



Peter's Six-Point Plan for Living Peaceably with All

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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October 30, 2011

PM Assembly



Introduction:

Romans 12:18 says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (ESV). We all know this verse. We’ve heard it. In fact, most of us believe we are obeying it. However, if you’re like me, there is a bit of a problem here. It doesn’t really matter what is going on with someone else, I always think it is their fault. No matter the conflict, I have a tendency to see myself in the best light and my opponent in the worst. Therefore, I’m sure I’m living by this verse and they are the problem. Then I remember **Matthew 7:1-5**. Before I spend my time pointing out the sliver in someone else’s eye, I’m supposed to work on the log in my own. How can I do that with **Romans 12:18**? How can I be sure that I really am pursuing peace? I believe **I Peter 3:8-9** provides a great plan.

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 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 (ESV).

Discussion:

I. Remember that the goal is harmony.

- A. Peter’s first key deals with the goal of our relationships and of each interaction in our relationships. Whether we are talking about family, brethren, roommates, co-workers we need to have the proper goal for these relationships. The goal is harmony, unity. The New Testament offers this directive on multiple occasions. **Romans 12:16** encourages us to “live in harmony with one another.” **II Corinthians 13:11** tells us to aim for restoration and agree with one another. **Philippians 2:2** says we will complete Paul’s joy (and I’m sure God’s as well) when we are of the same mind, being in full accord, and one mind.
- B. The problem is when altercations arise, and they will, we often lose sight of the goal. Instead of pursuing harmony, we pursue victory. We pursue control. We pursue advantage. We want everyone to know that we were right and others were wrong. I have no doubt that all of us want peace. We all want unity. We all want harmony. But when something goes amiss, we can easily lose sight of the true goal and, in the end, sacrifice that true goal in order to get an immediate victory.
- C. Let’s face it. We are working with people. People have fears, hurts, background, baggage. Because of that, people make mistakes. We all make mistakes. Good, Christian people make mistakes. As we deal with those mistakes, we have to keep the right goal in our minds. The right goal is not victory in an exchange. The right goal is harmony. That is why when Paul wrote the Philippians he commented on two sisters that were having an altercation. He said, “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord” (**Philippians 4:2**). These were two fellow workers of Paul. Their names were written in the book of life. They were both good people. But they both had to work on harmony with each other. Keep that the goal.

II. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

- A. If harmony is the goal, what’s the process? The process begins with Peter’s next key: sympathy. According to Thayer’s lexicon, the word translated “sympathy” means “suffering or feeling the like with another.”¹ It comes from a root word that means “to suffer or feel pain together.”² Sympathy, then, is the idea of understanding. It means feeling what the other one feels, walking in their shoes, grasping what is causing them to act that way. The best way to succinctly describe this key is what Stephen Covey made the second of his “7 Habits of Highly Effective People”—Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- B. Sadly, most of us spend our time trying to be understood, so we interrupt, voice bully, and yell. We tend to think our job is to get our point across. When this is happening we get loud and obnoxious as if we think the person who is loudest wins. Before we work on being understood, we need to work on our sympathy. We need to work on understanding.
- C. We accomplish this by asking questions. We accomplish this by mirroring back what was said to us. “What I’m hearing is ... is that what you mean?” Then work on seeing how you would feel in a similar situation as they have described. Often times, when we take the time to understand where the others are coming from, problems disap-

¹ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4835&t=ESV>

² <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4841&t=ESV>

pear. We learn how to gain consensus because we learn what each person wants and we sometimes find out that their wants don't actually contradict ours. Other times we learn the hurt we are causing them and we don't want to be that person so we back off, willing to sacrifice our rights in order to be a blessing to them. If peace will depend on us, we need to pursue sympathy.

III. Behave with brotherly love.

- A. One of the biggest problems with interpersonal altercations is we begin to lose sight of what should govern our behavior. Even some of the best people can become downright mean and hateful when they have been hurt, offended, or simply misunderstood. Unfair accusations, slander, malice can all come out even when Christians are involved. But if peace will depend on us, we must let brotherly love govern our behavior. The New Testament repeatedly encourages us to pursue brotherly love and affection. **Romans 12:10** says to love each other with brotherly affection. **Hebrews 13:1** says, "Let brotherly love continue" (ESV). **I Peter 1:22** says the purpose for our soul's purification is so we can have a sincere brotherly love and to love each other from a pure heart. **II Peter 1:7** says one of the Christian virtues we need to grow in is brotherly affection.
- B. I think **Ephesians 4:31-32** and **Colossians 3:8-9; 12-14** provide great pictures of what brotherly love looks like. We need to put away malice, slander, gossip, envy, hate, wrath, clamor. Instead we put on kindness, tender-heartedness, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love. Let these govern our behavior and as much as it depends on us, we will be at peace with others.

IV. Show compassion rather than vengeance.

- A. Let's face it; when wounded people get together, sooner or later they will hurt each other. We are a group of wounded people. We've all caved to sin at some point. We've all been wounded by the world, our upbringing, sin, Satan. We are here because we are trying to get fixed, but we are still struggling with our own wounds. You might think of this like a hospital. We go to the hospital because we need healing. But the problem is everyone who is there needs healing. Infection, sickness, injuries abound. How many times have we heard about someone going into a hospital with one problem, maybe even a minor one, and they end up with a major sickness? As much as I hate to say it, that can be a lot like a congregation. We're here to be healed but our sickness can still come out and cause trouble. We're sticking our heads in the sand if we think that because we're all Christians and this is a church there will never be any problems. There will be. The question is how we will respond to them.
- B. Peter's next key is to respond to these problems with a tender heart or with compassion. Compassion is more than feeling sorry for someone. Compassion is actively working to help the hurting. In **Luke 10:33** the Samaritan had compassion on the beaten Jew. He didn't just feel sorry for him; he helped him. Far too often when we get in the midst of an altercation, we want redress for our hurts and pains. We stomp our feet and pump our fists demanding that our rights be taken into consideration. We've been hurt and we demand some payment. Sadly, we seek vengeance. What Peter says is instead we need to be seeking to aid others in their hurt. Vengeance is seeking re-payment because of our hurt; compassion is seeking to help others in their hurt.
- C. I have no doubt that others have hurt you. They have violated your rights. They have put upon you. But look around you. These are people who want to do right. They don't want to cause hurt. What would cause them to do that? Their own hurt. We need to bestow some compassion on them. We need to help them in their hurt. Sometimes, that may simply mean offering them forgiveness for the stupid, sinful mistakes they have made. Other time, however, it may mean digging deep and finding the festering wound that causes them to fall. What wound causes them to keep up their pride? What struggle causes them to avoid their responsibilities? What hurt causes them to hurt in return? The Samaritan could have looked at the Jew in **Luke 10** and said, "Serves you right, you Jewish bum, for all the hurt you have caused my people." Instead, he saw the Jewish man's hurt and bestowed compassion. If peace will depend on us, we need to show compassion, not vengeance.

V. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought.

- A. For me, Peter's next key is the big key. This is the one that usually throws a wrench in the works for me. Peter explains that for peace to depend on me, I need to have a humble mind. Or as **Romans 12:3** says, I must not think more highly of myself than I ought to think.
- B. When I am humble-minded, I will follow the directive of **Philippians 2:3-4**. I will see others as more significant than myself and I will look out for their interests and not simply my own. Further, I will remember **Matthew 7:1-5**, the passage we read in our introduction. I will spend more time working on the log in my eye than the sliver in yours. I will not assume that my problems are bigger, my worries are greater, my rights are stronger. Rather, I will deal honestly with my own struggles and graciously with yours.
- C. I say this is the big key for me simply because my pride and arrogance generally has a tendency to wreck things when I'm trying to let peace depend on me. It's not that I want conflict; I don't. It's not that I don't want peace; I do. The problem is I generally want peace on my terms. I want peace on the basis that I come out smelling like a

rose, never once having to admit any of my own faults. So, I keep pressing on trying to get peace by forcing others to be subject to me. They need to apologize to me in such and such a way. They need to grovel for my forgiveness. They need to tell everyone else how wrong they were. They need to live in such and such a way so as to never forget how they wronged me and to protect me from ever being hurt again. When they do all of that, then we can be at peace. As long as they don't, then it is their fault we aren't at peace, not mine. I'm willing to have peace, after all, if they will meet my terms. That is not a humble mind.

D. Speaking of a humble mind, I can share with you one of the great demonstrations of this when altercations are taking place. As the preacher, I get frequent requests for sermon topics. I basically get two kinds of requests. The first is when someone has a personal struggle or question and they ask me to preach on the topic so they can be helped in some way. The second is when someone is upset at someone else about something and they want me to preach on a topic so that other person can get told. The first is the sign of a humble mind; the second, just the opposite. I can't always tell which kind of request I'm being given. Perhaps I should start asking. Allow me to assure you, if you are looking around at all the big problems that need to be preached on and the biggest problems you see are someone else's, then your biggest problem is pride. It will be tough for peace to depend on us unless we can develop a humble mind.

VI. Do all of this, even when others don't.

A. Peter's final key is a hard one to swallow. Frankly, I almost wish it weren't here and I'd like to skip it. I'd like to have an out sometime. There are some folks that I don't want to use the first five keys with. After all, they haven't used them with me. There are some folks who it almost seems they've seen this list and tried to do the exact opposite. They've pursued victory and control, not harmony; they've forced their way rather than tried to understand mine; they've been mean and hateful rather than loving; they've taken vengeance rather than had compassion; and they've lifted themselves up, making themselves out to be better than me. They don't deserve for me to be at peace with them. Surely those folks deserve some of my vengeance, hatefulness, and spite. Surely they deserve for me to spew my vitriol at them. Surely I get to treat someone badly after the way they've treated me.

B. But Peter's final key is the exact opposite. Peter recognizes that we will receive evil and cursing. In response, we need to give others a blessing. When others do not follow Peter's keys for peace, we do anyway. This is the heart of **Romans 12:18**. This is the heart of what it means when Paul says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (ESV). It doesn't mean saying, "I wanted peace, but they started it." It doesn't mean, "I would have peace if they would apologize." It means, "I'm pursuing harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility whether or not they do."

C. This is tough, but if we will live peaceably with all as much as depends on us, then we will do so even when others aren't.

Conclusion:

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Don't just tout that verse without digging deeper. Take an honest look at yourself. Are you letting harmony be your goal? Are you starting the process with sympathy? Is your behavior governed by brotherly love? Do you bestow compassion rather than taking vengeance? Do you think of yourself as lowly as you ought? And are you doing all this even when others aren't? That's Peter's six-point plan for living peaceably with all. How are you doing at it?