

Called to Bless



1 Peter 3:8-12

Bro. Ricky Cunningham

As I read this passage again and again this week, and you read it through the devotional reading, I hope you had the same reaction. It sounded to me like Peter, writing to a group of people he knows are not home yet, is reminding them of who they are and of how he wants them to act. It reminded me of being a parent. I remember when we were rearing Kiki and Kory we kept them with us a lot, but from time to time, we would take them to the grandparents or someone else and we would leave them for a little while. If we left them for a longer time, then from the time we got in the automobile until we arrived at wherever they were going to be staying, we reminded them of who they were. We would emphasize that where they were going to be staying for the next few hours or days was not their home. They were going to be representing who we are so we would remind them again who they were—they were Cunninghams. We reminded them of our family values and we reminded them that while they were in this home they were to remember who they were and to act accordingly. The last thing we would say before we got there was don't you forget this is not where you live, but you act like who you are. Do any of your parents ever have to do that with your kids? Peter really believed

Christians were a family but were not home yet, and he expected us to have behavior that reflected who we really are.

Scripture

"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. For 'Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep 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. 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.'"

I always like to tell you what the title of the message is because the title of the message, I pray, captures the theme, the main gist of the message: Called to bless. I just want you to let that sink in. As you listen to this message this morning, everything that's going to be said is so that we ultimately hear Peter say to each one of us that we have been called to bless, finally. Now this is kind of strange because there are still two whole chapters to go and more than half of this chapter left, so why would Peter say finally? You say he's Baptist, he just didn't know when to quit...no. It's actually three Greek words he uses at the end, signifying he is at the end of this unit of study that he's been talking about and he's going to summarize, he's going to make a conclusion, before he begins the next topic.

Now, we know that this section started back in verse 11 of chapter 2 where he reminds us again who we are—we are sojourners; we are exiles. He reminds us that our behavior should reflect our identity and that we are to win the war against our flesh and to live honorably among gentiles, live honorably among unbelievers. Then, when he starts telling us about how he wants the world to see our works, our actions, our deeds so that it will glorify God, he then immediately begins to talk about us as Christians being submissive. He singles out government, he singles out the master/slave relationship, and he singles out the husband/wife relationship.

Now he's going to summarize. I want to make sure you catch this...he's going to summarize what he's just said about submissiveness and he's going to start a new section. In this new section, he's going to deal with suffering. Now let's just be honest—submissiveness and suffering are almost anti-America themes. Agreed? So many of us are struggling with Peter telling us our loyalty is to the Kingdom of Heaven before it's to our nation. Whether we agree or not, we're to submit to governing authorities. There is some authority that has been set up in life that, if you're under authority you are to submit. You don't create chaos; you come under for order. If you're the wife, it's one thing if you've got a husband who loves you sacrificially like Christ, loves the church, but even those Christian wives who are married to a husband who's not under the Word has to be submissive. Then, we were told last week that as a husband if it's not going good with her, it's not going good with Him (God). So Peter is going to summarize and he is going to jump right into suffering.

Now, from time to time, there are things the government does that causes us to suffer. From time to time, in your work relationship there are some things that those over you do that causes you to suffer at work. Ladies, (don't raise your hand, don't even grin, don't smirk ☺) there have been times when you've suffered because you've had to submit to the leadership of your husband. I know we struggle with this...but remember that the reason we suffer is because we have a flesh that's unredeemed, and Peter reminds us that we are to win the war against our flesh so that our life will be honorable among unbelievers. Peter's concern here is for others being influenced with the good news of Jesus Christ as we've been influenced with the good news of Jesus—all of you. This is not dealing with servants, not dealing with wives, not dealing with husbands; it's dealing with every one of us. So if you are part of the body of Christ, this is for you.

Now in verse 8, if we were reading this in the Greek language instead of the English language, we would pick up that there are no verbs. Literally, Peter says, "*At the end, every one of you, unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender heart, humble mind.*" no verbs. The verbs are implied. Now, why does Peter do this? The Greek allows him do this to emphasize that these are five adjectives that describe who we are as the

body of Christ. Every one of us who have been born again to a living hope, who are warring against our flesh, should have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. If someone sees Hardin Baptist Church as a group of people, what they ought to see is unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender heart, and a humble mind. I hope when you read those you go, "That's me." I hope when you read that you go, "That's us, that's our church." Now, I want you to look at this.

1. Unity of Mind

2. Sympathy

3. Brotherly Love

4. Tender Heart

5. Humble Mind

Do you see how we've listed these words? That's not a mistake. The margin increases on "Sympathy," then again with "Brotherly Love." Then the margin decreases on "Tender Heart," then again with "Humble Mind." One and five are lined up, two and four are lined up, and three is all by itself. Do you see that? That's intentional. What I'm trying to do here is to capture the essence of this sentence, because Peter is using a technique that was used in Greek literature, called a chiasm. He would build and then digress, and so if we were listening, we would know brotherly love is the main thing. He's building to brotherly love and then he digresses from brotherly love, but unity of mind and humble mind complement each other, and sympathy and tender heart complement each other. What Peter is doing here is he's talking about the totality of your being. You have a mind, you have emotions, and you have a will. When it comes to your mind, there should be a unity of mind with us and you ought to be humble. When it comes to feeling you are to be sympathetic, and the reason you're sympathetic is because you have a tender heart. Love, despite what some people believe as being an emotion, is actually a matter of the will. It's a choice and he wants you and I to make the right choice—and that is to will to love our brothers and sisters as a family—no verb. If we're going to imply a verb, it's going to be a being verb; this is who we are, these five

adjectives describe us. Now I want to ask you this right now, in the presence of God, do these five describe you? If they do not and you've been a Christian very long, you are losing your war against your flesh...and you're supposed to win this war. If you lose this war against your flesh you will not have the influence among them believers that God wants you to have. So I hope you'll pause here and let God impress upon you the desire of these five adjectives. As they become manifested in you, they become manifested in us. I pray this is how the community around us sees us.

This phrase, "unity of mind," in the Greek is where we get our word 'harmony' from, and so when we get together we need to realize who we are. We are the body of Christ whether we're gathered or whether we're scattered, and there ought to be a unity of thinking, a unity of mindset. This doesn't mean uniformity—we're different, we're diverse, we're a body—but in our diversity, there should be unity. If I could say this, we are a uni-versity. We have a lot of diversity, but the thing that unifies all of us in our diversity is who we are, we are the body of Christ. We have some toes, we have some ankles, some knees, some arms, some shoulders, we have some necks...so there's diversity, but there should be unity, and that starts in the mind. The mind is the control center of the body.

Now, I want to pull for some other passages. Peter is summarizing, but I'm going to try to preach a message on his summary. So, how do we have unity of mind as a church? First of all, we remember what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. In the second chapter of his first letter, he reminded them that they are different from unbelievers because they have the Spirit of God in them and so they understand spiritual things, and then he says they have the mind of Christ. Who does Peter say our example in submission is? It's Christ. We have the mind of Christ. If you are a born again believer, you have the ability to make the same decisions Christ made. His life was not rigged; He had a body just like yours. Do you believe that? Now, when I first started preaching I struggled...I would read Corinthians and it would remind me that I had the mind of Christ, but then I would read Philippians chapter 2 and it would tell me to let this mind be in me which is also in Christ Jesus, so it was like... *well do I or don't I?*

I am old enough to have seen the beginning of what we call the personal computer age. Steve and Wanda Poole gave me my first computer, a Commodore. Now, (some of you will not believe this) I would be typing on my computer and when I got halfway through the sentence, it would disappear and then you start on the second half of the sentence. When you got to the end of that sentence, it would start showing you the next, and it was weird. I had heard so much about computers I thought immediately that my sermons were going to get better...they didn't...because back in that day you could only get out of the computer what you put into the computer. But my Commodore 64 computer had the ability to be programmed to do some really neat things. Catch this! Hardware—you have the ability to think like Christ—but you have to program yourself. You have to program yourself with the thinking of Christ. This is why when Paul wrote to the church at Rome he said, do not be squeezed into the mold of the world's thinking but be transformed, be metamorphosized is the word. How are we metamorphosized, how are we not squeezed into way the world thinks? By the renewing of our minds. So that's what I want to challenge each one of us with—if we're going to have a unity of mind, we have to be a people of the Word. We have to get into the Word so the Word gets into us. The Spirit of God gives you and I the ability to apply the Word to every situation in our life, and therefore, what will happen in the church is there will be a unity.

Now for Peter to write this, evidently there must have been some division and some dissension in the early churches. I hope you've never been like me and been in one of those churches where there was dissension and division. It's horrible. It breaks my heart to drive down the road and see that many of our churches did not start because a certain location needed a church; that church started because they couldn't get along with the other church. So instead of going to this other church, they just made their own church. Are you kidding me? A few years back I met somebody in Murray and they made this statement (they said it, not me), "Bro. Ricky, I'm amazed/ I have lived here my whole life and Hardin Baptist Church is the only church I've never heard anything negative about how you all treat each other." I was sad but happy. There's a unity! Where does that unity come from? It comes from us having the hardware to be like Christ in

every situation, and we have the ability to program ourselves. You know, my phone will do some amazing things. Most of the things my phone does is because my grandkids have put those things on the phone. "You're playing what?" "You're doing what?" "Papaw had no idea!" and that's how some of us live our life. But we have the ability to have the mind of Christ and be like Christ in every situation. Where does that come from? From getting in the Word, and letting the Spirit of God apply the Word of God to us.

But do you know where the unity really comes from? It comes from a humble mind. In Philippians 2, Paul said for us to think of others more highly than we think of ourselves. What usually causes division is when I put myself a little ahead of somebody else and I'm going to get my way. We're going to do it my way. Why are we going to do it my way? Not because I'm right, it's because I'm not humble. Christianity makes us different. Because of my diversity in the body and whatever role I play in the body, I am not superior and you're not inferior. As a matter of fact, I personally believe you are ahead of me and you are above me. See, I make that choice and you make that choice; it's a matter of the mind. Humility is not a weakness. Humility doesn't mean not having self-esteem. Humility is a willful choice. I'm going to put you ahead of me and you're going to put me ahead of you, and when we do that, there's unity.

Then, Peter deals with the emotions. He says we're going to be sympathetic; we're going to have sympathy. This word, sympathy, means 'to suffer with,' In the Greek, it literally means to 'feel' with. Has anybody ever been sharing something about their life with you and then you say, "I know how you feel," and then they shoot back at you, "No you don't." "I think I do." "No you don't. So what's involved in sympathy?" We have another English word, empathy, which is not to suffer with but to feel in, to actually be in the situation with you, come alongside you, walk in your shoes, so to speak. It's not because I've had the experience, only, but because you've had the experience. Because I'm willing to suffer with you, I'm going to listen to you and I'm going to actually live this life you have of suffering with you. See, what Peter wants is for us to be a community. He doesn't want us to live isolated...but that's what your flesh wants. Your

flesh wants you to believe that some of the things that's happened to you, nobody else has experienced what you've experienced. Therefore, no one understands, and nobody feels what you feel—they can't—so you shut them out trying to protect yourself. In the body of Christ, we're not going to let you. We're not going to let you pull away from us. We're not going to let you isolate because you are us and we are you.

Now, where does sympathy come from? It comes from that tender heart. Now this word, heart, is an interesting word. It's a word that literally describes your gut system, not modern day, but ancient day. This literally talks about having tender 'bowels.' I know that's gross to say in church. To us, heart refers to the organ that pumps the blood. But to the ancients, the seat of emotions, the deep-seated emotions, were in your belly, in your gut. Now let's not make fun of them as being pre-scientific. Have you ever had a gut feeling? It defied logic, defied explanation, but you went with it. It's usually true, isn't it? It's a deep feeling. Now please understand this...when you were 'dating' in that day and you wanted to find out how much the girl really thought about you, you wouldn't say to her, "I love you with all my heart." You would say something like this, "I love you with all of my small intestine." You were expressing your deep feeling but you also wanted an expression back. Now, the reaction you wanted back from her was, "But I love you with all of my large intestines!" ☺ Sympathy comes from a heart that's tender. Is your heart tender? Or have you been wounded, and because you've been wounded, you've walled a little part of you off and you're not going to let anybody in there? You think you're doing that to protect yourself—but when you do that, I just want you to know that you're not going to be tender to others. So, no matter what your life experience is as a born again believer, you should have a tender heart. You might think you can't, but this is a family member—the emphasis isn't on you, the emphasis on Christ and what He did and what happened to Him. What happened to Him? He bore our sin.

Now, there will be times when we'll be called to come alongside and walk with someone, so we move from mind and emotions to the will—brotherly love. It's the Greek word, Philadelphia. On its own, it's a word that literally means to give...but you give because you're in a relationship that's

reciprocal, so that when you give, in time, you will get something back...so great friendships are built on this word. Peter is using this word differently. He's not using it just to describe friendship; he's using this word to describe the reciprocal relationships that we have with each other because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. I want to be really careful here because I know experiences influence us, and I know some of us were raised in families to where there was not correct love. There wasn't proper love to the kids, there wasn't proper love among siblings, and there's been a lot of hurt. There are families who literally don't talk to each other. I don't say this braggingly, I just wish everyone could have been raised the way I was raised when it comes to love—my sister and I have the same parents, and we love each other. A few weeks back I made a comment to you about how my sister has never seen anything negative about me and I've never seen negative about my sister. I just want you to know that one of my sister's in-laws said to me, "Ricky, you're right. I've never heard her say anything about you." Do you know why not? It's not because she didn't have anything negative to say about me. (I was mean to her once as a brother. I'm not perfect.) So where does that come from? She loves me, and I love her. Why do we love each other? We're brothers and sisters. You and I are brothers and sisters. Our Father is God. Our brother is Jesus. So what are we do with each other? We give. Now at the moment we're giving, we're not giving to get, but we know as we give that the day is going to come when I will get because there will be a moment when I will be the one needing to be loved.

Now, how important is this love each other? Jesus said to His disciples, by this the world will know you're my disciples...by the way you love one another. I want you to evaluate how you talk about brothers and sisters in the church, to your spouse, to your kids, to your mom and dad, to your friends, to your work associates. We are family. This isn't a matter of feeling; this is a matter of the will. I choose to love. Why do I have that ability? Because of Christ. I just want to ask you, do these five adjectives describe you? Is that you when it comes to us at Hardin? When it comes to us, you're unified with us. When it comes to us, you're sympathetic. When it comes to us, you love us. When it comes to us, you have a tender heart. When it comes to us, you're humble.

And then, we take who we are and then step outside of us. Now, when we step outside of us, there are going to be some people who are going to do evil to us, and when they do evil to us, Peter says, "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling." Got it? Now, that should start inside the church, inside the family. For example, one of the kids comes to you and says, "He hit me!" You go to the kid who hit the other him and say, "Why did you hit him?" He or she quickly says, "Because he hit me first!" That's flesh. When one of your kids hits another kid because the other kid hit them first, your kids have a flesh problem, both of them. But in the family of God, we're winning that war—so when someone inside or outside does evil to us, we don't do evil back.

This word, reviled, means to criticize out of anger, to criticize harshly. Has that ever happened to any of you? When that happens, you do not do that back. Why? Because you're a Christian. You're a Christian and this moment is going to reveal who you are, just like that moment revealed who they were. You don't whine about it. You don't retaliate. See, the reason Peter uses this word "repay" is because when someone does something to us like that we feel like we owe them something back. As matter of fact, when somebody does something to us, what do we sometimes say? We'll point that finger and say, "You're going to pay for this." How would you feel if God pointed to you and said you're going to pay for this? If I remember right, He said I will pay for that...and He put His Son on a cross. This is who we are.

So here's what we do according to Peter—now can I just remind you that Peter was a fisherman, but he's a fisherman writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—so this isn't Peter, this is God speaking he says, "contrary," Instead of repaying evil for evil and repaying reviling with reviling, "on the contrary," here's what I want you to pay: I want you to bless. Whoa...I want you to bless. The word, bless, is where we get any word, eulogy, from. I get the opportunity many, many times to do a eulogy at a funeral, and most of the time it's good. There have been a few times it wasn't good. Please don't be one of those persons who die and I don't have anything good to say about you! Because that's what this word eulogy means, it means to speak well about, to speak good of. Get this

picture...you've just sinned against me, you've just criticized me out of anger, and what's my response back? It's to speak well about you, to bless you. Now, what if you think they don't deserve it? It's not about what they deserve; it's about what we deserve. Do you know what we deserve? We deserve not to do what they deserve, we deserve to do right, and what's right is to bless. How many of us need to confess right here that we've blown this in the last few weeks? Do you know why we blew it? It's because of our flesh. That did not come from the Spirit of God in you.

Now, I want you to look what it says, "...for to this were called..." You're in a church that believes there's a divine call to salvation where God calls us out of sin to Jesus, and we've been called to sanctification. Some of us believe that there are actually calls to particular places in ministry. Peter says there's a call in that moment to bless. Do you remember what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus? He was starting the part about them being a church member and he said to walk worthy of the calling to which you've been called, and the calling there is to church membership. That's what this is referring to. I want to remind you that you are to walk worthy. You're a member of the Hardin Baptist church. You're a member of the church of Jesus Christ. This word, worthy, means to weigh as much as, it's the picture of the ancient scale where you would put a standard weight on this side and what you were measuring you would put on the other side. When you put enough on that side so that it balanced the scale, you then knew what it weighed. You've been called to be a part of the body of Christ—are you balancing the scales?

I have told you this story before about the time on the farm when Papaw needed my weight to do something; really, he needed my daddy's weight. I had seen before where he would put a big breaker bar with an extension bar on the nut he was trying to loosen. My dad would hold onto the dual on the tractor, and he would get on that and I'd see it slowly break loose. Now, wanting to be a helper (I was six, seven, years old) I jumped up on that bar before dad could. I got out on the end of that bar and I'm just jumping up and down with all of my weight as a six or seven year old, and it did nothing. My papa looked at me and I'll never forget these words, he said, "Son, you don't have enough lead in your britches." I took my papaw

literally, and I got down off of that big extension bar and I started walking around the shop and started putting sockets, wrenches, and hammers in my britches pockets. I jumped up on that thing again—I still didn't have enough lead in my britches. Let me just say that on the farm now, I'm the one out on the extension bar; I've got plenty of lead in my britches! ☺

Do you have enough lead in your britches to bless? You just had to submit to something that was uncomfortable, you just had to submit something that caused suffering...you are suffering and instead of retaliation, instead of whining, you bless. How are you doing? Do you remember what Paul said? Never let any corrupt communication come out of our mouth, never let anything rotten come out of our mouth, but what needs to come out of our mouth should give grace to the hearer. You say, "But that they don't deserve it!" Did you deserve the grace you got? You're going to receive grace from God but you're not going to *give* grace? Can I remind you that when God gave you grace you were a sinner? When Paul wrote to church in Colossians, he talked about us walking in wisdom, making the best use of our time, and then he says season your speech with salt. My wife is a great cook. One of the things that makes her such a great cook is she cooks food just right, but man, she can season it in a way that she can make anything taste good! Can I just say this to some of you? You need to salt your words, because when you speak in that situation you are to be a blessing.

Look at what Peter says, "...that you may obtain a blessing." Now I want to be careful here—this is not implying a works type salvation. I know most scholars believe this is saying in that moment you do the right thing, knowing that in the future when you get to Heaven you're going to receive the blessing. That is true...but I don't think that's what this is referring to. I think this is referring to in that moment you bless, you *receive* a blessing *by* blessing. You just did the right thing, and in that moment when you do the right thing it's a blessing, because in that moment it's "I did it! I acted like Christ." Have you ever not blessed in that situation and did what your flesh wanted to do, and then a little bit later was apologizing for what you did? That's because it wasn't a blessing. It wasn't a blessing to them and it

wasn't a blessing to you. Throughout my life, I've had that happen to me and you have to.

Now, verse 10. That word, "For," is now going to take us back to Psalm 34. Peter is going to tell us that he's basing what he's saying on a song of David, and here's what the song basically says...speak good, not evil, do good, not evil. If you're doing evil, turn from it. Seek peace. Once you seek it and start getting your hands around it, pursue it. Then he says, "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." What he's saying is I've got my eyes on you. See, if we're reading this, we're thinking we're living this way so that our behavior will catch the attention of unbelievers because they're watching us. That's true, but that's not why we're doing it. Do you know why we're doing this? Because guess who is really watching us? God. I want you to remember that. The one who is watching us is God. He's watching you. There's never a time He's not watching. He's watching at work, He's watching at church, and He's watching at home too. It starts here in church, and then we act this out at home. And then, what we act out at home we act out there.

I want to close it with this one thought. This breaks my heart to know that there are some of us who never mess up out there and we got a great witness out there, but where we're messing up is at home. Our family sees us doing it right out there but doing it wrong at home. Do you know what ends up happening? You do it right out there so you have your influence out there, but when you're doing it wrong at home you lose your influence where it counts the most, and that's in the life of your family. I don't want to do it wrong out there, but I don't want to do it wrong in here at church, and I don't want to do it wrong at home either. Do you? The face the Lord is against those who do evil. Do you sense the Lord's eyes on you? Do you know His ears are open to your prayers? It's because you're in a right relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. So as a pastor, as your spiritual father, let me just say we are not home. So starting now, let's act like who we are.