

1 Peter 4:7-11

1Pe 4:7 (NKJV) **But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.** ⁸ **And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."** ⁹ **Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.** ¹⁰ **As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** ¹¹ **If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

After having dealt with “**the end of all things is at hand**”, we now want to look at the second part of v7 which says “**therefore be serious and (be) watchful in your prayers**”. Obviously, the word “**therefore**” connects the second phrase directly to the first phrase which seems to serve as a kind of warning against becoming complacent and inattentive to our Christian life. What we also saw last week is that the verbs for “**be serious**” and “**(be) watchful**” are in the aorist imperative tense which become the governing and controlling verbs of the passage. What the aorist imperative does is that it increases the intensity and the urgency of obeying the particular verb with which it is associated. You could think of it as “**be serious now**” and “**be watchful now**”. It is not something that Peter wants his audience to keep putting off, so he uses this very strong and dynamic parsing for this verb. What is important to understand about v7 right at the first is that it is not a teaching on prayer. It mentions prayer, but it should be seen as more of a warning. It is the idea that not to be serious and watchful in our prayers will certainly have some consequences that are almost impossible to define or quantify. I do not know what a lack of serious prayer in a person’s life actually means for them, but I am convinced of its necessity if that individual wants to be spiritually successful in their life.

So, for the other verbs or imperative participles in this passage – “**have fervent love, minister, speaks**”, and “**ministers**”, they have a somewhat secondary significance to them relative to the commands to “**be serious**” and “**(be) watchful**”. If I can say this in a little different way just to add a level of importance to these two verbs, if a believer is not going to be serious about their prayer life, then they simply do not need to pray. Normally if I start talking about prayer, people just mentally tune me out. I can see it on their faces. It is one of those things like Christmas and Easter messages that we have heard all of our life and already know all of the details and stories, so we just mentally begin to wander off into something else. I am personally convinced that if the enemy could get me to be faithful in everything else but prayer, that he would be totally satisfied with my Christianity – totally content.

In reality, praying should be considered as something sacred, as something that is a sacred privilege. There are a lot people of different religions who probably pray much more than most Christians, such as the Muslims. They are very, very religious about praying their 5 or 6 times a day toward Mecca. When we were teaching classes in Indonesia, Eddie and I were only about 150 – 200 yards from a very large mosque, and at specific times each day they would blast out prayers on a loud speaker that could be heard for a very long period of time. The first time that we went, we stayed in a hotel that had a mosque right across the street, and they would do this praying at night and early in the morning around 4:00am and wake us up. People were constantly streaming in and out of these mosques – all day, all night. Even in the enormous airport in Jakarta they had prayer rooms for the Muslims. I worked with a Muslim at

the SRS site and he had a little prayer rug that he had in his cubicle, and periodically every day he would be in his cubicle on his knees bowing and praying.

The problem with all of this is that for the non-Christian, their god is not real. Just think of all of the time that Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims spend praying and chanting to absolutely nothing but thin air, to no one. Then just contrast that with how little time the average Christian spends praying. For some Christians it is virtually non-existent until something tragic happens to them. I am not saying all of this to condemn anyone or to place you in some kind of “prayer bondage”, but rather to simply face the reality of how little the average Christian actually prays. To me personally, it is not the amount of time that is the issue, but just the fact that we do actually pray with some real passion and heart.

However, for us as Christians, when we pray we actually have a God who not only hears our prayers, but is willing to address them for us. We are the only people on the planet who actually have a God who hears and answers prayer. To not take that seriously is a tragedy of a great proportion. That may be one of the reasons why Peter even opened this passage with talking about the fact “**the end of all things is at hand**”. Anyone who thinks that he has a lot of time is playing the part of the fool. I was looking at the obituaries this week in one of the local funeral homes and this was the age of death for just some of the people listed – 45, 56, 59, 48, 47, 37, 62. Certainly they all anticipated living longer than that, but they did not. Life has surprises, and not to be ready for them is simply being foolish, and not sober and watchful. If we know that the return of Christ is imminent and that death may be even more imminent, and we have lost family members and friends that do not yet know Christ, then to not pray for them is really incredibly tragic to say the least. The relatively small amount of time that I could spend praying for them each day compared to the amount of time they may spend in eternity in a place of indescribable judgment cannot even be compared – and yet we too often ignore the reality of serious and watchful prayer. I am convinced that for some people that I could possibly be the only person earnestly praying for them. I still have plenty of the wrist bands to help you remember to pray for your loved ones if you would like one. Everytime I see my wristband, it is my signal to pray for those I love so dearly, and especially for some who may not know Christ.

The word for “**be serious**” is the Greek word “*sophroneo*” and simply means to be of a sound mind, to be sober minded, and in this context it is referring specifically to the believer’s prayer life and to the attention that they are willing to give to prayer.¹ This word is only used six times in the New Testament, but I love the connotation it provides in [Mark 5:15](#) of the demon possessed man,

Mk 5:15 (NKJV) Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one *who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind.* And they were afraid.

The actual meaning of the word in this context is specifically referring to the idea of being self-disciplined in the area of prayer. From a very practical perspective, prayer has to be one of the most elusive and seemingly difficult disciplines of the Christian life. Setting aside a disciplined time to pray, maintaining some kind of personal means of knowing what to pray for, or just developing a heart to pray – they all seem so very difficult, even for the most committed of Christians. For me personally, I have to maintain a prayer journal – I just have to do that.. As a pastor, I have people sending me texts and calling me and asking me to pray for them all of the time. If I do not write those things down, I will

¹ Zodhiates, 1362.

simply forget. It is that simple of a challenge for me – just a memory thing. There are times when I am so busy that I simply do not want to take the time to pray because for me personally it is much more than just reading something off of my prayer journal. When I get up in the morning, some days I feel a little overwhelmed with everything that I have to do before I even get out of bed – and I am sure that you may feel exactly the same way. So, honestly, spending some meaningful time in prayer can almost be a discouraging thing if we are not careful. Too often my day is over before it even gets started. If I truly am going to pray for someone, then my heart really needs to be connected with my actual prayer. I.e., just going through the motions of prayer seems as if it would be a total waste of time. I would rather pray less often, but more meaningfully if that is what I have to do to be in the right frame of mind to actually pray in a way that honors God. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their insincere, meaningless prayers. [Matthew 6:5](#) says,

Mt 6:5 (NKJV) "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."

It appears that because both the words “**be serious**” and “**be watchful**” are both in the aorist imperative that Peter really wants to emphasize what he is saying. It just seems to be much more than just a simple encouragement, but rather a very strong command. The word “**watchful**” comes from the word “*nepho*” which simply meant to keep sober from wine so that you could stay alert.² In this context, one of the meanings is referring to the simple issue that other things can easily become a great distraction to us, so we need to be very watchful. Really, it could be anything that we allow to take priority over eternal things. It could be anything – our job, our career, our recreation, our finances, our goals, our friends, our television, even our families. Peter uses this same word in [1 Peter 5:8](#) when he says,

1Pe 5:8 (NKJV) Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

In [1 Peter 4:7](#), the NASB says to be of a “**sober spirit**”. The ESV and NIV say to “**be self-controlled**”. The HCSB says to be “**disciplined**”. The ISV says to be “**clear-headed**”. All of those are contained in the meaning of this word.

The ultimate encouragement here is to take things that are of eternal value very seriously. I am always amazed, actually staggered sometimes at how nonchalantly, casually, and indifferently that some people take their Christian life. They have no real passion about it, no real hunger or thirst for the things of God at all. At some point in our life it is essential that we actually see the real importance of our life, as well as being ever mindful of its consequences in both time and eternity. Whether we want to admit it or even accept it, we all are answerable to God for our life and especially for how seriously or casually we take the things of God in our life.³ You can easily and quickly become very reckless and irresponsible with your Christian life if you lack this one quality of being sober, sober-minded, watchful.

Beginning in v8, Peter provides a series of ways in which each of us can demonstrate that we are taking our Christian life seriously. He begins by saying “**above all things...**”. We are to continue to show love

² Strong, #3525, ep.

³ Precept, *1 Peter 4:7*, ep.

and respect for one another simply because a genuine love for one another makes all of the other virtues what they should be. He actually says that our love for each other should be “**fervent**”. If someone were to ask you what you really thought that meant and how it applied to your Christian life, what would you tell them? It is a word that means to be stretched out, to extend yourself, and to be intense about what it is that you are doing for someone.⁴ The root word for this (“*teino*”) is from where we get our English word for “tension”. It refers to doing something constantly, and not sporadically, to doing what you do with passion and care and intensity.⁵ The Greeks used it to describe a runner who was running at maximum output – just straining and stretching their body to the limit so they could win the race. It refers to a kind of agonizing effort, a strong effort. Do you remember when Jesus was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and He was sweating drops of blood. [Luke 22:44](#) says,

Lk 22:44 (NKJV) And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

“**Being in agony, He prayed more fervently**”. What a great picture.

I do not know about you, but I just hate when I ask someone to do something for me and they just do a halfway job, and especially spiritually. I chide and downgrade my students at school for an obvious lack of effort that is simply unbecoming of their calling. There is no place in the ministry for mediocrity. The Christian faith is something that demands excellence. I am constantly teaching my students at school that the ministry demands excellence, that it demands their best, and not some halfway effort in their preparation. If that is their attitude and approach, I have advised them to please get out of the ministry and save a lot of people a lot of time and headaches. However, having this kind of fervent attitude in our relationship to one another is no different.

One time I received a phone call and the individual was asking me about someone I both knew and loved, and essentially they were asking me to communicate something to them that they wanted this person to change. Apparently they had made some efforts to get the person to change something they were doing, but had been fairly unsuccessful. So, they called to ask me to intervene for them without telling the other person. My response was very, very simple. This person they wanted me to “manipulate” was a precious friend of mine, someone I deeply loved, and I was not willing to deceptively try and coerce them to do something for someone else. I told them that I would not violate my love for that person by basically trying to manipulate their decision for someone else.

Listen very carefully. Every meaningful relationship that we have with another believer must have some passion and heart to it, or it will only become a burden to us to even be with that person. If another believer that you attend church with **legitimately** needs your help, give it to them, and do so without complaining. Do it fervently, intently, and without some expectation of reward. The AMP translates this as “**have intense and unflinching love for one another**”. the ESV says “**keep loving one another earnestly**”. The NIV says “**love each other deeply**”. The HCSB says “**maintain an intense love for each other**”. I like those translations. The word for “**fervent**” was often used to describe a horse at full gallop.⁶ Loving people that are unlovable, loving people that are rude, loving people that are cynical

⁴ Zodhiates, 556.

⁵ Harris, #1604, ep.

⁶ Precept, 1 Peter 4:7, ep.

and critical, loving people that are simply difficult to be with, loving people that do not like you and who insult you – none of this is easy, nor should we ever presume that it is. Loving people the way that God wants us to love them demands a great deal of mental and spiritual energy. We have to make difficult decisions and exercise a high level of personal resolve at times. At times we will certainly have to make personal sacrifices. All of that is inevitable.

As we close this morning, there is a very simple decision that we all have to make. Every one of us have to decide whether or not we are going to live a self-centered, me-centered, I want what I want kind life, or if we are going to be willing to give our life to help other people who may desperately need our help. This is NOT an emotional decision, but a deeply mature and spiritual decision. If it was a purely emotional decision, then none of us would ever make the right decision. When we truly love someone with a genuine Christian love, it means that we love them the way that God loves us. I am sure that there are times when we may actually be asked by God to love people that we do not even like or people who do not like us. There are many people with whom we simply have to accept their faults and shortcomings as part of who they are. It does NOT mean that we allow people to use us or to take advantage of us. I want you to think about one last thought for just a moment. The only time that Christ ever allowed anyone to take advantage of Him was at His trial and His crucifixion, but it was only because that was God's will for His life. People hated Him, sneered at Him, and tried to constantly trap Him, but He never allowed them to use Him or take advantage of Him. That is an incredibly important principle to understand because it will help us to have greater wisdom in dealing with people who only want to take advantage of us. However, we cannot turn that reality into an unwarranted justification and refusal to help people. It is only there to protect us from being used by people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harris, Ralph. W., ed. *The Complete Biblical Library: Greek English Dictionary*. Springfield, Missouri: World Library Press Inc., n.d.

Precept Austin. n.d. <http://www.preceptaustin.org>.

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Revised Edition, 1993. Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1992.