

Above All, Love

1 Peter 4:7-8

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:7-8 (NIV))

At the heart of this special letter that God gave the Apostle Peter to give to these Hebrew believers is a truth that expresses to them a simple provoking question. That being, “because you have been graciously given the gift of faith, and that faith has brought you to salvation, how then should you be living out your remaining days on this earth?”

And that same question is also being conveyed to you and me as we now study these words. By the testimony of each of our mouths, we have declared that we also are truly saved, and that we also have the same gracious gift of faith that these saints possess. And with that being so, the question also stands before each of us, “how then should we live out the remaining days that God has given to each of us?”

Thankfully, the answer to that question is given to us in simple words here in verse 8, “we are to love one another deeply”. “We are to love one another deeply, because love has the mysterious ability to cover over a whole multitude of sins.”

But may we note here first that God saw fit to preface this instruction for us to love one another with a strong sense of urgency and that prayer is to be an essential component of the love we should have within us. He tells us,

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:7-8 (NIV))

Those beginning words, “the end of all things is near”, no doubt, seem strange to some people who consider that almost 2000 years have passed since God first gave them. And those words do have a strangeness, even confusing element to them. And we also know from other such references that words such as these are not intended to be taken simply as a metaphor to explain some other kind of occurrence, that these words instead are very literal and actual, intending to admonish us to live each day as if “the end of all things really is near”.

But again, there is still an element of confusion regarding that expression, especially for those who are not familiar with other similar passages like it. It seems that that was so

for the people who were first reading this letter. We understand that because later on in Peter's second letter, He explained more fully what these words were meant to convey. Turn with me to his second letter, 2nd Peter, chapter 3, and read along with me.

Beginning in verse 1, Peter said to them,

¹ This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. (2 Peter 3:1-6(ESV)

(the deluge being the flood in the days of Noah as a "near end of all thing" that took place took place in his day)

⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. (2 Peter 3:7 (ESV)

(there will be no more floods, but there will be "fire" beyond anything we can imagine. And that truly will be the final end of all things). But listen carefully to these next words,

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (2 Peter 3:1-12 (ESV)

Folks, in our naïve human thinking, we try to rationalize God as being on the same level as us and having our manner of thinking. But as so many other of these scriptures tell us, the "Mind of God" and the "things He does" and His reasoning behind those things is much more "high" and "lofty" and "eternal" than our meager minds will ever fathom. Our minds are so small and easily confused and distracted.

The simple truth is, God has a form of being that is not confined to the boundaries of nature as we are, especially regarding “time”. To God, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. He lives in what some have described as an “ever-present now”, existing within “today” and “yesterday” and “tomorrow” all at the same time. And He is fully able to easily and simply interact and engage in any one of those “time frames”, at any one time, or all at the same time.

Simply put, God is now living in the day that He first gave these words to Peter, and He is also now living in this day, but He is also living in those very last and final days of human existence on the earth, those days when He will destroy everything with fire and then remake the earth for its eternal existence. And folks, we must grab hold of and really understand that those final moments can begin to actually take place at any moment, right now, today, or tonight or tomorrow or next week. But know this for sure, those days surely will come. He is God and He has declared this warning to us! But now, for these moments, for this while, He is withholding His all-mighty, all-powerful and all-knowing hand. And though it might seem to you and me to have been a long, long time, and may still be a long, long time out in front of us,

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 (ESV))

This is His reason for waiting so long. This is His “grace”, pure and wonderful “grace”, and we should be ever-so-glad for it.

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 (ESV))

But note then also that He gives a stern warning that we must heed,

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10 (ESV))

This is a stern warning about a very real and catastrophic end that will come upon the earth and all the people that remain on it. And it will come suddenly, without warning, as a “thief in the night”.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10 (ESV))

On that great and terrible day, there will be no second chances. These days that we live in right now, they are the days of “second chances”, there will be no others. And that is why God gives forth these next instructions

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God. (2 Peter 3:11 (ESV))

These words point us back to the words of today’s text and tell us “how we should then live”. Knowing that

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:7-8 (NIV))

This is the answer to the question that we just read from 2nd Peter 3,

¹¹ . . . what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God. (2 Peter 3:11 (ESV))

We are to

⁷ . . . be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
(1 Peter 4:7-8 (NIV))

Listen again to our text, and for the remainder of the time we have today, may we take a simple and “practical” look at these words. They instruct us clearly about how we should be living out each of our remaining days on this earth, “this day”, “today”. Our text . . .

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We are told that because the end of all things might take place at any moment, we should make every effort to always be clear-minded, “sober-minded” and not distracted. And we are to be self-controlled. And the purpose for our being sober-minded and self-controlled is “so that we can pray”, and “so that we can love one another”.

There are a lot of other reasons for us to always be sober-minded and self-controlled, but here the specific reason is first so that our prayers will not be hindered by a mind that “uncontrolled”. In response to those words, we might think, “but I believe that I am almost always clear and sober-minded and almost always self-controlled. But folks, that is not so! Not so at all!

If we will stop for a moment and remember the last time we were in a crowd of people, in the mall, in a restaurant, even driving their cars. We observed that a majority of the people were caught up in something else in addition to their immediate involvement. Most often these days it involves cell phones and ear-phones in their ears. And yes, in some circumstances that is OK, but not usually. Nearly always, a person's mind is distracted and divided between where they are and what they were doing, and then also, with the things they are listening to in their earphones.

And unfortunately, you and I are guilty of doing so of these exact same things.

And the simple fact is, a "clear and sober mind" as spoken about here in these words, is able to think on only one thing at a time. And when the second command, be "self-controlled" is added into the equation, there is no way that a divided thought process is under self-control.

For myself, I have often experienced a "wandering" in my mind as I do mundane things, like mowing the grass or sitting quietly on my patio. Yes, it is often OK to daydream and relax. But here, God is saying that our minds are best suited to continue often in an attitude of prayer. And that a preoccupied mind, a distracted mind is simply not able to enjoy real intentional and intimate relationship with Him.

As I think about this sort of scenario, I picture me praying, "talking to God", but with a wandering mind, and with my words sometimes not even making sense. And then as He talks back to me, He can see my eyes darting all around, distracted by other things, especially that text message or that email that just alarmed on my phone. Or even worse, He sees my eyelids sagging and about to fall asleep. What kind of prayer time is that? Our prayers are hindered!

Here, God is telling us very clearly that when we come to talk to Him, turn the cell phone off, put the kids down for their nap, get into your prayer closet where you can't hear outside noises, and then very intentionally make sure that your mind does not wander or fall asleep.

And then next, God tells us here in verses 7 and 8, that because of all of this,

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
(1 Peter 4:8 (NIV))

It is so very important to God that you and I love one another deeply, and that we express that love in the behavior that we have toward one another in all the moments of our ordinary daily lives.

When Jesus was asked about the most important commandment that has been given to man, He didn't hesitate even for a moment, but immediately quoted the words from Deuteronomy 6. He said,

³⁷ . . . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV))

Can we not grasp this! The most important thing that you and I can ever do is to love the Lord our God, intimately and personally, with all our heart. And then, turn and love our neighbor, our family member, our friend, even strangers with the same fervor and intensity that we love ourselves.

But then also in John 13, Jesus decided to elevate the measure of our love for each other far and beyond the measure that we love ourselves. He tells us there that we are to love each other just as He loves us. Listen!

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35 (ESV))

Folks, if we can grab hold of and have this measure of love, all the fussing and fighting and disagreeing in all the world would go away, especially within family and friendship relationships. There would be no more arguing and divorce. There would be no more broken hearts beating within the breasts of our children.

Love, real and genuine "agape" love, wipes away a whole multitude of sins. As a matter of fact, real and genuine agape love is so forgiving that it often doesn't even take offense when misspoken and unkind words are said, but instead gives and forgives ahead of time.

Folks, love has a mysterious ability to wash away and erase even the worst of offenses. And God wants you and me, His beloved sons and daughters to have it and to show it, exactly as He gives it to us! And that is the answer to the question that we have been asking. That is how we should then live out the remaining days of our lives!

Praise the Lord!

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