

Living and Loving the Good Life, Part 1

1 Peter 3:8

60-32

Let's turn together to 1 Peter chapter 3; 1 Peter chapter 3. The text before us in this glorious epistle is verses 8 through 12. And I would like to read those verses to you. Beginning in verse 8 Peter writes, "To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted 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 let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. And let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

There's one little phrase in there that I would like to capture if I might, comes in verse 10. "Let him who means to love life and see good days."

I believe that what we have in this passage is a marvelous discussion of the subject of living and loving the good life, living and loving the good life. I suppose everybody means to love life and see good days. I mean, almost everybody says to me, "Have a good day." The assumption is that everyone wants to have a good day, a lot of good days. Everyone wants to love life, to get all out of life they possibly can. I suppose that the title, "Living and Loving the Good Life," sounds almost like a yuppie title, like a yuppie theme song. Everybody is pursuing the good life.

The Italians used to talk about La Dolce Vita, the sweet life. And now in our society is... It is the pursuit of living and loving the good life. For most people that means chasing things, chasing objects. Some of those objects happen to be people, who are used for self-gratification. It means pursuing the good life via cars and houses and money and vacations and sex and drugs and alcohol and clothes and food and entertainment and sports and the body beautiful, etc., etc. The sad reality, however, is that that's not the good life, that you don't necessarily love life like that and you don't see good days because that kind of approach, a moment's pleasure, a high, a rush, falls short of the lasting love of life and the lasting goodness of days that really satisfies the heart.

A poet by the name of Charles Swinburne sort of summed up the emptiness of trying to love life and find its goodness in the wrong places. This is what he wrote, very cynical. "From too much love of living, from hope and fear set free, we thank with brief thanksgiving whatever gods may be that no life lives forever, that dead men rise up never." Pretty sad approach, isn't it?

We are all familiar, I think, with those in our society who seek the sweet life, who seek the good life. But how about those in another society? We can find it even on the pages of holy Scripture, can't we? You remember the man in the Old Testament who pursued the good life in all the wrong places? His name was Solomon. Solomon had incredible wealth. He had houses. He had chariots. He had horses. He had women. He had sex. He had land. He had power. He had fame. He had everything

that people today would say the good life must contain. Even the Queen of Sheba, who was no commoner herself, came to visit him and she was so staggered at his wealth and so staggered at his immense power, so staggered at his person and his possessions that in Scripture it says in 2 Chronicles 9:4 that she was breathless. It literally took her breath away to see what he had.

But was he content? Did he love life? Did he really see good days? Did he really experience living to the fullest? Listen to his words, Solomon, Ecclesiastes 2:17, "So I hated life." That's tragic. "I hated life because everything is futility and striving after wind."

Somebody in our society ought to listen to Solomon. He had it all. If he had been living in our day he would have had houses and villas and ranches and a fleet of BMWs and a huge bank account and a lot of investments and women and all of the things that people pursue today. And he said I hated life.

If there was one character in this century who sort of personified the pursuit of the good life it was probably Ernest Hemingway. Ernest Hemingway was a literary genius of sorts. We can appreciate him for that. But what really made Hemingway famous was his avant-garde approach to life. He pursued the good life with a vengeance.

Biographers tell us about Ernest Hemingway, that he had little regard for the Bible, little regard for Victorian systems of morality, little regard for any definition of sin that invaded his behavior. That he pursued his good life, the love of life, through drinking, through parties, through fighting in revolutions, through tumbling women all over the world, living exactly the way he wanted to live. He had power. He had fame. He had prestige. He traveled the globe. He sold millions of books. He pursued pleasure incessantly.

And in the end, did he love life? Did he find good days? No, in the end he put a bullet to his head and blew it off. It's amazing. It's amazing to think about the fact that we are told that the highest suicide rate in our country occurs among people over 60, who after all of the years have gone by have not lived a good life, don't love life, and don't see good days. In fact, I suppose we could safely say few people love life. Few people really do see good days. Few people have a good day. Few people are content. Few people are fulfilled. Few people are at peace. Few people are happy.

But certainly we as Christians should love life. We as Christians should enjoy its goodness day by day. That is a legacy we have been granted. But how does it become a reality? How am I to love life and see good days?

Well I believe Peter tells us here. He gives us some very simple straightforward, direct and practical insight into how to love life and see good days. The point of verse 10 perhaps needs to be elucidated a little bit. Look at that phrase, "Let him who means to love life." The word "life" here is *zoe*. There are two words in the Greek for life, one is *zoe*, one is *bios*. *Bios* from which we get biology simply means the stuff of life, living as opposed to dying, being alive as opposed to being dead. The technical reality of being alive, that's *bios*, biological life. *Zoe* means not just life as opposed to death but all the experience and the richness of really living, all that is the fullness of life. And that's the word used here. Those who mean to love, not the biological reality that they exist, but who love all the potential goodness and fulfillment that life contains. That's what he means. The word "love," *agapaōn*, comes from the strongest Greek word to love, *agapaōn*, it is a strong-willed affection, it is a strong desire. And what he means here is those who really mean to draw all there is in life out for

their own fulfillment, who really do love living.

And then he says, "And those who mean not only to love life in that way but to see good days," days that are meaningful, days that are beneficial, days that are productive, purposeful, satisfying, not empty, vain, useless, unfulfilling days. That's what he's talking about.

Those of you who want to really love life and see those kinds of days, here's the formula, here's the formula. And I suppose it would be safe to say that there's nobody that doesn't want that. Everybody wants that. But the question comes as it often does. Where do you find it? Where do you really find the love of life? Where do you really find those good days? What produces them, even for Christians?

The truth of the matter is I am confident that many of you do not love life in the way that you wish you did. There are certain elements in your life you just don't love. There are Christians — strange as it may seem — who even take their life. That's how they hate it. And I would say it's safe to say that many of you don't experience non-stop good days. So it is essential to stop at this point and recognize that this injunction can be to Christians, all right? That's a very important interpretive point here. To understand that we're talking about Peter writing to believers and there are many of us, and I suppose at times, all of us who fail to love life as we should and do not see good days.

In the case of the readers to whom Peter was writing, this was particularly related perhaps to the difficulty of their life. Back in chapter 1 verse 6 he says, "I recognize you have been distressed by various trials." That was true. They were going through it, it wasn't easy. Chapter 2 verse 11, he says, "You are strangers who are aliens," and, "you are fighting fleshly lusts which war against the soul, you are living in a hostile environment." Verse 20 and 21 he reminds them that you're going to have to suffer, that's the nature of living the Christian life in an ungodly environment. In chapter 3 verse 14 again he reminds them that even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you're blessed. And again he points out their suffering. Verse 15 again he reminds them of their suffering. Verse 17 again he reminds them of their suffering. In chapter 4 verse 1 he reminds them again of their suffering. Down in verse 12 he says, "Don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you which comes upon you for your testing." In verse 19 again he speaks about their suffering. In chapter 5 verse 8 he tells them that the devil is after them like a roaring lion. Verse 10 he reminds them again of their suffering.

So here are a group of people who from the standpoint of circumstances might...might understandably not love life and assess their days as particularly good days. But Peter says to them, if you really mean to love life, and if you mean to see good days in spite of all of this, here's the formula, here's the formula. And he proceeds to give them basically four simple points, and I want to share them with you briefly tonight, four simple, clear, direct points that will enable us to really love life and see good days.

Number one, you have to have the right attitude. You have to have the right attitude. Would you notice please it isn't what you possess. It isn't the absence of problems. It's the attitude you bring to life, that's where it starts. Go back to verse 8, "To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit." Five things he names there, five attitudinal matters, five aspects of attitude. Now in the little phrase "to sum up," which is really one word in the Greek, the word "finally," it means this is the final point, I am bringing it to a *telos*, to an end. And what do you mean finally? Do you mean this is the end of the letter? No, no, not at all the end of the letter, he's

got a long way to go. This is the end of the current discussion which began in chapter 2 verse 11. You see, beginning in chapter 2 verse 11 the apostle began a discussion of how we as Christians are to relate to the society in which we live. Now you've been going through this with me and I know you remember it.

Remember back in verse 11 he said, "You're aliens and strangers. You're in a war not only against the soul but a war against the society around you and you must keep your behavior excellent among the pagans." And what he then did was launch in verse 13 into a description of the social context in which they were to live Christ-like lives. They were aliens. They were strangers living in an ungodly society. They were to stay pure. And they were to live with excellent behavior in three social spheres.

The first one had to do with their relationship to government. The second had to do with their relationship to their employer, labor. The third had to do with their relationship to their spouse, marriage. The three, basic, social spheres in which all of us live: We live in a relationship to the government; we live in a relationship to the employer; we live in a relationship to the marriage partner. And Peter says in those three spheres you must live out a pure, irreproachable, excellent, Christian life. Those are the arenas of social relationship which demand godly living, first as citizens, second as employees, and third as partners in a marriage.

In each of these specific social arenas we are to live in an evangelistic way. Would you look at the end of verse 12? You are to glori...you are to bring these people to the point where they will glorify God in the day of visitation. What does that mean? The day of visitation is the Day of Judgment and in the Day of Judgment they will glorify God because they are the redeemed and not suffering His judgment. In other words, you're to live to bring men to Christ. You're to live evangelistically.

Then in every dimension, whether it's as a citizen, or as an employee or as a mate, you are to live evangelistically. He tells a wife in chapter 3, your husband may be won to the Lord without a word by your behavior. So Peter has been clearly laying down the fact that we as Christians live in an environment which demands our godly living. We are strangers in this world. Yes. We are aliens in this world. Yes. But that does not mean we can be indifferent to its social order. That does not mean that we can be superior to and unconcerned with these matters. We must be model citizens, model employees, and model mates. And the assumption here is you're going to have ungodly government, ungodly employers, and ungodly marriage partners, but you must live evangelistically. That's what he's been saying.

So those have been very specific directives. He closed out the final one in verse 7 of chapter 3 and that was the one dealing with marriage, how the Christian wife is to live with her non-Christian husband and how the Christian husband is to live with his non-Christian wife.

Now in verse 8 he says to sum up, this is what he's summing up. He's summing up this whole section on conduct in an ungodly world. And here he comes to general exhortation. He has been specific, talking about citizens, employees and mates, now he's very general. He says in summing it up, let all of you... And that word "all" is key to understanding to whom he directs this. Not just to you as citizens, not just to you as employees, not just to you as mates, but to everyone, here is the sum of it all. And we transition by that little word "all" out of the specific into the general. If we are to live and love the good life, if we are to enjoy life in this hostile world, if we as aliens and strangers who don't belong here are to have all the best that life can bring and all the goodness that God intended, then here is how we are to live. First principle, you have to have the right attitude toward everybody.

You say, "Does he mean the right attitude toward Christians or non-Christians?" He doesn't mean either, you have to have the right attitude and if you have the right attitude it will be the right attitude toward everybody. It has nothing to do with what's out there. It has to do with what's in here. So it starts with the right attitude.

Five components make up this right attitude. And four out of these five terms are never used anywhere else in the New Testament, so Peter is really developing almost a brand new vocabulary for this particular summation.

The first word, please, in verse 8, "harmonious." Oh what a great word. Two Greek words make it up and I need to mention them to you. One is *phronēs*, which has to do with thinking, the verb *phroneō*, to think, we get that frontal lobe from it. *Phronēs*, but it's a compound word and on the first half of it is *homo*, which means the same, homogeneous, the same. To think the same, that's what harmonious means, to be like-minded. To put it another way, to maintain inward unity of heart. To give it a negative definition, to not be in conflict, either with each other or those not in the faith. You see, as Christians in general, beloved, and I must say this to you, as Christians in general we are to demonstrate to the world an unearthly harmony. We are the purveyors of unity, not disruption.

Unity has always been prized in the church, always. Jesus began by praying that we would be one in His high priestly prayer in John 17. And Jesus instructed the disciples in John 13 that it would be by their loving unity that all men would know that they were His disciples. We see the commendation of the early church that they were of one accord, in one place. And they held all things in common. And we hear in Romans 12:16 the apostle Paul call for love and unity. We hear it again in Romans 15:5, love and unity. We hear it again in Philippians 2, that you all be like minded and have the same love one for another. We hear it in 1 Corinthians 1:10, there be no schisms, no divisions, no discord.

You see, it is to be the characteristic of Christians that we live in harmony. We do not create conflict. E.B. Cranfield writes, "The New Testament never treats this agreeing in Christ as an unnecessary though highly desirable spiritual luxury, but as something essential to the true being of the church," end quote. It should be in the warp and woof of our very existence that we are single-minded, like-minded, maintaining an inward unity, as Paul called it, that unity which is the bond of peace, the unity of the Spirit of God. The world is to know us by our love. We are to be harmonious. I love that word. That harmonious disposition then should extend beyond the church. The church should be a place where the world comes to see harmony in action, to see unity in action. But it should extend beyond the church. It should affect all of our relationships with everyone on the outside. The church should be peacemaker in the world, not stirring up conflict.

It is probably one of the great tragedies of our world that the conflict in Ireland is labeled as a religious war, that the world thinks that it is a war between Christians who can't get along with each other, some Catholic and some Protestant. That is an unbearable reproach to the name of Jesus Christ that someone would think that and, of course, that's really not true, that's not true Christians fighting each other. But that's the perception of the world.

I always cringe deep within my soul when I see so-called Christians screaming and creating conflict on the streets, even though they may be protesting some good cause, and the terrible discord and conflict which they create is the antithesis of what God would have the church demonstrate to the

world. We are peacemakers. Least of all do we generate revolution, chaos, conflict. You see, the weapons of our warfare are what? Spiritual, they are not fleshly. We do not war on that level. That is to stoop to pick up the carnal weapons. And not only are they impotent and will not pull down the strongholds of Satan, but they are a reproach to our testimony. We are to be the living example of harmony.

The second thing that he says in these wonderful five words is sympathetic, sympathetic. This word, too, needs our understanding. It is in part the word *pathos*. *Pathos* means "to suffer." *Sum* means "together with," *sumpathos*, sympathetic. It means to suffer with someone. To put it simply, we are to be ready to share in the suffering of others, even outside the church. We should be known as sympathetic and yet isn't it tragic how very often the church pulls back and pulls back and pulls back and pulls back until it becomes a highly defined and ingrown subculture that sits in total condemnation on the world around it with very little, if any, sympathy? We must understand the fallenness of humanity. We must find in our hearts sympathy. We should be marked like our Savior, who was a sympathetic high priest, says the writer of Hebrews. We must share in the feelings of others, joining in their sorrow, joining in their joy. We should be known not as indifferent to the world, not as the critic of the world, not as those who damn people, but as sensitive to the pain of the lost, as sensitive to the anxiety of the lost, as sensitive and tender hearted toward their great needs.

One Scottish writer put it this way, "Moses the greater man than Aaron was not called to be high priest. Why? Because he had grown up in the palace, he had never felt the lash of the taskmaster, the blast of the brick kilns, the raw-fingered agony of unrequited toil. He couldn't be touched with the feelings of their infirmities, but Aaron could. He was there. We may pity from above," he says, "but we can only sympathize from beside." And I suppose it is truest that within the church it is those believers who are first generation, who have been converted out of lostness, who find themselves most in sympathy with the lost around them, whereas the second, third, fourth and fifth generational Christians have been the products of an increasing indifference to a world they maybe don't even understand.

We are to be sympathetic with all of their anxieties and all of their burdens. We do not start revolutions. We do not start riots. We demonstrate harmony. We do not castigate and damn people who are struggling with the issues of life as fallen creatures. We come alongside and in sympathy we give them truth.

Thirdly of these five words, he uses the word *philadelphoi*. It's translated here "brotherly." It really should be translated as a hyphenated word, "brother-love," brother-love. It has to do with affection for those close to us. And this brother-love is that which is demonstrated in unselfish service, unselfish service. We are to be models of harmony, the peacemakers of the world, always bringing peace. We are to be those not only who are the purveyors of harmony but who are sympathetic, who enter into the suffering and the joy of those around us, who understand the pain of their fallenness, and who, thirdly, love them in an unselfish way which allows us to serve them.

This, of course, starts in the church, of course it starts there. We have been saved, says 1 Peter 1:22 and in that salvation our souls have been purified unto a sincere love of the truth. It starts with us loving one another, but it extends beyond that. That is not the end of it; that is only the beginning of it. And we are reminded again and again that the love of Christ was shed abroad not only to us but to all, "for God so loved the world that He gave."

And so, we must demonstrate love in a loveless world. And our love must be ever on the increase and ever abounding. I don't need to belabor the point about loving each other, that's replete in Scripture. But what Peter has in mind here is that if we have the right kind of attitude as believers within the assembly, it's going to spill out. If we are peacemakers and if we are sympathizers and if we are brother lovers, the world is going to feel all of that.

Then fourthly he uses this word, "kind-hearted," kind-hearted. It's really a unique word, very unique word. It means "compassionate." It means tender-hearted. It's the same word used in Ephesians 4:32, "Be ye kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another." It comes from the root that is such a fascinating root. It's the word *splagchnos*. What does it mean? Bowels, intestines, liver, kidney, this area; the Hebrews and the Greeks used it to speak of the...the feelings, the place of affection, of love of feeling. You feel your emotions and when you feel them you feel them here, in the viscera. And so it stands for the deepest human emotion. It's very much like the word "sympathetic." It has the idea of entering deeply into the feelings, tender affection. It's used a number of times in the New Testament with that regard.

Surely this is at the heart of God, who Himself pitied and was kind-hearted, tender-hearted and compassionate toward sinners. In fact, so compassionate was God in Christ that seeing sinners Jesus what? Wept.

The fifth is one word, also. It is translated three words, humble in spirit. It really is one word, "humble-minded," humble-minded. It's exactly what it means, nothing more, meek, humble-minded. And may I suggest to you that this is the all-encompassing and most essential of all Christian virtues? Humility; we are to be humble-minded. I cannot resist reminding you of Philippians 2:3: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." That's the same root word. Let each of you in humility of mind consider others better than yourself.

I don't need to remind you that even Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am (what?) meek and lowly and you shall find rest for your souls."

Beloved, we need to somehow say this to the church: That what God wants us to be is not protesters, what God wants us to be is not revolutionaries, is not political activists. What God wants us to be is not those who disrupt society, not those who stand aloof and damn the fallen, not those who shut off our love, not those who cannot be kind-hearted, cannot feel within us the pain of the lost and the struggle of their life, not those who proudly stand aloof from the world in a posture of supposed superiority. But quite the contrary, the world should see the church and say, look at them, ever and always making peace, ever and always pursuing peace, always willing to feel the joys and the sorrows of others, always eager to love and sacrificially serve, always compassionate, always kind-hearted, always tender-hearted, always showing pity, always meek, always lowly, always humble, never demanding rights.

Where do you see all of these virtues rolled into one? Jesus Christ. Who was the greatest living peacemaker? Christ. Who was the ultimate sympathizer, lover, kind-hearted person, and the humblest of all, who humbled Himself even to death? Our Lord Christ. And so someone says, "Where do we see these lovely qualities scintillating most brightly, but in the radiant beauty of the Lord Jesus Himself as He walked this veil of tears. He was meek and lowly of heart, loving the unlovely with a compassion that drew forth His pity and His power to relieve. He was gentle with the

fallen. He was gentle with women and gentle with little children. He cared about broken hearts and broken lives and broken homes. Like the river flowing out of Eden which compassed the whole land and where there was fine gold, His tears traced out His profound sympathy for all. Even when they wouldn't have Him, He went on to the cross to remove the cause of their griefs and make their deliverance possible."

That's to be the attitude of every Christian. Every Christian is to have the attitude of Christ. No matter how difficult the circumstances in which we live, we are to be conciliatory, we are to be peacemakers in disposition, we are to be sympathetic and sensitive to the pain of people and their joy. We are to be sacrificial in our serving love to one another and those outside. We are to be tender and compassionate, not ever unkind, critical or indifferent. And we are to bear the spirit of humility. That is the attitude that Peter calls for in every situation.

You want to love life? You want to see good days? Have this attitude. You see, what you gain out of life is predicated on what you feel inside. It all comes from attitude. And if the attitude isn't right, life will not ever deliver what you want from it. It takes more than the right attitude, though. It takes a right response to evil and to misjudgment and condemnation and cruelty and unkindness. It takes a right standard, namely the Word of God, and it takes a right motive. But those last three we'll have to save for next time. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we ask so many times, how could the church have gotten so far away from the directives that are so clear and explicit in Scripture? When did we cease to be peacemakers when we know You said blessed are the peacemakers? When did we cease to be sympathetic and caring toward those who are fallen and struggle with sin? When did we become indifferent to them and seek to damn them rather than to redeem them? When did we lose touch with that sacrificial love? When did the tender heartedness die? What happened to our meekness that doesn't demand anything but simply goes to You and pleads the cause?

God, we pray that You would restore a right attitude in Your church. We know that must begin with us. We ask that You would restore a right attitude in us. Make us peacemakers, sympathizers, lovers, compassionate, humble, that the world may see it, take note of it and identify us with You, that You might receive all the glory. Oh God, may we realize that living and loving the good life really starts inside. It isn't what we have or don't have, it isn't how well we've been supplied or entertained, or challenged, it isn't how much we've accomplished, it isn't how popular we are, how much prestige we have, how high our position is. The good life, the life we love comes when we bring to it the right attitude because if we're peacemakers we'll have peace. If we're sympathetic and if we have that graciousness that can suffer along with others, we'll even rejoice in the suffering which we have. And if we love and if we love others, we'll find our fulfillment in them, not in objects. And if we are tender-hearted and compassionate toward others, then we have nothing to protect of our own. And if we're humble, then we know we are worthy of nothing, we deserve nothing, we seek nothing, therefore we cannot lose anything. And whatever comes from Your good and gracious hand cannot disappoint us and so we will love life and we'll see good days because we bring the very attitude of Christ and to that end we pray in His dear name. Amen.

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