

"The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 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." 1 Peter 4:7-11, NAS95.

The first thing we need to discover in our text is what Peter means by the end of all things is near. We need to determine if:

1. he believed that Christ was coming in a very short time
2. did he mean this in a more unknown sense based on Jesus' own words to the disciples that he would return but no one would know the exact time
3. did he mean what James wrote that life is short and just a vapor and soon passes away

If he means the first, that Christ would come in his time and it was very literally near, then Peter was misleading those to whom he was writing. This presents a difficulty because he is an author of Scripture and if we are to trust his writings but can see such a grave error in theology, then how can we trust anything else he says. This is not the same as Peter erring in judgement on how to relate to Gentiles becoming believers and this is not equal to Paul, for example, making a perceived mistake in judgement in the narrative of the Acts:

Act 21:18-30 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. (19) After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. (20) And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, (21) and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. (22) What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. (23) Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; (24) take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. (25) But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality." (26) Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into

the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them. (27) When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, (28) crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." (29) For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. (30) Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.

Boice: "I hope to show that though Paul was driven by high motives, what he did at this time of his life was wrong." "Led to a terrible compromise of the gospel." "Paul had been right to oppose Peter. Yet this was far worse than anything Peter had been guilty of...Paul's error was worse than mere hypocrisy...It was a compromise of the gospel."

I use this illustration, although there are those who believe Paul committed no error, to show the difference between seeing an apostle in a narrative account doing something that may be in error as opposed to writing error in the Scriptures. Peter, with knowledge of Scripture erred in judgement concerning Gentiles as did Paul here but neither of them ever erred in doctrine when writing Scripture.

So, what does Peter mean?

I believe we have eliminated the first choice.

Did he mean what James wrote:

Jas 4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

This is certainly a viable option but I believe Peter has more in mind considering the context of the entire letter and the number of times we have already seen specific allusions to what Jesus taught directly to his apostles.

This idea follows after teaching on suffering and will be followed with more teaching on suffering. Suffering in the present for Christ is expected in every generation. The end is when the kingdom will come in its fullest glory. Also Peter declared that the last days were already here when he preached on the day of Pentecost.

14* ¶ But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.15* "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;16* but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17* 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,'

And then he proceeds to quote from Joel to illustrate that those things were occurring as he was speaking and depending on some interpretations some of those things would occur within the framework a some time later, yet within what was already the last days.

Therefore, Peter's understanding of the end of all things is near does not concede to a specific time but is his way of saying that the end is in the context of Christ's return whenever that should be, for no man knows the time ,

Acts 1:6 "Lord, is it at this time that you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Peter heard Jesus say, "It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (Acts 1:7).

Peter had been told that it was not his business to know when Jesus would come and establish his kingdom so Peter is teaching how we should live with the expectation of the appearing of Christ and for believers to be encouraged that their suffering will not be in vain because the end of all things is not just the consummation of the kingdom of Christ but the judgement for all who have hated and opposed him and his people.

Peter is not referring to the end as an escape from suffering or persecution, although it is, but his purpose is to drive home how we are to live in spite of suffering and persecution until that day arrives. We are not to long for the escape - we are to long for Christ and His appearing to see Him, to be with Him forever. We are to be desiring him and the beauty of holiness. The "great escape mindset is a horrible modern evangelical teaching of self-centeredness and a low view of God.

Once we see what Peter means about the end we can make the connection to the attitude we are to have and its relationship to prayer.

"The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer." 1 Peter 4:7, NAS95.

Regardless of how soon Christ returns we need to have a right mindset and heart as

the struggles of the age in which we live try to overwhelm us.

Again Peter is echoing the words of Jesus in Lukes gospel:

"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'" Luke 21:32-36, NAS95.

Prayer is an essential element of how we live until Jesus returns.

It is with prayer that we will find our comfort. It is in prayer that rests in the sovereignty of God and his purpose that we will be able to endure those things that are waiting to test us and to try us and to help refine us for the glory of God.

We don't need to be strengthened for a great escape we need strength to endure.

As much as we are to keep in communication with God we are told that our relationship to one another as believers is above all. Does that mean above all even our relationship to God. It can't. We can never have a priority over our relationship with Christ.

But after prayer in view of the end of things there is a priority as to how we are to relate to one another. The above all priority in our relationship is a fervent love for one another.

"Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8, NAS95.

This is so critical to our survival if you will allow me to use that term.

We live in a world of sin and sinners. We live as believers among believers and we sin.

We are surrounded by sin and so there must be some way that especially amongst ourselves we can find a way to live that helps us to endure until Jesus comes. The way is the way of fervent love and this is so important because when we really practice this kind of love there are sins against us by committed by our brothers and sisters that we will learn to overlook.

Now this does not mean that we do not hold ourselves accountable for sin. This does not mean that we abandon confrontation or church discipline when it is needed. We

cannot overlook adultery, habitual lying, and so on but once sin is addressed properly we cover it just like Jesus has and there are many things that we can just forget about. That slightly mean tone of voice, intended or not; the thing that someone promised to do but genuinely forgot to do it. It is usually these kinds of offences things that cause more problems between people than anything else. This is critical. if we do not live this way then we cannot minister to one another in genuine hospitality. You cannot be hospitable toward someone if you have something against them in your heart.

We are to be hospitable without murmuring, without complaint. "Yes dear, its alright if they come for a visit but I wish they really would not." Some may look at how someone was treated and for some reason cannot put it to rest even though it is in the past and the offended party has no problem with what occurred. It may have been wrong but love covered the sin.

You see, how can we serve one another with the gifts God has given us in any other way. It would be an affront to God.

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

How are we good managers of God's grace if we are not loving one another as Christ loves us. Whatever gift God has given to you it is special. He does not give us all the same gifts. Hospitality is a special gift from God. Yet we are all to be hospitable. Some have a greater ability as a special gift from God to be hospitable.

And also be hospitable to those outside the body as we invite them to know the joy of Christ. There is much that may need to be covered when working with lost souls

God's grace is varied in how he gifts us. He gives to each the measure that is needed to do what he enables us to do, but we are responsible to manage what he has given to us and to properly use the gift. Without fervent love for one another that leads to this all encompassing hospitality towards one another this serving one another is not what it should be it becomes an empty gesture, just a good work trying to earn favor from God.

We have an opportunity here to build a fellowship that is rooted in the truth of Scripture and pray that God will use it for generations to come. We have an opportunity to be what much of the so - called church has failed to be. How blessed we are to be given the opportunity to re-examine everything about how we function as a body of believers and to not be afraid to discard tradition, doctrine or any other thing that demeans the glory of Christ. This takes a lot of prayer and hard work and sweat but God has enabled us for it.

It may not make us popular, it may not cause us to see huge numbers of people in the pews but it will, if we really desire to be obedient to the Scriptures, glorify Christ our Lord and we will be none the worse for it.

Then Peter gives two exhortations that are to be heeded and both are to produce the same result.

"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." 1 Peter 4:11, NAS95.

Those who are entrusted with teaching the word of God are to be so conscious of what they are saying because they are speaking the utterances of God.

How is it that so many sermons become nothing but mere entertainment or self help exercises or self-esteem teachings.

You need to pray daily for your elders as they engage in the preparation for teaching God's word. You need to pray that they take it seriously. Pray that they will be enlightened to the truth and preach it in the power of the Holy Spirit and not with the mere logic of men with persuading words. Pray that the Word will change them so it will have its part in changing you. Pray for God's will in the Word for you as you come to our teaching times. Come prepared to learn and then to apply what you learn and then in the living of it help the body to mature in glorifying Christ.

Pray for us all to have an excitement when we meet that God really wants to speak to us through His word because he does. This is not arbitrary. The matters of life and

death are found in God's word. Be encouraged when we want to look at the whole counsel of God's word not just our favorite passages or the ones we know are easy to understand. Pray that we understand the hardest passages, the ones that seem to confuse us. Ask the elders to teach on things that you have never been taught and find the beauty of God's truth in all of God's word.

Peter then mentions those who serve.

Those who serve in the body are to do so by the strength that God supplies.

When you serve others in the context of the end being near, with persecution and suffering possibly being part of it, your service will be strengthened by God.

Ministering to one another does not stop when times are difficult, actually it should increase because we need each other even more.

By grace we are strengthened by God in every circumstance in times of peace or times of suffering. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Here is the beauty of this. I am born again to a living hope to be obedient to Christ. God has taken the responsibility for me because he saved me. He is accountable to his own word to do what he says he will and must do for me. I am accountable to do what I am to do because he saved me and because he enables me to do what I should do, therefore I have no excuse. I am to serve - he is to strengthen me. When I say I can't he says I can. When I say I won't, I will be disciplined and if truly saved, be shamed for my attitude and repent and then desire to serve.

Even in the midst of Christ's suffering he never once stopped being a servant or a preacher of the truth of God's word. As the God-man Christ was strengthened by the Father through the Spirit. He prayed for strength, "Father not my will but yours."

Should we do any less?

So when the teachers and the servants in our text do as they should, God will glorified through Jesus Christ.

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.

All glory comes to God through Christ. The desire of our lives should be the glory of Christ. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God but we sinners who know Christ have been reconciled with God through Christ and we are in Christ and he dwells in us so we can glorify the Father through the Son.

The end of all things is near is how our text began. As far as we know Jesus may not come back for as many years as it has been since Peter wrote those words.

We are to take these words as seriously as Peter meant for them to be taken then.

This is how we are to live now.

We may not drive chariots or walk everywhere, or be under a dictatorship or wear ancient clothes but we are still people who have been chosen by God for a purpose and as such we are to love as our brethren were instructed to live so long ago because as far as man is concerned, there has been no change.

Men are still born as haters of Christ and haters of those who believe in him. Until the day that a person is born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ he can be nothing but a sinner lost in his sin.

But when one is given a new heart by God's grace that person can live just as they did in Peter's day, in spite of every difficulty because God will strengthen us to do so.

These truths do not change from year to year, century to century or millennium to millennium because they are the eternal truths of God. Heaven and earth will pass away but God's word remains forever.

Whenever the end comes, and final judgement along with it, we can rest assured whether in the grave or yet alive that we are and will be Christ's forever. And even though a temporal end to life as we know it in this flesh could cease tomorrow, we have just as much need to live for Christ now or if we live another 25, 50, or even a 100 years.

As the end is near in both senses, we are to be committed to prayer as a body of believers and we are to fervently love one another and we are to be hospitable and we are to delight in the word of God and in serving Christ so that in all things God will be glorified through Jesus Christ.

We are to realize that these things are to be done and that they can be done. There are no excuses for genuine lovers of Christ to shrink away from any of these truths.

We are Christ's own. I do not think it unimaginable that as Peter wrote some of these things that he reflected on his own failures as a Christian and at the same time understood how great the grace of God was in his life and that he was able to live what he was writing.

How the words of Christ, as we have already seen numerous times in this letter, pour out from Peter's hand in the context of his present circumstances and then he instructs us accordingly.

Take heart brethren, the end is near but all we need to face the hours, the day, the weeks, the months or the years to come is found in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the riches of his grace.