

“Marriage: Turbulence”

1 Peter 3:8-9

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Introduction:

Over the past few weeks, we have been looking together at what the Bible teaches on the subject of marriage. We learned several weeks ago from **Genesis 2** that marriage is from God, it is a permanent union, it involves a man leaving his father and his mother, and it is the most intimate of all human relationships. Last week, we moved over into the New Testament, and we learned something from **Ephesians 5** concerning the distinct roles and responsibilities that God has assigned to men and women within the marriage relationship. We learned that women are to respect and submit to their husbands, and we learned that husbands are to love their wives, just as Christ gave Himself up for the church.

This morning I would like for us to look at another passage in the New Testament, a passage concerning some of the turbulence that takes place as two lives merge together into one. **»PPT»** Certainly we are at least a little bit familiar with turbulence in the air and water. We think about turbulence in the air. The photo here was taken about two years ago as a British Airways flight was coming down for a landing through some thin clouds near London. We understand, then, that a jet can cause turbulence—there is a disturbance as the jet moves through the air. We think about two great rivers coming together, perhaps the Ohio and the Mississippi, and we know that the water is very choppy where those two rivers come together. Several weeks ago, I watched something about the Amazon River and how the Amazon empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The Amazon is roughly a mile wide at that point, and the waves are huge as that mighty river hits the ocean.

For those of us who are married, perhaps we can all think back to our wedding day for just a moment. At a typical wedding, the bride and groom are perhaps quite young—they are full of life, everything is so positive, the two are deeply in love, it starts out in such an amazing way. But as those two mighty forces came together, turbulence had to happen. Coming together is not done smoothly. Two people from different backgrounds do not always adjust very smoothly. Sometimes they will hit some rough spots. But at the same time, we hopefully realize that it is not usually wise to get out of the plane during the turbulence. It is not smart to try to get out of the boat when those waves are choppy. Our best hope is to stay put and ride out those bumps and bounces as they come along. And what an amazing reward if we are able to hold on until things smooth out in the end! [Neal Pollard; Daily Bread; March 23, 2009]

For such an important relationship, we would expect the Bible to have some words of encouragement to help us through those difficult times, and certainly the Bible does not let us down! The passage is found in **1 Peter 3**. **»PPT»** In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1897**. In **verses 1-6**, Peter addresses the wives—as with Paul’s words in **Ephesians**, Peter also encourages the wives to submit to their husbands. And in **verse 7**, Peter speaks to the husbands as he tells them to live with their wives in an **“understanding way,”** and we do this so that our **“prayers may not be hindered.”** We pretty much covered that last week, so this morning I would like for us to look together at **verses 8-9** as the apostle Peter seems to address the possibility of turbulence as two lives join together. When we are faced with conflict, sometimes even Christians are tempted to simply throw out all the rules, and yet I hope we can remember based on what we are about to read that God’s word is relevant not only in times of peace, but especially when we are having a disagreement with one another.

Some have applied these verses simply to all people in the church, and certainly they would apply—there is some good advice for everybody here, but I would like for us to look at these verses specifically in the context of marriage, because that is the context in which they are given. Again, Peter gives instructions for husbands and wives, and then in **verse 8** he starts with our text for this morning and he says, **“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”**

As a married man, the apostle Peter had perhaps learned some of this the hard way, and so as he speaks of marriage in the first seven verses, and as he gets to **verse 8** he says, **“To sum up...,”** or in other words, when it comes to marriage, here is the secret—here is the summary of what I have said—in a nutshell.

I. And we notice the very first thing he says is that both parties are to be HARMONIOUS. »PPT»

And again, this is certainly true of everybody in the church, but for just a few moments let us apply it to those of us who are married. We start with the word itself. Perhaps we may not know the technical definition, but we know when we hear harmony in a musical sense that it sounds good. When we hear, for example, a C-major chord on a piano, we know that those notes are in harmony with one another—we know that it sounds good. Here in worship, we often try to sing in four-part harmony. And there again, our goal from a musical point of view is for those four notes to sound good together. Sometimes we even succeed at that! When we hear a good barbershop quartet, we know that they have achieved **“harmony.”** Those various elements are working together.

It is certainly hard to explain in words, but when we hear it we know it. The melody is the basic tune of the song—the harmony is different, but it does not work against the melody, it works with the melody—they are not in conflict, but the notes sound good together.

We look up the word **“harmony”** in a modern dictionary, and we discover that the concept goes back thousands of years. In the Wikipedia article on harmony, for example, the authors said that, **“In Ancient Greek music, the term was used to define the combination of contrasted elements: a higher and lower note.”** If that doesn’t describe marriage, I don’t know what does!

As we look at the actual Greek word that Peter uses here, we find that it literally refers to being of **“one mind,”** to being **“like-minded,”** not that a husband and wife will literally agree in every way on everything, but they work together—their minds are focused on the same goal, they are working in the same direction. They sound good together. They are cooperating as two members on the same team, they are united. Not **“un-tied,”** but **“united.”** Those two words have the same letters, but the order of those letters makes all the difference in the world. Unfortunately, some couples are closer to being **“un-tied”** than they are to being **“united.”** Perhaps some couples need a spelling lesson—we are to be **“united.”**

To help us understand harmony, perhaps we could think for a moment about the opposite of harmony. The opposite of harmony is disharmony, or discord. And there again, we know what disharmony sounds like—like the grating of fingernails on a chalkboard. Disharmony is what happens when the sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses forget to communicate, when they try to sing two different songs at the same time. But as it is, we are to agree with one another, we are different but we agree, we are to be harmonious.

This morning, then, let us ask ourselves: Are we satisfied with the music that our marriage is playing—the music we are playing for our children, for our grandchildren, for our neighbors, for the rest of the congregation? Are we in harmony or are we in disharmony? In order to sing in harmony, we need to agree on the music, we need to hear a common note as we begin to sing together.

Several weeks ago, my dad gave me something he had found in my grandfather’s belongings—it is a tuning fork that was used to find the pitch before leading a song. But this one is a little unusual in that it is adjustable. You can slide these little weights up and down for various notes according to the markings on the side. By finding the note it is possible to all sing together in harmony. I would suggest that our tuning fork in marriage (the note that we agree on) is the word of God. For this reason, we should encourage our children to marry someone who is also a Christian—someone who respects the word of God and someone who will not hold us back but will help us go to heaven. Otherwise, we are trying to sing together using two different tuning forks. First of all, then, we can endure the turbulence by being harmonious, by deciding together that we will follow the word of God.

II. As we look back at verse 8, we also find that Peter tells us to be SYMPATHETIC. ▶▶PPT▶▶

The word literally refers to **“feeling with”** someone. It means that we will feel with them when they suffer. We will weep when they weep. We will laugh when they

laugh. We rejoice when the other person is honored. We hurt with them when they are criticized or attacked. We experience what the other person is experiencing as if we were going through it with them.

The same word is used referring to Christ in **Hebrews 4:15**, where the Bible says, ***“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*** Just as the Lord can sympathize with us, then, husbands and wives are to sympathize with each other. They are to **“feel with”** each other.

It means that we are to get involved in their lives. We are not to be aloof or indifferent, but we are to get into their feelings and show respect and concern for what they are going through. We can try to walk in their shoes. We can try to feel what they feel so that we can respond with sensitivity to the need. It has been said, however, that people with true sympathy never say, **“I know exactly how you feel,”** because people with true sympathy know how unhelpful it is for someone to say, **“I know exactly how you feel.”** Sympathy, then, is done behind the scenes, it is often done without saying a word, and it takes a lot of time. We are to be aware and attentive to those things that may bring our mates distress, and we can be eager to patiently listen. We can listen as they explain how their day went—not always making suggestions as to how they should have handled certain situations. We are to be **“sympathetic.”**

III. As we look back at verse 8, we also discover that we are be BROTHERLY. »PPT»

The word literally refers to being a **“brother lover.”** It is the basis of our English word **“Philadelphia,”** the City of Brotherly Love. It may seem a little strange to say that we are to love our mates as brothers, but the idea is that we are not to be strangers. We are not to be mere acquaintances or distant relatives, but we are to relate to one another as close friends. Please remember that this was written in a time when many marriages were arranged, when love was never a prerequisite. Sometimes I will hear someone say, **“Well, if two people are not really in love, then God does not really join them together.”** No! Think about Jacob and Leah. Jacob worked seven years for the pretty sister but he got the ugly one instead. He woke up the next morning with shock, regret, and anger, but God recognized that marriage. And here we are today with total freedom to choose anybody on the face of the earth we want to choose, and (on average) after 6.6 years we say to ourselves, **“Oh no, what have I done—I’ve gotta get out of this!”** But God tells us that we can learn to love our wives—not only with agape love, but also with brotherly love.

We think about our own siblings. We did not choose them to be our brothers or sisters, but most of us eventually learned to love them in spite of the fact that we are related! We grew closer over time. Brothers do things with each other. Brothers stick up for each other. Brothers protect each other. Brothers take care of each other. Brothers work together, laugh together, and play together. Brothers talk together and they listen. Peter, then, tells us to be **“brotherly.”**

IV. As we go back to verse 8, we also find that we are to be KINDHEARTED.

»PPT»

One translation refers to having *"pity."* Others refer to being *"tenderhearted"* or *"compassionate."* Literally, the word refers to *"good innards."* The word refers to the *"guts,"* to the heart and the liver. The word refers to being *"sensitive,"* to be deeply moved with tender feelings over the pain or suffering of another person. There is no room for selfishness here. Men and women are different: When those differences come to the surface, when we face turbulence in our relationship, do we approach those differences with anger and abuse, or do we react by being *"kindhearted"*? Perhaps the opposite of being *"kindhearted"* would be *"cold-hearted"* or *"insensitive"* or *"over-critical."* And so the question is: Are we courteous? Do we use manners? Do we say *"please"* and *"thank-you,"* or do we order each other around?

It's amazing how just having good manners can change the tone in a family—a change from being cold-hearted to being kindhearted. As I was preparing for this morning's lesson, I ran across an interesting article on *"Stagecoach Etiquette"* that appeared in the *Omaha Herald* back in 1877. The article featured a few of the rules of common courtesy back then:

- Spit on the leeward side of the coach.
- If you have anything in a bottle, pass it around.
- Don't swear nor lop over on your neighbor when sleeping.
- Don't point out places on the road where horrible murders have been committed.
- Don't grease your hair before starting or dust will stick there in sufficient quantities to make a respectable 'tater' patch.

Well, certainly manners change from generation to generation and situation to situation, but it is amazing how being just a little considerate can help ease some of the turbulence in a marriage.

We need to ask ourselves: What are our children learning as they watch us interact and as they watch us disagree? Some husbands and wives somehow manage to treat each other much worse than they would ever treat an employee on the job. They meet each other at the end of a long day with whining, complaining, criticism—abusing one another with cruel and harsh words.

And yet you know, even if we start out *"cold-hearted,"* God allows us to have a change of heart. As Paul said in Ephesians 4:31-32, *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."* Or as he said in Colossians 3:12, *"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."* God allows us to have a change of heart. A cold-hearted person does not always have to be cold-hearted. Peter, then, tells us to be *"kindhearted."*

V. As we look back to verse 8, we also discover that we are to be **HUMBLE IN SPIRIT.** ▶PPT▶

The word itself refers to being *“lowly of mind”* or *“lowly of spirit.”* It is the opposite of being high-minded, proud, arrogant, haughty, or overly assertive. Sometimes in the world, a humble person is looked upon as being a coward, but that is certainly not the case. A humble person can be a person of great power, but that power is under control and is not flaunted.

The Bible teaches that humility can be learned and developed. As Jesus said in **Matthew 11:29**, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.”* The same word is used. Humility, then, is something that can be learned and developed over time. Several chapters later, Jesus said (in **Matthew 18:3-4**), *“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* We are to look at ourselves, then, as a servant of the other person. Instead of always taking candy *out* of the box, we need to be putting it *in*.

From high school literature class, maybe you can remember **“The Gift of the Magi,”** a short story by O. Henry that was first published back in 1906. He writes about James and Della, a young married couple who are very much in love, but they can barely afford the rent for their one-room apartment due to their bad economic situation. For Christmas that year, Della decides to buy Jim a chain for his prized pocket watch that was given to him by his father. To pay for the chain, she has her long hair cut off and sold to make a wig. Well, at the same Jim decides to sell his watch to buy Della a beautiful set of combs made out of tortoise shell for her beautiful, knee-length hair. Obviously, when they exchange gifts, they find that both gifts are useless, but they are thankful for what they received because both gifts represent the great love that they had for each other. Perhaps this is an illustration of the humility that Peter tells us to have in **verse 8**—we are to consider the other person as being more important than ourselves. He tells us that we are to be *“humble in spirit.”*

VI. Before we close, there is one more big concept in this little paragraph, and that is, Peter tells us as married couples that **WE ARE NOT TO RETALIATE.** ▶PPT▶

Perhaps you have heard of the woman who went to the doctor and discovered that she had rabies. The doctor left the room for a few minutes to let it sink in a little bit, and when he came back, she was busy writing on a piece of paper. He said, **“What are you doing? Are you writing your will?”** She answered and said, **“No, I am making a list of all the people I am going to bite.”** There was a woman who was ready to retaliate!

Peter, though, tells us in **verse 9** that we are, “...**not** [to be] **returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but** [we should be] **giving a blessing instead.**” We do not need to be married very long before we discover why Peter had to put this in here! In a time of turbulence, the husband and wife can say some cruel things to each other that they would never, ever say even to a total stranger at the front door. In the middle of a big disagreement, there are some horrible words that come flying out almost like arrows right into the heart of the one person we promised to love and cherish for the rest of our lives. And so the Holy Spirit spoke through the Apostle Peter that we are not to return insult for insult or evil for evil. Perhaps Peter is reminding us here that it is impossible for one person to carry on an argument alone [well, perhaps your marriage is an exception to that rule]. However, we know that a really good fight takes two people. And so if just one person controls his or her tongue and does not get involved in exchanging insults, then the argument is over. Peter, then, is warning us not to fall into this dangerous cycle—that we are not to give the devil an opportunity to come in and destroy our marriage. We are not to escalate the situation.

Perhaps in the middle of it we can ask ourselves: Will this situation control me, will this argument control me by dragging me into it, will this situation control me as I get even, or will the Lord control this situation as I refuse to trade insult for insult? We are not to let evil set the agenda in our families, but we can respond to hostility with grace. The ball is in our court.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on these two verses, I would only ask that we take some time to maintain our marriages, that we look at God’s word and that we make some changes, that we do some maintenance. What would happen if we went out to buy a new car and the salesperson says, “**When you buy this car, you have to make a solemn promise to God that you will keep this car as your only car for as long as you live**”? If we had to make that commitment, how would we treat that car if we knew we would be driving it for the rest of our lives? I would suggest that we would maintain it. We would take care of it. We would drive it gently. We would do everything possible to make it last. We would spare no expense to keep it running. And the point is this: Marriage is like a complicated piece of machinery, and if we want to keep it running we need to invest some time in making it work the way it should.

Do we really want a marriage that makes it through the turbulence? Peter would say, “**To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.**” For those of us as parents, it is up to us right now to determine how our children will remember growing up in our family. Was there peace and harmony, or was it a home where the two parents constantly picked at each other and insulted each other and basically made life miserable for each other? That decision is completely up to us.

There are some here this morning who are not yet Christians. The greatest blessing for any marriage is when both partners are members of the Lord's church, the body of Christ. This morning would be a great time to see a husband and wife joined together not only in marriage but also as brothers and sisters. If you are already a Christian but you would like us to pray together (perhaps even about your marriage situation), we would be happy to do that. You can let us know by writing it down and bringing it to the front during our next song. But on the other hand if you are not a Christian and are now ready to turn away from sin, if you are ready to confess your belief that Jesus is God's son, and if you are ready to participate in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, you can let us know about your decision to be immersed in water right now. If you're ready, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org