

RULES FOR A HAPPY LIFE

Psalms 34:12-16

I Peter 3:10-12

Frequently one says, "That man has seen a great deal of life." What is meant by those words? The statement does not mean that the man has been a good reader, or a good student, or a great traveler, or has come in contact with mankind and its needs. It means that he has experienced much of the gay and worldly side of life, perhaps even indulging in sordid matters. Those words, "He has seen a great deal of life," are spoken with the accent of implication that he knows how empty and vain that sort of life really is.

To see life at its highest and best is a laudable ambition. But to see life in the sense of always seeking pleasure and delight and self-gratification is a dangerous ambition, and one which is sure to reach its climax in disappointment, disillusionment, and bitterness.

I. Recognize The Providence Of God.

By the providence of God is meant the preservation, care, control and direction of all things which He has created, in order that they may accomplish the purpose for which they were created. Concerning the providence of God certain observations are in order.

1. God has a purpose.

His purpose embraces the past, the present, and the future; this world and the world to come. "For it is God Who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Philippians 2:13. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10.

Before the artist touches the canvas with his brush, the picture is painted on the delicate walls of his imagination. Before the poet pens his inspiring lines, the thought is conceived in the sanctuary of his soul. Before the music is set in sharps and flats, the musician hears the song in the depth of his spirit. Before the sculptor lifts his mallet and chisel on the shapeless marble, the statue arises in his illumined mind. Before the earth was formed in beauty and symmetry, it was planned by a sovereign Being in the councils of eternity.

2. God's purpose is redemptive.

It has a righteous goal. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28. God's Word does not teach that all things work together for our comfort, ease, health and wealth. The "good" referred to here is not primarily social, intellectual, financial or temporal. While these aspects are not excluded, the supreme "good" is spiritual; that is, that we may become more like Christ. God's purpose is the development of Christian character, making us into His likeness.

3. God's purpose never changes.

God's methods may change, but not His purpose. His methods include physical forces of all kinds, spiritual impressions and daily experiences. They embrace disappointment, pain, persecution, joys and sorrows. His methods may allow poverty instead of wealth, sickness instead of health, failure instead of success, and even war instead of peace.

It might seem to some as if God's purpose had been frustrated when His great

minister, Paul, was cast into prison. But in that very prison experience he saw and penned immortal truth which is incorporated in the New Testament. Infinite in variety are the methods of God, but His will is unchanged.

4. God's providence is not to be interpreted by isolated experiences. The editor of a country newspaper once received a letter from a farmer as follows: "Dear Mr. Editor: I plowed my ground on Sunday; I worked my crops on Sunday; and in October I gathered an abundant harvest on Sunday. In fact, all through the season Sunday meant no more to me than any other day. My neighbor across the road would never work his crops on Sunday, but always went to church, and he got a very poor harvest. How do you account for all this?"

The editor published the letter, and made this significant comment in reply: "God does not make full settlement in October."

In other words, nothing is finished until God gets through with it. The present must be interpreted in the light of the future or we will get the wrong answer. God always has the last word. His providence is the very foundation of faith and is an encouragement to faith.

II. Recognize The Duty Of Man.

In this thirty-fourth Psalm we have an ancient recipe for a happy life. These words from the third chapter of Second Peter are quoted from this Psalm. The Psalmist inquired, Do you desire life? Do you want to live for many years? Then Peter asked, Do you want to keep on being fond of life? Do you want to find it delightful and sweet to the very end?

In childhood life is always sweet. In youth all of us are in love with life. To the young man or the young woman life is thrilling. But the difficult thing is to keep in love with life through all the experiences of the years, through the sorrows and trials of the after days, and the disappointments which are the lot of everybody.

Peter used the expression, "he that would love life." Notice that he did not say, "he that seeks prosperity," or "he that would avoid adversity." This text does not mean bright days or dark days, sunshine or shadow. It does not mean poverty or wealth, sickness or health. It means something deeper, richer and fuller--life itself. Then Peter added, "and see good days." All of us are familiar with good days and bad days in the ordinary sense of the word. The business man returns home at night and says, "This has been a good day; everything went right." At another time he says, "This has been a bad day; everything went wrong." All have their good days and their bad days.

If we are Christians, and have the Christian spirit, attitude and obedience, all of our days will be good ones. Good days are not to be measured by their outward appearance. Riches do not necessarily make good days, neither does position nor power. Position and power may be coupled with a heavy heart.

Let us now turn our attention to the specific duties of Christians as set forth in our text, in the form of rules for a happy life.

1. Refrain from evil speaking.
"For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil." Speech is a great gift and one of our highest endowments. It enables us to utter our thoughts, and to converse one with another. But even the best things may be turned to bad uses. This is especially true with the tongue. If rightly used, it is a great blessing; if wrongly used, it is a great curse. The tongue is mighty for good or bad.

When Peter wrote the words, "Let him refrain his tongue from evil," don't you imagine he remembered his denial of his Master? He had learned from experience how the tongue that speaketh falsely can take all the joy out of life. Peter never forgot those hours beneath the stars when the thought of what he had said made him weep bitterly.

But the injury which the evil or false tongue does to others is not so great as that which it inflicts on its possessor. His own tongue makes him fall. In the enemies that he makes, in the friends that he loses, in the habits that he fosters, in the memories that he stores up, the man reaps in and for himself a far worse punishment than any which he brings on others.

On the other hand, with the tongue we may dispel the clouds of sorrow, remove despair, cheer the faint-hearted, inspire the discouraged, and do many other things for the uplift of multitudes.

2. Refrain from deception.

"For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile." Guile means deception. The figure is that of a baited hook to catch the unwary. We are urged to turn from deceptive speech. And this is one ingredient in the happy life, holding the tongue in subjection and thereby avoiding any deceptive speaking.

3. Turn away from sin.

"Let him eschew evil." Sin is the great shadow over our existence. It is sin which makes men hard and cruel and turns them against themselves and against their fellowmen. The word "eschew" comes from the same root as the word "to shy," which is used of the horse that starts away from some object that frightens it. As the dove flees from the presence of the hawk, so the Christian should turn away from evil. In skating a wise person will swerve around the thin place in the ice. So, happy is the person who has formed the habit of swerving around evil.

4. Do good.

Avoidance of evil is only the negative side of a happy life. Negative goodness is alright, so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It is real goodness, but it is not the highest type of goodness. Christ Jesus not only refused to do wrong, but "He went about doing good." He left us a wonderful example as to how we should live. Suffering and achievement stand out in His life. None suffered more, and none achieved more than He did.

5. Strive for peace.

"Let him seek peace, and ensue it." This word "peace" is a comprehensive one. It means peace with God and peace with men. Jesus Christ, Who died for our sins, is our peace with God. He is the One through Whom we come to God. We trust Him and God accepts us; "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is really the corner-stone of the happy life.

If we have peace with God, we will strive for peace with our fellowmen. As a general rule, if we strive for peace we shall obtain it. Quarrels, strife, hatred, and such-like make life miserable. They are out of place if found in the life of any Christian, or within the membership of any church. Those who are interested in that sort of thing do not have the spirit of Christ.

Ever bear in mind that the rules for a happy life, which are laid down in our scriptures all have to do with character and conduct. They are very simple rules, which any Christian, who desires to do so, can observe. It is entirely possible for us to have

good days in the true sense of the word. With the Lord's help, it is certainly within our power to refrain from speaking evil, to refrain from deception, to turn away from sin, to do good, and to strive for peace. Every sincere follower of Christ is eminently cheerful and happy. And none of us needs to change his or her abode in order to achieve happiness. It is simply a matter of our being genuine Christians and letting the Lord have His way in our lives.