

Uncommon and Unexpected

Christianity 101, Part 1

I Peter 3:8-9

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Christianity is vastly different from the rest of the world's cultures. It is unique because of its beliefs in Jesus Christ as God and it spurs on believers to be selfless and care for others in a way that is unnatural and thus brings God glory. This is an uncommon way of thinking and Peter is making sure to outline just how radical this way of life is compared to the ordinary.

Discussion Points:

Peter starts this section of his letter by saying he is going to sum up what he had written earlier.

- Knowing that he is building on what he had previously said, what should you do to remember what he is referencing?
- Why is it important to always remember the context?
- What strategies can you use to consider the context when you come across words such as “to sum up” or “likewise” or “therefore”?
- What other function-marking words can you think of that point to other parts of the text in reference to what is currently being taught?

The first conclusion Peter has for how the church should look according to God and his instruction is that the body should be *harmonious*.

- What does it mean to be in harmony?
- Why is it important to be in harmony?
- How does harmony relate to the church being referred to as the Body of Christ with many parts?
- What are the results of not being in harmony with one another as believers?
- How can we collectively keep our focus on Christ and our purpose of serving and glorifying him?

Discussion Guide cont.

Peter next tells the believers that they need to be *sympathetic* to each other.

- What does it mean to be sympathetic?
- How have others shown sympathy for you in your times of distress?
How does this relate to Paul's teaching in Galatians 6 to "bear one another's burdens"?

Peter says next that believers should be *brotherly*.

- What are some characteristics of being brotherly to others?
- What Bible passages refer to Christians in familial terms with God and with others?

Being *kindhearted* is something that can be difficult for strangers, but the within the church there is always one major commonality that unites everyone.

- What is the uniting factor for everyone in the church?
- How can this uniting relationship give a model for us to follow for tenderhearted compassion?

Having a *humble spirit* can change relationships between people and allow God to be at the center.

- How does humility help build up a church body?
- How does humility glorify God?

Peter continues in verse 9 to say that Christians are not supposed to return evil for evil or insult for insult. This is not the natural thing to do for humans in their sinful nature, but he even goes a step further by instructing them to give a blessing instead of the natural reactionary slander.

- How does this relate to Paul's teaching in Romans 12:21 of overcoming evil with good?
- How did Jesus demonstrate this attitude during his life on earth?
- What kind of witness will this refusal to unleash the tongue at others build?

Gospel Connection:

The Christian life is not easy. It consists of constantly fighting the flesh and striving to live for Christ because his blood has bought us to be invited into his family. We have been "called out of darkness into His marvelous light." He has redeemed us and is continuing to mold us by his Holy Spirit to demonstrate his love and character to others in a way that glorifies Him.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Does your life reflect the Christianity Peter is describing? How do you need to change?
- Pray:** Ask God to continue to mold you into the image of Jesus Christ so you can live up to the title of Christian.
- Do:** Strive to follow these 5 uncommon virtues Peter lays out in verse 8. Be uncommon yourself and bring God glory through your life that is lived for Him.

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I Peter 3:8-9

A symphony was announced and the featured violinist was, at that time, world renowned. The advertisements announced that he would be performing his solo pieces on a rare violin – at the time, costing an unheard of \$20,000. In today’s economy that would be upwards of \$500,000 or more.

The symphony hall was packed and the people were filled with a sense of anticipation. It wasn’t long before the master violinist stood and began to play . . . and what beautiful music it was!

As he began his final piece, he suddenly took his violin and crashed it to the floor, severely damaging the instrument. And with that, he walked off stage.

The audience was dumbfounded – shocked. The conductor however, who was in on it, turned and announced with a smile that the Maestro wanted them to know that he was not playing a \$20,000 violin but a \$20 violin. With that, the musician returned and finished his concert on the rare, expensive violin. And few people could tell any difference.

The point that he had wanted to make was that the violin was certainly important, but it could only make beautiful music in the hands of a master musician.

I find that analogy to life encouraging because, like you, I’m not a rare violin; I don’t know about you, but I’m more like the \$20 version.

In fact, the church is reflected in this analogy as an orchestra, made up of many different kinds of instruments. All from redeemed, yet common stock.

What makes us uncommon is the way the Master – our Lord – plays upon our lives, demonstrating to a world just what He can do. He gets the standing ovation, not us.

He receives great glory when we allow Him to play His tunes of grace in and through our lives.

The Apostle Peter has already described the uncommon uniqueness of the Christian in the midst of an unwelcoming culture.

He has described believers as foreigners living as strangers in a foreign land.

He has outlined the way we are to respond to:

- human government where we have been assigned by God
- human institutions of authority
- unfair treatment of employers
- and how to die to self and imitate the character of Christ in our marriage relationships.

And now what Peter does is move on to describe Christianity, played out, in even broader terms.

This is what the music of grace and the gospel sound like.

If you have your Bibles, turn to *I Peter chapter 3* and let’s pick up our study at *verse 8* as Peter makes some sweeping conclusions.

He writes, *To sum up, all of you be harmonious* . . . stop there.

He’s writing believers and saying in other words, learn how to make music together; learn how to play along with each other.

More on that later. I want to point out that Peter begins by telling us *to sum up* – or – your translation might read, “finally”. This doesn’t mean his letter is over any more than a preacher’s sermon is over when he says “finally.” I’m just setting you up for later.

Peter is summarizing his previous comments on how to demonstrate Christianity in a broader

context than in your own personal life or job or marriage.

I'd like to call this a course on Christianity that we could entitle, Christianity 101. In fact, I've outlined the course to take us all the way through the end of chapter 4.

The curriculum in this course will include lessons on:

- Behaving like Christ
- Defending Christ
- Identifying with Christ
- Waiting for Christ and
- Suffering for Christ

Peter is going to take us to school and into the classroom and write words on the chalkboard for us to memorize and follow up on.

By the way, this isn't a course that Christians can skip; you have to attend. And these lessons are going to involve homework so you can't audit the course and skip the assignments.

Peter is the inspired professor, the ultimate Teacher is the Holy Spirit, and the opening lesson is on 5 uncommon virtues and 2 unexpected reactions.

Five Uncommon Virtues

1. And the first adjective he writes on the board is the word **harmony**.

We read it just a moment ago – *To sum up* – that is, to sum up what I've said already on what it means to demonstrate Christianity well, *all of you be harmonious*.

He is writing to the church, "take your place in the orchestra of the redeemed."

Let me emphasize this virtue by changing the analogy. Harmony in the body of Christ is as important as harmony in the human body. When there is disharmony in our physical bodies or when something isn't working properly, we call that a disability.

When one group of unhealthy cells begins devouring another group of healthy cells, we call that cancer.

It is no less serious to a local church – a local body of believers who can potentially become disabled or even begin to devour one another.

Paul warned the Galatian church, *If you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. But I say (instead) walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:15-16)*.

Whenever you go to the doctor, you never go into that examination room casually. You are entirely interested. And when you get that blood work done, how important are the results? How concerned are you?

How concerned are we with the harmony and the health and the unity we have with other believers in the local church?

One author reminded me that we have never been asked by God to manufacture unity in the church. It is already there. We are already *one in Christ (Galatians 3:28)*.

But we do have the obligation to maintain that unity – we are to endeavor *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)*ⁱ

It's not your responsibility to produce unity in the church; it's your responsibility to protect it.

Now when Peter writes here that we are to be harmonious, he is not telling us to be monotonous. Unity isn't the same thing as uniformity.

Peter isn't telling us to be the same in every way; if that happened there would not be harmony but unison.ⁱⁱ

We are not supposed to play the same note in unison; we play different roles with different gifts and different personalities and different and creative abilities and backgrounds and tastes and we put them together in submission to and under the direction of the Divine Conductor. And guess what – \$20 dollar violins and trumpets and trombones and clarinets make beautiful harmony.

You could translate Peter's description here to read, "Live in harmony with one another."ⁱⁱⁱ And this is uncommon in the world today; just watch the news nationally or globally.

In a self-serving, self-exalting, self-enamored, self-promoting world, individual rights supersede the common good. Mankind is anything but harmonious.

Which, in Peter's mind, gives the church the outstanding opportunity to demonstrate something absolutely uncommon – Harmony.

Peter writes another word on the board . . .

2. It's the word **sympathy**

Notice – *all of you be harmonious, sympathetic.*

The word basically refers to sharing fellow-feelings or entering into the feelings of others.^{iv}

The first and last miracles of the Lord's ministry, recorded in the Gospel by John, are an illustration of this. The Lord's first miracle was at a wedding, which is one of life's gladdest hours; and His last miracle was at a funeral – which is one of life's saddest hours.^v

The Lord entered fully into the experience and emotion of humanity.

In fact, the writer of *Hebrews* uses this same word when he writes that eye-opening description of Jesus Christ, our High Priest who is touched – same word – He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (*Hebrews 4:15*).

Imagine, Jesus Christ feels your feelings. He feels the joy of that wedding and the sorrow of that funeral and everything in between.

This is what it means to *rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep* (*Romans 12:15*).

Given an audience of this size, I have no doubt that I will preach today to hundreds of people who are hurting and suffering mentally, physically and emotionally. What better day than the Lord's Day to act like the Lord – with sympathy – taking the time for a word or two to share in another person's loss or sorrow or confusion? What better day for pulling off on the side of the hallway for prayer with someone

who is weak or wavering or concerned; welcoming someone with kind words of understanding. Again, this is an uncommon way to act.

The common thing is to think, "I'm the one suffering; I've got enough problems of my own; I'm here for me and only me."

Christianity 101 teaches us the uncommon virtue of entering into the feelings and emotions of others with sympathy, demonstrating the sympathy of Jesus Christ for others.

3. Peter moves to write another word on the board – it's the word I would categorize as **loyalty**.

My translation reads, *harmonious, sympathetic* – now notice – *brotherly*.

Treat each other like you belong to the same family; treat each other like brothers.

I had three brothers growing up, so I'm assuming Peter isn't thinking about treating each other like 6-year-old, 8-year-old and 10-year-old brothers. The way my brothers treated me, it's a miracle I survived . . . and them too!

The word here is *philadelphoi*, which gives us the name of that city, Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

Raise your hand if you have lived in that amazingly loving city?

I don't think anybody living in Philadelphia expects anybody to live up to the name of that city.

But Peter evidently expects us to live up to the name of the church – and every church is to be marked as a church of brotherly love; brothers, sisters, young and old, old in the faith – or like some of you – brand new to the faith.

This word carries the idea of loyalty to those who are members of your family. There's a natural family bond.

Peter tells us that Christianity is uncommon in that it treats those who are not biological members of their family as if they are.

But as many as received Him – Jesus Christ – *to them He gave the right to become the children of God* (*John 1:12*).

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God (1 John 3:1).

Because of that, the Apostle Paul will write, ***Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Romans 12:10).***

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters (Hebrews 13:1).

This is family vocabulary; we are members of the family of God.^{vi}

So what is family life like? One author wrote, “We spill our milk, say things we shouldn’t say and fail to act our age. We might have more knowledge than obedience. We can demand our way like a toddler, pout like a preschooler, complain like a teenager or maybe even take a trip back every so often to the terrible twos.”^{vii}

So let’s demonstrate grace and loyalty and brotherly love to the maturing members of the family, which means to all of us.

4. Peter writes another virtue on the board – we’ll call this one **empathy**.

He adds here, ***harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly*** – now notice – ***kindhearted***.

This word comes from the Greek word that gives us our word *splanchna* – a word used for internal organs – the heart, lungs and liver.^{viii}

In other words, Peter is referring to the deepest emotions here; the deepest sense of compassion.^{ix}

The Apostle Paul uses the same word when he urges the Ephesians to be ***tenderhearted*** to one another (***Ephesians 4:32***).

Just like Peter’s earlier mention of sympathy, here in ***1 Peter 3:9*** is again a word for being conscious of other people’s feelings.

However, the difference is that this word refers to taking action to alleviate whatever need there may be.^x

Empathy is a desire to not only see the problem but to become a solution to fixing the problem.

How uncommon is genuine empathy for the suffering? John Phillips writes historically, “the pagan world of the First Century, before Christianity took root and began to make sweeping changes – it was a pitiless, callous and cruel world. The Roman world provided no hospitals – they only provided medical care for military and royal personnel. There were no nursing homes for the elders; there was no public education for the illiterate population; there were not retirement homes for the old or rescue missions for the addicted; it had no organized help for widows, battered wives, abused children or the homeless. There were no civil rights for the millions of slaves in the Roman Empire; there were no orphanages, no missions, no charities and no social programs. All of the above will become the by-products of Christianity.”^{xi}

In other words, Christians who did uncommon things and demonstrated uncommon virtues like empathy, being moved with compassion and figuring out a way to address the need.

The brand of Christianity that fails to make us more tenderhearted and kind is not New Testament Christianity.^{xii}

5. Peter adds one last uncommon virtue to the list - **humility**.

He writes, ***all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit***.

This is one word in the original language that can be woodenly translated, “humble-minded.”^{xiii}

Make sure you notice that Peter didn’t write, “humble in church” or “humble when people are looking” or “humble when you publish your book on Three Ways to Be Humble and How I Do All Three” – no.

Humble where no one but God can see you; humble in your thought life; humble in spirit.^{xiv}

How uncommon is humility – the attitude that was in Christ when He humbled Himself

and became one of us? (*Philippians 2*). He, the King of glory, became a servant to all.

The test of whether or not we are developing servant-like humility is whenever we are treated like one.

Again, the first century world wanted nothing to do with this virtue. They prided themselves on courage and aggression and assertiveness and being king of the mountain.

Only the people who aren't with it and aren't on top of it need humility because they certainly need humility where *they're* living.

I have read how, in the 17th century, the wealthy landowners would hold hunting expeditions. And although they camped out in the open, they brought fully-staffed kitchens, dressing rooms and even libraries and all the household staff to make it work. Now that's my idea of camping out!

After they shot and killed a number of deer, the camping trip would turn into an outdoor feast.

The household staff, however, never got any venison to eat. Although they did all the work, all they would get would be the leftover scraps – the innerds – we call them, which they referred to as “umbles”.

They would take the umbles and clean them, prepare them with vegetables and fruit and then roll it all up in dough and bake it; it came out looking like a pie. They referred to it as “umble pie.”^{xv}

This phrase would change over the course of time into *humble* pie and it came to refer to someone who was forced by failure or loss or demotion to be eating humble pie.

They would be brought down a notch or two because they didn't win; so they were effectively forced to eat humble pie.

Look, no one voluntarily steps down a notch or two; no one orders a slice of humble pie.

Peter essentially says, “Pull up a chair and join in with your brothers and sisters as you willingly demonstrate uncommon humility.”

Along with the other uncommon virtues of harmony, sympathy, loyalty and empathy.

Add to these uncommon virtues, two unexpected reactions.

The first one is **resisting revenge**.

Notice *verse 9. Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult*.

Christianity is demonstrated not only in how we act, but in how we react.

These words here for *evil* and *insults* simply refer to mistreatment by others through evil and bad words and evil and bad deeds.^{xvi}

Peter isn't speaking in pious tones; he isn't living in some ivory palace removed from the dog-eat-dog world.

His quill is dipped in the reality of life. He is anticipating that situation you might be right in the middle of right now; he is writing about how to react to undesirable and undeserved and unhealthy and improper actions and words.

And he says here – in the present tense, by the way – so that this is to be our ongoing response, not just the first time or the fifth time, but every time – ***don't return evil for evil and insult for insult***.

And this will be unexpected in your world! You simply stop the cycle. You break the chain of “he did that so I'm going to do this” or “she said that so I'm going to say this” or “they did this to me, so I'm going to do that to them.”

Peter tells us what not to do – and now he tells us what to do – notice, ***but giving a blessing instead***.

The term translated “blessing” is the word from which we get our English word “eulogy”. It means to speak well of someone else.^{xvii}

Talk about unexpected! You are not only speaking kindly of someone who is alive, but you are speaking kindly to someone who is not speaking kindly to you!

While the world's speech is marked by belligerence, our speech is marked by blessing.

I'm sure the believers in the 1st century church were wondering the same thing believers are wondering today – *how in the world will we ever be able to pull this off?*

Which is why Peter ends this verse with a reminder of

Our Unending Future

For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

In other words, don't forget you have inherited an eternal blessing. You didn't deserve that either. It was a gift of grace.

Now that you are on the way to the blessing of your inheritance, it is as if Peter reminds us that we should deliver as much of a blessing as we can to others – even to those who misuse us and malign us and mistreat us.

Just don't forget where you are heading. In the process, we are going to fail many times; that's what going through the curriculum of Christianity 101 is all about.

But the issue isn't really how smart you are or how strong you are; it doesn't matter how weak or how frail you are either.

Peter is clearly implying that we need to increase our estimation of Christ and our dependence upon Him.

We happen to be \$20 violins, but in the hands of the Master, the music of uncommon virtues and unexpected reactions invite our world to join us in this grace that will eventually take us to our unending future with each other as believers and our unending future with Him.

Christianity 101 is all about being in the hands and under the direction of Jesus Christ.

I couldn't help recalling some lyrics from my childhood days of a popular gospel song that has since faded from view. Let me read them to you; it's a fitting conclusion to our study today:

Twas battered and scarred,
And the auctioneer thought it
hardly worth his while
To waste his time on the old violin,
but he held it up with a smile.

What am I bid, good people, he cried,
Who starts the bidding for me?
One dollar, one dollar, Do I hear two?
Two dollars, who makes it three?
Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going
for three,

But, No,
From the room far back a gray bearded man
Came forward and picked up the bow,
Then wiping the dust from the old violin
And tightening up the strings,
He played a melody, pure and sweet
As sweet as the angel sings.

The music ceased and the auctioneer
With a voice that was quiet and low, said
What now am I bid for this old violin
As he held it aloft with its bow.

One thousand, one thousand, Do I hear two?
Two thousand, who makes it three?
Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
Going and gone, said he.

The audience cheered
But some of them cried
We just don't understand.
What changed its worth?
Swift came the reply.
The Touch of the Master's Hand.

And many a man with life out of tune
All battered and bruised with hardship
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd
Much like that old violin

But the Master comes
And the foolish crowd never can quite
understand
The worth of a soul and the change that is
wrought
By the Touch of the Master's Hand.^{xviii}

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/24/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- v John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of Peter (Kregel, 2005), p. 143
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- xv Adapted from wordorigins.org/humblepie
- xvi Adapted from MacArthur, p. 189
- xvii MacArthur, p. 190
- xviii Written by: Myra 'Brooks' Welch; John Kramp Published by: New Spring Publishing