

***PEOPLE WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY***

**1 Peter 4:7-11**

**February 22, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

Martin Luther was once asked what he would do if he knew the end would come today. We might have expected some deep, profound theological response from the one who was known as “The Father of the Reformation.” He replied that he would plant a tree and pay his taxes. What Luther meant, of course, is that he lived every day in light of the end and that he would do nothing more or nothing less than the normal course of any day required.

Peter begins this paragraph with a reminder, “**The end of all things is near.**” In v. 2 he exhorted his readers to live the rest of their days not for the lust of men, but for the will of God. Here, Peter reminds them that life as they know it will one day come to an end. The world and all that is in it will not last forever. Peter states this as an encouragement to these who were in the midst of persecution, making it clear that they were living the final age of God’s redemptive history. Wayne Grudem remarks, “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, the birth of Christ, his life, death, and resurrection, his ascension to heaven, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit to establish the church. The great ‘last act’, the church age, had been continuing for about thirty years by the time Peter wrote. Thus the curtain could fall any time, ushering in the return of Christ and the end of the age. All things are ready: *the end of all things* (the ‘goal’ to which ‘all’ these events have been leading) *is at hand.*”<sup>1</sup>

In other words everything on God’s timeline concerning the redemption of man *except* the return of Christ in judgment has occurred, a judgment that Peter reminded his readers of in v. 6. But Grudem makes an observation. Some thirty years had passed since Christ’s ascension and Pentecost. Surely they had been tutored along the way with these words before Peter wrote them. The immanency of the Lord’s return was probably the topic of many a discussion around the dinner table. Now they were being persecuted for their faith and might be wondering, “Where is the promise?” As a matter of fact, Peter a few years later alludes to this in his second letter in describing the mockers who made light of the fact that in spite of their continued suggestions about His return, everything continued to rock right along (2 Pet. 3:3-4). In that letter Peter reminded them that God’s watch does not tick like our watch (2 Pet. 3:8) and then describes what “**the end of all things**” means, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (3:10); “all these things are to be destroyed in this way” (3:11); “the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!” (3:12). Peter then asked a question, a question that we must still consider 2,000 years later:

**2 Peter 3:11** – Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?

You see, nothing has changed, “**The end of all things is near.**” If you were asked Luther’s question this morning, what would your answer be? What sort of people ought the church to be

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *TNTC: 1 Peter*, 172-173.

in light of Christ's immanent return and impending judgment? Peter says that the church ought to be a people that have a sense of urgency, not of panic or fear, but an urgency that is grounded in their trust in the Lord. This urgency ought to be marked by three things.

### **I. Prayer (4:7)**

**“Therefore,”** in light of this, Peter writes, **“be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”** Peter has already mentioned the subject of prayer twice in chapter 3. The inconsiderate husband does not have his prayers heard (3:7), but the Lord's ear is open to the righteous (3:12). Both of these demonstrate that it is not the quantity of faith that is important for an effective prayer life, but the quality of life as a believer.<sup>2</sup> Peter further develops that here, stating that the believer is to be characterized by **“sound judgment and sober spirit.”** The two words in the Greek are close in meaning and should be taken together. It means to have a clear head in order to make good decisions.

In the midst of persecution, this is of utmost importance. In the opening verses of the chapter Peter reminded them of their former life, a life that was marked by a lifestyle of drunkenness (v. 3). When I first read the word **“sober”** in our text my initial thought was, “Of course this doesn't simply mean ‘not drunk.’” However, in the context, that is surely an implication. Peter's exhortation, particularly in light of the nearness of the end, is for them to keep a clear mind, make wise decisions, and not succumb to that old way of life, a life that was one of a drunkard.

This warning of sobriety in the last days did not originate with Peter. Jesus spoke the following to His disciples:

**Luke 21:34-36** – <sup>35</sup> “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; <sup>35</sup> for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. <sup>36</sup> 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.”

We find similar language in Mark 13 in the exhortations to “watch” and “pray.” Matthew expands on Christ's words:

**Matthew 24:35-39; 44-51** – <sup>35</sup> “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. <sup>36</sup> But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. <sup>37</sup> For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be... <sup>44</sup> For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*. <sup>45</sup> Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. <sup>47</sup> Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. <sup>48</sup> But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; <sup>50</sup> the master of that slave will come on a

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<sup>2</sup> Angus Macleay, *Teaching 1 Peter*, 205-206.

day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour which he does not know,<sup>51</sup> and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here we see the importance of soberness and a clear mind in relation to the end of time. Of course, this does extend beyond simply drunkenness. The implication is that in the midst of suffering, especially the intense suffering at the end of the age, our minds and hearts must be focused on Christ and not on the things of this earth. Of course, we are to have this mind at all times. But let’s face it, it is easier when things are going well. Remember Habakkuk, how he started off wrong in his approach to God because he was overwhelmed by his circumstances and forgot the author of those circumstances. In the end, however, he heard the Lord’s report and he feared Him (Hab. 3:1). And what was Habakkuk doing when he voiced those words? He was praying!

ILLUS: Peter’s lack in Luke 22

That is what Peter tells his readers is of great importance. A mark that they truly understand the seriousness of the Lord’s judgment is that they pray. They pray for protection and safety. They pray for one another, individually and corporately. One of the joys we have in this church is gathering together to pray for one another, demonstrating our dependence on God for all things. We have prayer guides that you can take home with you and continue to pray for our missionaries and leaders and those in the flock. Peter says, “**be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.**”

The nearness to the end has at times in church history caused Christians to act lose their heads and act irrationally.<sup>3</sup>

ILLUS: *88 Reasons Why the Lord Will Return in 1988*

## **II. Love (4:8-9)**

Jesus warned in Matthew 24:12 that in the last days, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.” Here, Peter stresses the importance of love within the church family, “**Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another.**” Persecution often leads to division in the church rather than promoting the harmony and unity that Peter stressed in 2:17, “Love the brotherhood”; in 3:8, “All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.” That is the love that the body is to exhibit toward one another. This love Peter says is exhibited in two ways.

### **1. Forgiveness (v. 8)**

Peter quotes Proverbs 10:12 – Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions. James 5:19-20 –<sup>19</sup> My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,<sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

One of the sure marks that one loves the brethren is that he is quick to forgive. He is slow to judge, especially when his focus is on the judgment that awaits the believer at the Lord’s return.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *NAC: 1,2 Peter, Jude*, 211.

They remember their standing with God because of Christ's love for them. They return it in their love for Him and for others.

ILLUS: Peter and forgiveness (Matthew 18) Church discipline, then Peter piously comes to Jesus and asks, Matthew 18:21-22 – <sup>21</sup> “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” Jesus then shares the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Here we see the importance of having an attitude of forgiveness, of being a quicker forgiver. Peter does not mean that by our love for the brethren we somehow merit forgiveness for our own sins before God, but as Edmund Hiebert points out, “Peter is thinking of the life of the Church, not of relations between man and God. The view that love is covering another's sins best suits Peter's purpose to promote the unity and peace of the whole Christian community.”<sup>4</sup> So the thought here is that if we really love the brethren, we will be quick to forgive the sins of others and overlook those things that annoy us. If you struggle with this, I would ask you to consider how you might annoy Christ! Genuine love is exhibited by being a quicker forgiver. **“Love covers a multitude of sins.”**

## **2. Friendship (v. 9)**

Love is also shown in the exercise of hospitality to one another. And perhaps it might be good to remind us that this means all ‘one another's’ in the body. We can't pick and choose those that we would rather hang out with. As a matter of fact, when we remember the context of Peter's writing, we see this hospitality is to include everyone. This friendship extends beyond the fellowship of two or three, which is important. However, at the time, church gatherings would have taken place within the homes of believers. The exercise of hospitality was therefore vital in order for the church family to have somewhere to meet. Furthermore, as one writer suggests, such hospitality could not be limited to the invitation of a few friends, but would need to include a welcome to all who might wish to gather together.<sup>5</sup> Peter says that this should be the heart of every believer in the church, **“without complaint”** or grumbling. Simply put, they love to be with the brethren, all the brethren, whenever and wherever they meet, joyfully willing to open their home for such gatherings.

Of course, in the midst of persecution, we see this happen without a second thought in many places today.

ILLUS: China

Given this, is there a point where the church can become too large? I simply ask the question.

## **III. Ministry (4:10-11)**

Peter now shifts to the gifts that believers have received by God's grace. The New Testament contains various lists of spiritual gifts that are bestowed on believers with a view that the believer is only dispensing that which God has given to them to give to others. And Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that these gifts are to be used “for the common good.” In other

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<sup>4</sup> D. Edmund Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 272.

<sup>5</sup> Macleay, 208.

words, we are given these gifts for the sole purpose of serving others, not ourselves. The list of gifts in the New Testament is not exhaustive, and the believer does not have all the gifts. It is a fallacy of some movements today that suggest that you are somehow a lesser Christian if you don't have certain gifts, especially the miraculous gifts. Scripture plainly teaches that the believer has at least one of these spiritual gifts, probably more, but not all of them. Further, God might specially anoint a person with a gift for a particular purpose at a particular time. Having said that, I think it important to say that I am of the persuasion that the miraculous gifts have ceased. Those were for a time of special revelation in the history of God's church before the completion of the canon. We no longer have revelation in that God has given us all we need in His Word. Therefore, we no longer need those miraculous gifts to attest to His truth. I would refer you to my messages in 1 Corinthians for more concerning this.

In our text, Peter does not name the gifts specifically, but lists the categories of speech and service.

### **1. Speech**

Those whose gifts involve speaking (perhaps teaching or encouragement) Peter says must use them **"as one who is speaking the utterances of God."** This does not mean that the words spoken are infallible; rather they are spoken with the same care and seriousness of the prophets and the apostles. They understand James' warning in James 3:1, "Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."

**Ephesians 4:11-16** – <sup>11</sup> And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup> *but speaking the truth in love*, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even Christ*, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Richard Belcher notes four things related to those who have the speech gifts from 1 Peter:

- (1) He must speak the Word of God
- (2) He must speak in agreement with the Word of God
- (3) He must not speak just his own ideas
- (4) He must not claim to speak his own supposed revelations

### **2. Service**

Likewise, those who serve are to do so in God's strength and not their own. They minister not in human ability or human wisdom but by God's might and strength. And all of this is also in love:

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3** – <sup>1</sup> If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to

remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

*Our speech without love is nothing (v. 1)*

*Our ministry without love is nothing (v. 2)*

*Our deeds without love are nothing (v. 3)*

### **Conclusion**

How can we know if we are living with this sense of urgency? Peter answers this by way of benediction, **“So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

*Be of sound judgment and sober in your prayers for His glory.*

*Fervently love one another for His glory.*

*Be hospitable to one another for His glory.*

*Minister your gift for His glory.*

*Teach or preach for His glory.*

*Serve by His power for His glory.*

*So be it – that settles it – Amen!*