

1 Peter 3:8-12

1Pe 3:8 (NKJV) **Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. ¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."**

The next penetrating attribute that Peter provides is that of being “**tenderhearted**”. It is a word that was originally a medical term that referred to the intestines and the bowels, or what was often called the “tender parts”. Over time the meaning shifted from the physical meaning to the idea of being affectionate and showing tender mercies to someone.¹ I just love the connotation of this word – of not being hard hearted with people. It is the opposite of someone who is hard, abrasive, and without any kind of natural affection for other people. I know someone right now who is so caustic in their personality that no one wants to ever be around them. They complain, they criticize, they belly ache about everything, and they say harsh, callous, and unkind things about almost everyone they know. No one ever enjoys their time with this person. It is really sad what being argumentative and sharp with people actually does to someone. What God is after is that as Christians that we are merciful and compassionate in all that we do. We are to be full of compassion and pity for people. That is what this word is expressing. The NASB translates it as “**kindhearted**”. The ESV calls it “**a tender heart**”. The AMP, NIV, and HCSB use the word “**compassionate**”. It is a word that is only used twice in the New Testament. [Ephesians 4:32](#) is the only other use of the word in the New Testament and it says,

Eph 4:32 (NKJV) **And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.**

When we read a verse like this, it is obvious that being tenderhearted and compassionate goes hand in hand with being kind to someone and forgiving someone when they have wronged us. This is a kind of word trilogy (“**be kind..., tenderhearted, forgiving**”) for being able to take away any kind of harshness, or resentment that we may be carrying towards someone. It is a natural tendency, even among faithful believers, to become stubborn and difficult in the most treasured relationships that we have. We all know how a negative quality like anger or verbal abuse can actually hurt those that we love the most in our life. Just think of what happens to us sometimes when someone does actually offend us in a very degrading way, in a very insulting and hurtful way. At that moment, it becomes a very difficult thing to show kindness and forgiveness to that individual – even if we say that we love them and care for them. However, the truth is clearly that we can be tenderhearted and show both kindness and forgiveness to them. God is not asking the believer to do something that He Himself has not done. What is important is to reflect the same kindness and forgiveness to others that God has provided for us. It would be incredibly foolish on our part not to consider the condition of our heart at any given moment.² [Proverbs 4:23](#) says this,

¹ Harris, *tenderhearted*, #2136, ep.

² Wake, ep.

Pr 4:23 (NKJV) **Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of life.**

Stated another way, what we keep in our heart and what we allow to rule our heart becomes our way of life. What we put into our heart will always determine what comes out of our heart. In fact, we can tell exactly what is in our heart by just listening to what comes out of our mouth. The correlation between our heart and our mouth is undeniable. [Luke 6:45](#) says it this way,

Lk 6:45 (NKJV) **A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

We can do the right thing and receive God's blessing on our life, or we can be stubborn and harbor ill feelings toward someone and completely miss what God is desiring to do in us. When God desires to do something really meaningful and benevolent to someone, too often we ignore His promptings, we put on our stubborn heart and façade, and at that moment we utterly miss the blessing of God on our life. We have no idea as to what it is that we are giving up, what we are losing, and what part of God's work in our life that we have missed. In almost every case, stubbornness and selfish pride will completely overrule compassion and tenderness. Human nature is incredibly self-centered, and because of that the average person is not very sensitive to the needs and circumstances of other people, and unfortunately, they do not even make the effort to consider those needs and circumstances. We are not inclined to go out of our way to consider where someone else may actually be hurting in their life, so the natural tendency is to simply look away, to ignore, and to just overlook what may be obvious.

The idea of being tenderhearted is a present tense, imperative mood verb, so it is clearly a command. Stated another way, it is a call on our life to be our lifestyle. I love what Charles Spurgeon wrote about this word when he said this,

*"The Christian should be the highest type of gentleman, in every respect the most gentle man, kind, self-forgetful, seeking the comfort and well-being of others to the utmost of his power."*³

This is such a strong word and it means simply to be full of compassion for people, overflowing with pity and concern for them – no matter what their lot in life and no matter what may have happened in their past. It is often expressed as having a certain feeling deep in the bowels, a kind of gnawing pain that is due to a person's empathy and concern for someone else. It is like when they hurt that the believer hurts, and it is a real hurt. This particular Greek word is more of a word about what is happening to a believer on the inside rather than their actual conduct or behavior.⁴ Deep inside of their being, they feel these emotions of unrest for someone, of care for them, of sympathy and compassion, almost a kind of distress for the person. Listen to how Paul expressed this in [Philippians 1:8](#),

Php 1:8 (NKJV) **For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.**

[1 John 3:17](#) seems to sum up this idea of compassion in a simple way,

³ Precept, *1 Peter 3:8, tenderhearted*, ep.

⁴ Precept, *1 Peter 3:8, tenderhearted*, ep.

1Jn 3:17 (NKJV) But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Christians simply cannot just shut their heart up to people, even people that they may not like. I know someone whose father recently became very, very sick. Unfortunately, this young man and his father had a falling out just several days earlier while his father was very sick. Obviously the dad was not feeling good and the son did something that was inappropriate. Later on the dad had to be rushed to the hospital and is still there without any medical prognosis of what is wrong with him. When someone asked his son if he wanted to go to the hospital to visit his dad, he said no. The person said “*Well, he may not live.*”, to which the son replied “*I don’t care. I don’t like him and I’m mad at him.*” Now, obviously that is the opposite of being tenderhearted, of being kindhearted. That is so typical of a person who has no compassion. Life always just revolves around them, around how they feel, what they like, what they do not like. They seem to just care less about people. There is no place for forgiveness, no place for sympathy. Anyone who interferes with their life is a nuisance and a source of great irritation to them. They lack this quality, and unfortunately it is seen in people all the time. I hope you feel exactly as I do, but I simply do not want to be like that. Life is hard enough without adding a hard, abrasive attitude and demeanor to it. Just be merciful to people, even when they may not have treated you the way that you wanted them to treat you. If you want God’s blessing on your life and you want to “**love life and see good days**”, then figure out how to be “**tenderhearted**”.

So, how does a believer become “**tenderhearted**”? Well, please look back at [Ephesians 4:29-31](#) which preceded the second use of “**tenderhearted**” in the New Testament.

Eph 4:29 (NKJV) Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.³¹ Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

This is an entire list of various things in a believer’s life of which God says they must rid themselves. He uses words like “**Let no corrupt word proceed**”, “**do not grieve**”, “**Let...be put away**”. Every one of those phrases is in the imperative mood which means that they are commands. The first two are imperative mood, present tense verbs. However, the last one for “**put away**” is the unusual and fairly rare “aorist imperative” verb which is the strongest of verb parsings that makes everything else in the passage subservient to it. Paul simply says that there are things in our life that we must “**put away**”. If we do not get this,, then none of these godly attributes will have any room to grow and develop in our lives. If a believer wants to be “**tenderhearted**”, they cannot become that way until there are some things that they have simply gotten rid of in their life. That is what the word means – to get rid of. What is important about this is that when we come to v32 which says to “**be kind**” and to “**be tenderhearted**”, both of which are present imperative verbs, those verbs are still secondary to the aorist imperative verb to “**put away**”. I.e., what Paul is doing is adding great emphasis to the idea of putting away and getting rid of the negative traits that will hinder us from being “**tenderhearted**”. In this listing, those things are using “**corrupt words**” and not edifying people with what we say, “**grieving the Holy Spirit**”, being “**bitter**”, having “**wrath**”, “**speaking evil**” of others, and doing so with “**malice**”.

This is where every believer has to start – getting rid of these things in their life. Listen very carefully. **Start with those who are the closest to you.** If you are a husband, put all of these things out of your life in relation to your wife. Do not talk ugly to her, do not become angry with her, but build her up and edify her life. If you are a wife, put all of these things out of your life in relation to your husband. Do not talk ugly to him, do not become angry with him, but build him up and edify his life. If you are a parent, put all of these things out of your life in relation to your children. Do not talk ugly to them, do not become angry with them, but build them up and edify their life. If you are a young person, put all of these things out of your life in relation to your parents and your friends. If you are a church member, put all of these things out of your life in relation to your spiritual family. If you will simply begin to do this intentionally, what will happen is that God will supernaturally help you to be “**kind**” and “**tenderhearted**” to those that He brings into your life. Literally, just “**put away**”, just get rid of these negative qualities. You have to want to do this. Stop being who you are, stop letting your negative personality and petty emotions control your life. To the contrary, intentionally and deliberately concentrate fully on becoming who God wants you to be. The goal is always to become like Christ, so if I am not talking, acting, and thinking like Christ, it is simply because these negative attributes that Paul has mentioned are controlling and dominating my life. We must want to change. We must have this heartfelt, burning desire to not be what I am, but to be what Christ is like. Anything less is just a spiritual compromise on our part, and in many ways reveals how self-centered and selfish that we really are, as well as how little we really love God.

The last word in this trilogy is that of being “**courteous**” (NKJV). Now, based on whatever translation that you use, there is something that is not apparent at first glance, but it is very important hermeneutically. The NKJV uses the Textus Receptus as its primary Greek text, and that text uses the Greek word “*philophron*”. It means to have a mindset that is friendly, that does things in a friendly or kind manner.⁵ However, the majority of scholars prefer the Nestle-Aland manuscripts which use the Greek word “*tapeinophrones*” which means to be of a humble spirit, to be of a humble mind. In both cases, and this is somewhat unusual, for both Greek words this is the only verse in which either word appears in the entire New Testament. Based on what the majority of scholars accept, it is probably best to use the second word. The NASB says “**humble in spirit**”, the ESV, RSV, and NRSV say “**a humble mind**”. The AMP uses both – “**courteous and humble**”. The NIV and ISV uses “**humble**”. The ASV uses “**humble minded**”. So, the major consensus is to translate the word as being “**humble**”.

Humility seems to be a fairly rare quality in today’s culture, even the Christian culture. When people live for themselves, it is highly unlikely that they will be of a humble mind or of a humble spirit. Humility is not the idea of thinking lowly of yourself, but rather it is simply having the proper estimate of yourself in comparison to God. It is a word that refers to not thinking of yourself first, but putting someone else first. What is so remarkable about this attribute is that someone with true humility is not even conscious of that reality. They would blush if you told them that they were very humble. They just think about other people first. It is an attitude that simply sees other people and their needs first. The humble person often feels somewhat fragile and weak in and of themselves, and that attitude is what creates their humility. It simply keeps them from asserting themselves on people, from taking advantage of people who may be weaker than they are. It is never forceful, insistent, or assertive about things, but

⁵ Zodhiates, 1448.

is generally more than willing to defer to someone else to help alleviate unnecessary tension and conflict. That is true humility. In reality, God is sovereign in our lives, and when we just determine that we are going to do what pleases Him, I think we will not be disappointed with the results. Just remember that you can always win the battle, but still lose the war. So let “**a humble mind**” govern and control how you treat and deal with other people, and you will be rewarded by God accordingly.

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