

Living in Light of “the End of All Things”

1 Peter 4:7-11

If human history were a book, I think it's accurate biblically to say that we're living in the next to the last chapter of that book. The last chapter is the consummation/restoration of all things. One day God will restore to redeemed humanity and to the rest of creation the glory that existed before the fall. Believers will be transformed into the image of Christ and will be given immortal resurrected bodies; even heaven and earth will be transformed into the new heaven and the new earth. God is bringing human history to this goal or end.

We are now living in the chapter before the end of all things. The New Testament often calls this “the last days” (See Acts 2:17, Hebrews 1:2, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 1 Peter 1:20, 2 Peter 3:3-7, 1 John 2:18, etc.) Notice what Peter says in today's passage, 1 Peter 4:7.

7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Peter is telling us that we are living in a very strategic time in the history of humanity. We are living in the last days before “the end of all things.” Peter is urging us to understand just where we are in the plot of human history so that we will live accordingly. Karen Jobes, in her commentary on 1 Peter, summarizes what Peter is saying this way (Jobes; 276):

Peter is saying that because his readers are living in the last stage of a divinely initiated process, whose outcome has already been assured by the resurrection of Jesus (1:3, 3:22), their behavior should reflect that reality.

We should behave in a way that is compatible with the fact that “the end of all things is at hand.” But what does that mean? Does that mean that we quit our jobs and live at some frenetic spiritual pace? No, the NT warns against that way of living (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12). To the contrary, living in light of the end of all things means excelling in foundational habits of prayer, love, hospitality, and servanthood. Since we live in such a strategic time in human history, we dare not neglect these four things.

Why are these four habits so strategic? They promote the health/vitality of the church and they make our witness compelling. If these four habits characterize a church, that church will have unity and will have a powerful witness in its community.

As we work our way through these verses, it might be profitable if you focus on one or two of these behaviors this coming week. It's better to make significant progress in one area than superficial progress in several.

If we understand that “the end of all things is at hand,” our lives will be characterized by: ***Prayer (thinking rightly and clearly).*** (1 Peter 4:7) Notice how Peter uses the word “therefore” to denote that the command he is giving is an implication of the reality that “the end of all things is near.”

7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

The terms translated “sound judgment” and “sober spirit” are similar in meaning. Peter probably meant to convey a single idea, that of “thinking rightly and clear-minded” (Jobes; 227). If you have “sound judgment” you think rightly about a situation. This term was used in Mark 5:15 of the man who was delivered from a legion of demons. Mark’s comment was that he was now “clothed and in his **right mind**”; he had “sound judgment”; he was able to think rightly. If you are “sober” your mind is clear; your mind isn’t clouded and confused (as would be the case if you were drunk). Together these two terms paint the picture of a person who is thinking is rightly and clearly about something.

Peter writes, “therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit **for the purpose of prayer.**” The implication is that if our thinking is sloppy and/or cloudy, we won’t pray (or we won’t pray well). If we are sloppy and confused in our thinking we will find a hundred more important things to do than pray. Many of them will be good things, but we won’t ever really find the time and the spiritual/emotional energy to pray.

This is important to realize because prayer is one of our core activities in these last days. Of course praise and thanksgiving will continue throughout eternity; but there will come a day when praying “Your kingdom come, Your will be done” won’t be necessary. In a unique way, we now (in these last days after the resurrection/ascension of Christ) have the opportunity to participate in God’s great plan of redemption. One of the core ways we do so is through prayer. We so fervently want to see God’s kingdom come that the pour out our petitions to Him.

Peter understood that we will never be people of prayer unless we think rightly and clearly about these last days. Such thinking is the byproduct of meditating day and night on Scripture, having spiritual conversations, and thinking deeply about our lives.

A couple of weeks ago I was one of a small group of people praying for an individual who is dear to each of us. There were some specific, urgent needs, so we purposed together to spend a day in prayer and fasting. A couple of days ahead of time we designated a specific day. I can tell you that I woke up that morning with a resolve and focus that I don’t normally have. In retrospect, I would say that we were “thinking rightly and clearly for the purpose of prayer.”

This coming week, you will need God to work on your behalf or on behalf of people you love. Let is not be said of us, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4). We will not ask (or ask well) if we don’t discipline our minds to think rightly and clearly.

If we understand that “the end of all things is at hand,” our lives will be characterized by: **Love (minimizing each other’s sin).** (1 Peter 4:8) Without trivializing the other commands in this passage, Peter says that fervent love for one another is “above all.”

8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

Consistently and unfailingly loving one another is to be our highest priority. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching (Matthew 22:34-40 - the greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbor), Paul's teaching (1 Corinthians 13 - faith, hope, and love. . . the greatest of these is love), and John's teaching (1 John 4:8 - the one who does not love does not know God, for God is love).

Why does Peter say, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another"? Because "love covers a multitude of sins." Our love for one another doesn't cover our sins the way that the blood of Christ covers our sins. And Peter isn't saying that we should "cover up" sins in the sense of not dealing with them; there are too many Scriptures which speak about confessing our sins to each other and admonishing each other (see James 5:16 and Romans 15:14)

Peter is probably making an allusion to Proverbs 10:12 which says:

12 Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers all transgressions.

This is a classic example of Hebrew parallelism in which a contrast is being made. Hatred is parallel to love; stirring up strife is parallel to "covering all transgressions." Whereas hatred results in strife (discord, bitter disagreement, division), love does the opposite; love covers transgressions in the sense of minimizing the relational fallout from another person's sin. That's exactly what Peter urges us to do:

8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

I feel like we should sing "The Power of Love" here this morning because that's what Peter is talking about. You and I have the power to minimize the fallout of each other's sins by being fervent (consistent, persevering) in our love for each other.

Let's say that someone has sinned against you; someone has said something about you that was unfair or unkind. When you learn about it, you have at least a couple of options. On the one hand, you can get angry, stir up strife, and do things that would magnify the other person's sin: you can tell five of your friends how this person has lied about you; you can snub this person when you see each other in the foyer; you can hold a grudge tell yourself all sorts of condescending stories about the other person. But as they say, this is like drinking poison and hoping that the other person dies.

The other option is to love the person fervently. Love is patient and kind; love is not provoked; love doesn't take into account a wrong suffered. You could actually talk to the person and say, "Someone told me that you said something about me. What they told me you said was hurtful to me. So I wanted to talk with you to find out if it's true and if so what you meant by it." There are no guarantees, but it's possible that the issue could

be resolved very simply and directly. Instead of stirring up strife, you've minimized the fallout from the person's sin.

Real-life situations are often complicated; we don't experience others' sin in a vacuum; other Scriptures sometimes have a bearing on how we respond. But let's not miss the simple reality that genuine love is powerful relationally - far beyond what we might imagine. Since we're living in the last days, it's only appropriate that we **exercise fervent love that minimizes each other's sin**. To do otherwise compromises our unity and our effectiveness as the body of Christ.

If we understand that "the end of all things is at hand," our lives will be characterized by: **Hospitality (without grumbling)**. (1 Peter 4:9)

9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

The term hospitality literally means "love of strangers." Through hospitality strangers and acquaintances become friends. Sometimes hospitality in the first century involved hosting believers who were traveling as overnight guests. Hotels were few and far between, were expensive, and were often known as places of immorality. But Peter seems to have something more local in mind because he says, "Be hospitable to one another." Believers were to befriend each other from the heart, welcoming one another into their fellowship and into their lives.

Hospitality is a foundational quality that should be present in the body of Christ. It's actually one of the qualities that Paul mentioned as necessary for elders in 1 Timothy 3. Instead of giving the vibe, "I don't really care about you," elders need to have a genuine love for people, welcoming them into their lives.

I recently read an interview with Rosaria Butterfield about hospitality. She came to Christ through the hospitality of a family that welcomed her into her home every week for two years for a meal and conversation. This family basically opened their home one night every week for whoever wanted to show up. [I realize that not everybody can do this; but the example is compelling.] When she met this family she was very antagonistic to Christians and their theology; but the very people she mocked invited her into their lives. She was won to Christ over time by their genuine love. The witness of this family was so powerful because they showed hospitality to those inside and outside the body of Christ alike.

Naturally, she has deep convictions about hospitality. She's eager to point out that hospitality has nothing to do with entertaining; the point isn't to impress people. The point is to love "strangers" so well that they become friends and eventually brothers and sisters in Christ.

Peter makes an interesting qualification here, doesn't he? He doesn't merely say "be hospitable to one another"; he adds "without complaint/grumbling." Peter anticipates that it's possible to expend time, energy, and resources in reaching out to others and then resenting it. Maybe people don't reciprocate your hospitality; maybe people mess

up your house and make your life more complicated. Genuine hospitality is costly. But this is one of the core ways that we develop spiritual friendships in the body of Christ and one of the core ways we reach out to those who don't yet know Christ.

Not everybody is set up to show hospitality in their home. What is one way that you can open your arms just a bit wider to welcome people into fellowship and into your life?

If we understand that "the end of all things is at hand," our lives will be characterized by: ***Servanthood (using God-given gifts to God's glory).*** (1 Peter 4:10-11) In these verses notice the emphasis on understanding and using our gifts in a God-centered (vs. a self-centered) way.

10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Peter is consistent with Paul in saying that "each one has received a special gift" from God. If you are a believer in Jesus, God has given you one or more spiritual gifts. It's interesting to observe that we're never commanded to figure out our spiritual gifts; it is assumed that we will discern our gifting as we live with and serve others in the body of Christ. Generally speaking, your gifting becomes apparent by observing how God tends to use you and by observing what you're motivated to do. If you rather naturally alongside hurting people and if those people tend to experience God's mercy through you, you probably have the gift of mercy. Similar things could be said about administration, leadership, teaching, shepherding, giving, prophecy, or serving.

Peter tells us that each of us should employ the gift we've received in "serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." It's as if God has said to the church, "My grace is so nuanced and varied that I'm not giving every one of you the same gift. Rather, I am entrusting each of you with specific gifts that will allow you to serve each other in unique ways. Together you will as a church do what Christ would do if He were bodily present with you. You are now the body of Christ. If you don't each use your gift, there will be lack; if you do use your gift, the body will be built up. Therefore, be good stewards, taking seriously the assignments I've given you."

To illustrate what it means to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God, Peter gives a couple of examples in verse 11.

11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

If you've been given speaking gifts, you are a good steward of that gift if you express the utterances/sayings/teachings ***of God***. Speaking gifts certainly include your personality, experience, insights, etc.; but the content is fundamentally what God has revealed (instead of our own thoughts/ideas).

If you've been given a gift that involves serving others, you are a good steward of that gift if you serve "by the strength which **God** supplies." God doesn't expect or want us to serve out of our own strength; that would be ineffective and self-exalting. God is willing to supply the strength through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

We speak **God's** message and rely on **God's** strength "so that in all things God may be glorified" - so that that His reputation grows (not ours), so that people are impressed with Him (not us). As always God is glorified "through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

This week you will have opportunity to use your gifting in many different ways (in your home, in the church, and in the community). Will you be a good steward of your gifting, accepting the assignments that God gives? Will you invite God to empower the use of your gifts? Will you use your gifts in a God-centered way?

Conclusion. Let me remind you of the context of this passage. Since we are living in the next to last chapter of human history, we have great opportunity to participate with God in which He's doing in this world. Therefore, we should excel in prayer, love, hospitality, and servanthood. Doing so is vital to the health/vitality of the church. And doing so makes our witness compelling.