**PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCH UNITY**

Sunday School Lesson 6

*Bible Principles for Daily Living*

1 Peter 3:8-12

7/17/2022

**Introduction:** The Apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives general instructions in 1 Peter 3:8-12 for all who are in the church and part of the body of Christ. God has brought everyone in the local church together, but the people in a church can certainly rub each other the wrong way from time to time. Since we are around each other often and our children grow up together, it is especially important for us to work together to keep the church on the same page. 1 Peter 3:8 tells us that we must be all of one mind. Peter was reminding the church of some specific things to keep in mind in order to be on the same page. We all are supposed to believe the same Bible, conform to the same principles for living as found in the Bible, and stand on the same doctrines taught in the Bible. The Bible tells us how to live, and we should live as the Bible commands us to. It gives us doctrine in order to be scripturally correct in all that we do, and we must stand on that doctrine. We all are supposed to be growing in the Lord and trying to conform to the image of the Saviour. The church does not have perfect people in it, though. We have a perfect Saviour, but we are all dealing with the constant battle between the Spirit and the flesh. For this reason, church unity can be especially challenging. We must be reminded often of our need for unity and the Bible principles that will help us accomplish that unity in the church. Let’s observe some of those principles this morning.

1. **CHRISTIANS MUST HAVE CONCERN AND COMPASSION FOR ONE ANOTHER.**
2. **Notice that proper concern for each other in the church fosters unity among believers (Philippians 2:3-4; 1 John 3:17-18; Galatians 6:2).** We all face problems and deal with issues, so we should have a genuine concern for one another in the church. Throughout life, there are times when we are going to endure trials and carry burdens. During those times, we tend to put the focus totally on ourselves, but being genuinely concerned about others will help us to bear our own burdens. We are not to try to find out everybody else’s business, but we ought to be concerned. Most issues in the church arise because we are primarily concerned with our own burdens and problems, and we have so little regard for what others around us might be going through. We can only see our problems and difficulties. We can only see our hurt. We become easily offended because we are too sensitive to our own feelings and not at all concerned with the feelings and challenges of others. It is really difficult to gossip when you stop to think about the damage that it causes. If you are concerned for your fellow brother and sister in Christ, then you will not be inclined to look for opportunities for gossip and discord sowing.
3. **Notice that showing compassion for each other in the church fosters unity among believers (1 Peter 3:8; Jude 22; Mark 6:34; Psalm 145:8).** What is the very next thing that we find in 1 Peter 3:8 after we are commanded to be of one mind? We find a call to have compassion one to another. Compassion is a painful sympathy. It is a mixed passion of love and sorrow. It is love’s response to the injury or suffering of someone we love. Compassion usually causes movement. It is active in nature. Thus, compassion moves us to do good for others. How do we develop compassion? We develop it through prayer. As we pray for others, it helps us to be more compassionate to their difficulties. We also develop compassion through shared work. When we are working alongside someone else, we are generally going to be more compassionate to the struggles of weariness that come from working. One more thing that helps to develop compassion is simply fellowship. It is hard to be compassionate when we are not around enough to even be able to care for the needs of others. This happens sometimes in the church. A member becomes disengaged, and he stops showing the care and compassion he should have for other believers.
4. **CHRISTIANS SHOULD SEE A FAMILY CONNECTION WITH ONE ANOTHER.**

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1. **Notice that we are commanded to have a brotherly love for one another (1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 4:20-21; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Romans 12:10; Matthew 12:47-50).** In 1 Peter 3:8, the Bible does not command us to love the brethren. It commands us to love as brethren. We are to view our fellow believers as our family. They are to be our siblings. Unfortunately, some folks think of this dynamic and Proverbs 17:17 comes to mind. They think about the brother being born for adversity, and they view the brother in Christ in the same way. They are quick to want to argue and fight. I don’t believe that’s the idea the Bible wants us to take away from our fellow Christians being siblings. Whether or not we are close to our biological families or not, God put a love in our hearts for them. Our parents will always be our parents. Our brothers and sisters will always be our siblings. We may not always enjoy being in the same room with them, but we love them just the same. The person on the other pew is not supposed to be a stranger, an acquaintance, a rival, or an enemy. He is your family member. Learn to love him.
2. **Notice that family members ought to be able to resolve matters within the family (Psalm 133:1; Luke 16:28; Acts 7:25-26; Romans 9:3; 1 Corinthians 6:5; 11:33).** Paul gave a challenge to the church in Corinth regarding this topic. He wanted to know why there were not any brethren among the church who could resolve conflicts that had come up. Growing up with three brothers, it is not difficult for me to understand this question. When there was an issue among us, it was expected that it would be resolved among us. It was not going to stay an issue for very long. The problem in many churches is not just that there is conflict, but it is also the fact that they do not handle the conflict as brethren. For the Jews, they understood this in two different ways. First, they regarded their family member as brethren, but then they also regarded their fellow Jews as brethren. They took pride in the fact that the Roman government allowed them to keep their law and oversee the matters of their law. We should strive to handle situations in the church as a family with love and a desire for a quick resolution.
3. **CHRISTIANS NEED TO BE KIND AND TENDERHEARTED TOWARD ONE ANOTHER.**
4. **Notice that kindness among believers help to promote unity in the church (Romans 12:10; Ephesians 4:32; 2:7; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Corinthians 6:6; Col. 3:12; Titus 3:4; 2 Peter 1:7).** In 2 Peter 1:7, the Bible speaks about a need for brotherly kindness. Romans 12:10 tells us to be kindly affectioned one to another. We are to prefer others before ourselves. Some parents have children in the church nursery. When they take their children to the nursery, they are glad that the nursery worker chose to prefer others above herself. It would be easier and less stressful for that nursery worker to be in the morning service. The same goes for others who serve in the church. The usher shows kindness and prefers others by spending his Sunday’s helping families who are coming in and out of the church. A church who is busy showing kindness and preference for others through service is less likely to be a church where conflict is taking place. The church member may not be able to lead music, sing in the choir, teach a Bible class, or do other work in the church. Yet, every church member can show kindness.
5. **Notice that tenderness in our responses to each other helps to promote unity in the church (Proverbs 15:1; Luke 6:28; Ephesians 4:32).** We should not match hostility with hostility or strength with strength, especially when we know that we have the Bible on our side. We ought to try to diffuse situations in the church house by giving a tender response as opposed to an evil response or railing against someone. The flesh likes a sharp response. It feels good. Many times, it even feels right. Yet, the Christian must resist the temptation to give in to a harsh or sharp response and seek tenderness instead. You would not speak to a small child the same way that you would speak to an adult. You handle them with tenderness. Why can’t we show tenderness to the fellow Christian, especially to the newborn believer who is learning and growing in his faith? We must speak well of each other and to each other. We are to bless them. If we dwell on the evil that has been done to us, we will get angry and bitter. It will then lead to us saying things to others that we ought not to do.
6. **CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE PEOPLE WHO SEEK PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER.**
7. **Notice that the believer is expected to eschew evil and do good (1 Peter 3:11; Romans 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 3 John 1:11).** We need to avoid evil, stay away from it, run from it, and do good. To do evil means to do things that injure or harm someone else. As believers, we are to run away from evil. We are never to repay evil for evil. We are never to intentionally do things that are evil against others. We are to be people who do good to others. We are ambassadors of God’s goodness in this world. If we are to do good to those who are without, how much more are we expected to do good to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? Oftentimes, the problem in the church is that once the offense has taken place, neither party is willing to seek good. Both are looking for ways to get even or to be proven right. What example are we setting in this world if we cannot even have unity in the church? What example are we setting if we cannot even be kind and avoid doing evil to our Christian friends.
8. **Notice that the believer is expected to seek peace with other believers and in this world (1 Peter 3:11; James 3:17-18; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Timothy 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).** When situations arise between church members, we should think about how we can make peace in the situation. The Bible is not talking about compromising. We cannot make peace with a person if it contradicts the Bible. It is certainly better to have a clear conscience with God than to please another person; however, if it is not compromising the Bible, then we must look for a way to make peace by solving problems instead of creating more of them. Not every opinion needs to be made known. If two Christians cannot solve the problem, then they should bring in a mitigator such as the pastor to help. There has to be a way forward in peace because our battle is not against flesh and blood. We are commanded to be in unity with each other, so there must be a way for peace to be maintained in the church. Let’s be people of peace.