

Living the Good Life of Sincere Love: A Study in 1 Peter, 1:22-2:3

Preached at Harambee by Caleb Mayberry on April 26th, 2009

Intro

What is the good life? The world has many definitions to offer. The good life from scripture is about loving God and people sincerely. The world does assign a value to love. But this love falls far short of the sincere and pure love that God wants for us. But in order to love sincerely, there are three things that must take place in order for this to happen: Rebirth, Faith, and Purification. We will look at how these three things we see in 1 Peter 1:22-25 enable us to live the good life.

Defense of Biblical Love

The world values success and achievement. Much of our western culture in particular focuses on the value of improving our material and spiritual well being. Material and spiritual satisfaction is the “Good life” that the world longs after. If we have the right car, the right job, right spouse, and right house, with inner peace and complete control of self, this is the good life. Most would agree that love enters into this equation, but this type of love is almost inevitably focused on self. There are not many best-selling books on how to love your neighbor as yourself. But there are plenty of best-selling books on how to live your best life now. Why? Because, the type of love that appeals to the world is self-love. And ultimately, this is no love at all.

1 Corinthians 13 states the case for the primacy of love. The issue is not that having more material goods is bad. Nor is it wrong to seek inner peace and happiness. The problem is that the world does not place biblical love, namely sincere love of God and others, at the forefront. In 1 Cor 13, Paul writes that you can be super-spiritual, but if you don't have love, you're nothing. America's spirituality and concept of the good life is worthless, if it is not underpinned by true biblical love.

What is true biblical love? It is pure and sincere love for God and others. We see this love most clearly demonstrated in God sending his son, Jesus, to die for our sins. (John 3:16, 1 John 4, Romans 5:8). Jesus demonstrated his love for God and his love for us through his obedience to the will of his Father to endure his crucifixion for our salvation to the glory of God. This is the radical kind of love that scripture calls us to. (John 13:34) It is sacrificial and outwardly focused, towards God and other people. Without this kind of love there is no good life. Why? Because it is only God that truly satisfies. We cannot satisfy ourselves. A world without the love of God degenerates into a self-serving world that is incapable of loving each other sincerely and this ultimately leads to a hate-filled world. (Romans 1:28-32, 2 Timothy 3:1-7)

Three Prerequisites for Biblical Love

1. **Rebirth:** The scripture says that we must be born again in order to love God and others sincerely. Peter exhorts us to love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since we have been born again (1 Peter 1:22-23). And this is most clearly **not** something that we do. 1 Peter 1:3 says that God has caused us to be born again. We have no more say in our new birth than we did in our old birth. This is entirely God's doing. Scripture says that we are dead in our sin, and thus we cannot make decisions for Christ from our spiritual graves. But God first made us alive so that we could have eyes to see properly and respond in the faith that God requires. (see Ephesians 2)
2. **Faith:** Once our eyes are opened then, we are able to respond in faith. Rebirth and faith happen simultaneously, just as fire and heat happen simultaneously. Whenever there is fire, there is heat. We wouldn't say that the heat caused the fire, because we know that fire is the cause, but yet they happen at the same time. (Illustration from Dr. John Piper). 1 Peter 1:22-23 says that the purification of our souls leads to sincere brotherly love. And all this happens by our “Obedience to the truth”. This phrase is referring to our right response or

submission to the truth. The truth in context here is what was referred to in verses 18-21, namely that we have been ransomed by the blood of Christ. In short, the truth is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our obedience to this truth is faith. John 6:28-29 says, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him who he has sent" This is our work. But even this is predicated upon verse 23, where we are first born again.

3. **Purification:** And so because of our faith in the gospel, our souls are purified or cleansed. Sin no longer has power over our lives to control us, and thus we can begin to love from a pure heart. We cannot do this ourselves, because sin is not just some external thing that we can wash off, but is more akin to a stain on the soul that can only be washed by the blood of Christ. When we put our trust in Christ, he promises to wash us a white as snow. (Isaiah 1:16-18) Scripture says we are a new creation with a new heart, and from this new heart we are now able to worship God and love others out of a sincere heart and not out of selfish motives.

Pursuing the Good Life of Love

Because of what God has done in us as Christians, we are now able to cast away our old ways and pursue sincere, earnest, and brotherly love. We can now live as the family that God has created us to be. In 1 Peter 2:1-3, Peter commands us to put away all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander, because we have been changed. Our lives ought to be a reflection of who God has made us to be. Peter is addressing this exhortation to Christians. Why? Because so often we forget what Christ has done for and to us. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:9 that some of us are so near-sighted that we have forgotten that we have been cleansed from our former sins. Peter writes to us to remind us of the work that God has already done in us, so that we would confidently pursue the good life of sincere love for God and others.

When we forget what Christ has done, we tend to fall back into the pattern of the world's ways. We start to believe that the good life is more about satisfying ourselves than it is about loving others and thus we inevitably regress into malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander and other such things that are the antithesis of love. Peter reminds us that we have been born again of imperishable seed through the living and abiding Word of God. And he quotes Isaiah to juxtapose the permanence of the Word of God with the impermanence of the flesh. If we trust in the ways of the world, we like the flowers in the field will wilt and wither and one day we will be no more. The flesh is beautiful in its time, and so is money and possessions and pop spirituality, but in the end, if it be not held up by the lasting Word of God, then its vanity will become plain in its fading away.

And so Peter calls us instead to remember what God has done and find our daily sustenance in his word, which is the spiritual milk that sustains us. This is what allows us to grow up into maturity of sincere love for God and others. And Peter ends in verse 3 of chapter 2 by saying, "if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." Here, he is not questioning the fact of whether we have tasted that the Lord is good, but is stating that this must happen to us in order for us to want to love God and love others. As Christians that have been born again, our tastes, appetites, and desires have been changed, and as a result, we are now able to find true enjoyment and satisfaction in loving God and in loving others. This is the good life that God has so graciously blessed us with.