



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

May Our Love Increase
First Peter 3:8-12

Since the beginning of the year we have been working our way through First Peter. You remember that Peter wrote the churches in Asia Minor who were beginning to feel the pains of persecution under the reign of Emperor Nero.

Peter reminded his friends that though times were dangerous, and they might suffer grief and all kinds of trials, their hope was in Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead. Maybe ringing in Peter's ears were the words he heard Jesus speak years earlier, **“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”**

Peter reminded the church that **“we are chosen by God, we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that we may declare the praise of him who called us out of darkness into God's wonderful light.”**

One of Peter's goals was to encourage the church, suffering horribly under persecution, to **“live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse Christians of doing wrong, they will see our good deeds and glorify God.”**

Then Peter gave three examples. He told the Christians of his day to submit to the authorities, even the emperor Nero. Peter told slaves to submit to their masters. Then he told wives to submit to their husbands. The reason for living in such submission is that by living good lives, emperors, governors, slave owners and husbands may see the light and come to Christ.

Then there is that line from last week's sermon, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Jesus Christ is the main thing, and when our lives are filled with love both for the abused and the abuser, when we love even those who will do us harm, when we obey Jesus and love our enemies, their hearts may be changed. Yes, we may suffer; our individual rights may be tread upon, but the goal is not our rights. The goal is to make the love of Jesus Christ known. No one is won to Christ by hate, coercion, or manipulation. People learn about Jesus and make a decision to be Christ's disciple through our love.

Today's text is First Peter 3:8-12. It is a text that proves that Peter was writing a sermon for he begins with the word "finally." In typical preacher fashion he says, "Finally." And the audience is saying, "Good, it's time for lunch, end this sermon." And Peter says, "Finally," then like most preachers, goes on for another two and a half chapters. I think, for most preachers, the word "Finally" means I am about half way through so sit back and be ready for some more homiletical gems.

Hear the word as I read First Peter 3:8-12, **"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."**⁹ **Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.**¹⁰ **For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech."**¹¹ **They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.**¹² **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 passage defines the attitude of someone who follows Christ. Other New Testament texts do the same, but hear the list of attributes of a Christian as given by Peter: "Like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, humble, one who repays evil with blessing and controls their tongue, seeking peace and pursuing it." This is a good list, and if we commit ourselves to do the things on this list, you will honor Jesus Christ and draw people to Christ.

In his book, "Who Switched Price Tags?" Tony Campolo gives excellent advice to husbands and wives who have lost the affection they once shared. He writes, "Sometimes in counseling situations, I encounter a person who claims an absence of any kind of affection for their mate. These people say that whatever they once felt has died and that they are left with no alternative but to end their marriage. Whenever I counsel such people, I always tell them that if they will faithfully do what I tell them to do, within a month the feelings of affection will return. I tell them that if they follow my directions, they will once again be 'in love' with the person to whom they are married. When they ask me if I have some new and secret method to employ, I simply tell them to do the following:

"One: make a new list of the things that you would do for your spouse if you were madly in love. And 2: each day, do the things that are on your list. It is as simple as that. There is no secret formula or magical recipe. There is no mysterious process that is the result of extensive research. There is the age-old

truth that those who do loving things will have loving feelings; for what you do will affect how you feel.”

A man who took this advice called a friend of mine and told a wonderful story of the consequences. He said, “I usually leave the factory sweating and dirty, but I decided that, if I really loved my wife, I would clean up before I saw her again. So, I showered and shaved at the plant. I put on clean clothes. On the way home, I stopped at a florist and bought some flowers. When I get home, I usually go to the back door, get a beer out of the refrigerator, go into the rec-room and watch TV until supper. But, because I wanted to do what a lover would do, I went to the front door, rang the doorbell, and waited for my wife to answer. When she opened the door, I held out the flowers and said, “For you, honey! I love you! Let’s cook dinner together.”

She looked at the flowers, then at me, and then burst into tears. She said, “I’ve had a terrible day. Billy hurt his ankle and I had to take him to the emergency room for x-rays. When we got home your mother called. She is coming in two weeks. I tried to do the wash, and the washing machine broke. There’s water all over the basement floor. And now you have come home drunk.”

“Nevertheless,” wrote Campolo, “if this man continues to do such things, I am sure that it will not be long before his heart is palpitating with such excitement over being married. If he does what he promised to do, it’s only a matter of time before he will find that his marriage is fun again.”

As we consider the words of Peter consider the logic of these actions. What you do affects how you feel. A husband comes home and pays little attention to his wife, whose only words to her when he comes home are, “Get me a beer,” and “When will supper be ready?” This person has in fact demoted the love of his life to the level of a common piece of old furniture.

Of course, this downward spiral applies to other relationships. But a wife or husband who is cherished and loved, one who is a partner in conversation and affection, who is put on a pedestal is a spouse who will be the love of one’s life.

In a similar way this is true about our relationship with Jesus Christ and his church. It is true, certainly not of anyone within the sound of my voice, but for some it is true that their life with Jesus Christ is comparable to the husband who comes home, turns on the TV, and asks, “When is supper going to be ready?”

Once again I am certain that no one in this building has this attitude, but there are people in church, who have worked hard all week, and play hard all night

and when they arrive in worship they mentally lay down in their pews. They wish the hymns were not so long, and their prayer is simply, “Jesus, when are you going to help me win the lottery?” And is there any wonder there is little fire for Jesus in their lives? The river of living water about which Jesus speaks has slowed to a trickle. Their love for Christ has slowed from a Mississippi to a falling drop here and there. Rather than soaring with the eagles they find themselves grounded.

It is true that in the life of a married couple, it is true that in one’s relationship with Jesus Christ and his church, that your giving, your mission activity, the way you love others including your enemies, it is what you do that will support how you feel. If you do nothing for your spouse, then it will not be long before you feel nothing for your spouse. And if you say you believe in Jesus Christ, but do not allow your belief to turn into action, it will not be long until your religion is simply a liturgy, going through the motions. And it is also true that if you do nothing with or for your brothers and sisters in the Lord, it will not be long before you slip away from their fellowship.

In our text this morning, Peter is like the husband making a list of the things he would do if he were madly in love with God. And he presents this list to us. The reasoning behind this list is found in verses 10 and 12. In verse 10 we read, **“Whoever would love life and see good days do these things.”** And in verse 12 we read, **“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayers.”**

Peter is quoting Psalm 34, and the message is clear. The actions listed here are for those who want to love life, to see good days blessed by God. This list is for those who want God to be attentive to their prayers. Notice it does not say answer their prayers with a big yes, like a magic wand, but more along the lines of knowing the presence of God in our lives.

Peter presents us with a list. It is a wonderful list full of grace, for the purpose of this list is to call our attention to those things that will change the way we feel about God and those people God calls into our lives.

You might make your own list. Put on the top of the page, “Things I would do if I really loved God.” Have you ever tried to make such a list? I hope you will go home and find a time to be alone and do some reflecting and make a list.

Look at Peter’s list. His list begins in verse 8 with these words, “Live in harmony with one another.” Harmony does not mean we are all the same or that we have to agree on everything. We may disagree on major issues, but we have

committed ourselves to seek what is best for each other, and when it comes to how we are governed we have committed to a certain set of rules. That is part of what it means to be Presbyterian: we have an order that helps us to live together.

Peter added to the list, “Be sympathetic,” or “suffer with” others. This is certainly a trait I see in this particular church. In Romans, Paul writes, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” And though I mourn when people suffer, I rejoice when I see the quick response of our members to help others. For you are there to cry, to cook meals, to drive, to help anyway you can.

Peter then added to our list, “Love one another.” When I read this, for some reason I thought of my four brothers, especially my brother Carey. He is one of my older brothers, but he is the one who is closest to my age. When we were growing up, he would take me to play football with his friends and when we were back at home he would brag at the dinner table about how well I played, even though I was the youngest one playing. Maybe Peter was talking about how Carey would keep the bullies away. Maybe Peter was talking about the confidence I have that even today if I was in trouble at three in the morning, I could call any of my brothers, and I am confident that without hesitation they would come to my aid. Maybe Peter was talking about how Jim, Chuck, Carey or Richard would do anything for me, and I would do anything for them. Peter says, “Love as brothers.”

Peter then added to the list, “Be compassionate.” As Jesus had compassion on a hungry crowd we too are to show compassion.

There are other items on Peter’s list. Peter mentioned humility. I love what one person wrote, “If you think you are humble you’re probably not. But consider if you know anyone who is not worth your time and talents. If you do then pray for humility.

On Peter’s list are words he may have heard from the Apostle Paul, or who knows, Paul wrote what he heard from Peter, but both Apostles agree that we are not to repay evil for evil or as we find so easy to do to repay insult for insult. Christian speech should bless others.

Peter’s list includes our speech, “**Keep from and evil tongue.**” To his list he adds, “**Do good.**”

Peter concludes his list with the words, “**Pursue peace.**”

Think about your walk with Christ. Is there any feeling there? Any love? We are not talking about salvation here. I am confident that for most people here, if not all, have experienced salvation. What I am talking about is that relationship

with God that gives life to life. It's similar to that relationship that gives life to marriage or devotion to a friendship. It comes when you do -- when you are actively working to grow closer. It may be thought of as those things you can do that will make it a joy to approach God in prayer. So consider Peter's counsel: live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate, be humble, do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but bless those who would hurt you, keep your tongue from evil, and finally, do good and pursue peace.

Have you made a list of what you would do if you loved Jesus Christ? If you have not, start making your list. There is a bulletin insert that will help you get started. But don't stop with making the list, but do what is on the list and it will make all the difference in your walk with Christ. Amen.