

# Studies in 1 Peter-13 1 Peter 4:7-11

by Dwight Pentecost

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*The believer's response to suffering should be characterized by sobriety, prayer, and fervent love, as we await the Lord's coming and His deliverance from this wicked world.*

**Duration:** 29:37

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 13:3, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 1 Peter 4:7-11

**Topics:** "End Times", "Fellowship"

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## Description

In this sermon on 1 Peter, Chapter 4, starting at verse 7, the preacher emphasizes the imminent return of Jesus Christ and its implications for believers. He highlights three characteristics that should be evident in the lives of believers who have the hope of Christ's coming. These characteristics are sobriety, watchfulness in prayer, and fervent love for one another. The preacher also emphasizes the importance of fellowship among believers, stating that it is based on our relationship with Christ rather than any external factors. He concludes by referencing the example of Daniel, who experienced intimate fellowship with God even in the midst of trials.

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## Transcript

1 Peter, Chapter 4, starting at verse 7. But the end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer, and above all things have fervent charity one among yourselves. For charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging, as every man hath received a gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God, and if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God hath given, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Men who are stumbling in darkness look for light, and because the child of God is living in the midst of the encircling darkness of this world, God has given him light that he need not stumble.

The light that was given to the child of God to illumine his pathway was the promise of the word of God, coming from the lips of our Lord, if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself. The light, the hope that was given to the child of God, was the light and the hope there is in the promise of our Lord's return. The Apostle Peter is writing to a generation of believers who are being severely persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ, and the Apostle Peter has been writing to encourage them, to instruct them, to explain to them the use that God makes of suffering in the life of his

child.

But now, in the portion of his epistle that occupies our attention this morning, 1 Peter 4, verses 7-11, the Apostle gives the light that the believer has on his pathway as he endures the sufferings of this present life. Peter says, the end of all things is at hand, and the phrase, the end of all things, is Peter's way of reminding these believers that the Lord Jesus promised that he would come again and would translate believers out of this sphere of darkness and bring them into the glory of his presence. The hope that the believer had was that his present sufferings might immediately be terminated by the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to take them out of this veil of tears, out of this place of suffering, into his own presence.

Peter held before them this hope as a present hope. This was not a hope that he moved to some distant time that was irrelevant to his hearers, but rather he told them the end of all things is at hand. That is, it may be anticipated any day, it may be expected any moment, it may be before we can draw the next breath.

And in the light of that which was a consistent teaching of the Apostles, that this natural order of things would at one moment be terminated by the appearance of the Lord Jesus to take us into his presence bodily, he now wants to draw a conclusion and apply the truth of the Lord's coming to the present sufferings of those believers. And as I examine verses 7 and 8, I find there are three results that should be evidenced in the life of the child of God, because he has the hope of our Lord's coming as a present hope. Peter said, first of all, be ye therefore sober.

Second, watch unto prayer. And third, have fervent love among yourselves. These three characteristics were to be evidenced in the life of the suffering saint who lived not in the light of his present sufferings, but who lived in the light of the hope that he might be delivered from his present sufferings by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would cause the sufferings of this present age to cease.

His first conclusion is that be ye therefore sober. This was a relationship of the child of God to the suffering through which he was going, and sobriety had to do with a serious-mindedness. It had to do with a true evaluation of things.

It had to do with seeing things in their true light. As we've emphasized so often, sobriety does not always have to do with abstinence from intoxicants when it is used in the New Testament. Frequently, it has to do with an attitude rather than an act, and it has to do with the attitude in which one can see beyond the present and see things in their true light.

The Apostle has pointed out to us in the previous chapters that God is a sovereign God, and that God is controlling all things according to his own perfect will. The Apostles point out that nothing happens to us in this life by fate or by accident or by happenstance, that all things are working according to God's predetermined plan that was devised in infinite wisdom and infinite love. God is using the circumstances through which he takes his child to mature his child, to develop his child, to produce holiness and godliness in his child, as well as to correct or discipline his child.

And since God uses suffering in so many different ways, if the child of God focuses his attention only on what the suffering costs him, he will learn nothing, and God's purposes will never be experienced in the life of the suffering saint. But when one can see beyond the immediate experience of suffering and see that this is God's means unto God's end, and then begin to evaluate his experiences in the light of God's purpose and program for him, then God's will can be and will be accomplished in his life. And so, Peter

says in the first part of chapter 4 and verse 1, as we saw it last time, "...he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." Peter was reminding these readers that God was taking them through some of their present suffering in order that his righteousness might be reproduced in them, and that they might be set apart unto God.

In our natural faith, we pride ourselves on our self-sufficiency and our independence, and we reject any concept that we must depend on another, even God himself. And one who depends only on himself will never be set apart to the will of God and experience the strength of God, or the peace of God, or the joy of God in his testing. But God uses these experiences to bring us to the end of ourselves in order that we might learn the sufficiency of his grace.

Now, one who approaches suffering with the question, Why have you sent this to me? and then examines his own life and his own experience, and the light of the sufferings will be matured as he learns what God has for him to learn. That is biblical sobriety. That is seeing things in their true light.

If one does not have this attitude toward suffering, he certainly will give way to despair, to discouragement. He will have no sense of Christ's presence and of Christ's purpose through the sufferings, and in his heart there will be generated a rebellion against God that says, God, if you could have done something about it, why didn't you do it? Why did you let this come to me? And there will be a bitterness that will be destructive of any spiritual development whatsoever. But when he has the attitude of sobriety toward God, when he sees things in their true light, he turns to God and says, God, I thank you that you have not abandoned me as your child, and that you love me and care for me and are bringing the experiences to me that are going to reproduce Jesus Christ in my life.

That's sobriety, seeing things in their true light. Then he says in the second place that, since we know that the Lord is coming, we ought to be watching unto prayer, and as sobriety summarizes the believer's attitude toward suffering, so prayer summarizes the believer's attitude toward God who sends and permits the sufferings. This is the Godward aspect of the believer's response to the suffering that God sends.

Watch unto prayer. Praying is an exercise in dependence upon God. A man who is independent never prays, he never asks God for anything.

A man who considers himself self-sufficient never turns to God to say, God help me, God direct me, God strengthen me through the present experiences. The individual who prays goes to God, and in his weakness claims God's strength, and in his ignorance claims God's wisdom. In his restlessness, he claims God's peace, and in his burden he claims God's joy, a sense of dependence upon God.

And one of the purposes of suffering in the life of the child of God is to bring the individual to the end of himself so he is totally cast on God, and that attitude of dependence upon God naturally manifests itself and expresses itself in a prayer of dependence. Now, I think in the immediate context where Peter has said, end of all things is at hand, watch unto prayer, he has particularly in view the coming of the Lord, and he is telling us that it is perfectly legitimate for the child of God to ask the Father to send Jesus Christ to get us out of the mess we're in. But I wonder how many of us in a time of desperation have ever thought of the Lord's coming as God's perfect and complete and final deliverance from the circumstances that overwhelm us.

You see, for us the coming of the Lord is so far down the road it has no relationship to our daily experience. But if we go to the Father and talk to the Father about sending the Son to deliver us from the

experience that seems to overwhelm us, it gives us anew and afresh the hope that the Lord could come at any moment to take us, to be with Himself, to gather us as believers home to glory. But this watching unto prayer is more than just praying for the Lord's coming that will terminate our time of suffering as saints here and here, but it has to do with an attitude of careful dependence upon God and all the circumstances through which we go.

I cannot help but think of the prophet Daniel in this connection. One of the most fascinating stories in that book is the history of Daniel's night in the lion's den. Who can forget the audacity of Daniel as he stands up before the mightiest monarch of his day and defies him and refuses to give worship to man who directs his worship openly and publicly to God? Because of his complete devotion to God, Daniel ends up in the lion's den.

The scripture gives us one interesting word that gives me a clue as to what Daniel was doing all that night. The next morning, when the king came and called him to the mouth of that pit, is thy God able to deliver thee? Daniel said, God hath sent his angel and hath sealed the mouth of the lion. I believe the angel there is the angel of Jehovah.

This is a pre-incarnate revelation and manifestation of the Son of God. How did Daniel know that God had sent his son to seal the mouth of the lion? He saw it. He saw it, and that's why he could tell how he had been delivered.

Will you tell me what Daniel was doing when he was in the presence of the Son of God revealed to him? Daniel, in that lion's den, was enjoying the most intimate, personal, sweetest fellowship that he had ever known with God all the days of his life. If you were to ask Daniel at the close of his day, Daniel, what was the high point of your life? Daniel had so many experiences that he could look back on. Think of it.

In Daniel, chapter 2, he was able to recall a dream that was locked up in the secrets of King Nebuchadnezzar, and he was able to interpret the dream, and he was able to unfold all of Gentile history that was stretched over thousands of years. My, what a high point. He was able to give that great prophecy in Daniel, chapter 9, telling us the exact time when the Lord Jesus Christ would come to this earth so that men could count the years until Jesus Christ came.

But if you were to ask Daniel, Daniel, what was the most precious experience of your life? I am confident Daniel would have said, the hours I spent in the lion's den, and Daniel would not have escaped it for anything. Why? Because the lion's den brought him into personal, intimate fellowship with the Son of God who walked with him through that experience. And instead of asking for a revelation of the Son of God to you in your sufferings, you spend all your time crying out for deliverance from them.

That's why Peter says, Watch thereunto with prayer. The third thing that ought to be produced in the life of the child of God in his sufferings, because the Lord is coming, is a fervent love among yourselves, love of the brethren. He talks about love of his coming and love of fellowship with this person, and now love for the brethren, produced by the love of his coming.

And once again, Peter gives us in verses 8 and 9 three things that love for the brethren will do. First of all, love shall cover the multitude of sin. Now, the apostle is not saying that if we love one another, our sins will be forgiven us.

That's not the basis of forgiveness of sin. Sins are forgiven because we trust Jesus Christ for salvation, not because we love one another. What, then, does he mean when he says, love shall cover the multitude of sin? What I think he is saying is this, that love will not dwell upon the sins of the brethren.

Love does not seek out the weaknesses of the brethren to criticize them and to impugn them in their Christian walk. See, here are brethren who are being tested, and some of the brethren fell under that testing. They were overcome by the persecution.

Why, the apostles had to write the epistle to the Hebrews, because some of the brethren were even going back into the old customs and associations in the temple. That's how far they had stumbled from the doctrines of the grace of God, and they were fellowshiping back in Judaism to escape temptation. Now, the apostle says that true love will not point an accusing finger at the weaker brother and expose his sins.

This is what the apostle is talking about in 1 Corinthians 13, that great section on love, where he says in verse 5, Love doth not behave itself unseemly, that is, is not bitterly critical. It seeketh not our own, that is, is not selfish, is not easily provoked or become irritable, thinketh no evil, that is, is not suspicious about the object of affection. Now, Peter, paralleling what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, says that in the light of the Lord's coming, if a believer sees another believer stumble, he does not multiply the sin and spread the knowledge of that weakness or that stumbling.

He does not develop a critical, bitter spirit because the believer has succumbed to those testings, and he hasn't. Love will cover the multitude of sins in other believers. The second thing he says that love will produce in verse 9 is hospitality one to another without grudging.

In the days when believers were dependent upon other believers, when they were separated from loved ones at home, hospitality was an essential Christian virtue. Hospitality had to do with a care and concern with a physical need, the material needs of a brother in Christ, and as Peter has told, that love will cloak over the sins of a weaker brother. Love also will provide for the need of the brother sacrificially.

The Apostle John told us that if we profess to have love for a brother and see a brother have a material need and shut up our love and do not contribute to him in his physical and material need, how can we say the love of God dwells in us? So, Peter is reminding thee that there may be some of these suffering believers who, because of economic pressure, have lost their livelihood, and they are destitute. And he says that those believers who have not suffered so materially and economically ought to share that which God has given to them with those who are suffering in that way, and it is love for the brethren that will open up the pocketbook so that we contribute to the physical or the material need. Then in verses 10 and 11, he emphasizes the fact that love will minister according to the gifts and abilities God gives a man so as to glorify God.

He is emphasizing here the great truth that the Apostle presents in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, that the Spirit of God gives every believer a spiritual gift, and blessing in the Christian life depends upon a spiritual use of the spiritual gift entrusted to a man. And God's blessing comes on an individual who so exercises his spiritual gift. But the Apostle is emphasizing in this context that this gift must be exercised in love.

If God gives a man the gift of giving, it must be exercised in love. If God gives a man a gift of dealing with other men who have been overcome by spiritual weakness or sin, that spiritual oversight must be exercised in love. If God gives a man a gift of ministering the word, the word must be ministered in love.

That is why right in the middle of teaching spiritual gifts, the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, the first reminds us that though we have the tongue and the gift of speaking as angels speak and have not love, we have become a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing. Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

And the Apostle in those first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13 is moving in the same areas that Peter moves in 1 Peter 4, verses 7 to 9. Though we minister the word, though we minister to material needs, though we minister to the spiritual needs of men, yet do not have love in that ministry, and though we are not energized by love for the Lord and the brethren in that ministry, it will be a profitless ministry. The Apostle Paul testified concerning his life and second Corinthians 5 verse 14, that it was the love of Christ that constrained him. Verse 9 was irresistible for us, and if you were to ask the Apostle Paul why he was willing to suffer so much at the hands of Jews and Gentiles, why he was so faithful over long periods of his life to minister the gospel, it was because the love of Christ carried him along the same way a boat is carried along that drifts in the stream.

And the Apostle Peter wants to drive this fact home that one who believes that the end is at hand and that the Lord's coming to deliver us into his presence out of this wicked world is at hand. That one will be characterized by a serious-mindedness in his life. He will be characterized by a prayerfulness in his life.

He will be characterized by a love for Christ and a consequent love for the brethren in his life. May I remind you, beloved of God, that God has provided but one basis of fellowship for believers. That one basis of fellowship is not the church.

It is not because we are members of the same local assembly of believers that we enjoy fellowship one with another. It is not because of our background that we have left the same organization or church and have come together here that binds believers together in fellowship. It is not economic status that binds together, but because we are of the same social or economic status, we have fellowship one with another.

It is not the education that provides basis for this blessing of fellowship of believer with believer. These are often made a superficial basis of fellowship, but that's not biblical fellowship. Biblical fellowship is provided for on the basis of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There is no other basis for fellowship. When we make organizations a basis or attempt to fellowship, when we make personalities a basis or attempt to fellowship, when we make economic status or background or privilege or anything else a basis of fellowship, we are excluding the only basis of fellowship which the word of God is. That is, may I repeat, the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And whenever division comes in a fellowship of believers, it comes because something other than the person and work of Christ is placed as the basis of fellowship. If we turn our eyes from the Lord Jesus Christ, turn our eyes from the word of God and from the truth of Jesus Christ as it is presented in the word, and look to any other tie to bind us, that tie will break in mass. But only when we are bound together in the Lord Jesus Christ can there be a true fellowship of believers that satisfies the requirements of Peter when he says, have fervent love among yourselves.

May I exhort you to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, to center your eyes upon him, to focus your affection upon him, for when you love him with a pure heart fervently, you will love his appearance, and you will be

watchful unto prayer, and you will love the brethren, even the weakest and orneriest and most unlovable. Wouldn't it be a tragedy to have the Lord Jesus come and take up two believers who are trying to settle an argument on their way into glory? Instead of manifesting that which Peter commanded, a fervent love among yourselves. Our Father, may the Spirit of God bring the truth of this passage home to our hearts, so that we realize that the Lord Jesus Christ has been put in a place of preeminence in order that he might bind us with self, that in him we might enjoy fellowship one to another.

We pray that the love of God for us might so permeate us that we will have love, one for another, that will strengthen us in our suffering, that will cover the weaknesses and failings that we discover in our brethren, that will give us a serious-mindedness that we might live our lives in the light of the truth of the Lord's coming. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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