

Thick-Skinned, Tough-Minded, Tender-Hearts

1 Peter 3:8-12

Introduction – You are Christians. This is a fellowship of believers, the body of Christ, the family of God. The way we live with and around one another is key to ‘*put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*’ (2:15) and cause unbelievers to ‘*glorify God*’ (2:13). This passage teaches that as Christians, certain behavior is commanded of us, such behavior that testifies of our hope and our inheritance.

To the Church – Finally (“*And now, the end...*”), Peter instructs believers on our relationship as the body of Christ. The issue is how Christians are to relate to one another.

One Mind – Peter does not describe Christian unity in the same way we modern evangelicals talk about unity. “Doctrine-less” unity is not what he has in mind. Paul (in 1 Cor 1:10-13) pleads the same – there are to be no divisions among us. We may not ‘forget our differences’; we must repent of our divisions rather than hide them, and we must strive for unity ‘*of mind*’.

Sympathetic – The same word describes Jesus’ compassion towards us in our temptations (Heb 4:15). It means ‘to feel together’. In our afflictions (Heb 13:4), in our weeping and rejoicing (Rom 12:15), we must strive for a unity of emotion as well.

Love as Brothers – A family is one of the word-pictures God uses to describe His people (along with a building-temple, a priesthood, a kingdom...). It is this word picture that is connected to the fact that we are heirs of God (Rom 8:17). Belonging to a church is not like joining some rotary club, a workout gym, or going regularly to your favorite restaurant. Your relationship to those around you here should be much different than your relationship with those in those other places.

Tenderhearted – The word means to ‘feel generous deep in your belly’. One who is pursuing the truth with zeal (one mind) must do so without a stiffness of heart towards others, never indifferent towards their needs – “*as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies*” (Col 3:12).

Love-Minded – That’s a literal translation of ‘courteous’ here. Love in all the trifles is constantly to be on our minds. This is not satisfied by staying out of people’s way, but rather by getting in the way of their troubles, bearing their load, and honoring them. Remember – invisible courtesy is discourtesy.

Not Reviling, But Blessing – Peter is not simply talking about people who always get along. He is talking about sinners. Where there are sinners, there is bound to be sin. What are you to do when evil is done to you? What are you to do when you are slandered? It is not enough to leave them alone. Even in Gal 6:1, where instructions exist to go to a brother who has wronged you, you must be qualified, which means you must first return evil with blessing (Matt 5:44f).

“Called to this” – This is not teaching that the blessings you inherit are based on your works. You were called to something in order that you would inherit a blessing. You were called to Christ, and as Paul says, “*not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...*” (Phil 1:29).

Psalms 34 – Now Peter quotes from this psalm. This Messianic psalm speaks of Jesus’ suffering as well (34:20). Reviling and returning evil are set aside when one rests in the sure justice and vengeance of God, just as Jesus did. As He hung on the cross, His desire was to give blessing. And He did. He turned from evil, He kept His tongue in control, and He sought peace for those who hated Him.

Eyes, Ears, and Face (3:12) – It’s important to note the use of anthropomorphism. God is a spirit and does not have a physical body. The point made is how close God is to those who do right and how close He remains to those who seek to run from Him and His ways.

Application from the Heart – There is much that needs to be done, according to this passage. But you must only work out what God is working in. You must ‘be’ somebody before you can ‘do’ something. If you are in Christ, then you are being called to sacrificial service. But that service is not faithful obedience unless it is done with the song of Psalm 34, and the hope of God’s future grace, in your heart. And to this you were called.