

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Living and Loving the Good Life, Part 3

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:10-12

Code: 60-34

Let's open our Bibles now tonight for a time together in the Word of God. And I want to draw your attention to 1 Peter chapter 3 in our ongoing look at this epistle. First Peter chapter 3 of the text we have been looking at is verses 8 through 12. Let me just read these verses again and set them in your mind.

First Peter 3:8, "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."

Now you will remember that the key thought we're dealing with here is that thought in verse 10, "Let him who means to love life and see good days." We're trying to get a handle on this idea of living and loving the good life. How do you learn to love life and see good days?

We've been noting that the elusive good life is the rather disappointing pursuit of our entire generation. One song says, "O the good life, full of fun seems to be the ideal, O the good life, tries to hide all the sadness you feel." Everybody pursues the good life.

The whole value system seems geared toward the good life and the good life is basically synonymous with sin. Sin is the good life, over indulgence in everything. I was noticing an interview this week with a well-known celebrity who is well known to our culture. She is a woman who has clearly prostituted herself and perverted her life into some kind of a symbol of the good life. She lives for money, sex, the physical body. She is the epitome of the symbol of the good life. She has it all. She has fame. She has notoriety. She has men. And she is eager to note young men at that. She has sexual appeal. She has the media on her side. She has maintained the physical form that is part of the idolatry of our culture. And she is loving and living the good life. She has abandoned herself to a lewd kind of sexual exhibitionism that is her trademark. And she was being interviewed and someone who was interviewing her asked her about her critics, those who would criticize her for the performances that she gives and the kinds of things that she indulges in. And she said, "Those

people who criticize me have no moral standards. I wish that they were moral."

And I thought to myself, "I cannot be hearing this. I can't...something is wrong, I need a hearing aid." She punctuated this plea for morality with at least four four-letter blips. But it seems to me that she is sort of the model of the rather incredible indulgence that says, "I live with my own lusts being expressed to the absolute hilt. Whatever passionate perversions may entertain me, these things I have every right to do and not violate any moral standard. This is the good life. Virtue then has been isolated to be whatever I want it to be. And anybody who criticizes it is immoral."

And if a person decides to be a full-blown pervert and to do the very worse thing imaginable, and then flaunt it and you condemn it, you don't have any moral standards for being critical, unloving, judgmental. This culture has caved in to a new and tragically distorted view of what makes life meaningful. What is the good life? Is that what it means to love life and see good days?

That life is empty. That life is destructive. That life is damning. It has its moments of indulgence without true fulfillment, I might add. The good life is not anything that the world offers. Solomon had it all. He could have competed with her or with any other celebrity on every level. He had more money. He had more power. He had more notoriety. He certainly had more women. And he hated life. You remember, we've been looking at Ecclesiastes and reminding ourselves that the men who had the most hated life. And finally at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, that marvelous twelfth chapter and the first verse, he comes to a conclusion that could have saved him all the pain. If he had only done this. He comes to the end of his life, looks back over the whole thing, hates it all because he lived it for his own indulgence. And then he gives this very pertinent advice. Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your...what?...your youth before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no delight in them.'" You better get your life on course early.

The good life, the life that is full of good days is the life that remembers God, the life that is set on Him. Solomon finally came to that. All of the money, all of the notoriety, all of the accomplishments, all of the fame, all of the women, all of it, the riches, everything brought him nothing but emptiness, vanity, vanity, all is vanity. And he says, "Remember God who is the key to the good life."

Peter then is writing about the good life. And as that phrase comes to us in verse 10 it is really a quote. Peter here is quoting the Old Testament. That particular phrase and the rest of the section from verses 10 through 12 is taken from Psalm 34. We're going to be looking at that in just a moment. So Peter is really taking a Scripture out of the Old Testament, letting us know that those in the Old Testament also wanted to love life and see good days. That's always been the pursuit of man. But how and where is that accomplished?

Well Peter is giving us the answer. In this wonderful little text he opens up to us some windows of understanding about this good life. Remember now, he's writing to some people who were from a human viewpoint living a very bad life in the sense that they were persecuted. They were hated. They were resented. They were believers living in an aggressive hostile society. Chapter 1 verse 1 says they were residing as aliens. They didn't belong there. They were under those people's purview who had no tolerance for Christian faith whatsoever. They were being slandered. They were being falsely accused. They were being persecuted. They were suffering. Anything but the good life from a circumstantial viewpoint.

So Peter writes to them and says, "Now if you mean to love life and see good days in spite of this, here's what you need. First of all, you must come to life with the right attitude. It is only a question of attitude, not possessions." Verse 8, "Your attitude should be one of harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted humility." That's the right attitude.

Then in verse 9 he says, you should learn to make the right response when you're mistreated, 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. So if you want to love life and see good days, then approach life with the right attitude, number one, you have that harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted humility. And secondly, you don't retaliate. No matter how unjustly you might be treated you do not retaliate. Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. You leave the equity matters to God. You don't try to get your pound of flesh in your own way. Clearly this is an Old Testament principle. If you go back to chapter 19 of Leviticus, way back in the Pentateuch in verse 18, the Bible says, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people but you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord." God says don't you hold a grudge, don't you retaliate. Don't you pay back. Don't you avenge.

In Proverbs 20:22, "Do not say I will repay evil. Wait for the Lord." Don't take His business over. Proverbs 24:29, essentially the same thought. "Do not say, 'Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me,' I will render to the man according to his work." Don't say that. That's not the right response. Be like Jesus Christ. At the end of chapter 2 in 1 Peter, do you remember it? It says in verse 23, "While being reviled, He didn't revile in return. While suffering, He uttered not threats but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

So, the right attitude is one of peace and harmony and sympathy and kindness. The right response is a non-retaliation response. We do not give back what is given to us.

Now, the good life then is not what you have on the outside, but how you respond on the inside...the right attitude, the right response. Now with that in the background, let's go to another point and we'll finish up tonight. Two final points, the right standard...the right standard.

If we are to love life and see good days, then life must be built on the right standard. Or we could say the right authority. Look at verse 10 and 11. "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."

Now this is a very important thing for you to note. What Peter is doing here to defend what he just said is quoting the Old Testament. To defend his teaching and to strengthen its authority he reaches into the Old Testament and he brings up Psalm 34. Why does he do that? Because Scripture is a substantiating authoritative Word of God. And he is really giving us a sort of allusion to the idea that you must live your life according to the Word of God. That's essentially why he's quoting it, as if to say...Look, you're living in a hostile situation, you're living in grave difficulty, you're probably wondering how life could be much worse than it is and I'm telling you to live harmonious, sympathetically, brotherly, with kindness, with humility and never retaliate and never insult back and never do any of that. And you're probably saying to yourself, "This can't be true, you've got to be kidding, that doesn't seem reasonable. We ought to be able to strike back, we ought to be able to retaliate." And so to reinforce what Peter has said, he says, "Just in case there's some question, then this comes from the Word of God." And he quotes them out of Psalm 34.

The little word "For:" at the beginning of verse 10 is interesting. That signals the authority for what he just said in verses 8 and 9. "Do this for, or better, because that's what Scripture says." That's the idea. That's what Scripture says. And he quotes from Psalm 34 verse 12 to 16 in this following section. Verse 10 is Psalm 34:12 and 13. But the idea here is just to support with Scripture his exhortation. The one who wants to love life and see good days, the Old Testament says in Psalm 34, must refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. That is exactly what is called for in verse 9. You must refrain, the word means to stop, to cease all together. You must cease your tongue from evil. The idea here is to give back evil. The word "evil" means not just an evil deed, but the underlying immorality of an evil disposition, a morally bad disposition. You are not then to return evil that someone gives you by the evil of a morally bad disposition. You're not to do that. That's why the psalmist in Psalm 141:3 said, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth, keep watch over the door of my lips." It's a very practical prayer. We are to make sure that our tongues are under control because that's what God says in His Word, and Peter quotes it just to remind us that we have to live by the right authority. We have to live by the right standard. If you want to love life and see good days, then obey God. Have the right attitude, the right response, and the right reaction to God's authority.

In James you remember this particular chapter because we studied it in detail, James chapter 3. It talks about the tongue and how unruly the tongue can be. And how in verse 6 it can be literally a fire that sets a very world of iniquity on fire. It defiles the entire body, sets on fire the course of our life, is

set on fire by hell. Verse 8 says nobody can tame the tongue, it's a restless evil, full of deadly poison. That is the tongue that we've got to control. No wonder the psalmist pleaded with God to guard over his mouth to prevent him from such sins.

And then Psalm 34 also says, "And let him turn away from evil and do good." But before that, it reminds them to refrain the tongue from retaliation and the lips from lying. The word "deceit" means to lie. We are to avoid lying. We are to avoid retaliation. By the way, lying is always a coverup, always a coverup. We must be committed to truth. We must be committed to turning the cheek, to giving back good for evil.

Now, these are what things are to be eliminated if you want to love life and see good days. But what are the positive things? "Turn away from evil and do good." There's no moral vacuum here. We are to be committed to doing good. And as I say, Peter's only point here is to support what he said with Scripture.

Then in verse 11, that Scripture I just read to you, to turn from evil and do good, has added to it, "Let him seek peace and pursue it." Now in that verse, verse 11, taken from, by the way, verse 14 of Psalm 34, you have four imperative commands...four imperative commands. Command number one, let's just look at them briefly because they're very clear. "Let him turn away from evil." Now the verb here, "to turn away," means to reject. It's a compound verb again which has an intensity about it. It is a positive rejection of what is sinful in the treatment of others. We are to turn away from that, even our persecutors. Proverbs 3:7 says, "Fear the Lord and turn away from evil." And then on the positive note, "Let him do good."

And may I add here, the good life is not doing evil. That's what Peter is making abundantly clear. The good life is turning from evil and doing good. If you want to love life and see good days, you really want to live and love the good life, then turn from evil to do good. The good life is not sex, drugs and parties. The good life is not doing your own thing, whatever makes you feel good no matter what God thinks about it. The good life is doing what is good and the word means excellent and quality. We must do what expresses a deep-down virtue. And then he says, "Let him seek peace," that's the third imperative. And the fourth imperative, "Pursue it."

And by the way, the word here for seeking is the strongest verb, the strongest form of seeking, *zeteo*. Let him seek with all his might peace, tranquility, concord, unity, no conflict. Now this is very important. And let him pursue peace, another intense verb that means to hunt. Now get the picture. You're in a hostile world, you're under persecution, persecution that threatens your very life, evil men are trying to take your life from you, trying to discredit you in every way, short of that and that too, trying to make life absolutely miserable for you from a human viewpoint and succeeding at it, causing

you great suffering, and you are told by the Word of God to do everything you can to be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, humble in spirit, never give back evil for evil, insult for insult and if you really want to love life and see good days, make sure you hold your tongue from any evil retaliation, your lips from any lie that you might be prone to give in the midst of persecution, turn completely away from all evil, do only what is good, seek peace even with your persecutors, and hunt that peace aggressively, make a persistent, intense effort to be a peacemaker.

This is what we are to do. And this message has been ringing all through this epistle since chapter 2 verse 11. Christians are to live like this. We should be the greatest blessing in any culture. We are those who are the peacemakers.

The term for peace here has the idea of a constant condition, a constant condition of tranquility which produces permanent joy, permanent happiness. This is to be the nature of our living. We're to be in the world to be the peacemakers, the Beatitudes remind us of that, don't they? Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the...what?...peacemakers." So many Christians are doing the opposite today on so many fronts. We are to make peace as much as is possible without compromising truth.

Let me just support this...this whole thing really here while I've divided it up into some sub-points is really one single message because it all talks about harmony, sympathy, peace, non-retaliation, holding your tongue. It all talks about a right reaction, a right response to those who are hostile. And let me just show you how important that is in New Testament teaching.

In Romans 14, that familiar verse that I often quote, talking about the Kingdom, it says in verse 17 of Romans 14, "The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The Kingdom of God should be known by its peace. And we are the citizens of the Kingdom, we must be the peacemakers. Second Timothy 2:22, "Flee from youthful lusts," Paul tells Timothy, "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace...peace." James 3, this wonderful, wonderful portion in verse 13 of James 3, "We are to show our good behavior in deeds of gentleness." We are to make sure, verse 17, that we are peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. Why? Because that's characteristic of spiritual wisdom from above. We are to be peacemakers.

Back in Romans again in that great twelfth chapter and verse 18, the same thing in other words, in different terms. He says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." That's the key. As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Chapter 14 verse 19, "Let us pursue the things that make for peace." This is repeated throughout the Scripture. Second Corinthians, that marvelous closing, that benediction, chapter 13 verse 11, "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made

complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you." On and on it goes. We are to be peacemakers. And I think you understand that point. We are to pursue it, we are to hunt after it, we are to do everything possible to make peace in the congregation of God's redeemed and with the people who are around us.

So, people live the good life are people who have the right attitude, who have the right response, and live by the right authority, and that's the Word of God. And he brings the Word of God in here to bear upon our hearts. One last point...one last point. Just a very, very important point, the right incentive...the right incentive.

Verse 12, "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." That's the incentive. That too is taken from Psalm 34, only it's taken from verses 15 and 16, so he's gone all the way from verse 12 to verse 16. And by the way, these two verses are almost a direct verbatim quote right out of the Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. Here we are reminded of what ought to motivate us.

You say, "Well why should I be concerned about this? Why should I be motivated to have the right attitude, right response and submit to the right authority?" And the answer is for the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous...the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous. The incentive is that God is...what?...He's watching...He's watching.

Now that has inherent in it accountability and responsibility and a healthy fear. God is watching. But that's really not the primary issue here. I mean, we could preach that, that preaches pretty well, actually. You better get your act together, God is watching. I remember as a little kid my father used to tell me, "God sees everything you do. I may not see it. Your mother may not see it, but God sees everything you do." That was indelible. I was a little tiny kid and that stuck with...that's always stuck with me. I remember a friend of my father's came over in the second World War and brought a German helmet off a dead German that he got in Europe. And he gave it to me as a gift. And he told me that it was bullet proof. And I can remember consciously wearing that little helmet around on my head and thinking, "Ha, now God can't see what I'm thinking because even bullets can't go through this." I was very conscious that God was watching. And my father also gave me...reinforced a lesson to me one time when a teacher left the room when I was in the second grade and I decided to...to jump from desk to desk, showing off in the classroom for all the other kids who were egging me on. And I was...I was like that, to be honest with you, when I was young and I was jumping from desk to desk just as though orthopaedic wedges came back in the door, you know. She was one of those with the bun on the back...you know, whatever, she was an old-fashioned teacher. She came in the door and there I was, you know, full flight. I thought back about the fact so many times that to get caught by an authority figure in the midst of something like that is a pretty serious thing and I paid

dearly for it. I will be the first to admit.

But that kind of accountability of knowing there's an authority figure who is there and who sees what you're doing can be an incentive. But that is not really the primary issue here. I want you to note what is the primary issue, it's a very gracious one. "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, not for judgment and chastening, but so that His ears may attend to their...what?...to their prayer." In this particular case He is watching His people not primarily for punishment, and the key to understanding that is that statement, "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous." The eyes of the Lord, that little phrase, I decided to do a little study on that and find out what that means. So I chased that phrase, the eyes of the Lord, around and found it is a very common Old Testament term and it always relates to God's watchfulness over His people as He watches them carefully because they are of special concern to Him. It is a watchful caring oversight. Proverbs 15:3, it says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." There it's a very broad usage. But a more common usage is in Proverbs 5:21, "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord and He ponders all his paths."

It's not so much associated with great judgment as it is that God is watching over man. Yes, He's assessing good, He's assessing evil, but the idea is omniscience. It is not supposed to emphasize the judgmental aspect of God's watchfulness, but just the omniscience. In fact, in Zechariah 4:10 it says, "God is scanning to and fro throughout the whole earth and seeing everything." He's aware of every detail of our lives.

So the issue here is not primarily for judgment, but rather He is scanning our lives, He is watching everything in order that He might listen to our prayers. By the way, the word for prayer here, *deesis*, means entreaty, petition, supplication, it's all related to needs. It's our askings, not praise or adoration, thankfulness. This is supplication, entreaty, petition, crying out about our needs. Why is God watching over us carefully? Why are His eyes constantly on us? In order that He might immediately respond to our...what?...prayers.

So what is Peter saying? It ought to be a great incentive to live like this, it ought to be a great incentive for you to live with the right attitude, the right response and to obey the right standard no matter how great the hostility, no matter how severe the persecution, no matter how unfair the treatment, no matter how difficult or painful the circumstances. This is how to live and love the good life in the confidence that the Lord is...what?...watching and waiting to meet your every need. That's the idea. That's the idea. Peter is simply saying, "Look, you can live like this, you don't have to retaliate, you don't have to get your own pound of flesh, you don't have to take vengeance into your own hands, you don't have to live that way. You can simply have a right attitude, a gracious and humble and sympathetic, harmonious attitude, you can give back love to your enemies, even though they give you hate, don't retaliate. You can live under the authority of the Word of God with a

controlled tongue and controlled lips, turning away from evil, doing good and pursuing peace and hunting after it no matter how intensely you must do that. You can live like that without fear because whatever difficulty you get into, you don't need to be the one who gets you out. All you need to do is let the Lord know and He's ready to hear your prayer. What a tremendous promise...what a glorious truth.

But on the other hand, look what Peter also says, "But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." "The face of the Lord," that's a different phrase than, "The eyes of the Lord." The eyes of the Lord in the Old Testament have to do with omniscient watchfulness, not so much judgment. The face of the Lord is most often used to refer to judgment. The eyes speak of His omniscience, the face begins to demonstrate the visage of anger. That's why it is the term used here. When God becomes angry, the Bible talks about His face for it begins to appear, as it were, on His face. Genesis 19:13 says regarding Lot and Sodom, "We are about to destroy this place because their outcry has become so great before the face of the Lord, is the idea, that the Lord has sent us to destroy it." In Lamentations which, of course, was written by Jeremiah chapter 4 and verse 16, I believe you have another usage of that same phrase. "The presence of the Lord," or literally, "The face of the Lord has scattered them." So God sees the wicked, but He sees them with an angry face.

What is our incentive then? Well our incentive is to so live that the eyes of the Lord are on us and as He watches us with omniscience and hears our cry, He meets our needs. Rather than to live in wickedness, sin, and evil so that when God sees us His face is moved to an expression of anger. The wrong reaction, the wrong attitude, disobedience to God's commands brings the anger of God against...are you ready for this?...even His own people. I wish we had time to do a full study of that, but God gets angry even with His own. Leviticus 17:10, "Any man from the house of Israel or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person." Any man in the house of Israel who does that, I will set My face against him. Leviticus chapter 20 and verse 3, "I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people because he has given some of his offspring to Molech, the false god, so as to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name." Verse 6, "As for the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and cut him off from among his people." And so it goes, and there are many other usages of that. God sets His face in condemning, judgment, in serious, severe chastening against those who disobey His Word. In Revelation 6:16, do you remember this? When at the coming of Christ the people begin to cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them and they say, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." The face of God, the face of the Lamb, associated with wrath, with anger against sinners.

So, for those of us who are righteous, who live with the right attitude and a right response and according to a right authority, we can know the good life. You say, "Well what about all the problems?" All we have to remember is that the Lord sees everything and is attendant to our prayers and will meet every need. On the other hand, to live the good life the way the world advocates it is to turn the face of God into anger.

I can't resist just noting verses 13 and 14a as we close. This is wonderful. Peter asks, closing up that little section on Psalm 34, "And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" In other words, that's the whole point. Who is ever going to harm you and take away the good life? Who is ever going to do that if you're zealous for good when God is watching over you and will always be attendant to your needs when you're living the way He called you to live? And verse 14, "And even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are still...what?...blessed." So don't fear their intimidation and don't be troubled.

That's the message. We do live in a hostile world. We must live humbly. We must live with a forgiving heart against those who do evil against us. We must not retaliate. We must obey God's authority and we are motivated by the fact that since we are zealous for what is right and zealous for what is good, who is going to harm us when God sees our whole life and hears our every prayer and answers it? What an incredible message for us. This is the happy condition. This is the real good life, lived to experience what he says in verse 14, the blessing of God. Well, more to say, but no time. Let's bow in prayer.

It's been a simple message tonight, Lord, but a thankfully practical one. We want to live the way You want us to live and we've been reminded again tonight how that is. Grant to us, grant to us, O God, that we might be able to live with a forgiving heart toward all, that we might not retaliate or respond improperly but that we might give back good for evil and love for hate. Grant that we might live under the authority of the Word of God which has called us to pursue peace and may we pursue it with all our hearts and may we be motivated to make the right responses because we know that there is no harm that can come to those who are zealous for good for they're protected by an omniscient God who hears their every prayer and meets their every need. We praise You for that. We thank You. Conform us to this truth, Lord, that we might be to Your glory in our Savior's dear name, we pray. Amen.

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