

Lesson 21 – Spiritual Duty in a Hostile World

1 Peter 4:7-11, **“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

Our world today is something like Play-Doh. In the 1930’s, Kroger Grocery desired to have a product on their grocery shelves that would clean the coal residue off of wallpaper. In 1956, the product was reworked and hit the market as the child’s modeling compound that we all know, Play-Doh. It seems like the landscape of our society is very Play-Doh-like, malleable and being re-shaped into someone else’s hands every fifteen minutes. It’s almost hard to keep up with what is politically correct these days, in fact, I’m not even sure if its politically correct to say politically correct anymore. Things like values and morals and ethics has been tossed out of the window in our world, all under the guise of becoming more moral and more ethical. I remember as a child having plastic moulds that I would press my Play-Doh into. Our world is being pressed into new moulds these days, as we attempt to form a society around social practices that have no moral, ethical, social, or scientific basis. The changes do seem to be very rapid. Even the people involved in invoking change seem to be unaware of the changes that other leaders are bringing about. While the world is devolving, tail-spinning out of control, the Church is called to stand as a light to this dark world. Unfortunately, we see sects of Christendom bowing the knee to society as an attempt to win them to Christ. They refuse to preach sin and repentance. They instead preach a false gospel of ‘come-as-you-are’ inclusivism. Certainly God invites you to come as you are, but He doesn’t allow you to stay that way.

The Church today must stand firm in a world of Play-Doh. While everything else is constantly being pressed upon and morphed from one minute to the next, the Church should be an anchor of truth in Jesus Christ. This can only be accomplished by a Church that is Holy Spirit indwelt, wholly devoted to preaching the Word of God alone, and humbly and fiercely devoted to seeking the lost. The Church at large these days needs to become aware of the spiritual war that is happening all around them. This world seems chaotic and blurry, but rest assured that the mind at work behind the scenes is quite intelligent and determined. The Prince of the Power of the Air is orchestrating a world that may seem disconnected on some fronts, but the one common denominator that they share is their hatred for Jesus Christ. Therefore, a Christian ought to expect to feel the heat for following Christ in a hostile world.

Peter opens this lesson in verse 7, **“The end of all things is at hand.”** What does Peter refer too? Was he convinced that the end of the world was imminent in his own day? What does that mean for us two-thousand years later? To answer these questions, it will be helpful for us to pick apart this verse. As we consider the word ‘end’, the word that Peter used is *telos*. That word does not speak of chronology, nor does it speak of termination. It has to do with ‘consummation’, ‘fulfillment’, ‘goal achieved’. A few examples of *telos* used in other verses are: Matthew 10:22, **“And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”** Matthew 26:58, **“And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.”**

Many writers of the New Testament refer to the end of time. For instance, Paul tells the Romans to understand their time in relation to the end, Romans 13:11, **“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”** The writer of Hebrews exhorts the readers of his epistle to meet together for encouragement; then he notes in Hebrews 10:25, **“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”** James points to the end of time and comforts his oppressed countrymen with these words in James 5:8-9, **“You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”** The Apostle John also alerts his readers to the fact that this **“is the last hour”** in 1 John 2:18. So we see that across the NT, believers expected the imminent return of Jesus.

Peter’s intention then is that the ‘end’ is the fulfillment or the goal of ‘all things’. **“The end of all things is at hand.”** The word order of the Greek places “all things” as the first word, emphasizing the comprehensive sweep of Peter’s statement. Even when our Play-Doh society judges the Christian Gospel to be undesirable or irrelevant, or even dangerous and immoral, everything will be judged in reference to the resurrected Christ, and that judgment is at hand because the resurrection has already happened. Therefore, Peter is about to tell us how to live in light of that end, because it is defined by victory in Jesus. To that end, everything throughout HIStory is pointing towards the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 3:19-21, **“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”** Colossians 3:4, **“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”** 2 Timothy 4:1, **“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom.”**

The meaning of ‘at hand’ in the Greek is *approaching*. Perhaps a good word to use is ‘next’. It carries in it the meaning that nothing else is required to take place before the end (the Second Coming of Christ) takes place. While Christ encouraged believers to be looking for various things in the world that would be happening just before His return, that’s not to say that the entire world would be obviously anticipating the event. In fact, Jesus says that His return will be a sudden shock to the world in that day, Matthew 24:36-44, **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** Just a moment ago we read Romans 13:11, now let’s read verse 12, **“The night is far gone; the day is at hand.”** Paul agrees with the swiftness of the return of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, **“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”** The return is next, it’s imminent, and so the reality of that near future

event ought to invoke a response from all believers. We ought to anticipate the near return of Christ, we ought to expect it, we ought to be excited about it, we ought to be praying for it daily.

During the period of the Old Testament, God instituted what we now know as the Old Covenant, to purify His people by pointing them towards the coming Messiah as the perfect sacrifice for their deadly sin problem. The purification process was carried out through careful obedience to various ceremonies, rituals, sacrifices, priests and offerings in the temple. When Jesus Christ came, He said in Matthew 5:17, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** Jesus came in perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning where and why He would come. Upon the fulfillment of Jesus’ death and resurrection, a New Covenant was brought in, one that ended the need for the Old Testament temple worship. It was Jesus who prophesied the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24:1-2, **“Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”**

Jesus accomplished the perfect one-time sacrifice for the sins of all of His people in the offering up of Himself on our behalf in His first coming. Hebrews 10:1-14, **“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’ ”** When he said above, **“You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings”** (these are offered according to the law), then he added, **“Behold, I have come to do your will.”** He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”** The Jews expected the Messiah to be not just a religious ruler, but a military conqueror and a king. The signs and wonders of the life of Christ was leading to His popularity amongst the people as the certain arrival of the Messiah, but His death sealed the fate that He would not attain kingship and therefore be the Messiah they had anticipated.

The first coming of Christ was not a failed plan, but the exact plan of God to save His people, (See all of John 17) but the plan to return is still coming, and it is almost here. Peter again says in 4:7, **“The end of all things is at hand.”** Paul encouraged the Corinthians to live in light of the first event that marks the return of Christ to His earthly rule in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, **“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”** Speaking of the same event, Paul told the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 4:15-17, **“For this we declare to you**

by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."

The author of Hebrews encouraged the believers in Hebrews 10:23-25, **"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."** If the Day was drawing near 2,000 years ago, if the Day was at hand 2,000 years ago, how much closer it is today? How much more anticipation should we have today?

Regarding His second coming, Jesus said in Matthew 24:36, **"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."** I think we can see God's perfect wisdom at work in keeping the exact timing of our Lord's return a mystery. If those believers knew that more than two millennia would pass by before the Lord's return, it may have discouraged them from living as they ought to have. Contrarily for us, if we knew for certain the Jesus was coming down from Heaven tomorrow, how frantic would we be to prepare ourselves and those around us? Our God desires His people to live in a proper expectation that the Lord could return imminently.

Living with a proper expectation of the Lord's imminent return will have an impact on our daily living. For one thing, it will impact our personal walk in holiness. Jesus said in Mark 13:33-37, **"Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."** Think of holiness as being awake and alert. We know that sin pollutes, it darkens the mind, it becomes a thick cloud or a fog, it separates. The believer needs to keep awake in anticipation that the master will return at any moment. John touched on the truth that our anticipation of the second coming will produce holiness in 1 John 3:1-3, **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."**

Beyond producing holiness in us, an eager expectation of the Lord's imminent return will produce a desire to preach the gospel to everything the moves around us. 2 Corinthians 5:6-11, **"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others."** It's not a pleasant thought, but I find that my selfish heart thinks about God's just judgment of me frequently, and at the same time I need to remind myself (more than I want to admit)

that God will eternally judge the lives of many of those that are in my life. Of course I do think of God's judgment on the wicked, but I will admit that I don't attempt to persuade them with the eager anticipation that there isn't much time left!

Evangelistically speaking, many in the name of Christ attempt to persuade unbelievers to follow Christ by presenting Him as a bold visionary who wasn't afraid to stand up to those in power on behalf of the people. Countless times today I've heard of a Jesus who embraced and loved people in their sin (which He certainly did love them), but the moral of their story is that Jesus is accepting of all lifestyles. If Jesus were in His earthly ministry today, He would be fighting to protect the rights of the LGBTQ community, He would be shaming any who would dare oppress them by calling out 'sin'. Any student of the Word would quickly understand that this isn't the Jesus that we see in the gospels. The Jesus I just described is proclaimed and accepted by the world as a model citizen who progresses one agenda. The Jesus we read of in scripture is despised and rejected by this same world, exactly as He was two-thousand years ago. And why? Because Jesus came to redeem His followers from the kingdom of darkness, not to love them while they stayed in it. He came to forgive their sin, not to encourage them to roll around in it. He came to demonstrate His authority, not to affirm the authority of the people. He came to proclaim His Kingdom, not theirs.

People don't want to hear about what Jesus came to do. Paul tells us what these last days will look like in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, **"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."** People want to deny Christ, His agenda, and His power. 2 Timothy 4:3-4, **"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."**

We should be getting the idea at this point in the lesson that we're to be anticipating the Second Coming of our Lord, growing in holiness and evangelistic zeal, while doing so in front of a world that is hostile to Christ, and by extension, us. I want to spend a paragraph now to address a few things that we should not be doing in these last days before a world that desperately needs to someone to tell them the Gospel. Matthew 24:36, Jesus said, **"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."** No one knows. Not even the angels who operate with sinless minds, who have been in existence for all of human history, and who therefore know have a theology more refined than any person today, even the angels don't know. So don't guess, don't listen to anyone who says they know, and please don't tell other people that you know...you don't. 😊 Concerning the last days, and the events that will take place essentially from the Rapture, through the Millennial Kingdom, and on into eternity, concerning all of those things, the Bible tells us very little. Our God was wise enough to tell us exactly what we needed to know concerning all of these things, and He left much detail out. So my next instruction of what not to do, is to leave what's out of the Bible, out of the Bible. If no one in Church history has even known a particular detail of Eschatology, neither do you. You might have a guess, or an opinion, but you do not possess a 67th inspired book. In step with that last point, is to avoid connecting current world events with Bible prophecies. You may have an opinion, but at very least frame what you say including that very important detail. Christ called me to Himself in April of 2001. On September 11th of that year, the world changed in a half an hour. I can't tell you how many

times I heard people say that the Twin Towers that fell were actually a fulfillment of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. ←Did you also notice how the number eleven looks like twin towers? That Biblical prophecy fulfilled if I've ever seen it! Saddam Hussein was the Antichrist. Hitler was the Antichrist. I hope you understand the point being that you don't know. People have read the tea leaves of history and incorrectly prophesied the return of Christ every single time up to this point.

Luke 12:35-40, **“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** Jesus warns each believer to remain awake and prepared for His return because no one knows when He will return, but the language does imply imminency.

It was important for us to take our time unpacking Peter's phrase **“The end of all things is at hand.”** Now let us gravitate back to our letter and let Peter give us the instruction, verses 7-11, **“therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.”**

Peter isn't exactly inventing the wheel with his instruction, in fact, it sounds a lot like something Jesus said in our last paragraph. There is a stark difference in the life of anyone who follows Christ from the person they were before. There is a decisive and violent turning from sin towards holiness. There is a desire to follow and love and obey and please our Master. This new life isn't easy. It's much harder to fight sin than to let it win. Staying focused, practicing self-control, denying yourself, these things aren't natural. Jesus paints the picture well for any who ever consider following Him, He said in Luke 9:23-24, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”** I wonder if the modern “church-growth” guru's use this methodology? Jesus didn't preach living on cruise-control until eternal bliss. Jesus asked His followers to live a life of self-denial, of putting your desire last and His first. And carrying out that self-denial to the point where you'll obey Him through the impact of your physical death as this hostile world will hate the Christ that they see in you. Like our Lord, do you evangelize this way? Do you ask the lost to count the costs as Jesus does in [Luke 14:25-33](#)? The decision to follow Christ is one should only be considered once the cost has been counted. Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit, and our justification in Christ alone, following Christ would not be possible despite our best efforts. We ought to thank God daily for not only His calling of us, but His gracious provision to us, enabling us to fulfill the commands that He gives us in scripture. Following Christ is therefore quite paradoxical: It costs everything, making it difficult, yet it's graciously made possible through our new life in Christ, making it easy. Our following Christ requires much attention to the small details of our life and the giving of all the resources that the Lord provides, making it difficult, and yet what life could be more rewarding or fulfilling than following Christ?

Ephesians 5:15-21, **“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** This world that we live in is difficult, hostile, even violent towards Christ, and they are observing our every word and deed carefully. The greatest need in the heart of every godless person in our lives is the exact same need that we have. We both need our sins covered at the cross of Christ. There is a reason why the Lord does not privately rapture us up to Heaven directly at the point where He regenerates us, and that reason is to live a life that glorifies Him. God’s will is that we walk in His wisdom, being filled with His Spirit, and that we lead joy-filled and thankful lives before our fellow men. God’s will is that we mature our fellow believers as we minister to them, while we evangelise to the lost around us. This life will prove to be challenging to us as we battle against our indwelling sin nature until the day that we’re called to glory, and yet we will be enabled to obedience as we follow the Lord’s clear commands that are set plainly for us in His Word. Thankfully, it doesn’t require a Harvard scholar to understand and follow Christ. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, **“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”** How humbling is it to know that statistically speaking, you probably weren’t wise, powerful or noble in anyone’s sight before you knew Christ. In fact, Paul says that God chose you because you were foolish and weak and low and despised and ‘not’, and He did this to shame the ‘wise’ and the strong, and the people that ‘are’. Because of Christ alone, you now have wisdom from God. Now you have righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so boast in Him before others! Whatever walk of life that you were saved out of, join Paul’s heart in Philippians 3:7-15a, **“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way.”**

We’re now a full seven pages into this lesson, and all that we’ve done is glossed over the text of 1 Peter 4:7-11 a few times. I hope it was a fruitful journey to set the table before we are nourished by the spiritual food in this text. There are three parts of this texts that we will begin to look at in detail to close this lesson: Our holiness, our love for one another, and our service in the Church. Let’s dig in to the text once again starting at verse 7.

1 Peter 4:7, **"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers."** I believe that it's clear to see the call of God upon us all to lead a life of holiness before Him. We know that the word 'holiness' is a word meaning 'set apart'. The world thinks of holiness as someone who is filled with spiritual pride, who considers themselves to be 'holier than thou'. People might also consider being holy as being angelic, as though you walked around with a halo over your head. But the word means that the Lord has 'set us apart' from the world we once walked in, and so we now walk in obedience to Him. Our holy actions (coming in the next verses) are borne out of our newfound holy thinking, which we can see here in verse 7. We are to be a people who are self-controlled and sober-minded. Concerning the command to be self-controlled, there is a bit more going on in the original language than I would have expected going in. The term means to "be in your right mind". In any relationship, if the person becomes out of their mind, and forgets who they are, the relationship will suffer. We see this in people who develop dementia, once the mind starts to deteriorate, love and communication and affection are reciprocated less and less, and sometimes anger and frustration begin to replace those emotions. I use that illustration of dementia that has almost certainly impacted every one of us in this room to show us that we are all in relationships ourselves. We are all first and foremost in a relationship with our God, and consequently, we are in relation to everyone around us. All relationships have rules, and it's important that we understand exactly who we are in those relationship and remain within those boundaries. If our thinking is errant, and we draw wrong conclusions about ourself, or those around us, relationships will suffer.

Considering our primary relationship with our God, it's critical that our mind be instructed, and therefore be washed in His Word. We need to fill our minds with the truths concerning both Himself, and ourselves, so that the relationship operate within the boundaries and limitations that He has set. This thought of self-controlled thinking is what Paul was after in Romans 12:1-3, **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."** Do you see the stark contrast that Paul paints about leaving the conformity of the world that we all once walked in, and to transformed by the renewal of our mind? There is a necessary drastic transformation in thinking that must come upon every believer in order to have a fruitful and holy life. Paul goes on to say that we must not think of ourselves more highly than we ought, which is drawing a wrong conclusion about ourselves in the relationship. And then Paul uses the exact same thought in our text in 1 Peter and tells us to think with sober judgement. We are to guard our minds as we walk with the Lord. The Christian life must be clearly fixed on spiritual priorities and righteous living. Paul says again in Titus 2:11-12, **"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age."** This self-controlled lifestyle that is detailed and calculated so much so that our every thought, word and deed is weighed on the scaled of divine justice to see whether or not they bring glory to God is in direct opposition to the world around us. The world around us prides itself on being self-indulgent and deceptive. The Prince of the Power of the Air is deeply embedded into the sinful mindset of this world. Believers are to be a light in a dark world. Our thinking at the outset of our walk with the Lord ought to stand out. Our mindset must be oriented around no longer loving the dying world around us, but loving the God who saved us

from His wrath upon it. 1 John 2:15-17, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”** Our perspective needs to be eternally minded.

Not only ought our life to be self-controlled, but our thinking must also remain clear and alert, Peter words are translated **“sober-minded”** in our ESV translation. The thought is similar in nature to being self-controlled, you certainly couldn’t do one without the other. Jesus similarly commanded us to alertness in our minds in Matthew 24:42, **“Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”** Later in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus encouraged the disciples in Matthew 26:41, **“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**

In light of the truth that the end of all things is at hand, we are to be self-controlled and sober-minded **“for the sake of [our] prayers.”** I write these words on a Thursday morning, with our Wednesday night Bible study fresh in my mind. Pastor Rich mentioned last night that the gospel does more than save us from the wrath of God, it heals the whole person and brings restores us back into a right relationship with our God. (Is that exactly what he said, I don’t know, ask him.) One of the activities that we gain the privilege of taking part in is communion with our God in prayer. If you’ve been a Christian longer than an hour, you’ll likely know that our communion with the Lord in prayer is greatly diminished (if not stunted) when we’re not living in obedience. In prayer, we gain access to all of the spiritual resources that our God has graciously provided for us. If we’re living in sin as we chase the love of the world, we will not be praying as we ought too. If we’re ignorant of biblical truth because we will not prioritize the adequate amount of time into reading God’s Word, and being present when it is exposed to us, our prayer life will suffer. If we are just living a life of indifference to the Lord, where we simply coast through our life, picking things up as we go (or not), our prayer life will not be anywhere near where it ought to be. Do you recall 1 John 5:14-15? **“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”** Those verses are many times taken out of context to mean that the Lord will respond with answered prayer to anyone who asks Him with confidence that He listens, but that isn’t what the verse says. John says if we ask anything according to His will he hears us. The new and immature believer prays according to their will. You cannot pray according to God’s will before you are instructed in what it is. Only the saints who seriously study the Bible and discover its deep and rich truths about God can experience this right communion with God in prayer. Holy living comes when believers read and meditate on God’s Word so as to be renewed in their minds (Rom. 12:1-2), so that their thinking is washed and falls into alignment with God’s thoughts.

The next part of this text that I want to unpack is our love for one another, found in our text in verses 8-9, **“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”** Note that we’re not talking about how we love all people. Christians ought to love all people in a way that is holy in comparison to how the world loves itself. In this text, Peter is talking about how we love one another in light of our holy living, in light of the truth that the end of all things is at hand. Peter places the important of our love for one another “above all”. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:13, **“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”** There are two words that Peter adds to this command to love one

another: we are to keep doing it, and we're to do it earnestly. I remember one day up at the cottage, my brother-in-law (an excellent swimmer) asked me if I'd join him in swimming to the other side of the lake. Then around 30 years old and 50 pounds lighter, and functionally athletic, I quickly agreed. The other side of the lake was much farther than I thought it was. After we rested on the other side, I knew that I needed to prepare myself to make it back. I asked Chris if to stay near me in case I go into trouble. The water is dark up north, if I went down, no one would ever find me. He vowed to stay near me. I chose to backstroke my way back and I felt more relaxed in that position, and I could control my breathing better. When I figured I was likely 80% of the way back to the cottage, I peaked my head up only to realize that I had swam entirely in the wrong direction. Chris was nearly home, and I was in the middle of the lake, no closer than before, and now needing to swim a third leg all the way home! Now very fatigued, my heart rate began to elevate. My swimming became frantic. My breathing was short and not well controlled. I knew that I no choice but to dig deep and give every last ounce of energy I had. I felt like that was the closest moment of my life to drowning. When I arrived at the shore, I collapsed onto the beach and couldn't move a muscle for quite a few minutes. I had completely emptied the tank in an effort to survive. The point of this story: I swam earnestly. What Peter is after in our love for one another is that it goes beyond a hug and a smile. Our love for one another ought to be done like an idiot in a lake who is straining and stretching and exerting a maximum effort because it is the most important thing that we could be doing. Our love for one another ought to be sacrificial, so much so that we love one another at whatever cost to our lives. Paul wrote in Romans 12:14-21, **"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**

Peter says that our love for one another "covers a multitude of sins". I often find myself so thankful that our God covers all of my sin in Christ, and yet I also find myself with a battle in my heart to cover a multitude of sins in someone else. It takes preaching the gospel to myself on a daily basis to remind my wicked heart that I've been forgiven a zillion times more than I'm asked to forgive someone else. The love that Peter is talking about isn't the uncontrollable emotion that people experience from Cupid's arrow, quite the opposite, it's the completely controlled and sober-minded action of a believer that is lived out of their will, according to God's will. How do we love one another? Exactly the way that God loves us. When did God set His loving affection on us? When we were unlovable. (I know, Tim McGuire has always been lovable. That's the exception, not the rule.) Paul wrote in Romans 5:8, **"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Our love for one another that extends beyond loving our favorites (as the world does) and setting a loving affection upon even the unlovable is what causes the world to wonder about what is going on in our hearts. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, **"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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** Next Peter moves on to speak about the eager hospitality that we should be showing each other.

According to the Mosaic law, the Jews were to extend hospitality to strangers, Deuteronomy 14:29, **“And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.”** Jesus commended all believers who were hospitable in providing for the needs of others, Matthew 25:35-40, **“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’** Then the righteous will answer him, saying, **‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’** And the King will answer them, **‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’** Also, when Jesus was giving the Parable of the Great Banquet, said in Luke 14:12-14, **“He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”** Peter likewise in our text commands all believer to be hospitable with one another, but he goes further than commanded an action from everyone, he wants to action to be carried out ‘without grumbling’. There must be a heart preparation that goes before the work of hospitality so that it is done with the right spirit, for the motive that in everything God may be glorified. As the unsaved world takes notice of their loved ones whose lives have been radically transformed, as the world pays attention to the group of people their loved ones meet with regularly, they’re not going to see a group of perfect people, they’re not going to see people pretending to be perfect, they’re going to see people who sin and people who love and forgive one another. They’re not going to see people who are isolating themselves because they look down upon outsiders, rather, they’re going to see people who love the lost world and have placed a high priority on reaching them to meet their needs.

The next portion of our text that I want us to focus on is our spiritual service to the Lord, we see this in our text in verses 10-11a, **“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.”** This language of spiritual gifts has been abused and taken out of context by certain churches so much that it has caused others to push against ‘gifts’ to the point of believing that they’ve ceased. To be clear (and this is all I will say on this issue, because this lesson isn’t about it) I am a cessationist. I do not believe that people in the power of God today can perform miracles, raise the dead, cast out demons, heal infirmities, etc. There are two major passages where we can learn about these gifts, the first is Romans 12:3-8, **“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”** The second major passage is 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, **“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the**

same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."

As became obvious by a simple reading of these text (and as mentioned directly in 1 Corinthians 12:4) there are a variety of gifts. Some of us possess a combination of multiple gifts, some of us are given the same gift but to varying degrees. As we take the time to get to know each other, we'll quickly realize that the same Lord that called and owns each one of us has made us all differently, for the same purpose of glorifying Himself. I love how the God who calls us doesn't simply save us and leave us in a state of neutrality. His grace goes further as He not only gives us a gift to serve Him with, He even gives us the necessary willingness to serve Him! Ephesians 2:10, **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** We read Paul urging us to walk in a worthy manner as we walk according to the measure of Christ's gift in later in Ephesians 4:1-7, **"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."**

Our God gives us these gifts. By definition of the word 'gift', we ought to understand that it's not something that we earn. Our wage in this life is death, but the free gift is given to us by God. (That last sentence could make a decent Bible verse) Our salvation in Christ is a free gift, and the equipping that we receive in order to serve our Lord is likewise a free gift. Whatever our calling is to serve, whatever our skills or talents are, it is a gift. Only one player on the team is starting quarterback, but you had better believe that it's a privilege to be the third string quarterback on the team. Sure, no one may know the third string quarterback's name, but ask anyone else on the team and they benefit from his service to the team week in and week out. Some of us are on the team's medical staff, some of us are the waterboy, some of us cut the grass and paint the lines, but we all have a role. Every player and coach and could prepare to their maximum capacity and be in big trouble if they played in elephant grass.

It's no different in our calling here at Emmanuel. Some preach, some clean, some teach, some work the sound booth, some lead devotions, some know exactly what to pray for and are unceasing in it, some garden, some are great at being hospitable, some lead in extra ministries. Who's the most important? Simply answer: Jesus Christ! We're not serving for ourselves. We're not padding our spiritual stats so we can build a spiritual resume or become a spiritual celebrity. We work hard in our given ministry to impact and serve the lives of our fellow brothers and sister so that they excel in their service to the Lord. We don't clean so that other believers and visitors wonder, "Who does this church hire to clean? It smells so nice in here!" We clean in order that no one notices that the church is clean. If the church were dirty, that would distract people's attention away from their worship to the Lord. What a ministry! While some are busy fighting to sit at the Lord's side in His glory, the call for us is to minister with all of our heart, all the while getting no recognition for our labour!

One page ago, we read a lengthy passage from 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, let's pick up and carry on in that chapter from verses 15-26, **"If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."**

There are some who struggle to 'find their gift', concluding that the Lord must have forgotten about them. This of course is not true, and may very well be the wrong conclusion of someone who cannot do the one ministry that they desire to do. Our service to the Lord might take serious thought to put our skills and talents into physical ministry in the church. Maybe there are no openings in the various ministries that the church has. Could it be that there is another ministry that you serve the Lord in, that the church doesn't yet have?

Peter breaks down the use of our gifts into two categories in our text: Whoever speaks, and whoever serves. What I am doing right now is one version of someone ministering through speaking. Perhaps you serve the same way filling the pulpit occasionally, or leading a Wednesday night table, or helping in junior church, or teaching VBS, or counseling a brother or sister in private. We have already spent time unpacking the various ministries that we can serve in. Regardless of how we serve, we serve **"as one who serves by the strength that God supplies."**

Let's close this lesson by refocusing on the motivation for our ministry. Peter ends this lesson with verse 11, **"in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."** We're going to talk a lot more about suffering in our next lesson, but why should a believer live a life of faithful service to the Lord in the midst of a violent and hostile world? So that in everything God may be glorified!

We should all desire to glorify our Lord in our every thought, word and deed. Brothers and sisters, do you know that the Lord's Kingdom is near? Do you know that the end of all things is at hand? It is! So be self-controlled! Stay sober-minded for the sake of your prayers! Make a point to serve the people here earnestly! Use your gifts well. Find what the Lord has given you a love for and grow in the knowledge and use of that skill for His glory! If we make it our aim to love and serve others before our own needs, we will excel in our personal holiness before the Lord. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, **"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."**