

Date: 16.08.2020

Time: 6pm

Service taken by: Rev Gavino Fioretti

Psalm: Psalm 34:1-10

Reading: 1 Peter 3

Text: 1 Peter 3:8

Outline: Christian relationships

a) Introduction

1. Unity of mind

2. Sympathy

3. Brotherly love

4. Tender heart

5. Humble mind

Christian relationships

- **Introduction**

Christian conduct: Since the middle of chapter 2, Peter has been exhorting believers to have gracious conduct to those around them. The apostle is now summarising from verse 8 how Christians should conduct themselves, even in suffering.

Christian witness: Connected to the way we behave is our witness. We've seen this previously. Later, we see that if we will be asked about the reason for our hope, if we're conducting ourselves rightly. We're not to be just hearers, but doers of the word – the world will see this. Sometimes as Christians, we remember that we have a duty in our behaviour towards the world, but can neglect our behaviour to other believers. But as the church cares for one another, this is a mighty witness in that community. If we want to have a fruitful witness, we need to consider how we behave towards one another as a congregation. We cannot neglect Christian relationships.

1) Unity of mind

Peter is not saying that we should think in the same way all of the time. In this life as believers, this will not happen. We see this with how many church denominations there are. We are called as much as possible to seek unity of mind in spite of our differences. We should be one-minded on certain things including faith in Christ, love for Christ, care and concern for God's kingdom. As God's people,

we should pull in the same direction. Look in the same direction, with the same goal in mind. Look to what is eternally important. How can people from different places have unity of mind?

One Father: It is possible to have unity of mind because we belong to the same family, with the same Heavenly Father.

One Saviour: We are united in Christ, with the same Saviour. We belong to the same body, the church of Jesus, with the same head and source of strength – Jesus. We’re united in the same way to Jesus. We’re one body, one bride, one church – this makes it possible for us to be united in mind.

One Spirit: The Spirit of God enables Christians to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. We don’t have more or less of the Spirit – we have all received as believers the Holy Spirit. Because we have the same Spirit within us, we can have unity in mind. Having less of us and more of God leads to greater unity. We need to seek God first – don’t put self or your denomination on His throne.

2) Sympathy

Sympathy = with pathos, with passion – we share in what people are going through. A sympathetic person comes close to us in our experience and situation. We rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. It’s difficult to come close to those who are suffering, because as we do, we will suffer – we’re sharing that suffering with them. When we have sympathy, we’re following the example of Christ. When we live the suffering of people, we are understanding of people. We are living experience with people. Some are unafraid of coming close to those who are suffering. We should always be willing to be out of our comfort zone and to draw near to those who are suffering.

3) Brotherly love

If we love one another, we’ll seek unity, be sympathetic, have a tender heart and be humble.

Our doing: Having the Spirit of God is the mark of a true believer – a fruit of this is brotherly love one to another. We are mindful of loving the lost, which is right. But how can we love the world if we don’t love our brothers and sisters? If we can’t care for our own brothers and sisters, how can we care for the world? Brotherly love isn’t just a feeling. Love is more than words; it’s actions. If you love someone, you’ll try to protect that person and care for them. We’re to seek the good of others in whatever way that might be. We’re called to work in such a way that it will bring good to our family.

Our speaking: Love includes words. We should show love with what we say. We should encourage rather than criticise. We should speak well, rather than criticising. We can build up or hurt with our tongues, what we say of our brothers and sisters. We need to show love in the way we speak. Speak what is good and honours God.

Be careful in how you behave and how you speak of your spiritual family.

4) Tender heart

We must have a tender heart (compassion and being sensitive to the needs and concerns of others).

Take notice: Don't be selfish. Don't be hard when you hear of others suffering. Don't be careless, but take notice. God takes notice of us. He knows whatever we're going through. He remembers we are dust, but He takes notice of us. We should be alert to the needs and circumstances our brothers and sisters are in. If we're more concerned about others, we'll be less concerned about ourselves (this is a mark of spiritual maturity).

Take care: If we're tender-hearted, we won't just take notice, we'll take care. If our hearts are affected by suffering, this will lead to action. Sometimes we content ourselves with feeling sorry for people, but there is more. God takes notice and takes care. We're to follow the example of our Heavenly Father in this – taking notice and taking care. Deacons should be mindful of the needs of the people in a congregation.

As a congregation we should be alert to the needs of others and we should be tender-hearted towards them.

5) Humble mind

Real humility requires understanding. The only way to be saved is to be humble before God – as we realise our insufficiency, we rely upon the Lord.

Understanding myself: We need an understanding of ourselves – this is hard – we are too critical or too forgiving towards ourselves. It's difficult to have a balanced understanding of ourselves, but we need to understand who we are. The more we understand ourselves, the more we realise our unworthiness and insufficiency. It's not biblical to love yourself or think well of self. We need a biblical balance. The more we challenge ourselves in the light of scripture and compare ourselves to Christ rather than Christians, the more humble we will be.

Understanding my brethren: Our brothers and sisters are just as weak as we are. We tend to expect more of others. We make excuses for ourselves when we fail, but not for others as we don't understand them. If we understand our brethren are Hell-deserving sinners able to obey God only by His enabling, this helps us.

Understanding my God: Understanding God's graciousness towards me and others helps us to understand more of Him and His dealings towards us and others. One way to know self is to compare ourselves to God – the comparison leads to humility and a greater closeness to God which leads to greater humility.

The devil doesn't like unity in the church and will do all he can to divide us. We must be watchful and careful. Don't lose unity and love with and for each other, or we'll lose gospel-usefulness.