

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 6/27/93
I Peter 3:8-12 "The Marks of a Strong Church"

Intro: Illust: Behind the house where I grew up is a 30 acre piece of rich bottomland. To the south there is a 60 acre woods. To the east is another dense woods. The whole area is teeming with wildlife. From talking to my parents last week, I heard about a most interesting showdown that took place in that piece of bottomland.

One evening, about 2 weeks ago, there were 5 deer grazing in the field. Suddenly, out of the brush came a sly coyotte looking for supper. He moved slowly towards the deer. Now typically, a speedy deer would have little trouble with a slower coyotte, especially in the open field. But something was wrong. Apparently one of the deer was injured. The other deer knew that. And so did the coyotte. A showdown ensued. The coyotte crept forward. And instinctively, the 5 deer huddled together and challenged the coyotte! They glared at each other. The seconds ticked off. And the seconds turned into minutes. The coyotte slivered forward. The deer countered his move. It would be just a matter of time. But then, out of the corner of the field, another deer joined the ranks. And then, out of another corner, another deer. And another. After about 45 minutes there were some 10 deer in the standoff with the predator coyotte.

Then darkness settled in. And guess what happened? I don't know. It was too dark to see! I wish I could finish the story.

I've pondered that showdown. Isn't it amazing how God gave those deer a natural instinct to stick together, to put the interest of the group ahead of the interest of self?

Just imagine if the conversation between the deer would have gone like this, "Hey Bambi, let's get out of here. Here comes that old coyotte!" "I can't. Remember, I messed up my leg jumping that fence." "O, yea. Well sorry about that. But I gotta go now. It's a dog eat dog world, and it's up to me to look out for #1. I'll pray for you."

That's not the way it happened. God designed the deer to stick together. They banded together to protect one another. There's strength in numbers. That's true for deer. It's also true for people.

Q: What are the marks of a strong church?

Did you realize we are under attack? The church has a vicious enemy. Our enemy is sly. His aim is to destroy. His domain is the world system. Our enemy is that old roaring lion, Satan himself.

Q: How can we stand against our enemy? How can we be a strong church?

Let me put it this way. What must be true of WBC if we are going to stand against the increasing attack against Christianity, and impact our community for Christ?

Proposition: According to I Peter 3:8-12, if we're going to be a strong church, we need to get a handle on 4 areas. Our impact on the world is affected by 4 things.

I. Our Character (8)

A. Unity

- B. Compassion
 - C. Love
 - D. Affection
 - E. Humility
- II. Our Conduct (9)
- A. What We are NOT to do
 - B. What We are to do
- III. Our Convictions (10-11)
- A. Involves our Speech
 - B. Involves our Morality
 - C. Involves our Relationships
- IV. Our Confidence (12)

Notice that first word of v 8.

V 8 "Finally."

What do you mean "finally" Peter? You're only half done with your letter!
What does Peter mean by "finally?"

The context goes all the way back to 2:13. 2:13 begins what we've called the "Submission Section" of Peter's letter. Remember the people that received this letter were facing strong criticism from society. It was not popular to be a Christian.

Stats: In Ohio, 3.3 million people do not belong to a local church.
Another 3.3 million are members, but attend only to be baptized, married, or buried.
Listen. 6 out of 10 Ohioans have no meaningful relationship with a church.

Q: What's the best way for the church to impact a skeptical world?

A: 2:11-12 Let the world see Christ in us. How?

--In the way we relate to Civil authorities (2:13-17)

--In the way we relate to our bosses on the job (2:18-25)

--In our family relationships (3:1-7)

The world ought to be able to see in all those areas. And then, there's one more. Finally (8). To sum up the submission section. We need to let the world see Christ in our Church Relationships.

READ I Pt 3:8-12.

If we are to be a strong church we need to get a handle on 4 areas. First...

I. Our Character (8)

V 8 "Finally, be ye all of one mind..."

V 8 is a character checklist. Peter gives us 5 essential character traits. If you'll notice the 5 items are not so much things we are to DO, as things we are to BE:

We are to be known for our...

A. Unity--"Be ye all of one mind"

This is the only time this greek word appears in the NT, although the idea is abundant. It means to be of the "same mind." A strong church is a church that is in agreement.

You say, "How can we agree on everything? We're all different! Agreement about what? The color of the carpet?" No.

Our agreement and unity has to do with two things. Our Identity and our Purpose. We are followers of Christ. We belong to Christ. Every one of us. And He has given us a job to do. What is that job? Mt 28:19--Make Disciples.

Listen. There are aprox. 32,000 people within a 15 minute drive of this spot. There are some 97 churches. If they were all full (which they are not), and if they were all committed to the sufficiency of Christ (which not all are), there would be some 11,000 people worshipping Jesus Christ. That means that for every person connected with a church, there are 2 people with no church affiliation.

Don't miss this. If we are going to impact this community, we need to be of one mind when it comes to this. Our mission is clear (see church bulletin).

Mission: "We are WBC, a church that cares because of Christ...."

Illust:

Q: Who is to be concerned for unity in the church? The pastor? The deacons?

A: "Be ye ALL"--Unity is all our business.

B. Compassion--"Having compassion one of another"

It's the greek word "sympatheis." We get our english word "sympathy" from it. Sympathy and selfishness can't co-exist. We're to be known for our compassion for o.a.

C. Love--"love as brethren"

It's the greek word "philadelphoi." Peter doesn't use "agape" which is divine love. He uses "philos" which is brotherly love. The church is a family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to stick together.

D. Affection--"be pitiful"

The KJV says, "be pitiful." The word actually means to be tender-hearted.

Q: Let me ask you, "When it comes to loving God and loving people, do you have a tender heart or a hard heart? Do you have a big heart or a pea-sized heart? Is your heart bigger today than it was 5 years ago?"

Illust:

E. Humility--"be courteous"

The KJV says, "Be courteous." The word actually means to "be humble-minded." Jesus Christ was humble-minded (Mt 11:29). So must we be.

Listen. If we're going to be a strong church, there's no room for personal agendas. People with personal agendas destroy churches. Just look at Diotrophes in III John.

Illust: Have you ever walked through the woods in the winter and looked at a big towering tree. Looked great. Until you got close enough to see that the trunk was rotten. When that happens, it's only a matter of time...

The Church will always be under attack. As long as there is a devil, there will be opposition from the outside. But if we're going to stand, we must be strong on the inside. And our strength is linked to our character. For each of us. We must be known for our unity, for our compassion, for our love, for our affection, and for our humility.

Application: WBC is growing! It's exciting. Lots of new people. But we need to remember something. WBC is not a lecture hall. It's a body. If you view this church merely as a place where you come once a week to hear someone talk, you are shortchanging yourself, and others. I want to challenge every person here make a commitment to get to know other people. 1 out of every 3 here today has been in WBC less than 3 years. Get involved. How? S.S. Christian service. Invite to home.

Tran: If we're to be a strong church, that's where it starts. With character.

II. Our Conduct (9)

What do we mean by conduct? In this verse, conduct has to do with the way we treat other people.

A. What We are NOT to do

V 9 "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing"

Remember the setting. Some of the people reading Peter's letter had lost their jobs and their homes because of Christ. Humanly speaking, they got a raw deal. Someone took advantage of them.

Q: How should a Christian respond when wronged?

To render means to give back, to return. Here's the point. Do you know what has no place in the life of a Christian? Retaliation. We're not to retaliate, even when we've been wronged.

Illust:

Objection: "So what am I supposed to do when I've been wronged?"

B. What We are to do

V 9 "but on the contrary, blessing..."

You say, "I don't get it. How do you respond with a blessing? Say gazoontite?"

Q: What does it mean to bless people? Great word!

"bless" = basically means to speak well of someone

The Bible says we are to bless God (Ps 103:1). When we bless God, we speak well of Him. The Bible says God has blessed us (Eph 1:3). He speaks well of us, He extends to us favor, not because we are worthy, but because of who we are in Christ.

Now watch this connection. People who have been blessed are to what? Bless other people. Including people who wrong them. May I say ESPECIALLY people who wrong them.

Remember what Jesus said?

Mt 5:43-44 "Ye have heard...But I say, Love your enemies, bless them..."

When wronged, I must bless. Two questions: One, how. Two, why.

Question #1: But HOW do we bless people who've wronged us?

My aim is not retaliation. My aim is repentance, to see God grant the gift of repentance and forgiveness to my offender. I must choose to do what's good for my offender.

Question #2: Why would we do that? For 2 reasons...

1. Because of our Calling--"knowing that you are called to this"
2. Because of our Inheritance--"that ye should inherit a blessing"

Warren Wiersbe is right when he says, "As Christians, we can live on one of three levels. We can return evil for good, which is the satanic level. We can return good for good and evil for evil, which is the human level. Or we can return good for evil, which is the divine level." (412)

Application: Christianity is really taking it on the chin these days. The media slanders the church. Civil authorities chip away at the church's rights. How should we respond? Badmouth them? Rail against them? Is that what Peter says? No. He says to bless them. He says to behave in such a way that those who attack us can't help but see the love of Christ in us.

Illust: Polycarp

Tran: What are the marks of a strong church? Character, Conduct, and...

III. Our Convictions (10-11)

V 10 "For he that will love life and see good days"

At this point Peter quotes Ps 34:12-16. Ps 34 talks about how to experience "good days" (i.e. "the good life"). Now don't jump to the conclusion that the "good life" is the life free from problems. It's not. The good life has to do more with what God is doing IN us than it does with what He's doing FOR us.

Quote: I've been reading Colson's "Loving God." In it he shares a profound insight from Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "The meaning of earthly existence lies, not as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but in the development of the soul." (35)

Q: How can we experience the good life?

A: The truly good life belongs to those who, because of Christ, live with convictions. Don't miss this. When Christ is real in our lives, when we live with the realization that He's with us wherever we go, we'll have convictions.

Like what? These convictions pertain to 3 areas.

A. Involves our Speech

V 10 "Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips...no guile."

I like Wiersbe's counsel. He says we all need to pray Ps 141:3 daily, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

There ought to be a marked difference between the speech that comes out of your mouth, and your unsaved neighbor. Why? Because I am convicted that my mouth belongs to Jesus Christ.

B. Involves our Morality

V 11 "Let him eschew evil, and do good."
Morality is a 2-sided coin.

1. We must hate evil.

"eschew"--means more than just avoid; it means to avoid something because you despise and loathe it (Wiersbe)

2. We must love good.

Q: Do you hate evil? One of the questions that bugs me is, "Well, what's really wrong with it?" God calls us to draw the line in the relativistic sand. Evil is evil. And good is good. Period. I must hate evil, and love good.

Illust:

C. Involves our Relationships

V 11 "Let him seek peace, and pursue it."

Peace between people is precious. It's also elusive. That's why Peter tells us to seek it, and pursue it. The word in other places is translated "persecute." It's an intense word.

This is critical. If the church is to be strong, we need to have a passion for peace. Mt 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Some scholars think Peter had Rom 12 before him when he wrote I Pt 3.

Rom 12:9-14

Rom 12:18 "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

Tran: OK, so we're to seek peace. But what if I seek peace, and the other guy seeks war?! Kind of a raw deal, isn't it?" It would be except for v 12.

If we're going to be a strong church, and if we're going to impact our world for Christ, there's the fourth area on which we need to get a handle: Our Character, our Conduct, our Convictions, and finally...

IV. Our Confidence (12)

Q: What is our confidence?

V 12 "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous..."

We serve a God who sees all. And hears all. Every injustice. And every act of kindness in response to injustice. And guess what's true about this God.

If we're in Christ, He's on our side.

Strong churches live with this confidence. God cares for them. He's involved in their lives. Not because they are worthy, but because He is gracious.

My prayer is that WBC would be a strong church, for the glory of God, and for the good of this community. If that is to be so, it will involve each of us taking stock of 4 things: Our Character, our Conduct, our Convictions, and our Confidence.

Q: Do you have the confidence that God is real in your life?

Illust: This past Tuesday, Julie, Katie, and I went out to the camp. I saw something I've never seen before. We were looking at a nest of baby, wild rabbits. One of the babies got out of the nest and ran across the field. Gary ran and picked it up. It started screeching hysterically. And then it happened. About 20 yards away, out of the thick grass, came the mother rabbit. She charged right at Gary! What was she doing? Really there was nothing she could do. But that didn't matter. This much was clear. She was willing to put her life on the line for her own.

That's the way it is in strong churches.