

FIRST PETER 4:7-11 "Employ Your Gifts In Serving One Another"

1 Peter 4:7-11 ⁷ The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. ⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaint. ¹⁰ As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 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.

Peter has been speaking of the trials and tribulations these Christians were experiencing in their lives. He has been encouraging them to have the same attitude as Christ, who suffered in the flesh, with the understanding that all suffering in the flesh for Christ has a purpose.

And when we understand that the purpose is to ultimately glorify God, then the willingness to walk in a way that honors the Lord in that trial will be there as the Spirit of God enables us to have the strength to go on. This is why Peter started chapter four the way he did.

He was using Christ as the example of One who knew that suffering for God had a purpose in His life and that purpose was to redeem you and me. We, of course, were not called by Christ to suffer the same way, but Peter's point is that in our suffering we have been called to "live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."... as Peter puts it in verse two.

That's the hard part; understanding that our lives are to be used by God for His will, not ours. Sometimes God will call upon us to suffer for His sake, but if He does He will always provide what we need to walk through the situation as long as we seek Him and love Him, knowing He loves us and desires to use us.

When James wrote his epistle he too understood how suffering for Christ was sometimes a reality, but just like Peter, he understood how God desired to use that suffering to build us up in Christ.

James 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

If there is an area in which we are lacking, God wants to hone that area and cut out the dead wood and prune us in a way that encourages our growth. Pruning can be painful, but God does it not to hurt us but to help us.

This is what Jesus tells us in JOH 15:2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes (The Greek for prunes also means cleans) so that it will be even more fruitful."

Fruit is what God wants us to bear, but if there is something he wants to do to enhance new growth, sometimes the hindering branch needs to be cut out. But whenever our heavenly Father prunes He does so with a hand that is loving, even in the midst of what appears to be hurtful.

JOB 5:18 "For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal."

And so, Peter is saying in our text that this pruning process will make these Christians better servants to bear the kind of fruit God wants from them. The process that God uses to build us up is what we know as sanctification, but sanctification, though prompted by the Spirit, goes forward as we cooperate through submission and obedience to God. To fight it only undermines it.

And what Peter wants of his readers is to understand that this personal relationship with God through Christ must be done on His terms and must be pursued with the understanding that there isn't much time left.

1PE 4:7 "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."

The NAS puts it this way. "The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." The word prayer is actually in the plural and so it is prayers of all types.

"The end of all things is at hand...? Wasn't that said a little less than 2,000 years ago? Yeah. But what Peter was conveying is the

truth, and for us to live as though it will be another 2,000 years is to misunderstand how God wants us to view the total consummation of his plan. We must always be expectant of His imminent return.

All throughout the Scriptures we are given this sudden expectation of the completion of God's plan. Dr. Kistemaker in his commentary on Peter says, "Paul tells the Romans to understand their time in relation to the end, because, he adds, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (Rom.13:11). The writer of Hebrews exhorts the readers of his epistle to meet together for encouragement; then he notes, "All the more as you see the day approaching." (Heb.10:25).

James points to the end of time and comforts his oppressed countrymen with these words: "You too be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.... The Judge is standing at the door" (Jam.5:8-9). And last John alerts his readers to the fact that "this is the last hour" (1Joh.2:18). In the early church believers expected the imminent return of Jesus.

Everything in a Christian's life should revolve around the reality that Jesus could come back today. That's not wishful thinking. It could happen. And as we anticipate Jesus' return it forces us to look beyond our situation in life and look to Him who could return at any moment.

You know God has always dealt with man in a way that made him look with sudden expectation that He will come and deliver. Right after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden God promised to send a Savior, One who would restore life and reestablish the fellowship that was lost because of sin.

Right after that promise we read in GEN 3:20 "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living." That was not simply stating that Eve would birth the world, it addressed the truth that life would be restored and that through her seed the Messiah would come who would restore that life and fellowship they once enjoyed with God.

By faith Adam renamed his wife. Prior to the fall she was named Woman.

GEN 2:23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of

man." The name woman in the Hebrew is *Ishshah*. Her name was now Eve, or *Chavvah* in the Hebrew, which means life giver.

After Eve became pregnant with Cain, by faith, she thought the promise was now fulfilled. We read in GEN 4:1 "Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." The idea here is she sees the fulfillment of God's promise in the coming seed of Cain. The imminent coming of the Messiah is what she had in mind.

Of course we know that many years would pass before the Messiah would come, but still many believers expected to see the Messiah in their lifetime. One such believer was Simeon who longed for the day when Messiah would come.

LUK 2:25-32 "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

He was an O.T. believer who, by faith, looked for the Consolation of Israel. Of course he was born in a time when that consolation would be fulfilled. He didn't know that, but he still longed to see the Messiah. And then we're told that the Spirit of God revealed to him that his longing would be rewarded.

You and I don't know for certain if we've been born in a time which will see the second coming of Jesus, but that shouldn't make any difference. Our longing for our consolation should be ever present. Peter knew that many people's fire would grow cold because time had passed without Jesus coming back.

2PE 3:3-10 "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's

word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief...."

A thief doesn't announce himself for all to see. When Christ comes for His church no one will know the day or hour, but we don't want to be caught unaware or found in a condition where we're not prepared, as we are longing for Him and looking for Him as we love and serve Him today.

More than ever we must make a conscious effort to draw close to God. This is what Peter implies in verse 7.. 1PE 4:7 "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."

Prayer is our way of communicating with God, showing our dependence on Him for all things. Dr. Wayne Grudem makes an interesting observation. He say's," The reason given for being sane and sober, (clear minded and self-controlled), is for your prayers; the plural suggests specific individual prayers throughout each day. The idea is not simply 'so that you can pray' (NIV), but in order to pray more effectively, more appropriately, Christians should be alert to events and evaluate them correctly in order to be able to pray more intelligently.....

..... Peter's words also imply that prayer based on knowledge and mature evaluation of a situation is more effective prayer (otherwise there would be no relationship between being sane and sober and one's prayers). What this verse teaches could well be put into practice when reading the newspaper, listening to the news, traveling to work and so on."

By the way, the idea of "being sane", "clear minded" (NIV), or having "sound judgment" (NAS) in the Greek suggests preserving your sanity as William Barclay puts it. He makes a very interesting connection between preserving your sanity and prayer.

He say's, "The great characteristic of sanity is that it sees things in their proper proportions; it sees what things are important and what

are not; it is not swept away by sudden and transitory enthusiasms; it is prone neither to unbalanced fanaticism nor to unrealized indifference. It is only when we see the affairs of earth in the light of eternity that we see them in their proper proportions; it is when God is given His proper place that everything takes its proper place."

So, one very important thing which should be heightened in light of the end of all things being at hand is prayer. Prayer, which is the result of sane judgments and a sober spirit. Something else which should be at the forefront of our lives is a concern for one another.

1Pe.4:8 "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

In the Greek the emphasis is just as it's recorded here in the English. "Above all or above everything else', and then what follows is connected to that emphasis. What follows is our love for one another. I like the way the NAS puts it. "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another. "

In my study this week I found that the different commentators had some great things to say on these verses and so I'm spreading it around and must include Dr. Hiebert. He states that "Above all" (*pro panton*) places love at the summit as of paramount importance in Christian social relations. Peter had already mentioned love [in this letter four times]. He fully realized its importance in all the relations of believers with one another. At a never-to-be-forgotten interview, the Master reminded him three times that the supreme qualification for ministry was love."

Now when we talk about love in this text we're not talking primarily about an emotion that is dependent on the response we get from another person. Rather, we're talking about an act of the will which desires the best for others. In fact, this is the reason that love can be commanded by Peter here.

You can't command emotions, you can command obedience. And so love, (*agape*), is an action we do, not an emotion we wait to fall upon us. It's a willingness to submit God, to obey His word by trusting His power for the doing of it.

This kind of love is able to be patient, it will be kind when others are not so kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps

no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1Cor.13:4-8)

This is the kind of love Peter speaks of in our text. But then he adds, this kind of "love covers a multitude of sins." Now, we know that God's love for us covers all of our sins. He has paid our penalty for sin. But this verse is talking about human relationships with each other.

How does love for each other cover a multitude of sins? Well, it's not as though sin is disregarded as much as it's placed in its proper perspective and then handled appropriately and biblically. We're told for example that when a brother sins against us we go to them and try to restore them.

But that will not always be the case for every type of sin. If we had to go to a brother or sister every time someone sinned against us we'd spend all of our waking lives going to someone. Peter is saying that there are times when you can let things slide, knowing that it may be the kind of sin which probably won't be repeated.

And so, if someone is having a bad day and they dump on me, I can cover that and not let it get in the way of our relationship, because I know that it's probably not personal. There are other times when someone is sinning in a way that's not necessarily hurting the body at large, though it may be hampering that person. But maybe that person is not willing to listen under the circumstances. And so instead of making a big deal of it I'll let them come to the point where God can break through and make them open as I pray for them.

Every case will be different, but this is partially why Peter commands us to seek sound judgment in verse 7. In those times when restraint is the better solution we should be forgiving and patient. However, if the sin persists, where it's now hurting the rest of the Body or hurting that individual to a point where it could get serious, we should go to them.

But here in our text the implication is that someone has sinned against you. And we should love them enough to cover that sin under certain circumstances. The opposite of that would be to harbor resentment toward a person and let that fester. If we're not willing to go to a person we feel has hurt us, then we must cover that sin without resentment. Let it go. If you don't it can stir up hate instead of love.

This is what the writer of Proverbs says in PRO 10:12 "Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs."

Dr. Wayne Grudem puts it this way: "Where love abounds in a fellowship of Christians, many small offences, and even some large ones, are readily overlooked and forgotten. But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding, and conflicts abound - to Satan's perverse delight."

HEB 12:15 "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

A biblical love will nip that in the bud and the peace that God desires in the Body of Christ will be promoted as well as the purity of the truth.

One practical outworking of agape love is shown in 1PE 4:9 "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." Or as the NAS puts it: "Be hospitable to one another without complaint."

There's nothing more irritating than someone doing something for you begrudgingly, like they're doing you a favor, even though they'd rather be doing anything else. Hospitality is one of those areas of life we should all be willing to do at times. But it's important to do it with the right attitude.

Now, hospitality is usually viewed in our culture as something we do when it's time to ask someone over for coffee or dinner or just to get together with someone from time to time. That's not quite what Peter has in mind though it could certainly include that.

Hospitality was one of the primary means of spreading the gospel in the first century. People would travel great distances to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to an area. More often than not they would need a place to stay. They didn't have the Hyatt Regency in those days and they wouldn't have been able to afford it if they did. Maybe Motel 6.

In those days there were inns which put people up, but it was very dangerous and the types of people who would use these inns often used them for sinful indulgences. And so Peter is encouraging these Christians to avail themselves to open their homes to such men and women of God and not force them to put themselves in harm's way.

But there was another practical way of being hospitable. Almost all churches, for the first 200 years after Christ, met in homes. Periodically if the price was right and the pagans allowed it they would meet in schools like Paul did on one occasion. But even then most churches had bible study in homes as well as worship on the Lord's Day.

Someone had to be hospitable enough to open their homes to such activity. But being hospitable is not simply opening your doors. Being hospitable in God's sight is doing it with a grateful heart and a willingness that doesn't grumble and complain in the process.

Of course this isn't limited to hospitality. Every area of service to Christ should be done in a way that doesn't grumble or complain. Why? Well, it's not very loving to the brethren, but more important it shows an ingratitude to God. It's actually grumbling and complaining to God for having to serve Him in any capacity.

But that defeats the whole purpose of being called into the Kingdom of God because He called us to be servants, both to Him and others in this world. Sometimes the attitude is, 'God save me and give me life but don't bother me with having to deal with people.'

No, here's what Peter says in verse 10, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

I prefer the NAS on this verse which says, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

The word gift in the Greek is indefinite in its usage and so it's not limited to only one gift but could include more than one. In fact Paul speaks of seeking gifts in the plural when addressing the Corinthians.

1CO 14:1 "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual GIFTS, especially the gift of prophecy."

1CO 12:31 "But eagerly desire the greater GIFTS."

And so, don't think you're limited to just one. And don't ever think you'll never have any. Every believer has a gift or gifts to be used by God in the Body of Christ and therefore every believer is vital to that particular body or church.

But there's something very important to understand about the gifts of the Spirit and that is that they are gifts. Dr. Hiebert states that the "term gift (*charisma*), derived from the same root as grace (*charis*), denotes something that has been freely and graciously given, a favor bestowed. This noun, which outside the Pauline epistles occurs only here in the N.T., denotes any capacity or endowment that can be used for the benefit of the church. The reference is not to be restricted to miraculous gifts."

Regarding any gift God graciously gives Dr. Kistemaker says, "a believer cannot create them or claim them, because he receives them from God, who grants them freely to His people. In short, these gifts belong to God and must be used in the interest of His Kingdom. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others."

And this is why Peter urges his readers in light of their gifts to "faithfully administer God's grace in its various forms." Or as the NAS puts it be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

A steward is one who serves another and distributes what belongs to another. We belong to God and His gifts are to be used in a way that brings glory to Him. We can't puff ourselves up or draw attention to ourselves just because God has given us any particular gift.

If God didn't give it to you, you wouldn't have it. But since we do have it we must be good stewards of the gifts God has given which means we use them to His honor and glory. A good steward takes into account that the master is concerned what we do with what belongs to Him.

A good steward takes special care to handle the gifts given. A good steward looks to the Master who gives the strength and grace to use that gift effectively. Don't take your gift or gifts for granted and seek God as to how He would have you use your gift in the Body. That's what it means to serve one another.

I like the way William Barclay puts it. "The Christian must always be under the conviction that nothing he possesses of material goods or personal qualities is his own; it all belongs to God and he must ever use what he has in the interests of God to whom he is always answerable."

Let me end by quoting Peter himself in verse eleven. And may we take it to heart and desire to honor God with every area of our lives.

1PE 4:11 "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

We'll expand on this next time.

To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.