

STAY IN PEACE WITH GOD **(By Ps Ng Kwan Loong)**

Before I begin with my sermon, I would like to share an incident that happened when I was attending a relative's wedding lunch reception in Singapore few days ago. As usual in Chinese traditional culture, the bride and bridegroom will be toasting actively with all the guests. The bridegroom was having good time with his good friends, colleagues, and bosses. They not only drinking hard liquor but mixed something else like chili powder into it. The bridegroom had shock, possible acute alcohol intoxication, and he was sent by the ambulance to A&E. Luckily, he was rescued and recovered. I don't know if it had been late then he might be fighting for his life. The thing that concerned and sadden me the most is that they have yet to know God. Some of these things will be expected in their behavior and in the way they look at life.

Who Are Qualified To Face Lord When That Day Is Coming?

I have been talking a lot about the days that the Lord's return ever since the COVID started. We are more kind of very fixated, very interested in this topic. And to the extent that a lot of people are speculating what events are happening now and how does it tie up with prophecies in the scriptures and so on.

But I just want to look at it from the other angle as stated in 2 Peter 3:10-12,

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”

From this scripture, we know that the world will disappear or melt when the day that the Lord coming like a thief in the night. At that time, only persons in holy conduct and godliness are waiting for this day because they are well prepared to face the Lord. So, I would like to balance out this picture by emphasizing on our preparedness for this day.

How are you preparing? What sort of people you ought to be to face this day? What kind of people would you be, or should you be when the Lord is coming?

We know that the world is moving towards in a very unfamiliar position, and we don't know what is going to happen in this earth next. With the current global climate changes, the politics instability or invasion of sickness and diseases, we know the world is moving into a state of uncertainty. Though this uncertainty has been happened for a long time, but the scriptures keep on reminding us that we ought to be living in holy conduct to order to prepare ourselves to ready for the day coming.

Qualities We Ought To Have To Be The Pillar Of Truth For Our Living God

In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Apostle Paul wrote to the church and said:

“I am writing these things to you now, even though I hope to be with you soon, so that if I am delayed, you will know people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church (assembly) of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

I think the Apostle Paul may have a reason that he wants to stress that this church, is not merely refer to a building or room, but it's an assembly where the living God is among us. If we have put our faith in the scriptures, we know that the Living God is with us when we come together. It is not imagination. And at the same time, it reminds us again that we are the pillar of truth. We are not an ordinary group of people, but we are people who come together because of the Living God of Himself. The Living God is with us. So, how should we conduct ourselves in view that we are the Church of the Living God?

The Apostle Peter makes some very constructive suggestions, which I find very practical to our context in relating with brother and sisters in the assembly of the living God.

Let us just read 1 Peter 3:8-12,

“To sum up (Finally), all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted and humbled 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 the one who desires life, to love and see good days, must

keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good. He must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are towards the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Before giving these instructions to guide us on how we should conduct ourselves when we assemble, the verses before (1 Peter 3:1-7) are talking about on how we can relate to the government, our bosses (master means boss), our spouse whether they are believer or non-believer, and so on. After that, in verse 8, he said 'finally', means he summed up that we must possess the qualities of being harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit when relating to others anytime anywhere. We can't just show up these qualities when we meet up in church on Sunday. This is because our living God knows every deed we do to others, every word we say, every attitude of our heart.

As a Christian, we know that we should give tithe, serve in church, do church cleaning, do Sunday school, and we should be courteous. However, in the eyes of God, He is more concerned of our beings. The emphasis is on the kind of people we ought to be and the quality of life that we have.

God Will Work In Our Life To Transform Us Be A New Creature

Human beings are, by nature, not possessing the qualities of harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humbled in spirit as mentioned. But rather, humans always against this kind of traits and always on the opposite end. They like to fight and to challenge everything. They will step on each other and competing each other.

However, we are Christians, we are different, we are not like the people of the world. Let's read 1 Peter 1:3:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

This verse said that we have received the great mercy from God that made us born again, we are new creation!

By God's grace, we will be there. And if you are not there yet, and we will continue to be a new creation. So these are the qualities expected of someone who are born again, to be harmonious, sympathetic, and so on. These are the qualities that God has transformed in our lives. He has caused us to have this kind of qualities in our life through the work of the Holy Spirit, and we indeed have the spirit of God. So, it's not something that we do on our own. It is also not a list of things that we must do to show that we can become like this. But it is God's work in our lives.

Brutal Fact: Believers Can Be Evil And God Is Always The Enemy Of Evil

When you read verses in 1 Peter 3:8-12, you'll find there is one word repeated many times, and I would say this is a very significant word, which is the word 'evil'. It repeated at least five times there. How can people who are already born again to be a new creation end up being evil? Can you imagine yourself being evil? Do you think you have been ever evil before? Ever since you become a Christian, have you been evil before? Have you ever felt evil when you did something wrong?

We often will have the thinking that, "I'm not that evil because I'm not that anger kind who need the anger management counselling. I neither throw things around nor using vulgar words. I didn't use violence to settle problem, I also not that kind who are loose morally and have different sexual partners or greed or losing self-control in drinking." So, how does evil fit into the new creation like us? Why did Apostle Paul have to warn us to be careful not being end up being evil? How can this happen?

As a Christian, we are always positive, and we always want to have positive vibes. We know our God is very forgiving and He will always forgive us. After all, every Christian is the about the same. We might occasionally make some mistakes, but after all, we are basically good people. Thus, we don't judge ourselves too hard. Have you ever thought that those born-again children under the mercy of God can turn into evil? Because these verses are spoken to believers rather than non-believers. It means believers can become evil too.

Meanwhile, our God is strictly against those who do evil, and He will be the enemy of those who are evil. Hence, if we turn to become evil, God will be our enemy and He will be against us. Does it sound frightening to you? Once become evil, everything I do will not be pleasing to Him. This is a danger for us, this is a warning for us.

Three Types Of Poisons That Suffer Our Life

In one of the videos in TikTok, a lady was talking about three types of poisons that often poison our life each day because of our attitude. I found it is very true and I'd summarized here for you:

- The first poison she mentioned was our expectation on others in which we assume others are obliged to do something for us. For examples, your expectation on your spouse like bringing umbrella to you and pick you home when there is a rain, buying you a cake on your birthday or bringing you roses on Valentine's Day. If they don't meet your expectation and assumption, then you will feel very unhappy.
- The second poison was victim playing. We always put the blame or accusing others and ensuing of their fault, we always ended up as victim. For instances, oversleep of other causing us to trap in traffic jam and late to work, bringing us to a wrong restaurant causing us to have food poison and so on. If we have this victim playing concept, our life is controlled by others.
- The last poison was that we always think that we are on the right side to judge because our views are always correct whereas others are always wrong. Not only that, in order to prove they are wrong, we will first raise up the accusation on others when things don't go right. We will usually make them feel bad verbally and apparently, we are the victim. What is our motive behind this scene? This is because we want that person to feel guilty meanwhile, we are the blameless victim. It is like a kind of fighting strategy in the battlefield where we are using indirect threat which is our poisonous speech to attack others. Do you ever think that this is evil? You don't, right? It's very common and everybody's doing that. I learned it from my parents and my children learn it from me. People around us are doing this all the time and thus, we think it's acceptable. But is it acceptable before God? Do you think God can accept this kind of poison spill out from our mouth?

If you hold these three concepts as your life motto, you are eating these three poisons daily. You will be suffered in your life.

Evilness And Goodness In The Eyes Of God: Can We Pass?

Now, I want to come back to my question. What is evil? Do we consider that three poisons as evil? When the intention of our speech is to make the person feel bad, to put

pressure on the person, to shame that person, to do everything against and take the person's dignity away even when it comes to the stage of that seriousness. Is it considered evil? And what is our actual motivation behind this?

From the view of non-believers, these might not be the evil as everyone is having the similar poisons. But, how about us as children of God or as assembly of living God? When we speak like this, behave like this and we conduct like this in this way to one another, is it evil in before God? Is it acceptable for God?

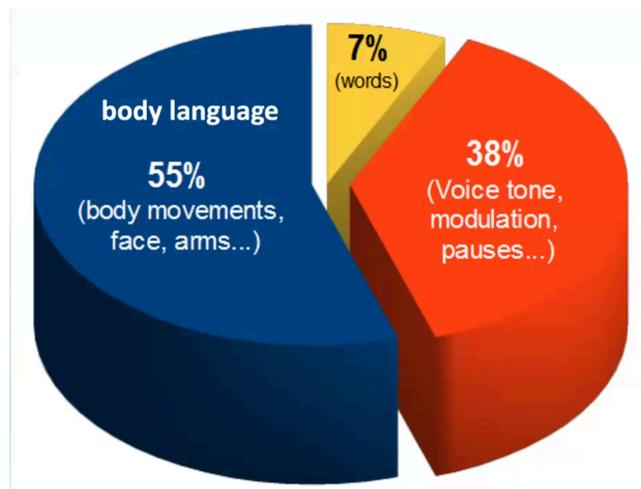
Let's look at some verses that imply and gives us an understanding of what evil is. In 1 Thessalonians 5:15:

“See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.”

From this verse, we can see the opposite meaning or the opposite direction of evil is good or goodness. For us to be good in the eyes of God, we must act opposite of evil. Our consideration in all our actions, our speech and our thoughts must be always for the good of all men, regardless of their race, belief, or language.

If you can differentiate good and evil but you do not practically implement it, what does it imply? Would God consider us at this moment based on all the things that we have, the way we deal with other people, our attitude and so on? Did we ever constantly think of the good of the other person? Are we good or evil in God's eyes? I think this is a question for us to consider.

Communication Skills That Drifted Us Away From Assembly With God



Pie Chart: Communication between people

I think most of you know what communication is, i.e. sending or receiving information from others so that you can setup relationship with them. From the pie chart above, the words only contribute 7% in our communication with others. Meanwhile, our voice tone, modulation and pauses contributed 38% in our communication with others. It obviously shows that the tone of our speech is very important when we talking to each other. We neither AI nor recorder, where we can't detect the tone. On the other hand, we are constantly using the different tone in voicing out our speech, and the type of tone we are using is largely dependent on our feeling or mood. In other words, the words that come out from our mouth shows what is going on in our hearts. One of the common circumstances we can see in our routine life is when we're not happy with our children, we will always use the resentment tone to blame our spouse for not being a good parent or we will accuse our them for causing the kid for acting up or we even will disdain our spouse for making us shameful to be a failure parent.

Next, 55% of our communication with people come from our body language. Unless we are very good actor or we've been trained in building self-image especially as per require in corporate world, our body language which include our conduct or behavior usually would represent our inner self. Because Apostle Paul knew that the effectiveness of our communication is greatly affected by our body language, he instructed us to be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble spirit. Of course, the opposite of all these five traits would be dissensions, factions, arrogance, self-exaltation, just like we read in James 3:16,

“For where jealousy and their selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

Apostle Paul precisely knew the root cause attributed to our failure in achieving holy conduct in the assembly of the living God is our jealousy and selfish ambition. He recalls and reminding us repeatedly not to fall into the kind of person for if we do so, God will call us evil.

Selfish Ambition & Jealousy Are Key Drivers Make Us Losing Peace With God

Now, let us come back to the question earlier, what is the motivation behind the that three poisons mentioned? It is all about the self. In order to get something from the other person, we put pressure on the other person, we make shame on the other person, we use words that cut through their hearts, we make words that shows that they are at fault. The motivation behind is for us to get advantage over the other person! Scripture tells us very often that our words and our conduct as well as the way we relate to one another is motivated by selfish ambition, jealousy. Subsequently, we become evil. Hence, before God judging us, we can ask ourselves, is there any selfish ambition or jealousy when we relate to one another?

I have a worry everytime when I browse the social media. I have a feeling that my spiritual life might get stumbled when I see my friends posting their enjoyable life. This is because I might get envious on them. How I wish I also having such good time like them, where I can travel around the world, enjoy the good foods and sceneries. However, I'm stuck here to serve the church. I know I shouldn't have this envy spirit, but I am a human. If I'm not alert, I might fell into the trap of jealousy or resentment, and after which can cause me to lose my peace with God.

First Quality To Have Peace Relationship With God: Harmonious

Now, we will look at the kind of conduct that we ought to have with one another. The Apostle Peter told us be harmonious. What is the meaning of harmonious? It means we have the same mind and same attitude. There is another verse in Philippians 2:2 that elaborate on harmonious,

“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

And to accomplish this, the following verse Philippians 2:3 said,

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.”

As a multi-racial nation country, we always struggled with the issue of unity and we always have problems with living with one another. Superficially, we are okay. But

when there's any issues arise, there will be instability and a lot of disturbance in our hearts. What is the root cause of all these problems? The scripture makes it very clear that, when there's selfishness, there will be no unity. When everyone is selfish and conceited, they think they are always a cut above of others and therefore, they want their ideas and thoughts always be accepted. Finally, it leads to disunity and dissension out-turn.

Let us look at the verses in Romans 15:5-7,

“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to the Lord Jesus Christ, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, accept one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”

From here, we can see that one of the barriers to having harmony with one another is the fact that we can't or hardly accept one another. The scriptures told us it is very important to accept one another because the Lord Jesus Christ can accept us. Hence, we have no excuse not to accept others.

It's so easy for us to find faults with one another. We prefer to look at the differences rather than the common areas that we share with each other. We like to compare our interest and background especially our culture, language and so on. We would have labeled those English-speaking Chinese as Western oriented or in layman term 'banana'; whereas those non-English speaking Chinese will be stigmatized as less cultured. Even though among the Chinese, we have issues of accepting each other and we are even prone to exaggerate the differences when we come together, not to mention when we talk about having one goal, one mission, and one voice with people from different races and nations. Unless we have removed all these barriers, we cannot accept and loving each other.

Second Quality To Have Peace Relationship With God: Sympathetic

The second instruction given is that you should all be sympathetic, just as the scripture says in Romans 12:15,

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

This is an example of how we can be sympathetic to one another.

I had browsed the meaning, definition and difference between sympathy and empathy, and I prefer to use the word empathy. Sympathy is like sparing pity on somebody or feeling sorry for someone when he/she is losing of someone they love, losing their job etc. But empathy is on a higher level. Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another.

I believe the Apostle Peter is telling us is to be more with empathy, even though the word seems to sound like sympathy. This is because the prerequisites when you want to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep are you must be able to see what is happening with that person, to fully focus listen to that person and to engage our heart in the feelings for that person. When you can fulfil these, it means you can understand what Apostle Peter meant by sympathetic.

However, we often too focus and busy of our own self until we unable to spend times on others. Frankly speaking, can we be empathy when we keep on thinking about our own needs? Can we still do it when we're thinking about how tired I am? What am I going to miss if I waste my time here? What benefit do I get? Apostle Paul already told us that self is the issue that we need to deal with. As long as we haven't removed all these self-centeredness, self-focus, the thought about the self, and so on, we will fail to pursue this quality of sympathetic in our life.

Third Quality To Have Peace Relationship With God: Brotherly

The third quality is to be brotherly. We know that as a believer, all the members in the church are our family in Christ where we should exert the brotherly love just like the Philadelphia Church. We should be aware that the words from our mouth and our conduct shall always come out in edification and for the good of the other person. But unfortunately, we always do on the contrary where we contempt one another, we make a lot of assumptions about one another, and we even take them for granted. Instead, we are supposing accept, love and care for them. This brotherly love practice is pivotally significant for us to not only treat our physical family but our spiritual family as well.

Hence, I would like to take the opportunity here to apologize to my wife, daughter and son whom they are not only my family members but also my brother and sisters in Christ. In my days when I was still immature and not walking with the Lord, I would use

those three poisons on my family members. I'd use the condescending and demanding and manner, to exert my authority on them so that I can get to my advantage. And I find that this is where I've gone wrong, and I hope that by God's grace, I can make it right.

Forth Quality To Have Peace Relationship With God: Kindhearted

And fourthly, it's kindhearted. In Greek, this word contains the meaning of esophagus. Esophagus is part of the digestive tube that sending the food into stomach for digestion. So basically, when we talk about gut feelings for something, it means we are accepting something for digestion. This feeling is exceptionally used in our relationship with one another, where we should have a deep sincere and genuine concern for others. More than that, in Ephesians 4:32, it stated that,

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted (kindhearted), forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

It is overtly telling that kindness is the kind of attitude that we must have willingness to forgive one another. It is a sensitive and genuine concern rather than being superficial and hypocritical.

Fifth Quality To Have Peace Relationship With God: Humble In Spirit

Lastly, the quality instructed to us is to be humble in spirit. Conventionally, the moral we were taught of being humble is to be a modest person and not to steal attention from others. And this humbleness can easily become hypocrisy when we cannot admit our strong point above board but instead to flatter on others.

We can make a reference to Philippians 2:3-4 on the elucidation of true humility,

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, let each of you regard one another as more important than himself, do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of the others.”

It is not about we always detract ourselves and give credits to others; or we competing to be less valuable or less deserving merits. On contrary, the Bible telling us that being humble is we are truly look out for the goodness, worthiness, and interest of the

other person. We must disregard our self-value including our preferences and fondness. We must let our heart and mind be looking out for the interest of the other person.

Eradicate Self, Seek And Pursue Peace

I think having said all this, we know that the root cause of our evilness is that self. Owing to this, in the scriptures, the Lord Jesus over and over again talking about dying to the self, about putting to death the deeds of the flesh and he also told the crowd in Luke 9:23,

“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me.”

Literally, he was trying to tell that, “If you want to be my disciples, if you want to have an inheritance in the blessings of God, you must deny yourself. Pick up your cross and follow me. Saying no to yourself.”

I would like to take this opportunity here to talk about peace which is mentioned in 1 Peter 3:11-12, which come after the five Christianity qualities as elaborated:

“He must turn away from evil and do good. He must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

According to Apostle Peter, peace is very important and there is a sequence to acquire this peace i.e., turn away from evil (possessing the five qualities), seek for peace and next is to pursue it.

Over and above that, peace is one of the criteria that must be present within us to look out for the signs of the Lord Jesus return! It is evidenced in 2 Peter 3:14-15,

“Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you.”

Therefore, peace is equally significant as spotless and blameless to be diligently found by Lord Jesus Christ when he is coming.

Pragmatic Approach To Have Peace With Others

What is peace? Do you have peace? For our common understanding, having peace is devoid ourselves from dealing in complicated human relationships. I live in peace by myself, I don't need to interact too much with people, I even play cold war no matter how people insulting, offending or even fight with me. By doing so, will I be qualified to be at peace with God when the Lord Jesus return? Is it cutting ourselves off from relationships make us be acceptable by God?

We can get the insights from the verse in Romans 14:19, it says,

“So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

It is very clear that peace and building up of one another are related to one another. If you are going to be at peace with God, you must build up with other persons, then only you will be qualified to be at peace with God.

God wants us to be a realistic Christian and not an imaginary Christian because He wants us practically building up relationships with one another. The scriptures are not teaching us to disengage from world but on the other hand, Lord Jesus is instructing us to equip with those qualities of being harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit. These qualities will subsequently be making us to have peace with others. At that time, we will be actively encouraging one another, loving one another, seeking the good of one another, just like what the Lord Jesus is expecting from us.

At the same time, the scriptures in 1 Peter 3:8-12 also distinctly warning us never repay evil for evil or insult for insult but give a blessing for you will call for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Type Of Blessing We Should Long From God

Have you ever pondered on the type of blessing that you are looking forward from God? Personally, the greatest blessing I would have wanted from God is forgiveness. Don't you agree that the best blessing from God is His forgiveness, do you? The only way

we can receive this blessing is through our repentance and turning away from ourselves, by doing so God will refresh us and His blessings will flow abundantly in our lives.

I think knowing that the tendency for us to fall into the category of being evil, I think that for myself the greatest blessing that I would, you know that I would want from God is that He will forgive me. He will forgive me and He will give me refreshing times. So this is the best thing if you really want blessing from God is that we can feel His forgiveness that He will refresh us, He will grant to us His forgiveness.

Lastly, I would like to share my wish for today with you all using a verse in John 3:30,

“He must increase. I must decrease.”

May this also be our wish for all of us. God's interest must increase in my life and my own selfish interest must decrease. May this be true in my life and in all of us.

Closing Prayer

Let's close in prayer.

Abba Father, we thank for Your words. We thank for Your forgiveness. We thank for Your refreshing presence that You promised to those who repent and come back to You, those who put away their self and learn to consider the good of the others, those who put You number one in our lives, to love You and to love those You love. Father, please forgive us for our failures and our sins. We pray that even as we come before you each day that you will continue to refresh us by Your presence and grant to us Your grace each day that we can truly live in a way and conduct ourselves in a way that is worthy of You. You will make us holy and blameless in the presence of the living God as we assemble. Thank You, Lord, for hearing our prayers and ask for Your blessings to be upon each one of us that truly Your glory may go forth from us. Here are our prayers and accept our thanksgiving once again. Amen.