



The Letters of James and Peter

Week 6 – 1 Peter 3:1 – 4:11

Day 1 - 1 Peter 3:1-7

¹ *Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct,* ² *when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.* ³ *Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing;* ⁴ *rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.* ⁵ *It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands.* ⁶ *Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.* ⁷ *Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.*

Understanding the Passage:

In this passage, Peter tells women not to adorn themselves outwardly with fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or the latest fashions. Instead, he charges them to be known by their gentleness and quiet spirit. The word quiet is translated from the Greek *hēsychios*, which means tranquil and peaceful. So Peter is telling the women to whom he is writing that they should take on gentleness and peacefulness, which are two of the components of the fruit of the spirit. So often we try to compensate for our internal shortcomings by doing something externally that we think will make us feel better or look better. But we know that God can see through all of our external armor, both tangible and metaphorical. Though Peter has written this specific instruction to women in his community, it is really applicable for all folks. A fancy job, set of golf clubs, new bracelet, reservation at the hottest restaurant – none of these things come close to the magnetic appeal of someone who is comfortable in their own skin because of their faith in God.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

- What are some worldly things you have tried to adorn yourself with? What has been the result?
- How are you at being gentle and peaceful? Do they come naturally to you or do you have to work at them?
- How can you cultivate an inner beauty that makes your outward appearance pale in comparison?

Day 2 - 1 Peter 3:8-12

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For

“Those who desire life

and desire to see good days,
let them keep their tongues from evil
and their lips from speaking deceit;

¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good;
let them seek peace and pursue it.

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.”

Understanding the Passage:

As Christians, we say that we live in an “upside-down Kingdom.” That is, we live in a way that is totally opposite (upside down) to the ways of the world.

By worldly standards, the first is first. By Jesus’ standards, the last is first.

By worldly standards, evil is repaid with evil. By Jesus’ standards, evil is repaid with kindness.

It may be our natural instinct to harm someone that brings harm to us, but Peter tells us in this passage that we are called to a higher standard as Christians. There is no magic switch that flips when we become Christians, so we still have to fight the human, worldly urge to repay evil with evil. But when we do, we are rewarded with a loving community that far exceeds any kind of community we could have put together on our own.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

- What is your natural inclination: to repay evil with evil or with a blessing? Why?
- What does it mean to work for peace?

Day 3 - 1 Peter 3:13-22

¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Understanding the Passage:

When I was younger and would pick a fight with my younger sister or be disrespectful to my parents, I'd eventually come to my senses and would apologize for my behavior. My mom would always say, "it's nice to hear that, but I want you to really show me with your actions that you're sorry." In this passage, Peter tells the people to whom he is writing that they need to always be ready to give an account of their faith, but that they should also keep their conscience clear because ultimately, actions speak louder than words.

One of the main reasons that people give for not wanting to go to church is that they see hypocrisy in Christians. They know that Jesus cared for the marginalized, but they see Christians oppressing the poor and powerless. They know that Jesus treated both men and women with respect, but they see Christians overlooking assault and harassment of women. They know that God created the earth and called it "good," but they see Christians littering and contributing to the ecological problems that plague the world. It's hard for a person to make a compelling case for God when their actions don't line up with their words.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

- What do your actions say about your faith?
- If you never said a word about your faith, do you think the people around you would know you are a Christian?
- Is there an area of your life in which you are acting like a hypocrite? What can you do to change that?

Day 4 - 1 Peter 4:1-6

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), ² so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. ³ You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. ⁵ But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

Understanding the Passage:

One of my more troubling traits is my desire flaunt the rules. The signs that say "do not touch" beckon me to just get a little feel of the forbidden surface, so that I might discover why the rule is there. (I usually discover that the paint is wet!) As I have grown older, that defiant streak has faded a bit, but it is still latent beneath the surface. So, as I have been reading along in 1 Peter, and continue to come across the word "obedience," it feels stifling. It seems like obedience tells us not to think for ourselves, to be automatons who simply do what we are told to do.

Peter's point is not that way at all, and this passage explains it. It isn't a "read the rules in the Bible and don't ask questions – just do what it says" approach. Instead, when Peter speaks of being obedient to God's will, he is speaking of an inner transformation that leads to an outer one. We are called on to "arm ourselves with the same intention" as Jesus. Our old desires are crucified and replaced with the mind of Christ within us. I am reminded of Philippians 2, in which Paul says we are to "have the same attitude as Christ Jesus" and then Paul goes on to describe Jesus' humility and servanthood. So we are to have the mind of Christ, which then produces a new set of desires. It is those desires that guide us to give up the former way of life, and it is those desires to which we are obedient.

The first verse of this passage also really speaks to my heart. Peter says “whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin.” Does this mean that when we suffer, we no longer sin? Many explanations have been proposed, but my favorite grows from a reminder that sin can be defined as separation from God. Because Jesus suffered, he is closest to us when we suffer, and so the separation is overcome by Christ himself. When our hearts or bodies or spirits are broken, he is present as at no other time.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How do you react to the word “obedience?”
- In what way do you think you have “armed yourself” with the mind/intention of Christ, and how has that showed up in your desires and behavior?

Day 5 - 1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Understanding the Passage:

We can see in the first verse (“be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers”) how important that Peter believes that prayer is for undergirding our faith and giving us strength in the face of what is to come. When we’re in any kind of relationship – whether it is romantic or a friendship – we certainly find it easier to talk and share our feelings when we *maintain* open lines of communication. If we let our regular communication fall by the wayside, it is harder to start it back up. And it becomes exponentially harder to ask for help. The same goes for God. When we are disciplined (regular) in our prayer, we are better able to handle whatever happens because we are able to lean on God.

So often, we think of spiritual disciplines, like prayer, as things that we do on our own – they enhance our *personal* relationship with God. But in this passage, Peter is also reminding folks that the communal bonds of love and hospitality are critical to our Christian faith. In fact, sacrificial love and hospitality are the ways that Christians are known in the midst of the secular world that puts “me” first.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

- Can you think of a time when you needed to rely on someone, but you hesitated to reach out because you would let your communication falter? Has the same happened with God?
- If you need to, spend some time today re-opening the lines of communication with God. Tell God what is on your heart, whether it is something really small or something really big.
- How can you practice hospitality without complaining?