love that believers are to have for one another. It is all over his letter (1:22, 2:7, and 5:9). Peter wants exiles to understand that their relationship with Jesus has ushered them into a new family with new relationships and a new identity. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are a brother or sister in Christ. And we are to love one another in a way that fits with that relationship.

Therefore, to be the church means more than that we just gather together once week. Or that we all like the same ingredients that make our church what it is. Being part of a church means that there is a connectedness between us that is underneath any similarities and differences. Our common love for Jesus creates a love for one another that transcends all other typical barriers. Therefore, to really experience and to be the church, it demands that we live out this love.

Is this how you think about your church? Is that how you thought about coming to church this morning? Do you realize that a very important reason why you are here today is to live out brotherly love? The normal and healthy way for a church to function is through brotherly love. And if that isn’t happening, then something is wrong. If that isn’t a part of how you see the church, then your understanding of the church is not in line with the biblical vision. Brotherly love is the normal way that a church is to function and live. In other words, you should be giving and receiving brotherly love in the church all the time.

### **4. Tenderness**

The next virtue is connected to what we feel for other people when they are suffering or in pain. The ESV chooses the words “a tender heart,” while the NIV uses “be compassionate.” In the original language, the word is a combination of “good” and “internal organs or bowels.”

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 163

Have you ever heard about someone's struggle and pain such that it made you feel sick to your stomach? Maybe it zapped your energy or made you feel a bit nauseous. That's the idea. You feel for other people deeply. Their ache is your ache. Their pain is your pain.

One of the reasons that our Elders are working hard at knowing our members is because we want to do our part in being aware and praying for the tender struggles of our people. We've had almost 900 prayer requests turned in, and our Elders are praying for each one.

Part of the reason why it is important for you to know one another by name (as best you can) is that you can be involved in each other's lives at some level. Being considerate of each other is part of what the church culture is supposed to be.

Could you look for hurting people around you? Would you be so bold as to ask people how you can pray for them? Would you hang around a little bit on Sunday morning after service and get to know people? And if you are not connected yet, would you let us help you find a way to live in community?

## **5. Humility**

This last virtue is obvious but so elusive. Humility means that you have a right understanding of yourself in light of God, the gospel, and others. People who have been rescued by God and captured by His grace see themselves differently. People who know the depth of their own sin and who know how much they've been forgiven treat fellow sinners differently. Humility is only truly possible if we know the reality of the gospel.

During Peter's day humility was not prized by the Greco-Roman world so this virtue would have set the church apart from the culture in a substantial way.<sup>3</sup> The deference and considering of others as more important than oneself creates a culture that says something powerful and compelling to the world.

This is one of the many reasons why it is important that we rehearse the gospel when we gather together. We need to be reminded who God is, what He did for us, and the effect that has on our relationships with others.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, this is one of the things that should pique your interest about the gospel. I want you to understand that true humility comes out of understanding that Jesus rescued a rebel and paid for his or her sins. I want you to understand that a Christian has nothing to boast about because everything we have is a gift from God. And that is why many people reject Christianity. They cannot come to acknowledge that they are a sinner and that Jesus is the only one who can take care of our sins. But when you come to believe that, it changes everything!

So, believers, these are the virtues that should mark your relationships with other believers, in your small group, and in our church in general. This is the kind of culture that we should strive to create, to

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<sup>3</sup> Schreiner, 163.

maintain, and to protect. This is the kind of culture that is desperately needed in an antagonistic, hedonistic, self-centered world.

This is the inside culture that we should seek to create in our expression of the body of Christ at College Park Church.

## **Five Virtues for Outside the Church**

Now that we understand the priorities inside the church, let's look at how Christian exiles are to handle opposition and persecution outside the church. We are going to see this in verses 9-12, and also in the rest of chapter three, so let's consider this a bit of an introduction. We'll unpack these concepts even further in the weeks to come.

How are you to respond when your Christianity becomes costly? What should be your response when you are mocked, slandered, mistreated, or directly persecuted? Let me give you five virtues to think about and act upon:

### **1. Christ-likeness**

Peter begins by saying something that should sound familiar: "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling." Where did we hear that before? It was back in 2:23 as Peter talked about the example of Jesus in His suffering and how He left us an example or model for how we are to respond.

The natural, human tendency is to treat people the way that you are being treated. It only seems fair and even just. If someone is cutting you down, you respond in kind. If someone is being condescending, it is very tempting to do the same. The pull toward a "tit for tat" or blow for blow is very strong. It is hard to let someone get away with unfair treatment.

And yet this text invites us to embrace the example of Jesus by not responding like everyone else. When we don't retaliate, we do two things: 1) we follow the example of Jesus, and 2) we make a loud statement that there is something very unusual about us. Therefore, you need to see moments of mockery and unfair treatment not simply as unfair but as a platform. You **get** to suffer. You **get** to be Christ-like. You **get** to show people how real your faith really is.

### **2. Kindness**

However, the Bible is not calling you to merely passively endure. You are actually called to do something, but it is not easy. This text, along with a number of others, calls those who are being persecuted to bless their persecutors. Luke 6:28-29 offers this stunning command:

<sup>28</sup> ... *bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.* <sup>29</sup> *To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.* Luke 6:28-29 (ESV)

What does it mean to "bless"? The idea is to cry out to God on behalf of those who are unkind, asking God to be kind and gracious to them. You pray for God's grace to come into their lives. You pray what

Jesus did on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” You pray compassionately for them because they are only doing what is natural for them to do. Sinful people are trapped in their own sin, and the follower of Jesus is able to look beyond the immediate hurt, unfairness, and unkindness. They pray on behalf of those who persecute them.

So is there anyone in your life right now that you should be praying for and blessing? Is there anyone who you should be treating with the grace that God treated you?

### **3. Conviction**

Do you feel the weight of this? To respond in this way is so unnatural and hard, and yet Peter says “*to this you were called.*” To be a follower of Jesus involves some level of opposition and suffering. It is part of what it means to be a Christian. If you live your entire life and never face any mockery or unfairness or mistreatment for being a follower of Jesus, it just might be that you really are not a follower.

To suffer for the name of Jesus is part of what it means to be Christian, and coming to Him means that you know that it will prove costly to receive Him. Suffering by conviction is part of the equation. Just listen to 1 Peter 1:12-13a:

*<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings... 1 Peter 4:12–13 (ESV)*

### **4. Hope**

The fourth virtue in responding to suffering is connected to the reward in suffering. The text says, “*that you may obtain a blessing.*” It is interesting how often suffering is motivated by the promise of future reward. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the following:

*<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11–12 (ESV)*

Part of the motivation for doing what is right in the midst of persecution or opposition is that you will be rewarded. Unfair treatment feels in the immediate moment as if it is a loss. What are people saying about you? What do they think about you? What about your future? These are all questions that are normal and understandable. And yet a follower of Jesus lives for the hope of what Jesus is going to say about you, what He thinks about you, and what your eternal destiny is all about.

The future hope and the blessing that is to come are part of the motivation for faithfully enduring opposition.

### **5. Belief**

The final verses in our text (vv. 10-12) are a direct quote from Psalm 34. Peter has used this portion of Scripture before, and he cites it here to reinforce what he is saying in the Scriptures themselves. Psalm

34 connects godly actions to promises, and Peter uses this passage to call them to believe what the Bible says to be true. Notice what it says:

- If you want to truly live and see good days (likely eternal life), then keep your tongue from evil and from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil, do good, and seek peace. Live in a godly way.
- God hears your cry and His face is against the ungodly. God knows and He will be just.

Underneath enduring persecution is the strong belief that what the Bible says is true. No one suffers well without really believing the Bible. 1 Peter 2:23 called us to entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly. And it takes an enormous amount of belief to do that.

You have to believe that following Jesus is worth it. You have to believe that someday Jesus is going to make it all right. You have to believe that any loss you experience now is totally worth it. That is why suffering is so challenging and helpful; it proves that you really believe what you say you believe. Enduring through hardship requires you to keep believing.

Some of you need to mark that down somewhere in your mind because in a short time you are going to be tested and asked to suffer in some way. Someone is going to mock you, be unkind to you, or treat you unfairly because you are a follower of Jesus. And when that happens, these five virtues need to kick in.

You need to remember that living as an exile in an unfriendly world requires Christlikeness, active kindness, deep conviction, biblically grounded hope, and a belief that the Bible is true. God will help you, and He is starting to help you even today as you hear this message.

Christian exiles live inside the church and outside in the world. Both realms require particular values and virtues.

So which realm needs some work in your life today? Some of you need to be more intentional in creating a gospel-centered culture in your relationships and how you approach Sunday. You may need to decide to join this church, get into a small group, or just linger a bit longer today. Let me encourage you to take a step toward making church a place where you are known and are loved by others.

Others of you need courage to face the challenges at work, in your school, at home, or in your neighborhood. You need God's grace so that you can be bold in your witness, and you may need to ask the Lord to free you from your affection for safety and peace. You may need a change of heart toward someone who is unkind and demeaning.

A Christian exile lives in two realms. God has called us to be the church to the church and to be the church in the world. May He help us to live out our calling with compassion and boldness.

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