

Sermon: How to Live the Christian Life

Text: [I Peter 3:8-22 ESV](#)

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March 13, 2022

Introduction: When studying [I Peter](#), one must always keep in mind the Apostle Peter was writing a letter to Christians who were undergoing persecution. It is one matter to lead a Christian life in a sympathetic culture, but in a context of mistrust and antagonism is yet another. Some of the members in the congregation to whom Peter wrote may even have been facing martyrdom.

Today, in America, the Church may not be so much persecuted as it is mocked and made into a negative caricature. Our post-Christian culture believes in: many ways to God (whoever She is). And as people in the Church question their own faith and moral convictions because the majority of opinions are against them, it is still critically important to remember that God's Word is our foundation.

To get to heaven, there must be a plan to follow. Everyone is on a spiritual journey that will take him/her one of two places. Who we travel with will make all the difference. A clear roadmap has been left to us. The Bible makes it clear:

I. We Must Live in Harmony ([vv. 8-12](#)).

[I Peter 3:8-12 ESV](#) ⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep 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 prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Looking back at our text from last week ([3:1-7](#)) we have just finished talking about the importance of submission and having healthy marriages. And if the church is full of healthy, biblical marriages, the church will be healthy as well. It is a little like the husband who says to his wife who is considering leaving him where he says: “if you leave me, I am going with you.”

We must live in harmony

A. with the church

There are a number of qualities Christians should demonstrate as we try to live in harmony with other brothers and sisters. Even though these five words Peter uses are adjectives they are stated as commands (imperatives). We must have...

1. unity of mind,

This idea of unity of mind is “living in harmony” and is literally the idea of being like-minded. It is “that inward unity of attitude in spiritual things which make schism unthinkable” (Beare, see Rienecker, p. 757).

It is the same as Paul’s idea for the Philippian church. **Philippians 2:2 ESV** ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

2. sympathy,

This is the sharing of a wide range of emotions both happy and sad (good times and bad). This is what Paul describes in his first letter to the Corinthians. **I Corinthians 12:26 ESV** ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

3. brotherly love,

Here we are not talking about dysfunctional family dynamics, the way some brothers may interact by being even overly competitive. Peter is talking about the kind of person who would sacrifice anything for the benefit of another. This comes from a pure heart as he has already said in the opening chapter.

I Peter 1:22 ESV ²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

Jesus is the ultimate example, but there are those like the people of Ukraine who will sacrifice their lives to protect their families and defend their country...

4. a tender heart (*compassionate*, NIV; *ευσπλαγχνος*, Greek)

This is literally good-hearted. We live in a world where we hear almost every day of disaster and war. A few years ago there were 60,000 plus fatalities in an earthquake in China and over 100,000 people who lost their lives in a Malaysian tsunami. We are hearing every day of the loss of life in Ukraine. And many will not miss a beat, and just go on with their normal activities. It takes a lot to move us - unless WE feel threatened!

God is not distracted by the terrible events happening to his creation. In fact, it was because He WAS paying attention that God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth. It was compassion that led Jesus to Calvary. And it was love that kept him on the cross until He could say “it is finished!”

We must have...

5. a humble mind.

When a Christian becomes aware of how much he depends on God, it is easy to be humble(d). And when we compare ourselves to Jesus instead of our “fallen” neighbors, it is also cause for humility.

Whenever people do things to us, even if it is evil and intended to harm, we are to offer back blessing. You can still see Jesus on the cross here, after being wrongly treated, asking His Father to forgive his persecutors.

Just like the Father, we should want everyone to be saved. We were once enemies of God. In fact, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. It is because we were once where our enemies are, and because we have been saved (changed) that we can and should extend grace to others.

These personal qualities are especially to be lived out with the Church (members of Christ’s Body), but also:

B. with outsiders

It is really easy to treat well those people who are kind to us. The real test comes, though, when we are treated poorly. Then how does one react?

“I Peter contains several examples of blessings in this life which are promised as a result of righteous conduct.” - Tyndale, Wayne Grudem, p. 149

Yet even if we do everything right, it does not guarantee a trouble-free life. [Psalm 34:12-16](#) is quoted in Peter’s letter here. Later in the same psalm, in a verse that is not quoted by Peter, it reads: [Psalm 34:19 ESV](#) ¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Our text today makes it clear that “those who do evil” have no chance of getting a favorable hearing from God (his face is against them). God will vindicate his people; and the Church has been called simply to lead holy-devoted lives to God.

II. We Must Live for Christ (vv. 13-17).

I Peter 3:13-17 ESV ¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

We must live for Christ...

A. by doing good

The idea here is of being zealous for good works. The cause is Christ. And those who passionately follow this pattern of living will be ultimately blessed. **Matthew 5:10 ESV** ¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Not only are we to do good deeds, but we are to speak up for Christ as well. Let's briefly look at **verse 15** in our text: ¹⁵ **but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense (απολογιαν) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,**

If Christ is our Lord, we should always do what He wants. And when given an opportunity to say a word about our Lord, we will be ready. **Luke 12:11-12 ESV** ¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

There is a qualifier used for speaking the Gospel. Do you see it? We are to give this verbal gift to: **anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.**

“**Hope**” is what distinguishes Christian from non-Christian Gentiles.” - Word Biblical Commentary, J. Ramsey Michaels, p. 188 **Ephesians 2:12 ESV** ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Finally the Gospel is to be offered with respect and in a gentle way. We have all been put upon by well-meaning people who did not respect us. Yelling or being angry with people, telling them they are going to hell rarely produces a cooperative listener.

We must live for Christ...

B. without fear (for man, but God, that's a different story)

We should never worry about man's response to our following God. We should only concern ourselves with what God wants.

Isaiah 8:11-13 ESV

Fear God, Wait for the Lord

11 For the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: 12 "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. 13 But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

In the NT we hear that perfect (mature) love casts out (drives out) all fear.

I John 4:18 ESV 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

If you are doing what is right according to God, there is no reason to be afraid. And Paul insists that if God is for us, who can be against us? - Romans 8:31

We must live for Christ...

C. in a proper relationship with God

The difference between non-Christians and the Church is not always what each one does, but for Whom and why.

Our conscience needs to be governed by God's Holy Spirit coupled with His Word (not one or the other). We should make every decision based on what God wants from us!

There are really two groups of people in the world:

**Those who do good and may suffer for Christ in this age,
but who will be rewarded in the age to come.**

**Those who do evil and may not suffer in this age,
but who will certainly be punished in the age to come for their foolishness.**

This age is but a little time; the age to come is forever (eternal).

Which is the better decision, do you think? Live for now; live for eternity?

III. We Must Live Like Christ Did (vv. 18-22)

I Peter 3:18-22 ESV 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

This section is called “The Journey to Heaven” by Michaels (p. 194). This is a very complicated section of Scripture, but I believe it portrays what Christ did for us before returning to God and setting for us an example. “Christ is not merely the one to whom believers have come, but the one in whose footsteps they must follow.” - Michaels, p. 203

We must live like Christ did...

A. by dying

Jesus died intentionally for us as a perfect sacrifice that was performed only once. He did this because we cannot save ourselves. We are not righteous on our own.

And what was Jesus' intentions in dying? He hoped that we would follow him to be with God. He died in this physical realm, we call the world, so that we might be with him in the spiritual world we call heaven.

We cannot follow our Lord, however, unless we also die to sin. God must be given first place in our lives.

B. by being made alive (resurrected)

Jesus was brought back to life by the power of the Spirit of God. He was resurrected physically from the grave. Our future experience will duplicate Jesus' journey home, if God's Spirit dwells in us now.

Romans 8:9 ESV 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

C. by going to heaven

If we follow Jesus in everything here, we will be with God there. We are ultimately saved by means of Jesus' resurrection.

We come in contact with God's Spirit and are promised eternal life with God as we accept Jesus and are baptized in water for the forgiveness of all our sin. Baptism by immersion becomes a vivid and dynamic picture of dying to sin, being buried with Jesus, and being brought up out of that watery grave to live a new life.

Paul understood! **Romans 6:4 ESV** ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

There were others who understood - **John 3:5 ESV** ⁵ Jesus answered (Nicodemus), "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Conclusion: There is a question one might develop from **v. 14** where it says in the NIV translation: "Do not fear their threats[**Or fear what they fear**]; do not be frightened."

Of what are people afraid? Being alone? Being poorly treated? Having to suffer? death?

How is your conscience? If you are old enough to "pledge a good conscience toward God" or *make* "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (**v. 21**), you are old enough to place your faith in Jesus and be baptized. Have you done what God has asked? Do you know how your journey will turn out? The Bible is clear! **Mark 16:16 ESV** ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Just like Noah fled into the ark, so we must flee from the devil and come to Christ. He is the only One who can save us. Here are some words from a song by Lani Smith and Thomas Boomershine, *God Who Calls Us to a Journey*:

Make us Lord a pilgrim people
Free to move at Your command
Form the myst'ry of the future
into a new promised land
Send the fire and cloud before us
Be the guide along our way
Till the new land lies before us
Sparkling in the bright new day.