

## HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE FOR “THE END”?

*4* <sup>7</sup>The end of all things is near; so then, let your mind be alert and be [spiritually] sober for prayer. <sup>8</sup>Above all else, maintain a fervent love for each other, because love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Offer hospitality to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup>Just as each one has received a [spiritual] gift, so use it, ministering to each other as good stewards the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, [let him do so] as one who speaks the words of God; if anyone serves, [let him do so] as [one who serves] by the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belongs the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:7-11)

### **Introduction**

You may have seen caricatures of self-proclaimed prophets—eccentrics—pacing back and forth on a crowded city street; dressed in little more than a tunic and sandals; wearing a somber, expressionless face and a long scraggly beard; and carrying a placard that reads, “Repent! The End is near!”

Now here we find the Apostle Peter saying the same thing! “The End is near!” James likewise declares that The End is near: *“be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near”* (Jas. 5:8.)

Yet, as we all know, nearly 2000 years have passed since these words were written by the apostles. Were they mistaken? Certainly not! But how are we to understand these words, “The end is near”?

Actually, the translation, *“The end of all things is near,”* (or, *“at hand,”*) is a bit misleading. A more accurate rendering of these words proves to be very awkward when translated into English: “The end of all things is in the state of approaching;” or, “The end of all things is in the approaching mode.” By way of illustration, we can apply this phrase to a spacecraft that is ready for take off, all systems are go, it is in the launching mode.

Another way of expressing the truth of these words would be to say that we have entered the last chapter of world history. Regardless of how men may choose to divide history, God, the sovereign Creator and Lord of history, has chosen to divide it into two great periods; note Hebrews 1:1-2, *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”* “The past” refers to the days of history prior to the coming of Jesus the Messiah. “These last days” refers to the time of Christ’s coming and the years that precede His return in glory. Hebrews 9:26 refers to this time period as *“the end of the ages.”* 1 Peter 1:20 refers to this time period as *“these last times.”*

Scripture indicates that the only thing that prolongs this last chapter of history is the patience of God:

*The Lord is not negligent with regard to the promise, as some consider negligence; on the contrary, he is exhibiting great patience toward you. He does not desire anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)*

But the patience of God will not last forever; “The End” will surely come:

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will disappear with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed by being burned up, and the earth together with the works that are in it will be exposed. (2 Pet. 3:10)*

Seeing that we are living in the last chapter of history, how should we prepare for “The End”? The Apostle Peter tells us that the best way to prepare for “The End” is to live a healthy and consistent Christian life.

## **I. Prepare Yourself for “The End” ...by Maintaining a Sober Mind**

Because we do find ourselves living in “the last chapter” of history, Peter exhorts us, *“let your mind be alert and be [spiritually] sober for prayer”* (vs. 7.) What does Peter mean when he gives this exhortation?

In chapter one, verse 13, he instructed us, *“focus your mind [literally, “gird up the loins of your mind,”] and be [spiritually] sober.”* The imagery is that of binding up the loose-flowing robe at the waist with a belt so as to be ready for physical activity, such as working or walking. The meaning is that we must prepare our minds for action; we must have our minds to be spiritually alert, as opposed to their being spiritually disengaged.

We as Christians must not allow ourselves to be spiritual drifters. A spiritual drifter is a person who lacks well-developed moral faculties; he lacks a mind and heart that know the Word of God and are committed to it. A spiritual drifter is a person who does not trouble himself to pause and evaluate the various alternatives and choices that confront him, or the ultimate consequences of those choices. A spiritual drifter is a person who, in matters of moral conduct, seldom looks beyond the immediate present. A spiritual drifter is a person who is easily driven by his impulses and passions with little concern or resistance. A spiritual drifter is a person who has no strong moral convictions and whose life is not governed by any strong commitment to the divine moral standard. A spiritual drifter is a person who is not hardened in the depths of sin, but neither is he committed to Christ and His Word.

We as Christians must not allow ourselves to become preoccupied with the things of this present world and this present earthly existence, ignoring the great issues of eternity. We need to take a spiritual inventory, asking ourselves such questions as, "Is my life revolving around Christ, or around someone or something else?" "Am I growing in Christ, or am I drifting away from Him?" "Is the Word of God having a life-changing impact on me, or am I shutting it out, numbing my conscience to its convicting warnings and its righteous demands?"

This, then, is what it means to *"let your mind be alert and be [spiritually] sober."* It means to be aware of the fact that Christ will return, as the angels assured the disciples at the time of our Lord's ascension into heaven:

*[The disciples] were looking intently up into the heavens as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the heavens? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:10-11)*

It means to be aware of the fact that Christ's return will take the world by surprise, as our Lord Himself warns:

*As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup>and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24:37-39)*

It means to be aware of the fact that Christ's return will be of monumental and eternal consequence, again, as our Lord Himself warns:

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (Matt. 25:31-33)*

It means to be aware of the fact that we are living a life that sooner or later is going to culminate in a personal, face to face encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Paul informs us:

*... we make it our goal, whether at home [in the body] or absent [from the body], to be well-pleasing to him; <sup>10</sup>because all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ; so that each one may receive the just reward for the deeds done while living in this[ earthly] body. Each one will be rewarded for what he has done, according to whether it was good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:9-10)*

Peter instructs us to be “[spiritually] sober for prayer.” What does this mean? It means that as Christians we are to consciously live in God’s presence and live in fellowship with Him—one form and result of such communion is a life of prayer. To be out of touch with God, to live in disregard of God, is to be out of touch with reality—it is the spiritual equivalent of being drunk.

Let us prepare ourselves for “The End,” by maintaining an alert and spiritual mind. As Peter exhorts us in the opening chapter of this epistle: *“Therefore, focusing your mind and being [spiritually] sober, set your hope squarely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet. 1:13.)

## II. Prepare Yourself for “The End” ...by Practicing Brotherly Love

*“Above all else,”* Peter continues, *“maintain a fervent love for each other”* (vs. 8.) The thing that is of greatest importance is the practice of Christian love. We are to maintain such love, guarding it and not allowing it to lapse among us; where it has been neglected, we must make the necessary repairs.

Let us bear in mind again Peter’s earlier exhortation: *“Since you have, by obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere love of your brothers, earnestly love one another from the heart, <sup>23</sup>having been born again”* (1 Pet. 1:22-23a.) We must recognize that one of the great purposes of our redemption is Christian love; we have been saved in order to love God, to love our Christian brethren, and to love our neighbor. Regeneration (the spiritual new birth) is what creates the spiritual affinity between Christians, and what gives to us the ability to express brotherly love towards fellow believers. With these great facts as the foundation—namely, the purpose of our salvation being to express the divine attribute of love and regeneration giving us the new nature that makes it possible to do so—we are commanded to practice brotherly love in our relationships with one another. Christian love, brotherly love, must not remain a mere potential; it must be a divine reality in our lives and in our relationships with one another as Christians.

How is brotherly love to be expressed? We practice brotherly love when we seek to avoid offending our brethren:

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* (Rom. 12:18)

*[Love] is not rude; it is not self-seeking.* (1 Cor. 13:5a)

*Let us not become conceited—provoking each other, envying each other.* (Gal. 5:26)

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself.* (Phil. 2:3)

We practice brotherly love when we admit our wrongs and seek reconciliation. The Book of Proverbs tells us, *“A contrite answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”* (Prov. 15:1.) *“A contrite answer”* means the humble acknowledgement of wrongdoing and the asking for forgiveness.

We practice brotherly love when we extend forgiveness to one another and exercise forbearance:

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.* (Col. 3:12-14)

We practice brotherly love when we show concern for the well being of fellow Christians:

*Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others.* (Phil. 2:4)

*Bear one another's burdens, and by doing so you will fulfill the law of Christ.* (Gal. 6:2)

Another expression of Christian love, brotherly love, one specifically presented in this passage by the Apostle Peter, is the practice of hospitality. Hospitality has the effect of building up Christian fellowship, and combating the view that we are each independent and isolated individuals in our relationship with God, note 1 John 1:3, *“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”* We as Christians must not practice “elevator Christianity.” Just as the glass elevator ascends up the building, enclosing only a handful of people in its cell, so some Christians focus only on their personal relationship with God (the vertical dimension of Christianity,) to the exclusion of any genuine spiritual interaction with fellow believers.

Hospitality was not merely a matter of entertaining guests during the first century of the Christian era; it was primarily a means of ministering to one another. Will you open your heart and home to minister to a Christian brother or sister who may be lonely, who may be in need of encouragement, who may be undergoing a severe trial, who may even be in need of a home?

Peter makes the stipulation that Christian hospitality be offered *“without complaining.”* We must not be selfish about the possessions and blessings the Lord has seen fit to bestow upon us and entrust to us; rather, may we follow the example of Lydia, who invited Paul and Silas into her home, saying to them, *“If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house”* (Acts 16:15.) As Christians, we must cultivate the attitude described in Ephesians 4:28, *“He who has been stealing must no longer steal; rather, let him labor, doing honorable work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the one who is in need.”* Whereas the thief is self-centered, thinking only of how he can take advantage of others, the Christian must be Christ-like, thinking of how he can minister to those in need.

Furthermore, Christian hospitality must be offered *“without whispering.”* The word Peter uses (γογγυσμός) has both the meaning of “complaining” and “whispering.” With regard to its second meaning, Peter is informing us that hospitality is not intended to be an occasion for gossiping about other Christians. The purpose of hospitality is to build one another up, not tear one another down.

Let us prepare ourselves for “The End,” by practicing brotherly love. The Apostle Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonian church should be our prayer for ourselves as well: *“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you”* (1 Thess. 3:12.)

### **III. Prepare Yourself for “The End” ...by Using Your Spiritual Gifts**

It is a common view that it is the pastor who is the one who does the ministering, and the laymen are the ones who receive the ministering—but such is not the biblical view! Consider the biblical view of how the Christian life is to be lived within the church:

*[Christ] gave ... the pastors and teachers<sup>12</sup> to prepare the saints for the work of ministry for the purpose of building up the body of Christ<sup>13</sup> until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, until we become a mature man, until we attain the level of the stature of having the fullness of Christ.* (Eph. 4:11-13)

In the light of the message of 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, each Christian must inquire as to what is his spiritual gift:

*Now there is a variety of gifts, but it is the same Spirit [who gives all of them].<sup>5</sup> And there is a variety of ministries, but it is the same Lord [who appoints all of them].<sup>6</sup> And there is a variety of works, but it is the same God who performs all things in all ways.<sup>7</sup> Now the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the common good.* (1 Cor. 12:4-7)



How does a Christian discover his spiritual gift(s)? First, by acquainting yourself with the various gifts listed in Scripture, (note especially Romans 12:6-8 as well as 1 Peter 4:11a):

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.* (Rom. 12:6-8) Note: With the completion of the New Testament canon, the gift of prophecy is no longer an operable gift in the life of the church. As Paul indicates in Ephesians 2:20, the church is built upon *"the foundation of the apostle and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."*

*If anyone speaks, let him do so as one who speaks the words of God, if anyone serves, let him do so as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.* (1 Pet. 4:11a) Note: Peter's reference to "speaking" would pertain to such gifts as teaching, exhorting, and encouraging, but, in light of the comments made above with regard to the gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8, it would not include the gift of prophecy for the contemporary church.

Second, a Christian should ask the Lord to make known what gift(s) He has bestowed upon him. He may pursue the answer to his prayer by asking himself, as he considers the various spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, "What do I enjoy doing? What am I good at doing? What do I naturally find myself doing?" In his endeavor to ascertain his spiritual gift(s), the Christian should by all means listen to other Christians when they point out to him his areas of ability—and inability.

How are we to use our spiritual gifts? According to Peter's counsel (vs. 10-11,) we are to use them in ministry to one another. We are to use our spiritual gifts to serve and build up the body of Christ, first ministering to those Christians with whom God has brought us into immediate contact and then further expanding our ministry as God sees fit to open doors of greater usefulness and opportunity. Furthermore, we are to use our spiritual gifts as good stewards of the grace of God. We must recognize that our spiritual gift(s) are entrusted to us by God. We must recognize that the particular gift entrusted to us is a part of God's multifaceted grace. We must recognize that when we use our gift(s) we are actually ministering the very grace of God to one another. We must always be aware that we are to use our spiritual gifts for the glory of God:

*Just as each one has received a [spiritual] gift, so use it, ministering to each other as good stewards the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup>... so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belongs the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.* (1 Pet. 4:10-11)

Let us prepare ourselves for “The End,” by using our spiritual gifts. Let us carefully consider and take to heart Jesus’ parable of the Talents:

*... a man going on a journey ... called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ... <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. Master, he said, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more. <sup>21</sup>His master replied, Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness! ... <sup>24</sup>Then the man who had received the one talent came. Master, he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. <sup>25</sup>So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you. <sup>26</sup>His master replied, You wicked, lazy servant! ... you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed! (Matt. 25:14,19-21,24-26)*

## **Conclusion**

“The End” is approaching, we are living in “*the last days*,” (as the New Testament defines this present age between the time of Christ’s first coming and His return in glory,) and so we must be prepared. How do we prepare ourselves for “The End”? We do so, not by conducting a continual prayer vigil in the church; not by forming a Christian commune on the top of some mountain, not by re-locating in the land of Israel.

The Apostle Peter tells us that the best way to prepare ourselves for “The End” is to be found living a healthy and consistent Christian life, as it is defined for us in this passage of Scripture: 1) cultivate and maintain an alert spiritual mind; 2) practice brotherly love; and 3) use your spiritual gift(s).