

Theme: God's Recipe for our Relationship with Fellow Christians and for Evangelism.

Text: 1 Peter 3:8-15 (NKJV)

⁸ Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 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. ¹⁰ For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. ¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² 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." ¹³ And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." ¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has joined us together in His Church as Christian brethren, dear fellow redeemed;

During the course of the public ministry that I was privileged to be in over the years, Barb and I worked at and served in a wide range of congregations. They varied in size from being very large, to very small, to somewhere in between. Wherever we were at we found there to be very good cooks in the congregations. This, of course, made for some very enjoyable potluck fellowship meals. Now, we were willing to serve at these places not simply because of the good cooking, but rather to have the opportunity and the privilege to serve up the spiritual nourishment of God's Word and the Sacraments of Christ for our mutual blessing.

The thought of good cooking, that is in a spiritual way, came to mind when studying the Scripture text for today. For just as it is important to have a good recipe with the right kind of ingredients to produce a tasty dish of food, so also it is very important to have a good spiritual recipe with the right kind of ingredients in order to experience the blessings of God in our relationships and in carrying out our mission in life as Christians.

In the verses leading up to our text, we find the apostle Peter giving us helpful instruction concerning various kinds of relationships we have in this life. He speaks of the Christian's relationship with the government, with our employer, with our spouse, and then finally as we find it in the Scripture text before us today our relationship with fellow believers.

For the promotion of this special kind of relationship the Lord sets before us His divine recipe, containing various ingredients, which when added in this mix of people can produce abundant blessings. These are blessings that can make for a good life with one another. And there is also an added blessing which is very helpful in being effective in carrying out our mission as a church in reaching out to others in the community with the saving message of the Gospel of Christ.

Earlier I mentioned a very obvious fact, namely that in making delicious and nourishing food you need to have the right kind of ingredients. It then goes without saying if a cook were to add the wrong ingredients, the finished product wouldn't come out tasting very good. So also, in spelling out His divine recipe for a good relationship with fellow believers, the Lord warns against evil, hurtful, and destructive ingredients we have a tendency of adding to the mix because of our inborn sinful nature. These are elements which when discovered in our lives we need the help of our Lord and Savior God to eliminate through repentance.

There are certainly all manner of ways we can be guilty of doing harm in our relationships. Our text mentions some of those harmful ingredients which as believers we want to remove from our lives and then replace them with those good ingredients which make for good relations in the Christian fellowship. We find this in verses 9-11 of our text where we read, “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. For ‘He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain 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.’”

Whenever a Christian brother or sister becomes guilty of doing or saying something bad or hurtful to us, we are not to try to get even with them by seeking revenge or a pay back. This is the way of the unbelieving world, but is not the Christian way. Yes, revenge is the way our fleshly nature would prompt us to respond, but the Spirit of God working in our hearts would compel us to repay evil with good, that is, with loving words and actions which serve to bless our sinful brethren.

What does Jesus tell us to do when we have been wronged by fellow Christians? One of the first things our Savior calls upon us to do is to show them unconditional love by forgiving them even as God has forgiven us in Christ Jesus for our countless sins. This means not holding a grudge against them. Also, out of a loving concern for the spiritual welfare of a fellow Christian who has wronged us, Jesus instructs us to go and humbly try to lead that individual to a knowledge of his sin and to repentance.

While repaying evil with evil can make our relationships even worse, it is our repaying evil with good and lovingkindness which will help mend the breach and restore peace in our relationships with one another. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to us, “Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.” (Matt. 5:9)

The apostle Peter also warns us against still other sinful ways of hurting our fellow believers and do great harm to our relationships with them. It is using our tongue to speak evil and deceit. He is talking about sins against the eighth commandment, which says, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” This involves bad mouthing our brother or sister in the faith before others by speaking evil of them, whether it be running them down in the eyes of others by revealing our brethren’s faults and failings or by spreading around groundless rumors about them. As you well know gossiping or talking about the bad points of others is society’s favorite pass time. However, being compelled by the redeeming love of our Savior God as Christians we want to say things benefitting others, and therefore whenever our flesh trips us up to say hurtful things of our brethren, we humbly repent of them, seek God’s forgiveness for Jesus’ sake, as well as God’s help to say only that which blesses others.

Turning to the beginning of our Scripture text, the apostle Peter gives us a short list of some of those good ingredients found in God’s recipe for good relations in the Christian fellowship. The apostle starts it off with what we recognize as a key and most essential ingredient, namely being of one mind. This unity of mind most certainly is not being worldly minded or fleshly minded. Rather it is a spiritual mindedness where we are united in Christian faith and confession, sharing the same beliefs, purpose and goals, as well as the same Christian love. Our shared Christian faith is what united us together as brothers and sisters in the Lord, for our elder brother Jesus Christ paid the costly price for our adoption into the family of God and the Holy Spirit joined us together in this eternal family by instilling faith in our hearts to believe in Jesus as our Savior from sin, death, and the devil. A wonderful product of this shared faith is Christian love. This form of love is the spiritual glue that bonds us together and keeps us together in the family of God in spite of the fact that we are sinful, imperfect human beings.

Christian love, which God blesses us with in knowing His great redeeming love for us in Christ Jesus, is then manifested in the remaining list of ingredients in God’s divine recipe for good relations with fellow believers, namely having compassion for one another, having a brotherly love for each other, being tenderhearted and courteous toward one another.

The loving way of being compassionate toward others involves having a keen interest in and utmost concern for one another's lives so that what affects our brother and sister in Christ also affects us, whether it is their triumphs or defeats, their joys or their sorrows. In this vein of thought we find the apostle Paul writing to us in his letter to Corinthians, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Cor. 12:26) And he exhorts us in his letter to the Romans to "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." (Rom 12:15)

Another product of mutual Christian love is the ingredient of having brotherly love for each other. When speaking of the importance of blood relatives, the expression has been used "blood is thicker than water." Well, the brotherhood and ties of our spiritual family is even more important than our blood relationship. And why is that? It transcends all other relationships, because we share the same faith, the same love, and the same eternal hope. And so, in this very special family we show each other brotherly love. If this is totally absent with us in the Christian brotherhood, Holy Scripture reveals that we really don't know God by faith and we don't possess His love. Whereas the opposite is truth, that is, when we have brotherly love for all our brethren, we really do know God by faith and His love is truly at work in our hearts.

Still another ingredient in God's divine recipe for good relations is being tenderhearted toward one another. The thought behind this ingredient is having a tender spirit and a merciful way toward others. When our brother or sister in the Lord is in distress, trouble, or pain, our heart feels for them and we do all that we can to be of help to them. Also, when our sinful brother or sister display their imperfect ways, in Christian love we are patient with them, bear with their weaknesses, and finally are forgiving toward them. Even as God is tenderhearted toward us in these ways, so also as His children we are tenderhearted to all the members in the Christian family.

Finally, Christian love produces in us the good ingredient of being courteous toward one another. Out of love for our brothers and sisters instead of turning our backs on them and separating ourselves from them or speaking to and treating them in a rude, inconsiderate, and unfriendly way, we turn to them and reach out to them, and speak to them with courtesy, that is, in a friendly, considerate, and helpful way.

All these ingredients which the apostle Peter lists in our text are a part of God's divine recipe for a good relationship with all those who are a part of the family of God.

All this not only blesses us with good relations, but it is also very helpful in our being able to effectively carry out our mission as a church in reaching out to others in the community with the saving message of the Gospel of Christ. The Word of God exhorts us in regard to this mission in life, "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." Having this mission to perform, if we are not getting along with our brothers and sisters in the Lord, would anyone in the community be willing to listen to us concerning the Christian hope that is in us? Whereas, when the Lord through His Word and Sacraments blesses us with good Christian relations, then those outside the fellowship might well be inclined to listen and learn of what it is that enables us to be united in a faith which blesses us with God's forgiveness and eternal salvation, and with a kind of love which enables sinful and imperfect people like us to be compassionate, tenderhearted, and courteous toward one another, and to show each other brotherly love, as well as to respond to sins against us by being patient, longsuffering, and forgiving to one another.

So then, God's divine recipe for good relationships not only blesses us with a good and beneficial life together, but also goes far in helping us to have a more effective Christian witness in the community. As children of God in Christ Jesus we are able to both love God and one another. May God work this in all of us for the glory of God, for the benefit of one another, and for the sake of reaching out to unbelievers with the saving Gospel of Christ. Amen

-Pastor Mark Gullerud