

# **Sermon: How to Live the Christian Life**

**Text: I Peter 3:8-22**

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**Introduction:** When studying I Peter, one must always keep in mind that the Apostle Peter was writing a letter to Christians who were undergoing persecution. It is one thing 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 writes 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 faith because of the majority opinions against them, it is still important to remember God's Word.

To get to heaven, there is a plan one must follow. Everyone is on a spiritual journey that will take him 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 (NIV)** <sup>8</sup>Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup>Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup>For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup> He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

This idea of "living in harmony" 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 (NIV)** <sup>2</sup>then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Peter had just completed talking in [vv. 1-7](#) about how to have 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 the wife who is thinking of leaving the marriage. 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 others. Even though these 5 words Peter uses are adjectives, they are stated as commands (imperatives).

1. be sympathetic

This is the sharing of a wide range of emotions both happy and sad. This is what Paul, talking about the Church body, is getting at when he says:

[I Corinthians 12:26 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

2. love as brothers

This is literally “brotherly love.” And here we are not talking about dysfunctional family dynamics, or overly competitive siblings. Peter is talking about the kind of person who would sacrifice anything for the benefit of another.

This was a quality that did not go unnoticed by the non-believing culture then, nor does it now!

3. be compassionate

This quality carries the idea of tenderness, literally “good hearted.” We live in a world where we hear almost every day of disaster and war. Sixty thousand plus Chinese fatalities in the latest earthquake, more wiped out in a Malaysian tsunami, and one hundred thousand citizens displaced in Georgia the announcer says. And some just go back to breakfast and wonder about the sale at the mall.

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

#### 4. be humble

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

#### 5. bless rather than retaliate (forgiveness)

Whatever action is done 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 the 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 extend grace to others.

These personal qualities are especially to be lived out with the Church (members of Christ 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 says:

[Psalms 34:19 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>19</sup> A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

Our text today makes it clear that the “evildoers” have no chance of getting a favorable hearing from God. God will vindicate his people, and the Church has been called to lead holy devoted lives to God.

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

**I Peter 3:13-17 (NIV)**<sup>13</sup>Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?  
<sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” <sup>15</sup>But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup>It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

### We Must Live for Christ

#### A. By Doing Good

You could almost translate this “zealots for good works.” The cause is Christ. And those who passionately follow this pattern of living will be blessed.

**Matthew 5:10 (NIV)** <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, 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.

**<sup>15</sup>But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,**

If Christ is Lord, we will always do what He wants. And when given an opportunity to say a word about our Lord, we will be ready.

The word “answer” here is *apologia*, a defence or support for the validity of the Gospel.

There is a qualifier used for speaking the Gospel. Do you see it? We are to give this verbal gift to: “everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope (faith) that you have.”

“ ‘Hope’ is what distinguishes Christian from non-Christian Gentiles.” - Word Biblical Commentary, J. Ramsey Michaels, p. 188 (see [Ephesians 2:12](#))

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 at people and telling them they are going to hell rarely gets a cooperative listener.

## **B. Without Fear**

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 (NIV)** <sup>11</sup>The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said: <sup>12</sup>“Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. <sup>13</sup>The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread,

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

**I John 4:18 (NIV)** <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect 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. We 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.

This age is but a little time; the age to come is forever (eternal). Which is the better decision, do you think?

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

**I Peter 3:18-22 (NIV)** <sup>18</sup>For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup>who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup>and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission 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.

And what was Jesus’ intentions in dying? He hoped that we would follow him to be with God. He died in this physical 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 first 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 (NIV)** <sup>9</sup>You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

### 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 grave to live a new life.**

**Paul understood! [Romans 6:4 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>4</sup>We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

**And Jesus also had explained this to Nicodemus! [John 3:5 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**

**Conclusion:** There is a question one could develop from [v. 14](#) where it says: "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." What are people afraid of? 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," 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 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>16</sup>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.**

**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.**