

Studies in First Peter

"Homophronia is Healthy"
First Peter 3:8-12

Introduction

How is your love-life?

Not your personal love-life; your **spiritual** love-life. It's a fair question - especially when you consider that Jesus said, "**By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another**" (John 13:35).

Peter described a healthy spiritual love-life. He summed-it up using a single Greek word in verse eight, and the word is *homophron*. It's a tough word to translate into English. Various attempts include "likeminded," "of one mind," "agreeable," "unity," and "harmonious." These are all accurate, but they fail to capture the intensity Peter intended.

Homophron is a compound word and we can look at its parts:

1. The prefix, "homo," when used of persons, means the *same* or *together*. The persons you are *together* with, who are the *same* as you, are other believers in the Church.
2. The root word, "phren," is from an obsolete word whose original meaning was to *rein in*, as in the *reins* used to restrain and guide a horse you are riding. It came to be applied to the *midriff* or *diaphragm* part of your body and is used figuratively to discuss your feelings - the same way we use the word "heart" to discuss feelings when we don't really mean the heart muscle that is pumping blood. "Rein-in your diaphragm" is my free translation. Since that makes no sense, in English we could say, "Steer your heart."

Putting these back together, you have a word describing your intense spiritual feelings towards other believers. You are to steer your heart in the ways Peter lists for you.

I dare you to tell your unsaved friends and family you are *homophronic!* But you are... Or you should be if you want to enjoy spiritual health. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Homophronia Will Improve Your Love-life, and #2 Homophronia Will Prove Your Love For Life.

#1 Homophronia Will
Improve Your Love-life
(v8-9)

We're looking at just these five verses because they conclude a section of this letter that began in Chapter two. Peter has been discussing your submission as a Christian in all the major relationships of your life. He began discussing your submission in society; then as a spouse; and now in a spiritual sense, within the Church. In verse thirteen he will begin a new subject: Your suffering persecution for the sake of Jesus. Before we get there, we want to enjoy what he said about love-life in the Church - which ought to serve to strengthen us for our troubles and trials in the world.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;

"Finally" means *to sum up*. He wasn't anywhere close to being done with his letter; he was summing-up and finishing his current line of thought.

He encouraged them "all" to be *homophronic*. It's a hard word to define, so Peter put it in a context and defined it for us. The context is "all" of them, meaning their fellowship together in the Church. The definition is the traits which he listed in verses eight and nine. Taken together they describe a healthy spiritual love-life among Christians.

Before we look at each trait, I want to note that the particular words Peter used for these traits, with one exception, occur only here in all the New Testament. (The one exception: The word he used for

"compassionate" occurs one other time, in Ephesians 4:32). It seems as though Peter was coining his own Christian vocabulary of terms to describe your love-life. He must want us to take careful note, to stop and consider these words in a deeper, richer, fuller way than their bare dictionary definition.

The first word is "compassion." You'll have a healthy spiritual love-life if you first of all "[have] **compassion** for one another..." in the Church. As one commentator said, "there is no adequate English word" to properly define biblical compassion. The best way to define it is to use Scripture:

1. Christian compassion is seen in Romans 12:15, which reads, "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."
2. A similar but stronger sentiment is found in First Corinthians 12:26, which reads, "and if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." This passage in First Corinthians compares the Church body to your own physical body. If one part of your body is hurting, your whole body feels it and makes the appropriate adjustments. Likewise if you are honored for something, say an athletic achievement, it's because your whole body was involved - not just the particular muscles and nerves needed to compete.

Christian compassion is feeling together with other believers **exactly what they are going through as if you were going through it!**

Your first thought might be that this is not possible without experiencing similar things. While experience is certainly important, it must be possible for you to be compassionate without experience.

Thoughtfulness is the true key to compassion, not experience. In fact, experience can work against you: Your particular experience could be very different than someone else's even though the circumstances are similar.

You can *be* or *become* thoughtful. Thoughtfulness is a discipline. It is a steering of your heart in order to identify with your brother or sister.

Peter's next word is "brotherly." You'll have a healthy spiritual love-life if you "**love as brothers...**" The NASB translates this, be "brotherly." It is a unique form of the Greek word *philadelphia*, which (as you know) means *brotherly love*. Our English equivalent would be the word *fraternal*. The Church is your fraternity!

1. A fraternity is a body of people who associate together for a common purpose. In our case, it is to exalt Jesus Christ.
2. Fraternity implies showing others who are not part of the group that we stick together and care for one another.

All believers are brothers and sisters by virtue of being born into God's family. But we don't always have a sense of fraternity - of sticking together and caring for one another in ways that show the unsaved the wonders of God's love. There should be a camaraderie and care among believers that makes the unsaved jealous and want to be included.

Peter's next word was "**tenderhearted...**" Your Bible may translate this word "compassionate." It goes beyond your feelings of compassion to describe actions based on your feelings. It describes a heart for other believers that doesn't require much prodding in order to motivate you to get involved and help.

Next Peter said, "be **courteous...**" I'm all for common courtesy to return to our society... But Peter meant something different. The word means *friendly of mind*. These are tough words! Biblically speaking, you will be *friendly of mind* toward other Christians when you are humble. You are humble when you compare yourself to Jesus rather than other believers. You see He is at work still in your life and conclude He is also working in their lives. Seeing them as a work in progress encourages you to be helpful rather than harsh.

All this sounds great! It depicts believers dwelling together in harmony. But that isn't always the way it is among Christians... So in

verse nine Peter told you how to apply what you just learned when things are rough in the fellowship.

1 Peter 3:9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

The word for "evil" means *injury*; the word for "reviling" has to do with words spoken against you. In the Church, at times, Christians do not always experience a very healthy love-life with one another. You are injured by their slander, gossip, backbiting, reproaches, etc. **You** can still have a healthy love-life by "returning... blessing" to them.

"Blessing" is from *eulogy* and means, *to speak well*. Here it means to seek their highest good rather than seeking to destroy or tear down. You were "called to this" reminds you that you have the ability to walk with Jesus even when mistreated and maligned.

You return blessing that you "may inherit a blessing." An inheritance is always a gift, so this must refer to your being given something. The something is "a blessing," the same word *eulogy*. It's not necessarily the people who are reviling you that will speak well of you, or even others in the fellowship. **God will speak well of you!**

If all this sounds a little touchy-feely to you, I'd remind you that Peter was no girley-man. He was a big, burly fisherman. In the Gospel of John you read of an episode in which Peter by himself pulled-in a net full of one hundred fifty-three "great fishes." He was not ashamed to be homophronic; neither should we.

Christians who work on their love-life also have a love for life:

#2 Homophronia Will
Prove Your Love For Life
(v10-12)

Peter supported his teaching in verses eight and nine with Scripture. He quoted from a portion of Psalm thirty-four.

1 Peter 3:10 For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.

"Love life and see good days" refers to the spiritual quality of your daily life. Psalm thirty-four doesn't guarantee life will be trouble-free. Later in the psalm, in verse nineteen, you read, "a righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all." Peter will launch into a long discussion about suffering and persecution. Many of his readers would suffer, and some would die... But they could all still "love life and see good days." They could go through their suffering, and their dying, with a spiritual quality of life only available to Christians..

Is there anyone here who would like to "love life and see good days?" Sure, *all of us!* Then we should do the things this psalm suggests. It suggests two things: Learn to *control your tongue* and to *tame your contention*.

First, learn to control your tongue:

1 Peter 3:10 For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.

Here is a great quote: "You cannot spit forth poison without feeling some of the venom burning your own flesh." You will never love life until you learn to control your tongue. "Evil" refers to anything that is contrary to what we've learned in verses eight and nine. By your words you can achieve a temporary victory, but inflict lasting hurt, wrecking a relationship and spoiling your own witness for Jesus Christ.

If you want to control your tongue, cultivate the traits we just learned about in verses eight and nine.

Next, learn to tame your contention:

1 Peter 3:11 Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

It's hard to maintain your love-life when others in the fraternity are spitting venom at you. You want to react in similar ways... But you should instead tame your contention.

"Turn away from evil" means first of all to avoid returning evil for evil. It means to live on higher ground than those who would seek to drag you down to their carnal level. You can do it because the Holy Spirit lives within you to empower you.

"Do good" means to continue moving forward with the Lord. Don't allow the contentions of others to hinder or halt your relationship with the Lord, or your serving Him in the Church.

"Seek peace" means you first seek the peace of God that can rule in your heart no matter your circumstances. Then, as much as is possible, "pursue" peace with those attacking you. It may increase their antagonism, but it will ultimately defeat them to see you bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

Simply put, you are to react in an entirely new way to personal attacks. You control your tongue and tame your contentions. It proves you have a new love for life that is motivated by Jesus Christ. You don't have time to be drug down into some pit with your enemies, to wallow in their mire. You're too busy loving the Lord and serving Him by loving His people to get sidetracked.

There is an encouragement for you to love life:

1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."

God sees you; His eyes are "on" you in the sense that He is intently gazing upon you. *It isn't to see you mess-up!* He sees what you are going through and must therefore deem it both necessary and beneficial.

His "ears are open to" your "prayers." You sometimes feel as though God is not "open to your prayers" because He doesn't do anything about your situation. Your situation is tailor-made for you so you might receive the spiritual blessings we've been discussing. For example: You can't return blessing for evil and reviling *unless you are treated evilly and reviled!*

"The face of the Lord is against those who do evil." God sees the people who are hurting you. Nothing escapes his eyes or ears. God is their adversary; but because He is gracious, He gives them space to repent. It may be at your expense - but you can take it as you rely upon the Lord and love life because He is the Lord over it.

Conclusion

We began by discussing your spiritual love-life and ended by discussing your love for life. The context in which this occurs is within the Church, in the fellowship of other believers.

The Church will never be free from problems. It will always be a place where your love-life is challenged. You, however, can go on loving life as you look to the Lord to supply every spiritual blessing.