

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #17

I Peter 4:7-11

When you think the end of something is near, your entire focus changes. I have been in situations in which I was visiting with someone who knew they did not have long to live. In those times, the conversation really zeroes in on the eternal. I have never been with someone who knew they only had a short time to live who said “let’s play a game of Scrabble.” There is a very real, sober realization that they are going to meet God.

In the early days of the Church, Christians expected Jesus Christ to return. They knew Christ said He would come back and get them (John 14:1-3) and they were looking for Him to do just that. They lived with a sober realization that this could happen at any moment. Most first century believers lived with an expectancy that Christ would soon return. The fact that He didn’t return did not in any way lessen their hope nor did it invalidate the prophetic promise that Christ would return (Romans 13:11-12).

We know today from a pure mathematical logistical standpoint that we are much closer to the return of Christ right now in time than they were in the first century, and we also know from a personal standpoint that we are much closer to the return of Christ than when we first believed.

I personally believe the end of all things is at hand right now. In the past few years, there are things that have happened that point to this belief. Who would have thought just ten years ago that you would have to have a police officer on duty in a school? Who would have thought that you would need a security team at church. These are perilous times, dangerous times and all of this leads us to believe we are nearing the end of the Church Age. The Rapture draws near and the anticipation we have concerning Christ’s return should make a difference in the way we live. If we really believe that the end of the Church Age is near, how should it affect us; how is it affecting us? That was the main point Peter wanted to communicate:

IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT THE END OF ALL THINGS IS NEAR WE MUST KEEP OURSELVES ON A GOD-GLORIFYING PATH OF A GRACE REFLECTOR IN THE WAY WE THINK, LOVE, ACT AND MINISTER.

Now the phrase “the end of all things is at hand” literally means the completion (το τέλος) or the finale of the character and quality of all things is nearing (εγγιζω). The perfect tense means the process of ending things has started in the past and continues right now to the present time. The word “all things” has reference to all eschatological things. **The end refers to the completion of eschatological things, which for the Church Age is the Rapture.** Peter had just told these believers that there would come a judgment against those unbelievers who had wronged them (I Peter 4:5); now he brings up the eschatological truth that the end is also near for the believer.

At one time, Peter had been focused on a fishing business that featured boats, nets, marketing, selling and buying homes and enjoying life. But that had changed. He had changed. His focus was on seeing Jesus Christ and he believed it would be soon.

Peter believed the Rapture was nearing. He believed that there were no further historical events that needed to take place eschatologically before the completion of the Church Age. This is a critical factor to Peter's eschatology because he was not looking for Matthew's predicted signs (Matthew 24:4-31), he believed in the imminent, at hand rapture.

He also believed in view of that it should change the way we think and live. Ever since the days of the apostles, the imminent return of Jesus Christ has been believed and taught. If you don't sense the end is near, there is something wrong with your spirituality and your eschatology (II Peter 3:4-7).

Now there are four specific eschatological focus points that Peter wants believers to have in view of the fact that the Church Age is nearing its completion:

ESCHATOLOGICAL FOCUS #1 – In view of the fact that the end is near we need a proper mind so we may properly pray. **4:7**

In Greek, the noun "prayer" is plural, meaning Peter has more in view than just one prayer; he has in view many prayers. **One thing the realization that the end is near should do is make us more driven to pray and pray more often than normal.**

Now in order to have an effective prayer life, we need a proper mindset and a proper mindset is comprised of two areas:

Area #1 - Sound judgment - be reasonable, sensible and right in mind.

Area #2 - Sober spirit - not intoxicated or befuddled both mentally and spiritually.

The word means to be calm and circumspect (Smith, p. 303). This is just the opposite of one who lives life in an extreme, mental frenzy. As we near the end, doctrines will become more bizarre and confusing.

Believers who want to glorify God will stay steady and stable in their minds and they will stay fervent in prayer. A key to staying calm in mind is prayer. When you see someone who is totally anxious and given to some extremism, you can know not much time in prayer really exists. Prayer will calm you, it will stabilize you.

This is a time when we need to be people who are theologically and mentally sharp, not fuzzy. We need to be stable, not jumpy or flighty. When spiritually-minded believers sense the end is nearing, instead of being drawn to various narcotics or to various winds of doctrine as an escapism, they will be drawn more and more to solid minds and sound prayer.

The phrase "for the purpose of prayer" indicates that **prayer is an expected discipline in view of Christ's return**, but only those with sound judgment and sober spirit will do it. As we near the Rapture, we need to be people of prayer. We need to pray more, not less. We need to be people of sound and sober minds.

We are living in a time when there are manias of all types, both secular and religious. These things excite the vast majority of people. We need to be people who have "cool heads and balanced minds." We need to be people of prayer, not given to the irrational, the emotional, and the non-sensible intoxications of world thought and opinion.

ESCHATOLOGICAL FOCUS #2 – In view of the fact that the end is near we need a proper love so we may cover a multitude of sins. **4:8**

One of the biggest emotional encouragements that God's people need is to know they are loved. In spite of their quirks, their oddities, their slipups and hang-ups, to know they are loved. As we near the end this becomes of paramount importance.

Now you will notice that **verse 8** begins with the words “above all” (προ παντων). Those words in Greek mean this is of extreme importance. This goes before and above the character and quality of all things.

We have a responsibility to see to it that we demonstrate a love for each other. We are to keep fervent in our love for each other, which means we are not to let the fire of our love die down. Love reaches out and it stretches out to others. In the Olympic Games, at the finish line of a race the victor would stretch out and lean as far forward as possible because the end of the race was in view. So it is with us, as we see the end of the Church Age, we need to lean forward in reaching out and in loving one another.

Now what reveals this kind of love? Forgiveness. Love forgives over and over and over again (Proverbs 10:12; Matthew 18:21-35). It is not that love lives a lie that denies the sin, it lives with a love that covers it. That word “cover” (καλυπτω) means to veil, to conceal, to not reveal something (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 229). This is just the opposite of Apocalypse which means to reveal or remove the veil. As we near the end of the Church Age, it will become more and more important that we protect one another and not reveal all the stuff we know.

The reason why love is given in the context of sin is because we are all weak sinners. We are all weak, failing people and we need to love one another in the church because we sure won't be loved in the world. We all miss the mark of God's perfect righteousness, but when we demonstrate true love for one another, a multitude of sins are covered up in the church of God. We are talking here about corporate church life and worship. Don't think for one second that you aren't being watched. When you verbally bash your brother or sister in Christ people in this world take notice. **Just remember this; you are most like other men when you judge and criticize, but you are most like God when you forgive.**

In every church, there are some people who rub you the wrong way. There will be those who come who don't quite have the social graces you wished they had. There will be those who talk way too much. There will be those who don't get along with much of anybody. There will be those who think they are more spiritual than everyone else. There will be those who grumble and whine and complain and that is all they seem to do. There will be those who just can't seem to make the church their top priority. There will be those who are exciting to be around and those who are drab. There will be those with whom you can connect and those with whom you can't. The temptation is to say forget them, who needs them.

The Biblical admonition is to love them. Love is the answer. It continues to overlook and tolerate. Just like Paul said “Love does not take into account a wrong suffered” (I Cor. 13:5)

ESCHATOLOGICAL FOCUS #3 – In view of the fact that the end is near we need to be hospitable to one another without complaining. **4:9**

Now I want to point out that the pronoun “another” means another of the same kind; that is we are to be hospitable to those in the church who are in Christ. Certainly not to heretics (II John 10); God wants us hospitable to other believers. Not just to people we like who meet our standards. Not just to those who are fun to be with.

I have a pastor friend who started fellowship dinners much like we have in this church. Some people wouldn’t take the time to eat one meal a month with some others because they didn’t like them or seem to connect with them. They had their special “click” group and they didn’t want certain people in their home because they didn’t think they were worth the effort or time. So they refused to be in the fellowship dinners. Some people didn’t meet their standards. You do not see that in the Word of God. According to Scripture, we are to be hospitable to all in the family.

Showing hospitality to someone back in the first century was much more difficult than it is today. There were no nice motels, no good restaurants, so this meant that you literally had to put yourself out to offer someone food and shelter. Getting to church was not easy in the first century. We don’t even begin to grasp the sacrificial logistics that were in view. A key teacher, such as an apostle, or an apostolic trained emissary such as Titus or Timothy, would often travel many miles to meet with believers at church. Families would get up early Sunday and would walk, sometimes for several miles to church. The matter of hospitality was more than just a nice thing; it was a key to survival for many of these first century believers. This was a valued attribute of a Christian in the first century, especially when believers were under attack.

Now apparently there was a problem in this area which is still prevalent today in the church. People needed to be reminded that the attitude they needed to have in their hospitality was to be hospitable “without complaining.” That is the real threat to hospitality, is complaining about the fact you have to do it. That word “complain” (γογγυσμος) means to mutter and murmur about it (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 94). It wasn’t that you couldn’t get the believer to show hospitality; it was that you couldn’t get them to stop complaining about having to do it. To show hospitality requires energy, preparation, cleanup and some expense. There are some people who moan and groan about it every step of the way.

I am totally convinced that one of the areas that we need to think carefully about as we think of the Rapture is not only what we are doing but the motive or the attitude we have in doing it. There are several passages of Scripture that clearly reveal God carefully analyzes not just the Christian action but the Christian motive and attitude for the action - Matthew 6:1-4; I Corinthians 4:5; Colossians 3:22-25.

If you truly believe the Rapture of the church is nearing, then stop whining and complaining every time you have to do something for the people of God. Show hospitality without complaining, without grumbling and murmuring. We all need a good dose of what is in this verse. As John Henry Jowett said, “True love is a splendid host.”

ESCHATOLOGICAL FOCUS #4 – In view of the fact that the end is near we need to utilize our own grace gift . **4:10-11**

If you really believe Jesus Christ is soon to appear, you must be concerned about what you are doing for God.

Each person has received from God a gift and each is to use that gift to serve one another. We are to be a good steward of the gift God has given us and we are to use it in such a way that it reflects the Grace of God.

In **verse 11** there is a twofold classification of the gifts:

(Classification #1) - There are Speaking gifts

The speaking gift is to be utilized in presenting the true things of God, the utterances of God. We don't have a right to use a speaking gift of God to present our opinions or views or philosophies of life. We need to base what we say on the written Word of God. Here is where many, who may or may not have a speaking gift, fall short. They either do not know what the Word of God actually says so they just say what they think or they don't have the gift and just like to talk in front of people. A speaking gift can unravel God's Word. Some will be able to do it at a children level, some at a teen level, some on the job or in the home and others are skilled to do it at a church level. All speaking gifts are needed. Preaching, teaching, evangelism.

(Classification #2) - There are Serving gifts.

Serving gifts are more behind the scenes, but they are an extremely important part of God's work. The body would be crippled without them. Some give, some help, some show mercy, some encourage and some pray. They are gifted by God to do their ministry.

The purpose for using any gift is to glorify God, not ourselves. We will also observe that God supplies various strength levels to utilize the gift.

Time is running out for this Church Age and we need to be focused.

When I look through these verses it becomes quite evident that if we really believe the Rapture is nearing we ought to:

- 1) Be more involved in prayer.
- 2) Be more interested in loving our brothers and sisters, not criticizing them.
- 3) Be more intent on helping each other and showing hospitality to each other with a good attitude.
- 4) Be more interested in using our gifts and abilities in the church in a God-glorifying way.