

Women's Bible Study of I & 2 Peter

Lesson 14 / I Peter 4:7-11 Notes

Pray, Love, and Serve One Another

End of the world predictions have abounded throughout the centuries as humanity has sought to understand what God has declared plainly in his Word to be hidden. In Mark 13:32-33 Jesus, speaking to his disciples says, *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is."* Yet, despite this clear directive of the Lord Jesus himself, many well-meaning Christians have been led astray by various self-proclaimed "prophets" who have claimed to know the exact day and time of the end. In our passage for today, Peter continues to speak of coming judgment by emphasizing the nearness of Christ's return. In doing so he makes clear that the knowledge of this nearness should motivate the believer to obedience, and the fact that we do not know exactly when Christ will return is a God ordained mystery meant to keep us watchful and productive.

The end of all things is at hand

The terminology Peter uses in vs. 4 is meant to make clear to believers that the second coming of Christ is *imminent*. All of the major events of redemptive history have taken place; everything is ready for the Lord to come and establish His kingdom on earth. Wayne Grudem speaking of this says, *"Rather than thinking of world history in terms of earthly kings and kingdoms, Peter thinks in terms of 'redemptive history.' From that perspective, all the previous acts in the drama of redemption have been completed- creation, fall, the calling of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the kingdom of Israel, the exile in Babylon and the return, and the birth of Christ, his life, death and resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit to establish his church."* Peter recognized that the time he was living in, the church age, was a part of the last days, the "last act" as it were, and while he never succumbed to making predictions, he did believe the judgment could happen at any moment. Peter lived with an immense sense

of expectancy, as seen in previous chapters when he speaks of *“a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time,”* (1:5) *“the revelation of Jesus Christ,”* (1:7) *“the day of visitation,”* (2:12) and the fact that those who malign believers *“will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”*(4:5) This knowledge kept him sober-minded and passionately focused on the task Jesus had assigned to him: to build the church by lovingly feeding them the Word and teaching them how to follow the Lord. (Matt. 16:18, John 21:15b) We have seen by studying I Peter, the apostle did indeed fulfill his calling, and the truth he lived and taught continues to live on through the church age as individual believers also heed the admonition to live as though Christ could return at any moment.

Be of sound judgment and sober spirit

The ever present reality that Christ could return at any moment should drive the believer’s mindset, resulting in sound judgment and sober mindedness. While the words used here have closely related meanings they do have unique slants. The word *sophroneo* (translated sound judgment, self-controlled, or sensible) means to be in one’s right mind; to be under control and not carried away by an errant view of self, undue emotion, or uncontrolled passion. Simply stated, it means we are to maintain a godly mindset at all times. I Thes. 5:4-6 brings this idea to life when it says *“you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.”* For the believer, because he has been transferred from *“darkness into God’s marvelous light,”* he no longer is to live flippantly, as though the Lord’s return is far off. He is to be spiritually alert, walking in the light of the Word, and maintaining proper spiritual priorities. As he puts on the mind of Christ, he learns to be discerning, spiritually perceptive and observant, and focused on doing God’s will. He is able to maintain sound judgment, solely as he learns to walk in the Spirit and daily submit to Christ.

Secondly, the believer is commanded to be of sober spirit. The Greek word used is *nepho* which not only forbids drunkenness, but it goes much farther in that it forbids **any** intoxication of the mind that would inhibit one’s ability to be

spiritually observant and alert. Peter is well aware of humanity's tendency to become consumed and fixated with the things of this world, so much so that it causes them to lose their spiritual concentration. It is though he is saying, "Stay focused on what matters-eternal things! Don't let your mind wander away from the truth!" As Grudem says, *"We today might well consider the dangers presented by such inherently "good" thing such as career, possessions, recreation, reputation, friendships, scholarship, or authority."* These pursuits, while morally neutral in themselves, can easily become idolatrous distractions if one is not careful.

Also, it is interesting to note that while Peter is trying to stir up effectual prayer in this chapter, in I Peter 5:8 he commands sober-mindedness again, as a way to resist the devil. He knows there is no possible way a person can say no to temptation unless he is in his right mind, thinking with clarity and maintaining a biblical focus. He makes clear that without sound judgment and a sober spirit the believer will lose his grip on eternal realities which are meant to keep him moving forward on the path of godliness.

For the purpose of prayer

The reason the believer is to maintain sound judgment and a sober spirit is for the purpose of prayer. Without spiritual alertness and a godly mindset, prayer becomes misguided and governed by worldly priorities and pursuits. This idea is similarly expressed in James 4:3 when the apostle James, warning against worldliness and referencing prayer says, *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the World is enmity with God?"*

Peter seems to have these same ideas in mind, and clearly wants his readers to know that there is a specific way to pray effectively and appropriately. For one, as the believer learns to be spiritually alert he becomes more discerning of the true spiritual needs around him, and is able to interpret information by the Spirit's guidance. This is vital to praying effectively. Secondly, a truly alert and godly mindset flows out of a deep relationship with the Christ where the Word is permeating the believer's thoughts and actions. As MacArthur says, "Believers

cannot pray properly if their minds are unstable due to worldly pursuits, ignorance of divine truth, or indifference to divine purposes. Saints who seriously study Scripture and discover its profound truths about God experience rich communion with Him, understanding what Paul called, ‘the mind of Christ.’” Having Christ’s mindset in turn, allows the believer to “pray in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20) which will always prove effective because it is intercession that is according to God’s will. (Rom. 8:26-27)

Above all keep fervent in your love for one another

In light of Christ’s imminent return, believers are also reminded to make love among themselves their highest priority. By saying “above all” Peter emphasizes the supreme importance of the virtue and by using fervent he makes clear intense effort will be required. Fervent, or in some translations earnest or unflinching, has the idea of a person running with maximum effort, at top speed, and with full intensity. There is a clear sense in which it is probable high sacrifice may be involved and therefore every “spiritual muscle” must be engaged. This type of love is designed to transcend insult, mistreatment, and injury from others, while forgiving what seems unreasonable. While willing to absorb the cost of severe mistreatment, the guiding principle of this love is that **it always seeks what is spiritually best for others**. At times, biblical confrontation and admonishment may be required, but in all cases the believer must be willing to persevere in doing all he can to represent God’s love to the offender, especially forgiving sin personally directed at him, and never holding a grudge or speaking ill of his brother or sister in any way.

Because love covers a multitude of sins

The motivation for having fervent love for one another is that love by nature inherently seeks to cover sin. It is willing to absorb the cost of another’s sin, regardless of the personal pain involved, and is willing to forgive at all times. Ultimately God himself is the perfect embodiment of this truth. Romans 5:8 illustrates the point when it says, “*God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*” True biblical love is such that it lives for the spiritual welfare of others. It “*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all*

*things, endures all things.” (1 Cor 13:6) While it “holds no record of wrong,” (1 Cor. 13:5) it is also willing to confront sin as a way of acting on behalf of the beloved. James 5:19- 20 illustrates this idea well when it says, “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death, and will **cover a multitude of sins.**” By acting, with passion, on behalf of the sinning party, the believer who engages in even the most difficult task of biblical confrontation and in the end sees the fruit of repentance in the sinning party’s life, witnesses much sin being covered as God ultimately grants forgiveness, and reconciliation occurs. Of course, in this situation there is an apparent heart of unbelief and rebellion, which dictates a more confrontational, course of action. The vast majority of situations within the body of Christ do not require this type of action, for as Macarthur says, “We are not perfect, and as long as we’re in this fallen flesh, we will sin. And the only thing that is going to ride over the top of that and keep us together is love. Love is always hiding, kaluptō. Love is always hiding a multitude of sins, that is its character. To put it simply, love forgives, and forgives, and forgives, and forgives, and forgives. And if we don’t have that in the church, we’re in real trouble.”*

Be hospitable to one another without complaint

Fervent love finds practical expression in showing hospitality to the body of Christ. Peter makes clear that the love of God that has been given to us shows no distinctions, and plays no favorites. (James 2:1-9) It is indeed a love that transcends all cultural and socioeconomic barriers, and enables us to love anyone simply on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. (Matt. 25:40-45) In fact, hospitality defined is the act of showing love to strangers, not merely to one’s kin or close companions. In the life of the early church many believers lived a more itinerant lifestyle, and were dependent upon fellow believers they most likely had never met to open their homes for them to stay in. This was because the vast majority of places to lodge, outside of this option, were unsuitable or places of ill repute. Some have noted that had it not been for believers showing hospitality during this time, the early church may have not survived. It was clearly a vital practice. While it might seem easy to dismiss the call to be hospitable as just an

early church practice, it is critical to understand that the call stands as much today as it did then. One would do well to remember that the heart of hospitality is what matters, and this is revealed in the attitude with which we welcome all other believers into our lives, and in our willingness to serve them sacrificially, and *“without complaint.”* This is only possible because of the love of God which was implanted in our hearts at salvation, and the ongoing work of the Spirit.

Glorify God by using your gifts to serve one another

A second way fervent love finds practical expression is by each believer using his God-given gift to serve the body of Christ. The Greek word used for gift is *charisma*, which means “a free gift of grace” and the passage makes clear that every Christian has received a special, divine enablement for ministry from God. While these gifts are all empowered by the Spirit, each believer’s giftedness is distinctive and ordained by God to fulfill a certain purpose. MacArthur speaking of this says, *“Each believer’s spiritual giftedness is unique as if each were a spiritual snowflake or fingerprint. It is as if God dips his paintbrush into different colors or categories of gifts, on His spiritual palette and paints each Christian a particular blend of colors. Not only does God grant spiritual gifts and arrange them in different ways, (Eph. 4:7) but He also gives believers the necessary faith to exercise them.”*(Rom. 12:3) This knowledge should remind the believer of the tender and intimate love of the Father, and the fact that God has created him and empowered him to accomplish specific good works. (Eph. 2:10)

Additionally, these gifts that God graciously grants are to be employed in serving one another. They are to be something the believer sees as a stewardship—something he has been sacredly entrusted with and will give an account for. Wise stewards are always good managers, and with gifts this means the believer should constantly be seeking to be Spirit filled, and resist the urge to be isolated from the body, for isolation has the effect of weakening the body God has called him to serve. This is because when the believer is isolated his gifts tend to fall into disuse because he has few ways to serve, and also because he tends to have become self-focused. (This of course precludes those who are physically unable to engage fully in the life of the church, but even then it is about the heart’s willingness to be used by God as He determines best.)

In general, God intends for every believer to be active in the body of Christ, and yet as the passage make clear the ways in which this occur vary widely. This is because God's grace is multifaceted (*manifold*), and there are no two people created exactly alike. God has a unique purpose for every believer, and each is vital to the proper functioning of the whole. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that Peter seems to imply there are two broad categories of gifts: speaking gifts and serving gifts. This lines up well with other passages of Scripture where the gifts are addressed. Examples of speaking gifts would include (but are not limited to) preaching, teaching, wisdom, knowledge, discernment, and evangelism. In all of these the key truth to remember is that when employing the gift one must *"speak as one who speaks the oracles of God."* This means one's own ideas cannot be upheld as the standard; only God's. The second category of gift mentioned is the serving gift. This is a very broad category but would include any type of helping or encouraging ministry to others such as gifts of administration, prayer, showing mercy, and giving. With serving gifts it is mentioned that the believer is to *"serve by the strength that God supplies."* In other words, he is not to seek to carry out service in his own strength or for his own recognition, but is to be dependent upon God's enabling power at all times.

Finally, all of this leads to the closing idea that Peter seeks to emphasize. He ends with the fact that in all things, whether in prayer, showing hospitality, or serving one another the end goal is always, *"that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."* This is the one and only motivation every believer should have, and in the end the only one which will sustain a lifetime of loving service.

References:

1. John Brown, *The Geneva Series of Commentaries*, I Peter Volume 1.
2. Wayne Grudem, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, I Peter.
3. John Macarthur, *The Macarthur New Testament Commentary*, I Peter 4:7-11
4. John Macarthur, *Courage in Times of Trouble*, I and 2 Peter Bible Study
4. ESV Study Bible

