

Abiding Fruit

informing the mind & inflaming the heart

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The End Of All Things

1 Peter 4:7

Every Christian, to some degree or other, understands what God has planned for the future, and yet at the same time we acknowledge with Job, God *"thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend"* (Job 37:5), and we agree with Paul that, *"...no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"* (1 Cor. 2:9). What is it that we do know, that we can know? I do not think it is too necessary to be so wrapped up with prophetic details (though they are important and should not be neglected), that we miss the injunction from Scripture to us about how we ought to live now in view of the future.

This is exactly what the Apostle Peter is saying in 1 Peter 4:7. Since the end of all things is at hand, we ought to be self-controlled and sober-minded. We ought to keep on loving one another earnestly (vs. 8). We ought to show willing and gracious hospitality to one another (vs. 9). We ought to serve one another according to the gifts God has given to us (vs. 10, 11). Why should we do these things? We do them so that in everything God may be glorified through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belongs glory and dominion forever and ever (vs. 11).

The Apostle Peter is concerned for these believers to whom he is writing. They were suffering for their faith, and probably that suffering was going to intensify (see vv. 12 – 19). Suffering and persecution have the remarkable ability to refine and purify (4:1). It marks out the true from the false. In the light of the soon coming suffering, Peter exhorts his readers to engage in service. Suffering is an incentive to encouragement in view of our Lord's return, but it is also, as we see in this passage, an incentive to live out our lives in Christian service.

Peter's immediate concern is for the believer's personal walk before God (vs. 7). Christians are to be self-controlled, that is, they should be of sound mind, able to make biblical discerning decisions. Our minds are to be grounded in God, just as cement encases and holds fast, so too, we are to lay hold of God with clear minds. We are not to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). We must know the mind of God, which means knowing Scripture. If we know Scripture, we can make good decisions that are self-controlled – our attitudes are governed by having a solid foundation rooted in Holy Scripture. We are also, to be sober-minded. This means we are to be abstainers (we are not spotted by the world). This is a word to our actions. How do we live before others? If we are temperate (sober) we display a godly character, but if we are not, we display a worldly character. This is also a word about the abuse of alcohol. Drunkenness leads to loss of self control.

The reason why we are to be self-controlled and sober-minded is so that our prayers might not be hindered (NKJV *"be serious and watchful in your prayers"*). It is impossible to pray as we should, if we are not of a sound mind and have lost control of our faculties. Restraint is required in each believer's life, which will enable us in times of suffering, to engage in a deep, rich and cogent prayer life before God. In times of persecution, the believer will find that turning to God constantly becomes paramount. Sharing in suffering at the present time leads to sharing in the glory of Christ (vv. 13, 14). If we suffer now, it is only for a short period, because Jesus is coming, so suffering is motivation to hold fast and hold firm (1 John 3:3). Suffering may also lead to death (4:6) which is a ceasing from sin. If we knew that our time was short, that would be a motivation to seek God seriously in prayer, and to live in a godly and holy way.

Peter's driving motivation however, is not our prayer lives being improved through suffering (that is a by-product of self-controlled and sober-minded living), but rather because "*the end of all things is at hand*" (vs.7). What is the end of all things, and what does at hand mean?

The word that is used for "*end*" never refers specifically to a chronological time frame that suddenly ends or stops. When we set goals, we know that once we achieve the goal we have come to the end of that particular ambition. We have realized or achieved our goal. The end for Peter is like that. He is thinking of consummation, of realization. The end must be determined by the context. Peter's mind has been on judgment (see 3:18 – 22; 4:5, 6). He sees God acting swiftly in judgment – God "*is ready to judge the living and the dead*" (vs. 5). In view of God's judgment, the end is at hand. Judgment is important for the believer in the present time (see 4:17). We must judge ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28, 31, 32) because if we don't, God will discipline us. Unbelievers will receive the terrifying judgment of God in His holy wrath (we used to be like that – see vs. 3).

The disciples had originally asked Jesus concerning the time of the end (Matt. 24:3). They wanted to know when all the things that Jesus had been referring to (destruction of the Temple – Matt. 24:2) were going to happen, and what signs would accompany the coming of Jesus and the close of the age. I do think that the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD, by the Romans, would have been viewed as a fulfillment of Jesus words in Matthew 24:2. Jesus refers to the *end* a number of times in Matthew 24. Many things were going to happen before the end would come. In fact, the occurrence of the many things mentioned by Jesus, are not the end, but simply point forward to the fact that the end was coming. The signs simply pointed to the fact that the coming of Jesus was near ("*when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates,*" Matt. 24:33).

It is the coming of the Lord Jesus that will bring the end. Not the end literally of everything, but the realized end of all things associated with His coming. For the believer, it begins eternity with Christ (our suffering will be over). For the unbeliever, it begins eternity without Christ (beginning with judgment – Rev. 20:11 – 15).

Peter tells us that the end of all things *is at hand*. This is a reference to nearness. The end approaches day by day. In comparison with eternity, the realized end of all things is very near. The conclusion of all things is near and the commencement of eternity with or without Christ is therefore, also near. The coming of Christ is near (Romans 13:12; James 5:8). It is at hand – at the very gates.

Since the coming of Jesus is near, the believer must be self-controlled and sober-minded. If you knew that today were your last day on earth, how would you live? The answer to that question is the motivation you have to living a godly, holy life. Our lives must be lived out in the attitude of prayer. Bathe everything in prayer. When you take a bath you are surrounded by the water, encased in the water. Whatever you do, wherever you go, whatever you think, whatever things – surround all those things with prayer. An active vibrant prayer life is a life that is expectant. It expects God to answer. It looks to God for deliverance in times of trouble. It rests in God. It is satisfied with God.

Peter concludes this section by going to another end. In verse 11, his mind is concerned with the glory of God. As we serve God in the church because we have each received spiritual gifts, we serve in order that God may be glorified through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to our God and to our Lord Jesus, that all power and all dominion belongs - *forever and ever*. What end is that? It never ends – it is for always. It is for eternity. Therefore, in the meantime, because another end is soon coming, be serious and watchful, be self-controlled and sober-minded, and pray always. Today marks an end of the year, and provides the opportunity for change in the new.