

### **Living in Light of the End**

Harold Camping was a Christian radio broadcaster, who ministered in Northern California from 1958-2011. Many of you may remember back in 1992, Camping predicted the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in his book entitled 1994? Camping predicted that on September 6, 1994 the Lord Jesus Christ would return, the church would be raptured, and the end of the world would ensue. September 6, 1994 came and went with no return, no rapture, and no end of the world. After some quick calculating and figuring, Camping admitted to a mathematical error and adjusted his prophetic timeline. The adjusted date was set to May 21, 2011 (for the rapture of the church), with the final consummation of the age, taking place 5 months later, on October 21, 2011. On May 21, 11:59AM thousands of Camping's followers were eagerly awaiting the return of Christ, but at the strike of noon nothing happened. So they waited a few more hours until six o'clock, but still, nothing happened. So they decided that they needed to wait until the last possible moments. In the final seconds of May 21, 2011 nothing happened. Shocked and a little embarrassed, Camping admitted to being confused, but still asserted that the end of the world would occur on October 21, 2011, but it did not.

In the months prior to May 21, 2011 many of Camping's followers had quit their jobs, they had sold their homes, they had cashed in their retirement savings, and they had maxed out their credit cards. The majority of his followers used this money to purchase billboards, radio broadcasts, posters and tracts to proclaim to the world Camping's prediction that the end was near. Other followers used their money to travel and to live in comfort and luxury for their remaining days upon the earth.

This is not the first time that Christians have jumped the gun on the return of Christ. Throughout history it has actually happened many times. Even though the Scriptures clearly and repeatedly state, "that no man knows the day or the hour of his return and that his return will be like a thief in the night; no one is going to see it coming." I think this is one of the reasons why Christianity is often looked upon with such ridicule and scorn. It is very common for the world to associate a crazed lunatic, wearing a sandwich board, ranting on the street corner, proclaiming the end of the world, with Christianity.

I do not think any true believer is comfortable being associated with that side of Christianity, but the truth of it is, the proclamation of the end of the world is a message that the world needs to hear. This is a theologically sound message. It is an accurate and truthful message. Indeed, the end of all things is at hand and judgment is very near.

Acts 17:30-31, The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this, he has given assurance to all, by raising him from the dead.

The question that I would like for us to address this morning, in light of the end, how does the LORD God desire us to live? In light of the end, what is it that the LORD God requires of his children? Are we to cash in all of our assets, buy billboards and radio broadcasts, and diligently proclaim the end? Are we to remove ourselves from society, move to the hills and eagerly await for his return? For

the Christian, what is the appropriate response to the end of all things?

Please turn with me to the book of 1 Peter. In our passage this morning, 1 Peter 4:7-11, Peter answers this question in detail.

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.

Since therefore the end is near, believers should live according to the will of God. Practically speaking this means four things:

1. Believers must keep alert in their prayers (v7)
2. Believers must love one another (v8)
3. Believers must be hospitable to one another (v9)
4. Believers must serve one another (vv10-11)

Since therefore the end is near, you must, Point #1, keep alert in your prayers.

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.

First off, I think it is helpful to define “the end.” What does Peter mean by stating “the end of all things is at hand?” The word translated “end” does not necessarily refer to cessation, or termination, or to a chronological conclusion. Rather, the term “end” is better defined as consummation, or fulfillment. The term refers to a purpose being attained, or a goal achieved. In this context, “the end” is referring to the return of the LORD Jesus Christ. The reason the “end” is at hand is because the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ has inaugurated the last days. All throughout the Scriptures, but especially in the New Testament, attention is drawn to this fact, that we, just as those living during the writing of the New Testament, are living in the last days. Since we are living in the last days, we must live our lives in light of this truth.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul admonishes the believers in Rome to understand the time of their lives in relation to the end of days, the consummation of the age.

Romans 13:11-12, 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 night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Likewise, in the Paul's letter to Titus, he reminds him that the grace of God has appeared,

Titus 2:11-14, ...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, waiting for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the book of Hebrews, the author exhorts his readers to hold fast the confession of their hope and to meet together regularly for encouragement.

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.

In the book of James, he also points to the end of time and comforts and encourages his readers by telling them:

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.

And lastly, in the book of 1 John, he plainly states in:

1 John 2:18, Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

Now these are just a handful of the passages that mention the end of days, but do you notice a common thread that runs throughout all of these passages of Scripture? The end is mentioned, judgment is mentioned, and instruction is given. This is very typical of New Testament eschatology. Notice that there is no encouragement to predict the specific date or the time. Nor is there a call for erratic or extraordinary behavior. There is no call for drastic measures to be taken. Rather, in waiting for the end to come, believers are called to be faithful, to be obedient, and to pursue godliness and holiness.

Today, within the camp of evangelical Christianity, there is an unhealthy preoccupation with the end times. Anytime something out of the ordinary happens, especially lately, you can almost be guaranteed that within a few weeks, someone will write a book explaining the event in light of biblical prophecy. But rather than latching onto the end times and focusing solely on the sensational and the astonishing, eschatology should be used to encourage believers to pursue godly living.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, when he was asked what he would do if the end came today, he replied that he would “plant a tree and pay his taxes.” I think what Luther meant was that we need to live every day in light of the end. We need to live every day in anticipation of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. So every one of our days is to be lived out in this light, and the tasks of each day must be completed, in this light.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10, 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.

The realization of the end, that the end is at hand, that the end is near, that the end is imminent,

should have a tremendous impact on your life today. Every single one of our days should be lived as if it were our last. This is exactly Peter's train of thought in 1 Peter 4:7-11. Peter is instructing his readers that in light of the end, they should live in a certain way.

The first instruction Peter gives, Point #1, believers must keep alert in their prayers.

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.

Here in this verse, Peter uses two verbs that should characterize our prayer life to God: self-controlled and sober minded. The Greek word translated "self-controlled" comes from a word that means "to save" and "mind." The basic idea is to keep a safe mind, to save your mind, to guard your mind, to protect your mind, or to keep your mind clear. The term often refers to having or being sound of mind. It refers to thinking moderately, or to thinking in a sensible manner. This term is descriptive of someone who is steady, unwavering, and level headed, not someone who is impulsive, not someone who is swayed by fluctuating emotions, but someone who is reasonable and sensible. The meaning of the term "sober minded" is very similar to that of the term "self-controlled." The literal meaning is "not to be drunk," although Peter's usage of this word goes far beyond intoxication. To be sober minded means that you will not be swept away by emotions, that you will not be swept away by desires, lusts, and passions. It means to be calm and collected, temperate and circumspect. It refers to someone with clarity of mind and sound judgment.

Regarding these characteristics, the question that comes to mind, in light of the end of all things, what does being self-controlled and sober minded have to do with our prayers? I think Peter is warning his readers that in light of the end, do not lose your head, do not act irrationally, do not get swept away with all the predictions. Do not get swept away by the frenzy of activity and preparation, do not be swayed by the religious hype. But rather, remain in control of your thoughts, and rationally think things through. Collect your thoughts and evaluate them, in the light of the Scriptures.

Be self-controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers. In other words, be self-controlled and sober minded so that you can pray, specifically so that you can pray more effectively. A self-controlled and sober minded spirit is conducive to the act of praying. The Christian who is always on the tear, whose mind is crowded with anxieties, fears, and the worries of the day is not going to have an effective prayer life. Neither is the Christian who is never at rest in his heart, or the one who is indecisive, vacillating and impulsive; neither is the one who follows the passions of lusts within his own heart. If we are self-controlled and sober-minded, then we will "be alert in our prayers." But if we are not alert in our prayers, if our prayers are scattered and confused, it is because our mind is scattered and confused. It is because our hearts are scattered, confused, and conflicted.

The realization that history is coming to a close, the realization that the Day of the LORD is fast approaching, that the hour is at hand, that the Lord Jesus Christ is returning, should compel us to wholly trust and depend upon the LORD God, and our dependence upon the LORD God is manifest by our prayers to him.

This is not the first time that Peter has expressed concern regarding the prayers of God's people.

1 Peter 3:7, Likewise husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Peter knew, firsthand, the importance of a strong prayer life. Peter is a great illustration of a man who had experienced a less than acceptable prayer life. Do you remember the Garden of Gethsemane? In the hours that preceded the arrest and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, he asked his disciples to, “Remain here and watch,” as he went on a little farther to pray.

Mark 14:37-40, And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him.

In the final hours of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter exchanged sleep for prayer. Peter slept in the garden, when he should have been alert, when he should have been self-controlled and sober minded, and engaged in prayer. And as a result he fell into temptation; he fell into sin. Prayer is the beating heart of our relationship with the LORD God, it is the source of our power, it is the source of our strength, it is the source of our encouragement and refreshment. By our prayers, we demonstrate our dependence and our reliance upon the LORD God.

Now, I am not just referring to our formal times of prayer, I am also talking about the unceasing attitude of prayer, our prayerful ongoing communion with the LORD God, our ongoing posture of God consciousness, our continual and ceaseless prayers that encompasses every moment of every day of our lives. To pray in this manner, to pray unceasingly, takes great discipline. Prayer of this magnitude is hard work. It takes drive, it takes tenacity, it takes a self-controlled and sober mind.

Where are you at in your prayers with the LORD God? Do you ever exchange sleep for prayer? Do you ever exchange work for prayer? Do you ever exchange good spiritual activity for prayer? The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak. This week, I want you to think about what it is that is hindering you from praying. What is it that is preventing you from praying? And whatever it is, lose it. Whatever it is, get rid of it. Whatever it is, cast it away immediately. Beloved, do not hesitate. There is great, great, urgency in correcting a less than acceptable prayer life. Do you know why? Because the end of all things is at hand, so make sure that you are praying, make sure that you are self-controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers. John Bunyan said “You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you prayed. In the life of a believer, prayer is to be preeminent, it is to be before all other activities.

Since therefore the end is near, Point #1, you must keep alert in your prayers. Since therefore the end is near, Point #2, you must love one another.

1 Peter 4:8, Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Peter now turns from the vertical aspect, of our relationship with the LORD God, to the horizontal aspect, of our relationship with one another. The immanence of the end of all things should not only provoke us to pray, but it should also provoke us to love one another. Again, this is not the first time that Peter has expressed concern regarding our love for one another.

1 Peter 1:22, Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

The Greek word that translates “sincere” is *anypokritos* which literally means, “not pretend or not hiding under a false appearance.” To be sincere is the opposite of being hypocritical. It means to be genuine, to be real, to be free from deceit, undisguised, and to be without pretense. Our love for one another should not be an act. It should not be just acting the part. It should not be phony, it should not be wearing a mask, it should not be hypocritical. Rather our love for one another is to be sincere, genuine, and authentic. Our love for one another should be agape. Agape love is the highest and the most noble form of love. It is the love that gives, there is no taking involved. It has the kind of love that sees the highest good for another and delivers that good, no matter what it may cost. Agape love is the sacrificial love of God. And the supreme example of this love was shown at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.”

The LORD God gave his Son. The Lord Jesus Christ who was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. God through the Lord Jesus Christ recognized our great need and he delivered the highest good for us, at the highest possible price, the precious blood of his Son, the LORD Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter 4:8, the command to love is prefaced with the words “above all.” Above all, keep loving one another earnestly. In other words, before all other things, in order of the most importance, the highest and most supreme duty is to love one another earnestly.

Peter here is making reference to the law of God and to the great and foremost command, which summarizes the whole of Scripture.

Matthew 22:37-39, And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depends all the Law and the prophets.

John MacArthur comments, “Love is not an unregulated impulse. It is a biblical discerning, discriminating service rendered to others in need, even if that need means sacrifice. It is not an emotion, it is a duty. It is an act of selfless sacrifice on behalf of someone else. It cannot be reduced to an emotional feeling. The key to love is selflessness. The key to love is humility. The key to love is to be lost in meeting the needs of others. And the people who really love are committed to others, unselfish, gracious to meet others' needs, no matter who they are and no matter what the need might be. Everything begins with love.”

Peter also qualifies the command to love one another with the word “earnestly.” The term “earnestly” literally means to stretch out or to strain. It was used to describe an athlete exerting

maximum effort, stretching out and straining his muscles to win the race. In this same manner, we must stretch, strain, and exert maximum effort to love one another. Do not wait for the loving feeling, because love is not a feeling, nor is love a state. Love is an action, love is shown in word, deed, and in truth. Love is a deliberate, volitional, act of the will that involves meeting the needs of others, even if that involves great personal sacrifice, pain, and discomfort (IE. stretching and straining). Love does not wait for the other person to ask for help. Love does not wait for the other person to respond (so you can reciprocate). Love is not conditioned upon anything. Love is not what the other person does for me or to me, love does not even focus on me, but it focuses on others. Love is others focused. Love takes the initiative. Love pours out expecting absolutely nothing in return. Do you know why Peter exhorts us to love one another in this manner?

1 Peter 4:8, Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

To love as God the Father loves, to love as the Lord Jesus Christ loves, to love in a sacrificial and selfless manner will mean that your love will cover a multitude of sins. The Greek word for covers literally means to cause something to be hidden or veiled and hence it is not visible –it is covered. One of the most common ways that the word “cover” or “covered” is used is in reference to God covering our sins.

Psalm 32:1, Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Jeremiah 31:34, For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The LORD God covers our sin by forgiving it. The LORD God covers our sin by choosing to remember it no more. The LORD God covers our sin by choosing not to hold our sins against us. The LORD God covers our sin by removing it as far as the east is from the west. The LORD God covers our sin by cleansing us with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When does God do this? When does God cover our sin? Is it always covered? God covers our sins after he has convicted us of our sin, after our sin has been addressed; after we confess and repent from our sin. To cover sin with love does not mean that sin is not dealt with in a biblical fashion. It does not mean that sin is ignored and allowed to continue. It does not mean that a blind eye is turned upon it, nor does not mean that church discipline is invalidated.

If sin must be dealt with biblically, if sin must be lovingly confronted and addressed, how then are we to cover it with love? What does this mean? To cover sin with love, means that love will not take it into consideration, love will not bring up, love will not share sins that have already been dealt with biblically.

Proverbs 17:9, Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.

Someone who does not lovingly conceal a sin repeats it to other people. This passage is talking about bringing up issues from the past. This verse is not telling us to ignore sin in the present, but to not gossip about sin that has already been dealt with and addressed. Without the covering of love, close friends will be separated, friendships destroyed, and strife and dissension will prevail. Wayne Grudem remarked, “But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding, and conflicts abound – to Satan's perverse delight.”

In the church, in the body of Christ, when all the confrontation is done, when all the exhortation is done, when all of the proper steps of restoration are complete, then we cover the sin, then we bury the sin, and then we remember it no more. If you truly love a person, it is very easy to forgive them. Love accepts people as they are, including their imperfections, including their quirks and all their defects. Love makes patience and forbearance easy. It is far easier to love and to be patient with my own child than someone else's child. Do you know why? Because I love my children. I love my children unconditionally. I will always love my children regardless of what they do or become.

Church life can be very difficult. Living and serving alongside other Christians can be very difficult. The local church is filled with all sorts of characters. The church is filled with unique personalities, with differing backgrounds, with differing opinions and perspectives. The church is comprised of all sorts. As we learned last week, the church is also under constant attack. The Adversary is a tempter. The Adversary is a deceiver. The Adversary is a devourer. Take these two points and add them together, and you have the perfect storm. Sinful individuals, with differing backgrounds, at different stages of their sanctification, under the attack by a great and powerful adversary.

The local church has the potential to be a nuclear bomb of dissension, and it is the slightest things that seem to set it off. Why? Because of the unseen spiritual battle that is raging against us. Why are misunderstandings amongst Christians so prevalent within the church? Why are well intentioned comments often perceived as mean spirited or hurtful? Why do Christians often think the worst about their interactions with their brothers and sisters in Christ? Why?

Ephesians 6:12, For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Much of our conflict and disagreements are merely the Adversary and his spiritual forces at work against us. The schemes and the wiles of the devil are alive and well, and they are seeking to divide us and to conquer. Church life can be very difficult. We are all over the map, but that which unites us is far greater than that which seeks to divide us. If we are to love as our Father God has loved us, if we are to cover sin as our Father God has covered our sin, then we must accept the shortcomings and the faults of one another. We must be patient with the foolish words, and the unloving actions of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must be willing to lovingly endure the hostility, the unjust treatment, and the thoughtless unkindness of one another. Why? Because love covers a multitude of sins.

To sum it all up, to cover sin with love means that we must be ready to forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and to overlook offenses against us, because our Father God went to great lengths to cover and forgive our sin.

Since the end of all things is at hand, be self-controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers. Do not be swept away by the end times hype, but rather, use your head, and think things through, be of sound mind. And if there is something that is hindering your prayer life, then cast it away entirely. Since the end of all things is at hand, love one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.