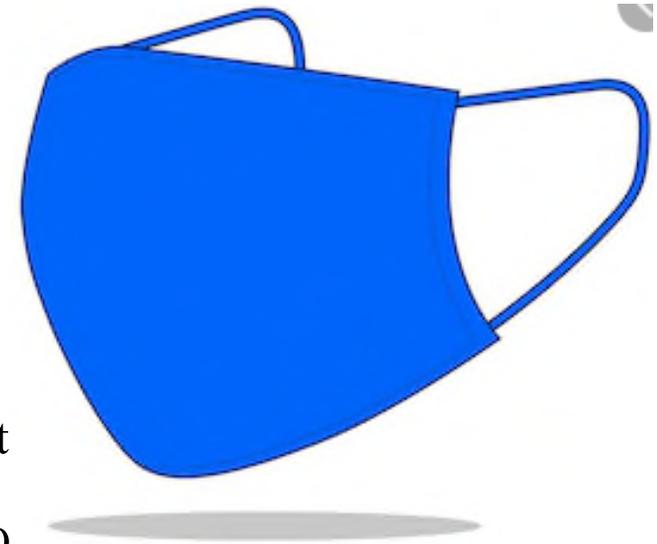


1 Peter 3:8-15
Hope in the storm

In Pursuit of Peace!



Christianity is not a movement of angry, fed-up people! We do not yell and scream at people, not even if they are yelling and screaming at us! There is A LOT of that going around these days, but Christ-followers are not participating in it! If they are, they are making a mistake! Of course, it doesn't just happen face to face, but there is a lot of hysterical yelling and screaming on line through the social media. I understand it – I do – we live in the most extremely exasperating times! But to participate in the name-calling, the vitriol, even to repost nasty posts that someone else has written – that is not who we are in Christ! It doesn't mean that we cannot participate in the political conversation that is so heated these days, but if we venture into the battle, we have to be the calm in the midst of the storm – the cool voice of reason when everyone else is being – well - jerky. If we can't be that, then we should not participate, at least until we are under control! But the '19 has exposed a soft underbelly in churches everywhere. We can still divide over the dumbest things! For instance, some Christians are scornful of the whole "pandemic" crisis and scornful of the people who take it seriously. That includes their spiritual brothers and sisters on the other side of the church isle. On the other hand, the Christians who take it seriously are scornful and upset with the non-Christians and Christians alike who *don't* take it seriously. Both have their own rationale. The one side says "*You're being a dupe in an obvious hoax, and a pawn to someone back in the shadows pulling the strings!*" Actually, less than 1% are dying from this!" And the other side says, "*You don't care about your own health and you don't care about mine either! As Christians we should all be doing the loving thing and protecting each other! And the death rate is 3%!!*" So the masks have become a symbol, a dividing line between two polar opposite positions, and the church is the society in microcosm. Masks work, vs. masks don't work! And then there's the poor people caught in the middle who *can't* wear a mask – whose facial skin reacts to the material, or whose lungs are too weak for some reason to pull air through the fabric of a mask, or who feel claustrophobic when the mask is on. And even these are divided between some that would like to comply and can't, and others of them that really should have a good mask on but are very unconcerned – "*If I die, I die!*". And the maskers would counter "*Yeah, but do you realize that you could be taking others with you?*" Point/counterpoint! Emotionally invested in one's position! Angst! Fear! Frustration! Derision! Division! Pretty soon we will divide over the vaccine – mark my word!



Back in the early church, pandemics were common, an accepted part of life. No one understood what it was, of course – & didn't know where they came from, and nothing could be done about it, so nothing was. People did isolate during epidemics, but just like it is now, disease was most commonly spread within families. People simply could not just isolate from their families! So they didn't divide over differing reactions to pandemics or epidemics. They divided over racial issues, primarily Jew steeped in Judaism vs. non-Jew. They divided over cultic teachers and teachings that infiltrated the church – usually **Gnosticism**, which took many forms, and these Gnostics worked like evil little trolls to disrupt the church. And then there were also people who wanted to **mix local pagan religious practices** with Christianity. There were also people in the church who differed over eating **food offered to idols/demons** in pagan temples, and then sold much more cheaply in the marketplace. They differed over **church discipline**, and they differed over the **unequal treatment of rich** over the poor. Plus, they had **strong egos** to overcome, alpha males and alpha females whose nature it was to try to dominate others, who then were moved to resent them. They had people who fought a shadowy fight from behind the scenes through **gossip** and **slander**! So they had plenty of opportunities to fight and divide over. But Peter makes a strong appeal to the churches. Don't fight! Don't take it farther than you should. There were some issues that they should have a vigorous debate over, but then come back together! Furthermore, Peter calls for **“harmony”**, which is surely *more* than just a refusal to fight and divide! *Harmony is a musical term. It is notes that fit together to form a chord out of notes that sounds good together. I love harmony! When I was three I remember discovering that I could sing harmony with my family. I didn't have to think about it. I just knew. I could hear it in my head. I would have totally taken it for granted except that when my family heard me doing this at such a young age, they laughed and made a big deal out of it because it was comical to them that one so young could sing perfect alto when most kids that age have trouble even carrying a tune! Harmony became one of my most favorite things in the world! I loved the sound of harmony. It thrilled my young heart and sent it on a ride to the moon! It put chills down my spine and goose bumps on my flesh. There was just no pleasure like the pleasure of singing harmony with someone else singing the melody, or singing melody while someone else sang harmony! That combining of complimentary notes was one of life's great pleasures, and₃ still is! On the other hand, disharmony sets everyone's teeth on edge! It is conflicting notes that make a bad sound together.



[Ps. 133:1-3] - *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”*

He has just gone through instructions for the behavior of Christ-followers in regard to governmental authority, and then instructions about the behavior of slaves toward their masters (and there were a lot of slaves that had responded to the message of the Gospel and which were a part of the early church)!

Then in chapter 3, Peter covers the topic of marriage, and now he is addressing relationships in the church. And in each previous topic he covers, the message is somewhat the same – don’t make waves, comply, have a good attitude, trust God with your grievances, be kind, show respect, be considerate.

Now he addresses the relationships with fellow Christ-followers. *“Live in harmony”* Peter says. Obviously this is referring to relational harmony. Relational harmony doesn’t just happen. It takes people who have a relational IQs in the upper registers, who know when to talk and when not to; who know what to say when they talk, and what to leave unsaid! It takes people who are aware of their audience and who are careful to say and do things that do not put people off if at all possible, that do not offend, or that do not bring known irritants into the situation. Now, that is not always possible because sometimes people have to get right down to it, and sometimes there is a dispute, and tensions, and unpleasantness because something important has to be dealt with. But generally it is good to be careful and measured in our speech, and to be nice, to be positive, to be cheerful with others, and to avoid things that will cause disputes and create offenses. Harmony is caused by people being easy and enjoyable with each other, when there is laughter and good humor, and when people are not being judgmental and mistrustful with each other. When people are happy to be together there is a sweetness to it that fills the heart in the same way a melodious chord hits the pleasure centers of a person’s mind and soul!



Point is that we are responsible for making our conversations kind, sweet, yet seasoned with salt [Col. 4:6]. In other words, not just fluff. There should be some spiritual depth to it at some point. It doesn't have to be all heavy all the time, but there are times when that seems right. Just make sure you are reading your audience right. Jesus said "***Don't give dogs what is sacred; do not cast your pearls before swine***" – Why? Well that seems obvious! They just wouldn't appreciate it now, would they?! So on the other hand, in Eccl. 11:1 he counters that with "***Cast your bread upon the water, for after many days you will find it again***" – a reference to being generous with wisdom or resources.



Don't hold it tight to the vest, he says, because one day you may need a friend. So spread it around! The key is to know your audience. *I haven't always been successful at that. I've made my mistakes and misread people – a few times, badly! But I really do try to learn from my mistakes. I want to be more effective not less. I want to have input in people's lives because Jesus has given me a pastor's heart. I have to curb my appetite to fix people. I just need to direct them to the Healer Himself, and let Him do His work in proportion to how willing they are! Sometimes I get that confused and turned around, and that is when I make a fool of myself and I'm trying to make the change in someone with MY wisdom and force of personality. It just never works – a waste of my time and theirs! So I'm learning to point people to Jesus and to pursue Him and discover what He wants. Only He has the power to change lives. Sometimes I forget that. But that doesn't keep me from continuing and from trying to get it right! It is important to me that I speak a word from the Lord, when the conversation gets "**salty**" and we are going in depth into personal issues or spiritual things! It is **compassion** for the human condition, I think. I so long for people to listen to all the counsel of God and I am not afraid to speak up if I think they will listen and consider what I have to say, especially if it comes from scripture – which it usually does. If it is not directly from scripture, it is indirectly from scripture. The knowledge of God and of His word brings wisdom, and for Christians, the wisdom of God is not to be hoarded but to be shared with others. This is what we are called to do.

Heb. 10:24 says "***Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds. Let us not neglect meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as we see the day approaching!***"

Peter continues – Do not retaliate! Be the contrarian! Don't do what everyone else would do. Do the opposite! Respond to a curse with a blessing, says the apostle! But that's crazy! No it's not. **[1 Cor. 3:3]**

It is genius – if we are trying to make a breakthrough in some hard-hearted person's life! We are not going to win them to Christ through heated debate and name slinging! The only chance we have is to surprise them with a kind word in exchange for a mean-spirited one! When we were called to Christ and we answered the call, we were also called to this! It is not a question, and not an option! Christ-followers were not called to be like John Wayne, or Bruce Willis, or Sylvester Stallone. We were called to be like Christ! Christ had courage like no one else. He had super-hero courage! Who has all-power and yet *chose* to be defenseless - chose to take the beating from sadistic men He could have crushed – or caused their hearts to stop beating – or he could have made them spontaneously combust! He could have done anything He wanted, but He just took the beating and then the nails through his wrists and through his feet, and then the agony of hanging on those nails, and the slow paralyzing suffocation. Peter says that we were called to suffer for Christ in the manner that Christ suffered! Not yelling and screaming in defiance; not shaking our fist in belligerence, or not posting the injustice of our plight on Face Book to whip up outrage from all our Face Book friends! We are called to do things differently – to seek peace and reconciliation even if it costs us!



Now, of course there are times when it is time to stand up, to stand in the way of evil or error - to be tough, stubborn, and unmovable. Inevitably there will be disputes in the church, **[1 Cor. 11:19; 1 Cor. 2:13,14]**. But we fight fairly, give our opponent respect even if we feel that they do not deserve it. We fight with truth and love. Our words are measured, not angry spew – not frothing and seething sentiments. No - our words are ALWAYS intended to be medicine upon a wound, to promote understanding and healing, not to foster infection and deterioration of the situation or of the relationship(s)! Our end game is to *resolve matters* in any and all situations. So, especially in the church, we apply truth, but with respect for our opponent! We have civil debate – disagreement with politeness rather than disrespect! We must discipline our tongues and curb our attitude along with our inner conversations. But self-discipline is one of the fruits of the Spirit, is it not?! It is true in our relationship with our neighbors, with our parents and siblings, in our marriages and children, and it is true between friends, and it is true between our spiritual brothers and sisters at church! **[Rom. 12:18; 1 Cor. 6:7]**

We are the only ones that have to abide by this rule – remember that! Yet we are destined to prevail!

