

## **FIRST PETER**

### Lesson 19

#### **Conduct in View of Christ's Coming**

1 Peter 4:7-11

Christ is coming back to this earth, literally, physically and bodily, in His Second Advent. Jesus will return in glory and in power. Biblical prophecy concerning the Second Advent and the circumstances surrounding our Lord's return will be fulfilled in every detail.

The Apostle Peter only briefly mentions the fact of Christ's return in this context. He does not go into the details of the events surrounding the return of Christ. He simply says, "The end of all things is at hand," but he was constantly exhorting his readers to look for the return of Jesus Christ, (1 Pet. 1:7; 1:13). However, in 1 Peter 4:7-11, he is concerned about how Christians should live now in view of Christ's return. How should we Christians think, act, respond in light of the fact that Christ is coming again to save the church and judge the world?

We should remember that prophecy is not designed to tickle our ears but to remind us that God has a plan for this world and that He expects Christians to live holy lives.

*"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).*

*"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:11-14).*

*"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat" (2 Peter 3:10-12)*

Almost without exception, when the coming of the Lord is mentioned, it is followed by exhortations to godliness and holy living on the part of Christians.

## CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS (4:7a)

### “(But)...”

For some reason the “but,” *de* in the Greek, was left off by the translators of the NASB. The KJV says correctly, “But the end of all things is at hand.” This word connects this verse with 1 Peter 4:1-6 and 4:5 in particular, which says the unsaved “*shall give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*” The thought of God’s judging the lost through Christ at the Second Advent causes Peter’s mind to focus on the return of Christ and then the end or consummation of all things.

### “the end of all things is at hand”

Some have tried to make this a reference to physical death, but it is an obvious reference to the second coming of Christ when all things will come to an end as we now know them. The way it is stated here in the NASB seems to indicate that Peter thought the end of all things was about to take place in his lifetime, but a more literal translation will help us understand what he actually meant. Because this is the perfect tense in the Greek it could literally be translated, “But the consummation of all things has drawn near with the continued result that it is drawing near.”

According to New Testament terminology, the last days and the consummation of all things began with the first advent of Christ. “*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son*” (Heb. 1:1-2). Yet the last days and the consummation of all things will not be complete until Christ returns in His second advent. “*Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet. 1:5).

For these Christians, the consummation had drawn near, in that it was nearer than before, but it is also continuing to draw near and will be finalized at the Second Advent. Christ’s coming and the consummation draws nearer for each generation of Christians.

Peter and these Christians looked for signs that would indicate that Christ’s coming was near and they saw some of the signs. Every generation has seen conditions in the world which would indicate that Christ might soon return because there are more signs as history moves on down towards the end. Today we are nearer the end and the return of Jesus Christ than any other generation, and the signs we see are greater than ever. We know that one day the trumpet shall sound, the Lord Jesus will break through the heavens with a shout and put His feet on the Mount of Olives, becoming the Savior of the church and the judge of rebellious nations. Even so come, Lord Jesus!

Realizing that Christ’s coming is near should motivate the Christians to live holy lives. Remember, these Christians were going through intense suffering. They had the hope of Christ’s return in the midst of their suffering. They knew that life was going to terminate and consummate either at death or the coming of Christ. They knew that suffering was temporary and fleeting and that Christ could come in their lifetime to deliver them from it.

## **CONTROLLED MIND (4:7b)**

### **“therefore, be of sound judgment”**

In view of the fact that Christ’s coming will bring the consummation of all things, Christians are told how they should live. These Asian Christians were suffering and there would be a great temptation to forsake the basics of Christian living to get out of the suffering. Peter points out that while Christians are patiently waiting for Christ’s return, they are to exercise “sound judgment” or “to be sane.” This is a term which is often contrasted with “insane,” and it means to be in one’s right mind, or in control on oneself.

Our whole intellectual life is to be brought under God’s control. Christians are to make sound judgments based on the fact that God has a plan for this world which is revealed in the Bible and which will be consummated at the second advent of Christ. Christians are to have the awakened, alert and disciplined mind of Christ and view the world and its happenings from a God-centered viewpoint. They are to make decisions according to their Bibles and not the newspaper. They should not be scatterbrained or frustrated about world events but should be calm, cool and collected, knowing that all things in this world are working for God’s glory, the good of the elect, and the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

## **CONSISTENT PRAYER (4:7c)**

### **“and sober spirit”**

The word “sober” is used in Scripture in contrast to “drunken” and it means to be calm and collected in spirit. In view of Christ’s return, we are to keep a cool head with our emotions under control. With this stability, we can pray effectively.

### **“for the purpose of prayer.”**

As Christians move on towards the end and Christ’s return, they should not be overwrought as they see world events, and they should give themselves to a consistent prayer life, seeking to know and do God’s will. We are not merely to pray but to give ourselves to prayer--praying habitually for protracted periods, through the day and at night, about everything.

Prayer is basically a mental attitude of faith. God is not impressed with flowery words, oratory or deep knee bends. The believer is to pray without ceasing because Jesus is coming again. A mind occupied with Christ results in prayer. This is to be the spiritual life of the believer, what breathing is to the human body, a natural necessity.

Christians must keep themselves awake and alert with all their faculties under control in order to give themselves to prayer. Prayer is essential for our spiritual growth and for any revival to come to the church. It is the means God uses to bring about His plans and purposes through us.

Our tendency as humans is to think humanly, running about in endless church activity, dissipating our energy on life’s various activities, none of which will have any lasting effect. Our first priority should be prayer—prayer for ourselves, our families, our

fellow Christians, our church, the lost, and for everything in life. Prayer allows us to get involved in God's plan for us until Christ returns. It is our number one priority; yet, it is the first spiritual exercise to go out of our lives when we get too occupied with the things of this world. Prayer is what changes our attitudes and our circumstances.

We must pray in our closets and we must pray collectively as a church in small groups and large groups, asking God to work supernaturally for us. The measure of a Christian's maturity is the quality time he spends in private and collective prayer. How much do we pray privately? Do we have prayer partners? How important do we think the public prayer meeting of the church is to the spiritual life of the church? Prayer must be a life style, not just a hit-and-miss proposition in our lives.

*"Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1).*

*"Pray without ceasing." (2 Thess. 5:17).*

Our first priority, as we wait for the return of Christ, is to pray; without it we will never know or do the will of God effectively!

## **CONSTANT LOVE (4:8)**

### **"Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another"**

The second priority of the Christian in light of the near return of Christ is to love one another. One of the key phrases in the Bible is "one another," a word stressing relationships. In 1 Peter 4:8-11, the phrase "one another" is used three times—love one another, be hospitable to one another and employ gifts in serving one another.

We are to love one another with God's kind of love, the Greek *agape*, a kind of love which is active no matter what the response of the object might be. This is a sacrificing love, one that cares for others more than self. It is a love which knows no bounds; that does the best and thinks the best of the one loved.

Love is to be fervent. Literally this means "a stretched out" love, and it was used of a race horse stretching his long legs and straining every muscle to reach the finish line. Agape love takes effort; it is going all-out; it is being fully committed to your fellow Christian.

Notice, Peter says above all. Before everything else in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we must have love. Love is the most important virtue we can manifest to our brethren.

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).*

It is not difficult to love when you agree with a person or your personalities hit it off, or you are in the same social or educational bracket. But it is difficult to love when these things are not present. This is precisely why we need agape love to overcome all the

prejudices and barriers that would keep us from loving all the brethren. It is agape love that we need when things get difficult.

Remember also that a negative, critical and harsh spirit cannot exist along with agape love. They are mutually exclusive. Critical Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit, for the first fruit of the Spirit is love. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).*

**“because love covers a multitude of sins.”**

Peter is not saying that we should shut our eyes to sin in the lives of other Christians or that we are not to exhort and reprimand another who is in sin. We are commanded to go to a brother who has fallen into sin and to restore him. *“Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).* What he is saying is that genuine love will cover and accept various personality quirks and imperfections in others (since all of us have them) recognizing that they are human and not yet totally sanctified. Love does not allow the shortcomings and failures of others to keep us from loving them.

All Christians have limitations in almost every facet of life—intellectual, social and physical, but in Christ, there is no limit to our capacity for growth in love. Most of us start out the Christian life rather cold, insensitive and loveless. Then God takes us and begins to share His love with us and we begin to grow in our capacity to love. By nature and personality, some people are more loving than others, but all of us need to grow in love. C. S. Lewis said, “God is in the business of making bad people good, and good people better.”

Our love capacity can and must grow if we are going to be effective Christians. Love is accepting another person for what he is in Christ, not what we would like him to be ourselves. Love forgives seventy times seventy and forgets. It accepts. It overlooks obvious faults. It is not critical and constantly dragging another person’s faults into public view. True love, God’s love, *agape* love, covers a multitude of sins. Every Christian and every local church needs this kind of love. We need this kind of love, and only God can give it to us. In fact, if we profess Christ and do not produce this kind of love to some degree, the Bible declares we are not Christians at all.

*“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:14).*

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).*

## **CARING HOSPITALITY (4:9)**

**“Be hospitable to one another”**

A third priority in view of the nearness of Christ's return is that we be hospitable to one another. Hospitality seems like such an insignificant thing, but it appears to be big in God's eyes and something He expects all Christians to do. The word literally means "friendly to strangers" and it was connected with entertaining others in the home with food and lodging. In the first century the public inns were filthy, immoral dives and both Christians and respectable non-Christians tried to avoid them, so it was necessary for Christians to open their homes to fellow Christians who were traveling.

What is hospitality? The love of strangers; the opening of the home in order to minister to others. What is one way you can be effective for Christ? Open your home for ministry. Be hospitable. Invite strangers to stay over night. Have a home Bible class and invite your neighbors. Have your home open for church functions. Have your home so open to others that they will feel very comfortable there. Homes are far more effective for ministry than a church building.

Hospitality is a ministry. Anyone can do it. God says open homes are a priority on His list of important things to do while you wait for Christ to return. We are to open our hearts as well as our homes to strangers. Perhaps you think your home is not nice enough, or you would like to open your home when you get a new sofa or some new drapes, but if you keep finding excuses, you will never open it, and you will miss out on one of the great ministries God has for Christians.

He wants you to venture out and start with what you have, however humble it may be, and make your home available to others. Anyone can start there. Perhaps you are saying, "It costs too much to have people over for dinner!" Then don't have them for dinner; have them for popcorn, or let them help by bringing some food. Homes are the most effective places to carry out ministries for Christ. Are you using your home for Christ?

### **"without complaint."**

We are to open our homes without complaining, murmuring or griping. We are to do it gladly and willingly, realizing that it is a ministry for the Lord. While there are times we need our privacy (and some folks are more private and less social than others), there is a place for all Christians to open their homes. This is to be done without a spirit of grumbling which may overtake us when we are asked to provide for the needs of others. (Even though we can well afford it and have time for it, we may just not want to do it.)

Hospitality—open home, open heart—is essential for the furtherance of the work of Jesus Christ on this earth.

### **CONTINUAL USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (4:10-11a)**

#### **"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another."**

A fourth priority in view of the soon return of Christ is a proper use of spiritual gifts. Peter is speaking about spiritual gifts, not natural talents. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, and some may have two or three.

Christians may differ on what gifts are active in the church today. Some believe that tongues, hearings and miracles are gifts for today, and some do not. However, all would agree that there are the active gifts of evangelism, pastor-teacher, exhortation, giving, teaching, showing mercy, faith, ministering (hospitality), administration, wisdom, knowledge and helps. There are varying degrees of these gifts, and there could be gifts not specifically mentioned in Scripture, although we dare not be dogmatic about this.

A spiritual gift is a supernatural capacity given by the Holy Spirit to minister to the needs of other members of the Christian family. Notice carefully that these gifts have been given to us that we might serve one another. They are to be used to encourage and build up the body of Christ.

*“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 11).*

All members of the Christian community are so gifted by God that they are to be interdependent; that is, we desperately need each other. Do you know your spiritual gift or gifts? Are you using your gifts in and through your local church to serve your brothers and sisters in Christ or have you become a spectator rather than a server? Those who are not serving are souring, and ultimately they will become spiritual cynics. Those who are serving others do not have time to be indifferent, negative or critical.

### **“as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”**

A “steward” was a slave who governed a household in direct obedience to his master. He had a responsibility to take care of something his master had entrusted to him. He guarded and administered the possessions of his master. A spiritual gift is given to the Christian by the grace of God. It is something that belongs to God that He has entrusted to the Christian to be guarded and used to get the work of the ministry done for Christ.

If we do not use our spiritual gifts for the good of the body, we will be unbalanced. How is your stewardship? Are you using your spiritual gifts to minister to fellow Christians? God expects you to use what He has given. A failure to do so is disobedience.

### **“Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies”**

Peter divides spiritual gifts into two categories. One of these is “speaking” which includes the gifts of teaching, encouragement, wisdom, and knowledge (and possibly tongues and prophecy), and may be applied to a preacher, a teacher of any size group or one-on-one contact with people. The person who speaks is to speak the Word of God, for it is through the Word that Christians are built up in the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

The other category is “serving” and would include mercy, administration, helps, giving, etc. Both categories are necessary and each is just as important as the other.

Notice that the serving gifts are to be done by “strength which God supplies.” To serve takes time and effort; it is just plain hard work. Our very best must be given to see that the Lord’s work is carried on in and through the local church to the world. We must never look at service to Christ, no matter how small or mundane the task, as an inconvenience or as unimportant.

### **CONCERN FOR THE GLORY OF GOD (4:11)**

**“so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ”**

The ultimate purpose of the use of spiritual gifts is not the good of the body, but the glory of God. This comes through the proper use of gifts. Whether teacher or helper, God is to get the glory through our faithful stewardship of our gifts. Whatever your gift, it is significant. The body of Christ needs you. You are to use your gift not to glorify yourself or other people, but to glorify -God.

**“to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

God alone must and will get the glory through the use of our spiritual gifts. We must use them faithfully. *“In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy (faithful)” (1 Cor. 4:2).* If we are faithful, we will be fruitful, and when we are fruitful, the glory belongs to God.

### **CONCLUSION**

We Christians must be aware that the return of Christ is near, and in light of His coming we need to reassess our priorities in the areas of prayer, love, hospitality and service. Remember, the things which please Christ are a fervent prayer life, an open heart that never stops extending itself to others, an open home that is used as a ministry center, and the giving of a loving, helping hand to brothers and sisters who are in need—using whatever spiritual gifts God has given us.

If you are not a Christian, I have some bad news for you. When Christ returns, He will judge the living and the dead. *“When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:7b-9).* The good news is that Jesus Christ has forgiveness and eternal life for all who will trust Him now as personal Lord and Savior. Will you trust Christ?