

# “Living at the End”

1 Peter 4:1-11

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**1 Peter 4:1-11** *Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. 4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. 5 They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. 7 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.*



Peter in this letter dared to do what few ministers and few churches are willing to do today. He was willing to bring news that was not pleasing to the flesh of his readers. Apparently Peter hadn't read all the latest church growth books or the most recent Barna polls. Or maybe, in light of His mission, he simply didn't care. Surely he knew that people go way out of their way to avoid such truths. Often they even go find another church to avoid it!

Certainly there is no argument that Christians are under some pressure these days. Without pointing any fingers of blame, the fact is it is a tough time to be a believer. Maybe it always has been. Maybe it always should be. Maybe that is Peter's point in this letter. For all that Satan and the world has dished out against us, they have also inadvertently served to purify the “spiritual pool.” For the church over the last century had become so watered down that we started to look like weak tea. But the game is on now. These days, you're in or you're not. It's really hard in our present religious age, to in anyway “ride the middle ground.” Maybe because there isn't any. In fact, there never was.

Out here in the Midwest US, few if any of us have ever “resisted unto blood.” (Heb 12:4) However, the believers in Asia didn't have it so easy. Many of them had in fact lost everything in pursuit for God and kingdom. Many had even died as martyrs. We might tend to feel that Peter could have gone a little easier on these folks. In light of our current culture, many folks have asked the same concerning my preaching over the years. Pastors are forever being tempted to take the spiritually broad and easy road. Just give folks a big spiritual hug, pat them on the head, and tell them that all will be OK, and have lots of people in your pews. But things aren't going to be OK. We're heading into the home stretch and the cold hard truth is that in fact things are going to get worse. (2 Timothy 3:13) And as *things* get worse, so will people in response. For in a great degree, as the world goes, sadly, *so goes the greater church.*

1 Timothy 4:1 tells us that “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...*”

Despite the stark reality of a difficult situation, Peter was calling and *is calling us* in this passage to not only stand strong, but to up our game. The call was to close ranks, hold each other up...protect one another, and serve God and Kingdom to an even greater degree. You see, the last thing Satan expects from any church when things

get tough is for us to turn it up! He doesn't expect us to give more, serve more, love more, communicate more, pray more, etc when we are under fire!

It wasn't that he was calloused or unfeeling. Peter *did* encourage them. He reminded them that God was still with them even in the fires. He had not abandoned them. And I am here reminding you of the same today. And He reminded his readers that this world was just a brief stop on a sojourners life. The real one was yet coming...just as it is for us today. But yet Peter *did* not and *would* not flinch from the message he had been given to deliver. That is a mark of a true man of God! He was not a man pleaser, and he was no wimp. Peter delivers his message and now it was their move in all of this. What now would they do? Would they fold, or push on?

So Peter lays it all on the line now. He again reminds them that Christ endured great suffering on their behalf. He points out that whatever they were going through, Jesus went there first, and endured far worse than they have. It was, no doubt, a hard message for him to deliver, and an even harder message for them to swallow. They were not words for the weak or the tacitly committed. It was the call to the maturing committed disciple. It was only for the faithful. It still is. Maybe that's why few receive it. For it was and is the litmus test for those who believe themselves to be so.

Peter now calls these suffering saints in verse 1 to "arm up." But his call was not to arm ourselves with the weapons of this world, (we would like that!) but rather with a state of mind. One that reflects an understanding of the truths of chapter 3, and a grasp of the gospel and the price that was paid for us to have it. We are called to the "same mind." The same as Christ and the same as each other. Both of which flies in the face of our current individualistic culture...and "every man is an island" social paradigm.

*Peter does not use the Greek word for light armor here but the word for heavy armor. We need all of the protection we can get to prepare ourselves for the battles ahead. God does not promise to carry us to the skies on flowery beds of ease. God does not hand out colorful brochures offering good health, prosperity, wide popularity, and a long life to those who accept Christ. Those who array themselves in such flimsy robes are in for a shock. Peter had long since learned to arm himself for battle. When he had been arrested years before in Jerusalem and sentenced to death, he simply went to sleep in his prison! He was not only a conqueror but also "more than conqueror," as Paul would have put it (Ro 8:37-note). He had learned how to arm his mind.*

(Phillips, John: Exploring Ephesians: An Expository Commentary)

Humanity today seems largely "aloof" as to those around him or her and what it really means to love them. Christ calls us to an other-centered, sacrificial, agape love while the world lives largely in the mindset of the great "me, my, and mine."

The journey we all are on is never static. There are no rest areas in the sojourn of Christianity. Each of us will be called, *sometimes in the midst of our worst personal storms or at the moment of our greatest earthly desires...* to take that next step up in this odyssey of faith. For many of course, it will be here that they "bow out"...and we know many who have. But some...the "remnant", the "*few who find it*," they will lean in and continue in their mission and on to greater blessings. The truth be told, even now God is "separating the sheep from the goats."

*Eze 34:17 'And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats.*

*Eze 20:38 "I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD."*

Mal 3:18 *“Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.”*

To move on and grow on, there is no magic elixir in which to avoid discomfort and personal sacrifice. There might even be pain. And in our effort to avoid all of such things, many folks will herein simply head on back to the world. These are the defining moments of our lives. The ‘cross-roads’ of your eternity! For it will be at those moments that you will unreservedly declare to all of the world just how much you love Jesus. Or *how much you don't*. Because anyone can sail when the sky is clear, the water is calm and the wind is at our backs. But *can* we...*will* we, do so in the midst of the storm...when all hell is breaking loose? And further, will you be willing to, in faith, “step out of the boat, and onto the water” in the middle of all of it? That’s what Peter was asking for...

While every individual will be tempted to sin, until the believer makes that firm “burn the bridges” commitment to, out of a love of Christ, to live a life of holiness and sanctification, he or she remains especially susceptible to the pull of sin, the world, and self. Until such a radical devotion is given, we essentially are attempting to reside in an imaginary “middle world.” Scripture warns us against trying to live there. For it is a place full of chaos, dissatisfied living, and the absence of peace. Often this stems from our belief that we are individually free and “master of our own domain,” and we therefor try to live in the light of that ideal. But everyone discovers sooner or later that that premise is bogus. I pray for your sake that you discover that truth earlier than later.

So therein lies our choice. To whom and to what shall we be bound? Because there is no man that is "free" in the worldly sense! We have a generation that believes that they are, but they are blind to the addictions they live under. They are in fact subject to the dictates of culture and society. The ever changing moralities, fluid word meanings, and the worldly desires of the flesh.

The word “lusts” here is plural, for that which the world lays before us is many and forever changing. Capricious fads, fluid cultural norms, and mandatory luxuries tend to push us into daze of confusion and overwhelmed with insecurities. The fact is, we can only choose either a life of bondage to the “lusts of men” or one of “bond-servant” to the will of God. This is the exercise of man’s free-will as well as the confines of such.

To quote John Phillips again: *we might have gotten away with things when we were pagans, but that will not do for the new life we have in Christ. Peter reminds us that the past is the past. It is over and done with. There must be no going back to it. There must be a break with all that now. As Paul puts it, "our old man [the man of old, the man I used to be] is crucified with [Christ]" (Ro 6:6).* (Phillips, John: Exploring 1Peter: An Expository Commentary)

And now as a child of God, those folks we used to run with think we are crazy. All their toys are broken but they won't set them down and they wonder why you have moved on. They don't understand your new life and decisions and have resorted to talking smack about you behind your back. And now they have social media to bring on the pressure.

They cannot imagine any value system other than their own. You and your Christ life are quite simple destroying the foundations ...the “underpinnings” that are holding up their assumptions about life. When one of their crowd makes a decision like this, they're astonished! It makes them wonder, and it usually makes them *angry*! And because we live in a fairly rural and therefore fairly backward community, they possibly have never seen such an occurrence except maybe on TV or a documentary they saw in junior high about cults.

But Isaiah 44:14 clarifies much of this for us, saying *"They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand."* (NIV) The New Living

renders that passage as "*Such stupidity and ignorance! Their eyes are closed, and they cannot see. Their minds are shut, and they cannot think.*"

One of our faiths "dirty little secrets" is that some have "tasted" the things of God and *have* returned to the darkness. Hebrews 6:4-6 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

It is not because they don't 'get it.' Those that return to the darkness do not do so because they *don't* see or because they *can't* see, but so *you* can't see *them*! That's the handy thing about darkness. I may not be able to see where I am going, but you can't see me going there either! John 3:19-21 ESV says "*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*"

In the midst of this passage...almost going unnoticed, is just a few words that have no doubt been given as a motivator ...a clarifier even, that overshadows the whole text: "*the end of all things is at hand.*" There seems to me to be a deep inability for humanity to grasp the reality that each one of us lives today in the shadow of our own eternity. We are today living in the brevity of one's time on this planet. This age is coming to an end and soon each and every one of us will stand face to face with our Creator. It **will** happen.

Again, so many within the greater church world are not doing well in this age. Our commitment and faithfulness is so **fragile**. 2Corinthians 13:5 says "*Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.*" Our lives speak what our tongues are unwilling to. Hebrews 6:8 tells us that "...*if a field bears thorns and thistles, it is useless. The farmer will soon condemn that field and (will) burn it.*"

Despite the stark evidence of our lives, we often will reject the fact that God does indeed operate in a realm of black and white. In a place where nuance, excuses, and human reasoning carry no weight, and souls are lost for eternity because truth was received mentally but never lived out. We mistake His grace for tolerance, and His silence for acceptance. We are so often caught up in the arena of church, religion and the faith community but live double lives where we clandestinely yet purposely transgress both God's grace and his commands. Titus 1:16 tells us that "*Such people claim they know God, but they deny him by the way they live. They are detestable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good.*"

And what is the worst part in this is that we damn those around us to hell also, because they see all of this play out...sometimes even interact with us in our sin, and Christ and faith become a joke and we are mocked by them for the seemingly cartoon version of Christianity that we attest to. Col 1:23 "...*you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.*"

And then, in what Peter calls us to do "above all things", we fail to the greatest degree. "...*above all things have fervent love for one another.*" This is how the world will know we are Christians. This is how WE know we are Christians. This is the supreme litmus test of salvation. And the clock is ticking. We all corporately and individually have precious little time to wake up. Jesus so loves you. There will never be any question about that. Do you love Him? The manifest of that vertical love is your true horizontal version. Your love "for one another."