



***Live In Light of the End***  
**1 Peter 4:6-11**

The word “theology” elicits different responses from different people. For some, they absolutely love theology. They think about it, they read books on it (some very old books), they talk about it with their friends and family. They absolutely love theology.

But then there are others who don’t give much consideration to theology. It’s not that they don’t think it’s important, but it’s just not important for them. It’s more for those who are interested in it, or for those who are academics and scholars, or pastors and other full-time ministry workers. Again, it’s important, but it just isn’t necessarily always relevant for them in their lives.

And among the various topics within theology, what is called “eschatology” - that is, the study of last things - has a tendency to elicit those same various responses, sometimes to an extreme. In my experience it seems that people either absolutely love eschatology or completely ignore it. Some obsess over eschatology in an unhealthy way, doing so at the neglect of other theological issues and doctrines, only giving attention to the controversial aspects of eschatology - like whether or not there is a secret rapture, trying to figure out who the Antichrist is, and watching the news to see what is happening to the nation of Israel and then getting anxious and excited about the possibility of Christ’s return. And then for others, they don’t like that people obsess over those things so their response is total neglect. For them, their eschatology would be nothing more than REM’s - it’s the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine. Jesus wins, I’ll be ok when the time comes, that’s all I need to know. But beyond that, there isn’t much need to think on biblical eschatology.

However, the Bible presents a different view of eschatology. One that is more robust than simply watching the news headlines and one that is far more important to neglect and ignore. **You see, what all people believe about the future of the world, has far reaching consequences about how they live in the present.** And this true for non-Christians as well as Christians. What we understand about eschatology will shape how we interact with those *outside* the church community and how we interact with those *within* the church community. And, our eschatology tells us the grand meaning and purpose of our history and our lives that are lived within that history.

This is what Peter is wanting to remind his readers, and us this morning, in our next passage in 1 Peter. So, let me invite your attention to 1 Peter 4 as we continue in our sermon series through this letter.

Last week we looked at verses 1-5 and Peter's call for us to live holy lives in an unholy world even though they might malign you and me for not living the same way as they do. Let's pick it up in verse 6, read through verse 11 and then we will walk back through it...

**1 Peter 4:6-11**

**6** For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. **7** The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. **8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. **9** Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: **11** 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.

Even though there is more in the letter, this really ends the main body of the letter. But the key phrase I want us to see, because it is the main thought in this passage which all other instructions flow from is the important phrase in verse 7 again...

**1 Peter 4:7a**

**7** The end of all things is at hand...

Now, when we read that it is easy to think of Peter as that guy standing on the street corner with a cardboard sign that says "The End is Near." And so we might think of Peter warning his readers about a cataclysmic or apocalyptic event that they need to get ready for. That they need to get their bunkers ready, stock up on ammo, canned goods, and toilet paper because things are about to go very badly. However, that is not the instruction. Instead, Peter gives instruction on loving others. And showing hospitality. And serving others. And preaching the good news of the gospel.

And the reason is because when Peter says "end" here, he doesn't have in view an apocalyptic event which will wipe out humanity. The Greek word used is "telos" and it carries with it a greater meaning than just the event of the end. It carries with it the idea of completion and fulfillment.

It's very important to understand that the Bible tells us the story of redemptive history. A history that has meaning and purpose. It had a beginning and has an end. Time is not cyclical, it is linear, moving toward something. That God has been working to redeem a people for himself and that work of redemption is nearing its "telos" or end. It's fulfillment and completion.

Which might sound strange because Peter wrote this a long time ago. And obviously, Jesus has not returned yet. So, we might ask, did Peter get this wrong? Well, the

answer is no, because the Bible speaks of the last days as the period of history that began with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. So, Peter really could say to those in the first century, the end is near, we are living in the last days of God's redemptive plan.

Well, what about us in 2022? Surely the end would have happened by now, right? I think it is important to consider that while 2,000 years or so since Peter wrote this seems like a long time to us, it is not in the grand scheme of things, especially when you think of eternity. We believe, like Peter, that the end is near, even if we don't see it in our lifetimes. And so, nearly 2,000 years later, we can say with all the more certainty, the end of all things is near.

But again, having a biblical eschatology, that God is working toward the completion of redemption, will shape how we live. In other words, our eschatology will shape our ethics. And this is the point of this passage.

So, let's see how this plays out in life. Let's go back and look at verse 6...

**1 Peter 4:6**

**6** For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

If you remember last week, verse 5 says that those who malign Christians for not living the way they do will have to give an account. That they will stand before the Lord and face him as Judge. Yet, this does not have to be the case for everyone. There is still time and opportunity for those still alive to hear the gospel and though they might die physically, they will live spiritually with the Lord forever.

That's who I believe Peter is talking about here, those who were alive but are now dead, but during their life heard and responded to the gospel. And because they did, they live spiritually now.

Why that is important to remember is because it might be easy for the world to look at Christians who pass away and think, "See there is no difference in how we end up. Whether you believe in God or Jesus or not, we all die." And that way of thinking might end up infiltrating your own thinking. What good is believing in Jesus if I still get cancer? What good is believing in Jesus if I still face the threat of tragedy and disaster? It seems as if it all ends the same for us, whether or not we are followers of Jesus or something and someone else.

But, Peter reminds them, no we don't end up the same. Yes, we all die physically, unless the Lord returns, however those in Christ live in the spirit with the Lord. And a healthy understanding of the nearing "end" or nearing "telos" keeps those things in perspective. So, we can walk through our trials as exiles with hope. And we continue to

preach the gospel to those who are still alive physically and implore them to repent and believe in Jesus that they might live spiritually.

But let's go on...

**1 Peter 4:7**

**7** The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Notice again, Peter's "therefore." Again, we live in light of "the end." And part of what that looks like, Peter says, is to be "sober-minded" and "self-controlled."

Those descriptions can certainly mean to keep yourself sober, to not be drunk (in contrast to others around us - 4:3) - it's used that way in other places, but it also refers here to making sure that you think rightly about life and eternity. Keeping an eternal perspective about everything.

And this is important because it is easy to begin thinking *wrongly* about life and eternity. Whether they know it or not, everyone has an eschatology. A belief about the source of problem in life and the source of the solution to that problem. A belief about what the future holds. A belief about death and the afterlife. And needless to say, not everyone holds a biblical eschatology. And so, as exiles in this world we need to stay sober-minded and not be influenced by the other eschatologies that exist and are so prominent in our culture.

Trevin Wax wrote a great book called *Eschatological Discipleship*, and it is basically a book about all of this, living as disciples of Jesus with a proper understanding of the last days and the future that awaits us. And in the book, he lays out what he calls "rival eschatologies" that are prominent, at least in our Western culture. He identifies three and I think it is very helpful in our understanding of how we may be shaped by these ideas.

The first rival eschatology that he identifies as the most influential in our culture was that of the **enlightenment**.

If you don't remember from school what the Enlightenment was, it is a philosophical tradition that came to prominence in the 17th and 18th centuries that exalted human reason and placed all hope for the future in science and technology. It ultimately stands in opposition to faith and religion and says that morality and purpose can be universally discovered by human reason alone. That there is no reason to look to a higher authority or transcendent authority for meaning and purpose. In other words, it was a liberation from a faith that was irrational where mankind is saved by its own reason. *Progress* is the goal of society and so to be *progressive* is to be on the right side of human destiny and the only way for society to positively move forward.

Obviously, tons more could be said about the enlightenment, but with even a basic understanding of its tenets, we can see how this infiltrated our culture's way of thinking. So, how is this different from Christianity's view of the end?

Wax writes, "The gospel confronts the Enlightenment's rival eschatology by proclaiming a different view of history. Christians claim that the turning point of the ages was not the dawn of reason in the sixteenth century but the dawning of new creation in the first. We do not believe the world is heading toward a secularist utopia in which naturalism reigns supreme but toward a restored cosmos in which every knee bows to King Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

But this foundation of western thought, that hope is to be found in progress and that progress is to be determined and delivered by human reason alone, shows up in other eschatologies.

A second rival eschatology incredibly prominent in our culture is that of the **sexual revolution**.

We can consider this an eschatology because it believes "that self-expression is the purpose of life and the best path to human flourishing."<sup>2</sup> That the problem of unhealthy emotional behavior is the result of sexual repression. People are restricted in their expressions of sex and gender, therefore the solution is liberation. Again, progress means standing against outside authority and critics in order to find salvation and fulfillment with the expression of your true self.

And a third rival eschatology identified by Wax is that of **consumerism**. The purpose of life is to move from not having to having everything you could ever want to or desire. In consumerism, the vision of the meaning of life is shrunk down to the personal pursuit of wealth, transforming products and relationships into commodities valued for their usefulness to people.

Clearly, these are ideologies and belief systems that are incredibly prominent in our culture and if we aren't careful we will be shaped by these rival eschatologies, so, we must be "sober-minded" and "self-controlled." We must keep the vision of the end in view as we live each day.

If we believe that this life is all there is, then we will live in a way that tries to maximize personal pleasure and fulfillment. That's what those last two rival eschatologies promote.

Paul talked about this in 1 Corinthians 15, in a chapter where he is trying to remind them that there is a resurrection and eternal life to be had based on Christ's resurrection. Listen to what he says...

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<sup>1</sup> Trevin Wax, *Eschatological Discipleship*, 199.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

**1 Corinthians 15:32**

What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

In other words, if this life is all there is, then of course we should live for personal fulfillment. This is all we get. Why wouldn't we encourage someone to express themselves any way their heart desires? Why wouldn't we try accumulate as much of the best and nicest of things for our own enjoyment?

But if we believe that there is an eternity - a *telos* to which God has been working towards - then that changes how we see the real problem of our world and the real solution that is needed. And again, this changes how we live practically.

In fact, it's been said that the Church is an eschatological people. We embody the next life as we await its arrival. "The grand narrative of the Bible not only shows us what the future is but marks us out as a people belonging to that future. We not only know the ultimate future of the world, but we also embody that future."<sup>3</sup> Which is what this passage is about.

It plays out in our prayers, Peter specifically mentions here. If we believe that we live under the authority of God who is not only our Creator but also our Father, someone we have been invited into relationship with, then we will spend time in prayer with him. We recognize that life is not just material. It is spiritual as well. So, we want to cultivate our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

And, having a biblical eschatology will shape how we interact with others within the church community...

**1 Peter 4:8**

**8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Above all "love earnestly" - earnestly refers to a persistent love. A love that doesn't give up due to difficulties. We might call the opposite of an earnest, persistent love as a lazy love. A love that gives up just because relationships get hard or don't want to put in the effort it takes to have friendships and relationships with other sinners. But, Christians are not to be characterized by a lazy love, Christians are called to love earnestly because Jesus loved earnestly. Jesus doesn't have a lazy love for us. He persisted even when loving us and serving us meant dying in a horrible, gruesome way. He continues to love us and extend mercies that are new each day, because we need them each day.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 57.

Peter here says the reason we are to give attention to our love for one another is because love covers a multitude of sins. He's actually quoting a Proverb...

**Proverbs 10:12**

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

And here we see the contrast between hate and love. Hate wants to dwell on the ways in which someone has harmed us. It wants to heap shame on the other person. It is ok with broken relationships. It feeds off of strifes and conflicts. But love is different.

Earnest love is characterized by "covering sins." It does that because love, as defined by the gospel, is not conditional. It is not based on whether or not the other person meets the requirements for your love, and as soon as they fail to meet those expectations and requirements then it's over. That doesn't mean that sin is swept under the rug, or kept hidden, or ignored. It means that sin doesn't ruin or destroy the relationship.

But this acknowledges something important for us when we think about the Christian community. Sin is real. Sin is real and present in Christian community because sinners are real and present in the Christian community. In other words, we shouldn't be surprised when relationships get difficult. You are a sinful person who has come together with other sinful people to live in community as God's people. We are people with renewed hearts but we are still sinful. And that doesn't change just because you become a member.

It's similar to marriage, we will say to a couple in pre-marital counseling, you both are sinful people, at times with selfish desires, and that doesn't magically change once you say "I do." So, don't be surprised when there are challenges and conflicts in your marriage. The same can be said about the church community.

Yet, we tend to be surprised when someone isn't perfect. Not recognizing the real presence of sin will cause you to think, "Well, this church isn't perfect and so I'm going to look for another church," which by the way won't be perfect either. I mean lazy love, a love that doesn't persist, that doesn't cover sins, is by far the most common reason for people to break fellowship with their church families and leave to find another one.

But we should remember that we are called to persist in love, a love that covers sins - *both* real sins - transgressions of God's law- and sins that we merely perceive to be sins. The last two years has wreaked havoc on churches all over the world, because of differences in opinion regarding politics, regarding COVID and how to handle the pandemic, and so much more. And there have been many, many articles written over the last year talking about the affect it has had on churches. People leaving, giving dropping, pastors burning out and quitting, and so on. But church, we are called to persist in love, not just when it is easy but all the more when it is difficult. That is when love is truly shown.

So, when you are upset by someone else's social media post, persist in love.

When you are upset because someone ISN'T wearing a mask and you think they are being unloving, irresponsible, and reckless, persist in love.

When you are upset because someone IS wearing a mask and you think they are being ridiculous and fearful, persist in love.

When your grace group becomes difficult because a difference in views, personalities, and expectations, persist in love.

When we as pastors inevitably disappoint you, because we too are sinful men still being sanctified just like any Christian, persist in love.

When someone doesn't persist in love with you, persist in love with them.

And this will cover a multitude of sins. Again, Christians should not be characterized by lazy love because our Savior was not characterized by lazy love. Our sins have been forgiven, every single one of them, and though we fail him daily, he is not moved to break off our relationship with him. Instead we stand before him covered by the blood of Jesus which was shed out of love for us. And so, above all, love earnestly.

And this love is shown in practical ways, as we go on...

**1 Peter 4:9**

**9** Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

The idea here is that we are to welcome one another. The local church is to be a place of warmth in a cold world. The relationships we find here are to be places of safety in a world that is hostile to believers. The church is to be a place where common beliefs unite more than differences divide.

And so we gladly welcome one another into our lives and into our homes. Which means we should try not to grumble about having to clean because people are coming over, or not grumbling when we've had a long day of work and all we want to do is sit on the couch and watch the game and zone out but we have grace group that night, or not grumbling when someone is going through a hard time and needs your time and space for a cup of coffee and a chat.

As we earnestly love others, it means letting people into our most private spaces, spaces we want to reserve for ourselves, and letting them make the comfortable sometimes feel uncomfortable. And because we earnestly love them, we invite them to come as they are knowing that God has done the same for us. That while we were on the outside, God, through his work in Christ and his Spirit, has drawn us in. Without



complaining or grumbling, God has invited us to bring our mess with us and warmly welcomes us to be with him now and for all eternity. You see how our understanding of eschatology might shape how we relate to one another?

Peter goes on...

**1 Peter 4:10-11**

**10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: **11** 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.

Here, we are called to serve others to the glory of God. When we realize that this life isn't all that there is, that there is a resurrection and an eternity where we will be with our Lord and our brothers and sisters, then our attention shifts from self to others and to God.

God has equipped every Christian with some kind of gift, given to serve one another. Here he mentions speaking, probably the gift of teaching, recognizing that they are representing God's words to the community, in other words, take care to point people to Scripture. However, with whatever gift we are graciously given we serve with the strength given to us by God.

One commentator does a great job summarizing the thought pattern of Peter here, saying, "Christians must have a perspective on life that is informed by the understanding that they live in the final stage of God's redemptive work. That realization must be met with a mental state that rightly apprehends this situation so that prayers can take their proper place in the Christian's life. Thinking rightly and praying in a manner consistent with God's redemptive work enables a love for one another that persists even when one is hurt by wrongs within the community. When one has correctly apprehended reality, is centered on prayer, and is able to break the cycle of wrongs, one can also speak words that are consistent with God's revelation and serve others with a strength that he supplies."<sup>4</sup>

And Peter says *all* of that, is done to the glory of God. He ends this section reminding those exiles of the glory of the king who reigns over his dominion. And this is an important truth to remember as we live in a world that is not our own. We walk through this kingdom but we are home in another. And our king reigns today, but he will reign in fullness soon.

And while await his arrival, we allow the ethics of his kingdom to shape the way we live in this present world. And as we do that, we glorify the Lord, and point those in our

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<sup>4</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 638.

culture to a better eschatology. One that gives clarity to man's problem and gives real hope for the future, and then invites them into that reality by faith in Jesus.

As we consider this, the apostle John echos this in his first letter, later in the New Testament...

**1 John 4:7-11**

**7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Jl Packer wrote in his classic work *Knowing God*, "Could an observer learn from the quality and degree of love that I show to others - my wife? My husband? My family? My neighbors? People at church? People at work? - anything at all about the greatness of God's love to me?"<sup>5</sup>

We could even extend that challenge to the rest of our passage in 1 Peter 4 this morning...

Could an observer learn from the quality and degree of hospitality that I show others...anything at all about the way in which God has welcomed me in Christ?

Could an observer learn from quality and degree of service that I show others...anything at all about the way in which God has served me in Christ?

Again, doing so, would bring honor and glory to the Lord as we live as exiles in a world that doesn't know him.

So, the end is near, let's live like it to the glory of God and the good of others.

**VERSES**

- 1 Peter 4:6-11
- 1 Peter 4:7a
- 1 Peter 4:6

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<sup>5</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 144.

1 Peter 4:7  
1 Corinthians 15:32  
1 Peter 4:8  
Proverbs 10:12  
1 Peter 4:9  
1 Peter 4:10-11  
1 John 4:7-11

## **SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What do you think of when you think of “eschatology?”
2. What “rival eschatologies” do you see as most prominent in our culture?
3. What does it look like to “love earnestly?” In what way does “love cover a multitude of sin?”
4. How do you feel about hospitality? How does the gospel encourage us to be hospitable?
5. Do you know how you’ve been gifted to serve the church? Are you using your gifts?
6. How does a biblical eschatology shape the way we live in the present?