

# Prayer, Love, and Service While Suffering

## 1 Peter 4:7-11

**Introduction** – We have preached on these topics before, and even turned to this passage when we have done so. But now, preaching through Peter, we are more aware of the context in which Peter is writing these commands. That context will beg the question for us this morning in *our* context – how much more should these things be manifested in our body-life?

**The End of All Things** (v7) – Peter believes something is about to happen and instructs these particular readers to therefore act in certain ways. He is not looking to some distant future event. The ‘end of all things’ is pointing to the end of the old Jewish order, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, and the surrounding persecution of the church under the Jews and then the Romans. This is the common understanding of the New Testament writers (Matt 24, Gal 4:4, Heb 1:2, 1 Cor 10:11 are just some examples).

**Therefore, Pray** – Peter is referring to a particular event in history centuries ago. But his pastoral principle still applies. In times of affliction and suffering, we must avoid the temptation to run from God and instead ‘take prayer seriously’. Prayer is work. You are accomplishing things in your prayer. We should believe that, study our prayer life and the prayers of scripture, and avoid the evangelical ‘if it be Thy will’ add on that really becomes an escape clause from trusting your prayers to actually produce.

**Watchful in Prayer** – Peter had heard these words from Jesus in another time of affliction and testing, and disobeyed (Matt 26:40f). Watchful and seriousness are not measured by intensity of devotion, but by faith in future grace.

**Above All Things** (vv 8-9) – We already know that love for God and for our neighbor are the greatest commandments. The emphasis of the command here is to make sure it is a priority during hard trials. It is to be done ‘above all things’. And this goes opposite of what our flesh desires. If we are having a hard time, we have a tendency to ‘batten down the hatches’ and turn inward.

**Fervent Love** – “Fervent” does not mean ‘really emotional’. It is a word that describes the stretched muscle in strenuous activity. It means ‘earnest’, ‘zealous’, and ‘with straining’. Why must our love be fervent? Because we all stumble in many ways, so Peter quotes – “*Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins*” (Prov 10:12). When I love you, I do not have to say to you each time you sin towards me, “that was sin and you need to seek my forgiveness”. Love lets it go.

**Hospitality Without Grumbling** – This love must have legs and feet and go somewhere. We should be well acquainted with one another’s homes. This is not simply a command to house the stranger, but rather to show love one to another by sharing our precious time, family, and resources to those here in the body. Elders and deacons are to be an example to the rest of the flock, but we are all exhorted here.

**To One Another** – You have chosen to be a part of this particular church. While we of course have many other friendships and relationships, we are called to manifest the love of the brethren with the people in this room – the gathered saints. And recession or not, we have the resources to be the most hospitable people on the face of the world in the history of the church.

**In All Things** (vv10-11) – Giftedness in the church, formally and informally, is all a matter of stewardship. Everything you are and have is a gift, so there is no room to boast (1 Cor 4:7), and the grace of God is to be manifest in your use of His gifts for His glory (Matt 25:15-30). God has given you a gift to serve the body. He has given manifold gifts. The body has the opportunity, responsibility and resources to truly serve one another. Two areas are specifically mentioned.

**Gifts of Exhortation and Teaching** – The one who preaches in the body ought to preach as though Christ were teaching, for covenantally, He is (Rom 10:14). We ought to listen with this in mind and an eye to the text in front of us. We look for the work of the Word and Spirit, not by whether we leave with a lump in our throat, but whether we see what is preached in the Word then in our hearts and lives.

**Gifts of Ministry and Helps** – Deacons first, and then all who serve with gifts of ministry, must do so “*with the ability which God supplies*”. Only in this way will we be able to obey the command to not grow weary in doing good (Gal 6:9). In addition, it is only as we use our gifts and abilities, recognizing that they have come from God, that we will keep our humility about us, and the goal before us.

**The Goal in Mind** – “*that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen*”. Even in times of stress, difficulties, hard providences, and sufferings, we live to glorify and enjoy the Lord God. Fixed eyes upon Jesus. Absolute trust in His sovereign love. Out of that confidence, faith to fervently love and serve from the gifts God has given. And all to the glory of God.

Does God see serious and watchfulness in our prayers? Does God see fervent love towards one another at EEF? Does God see arms-open hospitality? Does God see the manifold use of His gracious gifts to His body bearing fruit? Only then is the life of this body truly to the glory of God.