

I Peter 4:4b-7
June 25, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are picking up where we left off last week. As a quick refresher, Peter reminded us that Christians are to live in the present for the will of God because old acquaintances are now persecutors. He told us that the unsaved are genuinely surprised by the changed lives of those who once were like they are. Moreover, they don't seem to hesitate to heap abuse on these Christians. So these Christians are suffering and Peter is trying to help them with their overall mindset.

Transition: He wants his readers to focus on having a Christ-like attitude. As we go through this chapter, consider that **all of us CAN maintain a Christ-like attitude BY following the INSTRUCTIONS that he gives starting with v.7.** Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read I Peter 4:4-6]

V.4:

- They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

V.5:

- But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

V.6:

- For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

V.7:

- The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What should our attitude be toward the spiritually lost? [Look at lost people with sympathy; Reach out to them; be patient with them; understand they are blind to spiritual truth]

Q: How many of you are drawn to the spiritually lost such that you work harder to connect with them? If we aren't pursuing them, why aren't we? [Let people engage]

Observation: Our contact with the lost is important to them since we are the bearers of the truth that they need. When the unsaved attack us, this is our opportunity to witness to them. Instead, we want to turn the other way because we're put off or just don't want to have to deal with it.

Q V.5-6: Peter reminds his readers what faces those who are lost. What should they expect in the afterlife? [They will have to give an account to Jesus for their life choices and receive the consequences.]

Point of interest V.6: Uh oh. Here is a potential curve ball after last week's lesson. Let's get clear on the phrase "those who are now dead." Most likely this refers to the *spiritually dead in sin*.

Q V.7: What does Peter mean by the "end is near?" [He's referring to the imminent return of Christ for His Church.]

Q: Why do you think Peter wants them to think "the end is near?" [He wants to emphasize the shortness of time remaining is motivation to live for and serve Christ. **He wants us to have an "expectant" attitude**]

Q: How many of us wake up each day thinking "the end is near?" If we did, how would that change how you spend your time each day? [Let people wrestle with this.]

Q: What is the instruction Peter gives in v.7? [Be clear-minded and self-controlled]

Q: Why should believers be clear-minded and self-controlled? [So that we can pray-especially in times of persecution]

Q: What is the implication about our prayer life if we're not clear-minded and self-controlled? [If our prayer life is confused, it's because the mind is confused. Peter is suggesting that we be calm and collected in spirit with a view to giving yourself to prayer. Peter was especially sensitive to this because when Jesus asked him to watch and pray, he fell asleep.]

LOOK:

We must all live in expectancy. The important thing is that we shall see the Lord one day and stand before Him. How we live and serve today will determine how we are judged and rewarded on that day.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 420–422). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A Patient Attitude toward the Lost (1 Peter 4:4–6)

Unsaved people do not understand the radical change that their friends experience when they trust Christ and become children of God. They do not think it strange when people wreck their bodies, destroy their homes, and ruin their lives by running from one sin to another! But let a drunkard become sober, or an immoral person pure, and the family thinks he has lost his mind! Festus told Paul, “You are out of your mind!” (Acts 26:24) and people even thought the same thing of our Lord (Mark 3:21).

We must be patient toward the lost, even though we do not agree with their lifestyles or participate in their sins. After all, unsaved people are blind to spiritual truth (2 Cor. 4:3–4) and dead to spiritual enjoyment (Eph. 2:1). In fact, our contact with the lost is important *to them* since we are the bearers of the truth that they need. When unsaved friends attack us, this is our opportunity to witness to them (1 Peter 3:15).

The unsaved may judge us, but one day, God will judge them. Instead of arguing with them, we should pray for them, knowing that the final judgment is with God. This was the attitude that Jesus took (2:23), and also the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 2:24–26).

We must not interpret 1 Peter 4:6 apart from the context of suffering; otherwise, we will get the idea that there is a second chance for salvation after death. Peter was reminding his readers of the Christians who had been martyred for their faith. They had been falsely judged by men, but now, in the presence of God, they received their true judgment. “Them that are dead” means “them that are *now* dead” at the time Peter was writing. The Gospel is preached only to the living (1 Peter 1:25) because there is no opportunity for salvation after death (Heb. 9:27).

Unsaved friends may speak evil of us and even oppose us, but the final Judge is God. We may sacrifice our lives in the midst of persecution, but God will honor and reward us. We must fear God and not men (1 Peter 3:13–17; see Matt. 10:24–33). While we are in these human bodies (“in the flesh”), we are judged by human standards. One day, we shall be with the Lord (“in the spirit”) and receive the true and final judgment.

An Expectant Attitude toward Christ (1 Peter 4:7)

Christians in the early church expected Jesus to return in their lifetime (Rom. 13:12; 1 John 2:18). The fact that He did not return does not invalidate His promise (2 Peter 3; Rev. 22:20). No matter what interpretation we give to the prophetic Scriptures, we must all live in expectancy. The important thing is that we shall see the Lord one day and stand before Him. How we live and serve today will determine how we are judged and rewarded on that day.

This attitude of expectancy must not turn us into lazy dreamers (2 Thes. 3:6ff) or zealous fanatics. Peter gave “ten commandments” to his readers to keep them in balance as far as the Lord’s return was concerned:

1. Be sober—v. 7
2. Watch unto prayer—v. 7
3. Have fervent love—v. 8
4. Use hospitality—v. 9
5. Minister your spiritual gifts—vv. 10–11

6. Think it not strange—v. 12
7. Rejoice—v. 13
8. Do not be ashamed—vv. 15–16
9. Glorify God—vv. 16–18

10. Commit yourself to God—v. 19 The phrase “be sober” means “be sober-minded, keep your mind steady and clear.” Perhaps a modern equivalent would be “keep cool.” It was a warning against wild thinking about prophecy that could lead to an unbalanced life and ministry. Often we hear of sincere people who go “off balance” because of an unbiblical emphasis on prophecy or a misinterpretation of prophecy. There are people who set dates for Christ’s return, contrary to His warning (Matt. 25:13; see Acts 1:6–8); or they claim to know the name of the beast of Revelation 13. I have books in my library, written by sincere and godly men, in which all sorts of claims are made, only to the embarrassment of the writers.

The opposite of “be sober-minded” is “frenzy, madness.” It is the Greek word *MANIA*, which has come into our English vocabulary via psychology. If we are sober-minded, we will be intellectually sound and not off on a tangent because of some “new” interpretation of the Scriptures. We will also face things realistically and be free from delusions. The sober-minded saint will have a purposeful life and not be drifting, and he will exercise restraint and not be impulsive. He will have “sound judgment” not only about doctrinal matters, but also about the practical affairs of life.

Ten times in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul admonished people to “be sober-minded.” It is one of the qualifications for pastors (1 Tim. 3:2) and for the members of the church (Titus 2:1–6). In a world that is susceptible to wild thinking, the church must be sober-minded.

Early in my ministry, I gave a message on prophecy that sought to explain everything. I have since filed away that outline and will probably never look at it (except when I need to be humbled). A pastor friend who suffered through my message said to me after the service, “Brother, you must be on the planning committee for the return of Christ!” I got his point, but he made it even more pertinent when he said quietly, “I’ve moved from the planning committee to the welcoming committee.”

I am not suggesting that we not study prophecy, or that we become timid about sharing our interpretations. What I am suggesting is that we not allow ourselves to get out of balance because of an abuse of prophecy. There is a practical application to the prophetic Scriptures. Peter’s emphasis on hope and the glory of God ought to encourage us to be faithful *today* in whatever work God has given us to do (see Luke 12:31–48).

If you want to make the best use of “the rest of your time,” live in the light of the return of Jesus Christ. All Christians may not agree on the details of the event, but we can agree on the demands of the experience. We shall stand before the Lord! Read Romans 14:10–23 and 2 Corinthians 5:1–21 for the practical meaning of this.

If we are sober-minded, we will “watch unto prayer.” If our prayer life is confused, it is because the mind is confused. Dr. Kenneth Wuest, in his translation, shows the important relationship between the two: “Be calm and collected in spirit with a view to giving yourself to prayer.” The word “watch” carries with it the idea of alertness and self-control. It is the opposite of being drunk or asleep (1 Thes. 5:6–8). This admonition had special meaning to Peter, because he went to sleep when he should have been “watching unto prayer” (Mark 14:37–40).

You find the phrase “watch and pray” often in the *Authorized Version* of the New Testament (Mark 13:33; 14:38; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2). It simply means to “be alert in our praying, to be

controlled.” There is no place in the Christian life for lazy, listless routine praying. We must have an alert attitude and be on guard, just like the workers in Nehemiah’s day (Neh. 4:9).

An expectant attitude toward Christ’s return involves a serious, balanced mind and an alert, awake prayer life. The test of our commitment to the doctrine of Christ’s return is not our ability to draw charts or discern signs, but our thinking and praying. If our thinking and praying are right, our living should be right.

Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 853). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

4:4. Christians are to live in the present for the will of God because old acquaintances are now persecutors. Godless men are genuinely surprised by the changed lives of those who once were like they are. **They think it strange** (*xenizontai*, from *xenos*, “stranger”; cf. v. 12). A changed life provokes hostility from those who reject the gospel. Consequently **they heap abuse on** (*blasphēmountes*, lit., “blaspheme”) believers.

4:5. Those who have spent their lives in indulgence and idolatry will someday **give account** (*apodōsousin logon*, lit., “give back a word or an account”; cf. Matt. 12:36; Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40; Heb. 13:17). Peter warned that these people must one day face the One **who is ready** (i.e., willing) **to judge**. No one will escape this final judgment of the words and works of his earthly life, when Christ will judge both **the living** (*zōntas*) **and the dead** (*nekrous*) (cf. Acts 10:42; Rom. 14:9; 1 Thes. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:1).

4:6. **For this ... reason**, because everybody must give an account to God, **the gospel was preached even to those ... now dead**. This has been interpreted as referring to (a) those who are spiritually “dead in sin,” (b) those who heard and believed the gospel but have since died, (c) those who died without hearing or believing the gospel. Barclay preferred the third interpretation, assuming that 3:19 refers to Christ’s preaching to the dead. Consequently he believed that here “was a breathtaking glimpse of a gospel of a second chance.” This interpretation has no scriptural support and is contrary to orthodox Christian doctrine (cf. v. 5).

In verse 6 Peter, in contrast with verse 5, encouraged his readers with the fact that rather than facing judgment for their sins, those who had heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ faced an altogether different future. The penalty for their sin has been paid by Christ on the cross. The last earthly effect of sin is physical death. Believers still die physically; they are **judged ... in regard to the body** (cf. suffering in this life “in his body,” v. 1). But for Christians physical death does not lead to judgment but to eternal life. They **live ... in regard to the Spirit**. Those armed with a Christlike attitude will live forever in God’s presence.

2. CHRISTLIKE SERVICE (4:7)

Encouragement to endure suffering comes not only from a believer’s future hope but also from the Christlike service of others within His body.

4:7. **The end ... is near** (*ēngiken*, lit., “draws near”; the same form is used in James 5:8 to refer to the Second Coming). After mentioning Christians who had died (1 Peter 4:6), Peter then referred to the imminent return of Christ for His church. The shortness of the time remaining is motivation to live for and serve Jesus Christ (v. 2). As a result, Christians are to **be clear-minded** (*sōphronēsate*, lit., “be of sound mind”; cf. Mark 5:15) **and self-controlled** (*nēpsate*,

lit., “be sober”; cf. 1 Peter 1:13; 5:8) **so that** they are able to **pray** (cf. Eph. 6:18). Prayer, of high priority in persecution, is to be clear, reasonable, sober communication with God.

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