

FIRST PETER

Lesson 15

Practical Love

1 Peter 3:8-12

This section of Peter's epistle is almost in the middle of the letter, and it is sandwiched between so many great truths that it can be easily overlooked. Yet in these five simple verses we have the basis for a vital, living, active and dynamic faith.

The section is about practical living based on all the heavy doctrine of chapters one and two. We are told how to live life and how to have effective social and interpersonal relationships with one another as Christians. It divides the false Christians from the true Christians. This is real, simple and practical Christianity, and if we are not seeking to apply all these truths to our lives in a consistent manner, then all of our doctrine is just verbiage and intellectualism.

In these verses, Peter not only tells us how we are to love our brethren, but also how we are to love life. In 2:11 to 3:7, Peter has dealt with the subject of undeserved suffering by Christians from government, slave masters and unbelieving husbands. The Asian Christians to whom Peter was writing were suffering because of much social and some physical persecution from unbelievers in that pagan Roman society. By this point in the letter, many were probably feeling a little sorry for themselves and were beginning to suffer from a sanctified persecution complex. Peter did not want them to think that the Christian life was all gloom and doom, suffering and persecution, but that the Christian life was one to be lived to the fullest. It was a life to be lived with real enthusiasm.

It is true that "*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted*" (2 Tim. 3:12), but it also is true that they can "*love life and see good days*" (1 Peter 3:10). In order to get these Christians away from a negative persecution complex, Peter addresses the practical benefits of living a godly life. He desires that these Christians understand the life Jesus Christ offers to men is the best possible life they can live on earth. Christ's life in the Christian brings contentment, peace and happiness, and these truths balance the equally important truth that every Christian will suffer to some degree.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ATTITUDE IN GENERAL TOWARDS ALL CHRISTIANS (3:8)

"To sum up . . ."

This is not the beginning of the ending of this letter, but it is the conclusion of the exhortations to various classes—submission to government, slave masters and unsaved husbands (2:13, 18; 3:1). Now in 3:8-12, Peter is going to deal with the subjection of Christians to one another.

Submission is the placing of ourselves under the authority of another whether we like it or not. Submission is the voluntary bending of the human will to Christ as Lord in which we decide to run our lives by God's commandments rather than our own selfish wants, whims and philosophies. All Christians are to be in submission to one another and this is one of the definite fruits of being filled (controlled) by the Holy Spirit.

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5:18-21).

If we are filled with the Spirit, we realize that every Christian has a contribution to make to another Christian. Each is important, and each has something to teach another Christian.

“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 others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

What Peter does in this section is give some brief practical exhortations applicable to all Christians. He, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, demands love in action.

“Let all be harmonious”

This is not a good translation for it literally means “like-minded” or “of one mind” or “minding the same things.” The result of “one mindedness” will be harmony because Christians should be united by a common interest and outlook; that is, they should all “mind” the things of God and of the Spirit and thus imitate the mind of Christ.

“One mindedness” is a reference to agreement on the major and important doctrines of the Christian faith, such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary work of Christ for sin and sinners, salvation by grace through faith in Christ, a literal heaven and hell, the sinfulness of man, the future judgment, the second advent of Christ and many others which all Christians have believed through the history of the Church.

“One mindedness,” however, cannot be pressed to secondary doctrines such as modes of baptism, infant versus believer’s baptism, millennial issues, the time of the rapture, separation, questionable practices and others, because as long as there are sinful saints there will be variance in interpretation of the Scriptures. Not everyone in the local church has to dot his i’s and cross his t’s the exact same way in doctrine. All members in a local church do not have to think exactly alike. In fact, it might be a good thing if occasionally we have some healthy discussions over secondary doctrines as long as we do it in real love and with respect for one another.

It is the failure to love and agree to disagree which has caused so many denominations to spring up. In Christianity we always must deal with the religious dogmatic mind—there is one inspired Bible; there is one inspired interpreter of the Bible, the Holy Spirit; I have the Holy Spirit; therefore, I must be correct. When persons or groups do not agree, they go off and start their own churches or denominations.

Now, there are some legitimate reasons for leaving a local church but it should never be done over secondary doctrinal issues. We should remember that the local church ought to be a representation of the body of Christ. While there are differences, there ought to be a feeling of oneness because all are united around Christ and the infallible Word of God. We can see, then, that there should be “oneness of mind” in practice also.

There needs to be oneness in a local church, “*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (1 Cor. 1:10), and in our relationships with one another (Phil. 2:1-4). Throughout its history, the Church has been long on doctrine and short on love, but to be a balanced Christian, we need both.

Remember, our Lord did not say, “By this all men shall know that you are My disciples if you are Calvinistic, premillennial, baptistic, and fundamental, but He said, “*By this all men shall know you are My disciples if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35).

There is no challenge to love if everyone in a congregation thinks exactly alike. The challenge comes when we accept, respect and show concern for those Christians who do not agree with us.

“sympathetic”

Christians are to sense the feelings and experiences of others. Literally, this word means “fellow-feelings.” Christians are to be compassionate and share the feelings of others whether they are joyful or sorrowful.

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).

If a Christian in our local church (or one we know in another church) has lost a loved one through death, we all ought to share in that pain. If one has some kind of blessing, we all ought to rejoice with him. It takes as much grace to rejoice with another saint as it does to sympathize in his sadness. Jealousy creeps in when God has blessed a Christian. What a miserable thing this petty jealousy is among the saints! Whatever the experience of another saint, we ought to feel with him or her.

The local church has such an opportunity to show to the world that Christians truly care about others. We are living in a very selfish age in America today. Everyone is doing his own thing. Instead of having a caring attitude when they hear of tragedy or blessing, those in the cruel world often say, “That’s tough!” This sort of attitude should never permeate the church for we should demonstrate real concern for others.

“brotherly”

This is again a poor translation, for the actual meaning is “love as brethren” or “be loving brethren.” This is *phila* love which speaks of general love, affection and kindness that should be produced by every Christian towards his brethren. *Phila* love is a love that an unsaved man can produce to some degree, and if an unsaved man can produce it, how much more are we Christians to produce it by the help of the Holy Spirit. This is a love of respect, courtesy, appreciation and general affection.

Peter began this epistle with an important exhortation to love: “*fervently love one another from the heart.*” (1 Pet. 1:22), and further on he says, “*Above all, keep fervent in*

your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). Love is not necessarily an emotion although it is certainly to be demonstrated and felt by the giver and the receiver. It is a conscious decision, a voluntary act whereby a person chooses to love another person.

In a local church, there are all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds and from all kinds of social strata, but they are one in Christ and they are to love one another, for this is just as important as having right doctrine. *“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5).*

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will not only have to give an account for the doctrines we held but also for our attitudes and actions towards our brothers and sisters in Christ who did not see exactly like we did in the areas of secondary doctrine.

“kindhearted”

The best synonym for this is “tenderhearted.” It is sensitivity to others and their problems. A Christian is not to have a cold, hard heart but a heart that is joyful, understanding and sympathetic towards the feelings of others.

Tenderheartedness often comes as one has suffered much in his experience. A person who has suffered through the years usually makes a better counselor than one who has much head knowledge but little real life experience. This is why, as a rule, older men make better pastors than younger men. Those who have suffered much understand much.

“and humble in spirit”

A humble spirit is having a modest opinion of oneself. True humility is not weakness but meekness. *“Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation” (Rom. 12:16).* It is knowing what we are in God’s plan and thanking Him for it.

“For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it” (1 Cor. 4:7).

THE CHRISTIAN’S ACTIONS TOWARDS CANTANKEROUS CHRISTIANS (3 - 9)

“not returning evil for evil”

These Christians were under persecution which placed them in pressure situations. Tenseness may have made them a little edgy, jumpy and difficult to live with at times. The Christian is not to *“return evil with evil”*; that is, he is not to give back or exchange an evil act or thought when evil is done to him.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’ But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt 5:38-39).

“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” (1 Thess. 5:15)

As Christians, we are never to retaliate. This is a very difficult thing to do, but if a person desires to be obedient, through the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible.

“or insult for insult”

When another Christian makes stinging, sharp remarks that may leave a deep wound, the Christian is not to speak back in an evil way. He is to follow the example of Christ and say nothing. After all, it takes two Christians to make a fight.

“but giving a blessing instead”

When evil is done to a Christian, he is to respond by doing a good thing or a blessing to that one who did evil against him. He is not only to keep his mouth shut, he is to repay evil with good. It is one thing to stand there and take something with the mouth shut, and quite another thing to do a positive act to the one doing you evil.

In our English language, we would say, “Kill them with kindness!” Our Lord taught this same principle, “*Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you*” (Luke 6:28).

Some time ago, I attended an Association of Church Missions Committees in Massachusetts. There I saw a movie about some Christians in the country of Afghanistan who had their church building leveled by an antagonistic government. While the workers were leveling their church building, the Christians served them tea. Now that is giving a blessing in place of evil.

“for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

God may have called the Christian to suffer (2:21), yet he has also been sovereignly called to inherit a blessing, the heavenly inheritance (1:4). Because the Christian has been blessed by God, he can be a blessing to others no matter what his personal circumstances may be. Christians ought to be characterized as a people of blessing.

THE CHRISTIAN’S ANTICIPATION OF AN ENJOYABLE LIFE (3:10-11)

“For ‘LET HIM WHO MEANS TO LOVE LIFE AND SEE GOOD DAYS’ “

Peter goes back to Psalm 34:12-16 to show that this practical love was part of the life style of Old Testament saints. In the quotation, Peter adapts it to this New Testament situation. This quote describes the man who wishes to have a life which he can love and find worthwhile, a life that is not marked by endless frustration and boredom.

The idea of “loving life” is “to delight in, to relish life”; that is, to live life to it’s fullest, to have a happy, prosperous, meaningful, successful and enjoyable life. To “see good days” not only means that Christians will live longer but that they also will have a fuller life, days of prosperity, days of usefulness, days which are fulfilling.

It is certainly implied here that it is right to love life and to desire full and meaningful days. One of the most serious attacks by the devil on Christians is to get them to think that life is not enjoyable. Some people feel that being a Christian makes one miserable, but just the

opposite is really true. When a person is saved, he can then really begin to enjoy all the good things of life and leave behind the sinful things which destroy one's fellowship with God.

We are told that *"the earth is the Lord's and everything that is in it"* (1 Cor. 10:26). We are also told that *"they who seek the Lord shall not want for any good thing"* (Psalm 34:10). We have God's promise that *"No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly"* (Psalm 84:11). God wants Christians to enjoy life, for Christ said, *"I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly"* (John 10:10). We are to enjoy all the good things of life and avoid that which is sinful. Any and all restrictions which God puts on us are for our own good. Christians should want to get the most out of life; yet, without sin.

When we say "without sin," then someone may say, "But the most fun things are sinful." I can't disagree that most sin is pleasurable; if it were not so, we would never break the moral law of God to participate in it. However, all sin is bad for the Christian and destroys his fellowship with God. Satan is constantly trying to get the Christian to think that he is missing something by not participating in sin.

As we look around we see many of the sinful practices carried on by the non-Christian world and we may secretly say to ourselves, "I wish I could do that sin and get away with it. I guess I'll just have to persevere and be miserable until I reach heaven. If I just wasn't a Christian, I could really get into that!" Christians sometimes half admire unbelievers and their sinful life styles. Satan tries to convince us that we have left the good sinful life for the miserable Christian life. God, however, only forbids those things which will lead to our downfall spiritually.

Every Christian must be convinced that the reason God asks us to live godly and holy lives is that this is the best possible life to live right here and now on this earth. God has not forbidden us anything that is good, and the life He has commanded is the life most enjoyable, prosperous, fulfilling and fruitful to us as Christians.

"REFRAIN HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING GUILE."

The first way to have an enjoyable life is to turn off the tongue. The abuse of the tongue is probably the number one Christian sin. Many Christians, when they think of sin, do so in terms of the filthy five: "I don't smoke, drink, dance, or chew and I don't go with the girls who do." Christians often love to pounce on sins (which in reality may not be sins) that they are not guilty of practicing and neglect those they are guilty of doing, such as a vicious, maligning tongue that not only destroys another's reputation but may also destroy one's own life because the tongue merely expresses the bitterness of the soul.

In the Book of James we are told that if the tongue can be controlled, then every member of the body can be brought under control (James 3:2). The sin of the tongue is a very serious one.

"There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers" (Prov. 6:16-19).

A Christian who has learned how to bridle his tongue will not get in as much trouble as one who has not learned to do so. He, therefore, will not have as many enemies, worries and pressures; he will live longer and have a more enjoyable life.

“AND LET HIM TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD”

Another way to have an enjoyable life is to turn away from evil. A Christian is to avoid all forms of evil because sin can only destroy his relationship with God. *“Abstain from every form (appearance) of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22).*

It is not enough, however, to abstain (negatively) from evil, but the Christian must do good (positively). When one turns from evil, he must actively replace it with good. *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good” (Rom 12:9).* A person who is turning from evil will not be indulging in fleshy appetites or slowly destroying his body through dissipation; therefore, he will enjoy life more and live longer.

A person who is doing good will also have less guilt. This means fewer psychological problems and so the Christian does not have as much tension and stress of mind.

To abstain from evil without producing positive good will actually produce legalism and asceticism. It will result in a pharisaical attitude of “I’m holier than you,” which is always destructive to a person’s social relationships.

“LET HIM SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.”

The third way to have an enjoyable life is to turn towards peace. Our Lord said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9).* A Christian earnestly and reverently tries to live a life peaceably with all men. *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18).* A man at peace with God and himself is more serene about life; therefore, he is a less likely candidate for ulcers, nervous stomach, heart disease or many other stress related physical ailments. *“My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words—for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body” (Prov. 4:20, 22).*

THE CHRISTIAN’S ASSURANCE OF BLESSING OR DISCIPLINE (3:12)

“FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE UPON THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER”

The Lord knows who the righteous are and He blesses them spiritually; *“The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19).* God provides for and protects His own, and when He sees righteous acts in their lives, He is pleased and attentively listens to their prayers. God knows all about us and we can hide nothing from Him.

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:12-13).

God does bless those Christians who are seeking to produce righteousness in their lives, and the main blessing is that they get positive answers to prayer.

“BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.”

The Lord also punishes Christians who do evil. If a Christian chooses to do wrong, then he must face the discipline of a holy, sovereign and loving Heavenly Father. A rebellious Christian will have the face of the Lord against him, and he will also have all kinds of problems in his life because God will never bless disobedience. A Christian out of fellowship with God will have continuous problems until he confesses his sin, turns from evil and pursues practical righteousness.

CONCLUSION

God has two lessons He wants those of us who are Christians to learn. First, it is only practical love towards our Christian brothers and sisters that God approves of in this life. He wants us to show one mindedness, sympathy, brotherly love, kindheartedness and a humble spirit towards one another. We may not all hold the same doctrine, but we all are to show love towards one another.

Second, He wants His people to enjoy life, yet to do so without sin. If we are Christians who are always miserable in our experience, we have been deceived by Satan. We ought to enjoy life more than any unsaved man because God has told us to live life to the fullest. If we tend to be sad, dreary, ascetic Christians, each of us should pray earnestly, "O Lord, don't let me be a miserable Christian. Teach me to enjoy life, for I long to love life and see good days."

If you are not a Christian I ask, "Are you happy? Do you have many material things, yet still feel empty, void of the real meaning of life? Is life boring for you? Is life monotonous?" In Ecclesiastes 2:17 we read the statement of a man who had everything in life (money, women, power, prestige) but he said, "*So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.*"

The vacuum in your heart is the need for Christ, for only He can fill that void. You need to see your problem is sin. I ask you to receive Christ as your Savior and Lord. Only He can satisfy the deepest needs and longings of the human heart. Trust Him and begin the adventure of learning to live life to its fullest.