

## **1PETER 4:7-11    CBC 9.8.2020am**

Last time we saw Peter urging us to arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ by resolving to live the rest of our lives for the will of God, whatever the cost. Today, he's reminding us what "doing the will of God" involves.

### ***Read 1Peter 4:7-11 ...***

What Peter has just described is the change of life that conversion to Jesus Christ brings about. He has already reminded his readers of their previous lifestyle (vv.3-4) marked by drunkenness, lust, orgies – a life that was personally and socially destructive. And he says (v.3), "*You've spent long enough living like that*" – blunt and to the point.

And now, by contrast, he describes the Christian lifestyle:

- v.7: Clear-headedness instead of drunkenness, so that we can pray.
- v.8: Love instead of lust
- v.9: Opening our homes for hospitality rather than for orgies
- vv.10-11: Serving others rather than using them destructively for our own ends.

That's what living the rest of your life for the will of God looks like.

And why do we live this way? Because (v.7) "*The end of all things is near. Therefore ...*" live this way! There's a strong emphasis on the End throughout this passage. It shapes what Peter writes and it should shape how we live. *If you want to make the best use of your time, live in the light of Christ's return.*

This is the perspective of the whole New Testament. In fact, the last words of Jesus are (Rev 22:20): "*Behold I'm coming soon!*" Does that mean next week? It might! But that's not quite what Peter or Jesus are saying. The point is that Christ's return is the next great event in God's plan of salvation.

God's purpose in history is to provide a Bride for His Son by saving sinners; and all the major events in God's plan of redemption have happened, from the call of Abraham to the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, and the coming of the Spirit to equip us to preach the Good News. So things are now ready for Christ to return for His Bride (His people) and rule. *As Peter said in 4:5, the Judge is ready to give His verdict on the living and the dead.* We're in the "last act" so the curtain could fall at any time.

So when Peter says "the end is near", it's less about a date, and more about a practical perspective – about how we should live. History isn't just going round in circles – there's an end in view, the rule of Christ with and for His people – and this gives meaning to life! We need to live in the light of that.

v.7: "*Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.*" Note that carefully! Knowing that the Lord is coming should make us sober-minded, not crazy-minded! There's a long history of well-intentioned people getting side-tracked by end-time speculation and becoming wild fanatics. But we're not to set dates, and we're not to panic because the world is getting into a terrible state – we're to keep our heads and think clearly so that we can pray.

I'm sure this had special meaning for Peter. He remembered Jesus' words to him in Gethsemane: "*Watch and pray!*" He didn't do it! Instead of being alert and prayerful, he fell asleep and then panicked and started swinging his sword around in a way that didn't glorify God. Now he's teaching us a better way. Living for the will of God means keeping a clear head.

And then, v.8: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” – not in the sense of washing sins away (only the blood of Christ can do that), but in the sense of bearing with one another’s failings rather than let them ruin our fellowship.

Love keeps small things from becoming big things. Where love abounds, many offences are readily overlooked and forgotten. But where love is lacking, every little thing is viewed with suspicion and resentment and may lead to war – to the delight of Satan and the world. So live a life of love, because Christ is returning, and doesn’t want to find His Bride at war with herself!

Is this how you live? As long as we’re in the earthly church, love will be largely concerned with forgiving and forgetting, because we’re all sinful. We’ll have to overlook a lot. And that will take effort. That’s what Peter means by “Love deeply” – he’s not talking about maximum emotion so much as maximum effort, like an athlete straining every sinew. It’s the second time Peter has used this expression (cf. 1:22). And it reflects the way God has loved us.

It should stagger us to consider how much God’s love bears with us. He bears with us despite our small-mindedness, moodiness, pettiness, and obnoxious personalities. He perseveres with us like good parents who recognize that their immature children will someday become mature adults. That’s the love we’re to imitate.

It certainly doesn’t mean we condone one another’s sin. But it does mean we don’t make a big deal of every bit of clumsiness in our relationships. Life in a fallen world means we spend a lot of time treading on one another’s toes when we’re trying to dance together. Love doesn’t point out every mistake. Patterns of behaviour that are destructive, that prevent people growing – they need to be addressed. But many small things are better overlooked than confronted. People need lots of slack in their journey toward Christian maturity. Love isn’t indulgent of serious sin, but it knows how to make allowance for people who are stressed or exhausted or just clumsy or immature.

Nothing is more important than this, for our own growth and for our witness to a world which is so full of hatred and unforgiveness. “Above all”, says Peter. Since Christ is returning for His Bride, loving one another is top priority.

And then, v.9: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” Hospitality offered to anyone is pleasing to God, but the focus here is on using our resources of homes, time, money for the gospel. We tend to think of hospitality as inviting someone for dinner – and that’s good – but in the early church it meant so much more, which explains why it’s such a big theme in the New Testament. It was central to the church’s life:

- Churches didn’t own dedicated buildings – they met in homes! That gave them mobility. It enabled them to multiply churches with relative simplicity. And it meant a massive saving of resources. The cost was that many people had to be willing to open their homes to all-comers week in, week out. Serious hospitality! But it helped the church to look and feel and act like a family. *Perhaps Covid-19 will return some of those benefits to us?*
- Travelling teachers and missionaries depended on hospitality. They lived in a world with no airbnb and few cheap hotels. Such public accommodation as existed was dangerous and rife with immorality. So hospitality enabled the gospel to spread.
- And remember that Peter is writing at a time when persecution of Christians was increasing. How would Christians fleeing persecution be cared for unless other Christians took them into their homes?

Do you see what a big deal hospitality is in the New Testament? It's more than a cup of tea. It's using your resources, including your home, to build the church and preach the gospel. It's a willingness to put gospel advancement above personal comfort. And it's a requirement of Christian leaders that they model hospitality (1Ti 3:2, Tit 1:8).

I'm sure this kind of hospitality was often inconvenient and exasperating. It still can be! But when we're living in the light of the Lord's return, we're motivated to use our resources to serve others for His sake. We can see our homes as gifts to be opened rather than castles to be defended.

And so Peter tells us to offer hospitality to one another without grumbling – without wishing we weren't having to do it. Because such grumbling is ultimately a complaint against God who has been so hospitable to us. Once we were strangers to Him, but He brought us into His presence and seated us at His table and made us part of His family. And He did all this at enormous cost to Himself through the blood of Christ. The sign that we've received this kind of hospitality is that we offer it to others. Without grumbling and resentment. *And we'll find it brings great blessing!*

And then v.10: *“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.”* In contrast to a life which uses other people for our advantage, we're to use our gifts to serve others. That's how we prepare the Bride – the Church – for the return of the Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ. We're all gifted by God for this purpose.

And since God gives different gifts to different people, we don't have to try to be someone else or match someone else! God loves variety, and gives grace-gifts in various forms – Peter simply states that here without producing long lists of gifts, but you'll find those elsewhere in the New Testament and there's no reason to think those lists are exhaustive. Other gifts are mentioned outside of the lists, e.g. 1Corinthians 7:7 mentions marriage and singleness as *charismata* – grace-gifts. *(Incidentally, many an experience of marriage or singleness would be vastly and quickly improved if we would say to ourselves, “This isn't all about me! It's about Christ and His service. How am I going to use my singleness / our marriage to serve Christ today to build up His church?”)*

But let's keep to Peter's point! God gives each of us gifts, but it's up to us to be what Peter calls *“faithful stewards”* of those gifts (v.10). The word he uses means a manager – it's the word for the household slave who was entrusted with the Master's resources to manage them. And our Master is returning, so we should be using our gifts in light of that great day, not to serve our own ego, but to prepare His Church for the wedding!

Peter gives a couple of examples: gifts of speaking and gifts of serving. v.11: *“If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God”* - That doesn't mean they're infallible! But Peter says, If you open your mouth for God, do it with the seriousness it deserves! It's an awesome responsibility. Be careful what you say and how you say it, and do everything in your power to make sure that what you say conforms to the written word of God. That applies especially to pastors and missionaries, but also to Junior Church teachers, youth workers, small-group leaders, people doing one-to-one discipleship, sharing a testimony, singing, worship leading ... a lot of people!

Again, v.11: *“If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides ... ”* Gifts of service aren't lesser gifts – just different gifts. Peter probably has a range of things in mind: administration, finance, care of the needy, practical help in a thousand ways. Again, it's recognizing how God has gifted us, and faithfully stewarding God's resources. And that can be exhausting, but we don't do it in our own strength, but in the strength God supplies. Which means I'm asked to do what I can do. If God hasn't supplied a certain strength in my make up, I'm not asked to do it. What He has given me to do, I CAN do, in His strength.

And when we serve in that way, people will be blessed and ultimately God will get the glory: v.11: “so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.” And that’s a good note on which to end. All things done for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Amen” means ‘I agree!’

## **CONCLUSION**

This is what living the rest of your life for the will of God looks like. There’s a tremendous change of ambitions when we become a Christian, because we’ve discovered where life is heading – the return of Christ – and that shapes how we live. We’re no longer drifting, we have a purpose: to prepare the Bride of Christ for her wedding day by sharing the gospel and helping one another grow in holiness.

It’s easy enough to understand Peter’s words, but do we apply this teaching seriously enough? Are we living with the end in mind?

The test of our belief in Christ’s return isn’t our enthusiasm for drawing charts or naming the date. It’s in the way we live. *Has Peter been describing how you live?*

**PRAYER:** Father God, keep us watchful for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and serving faithfully by His Spirit, so that when He returns His Bride may be found ready and rejoicing; for Your glory’s sake. Amen.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION**

- How is the promise of Christ’s return shaping how you live?
- How are you using the gifts God has given you to build His church?
- What changes is God calling you to make as you reflect on this passage?