

Series: Faith Under Fire
“Walking in Harmony”

1 Peter 1:17-2:3

Today we continue in a sermon series called “Faith Under Fire.” Every person here today understands that we live in an imperfect world. We see this in many ways, but one of the clearest ways that we quickly observe this is through the trials that we face in this world. **James 1:2** commands, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, **when** you encounter various trials.” This verse clearly teaches us that trials will come into every one of our lives. The trials may be different and multi-faceted, yet we can be assured that we will all face them. We see this all throughout our world today. At any given moment it seems that half of us are going through a trial and the other half is awaiting the next trial. Trials are a part of life for all people.

The question that we will answer over the coming weeks and months is simply this, “What am I to do when my faith is under fire?” Other similar questions are: “What am I to do when I am going through trials and difficulties? What am I to do when my faith is tested? What am I to do when it feels like my world is falling apart?”

Over the past few weeks we’ve learned two keys to living when our faith is under fire. First, as Christians we have the opportunity and the calling to walk in hope. As a child of God, no matter what I face in this world it can’t diminish or take away what God has done for me, is doing in me, and will fulfill through me in the future. Because of God’s grace and mercy, I have complete confidence that heaven is my home. This confidence gives me living hope as I live in this fallen world today. So, the first key is that we must walk in hope. Second, we discovered last week that we must walk in holiness. Remember the believers of Peter’s day were going through intense persecution at the hands of Nero. Many were wondering how they were to live in a foreign land and how they were to live amidst such a difficult situation. Peter directed them to live in holiness. Peter clearly wanted them to know that their focus wasn’t to be on where they might reside. Instead they should focus on Who they had a relationship with. It didn’t matter where they lived or what they left behind. What mattered most was that God loved them, was with them, and He was calling them to holiness. God had set them apart for Himself at salvation, and Peter reminded them of this while they were going through adversity.

Today we come to a third key to living when our faith is under fire. God calls us next to live in harmony with Him and with one another.

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All of us here today have faced our own trials and troubles in life. Sometimes when we face these difficult times we try to put on a good face and act as if everything is ok. Sometimes we just try to “man up” and will our way through the tough time assuming that we can simply handle it. However, no matter how hard we may try to hide it, there is one area of our lives which is always impacted at some level by our trials. That area that is impacted is our relationships. We may think that we have done a good job of bearing our trial, but eventually our

relationships are affected by our silence, our distance, our coldness, our distraction and preoccupation, or by unloading all our pain on one another. I am not suggesting these things are good or healthy, but simply stating that they are usually a sign that there is something much deeper going on which likely stems from trial and difficulty. As these believers were going through intense persecution it, without a doubt, was affecting their relationships with one another. Peter pens these words to remind them of their relationship to the Lord and to show them how that relationship impacts their relationship with others in the body of Christ.

Verse 17 starts off with several motivations to walk in harmony:

1) Our works will be judged by God.

We live in a day where we want to view God as a buddy and friend. We should certainly know God and view God as our loving heavenly Father who made a way for us to know Him and desires for us to know Him more. However, in doing so we must be careful that we don't diminish the fact that He is also a holy and righteous judge. He is both a loving Father and a righteous Judge. We should take holy living seriously because He is a holy God. Please understand that this judgment that Peter is referring to has nothing to do with salvation. Instead, this judgment is referring to the fact that God will one day judge the believer's works. As we will see in a moment, our sins have already been judged at the cross. However, our works will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. **This judgment is not for punishment but for reward.** The Greek word here literally means, "to judge in order to find something good." Warren Wiersbe describes this judgment well, "Each of us will give an account of his works, and each will receive the appropriate reward. This is a 'family judgment,' the Father dealing with His beloved children."

2) We should desire to please God in all that we do.

Because He is a good Father who will judge to reward, we should love Him and desire to please Him in all we do. Peter says here that since God impartially judges each one's work, we must conduct ourselves with fear. This "fear" is not referring to terror or anxiety. This is not the fear that you feel when you stand before an officer, a judge, or some other distant authority. Again, this is in the context of a loving heavenly Father. It is not a fear of judgment, but a reverent fear of disappointing Him or hurting Him. Paul summarized it this way in **2 Corinthians 5:9-10**, "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." He even commanded in **Ephesians 5:8,10**, "For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of light...trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." Out of love and reverence to God, we should live our lives today for Him.

3) Our time on this earth is temporary and brief.

The third motivation for walking in harmony is simple. Our time on this earth is way too short to waste on disobedience and sin. The word that Peter used to described our "stay" on

this earth was the word for “sojourn”. Our life on this earth, compared to eternity, is so brief. We’re like a vapor that is here and then suddenly is gone. Because of this, we should live in such a way that we aren’t distracted by the temporary fleeting pleasures of this world, but instead living for the eternal, never ending profits of our heavenly home.

You may be thinking that living in harmony with God and others, though, sounds too good to be true. Perhaps you can accept and agree with the motivations, but for various reasons you feel that this is impossible for you. I believe that these verses unpack for us three reasons that we can and should walk in harmony:

I. We have been bought by God (1:17-21)

Please understand clearly that we can walk in harmony with God and man because of what He has done for us. This answers the “How?” The Bible says that we have been “redeemed” by God. The word “redeem” means “to buy, to buy back, or to pay off (as in a debt).” This may sound like a strange term to us today, but this term had significant meaning to those living in the Roman Empire. Scholars believe at that time there were 50-60 million slaves living in the Roman Empire during the first century. Slavery in that day was much different than the images and the stories that we hear of in the early days of America. In the Roman Empire and certainly in Old Testament times as well, a person became a slave when they were either a prisoner of war or most likely when they owed a great debt. Unlike what many of us have learned of slavery here, in those days and cultures a slave could be redeemed. If the slave could collect enough money, he could buy back his own freedom. However, the most common way for a slave to go free was for another Master to intervene and purchase the slave’s freedom. The other “Master” would literally pay off the debt owed, thus the slave would be redeemed.

It is this picture that God is using to teach us that He has redeemed us. We were slaves, but He intervened by paying the debt and buying us back to Himself. You may be thinking, “Well, how rude, I am no slave – never have been and never will be.” But the Bible says that every person without Christ is a slave to sin. **Titus 3:3** says, “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, ENSLAVED to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” **Romans 6:6-7** clarifies, “That our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be SLAVES to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.” We were slaves to sin. We were born with a sinful nature, we couldn’t separate ourselves from our sin, we continually turned to our sinful ways, and we were destined to suffer the punishment and consequences of our sin. But, praise God He intervened and redeemed us.

A. God’s Payment (vs. 18-19)

We must rejoice to realize that God paid the price for our freedom because we couldn’t pay a sufficient price. Peter tells us this. **He tells us first that our wealth can’t save us.** “You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold.” Simply put, salvation isn’t for sale. You can’t buy it. Throughout the Bible there are several people who thought they could use their money and their position to buy salvation and favor from God. However, they were all sorely disappointed to find that salvation isn’t about money,

power, or clout. **He tells us next that our works can't save us.** "You were not redeemed...from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers." If anyone had a hope in being saved by their lifestyle, it would've surely been the Jews. After all, they were God's chosen people. God had related to them, established covenant with them, and had given them the Law to live by. Sadly, by the time Peter was writing these words, the Jews as a whole had long abandoned their love and devotion to God. The purpose of the Law was to point them to God and to cause them to realize their need for a Savior. However, they had added their own list of rules and ideals to God's Word and felt that as long as they were good moral people they didn't need a Savior. They ended up with a cold, dead, man-made religion that was focused on works. Peter tells them clearly that they couldn't be redeemed by their way of life. We need to hear that today. Every false religion in the world is appealing to the natural man because every one of them teaches that salvation must be purchased or earned. They offer pilgrimages, penances, and "righteous" living. We long to find a way to make ourselves right with God. But, we can do NOTHING to save ourselves. Literally, Peter says it is "futile" which means "empty".

While we can't do any work on our own to save ourselves, the good news is that Jesus has already done the work for us. Peter said that you were redeemed "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." Remember, to redeem means "to buy back, to pay one's debt". In order for us to be redeemed from our sin someone had to pay the cost, the price of our sin debt. The Bible says that Jesus paid your debt and mine with precious blood. The word for "precious" in the Greek literally means "costly". The word was used to describe something of the highest value. He shed His blood and paid the ultimate sacrifice so that we could be freed from our sin. **Acts 20:28** tells us that Jesus purchased the Church with "His own blood."

There are many today who are trying to remove the blood of Christ from our terminology, worship songs, our culture, and our Bibles. I remember a supposed traditional church in Christiansburg that literally took every hymn out of their hymnals that spoke of the blood of Christ. They say that it is offensive. They say it isn't kosher for the culture. But, friends, we would have no life today if it wasn't for the blood of Jesus. All throughout the Bible, we see the picture of how the blood of a spotless lamb was used to cover sin and redeem.

In **Genesis 3** Adam and Eve sinned against God. They were ashamed so they ran and hid. God, of course, made them a covering by killing an animal and shedding its blood. Then with the flesh He made a covering for Adam and Eve. In **Genesis 22** God demanded a sacrifice from Abraham. As Abraham and Isaac walked up the mountain to give sacrifice to God, Isaac asked, "Daddy, where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" Abraham answered, "God will provide for HIMSELF the lamb." And as Abraham laid his son on the altar and raised the knife in the air, he looked and saw a ram caught in the thickets. He named the place "The Lord Will Provide" because God provided a substitute to be the sacrifice. In **Exodus 12** God was releasing the Israelites from Egypt. He was sending plagues upon Egypt. The final plague is that the death angel was to come at night and take the firstborn

male in every household and in every flock. Only to the Israelites God gave clear instruction. “Take a spotless unblemished lamb from your flock. Slaughter it, eat it, and then take the blood and put it over the doorposts of your home. When the night comes, I will come to your house to execute judgment. But, when I see the blood I will pass over you and no plague will come upon you to destroy you.” Exodus 11:7 tells us that the blood was required to make a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All throughout the Old Testament, we read about the annual sacrifices that occurred on the Day of Atonement as the people would bring their spotless animal and the priest would intercede for the sins of the people. All of these pictures of the Old Testament were pointing to a Savior who would come to atone for man’s sins and redeem us by paying a price. Then one day a man named John the Baptist was ministering and proclaiming the truth about the Christ who was to come after him. In **John 1:29** he saw Jesus coming toward him and instantly he knew Who He was. He declared, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Friends, Jesus is the only One to provide a sufficient payment for sin because only He was sinless and perfect. All of the sacrifices of the Old Testament were simply pictures pointing us to His sacrifice. His sacrifice alone was sufficient to redeem us from our sin. **1 Timothy 2:5-6a**, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.”

B. God’s Plan (vs. 20)

Peter next explains that this plan for our freedom to be purchased by the sacrifice of Christ was planned before the foundation of the world. Years earlier, Peter had even preached this. On the Day of Pentecost the Jews were gathered together and they were trying to make sense of all that had gone on. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to preach in **Acts 2:22-24**, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – this Man, delivered over by the **predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” In other words, Jesus’ death on the cross was no accident. It was a divine appointment and plan of God. Please understand that it was never God’s will for man to sin. However, God in His omniscience already saw the future and knew that He made creation and would one day need to intervene in redemption. Our redemption was not an afterthought to God. It was all a part of His sovereign plan!

C. God’s Promise (vs. 21)

Peter wanted to be sure that his readers understood the full implications of this redemption. It is easy sometimes to talk about mankind without realizing the personal connection. Peter said of Jesus, “He has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers.” Please understand clearly that Peter is saying, “Jesus did this for YOU.” You may feel unloved. You may feel abandoned. You may feel unworthy or invaluable. You may be proud and think you have it all together. You may be

depending on your wealth, status, fame, good works, or family heritage, but all of it is futile. There is only one thing that can set you free from your guilt and sin. There is only thing that can redeem you and that is the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And He has already shed His blood for YOU. The question for each of us is simple, “How are we responding to what Jesus did for us?” The promise is that if we believe in Him we will be saved. **John 3:16**, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” **Romans 10:9,11**, “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...for the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed’.”

We can walk in harmony because we have been bought by God!

II. We belong to the family of God (1:22-25)

The second key truth that helps us to walk in harmony is the reality that we now belong to the family of God. Notice the word is “we”. Yes, our salvation is a personal experience. However, it is a shared experience in the sense that we all had to come to God through the same Person. This answers the “Why?” Think of all the differences that we have. We have different personalities, different body types, different hair colors (or no hair at all), different skills, different backgrounds, etc. However, we have all been brought into the same family through Christ.

A. The Miracle of this new life (vs. 23a)

We see the miracle that took place in verse 23, “For you have been born again.” We all understand the miracle of life and of a new birth. ****ILL:** I have been with my wife on four occasions as we welcomed the birth of a new baby in our home. There are things about it that simply can’t be described. While I remember the joy of those occasions, I also remember how fragile the situations were. Life is a miracle. But, there is no greater miracle that occurs than when someone is born again. Verse 12 tells us that the sight is so amazing that even the angels long to look. In other words, they marvel when a sinner believes in Jesus and is born again.

The only way to become a part of God’s family is by being born again. When you and I were first born, we were born in this flesh. This is what Jesus was referring to in John 3:5 when he said that all men have been “born of water”. Literally, our first birth - our fleshly physical birth - was of water. We were in our mother’s womb protected in a sack of fluid or water. When the water broke, we made our entrance into this world and we began living in this flesh. But our flesh is destined to die and decay. ****ILL:** That’s why our hair turns gray or turns loose. That’s why we may have more wrinkles tomorrow than we do today. These bodies won’t last forever. Physically, we will one day die. However, the greater problem of our flesh is that we inherited a sin nature and live in this fallen world. As a result, the person who has not believed in Christ and confessed Him as Lord is already dead in their sin. They are spiritually dead and unresponsive to the things of God. When the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and opens our eyes to the truth, we respond to the Good News of Jesus and immediately we are born again. We inherit

eternal life and we are given a brand new life in Christ. It is an even greater time of joyous celebration than our first birth because the first birth was simply a celebration of the physical which is temporary, but the second is a celebration of the spiritual birth which is eternal.

B. The Means of this new life (vs. 23b-25)

How does this new birth happen? It happens by the Word of God. Verse 23 says that we have been born again “through the ??????”

The Holy Spirit of God uses the Word of God to open the sinner’s eyes and to convict his heart of his sin and his need for a Savior. **Romans 10:14-15, 17** clarifies, “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!’...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.”

God’s Word is different than everything else that we have in this world. Everything on this earth is temporary. Change and decay are literally everywhere. Even people, our very lives, are like the wild flower that grows in its season and then fades and dies. But, God’s Word – what He has spoken and declared – endures and stands forever. What is one evidence that this Word doesn’t pass away? Notice verse 25, “It is this word which was preached to you.” It is still enduring today and will endure for all eternity!

C. The Manifestation of this new life (vs. 22)

One of the greatest evidences that a person has been born again is that he will have love for the family of God. Jesus Himself taught this in **John 13:34-35** saying, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John clearly agreed. Listen to his summary in **1 John 4:7-11**: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Warren Wiersbe said it well, “The deeper we go into the meaning of the Cross, the greater will be our love for Christ and the greater our active concern for one another.”

But notice closely what Peter said. He knew that these believers had determined to love one another with a brotherly love, but that wasn’t enough. God was calling them to fervently love (agape love) one another from the heart. This “agape” love is the pure, sacrificial, selfless love that is characterized by God. It is this love that Paul describes as: patient, kind, not jealous, not bragging, not arrogant, not unbecoming, not seeking its

own, not provoked, not taking into an account the wrongs suffered, no rejoicing in unrighteousness, rejoicing in the truth, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things. This agape love never fails. God tells us in 1 Peter how to live in harmony with others. We must first believe and be born again. We must, second, recognize that we belong to the family of God and we should love our brothers and sisters with a pure, Godly love. We should do this fervently, which means it's a matter of the "will" not a matter of the "feel". We should also do this sincerely from the heart. This may sound difficult, but I assure you that if we are filled with the Word of God and filled with the Spirit of God, then the love of God will flow through our lives. After all, what is the first fruit of the Spirit? LOVE!

III. We should behave like God's children (2:1-3)

As a result of everything that God has already spoken through Peter, He then gets to the "What?" that we are to do. He gives two simple instructions to help us walk in harmony.

A. We must Lay off the Works of the flesh (vs. 1)

There are some things we must lay aside that can hinder our growth in relationship with the Lord and with others. There are some things that simply don't belong in the life of a child of God. According to God's Word, every believer has been made partakers of a divine nature. This means that we have a new nature. We have new "want to's". We also now have the power to live in newness of life, not overcome by life. We now love Jesus and want to live our lives through Him and for Him. However, at the same time we still have an old nature that wars against the new. We battle this old nature every day, but we must make the choice to put off the old man and put on the new. **Romans 13:12-14** says it well, "The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us LAY ASIDE the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

There are many things that we are to put off, but Peter lists five specific things that certainly affect how we view others and how we relate to them. Put off **malice**, which means a disposition set to commit sin. Put off **deceit**. The original word meant "a bait or a snare". It refers to those who used deceitful words to twist things to get what one wants. Put off **hypocrisy**, which means "put off the mask". It conveys the idea of actors putting on a show on stage. Put off **envy**, which refers to ill feelings upon someone else's promotion or blessing. Finally, he says to put off **slander**, which refers to evil speaking done by tearing others down. These actions should have no place in the mindset or the words or the actions of a believer. These actions will be detrimental to your marriage, your children, your co-workers, your neighbors, and ultimately to the entire body of Christ.

B. We must Long for the Word of God (vs. 2-3)

The greatest need for a newborn baby is care and nourishment. In fact, everyone in the house knows when a newborn is longing for milk. They are not satisfied until they get their nourishment. Then, as they get that nourishment, they begin to grow stronger and stronger.

The same is true for the Christian. We get that nourishment from God's Word. God's Word is so powerful because it not only is alive, but it gives us life by bringing us to faith in Christ. Many think, however, once they are saved they are good to go. But, God's Word is also for our growth and nourishment. There is no way that you can truly grow in a relationship with the Lord apart from His Word. Please understand that **there are no substitutes**. It is a blessing to live in a day where we have many Christian resources available to us: Christian magazines, websites, blogs, Facebook posts, books, excellent Christian music, podcasts, powerful movies, etc. Previous generations would likely be jealous of all the resources that we have at our disposal. However, there is a very real danger in all these resources. We can easily be so moved by these resources that draw us closer to a "feeling" than they do a relationship. As wonderful as they may be, none of them is a substitute for the Word of God. If the resources that you are depending on aren't directing you back to the Word of God, then there is either a problem with your resources or a problem with your priorities.

What is a proper response to God's Word? We must long for it. **There are no shortcuts**. We must get back to God's Word. It is the only way that we can grow from spiritual infancy to maturity. We must feast on God's Word. We must discipline ourselves to embrace it and enjoy it. Paul summarized it well in **1 Timothy 4:6-8**. He spoke of how things are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer and then concluded, "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the WORDS OF FAITH and of the SOUND DOCTRINE which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." Brothers and sisters, if we want to grow in the Lord we must get back to God's Word, to sound doctrine, and we must discipline ourselves to long for it and love it.

God calls us to walk in harmony with Him and with others. How can we do this? Because we have been redeemed from our sin. Why should we do this? Because we belong to the family of God and have been given a new nature. What should we do to accomplish this? We should put off the desires and drives of the old man and long for the Word of God. It is only by Him and through Him that can we live in harmony.