

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

A Christian's Duty in a Hostile World

1 Peter 4:7-11

Part Two

The novelist Leo Tolstoy once wrote, “Man’s whole life is a continual contradiction of what he knows to be his duty. In every department of life he acts in defiant opposition to the dictates of his conscience and his common sense.” This is a tragic commentary on the experience of mankind apart from Christ.

This was the way it was before we came to Jesus, but this is not so anymore. My master was sin, but now it is the Lord Jesus and I am looking to the word of God to show me the way. I want to follow the Lord not only because I have come to love Him but because I have come to hate sin. I hate it because of its impact on Jesus. It caused Him to suffer. I hate sin because of its impact upon the church. It seeks to rob us of all that Jesus is seeking to bless us with in this present age. And finally I hate sin because of its impact on the world. It has seduced the world and is leading it to eternal damnation.

I don’t want to return my old ways when I was a slave to sin. I want to walk in obedience to Christ and to fulfill my duty as His faithful servant.

1 Pet. 4:7-11 points the way. It speaks of duty. Let us read **1 Pet. 4:7-11**. What do we learn about duty in this passage? We first of all about the incentive for performing our Christian duty.

INCENTIVE

Why should we commit ourselves to living godly in the midst of a hostile world? **V. 7** tells us that **“the end of all things is at hand.”** What does this mean? A key to understanding this statement is the Greek word “TELOS.” Rather than meaning “end” in the sense of termination or annihilation it means “end” in the sense of “completion” or “consummation.”

Since Peter is addressing the church we need to ask the question, “What event will bring God’s plan for the church to completion in respect to the things of this world.” This event is described in **1 Thess. 4:13-17** and is commonly referred to by theologians as the rapture. It is the day when the living as well as the dead who are in Christ are gathered together with Him and given their glorified bodies.

When will this event take place? It says, **“The end of all things is at hand.”** When Peter tells his readers that the **“end of all things is at hand”** he is communicating to them that the rapture is “imminent” or in other words there are no other events that they need to look for before the consummation or completion of God’s program for the church. The rapture could take place at any moment.

The church has been in the “last days” since the ascension of Christ In **2 Tim. 3:1-5** it says, **“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,**

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(3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lover of God; (5) holding a form of godliness, although they have denied its power.” People when they read these verses will say, “Well we must be approaching the last days because we are seeing these kinds of behaviors all around us.” Let me let you in on something. We have been seeing these kind of behaviors throughout the church age, and it is for this very reason that Paul in **2 Tim. 3:5** concludes the verse with the admonition, **“and avoid such men as these.”**

Not only have we been in the last days since the ascension of Christ we have even been in the “last hour.” **1 John 2:18** says, **“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen, from this we know that it is the last hour.”**

The end of all things for the church has been at hand since the times of the apostles to this very moment. Because of this reality we must therefore live in expectancy. We must live in the expectancy of the imminent return of Christ.

I was browsing through a book this past week that argued against the imminent return of Christ, and near the conclusion of the book the author compared our belief in the “imminent return of Christ” to sugar water. Saying “that it may taste good, but it has no medicinal value.” (pg. 296 “Pre-wrath rapture”). In other words our belief in the imminent return of Christ provides little incentive for holy living.

This statement contradicts the statement of Paul in **2 Cor. 5:9-10**. Let us again listen to his words. “Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

And I believe that is exactly what Peter is doing in the passage before us!! Peter tells his readers **“The end of all things is at hand”** Or in other words the consummation of God’s program for the church in respect to the world is at hand. The rapture could occur at any moment. Jesus could be coming at any time to catch us up to be with Him. It is time for us to clean house!!! And in light of this Peter gives us some basic instructions on how to live in the midst of a hostile world.

THE INSTRUCTIONS

DUTIES TO THE ONE ABOVE - **“therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”** The first duty that we encounter is prayer. Prayer that flows from individuals who are characterized by “sound judgment” and “sober spirit.” What do I mean by this? Let us take a look at the passage more closely.

First of all Peter calls us to **“be of sound judgment”** (SOPHRONESATE). What does this mean? This word was used for a person who was in his right mind as contrasted to one who was under the power of a demon (**Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35**). More generally it meant one who was reasonable, sensible, prudent or in other words a “clear thinker.” Certainly demon possessed people described in **Mark 5** and **Luke 8** could not be described as clear thinking.

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And neither can we be considered clear thinking if we do not understand what? **“That the end of all things is at hand.”** But if we understand that the end of all things is at hand what activity do you think that we might be motivated to do? Prayer.

Doesn't this make sense? If we really are a people who understand **“that the end of all things is at hand.”** If we really understand that the breath that we are now taking may be our last breath before seeing Jesus face to face. If we really understand this, would it not be a tremendous motivator for prayer?

If I am truly living in light of the eminent return of Jesus then I do not want to come into His presence with soiled garments. Let us pray for the Spirit of God to search us and reveal to us those things within our lives that are not pleasing to Him, so that we might confess and forsake our sin.

Not only would I not want to come into His presence with soiled garments but I would not want to come into His presence empty handed. I want as a result of my abiding relationship with Jesus to have a life full of fruit. That it may bear testimony to His greatness and to His power. Let us pray that the Lord would bless our lives with fruit 20, 40, 60, 80, 100 fold.

Not only would I want this to be true of my life personally, but for the church of Christ as a whole. That we the church would be holy and that our corporate life would be fruitful. Let us pray for the church and those that comprise the church. Let us pray for one another.

If we are going to pray this way, we must guard ourselves from becoming “intoxicated” by the things of this world. Look at the very next phrase. **“be of sound judgment and sober spirit (NEPSATE).”** What does this mean? It means sobriety as the opposite of intoxication. It is a call to remain alert and self-controlled, in full possession of our faculties and feelings. The end of all things truly is at hand don't become intoxicated with the things of this world. Don't become so caught up with family, career, retirement, etc. etc. that you lose sight of the truth. And the truth is that Jesus could return at any moment and all the things we view as so important will be swept away in a twinkling of an eye. And it is this type of thinking that will produce a prayer life that is truly effectual, THIS IS OUR CHRISTIAN DUTY.

This addresses a primary duty that we have as Christians vertically, but what about our duties horizontally to one another?

DUTIES TO ONE ANOTHER - Beginning in **V. 8** Peter will list a series of duties which we are to perform in respect to one another. It is important to note grammatically that the exhortations in **V. 7** are imperative. Whereas the exhortations of **VV. 8-11** are participles which would indicate that duties now being spelled out in **VV. 8-11** naturally flow from the kind of prayer life described in **V. 7**. What is the very first duty? Let us read **V. 8**, **“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”**

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WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER - Our very first duty is to **“fervently love one another.”**

When Peter exhorts us to do this we need to remember that he is addressing the church. We, therefore, need to look at this exhortation primarily as an exhortation for Christians to fervently love one another. In fact this duty for Christians to love one another is more important than any other duty that is listed here or mentioned anywhere else in the word of God. How we do know this? What does the verse tell us? **“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another.”**

How are we to **“love one another?”** We are to love one another **“fervently.”** It is an anatomical word which means to stretch or strain. It is the picture of a runner in a sprint stretching to reach the tape. Loving one another is no casual walk in the park.

In fact, this concept is so important that Peter had stated it earlier in **1 Pet. 1:22**, **“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.”** Since we have been born again and are a part of the same spiritual family the obvious response is to love one another. And to love one another not complacently, but stretched and straining to do so.

When we think of loving one another in this way our minds might immediately go to the provision of food and covering and other basic needs to one another. Certainly this was certainly an area that very much stood out in the early church which was so very poor and their very lives threatened because of the lack of these basic things, but we need to see love in a much more broad sense. We need to see it more in the light of **1 Cor. 13**, **“Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous, love does not brag and is not arrogant, (5) does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, (6) does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; (7) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”** We need to be stretching ourselves, straining ourselves in all of these areas in respect to the brethren.

There is no way that we can fulfill this exhortation at a distance from the brethren. You may come into this fellowship on Sunday morning but we need to get closer. Not so much that we can have our needs met, even though this is true, but we need to get closer so that we can be placed into a situation where we can stretch ourselves in love for the brethren.

We have what we call Growth Groups in our fellowship. It is we believe very important that you become connected with such a group, because it is within those groups that you will have the opportunity to give your greatest expressions, love.

Peter points out one of those areas in the very next phrase. Let us continue to read the verse, **“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”** What does this mean? Does this mean that if we love our brothers that we would ignore their sin? And the answer would have to be, Of course not! The scriptures are very clear about what we are to do when we see our brother in sin in a number of passages, Two very clear passages would be **Matt. 18:15-17**, and also **Tit. 3:10-11.** If we are not to ignore sin then what are we to do in respect to sin? We are to forgive it!!

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In fact the passage from which Peter apparently borrows makes this clear. **Proverbs 10:12** states “**Hatred stirs up strife but love covers all transgressions.**” The covering of transgression is effectively done when hatred, anger, and malice is driven out by the grace of forgiveness.

If we would fervently love one another and as a result exercise a forgiving spirit toward one another, love truly in fact has covered sins. This is why Paul is able to say what he says in **Col. 3:14**, “**And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.**”

Above all the duties that we as Christians need to most consciously stretch or strain ourselves to perform in respect to one another is to fervently love one another from the heart.

CONCLUSION

How do you see yourself this morning in light of our Christian duty? Are we stretching and straining ourselves to love one another?