

A Biblical Method For

Contending With Conflict

1 Peter 4:7-11

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I. Serious And Watchful Prayers

The End Of All Things

“But the end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7a).

Likely a reference to the end of the Old Covenant, the Jewish priesthood and temple practices. This system, which became faithless and apostate, would end in a cataclysmic fashion known as the siege of Jerusalem. This is the primary focus on Jesus’ Olivet Discourse and is often misinterpreted by the more modern science-fiction orientated popular theologians as a reference to a, sort of, nuclear end of the world. If we cross reference this verse with verse twelve we see that Peter is writing of a trial his readers were about to go through. Writing to people who were about to embark upon difficult times, Peter offers the Christian method for contending with conflict.

“Therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (1 Peter 4:7b)

Serious

Peter gives the proper disposition for Christian prayers. Peter uses the word ‘serious’ or ‘sober’. The word in Greek is ‘sophroneo’. It means to be of sound mind, to be in one’s right mind, to exercise self control, to curb one’s passions. Although Paul teaches us that none of us know how to pray as we ought, we should have some idea how we ought not to pray. I believe this admonition by Peter would remove any notion of praying in such a way where we don’t know what we’re saying. The modern notion of tongues would fall into this category.¹ Other methods of praying this might address would be emotionally driven prayers where passions take control. This would be praying in the flesh -- just the opposite of praying in the spirit as it is often referred to. We must be aware of stream of consciousness prayers also, especially when leading in prayer. Our prayers should be sound and well thought out.²

¹ I don’t believe the modern notion of tongues is what was happening during the New Testament era.

² I don’t mean for this to paralyze our prayer life or to suggest we must do a theses prior to prayer. But there is a cavalier attitude many Christians have about addressing God that seems inconsistent with the types of prayers we see in scripture. Two things we commonly see in biblical examples of prayer are reverence and specificity i.e. they’re praying about something, not merely rambling.

Watchful

Peter buttresses this idea by telling Christians they are to be watchful in their prayers. This word ‘nepho’ means, to abstain from wine and is used metaphorically of moral alertness. In all this Peter is telling Christians that as they seek to find strength and encouragement through difficulties they are not to lose their selves or their minds in prayer but that their prayers are to be sound and thought out. We must keep in mind that it is easier to have our emotions manipulated than to have our thinking manipulated. We must guard against the enemy and our own flesh in all venues, even in our prayers. Peter now addresses something he considered to be even more important than prayer.

II. Love Covers A Multitude Of Sins

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8)

Stretched Out Love

It shouldn’t surprise anyone that the prime directive is love, one for another. Specifically here is a fervent love. Literally a stretched out love or a love that strains for its object. Jesus told His disciples, “As I have loved you so you also ought to love one another” (John 13). He stretched Himself out on the cross and died. This is the greatest expression of love. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13). At very least Christian love is a love that is willing to pay a price.

Willing Discomfort

To love like Christ loves means we’re willing to be uncomfortable with what we must go through in order to love someone. This means you love people who, in your estimation, are unreasonable, selfish, dispassionate, overly passionate, weird, sinful, self-righteous, angry, clueless, a nuisance, insensitive, overly sensitive. It also means loving people who think you’re all these things. Christian love also means that if you really believe your brother or sister has a fault, you overcome fear and confront their fault the way Jesus did to the ones He loved. Much can be said of Christian love but Peter’s next statement bears examination.

Covering A Multitude Of Sins

Peter writes, **“for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”** This reference to Proverbs 10:12 also contains an allusion to the sacrificial love of Christ which covers our sins. It seems Peter is suggesting that, although the Christian community may be full of faults, if they can manage to be loving, the sins with which each of us contend, will not overwhelm us. I have found that if somebody is aware that I love them, it is much easier for them to put up with the multitude of flaws they find in my character.

Speed Covers Fundamental Weakness

Daly Thompson was a two-time Olympic gold medalist in the Decathlon. He had world class sprinting speed running about a 10.3 hundred meters. When it came to a very technical event like the pole vault it seemed that he had numerous fundamental errors. I asked a pole vaulter why Daly was still able to pole vault over seventeen feet. He said because he can run the hundred meters in 10.3. If you're running down the runway fast enough you can make a ton of mistakes and still clear the bar. Love covers a multitude of sins.

III. Hospitality

“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling”(1 Peter 4:9).

Mundane, Yet Valuable

This may seem a bit mundane, Peter is simply suggesting (or commanding) that Christians be hospitable and generous to guests. But I have found that if someone visits the church, and later I find they have been invited to a church member's house, they are much more likely to stay at the church. Peter is addressing Christians who are about to undergo a fiery trial. A bit of advice he gives in being able to endure this trial is hospitable social interaction.

Teas, potlucks, breakfasts, birthday parties, showers, barbecues, etc. are social situations where you can come to develop relationships. These types of things should not be underestimated. It may seem pious to only want to involve ourselves in Bible studies, prayer meetings and service programs. But being hospitable and participating in the hospitality of others is part of the Biblical program for Christians.

Without Grumbling

And just in case we hate this idea but we're going to do it anyway with a stiff neck and clenched fist, Peter says this is to be done without grumbling – literally meaning a secret displeasure not openly avowed. So I guess we need to work on our attitudes. Maybe we mistakenly think that God has given us what we have so we can hoard it for ourselves. Peter corrects this notion in his next verse.

IV. The Manifold Grace Of God

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

Gifts...Not An Exhaustive List

I don't necessary wish to launch into a lesson on spiritual gifts. Allow me to express a few opinions I have regarding this issue. First, I don't think that the lists of gifts given in the New Testament are exhaustive. On the list to the church at Corinth, for example, we see helps and administration which we do not see on the list to the church at Rome. I don't think we can assume that the Corinthians had gifts available to them that weren't available to the Roman church. Paul, I believe, is merely putting together some examples. The fact that you can't match your gift with the gifts listed should be of little consequence. You might have a gift of greeting people or of friendship.

Responsible For Other Gifts

Secondly, I don't think that discovering your gift should, in any way, relieve you of the responsibility of other gifts. If you're a gifted teacher, for example, that is no excuse for not being hospitable. We must keep in mind that our ultimate example is Jesus. He had all the gifts.

Find By Doing

Finally, I think your gift or gifts are something you discover you have because you're doing it. If people are following you, perhaps you're a leader, if people are listening to you, perhaps you're a teacher, if people are coming to you for comfort, perhaps you have a gift of mercy. But you don't discover your gift through massive introspection or some temperament analysis. It's like being at someone's house for Christmas. Someone is greeting people at the door, someone else is generously bringing food, still another person is fixing the food, yet another individual is being encouraging while you're sitting on the couch waiting to open your gift. Weeks, months and years go by and still you're sitting on the couch. You really should be doing something. Whether you know it or not, the Bible teaches that every person in the church has something to contribute. As we seek to serve in whatever capacity we perceive as necessary, our gifts will become manifested.

Multi-Colored Quilt

Peter tells us that whatever it is (our gift) we should, **“Minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”** God has entrusted us with a life, as Christians, which contains qualities designed for each others' good. When we put all of these gifts together we, as the body of Christ, somehow convey to one another the manifold (multi-colored or the various qualities) grace of God. The church in a certain respect is almost like a quilt made of many patches which reveal the gracious character of the one who made it. It is when each patch in the quilt takes responsibility to be good stewards that the quilt provides warmth for Christians who find difficulties in this present life. We must also realize that no one is content or complete with his own gift, but has need of his brother.

V. Speaking And Ministering To God's Glory

“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” (1 Peter 4:11a).

Speaking In Accord With Scripture

Peter has gone from prayer, to love, to hospitality, to gifts in general. Of course, when addressing a community of people, the scriptures never neglect the following exhortation – the way we handle what we say. **“If anyone speaks,”** Peter writes, **“*let him speak as*”** like, or in a manner consistent with or even as **“the oracles of God.”** The oracles of God are the utterances or word of God found in scripture. So if you are going to encourage someone, it is important that your words be consistent with the word of God. We must avoid the “I think God would do this or that” statement apart from Biblical warrant. So often the “I like to think of God as...” statement is followed by either a sentimental image of God that may or may not be accurate or an abject denial of what the scriptures clearly declare God to be.

Jealous God

I realize that we want to be encouraging to one another but it is no small task to be a teacher of Israel and to speak on behalf of God who guards the presentation of Himself to mankind with great jealousy. This should be embarked upon with great fear and respect. God regards false images of Himself as an act of hatred toward Him (Exodus 20:4,5).

Minister By God's Orchestration And Ability

“If anyone ministers,” Peter continues, **“*let him do it as*”** or in a manner consistent **“with”** or by **“the ability which God supplies.”** The word ‘supplies’ here is the word ‘choregeo’ from where we get our word ‘choreography’. Literally to be a chorus leader, lead a chorus and to furnish the chorus at one’s own expense. To procure and supply all things necessary to fit out the chorus. In other words we’re not all just doing our own dance here. God has orchestrated the means and has supplied the ability by which Christians are to minister to one another. I think ‘ability’ and ‘supplies’ can be likened to spirit and truth. God has provided His truth through His word and by His Spirit inclines our spirit toward these good deeds.

VI. The Chief End Of Man

“That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11b).

Peter finishes this section by stating the ultimate purpose of his letter, of the church, of the scriptures and what the divines of Westminster determined to be the chief end of man. Peter writes, **“That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

The covenant community of God, which was about to undergo a fiery trial, is called to pray for one another, love one another, be hospitable to one another, minister and speak to one another in a manner consistent with God’s word, recognizing all this is done by a power He supplies.

The Chief End Is Not

Then we are told what chief end of all this is – the purpose for the fiery trial and our proper response to it. Although it is wonderful for people to get saved, that is not it. Although it is important for us to grow in our faith and maturity, that is not it. Although we all want to know God more intimately and personally, that is not it. Although we all want and should work toward reformation in our personal lives, in our families and in our world, that is not it.

To Glorify God

The reason we live, and the reason we go through what we go through, is to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. Glory belongs to Him. What Jesus did on the cross, that He died and rose again to save men from the due penalty of their sin, over and above being the hope of men, was done to the glory of His Father. On the great and terrible day of the Lord (judgment day) when the glory of the cross is made fully known, no doubt those who are in Christ will rejoice in their salvation. But what that day will contain far beyond personal rejoicing in one’s own salvation will be the glory of God Himself for His righteous judgments and tender mercies. This is the godly mindset toward which Christians are to move.

To Bask In His Glory

“To whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” He is the eternal, almighty God. He has been and will be forever and ever. The answer for Christians who are about to endure, or are enduring, the fiery trial – who are swept up and swept away by, what amounts to be, the trifles of temporal discomfort, is to bask in the glory and power of their almighty and everlasting Father. Our prayers for one another and

our counsel toward one another are to have this as it's end. It is the final answer to every question.