

XI. Christian Living

February 1/3/4, 2021

1 Peter 4:1-11

Aim: To live our lives with the mind of Christ according to the will of God, in contrast to the world and in love and service to one another within the church, to His praise and glory.

A. Living in Light of the Past (1 Peter 4:1-6)

MacArthur: In this section, Peter call for believers to be willing to face persecution for righteousness' sake, and even for martyrdom in Christ. His call is a call to strength, to resolve, to unwavering firmness like a soldier entering battle.

McKnight: Our present section (4:1-6) is the second piece of advice Peter gives to those who face suffering for their Christian faith. In the first piece (3:13-22), Peter encouraged the Christians to remain faithful to their tasks in light of the coming vindication of God. Now he focuses on the effects of suffering on the Christian life.

1. Context (4:1a)

¹Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh...

Gardner: Peter now returns to the question of how Christians should live, and in doing so, takes us back to 3:18.... Since they are people who have been saved by Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, they should imitate Christ. Peter has written of how Christians are to witness to the Lord, but now he urges them to face the fact that the contrast between *their* lives and the lives of those around will bring them suffering, as it did for Christ who *suffered in His body*.

MacArthur: *Therefore* obviously points back to what Peter wrote in the preceding passage, that at the Cross Christ endured His greatest suffering, dying under divine judgment as the just for the unjust; yet there He also accomplished for believers His greatest triumph over sin and its condemning power, over the forces of hell, and over the power of death. The cross of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof that suffering can lead to victory over the forces of evil.

McKnight: In 3:18, Peter started to talk about the suffering of Jesus but went hurriedly along to the end of His life, a vindication (3:22). He now begins at the same point (suffering), but this time contents with his readers that suffering is good for the Christian life.

Sproul: The suffering Jesus endured was experienced in His human body. This reference to Jesus' appearance in the flesh is that He appeared as one like us.

Helm: With the opening phrase of our text, Peter again returns to Christ's sufferings, but this time with different intentions—he feels no need to further *encourage* us with Christ's triumphant vindication. He accomplished that in 3:18-22. Rather, he writes about Christ's suffering in this particular text to call us to *embrace* it as well.

2. Commands (4:1b-2)

a) *Our Attitude (4:1b)*

...arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...

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(1) Arm Yourselves

...arm yourselves with the same way of thinking...

Gardner: He urges Christians, *arm yourselves also with the same attitude*. Moving forward in Christian obedience means, in an almost military sense (*arm*), being prepared with the mind of Christ, who Himself obeyed, and then suffered. Christians are involved in a spiritual battle and must arm themselves as Christ did.

MacArthur: The key verb in this whole paragraph is the command *arm yourselves*, out of which spring all the motivations to obey the command. The verb, used here only in the New Testament, is from *hoplizō*, an aorist middle imperative, meaning literally ‘to arm oneself with weapons,’ or ‘to put on as armor.’ The noun *hoplon* means ‘weapons’ and is used in six passages, e.g., John 18:3, 2 Cor. 6:7, 10a. The picture is of preparation for battle.... The primary weapon Peter calls for in arming believers is *the same purpose* that was manifest through Christ’s suffering and death. That *purpose* (‘attitude,’ ‘thought,’ or ‘principle’) is a willingness to die because Christians know death produces the greatest victory (cp. 1 Cor. 15:26, 54-55; 2 Tim. 1:10; Rev. 21:4). Peter himself would have that very opportunity when he faced martyrdom and was faithful unto death (cp. Jn. 21:18-19).

McKnight: His strategy is for the mental dimension of life. To survive persecution in an obedient manner, Christians must have proper mental preparation (cp. 1:13): *Arm yourselves also with the same attitude* that Christ had. In the context of Peter’s letter, the proper attitude includes a steadfast hope for vindication (1:13; 3:18-22), a fear of God (3:15), and a commitment to live (including suffering) in such a way that outsiders see the grace of God (cp. 2:18-25; 3:1-2, 15-16). But the fundamental attitude is that Christ surrendered Himself to the God whom He knew would judge justly and save (2:23).

Dorani: To survive persecution faithfully, we must prepare like soldiers, armed with the mind or insight of Christ. Peter has already described that insight: we fear God, not humanity (2:17; 3:15). We commit to make God’s grace visible (3:15-16). In troubles, we have ‘a steadfast hope for vindication’ and entrust ourselves to God, who judges justly (2:23).

Sproul: Again we see the parallel with Paul’s teaching (Eph. 6:13-17).... Here Peter uses the same language of preparing for warfare.... Just a few verses earlier, [Peter] wrote that angels and authorities and powers have been made subject to Christ (3:22). The powers and principalities against which we wrestle have been put in subjection to Christ; nevertheless, the war goes on for us, and in order to succeed in the battle of the Christian life, we need to be armed. The armor for warfare that Paul gives includes helmet, breastplate, and shield. For Peter, the principal item of armor is the mind of Christ. We are called to arm ourselves by seeking the mind of Christ.... I know of no other way to gain the mind of Christ than to immerse ourselves in His Word. Studying the Scriptures is the way by which we learn the mind of Christ, because the Scriptures reveal Christ. We are living in the most anti-intellectual period in the history of the Christian church. The application of the mind to the search for understanding of the things of God is dismissed in some quarters and actually despised in others. Feeling is substituted for thinking. Christians, we are called to think, to seek understanding of the Word of God; there is no other way to get the mind of Christ.

Helm: *Arm yourselves*. Emulate Jesus. It is as Peter has finally come to the place in the letter where he rises up to unashamedly proclaim, ‘Followers of Jesus, be prepared to embrace not only submission but suffering as an aspect of your calling! Get yourselves ready for suffering!’

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... How do we go about embracing our calling? First, by becoming persons of resolve.... Notice, to embrace our calling in Christ initially required the attention of our mind. We begin by *thinking* clearly. And for that we need to develop the mental disposition of Jesus. Today, in the West, at least, it is the church that suffers from a naiveté of the mind. It is difficult for Christians here to understand and embrace God's intentions in suffering. We prefer a gospel in which God gives us healthy bodies and bulging wallets. And we too readily think that material blessing is the entitled reward of the gospel. To put it bluntly, the democratized West expects Jesus, comfort, ease, and acceptance from the world. Yet, in actual fact the life of Christ challenges all of this. Jesus resolved to live as a stranger in the world. He expected hardship.

(2) Ceased from Sin

...for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...

[DSB Note: contrast the former life of the unsaved man in 4:3. What Peter is saying here and in verse 2 is that the lifestyle of the Christian has been transformed: we no longer living in corrupt lusts according to the will of the Gentiles; rather, we seek lives of obedience to the will of God.]

(a) Life of Obedience

Gardner: Peter's next comment that *he who has suffered in his body is done with sin* can appear very strange to our ears. Clearly even Christians who have suffered for their faith can and so still sin, so this cannot mean that suffering for the faith has somehow purged the believer of all sin or revealed them now to be perfect people. It is better to understand this in the light of all that Peter has been saying about the suffering of Jesus and the suffering that therefore we Christians must also face.... If we have to suffer, let's make sure it is for following the Lord's will, for obedience to Him, and hence for good. If we then suffer, we do so from having specifically chosen not to sin but to obey God. The suffering itself reveals the depth of our break with the sin of the flesh. Facing life with this attitude, and then experiencing suffering as a result, will in fact confirm the Christian in his or her turning from sin. It actually ends up strengthening and reinforcing the believer's faith and commitment to the Lord.

McKnight: This verse has generated several explanations, and it is worth our while, because of the importance of this verse in the overall point of the paragraph, to consider the views and the evidence called in for each, and then to consider which option is the strongest. Some argue that Peter has in mind only the inevitable transfer (seen here as a suffering death) from a sinful to a saved state that takes place at conversion, as can be seen in Paul (cp. Rom. 6:1-12) and John (1 Jn 5:18-19). Others contend that Peter is dealing more generically. The one who suffers physically learns from such experiences not to sin but to value the obedient life. A variation of this second view is that the one who suffers has chosen to break definitively from sin. A final view particularizes the phrase 'he who has suffered' so that it refers only to the suffering Christ. That is, *he who suffered* is Christ, and He is the example to whom Peter is appealing. In this context, *is done with sin* means that Christ did away with sin.... In my judgment, since Peter has moved in this verse from Christ (*since Christ suffered in His body*) to Christians (*arm yourselves also with the same attitude*), it makes more sense to think he is still speaking of Christians in the next clause (*because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin*). Furthermore, the use of *is done with sin* for describing the work of Christ is unusual and inconsistent with Peter's other expressions for the achievements of the cross (cp. 1:18; 2:21, 24; 3:18). Finally, 4:2 goes on to explain the Christian's subsequent life; this suggests Peter has the Christian (not Christ) in mind

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at 4:1b. Thus, the most likely interpretation of this difficult expression is that it refers to Christians who are suffering and that they learn not to sin by undergoing persecution.

Dorani: First Peter 4:1 adds, cryptically, that *he who has suffered in his body is done with sin*. The Greek verb translated *is done* means ‘to stop, cease, or have finished’ with something. That means when we identify with Christ in His suffering, we break with sin globally. A willingness to suffer for the faith, for our convictions, is galvanizing. It is *empowering* to suffer for the Lord. A willingness to suffer proves our faith real.

Sproul: Some commentators say that Peter was not referring to our flesh, but to Jesus’ flesh, and that since Jesus suffered in the flesh, He had ceased from sin. However, to cease from something means that there was a time when it was being done, and obviously there was no point at which Jesus was ever engaged in sin. The commentators argue that after Jesus’ resurrection took place and His glorified state had been secured, He no longer had to endure the temptations that were set before Him during His earthly life, but I do not think that is what Peter meant. Peter’s words refer to us. If we suffer in the flesh, we cease from sin.... If you are a Christian and the Holy Spirit has regenerated your soul, then in a very real sense your old man has been put to death. A death sentence stands over your sinful nature, and you have been made alive in your soul by the Spirit. We are taught throughout Scripture that even though we enjoy this new state of affairs, there remains an ongoing struggle from the time of our conversion to the time of our glorification in heaven.... What Peter means here is that if, in our flesh, we have ceased from sin, we should not live in sin. We should live in light of the change that the Spirit of God has wrought in us, putting the flesh to death and nurturing the new man, the man made by the Holy Spirit.

Helm: What is Peter saying? He is simply affirming that those who suffer for the gospel do, by their very willingness, demonstrate that they are done with sin. To put it as clearly as I can, everyone who suffers for Jesus first resolved, somewhere along the line, to cease from sinning. After all, the suffering they experience is a result of leaving off with sin.

(b) *Eternal Reward*

McKnight: However, to be fair to all sides, we do recognize another possibility: that Peter is summing the Christian’s entire life on earth as a life of suffering. In this case, *is done with sin* describes not some state on earth (post-conversion/suffering holiness) but their eternal reward. Just as Christ got to sit down at His Father’s right hand and enjoy His victory, so also will the Christians. While there is some contextual analogy (3:18-22) for this view, 4:2-5 leads the reader to think not in terms of the eternal reward for obedience, but rather in terms of a kind of life on earth—a life not so much of sinlessness, but of obedience. Thus, the theme of 4:2 follows naturally from our interpretation of 4:1b.

MacArthur: Thousands of martyrs throughout church history have been willing to die (cp. Heb. 11:13-16; 35-38) because they armed themselves with the *same purpose* Jesus Christ had—to be faithful to the Father, no matter what, knowing that the cross precedes the crown. The greater the righteous suffering, the greater is the reward. And history’s martyrs realized that there is the greatest triumph of all in death, because believers who have died have *ceased from sin*. The perfect tense verb emphasizes a permanent condition free from sin. For Christ it was, of course, eternal. He bore sin’s curse only once and for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10, 12, 14). And believers can face death with the same attitude their Lord had, that when it comes they will have entered into an eternal condition of holy perfection, free from all sin’s influences and effects. [DSB

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Note: MacArthur is the only one who takes the position this primarily refers to glorification after death. Other commentators take it as a commitment to live for God because of suffering.]

b) *Our Lives (4:2)*

²...so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

Gardner: A new page in life was turned, a definitive break was made with sin, and so the believer has a whole new world in front of him, one where *he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil desires, but rather for the will of God.* The idea is simple: once Christians have truly experienced obeying the will of God and suffered as a result, they know what it is definitively to turn their face from sin and live in Christ-like obedience. This is how Christians should now live for the rest of their lives!

MacArthur: The hope of Christians is to cease from sin one day in heaven. Since that is the goal, the purpose for their salvation, it has strong implications for them now; so that they ought to *live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men.* Since they are headed for holiness in eternity to come, saints are *to live (bioō, a reference to earthly life)* the remainder of time God gives on earth in pursuit of that holiness, no matter the physical cost. They are armed for victory who live for *the will of God*, not the sinful desires of men. Peter calls those desires *lusts*, a strong word (*epithumia*) that means ‘passionate longing,’ and in this context means evil desires.... Peter is telling believers to arm themselves with a commitment to do the will of God and abandon their former sins.

Dorani: Our *time in the flesh* is our allotted time on earth, whether long or short. It is our span of days, our ‘time of exile,’ whether filled with joy or sorrow (Ps. 90:9-17; 1 Pe. 1:17). Our lifestyle and our passions can be good or bad. We can indulge evil passions or pursue good ones, but disciples live *for the will of God.*

Sproul: Since we have been released from sin and the hold that it had upon our soul, we no longer should live the rest of our time in the flesh, that is, in corruption, *for the lusts of men.*

Helm: The two commitments we are to make are spelled out by way of contrast: 1) *...no longer for human passions;* 2) *but for the will of God.* Since the following verse is going to highlight the kinds of behavior the Christian leaves behind, let’s look first at what we are to be about. Peter says we are to live *for the will of God.* And how are we to start living for His will? Fortunately, we have already seen in 1 Peter the kinds of godly pursuits he wants us to pursue. And in fact, each of those places he contrasted the things that God wills for us with the same phrase he uses here—*human passions....* If the will of God is found by way of contrast to human passions, then we can know for sure that we prepare our minds for suffering by giving ourselves wholly over to the pursuit of holiness (1:14-15). God wants us to make a commitment to holiness, to sanctification, to putting on the new man. This is how we prepare to embrace our calling.... We do the will of God when we *keep [our] conduct...honorable* by doing *good deeds* (2:11-12). This, of course, will require us to be countercultural. We will always be swimming against the current of today’s moral tide. We are to be known for doing good. And as we have seen in this letter, the supreme mark of goodness is our submission to difficult and ungodly people in authority.

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3. Contrast (4:3-5)

MacArthur: This passage (vv. 3-5) is a vivid description of the tragic and devastating life pattern of the unconverted, which ends inexorably in judgment... Peter reminds believers to leave all that behind because it belongs to their former life in sin and under judgment

a) *Our Past (4:3)*

(1) The Will of the Gentiles (4:3a)

³*For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do...*

Gardner: Peter now provides a reason for living for God. Colloquially put, he says: ‘Enough already! You’ve done enough of the other!’ Before you were caught up in following all your sinful desires, and it was a *flood of dissipation*. These mostly Gentile Christians are no longer ‘pagans’ (or Gentiles) because they are now God’s people. The past life was one of sin; the new existence for the rest of this life on earth must be one that is done with sin. Peter speaks of having done *the will of the pagans* (rather than simply ‘what they choose to do’). And so he makes a deliberate contrast. There are people who do the will of the Gentile mind and there are those who do the will of God.

MacArthur: Since they have been delivered from that evil life, their souls are purified (1:22) and *the time is already past* for serving sins (Rom. 7:5; 1 Cor. 6:9-11a; Eph. 2:1-3). The phrase is literally ‘the having passed away time’ (*parelāluthōs chronos*) meaning chronological time. It is a perfect tense, as are the two following verbs, *have carried out* (from *katergazomai*, ‘to produce’) and *having pursued* (from *poreuomai*, ‘to conduct one’s life’). Each building on the other, these three perfect tense verbs make the point that, for the believer, the sinful past is a closed book and its saga of sin is over. *Sufficient (arketos)* in this context means more than simply adequate, but conveys the sense of being more than enough. Peter’s readers had had a whole life full of opportunity to sin, and that is more than enough *to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles* (the unconverted peoples) and to have lived to fulfill sinful passions (cp. Eph. 2:1-3). *Desire (boulēma)* here conveys the sense of a purposed longing. The hearts of the unsaved determine to follow their passions as part of what Peter earlier called their ‘futile way of life’ (1:18).

McKnight: Peter’s next idea is not so common: ‘After all,’ he says in essence, ‘you have sinned enough.’ While it is difficult to know what to infer from such a comment (e.g., did Peter think everyone was appointed to a certain amount of sin?), it is clear that his pragmatism takes over again: just as good behavior will help get Christians out of tough situations, and just as suffering purges the Christian from sin, so also these same Christians have sinned more than enough for a lifetime, and it is time for them to get on with a life of obedience.

Dorani: This is ironic understatement. One day is more than enough time for debauchery and idolatry; and Peter’s readers had spent their lives at these things until they received the gospel.

Sproul: We know the bankruptcy of our former way of life. We ought to spend our time for the will of God. We have spent enough time doing the will of pagans, when we walked like they walk—lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

Helm: It is as Peter barks out, ‘Enough already. Put sin in your rearview mirror.’ And then he goes on to list the kinds of things that Christians are to put away.

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(2) The Way of the Gentiles (4:3b)

...*living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.*

Gardner: The list of sins Peter chooses to mention include the more obvious ones in order to make the contrast with the former life even more acute. *Debauchery* refers to specific unrestrained acts of immorality or ‘sensuality.’ ... *Lust* is well understood. Peter has already spoken more generally of how such lusts or evil desires drive the thinking of so many (1:14; 2:11). Here the word is used more specifically of sexual sin.... *Drunkenness, orgies, carousing* listed together like this would have been regarded even negatively by the pagans of that day! The fact that Peter follows this with a reference to *detestable idolatry* suggests that throughout this list he was probably thinking of some of the horrible practices which went on in pagan temple worship. In other words, Peter’s contrast between the former life of these believers and their present one not only concerns their moral and ethical choices, but also fundamentally concerns their *religious* attitudes. This list is what may be expected of those who follow or do the will of those who follow idols. It is *not at all* what the life of one who follows and does the will of Christ will look like.

MacArthur: Their former disposition *pursued a course*; it conducted life’s affairs along a specific path of behavior, and Peter described that for his readers with six terms. First, *sensuality (aselgeia)* describes those who engage in unbridled, unrestrained vice of all sorts (cp. Rom. 13:13). It could also be translated ‘debauchery,’ an excessive indulgence in sensual pleasure.... *Lusts (epithumia)* are the sinful passions that drive people into such indulgences (cp. 1 Th. 4:5; 1 Tim. 6:9; Jude 18). *Drunkenness (oinophlugia)* literally means ‘wine bubbling up’ and refers to habitual intoxication. This term can also refer to the effects of narcotic use. *Carousing (kōmos)* refers to participating in wild parties or orgies. In one extrabiblical Greek source, the term described a band of drunken people that sang loudly and staggered wildly through the streets, causing a major public disturbance. The apostle completed his list of terms with two more expressions that fit this picture of uncontrolled conduct, *drinking parties* and *abominable idolatries*. *Potos* (‘drinking parties’) were sessions people engaged in just for the sake of becoming inebriated. *Abominable idolatries* denotes the immoral, debauched worship of false gods (such as Dionysius or Bacchus, the Greek god of wine) that accompanied *carousing* and *drinking parties*.

McKnight: The very sins that once characterized the Christians’ patterns of behavior have now been abandoned, partly because of the healing effects of suffering. But those behaviors continued among their old friends.

Dorani: Peter’s list of sins fits the times. Debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, and carousing are sensual sins. Many pagans gave themselves to such things, to liaisons with slaves, concubines, courtesans, and lovers, to drinking and feasting, as far as their resources and their need to protect their reputation permitted.... The principal religions of the time, emperor worship and the veneration of local patron deities, had scant doctrine or moral instruction. Those duties fell to philosophers. The popular religions emphasized public celebrations, in which everyone was expected to participate. Everyone came together to honor the emperor and swear by his genius, or to pay homage to the city’s patron gods. This promoted social unity and (allegedly) maintained the favor of the gods.... The vices of Peter’s day have parallels today. We spend enough time satisfying our greed and lusts, getting drunk or stoned, and following newer deities. Peter exhorts us that it’s time to change, to stop wasting our lives.

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Sproul: Peter uses the language of ancient orgies and wild parties. The purpose of drinking at these parties was not simple enjoyment of the fruit of the vine. The goal was drunkenness in order to get rid of all moral inhibitions so that there could be a flood of dissipation. This is what characterized the bacchanalias of the ancient world, drunken festivals dedicated to the god Bacchus. The idea was that people could get in touch with their idols by getting rid of their inhibitions. Any remnants of conscience operating as restraints were abolished at these parties.

b) *Their Attitude (4:4)*

(1) Surprise (4:4a)

4With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery...

Gardner: Why would anyone *not* do what they do? It's part of their religion their culture, their general way of life. It is easy to dismiss how those who do not share our Christian faith view those of us who are Christians. Part of a good Christian defense of the faith is to understand how others think. Peter understands this and it does not surprise him. Unbelievers see the world through different religious lenses and so cannot understand at all why Christians should think or believe or live as they do.

MacArthur: Such sins had been so much a way of life for Peter's readers that when they abandoned them their fellow sinners, still unregenerate, were *surprised* (*xenizō*), meaning 'astonished,' or 'shocked,' with the connotation of taking offense or being resentful. Sin was such a normal lifestyle for the unbelievers (cp. Ps. 64:5; Jn. 8:34; 2 Pe. 2:14) that they were not only amazed that the Christians' lives had changed so totally (cp. 1 Th. 1:9), they even resented the fact that the new believers no longer went with them *into the same excesses of dissipation*. That expression vividly pictures a large melee of people racing forward, what one commentator described as 'a euphoric stampede of pleasure seekers.' *Excesses* (*anachusis*) pictures waters coming together and pouring in excess or overflowing. *Dissipation* (*asotia*) is that state in which a person's mind is so corrupt that he thinks about nothing but evil and how he might indulge his sinful passions. Needless to say, Christians no longer desire such mindless pursuit of the passions that throw people into a state of over-the-top debauchery.

Dorani: Yet when people do change, it might displease old friends.... Old friends notice that the believer no longer (literally) 'runs' or 'travels with' them. The believer has a new crowd, and the old crowd doesn't like it. It upsets the equilibrium. The woman who lives for her lusts feels threatened or judged by the woman who lives differently. The secular man is baffled. Why doesn't his friend want to have fun?

Helm: First, your friends and family will be surprised. You will be misunderstood.... Over time their surprise will turn to ridicule.

(2) Slander (4:4b)

...and they malign you...

Gardner: Peter knows the majority of those to whom he writes came right out of paganism, so it is vital that, when they encounter former friends who *heap abuse* on them, they know where the abuse is coming from. Literally the word for heaping abuse means 'blaspheming,' which suggests that, though the abuse is aimed at the Christians, it is ultimately aimed at God.

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MacArthur: One-time friends become enemies and often *malign* those who *do not run with them into* sinful behavior. *Malign* (*blasphemeō*) literally means ‘to blaspheme,’ ‘to slander or defame someone,’ or ‘to speak evil of them.’ Ancient sources, both Christian and non-Christian, provide ample evidence that it was Christ’s reluctance to participate in many conventionally accepted amusements and ungodly civic ceremonies, and their refusal to engage in idolatrous, immoral functions that caused unbelievers to hate and revile them. That led to unjust persecution and suffering for righteousness’ sake.

Doriani: Change is unsettling, and that includes constructive moral reform. The secular person attacks. The church is still maligned for its moral positions. When a culture abandons biblical standards, when extramarital sex, cohabitation, and birth outside of marriage become normal, people attack the church for its moral snobbery and judgmentalism. While the church might deserve criticism if it constantly scolds, we surely invite reproach if we commit the very sins we condemn and if we blast one sin and tolerate another. Still, there is a time to stand up and say, ‘That’s wrong.’ Peter warns us that if we do take a stand, we need to expect slander, not applause.

Helm: Surprise evokes misunderstanding, and misunderstanding evokes a sense of being judged. And when the world feels that it has been judged by your way of life, those who are of it will condemn you as a ‘life-hater.’ They will malign you. Take a look again at the progression of behavior embedded in verse 4. *Surprised* gives way to the word *malign*.

c) *Their Account* (4:5)

⁵...but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Gardner: However, in the midst of all this, a Christian’s heart will be filled with compassion and pain; for judgment is coming, and those still caught up in such paganism *will have to give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*. What a contrast! Christians may be called to account before pagan people or their courts and must be prepared to give an answer in this age (3:15-16). Yet these very pagans will one day have to give ultimate account before the God whom they have rejected and derided and blasphemed by rejecting, deriding, and heaping abuse upon His people. The *living and the dead* reminds us that no one in any age can escape the inevitability of God’s judgment which comes with Christ’s appearing. Being *ready to judge* indicates that this may happen at any time (see v. 7). Yet what a difference there is in that day for those who have faith in Christ and live for Him!. For them, this is the day for which they have been shielded and protected (1:5) and the day on which finally they see the glory of their Savior.

MacArthur: Peter, however, assured his readers that those who slander and persecute believers *will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*. Such vicious attackers are amassing a debt to God that they will spend eternity paying back. He *who is ready to judge* will ultimately hold them accountable (cp. Mt. 18:23-24). *The living*—those alive when Peter wrote—and *the dead*—those already dead—will be judged.

McKnight: Accordingly, Peter informs the Christians of Asia Minor that *they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*. As at 2:12, so here the idea is less one of hopeful expectation of final reward than a threat of judgment on those who sin.

Doriani: Disciples might feel defenseless, but according to Peter, their foes *will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*. God is ready to judge all flesh.

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The living and the dead represent all humanity, past and present. If God is ready to judge, we should be ready, too, ‘for the end of all things is near’ (4:7)... This teaching originates with Jesus, who makes four essential points. First, no one knows the day or hour of His coming (Mt. 24:26, 42, 50). Second, He will come personally, in a manner that is visible to all (24:26-27, 30-31). Third, His coming ends the history of fallen humanity (24:37-40; 25:31-46). Fourth, we should always be prepared for Jesus’ return (24:42-25:13). If we are, we will have joy in His presence and will receive His blessing (25:14-46).

Helm: Peter closes our text with a reminder on the final judgment. It is meant as an encouragement to his readers. In verse 5 it appears that he is especially thinking of the judgment that awaits those unbelievers who choose to malign us.

4. Comfort (4:6)

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.

Gardner: All Christians, including those to whom Peter writes, will wonder from time to time about those who have died in the faith and those who die without believing in Christ. Peter writes about those Christians who are *now dead* that is, who have already died. It is just possible that the question is raised because some have died at the hands of their persecutors, but this is probably a more general statement. Christians need to understand that the life-giving gospel (see 1:3) never promised that men and women’s present bodily form would go on forever without death. Peter thinks back to those across the ages who are now dead but had faith in the one true God. God ensured that they too had received the gospel for their salvation, so that they might live. For Peter this is not just a matter of those who have died since the preaching of the gospel of the death of Christ, but also of all those faithful Israelites who committed themselves in repentance and faith to the prophetic preaching of the good news of God as a saving God... All are *judged according to* [the way of] *men in regard to the body*. This is the fate of all human beings. This is the way of men and women. Since sin entered the world they die in the body. It is only when Christ comes in glory that ‘there will be no more death’ (Rev. 21:4). But the preaching of the gospel through history has brought with it the offer of salvation so that those who respond may live according to [the way of] God in regard to the spirit. The life that Christians will continue to live even after they die will be a life in the spiritual realm in which God and Christ live. It is for this reason that the gospel is preached, so that people may live. So these Christians should take heart from the knowledge that those who have died having received the gospel do now live according to God in regard to the spirit. They live in his presence and enjoy all His blessings. This should further remove from Christians the fear of persecution and abuse and death.

MacArthur: Finally, believers are to arm themselves with the genuine hope of the reality of eternal life. God has promised them that through death they will overcome sin, escape final judgment, and enter eternal heaven in holy perfection. Peter thus reminds his readers that *the gospel* (the saving message of Christ) *has for this purpose been preached* (announced) *even to those who are dead* (those who heard and believed the gospel but had died by the time he wrote). Some who read this letter would have known them and realized that some of the dead saints were martyrs. Though some of the dead believers were *judged in the flesh as men* (physically put to death), they were triumphantly alive *in the spirit according to the will of God* (cp. Heb. 12:23). Peter’s point is that believers, even under unjust treatment—including death—should be willing

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and unafraid to suffer, knowing that all death can do is triumphantly bring their eternal spirits into everlasting life in heaven.

McKnight: This afterthought has spirited a great discussion. Are the *dead* those to whom Christ preached after His crucifixion (3:19), the spiritually dead who are now alive, or the Christians of Peter's churches who have already died? The vast majority of commentators today argue that Peter is referring to Christians in Asia Minor who heard the gospel while alive but are now physically dead. Because this life is only a prelude to life after death, the gospel was preached to those who are (now) dead. And because those people will have to give an account to God for their life, everyone must hear the gospel. Finally, Peter expresses the ultimate purpose of preaching, that people, regardless of what happens to them in this life, might be able to live eternally (i.e., in *spirit*) with God. The gospel is preached to all, including the (now) dead, because ultimately this life is only a prelude to a greater and endless world beyond. Those who hear the gospel and respond, *even if they are killed for their faith*, will be vindicated ultimately by God.

Dorani: First Peter 4:6 has been the subject of extensive debate because of lexical, grammatical, and theological questions. The great question is the meaning of the gospel proclamation to the dead. Some have cited 4:6 and 3:19 to support the concept of a postmortem gospel proclamation by which many, perhaps even all, humans eventually believe. Others believe that the *dead* are the spiritually dead and that they will receive either judgment or life, depending on their response to the message.... The literary context shows that the *dead* are the physically dead. The previous verse (4:5) has just mentioned *the living and the dead*, where Peter certainly means the physically dead. It would be most surprising if he changed meanings so abruptly in tightly connected lines. The literary and culture contexts also come together here. In the immediate context, Peter's first point...is that death does not exempt a person from God's coming judgment.... This preaching is therefore not connected to the preaching 'to the spirits in prison' mentioned in 3:19. Although English translations often use 'preach' for both verses, the Greek of 3:19 is *kērussō*, which means that Jesus made a proclamation, while 1 Peter 4:6 uses *euaggelizomai*, which means that Jesus preached the good news. Further, 3:19 says that *Christ* made a proclamation; 4:6 says that *the gospel was preached*. Acts and many of Paul's epistles show that the apostles and their co-workers did this preaching. The point is straightforward and fits the context perfectly: the people who malign Christians (4:4) will have to give an account to God for their actions (4:5). First Peter 4:6 begins: *For this reason*—that is, because judgment is coming—the gospel was preached widely, *even to those who are now dead*, that is, people who have died since they heard the gospel while they still lived. Peter points out that the goal of evangelism is to prepare humanity for the day when they stand before God and *give account* to Him as Judge. Death exempts no one from this judgment, nor does death remove any believer from God's care.... His gospel is essential for all and is no fleeting, provincial social construct. The people who mock it need it, lest they face the judgment with nothing but their sin. Everyone needs the gospel, and all who believe it *live according to God in regard to the spirit*.

Sproul: He is not talking about Jesus' preaching to dead spirits; rather, he is indicating the reason Christ came. Jesus preached the gospel, and many of those who had heard Him and believed had died, so their battle was over and their victory won.

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B. Living in Light of the End (1 Peter 4:7-11)

McKnight: These verses form the fourth and final section of Peter's exhortations to various social groups (2:11-4:11). Here he provides general instructions for the entire family of God. In essence, these exhortations can be summarized as *eschatological ethics*, that is, ... *in light of the End*. The foundation is stated in verse 7a: *The end of all things is near*. Put differently, believers ought to govern their lives by the perception that since the end of the world is near, they should live in light of God's judgment.

Doriani: Since 1 Peter 4:5-6 say that all flesh must render an account to God who judges 'the living and the dead,' Peter easily shifts, in 4:7, to the end of all things. More importantly, this passage concludes the long middle portion of 1 Peter, stretching from 2:11 to 4:11, describing the social conduct of a disciple.

1. The End of All Things (4:7a)

⁷The end of all things is at hand...

Gardner: The march of history is seen by Peter as a matter of progression towards the final goal of God and the full universal acknowledgment of His rule. The *end*, or the *goal* of that history, is *near*. The gospel had to be preached in order that salvation might be proclaimed. Christ had to come and to die and be raised and ascend to glory in order that sin might be forgiven. But these great acts of God in *His* history are not complete. The goal to which all this was leading is not far off.

MacArthur: The word rendered *end* (*telos*) does not necessarily indicate cessation, termination, or chronological conclusion. Rather here it means 'consummation,' 'fulfillment,' a purpose attained,' or 'a goal achieved.' In this context, it refers to Christ's second coming. The *end* in view here is not the consummation of persecution of Peter's readers. Neither did the apostle have in mind an imminent change in government that would result in more benevolent treatment for believers. His reference to the fulfillment of *all things* indicates he is speaking of the Lord's return (cp. Acts 3:21; Col. 3:4; 2 Th. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 20:11-13). The verb translated *is near* (*ēggiken*) means 'approaching.' The perfect tense indicates a consummated process with a resulting nearness—the event (Christ's return) is imminent; it could occur at any moment (cp. Mt. 24:37-39; Rom. 13:12; 1 Th. 5:2; Rev. 16:15; 22:20). Therefore believers are to live with an ongoing attitude of anticipation or expectancy, as a mark of faithfulness.

McKnight: To say that *the end of all things is near* is to say that Peter believed, in some sense, that the end of history was imminent. That End involved the Final Judgment (4:6), and it was *near*. It is important for us to realize that Peter roots his ethical exhortations of 4:7b-11 in this perception of history and judgment.

Doriani: The Greek has an untranslated conjunction, *de*, that loosely connects 1 Peter 4:6 and 4:7: the gospel is proclaimed because all humanity will be judged (4:6), and this is significant because *the end of all things is near* (4:7). The world as we know it, fraught with ambiguity at best and misery at worst, will not continue forever. When this age ends, Jesus will return to overthrow sin and establish His new order. Then creation will reach its proper end. This end *is near* not chronologically but theologically. Peter asserted that the end was near almost two thousand years ago, and he was right, because we have been brought into the final phase of God's plan of redemption by the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. (The word *telos*, translated 'end,' can signify the last stage of a process as well as the termination of a process.)

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Peter already noted that we are in the last times in 1:20, saying that Jesus ‘was revealed in these last times for your sake.’ When this age ends, Jesus will return to overthrow sin and establish His new order. That day is near in the sense that it could happen at any time (cp. Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 24:44; Mk. 1:15).

Sproul: The Greek word translated *all things* is *panta*. The Greek word he uses for *the end* is *telos*, which is often translated as ‘goal,’ ‘purpose,’ or ‘aim.’ So, we could translate these words as ‘the goal of all things is at hand.’

Helm: According to the Bible, the end has already begun. It came with Christ’s resurrection and will be fully consummated upon His return. Therefore, we are in the final stages of history. We are living in the last days (cp. 1:20).

2. The Exhortation to Christians (4:7b-11b)

...therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: ¹¹whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—

MacArthur: All those demanding commands make it clear that anyone who would truly receive Jesus Christ must first count the high cost of doing so. Following Jesus demands total self-denial and eager submission to His lordship, even if obedience means death.... This section contains three basic elements saints need to build godly lives and strong and effective in witness to the world: personal holiness, which concerns their relationship to God; mutual love, which concerns their relationship with each other; and spiritual service, which concerns their responsibility to the church.

Dorani: ‘Therefore,’ Peter says, we must live in light of Jesus’ return and be clear-minded, self-controlled, prayerful, and full of love and forgiveness (4:7-8). Because we are in the last phase of God’s plan of redemption, because the end is near, certain conduct follows. These commands are the backbone of the passage.

Helm: What a contrast to the kinds of activities mentioned in the verses that precede this text. There Peter listed the kinds of things people give themselves to when they live as if God has no king in the world, no moral authority to uphold, and nothing beyond this life except the reign of eternal darkness. 1) They give themselves to *drunkenness* (v. 3) rather than *sober-minded[ness]* (v. 7). 2) They give themselves to *lawless* activity (v. 3) rather than *sincere love* (v. 8). 3) They give themselves to *orgies* (v. 3) rather than *show[ing] hospitality* (v. 9). 4) They give themselves to *malign[ing]* (v. 4) rather than *serv[ing] one another* (vv. 10-11).

a) *Self-Controlled and Sober-Minded (4:7b)*

...therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Gardner: Peter urges...that Christians who are members of the body of Christ must be *clear minded and self-controlled*, so they can be properly at prayer.... It is most likely that Peter is drawing attention to the need for believers to be disciplined in their *corporate* prayers. The next verses clearly speak to the way in which the individual believers should function in the community of the church, in their love, hospitality, use of gifts, etc.... In this age while waiting for *the end*, the church suffers persecution and ridicule. She must remain a faithful witness to the

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truth and this can only be achieved through the prayers of the people which demonstrate the church's complete dependence on her Savior and Lord.

MacArthur: The word rendered *be of sound judgment* derives from a term that literally means, 'be in one's right mind' (*sōphroneō*)—to be under control and not be carried away by an errant view of oneself (Rom. 12:3; cp. Pr. 23:7), or undue emotion, or uncontrolled passion. Mark used it to describe the maniac Jesus freed from the legion of demons (Mk. 5:15). The verb also refers to guarding the mind (cp. Pr. 4:23) and keeping it lucid.... Holy living also requires spiritual alertness. *Sober spirit* (*nēphō*), closely related in meaning to *sound judgment*, denotes being spiritually observant. Jesus expressed a similar sentiment when He warned the apostles to 'be on alert' (Mt. 24:42) and to 'keep watching' (26:41). Godly thinking and spiritual alertness are crucial *for the purpose of prayer*. Prayer is the access to all spiritual resources, but believers cannot pay properly if their minds are unstable due to worldly pursuits, ignorance of divine truth, or indifference to divine purposes (cp. 1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 10:22; 1 Jn. 5:14-15).... Holy living comes when believers read and meditate on God's Word daily so as to know the thoughts of God and commune with Him according to His will. Jude calls this 'praying in the Holy Spirit' (v. 20).

McKnight: Like 1:13, Peter's first bit of advice is that Christians keep themselves mentally and spiritually alert.... The expressions here are to be understood as a twofold injunction to mental alertness, with the goal of having an effective prayer life. As was the case with the alert husband (3:7) and the obedient community (3:12), so here with the entire church: if they stay alert, they will be effective in prayer (cp. Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2). Thinking that the end of history is at the door and the Judge is about to enter through it can energize one's prayers and lead to a specially effective focus in those prayers.

Dorani: One could argue that Christianity is the most intellectually demanding of the faiths. It has robust and complex doctrines, and it regularly summons believers to be mindful of the implications of the faith and to let God's truth govern their lives. Peter's twin command, *be clear minded and self-controlled*, seems to be a hendiadys, with the two verbs functioning as one. To be clear-minded is to see things as they are and to act appropriately. The root of the verb translated *self-controlled* comes from a term that originally meant 'sober' rather than 'drunk,' but it came to mean 'alert, sound-minded, and mentally disciplined.' This promotes the life of prayer (cp. 3:7). This is no generic prayer, but the prayer that calls upon and submits to God in the light or reality seen from God's perspective and thus obtains power and guidance in the situation.

Helm: To put Peter's sentiment as clearly as possible, be clear-headed. Don't live like those in the world who are constantly looking for an escape. They look forward to the evening and the weekend when they can 'turn off their minds.' They desire to escape from reality. Yet, for the working Christian there is nothing further from the truth. We are to be different. We are to be clear-thinking men and women. We are to have our mental faculties with us at all times.... Our clear-headedness is for the sake of prayer. This is a convicting truth. Let me put it this way: the mark of a Christian at the end of the age is a person on his or her knees in prayer. Could it be that the strength of our private prayer life is an indication of our progress in self-control and sober-mindedness? If so, then most of us need to get busy before we are asked to meet and speak with Jesus face to face. We are to watch and pray.

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b) Sincere Love (4:8)

(1) Love One Another (4:8a)

⁸*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly...*

Gardner: God made us for community, that is, for His community of the church. It is here, as we pray together and care for each other, that we shall find the resources we need to face the antagonism of a world set against God.

MacArthur: Mutual love primarily concerns believers' relationships with each other. *Above all* refers to the supreme importance of that virtue in the Christian life, and the participle rendered *keep* collects 'sound judgment' and 'sober spirit for the purpose of prayer' under the priority of *fervent...love for one another*. *Fervent* (*ektenēs*) denotes stretching or straining and pictures a person running with taut muscles, exerting maximum effort. Ancient Greek literature used the word to describe a horse stretching out and running at full speed.

McKnight: Earlier in the letter Peter's ethics found one of their core values in *love* (cp. 1:22-25; 2:17; 3:8); now this communal ethic rises powerfully to the top. When the church is being threatened by persecution and takes comfort in the coming end of history because God will judge justly, that same church strengthens its faith by relating to one another in love.

Dorani: A disciple loves everyone, even his enemies, but Peter focuses on love within the Christian community.... The word *deeply* (Greek *ektenēs*) can describe an attitude of perseverance, earnestness, and eagerness, even devotion.... Why does Peter claim that such love is *above all*? Because the church is a society of sinners, redeemed by grace. Because we are sinners who both offend each other and take offense when no real offense is given. We cannot hope for a strong Christian community if we fail to extend to one another the grace that the Lord first gave us.... Love *includes* feelings (Rom. 12:10), but it is more than a feeling. Love is a resolve to do good to others, including the good of forgiving their sins.

Sproul: Christian love is not just about an individual's love for God or Christ. He who loves God cannot love God and hate his brother. We manifest our love for God by a fervent love for each other. There is a big difference between tolerance and zealous love.

Helm: There are two observations to make about this verse. The first is the attending word *earnestly*. Our love is to be real, sincere, genuine. Second, consider the words *one another*. Love is by natural relational. This is something Peter has been driving at throughout. The words *one another* appear in the next verse and in verse 10 as well. What Peter wants in the last days is a *one another* kind of life.

(2) Love Covers (4:8b)

...since love covers a multitude of sins.

Gardner: The idea that *love covers a multitude of sins* reminds us again that Peter is here talking of the church community. He is not suggesting that sin is to be wrongly covered up or denied by a person individually, nor is he suggesting that certain acts of love bring sufficient merit that they will outweigh certain sins. Rather, he is speaking pragmatically of the effects of exercising true and deep love between brothers and sisters in Christ. When decisions are made to act in love toward others, then many sins are covered. When a person speaks rudely to us or acts harshly or unfairly towards us, a response of love simply 'covers' the sin of the person. A response of

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anger or antagonism or of fighting back simply exposes the sin for all to see, thus dividing the body and bringing pain and hurt to many more people. In the community of Christ, we should be about demonstrating love in deeply practical ways.

MacArthur: It is self-evident that genuine love inherently tends to forgive the offenses of others (cp. Pr. 10:12). But commentators differ on how to interpret the expression *love covers a multitude of sins*. Some say it refers to God's love covering sins, whereas others say it describes believers who are lovingly overlooking each other's transgressions. Since the text offers no explanation, it seems to understand the phrase here as a general axiom. Whether from God or man, love covers sin. *Love* derives from the well-known Greek word *agape* (cp. 1:8, 22; 2:17; 3:10), which carries a strong volitional significance.... Christians must follow His example, choosing to love even the unlovely, because 'the whole Law and the Prophets' (Mt. 22:40) hinges on doing so (vv. 37-39), as does their witness (Jn. 13:34-35).

McKnight: Loving one another when things are tough is important *because love covers a multitude of sins*.... What does this saying mean for Peter? That loving others now will procure forgiveness from God at the end (cp. Mt. 25:31-46)? That loving others leads a community to holier and more forgiving behaviors (cp. 1 Cor. 13:7)? Or, developing this second view, that loving others is the sure sign that they have put away sinful behaviors (2:24; 4:1-2)? The essential ambiguity of the proverb, as well as the lack of substantial parallel ideas in 1 Peter, means that we are not able to know for sure. But in light of how the saying came to be connected in the early church with the second view, I contend that we are probably better off understanding the saying to be a social one by Peter. The community that loves one another is able to forgive one another more rapidly when minor issues arise.

Dorani: Such love *covers* many sins not by covering them up, and not by atoning for them, since Jesus does that (1:18-19, 2:24). Rather, we cover sins by forgiving them. This is first taught in Proverbs 10:12: 'Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.' The phrase also appears in James 5:20, and we see the concept in Matthew 18:21-22; Luk3 17:3-6; and 1 Corinthians 13:7. Furthermore, such forgiveness is vital to Peter's interest in preserving Christian community.

Sproul: Peter does not simply repeat Jesus' admonition, but he gives the reason for it, quoting from Proverbs (10:12). Peter writes that we are to have fervent love for one another, for *love will cover a multitude of sins*.... The meaning is that love does not seek to expose our neighbor for every petty weakness but to cover him or her from attacks of the world.

Helm: There is certainly some debate in regard to what this phrase means. After all, the blood of Christ alone is what covers sins. What Peter is saying here might be understood by way of analogy. Love takes the oxygen out of sin the way a blanket chokes the air from one caught on fire. Similarly, as long as oxygen is present, forest fires rage. But if we could take the air away, the blaze would settle down, and great tracts of land would be saved. May we love in this way. May nothing evil be allowed to breath for long. May we keep short accounts. The last days demand our sincere love.

c) *Show Hospitality (4:9)*

⁹*Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

Gardner: *hospitality* in the body is also of far greater consequence than many Christians realize. There is always a temptation to offer such works of love in a grudging way. This can happen

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when we see them more in terms of *duty* than of love and service. Of course in one sense hospitality is a duty of Christians, but the attitude of our hearts reveals to us whether we are sinfully grudging in what we do or joyfully content in our service. Hospitality cannot be understated as a prime cohesive factor in establishing community and demonstrating love for each other.

MacArthur: The command to *be hospitable* literally, ‘to love strangers’) takes that *love* beyond the circle of Christians’ friends to other believers they do not even know (cp. Heb. 13:2). According to the Mosaic law, the Jews were to extend hospitality to strangers (Ex. 22:21; Dt. 14:29; cp. Gen. 18:1-2). Jesus commended believers who provided food, clothing, and shelter to others (Mt. 25:35-40; cp. Lk. 14:12-14). However, the spirit of hospitality extends beyond the tangible acts of providing meals or a place to stay. It includes not just the act, but an unselfish attitude, so that what is done, no matter the sacrifice, is done *without complaint*. Biblical hospitality knows nothing of the ‘Poor Richard’s Almanac’ mentality that says fish and guests smell after three days.

McKnight: Hospitality is a specific example of loving one another—this time by receiving others into our homes, making them feel welcome, meeting their needs, and providing for them a place of fellowship and acceptance. But Peter knows that people are better at conforming externally than at doing something from the heart. Accordingly, he adds *without grumbling*. Hospitality formed the foundation of the Christian movement.

Dorani: He shifts from the general principles of 4:7-8 to particulars in 4:9. Hospitality is a form of the love mentioned in 4:8. Indeed, the Greek term for *hospitality*, *philoxenos*, is a compound formed from *philos* (*love*) and *xenos* (*stranger*). Hospitality is a specific form of love: caring for strangers, who might be part of the Christian mission.... The little phrase *without grumbling* reminds us that hospitality can be burdensome. Yet hospitality is necessary, given the imperative of Christian mission and the lack of decent lodging, in that day, for travelers. This implies that all the service we offer each other should be humble and joyful.

Sproul: The law of God commands that hospitality be given to sojourners. Peter knew that his readers were well aware of this mandate, which was such a part of the Old Testament ethic. Here, Peter adds something to the law: hospitality is to be offered without grumbling. We sometimes tend to feel that guests are like fish: after three days, they begin to smell.

d) *Serve One Another (4:10-11b)*

¹⁰*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—*

(1) Gifts (4:10a)

¹⁰*As each has received a gift...*

Gardner: It is a common teaching in the New Testament that Christians have been given gifts by God for building up His church. Whereas all believers are to pray, love, and show hospitality of the sort Peter has just mentioned, he now speaks to individual Christians (*each one*) as he or she seeks to become effective in ministry within the body of Christ. Peter uses the same word for *gift* as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 12. The word might literally be translated as ‘a grace thing’ or a ‘matter of grace.’ In His wonderful grace, God’s Spirit has given His people particular abilities or skills with which to serve Him and with which to help build up a cohesive community for the

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last days. Such gifts differ between Christians and are widely diverse. Here Peter mentions ‘speaking’ and ‘serving,’ but in Romans 12:6-8 Paul adds encouragement and contributing to the needs of others, leading and showing mercy. In 1 Corinthians 12 still more gifts are listed.

MacArthur: Every Christians *has received a special gift* (spiritual gift), a divine enablement for ministry to the body.... The term rendered ‘gift’ in Ephesians 4:7 (*dōrea*) emphasizes the freeness of His grace and gifts, whereas *charisma* (*gift*) highlights the gracious aspect of what God has done. In the New Testament, that word refers both to spiritual gifts and salvation (e.g., Rom. 1:11; 6:23; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

Sproul: Notice that Peter doesn’t say *if* each one has received a gift, but as each one *has* received. Peter is saying exactly what the Apostle Paul taught the Corinthians, that every believer is gifted by God. Every believer is charismatic in the sense that the Spirit has endowed him or her with some gift to be used for the edification of the church.

(2) Service (4:10b)

...use it to serve one another...

Gardner: In 1 Corinthians, Paul warns the church against those who use these gifts as a matter of pride and boasting. He warns against being ‘puffed up.’ Likewise, here Peter is insistent that whatever the gift that has been received, it is given by God *to serve others*. The focus is never on the individual so much as on what God has graciously enabled an individual Christian to do for the people of God to help them and build them up.

MacArthur: When believers *employ* their gifts *in serving one another*, they minister in a fashion that mutually benefits the church (cp. 1 Cor. 12:7). Conversely, nonuse of gifts or wrongly depreciating some gifts (and perhaps also those who possess them) adversely affects Christ’s body (cp. 1 Cor. 12:15-25).

McKnight: That the End is near prompts Peter to exhort believers to love one another beyond the idea of hospitality; they are to use their gifts *to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms*. Spiritual gifts is a special topic in Paul’s letters (cp. Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph. 4:11), and some maintain that Peter is echoing Paul’s ideas here. Whatever the origin of Peter’s ideas—and a Pauline or an early Christian tradition is likely—the purpose of Peter’s use of the theme of spiritual gifts is to illustrate the importance of loving one another in the Christian community. Thus, as in 1 Corinthians 12-14, love is the context for the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church.

Dorioni: Throughout, Peter stresses mutuality, as we see in the repeated use of *one another*. He says that Christians must *keep loving one another* (4:8), *show hospitality to one another* (4:9), and exercise our gifts to *serve one another* (4:10). These are universal obligations, but we are most likely to help one another cheerfully—*without grumbling*—and effectively when we act within our God-given endowments.

(3) Stewards (4:10b)

...as good stewards of God’s varied grace:

Gardner: Using God’s gifts properly in this way and to His glory and the benefit of His people is what it means to be *faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms*. The variety of forms reminds Christians that they will not all look alike or be doing the same things in the

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church. Peter's idea is that Christians are like stewards of a household, serving in different ways, but all for the same goal, that the house may be one that is complete and well provided for.

MacArthur: The highly visible, up-front gifts (e.g., preaching, teaching, evangelism) are not necessarily the most valuable in every instance. God views all believers' gifts as edifying and their exercise essential to the well-being of the body of Christ. *Good stewards* are those who manage their spiritual gifts wisely and use them obediently (cp. 1 Cor. 4:2; Titus 1:7). Peter's readers were familiar with *stewards* who handled an owner's land, funds, supplies of food, and other resources. The apostle's analogy was obvious, and not using one's gifts weakens the local church because others cannot replace the unique giftedness of those who are not ministering. The variety of spiritual gifts is expressed in the word *manifold*, which literally means 'many colored' or 'multi-faceted.' Two believers may have the gift of teaching, but each will demonstrate it with a unique blend of grace and faith. That provides for edifying and useful spiritual diversity within the church. One leader's preaching may emphasize the showing of mercy and gentleness, whereas another's may emphasize the discerning of truth, and another's the wisdom in its application. Since spiritual gifts result from *the grace of God*, the church cannot devise some human scheme for passing them out. Many Christians may not be able to neatly categorize their own gift because of its uniqueness, but they can be available to the Holy Spirit and observe how He motivates and uses them in ministry.

Dorani: We serve others because our gifts ultimately belong to God, not to us. We are *good stewards of God's varied grace* (cp. Rom. 12:6). God's gifts are gracious in two senses: 1) they are given widely and freely; and 2) they are bestowed apart from human merit. Because we *receive* gifts from God, they are never simply *ours*. Gifts in some senses do, and in some senses do not, belong to us. We receive them from God, but they are not our possession or trophy. There is no room for pride, and we have no right to view them as a windfall.

Sproul: In verse 10 Peter introduces the notion of stewardship, which, in New Testament Greek, is subsumed under the word *oikonomia*. The English word *economics* comes from *oikonomia*, which means literally 'house law.' The steward in biblical times was not the owner of the house but the one hired to manage household affairs. When we speak in the church today of stewardship, we almost always restrict it to matters of finance. Financial stewardship was clearly taught by Jesus, and certainly how we manage our finances is an important aspect of stewardship, but that is not the stewardship that Peter is talking about here. Peter says we are to be good stewards of the plentiful, abundant grace of God for the edification of the body of Christ.

(4) Speaking (4:11a)

¹¹*whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God;*

Gardner: Two illustrations will suffice for Peter. If a person has received a gift it should be treated with great seriousness. *If anyone speaks* probably refers fairly generally to any who might have a gift of prophesying, evangelism, preaching, or teaching. Peter is not implying that one who speaks in a church gathering is speaking words that are to be regarded as completely truthful or as absolutely and entirely God's words in the way Scripture is. Rather, he insists that any words spoken by a person using his or her gift in the congregation should be treated by the speaker as words given by God. This is not a time for an individual to push his or her perspective or to promote a personal agenda. The focus of this speaking must be that God is praised.

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MacArthur: The two broad categories of spiritual gifts are speaking gifts or serving gifts. *Whoever speaks* will minister through categories of preaching and teaching, wisdom, knowledge, and discernment.... Those who speak must communicate not human opinion, but *the utterances of God*, as revealed only in Scripture (cp. Acts 7:28; Rom. 3:2).

McKnight: Whatever Christians are gifted to do, those gifts are to be exercised in such a way that they reflect their divine origin and purposes.... That is, if someone is called on to speak in the presence of believers or if God's Spirit prompts a person to speak to the congregation, that person ought to take the opportunity so seriously that the words spoken be considered with reverence.

Dorani: For most gifts, there is no office, so Peter speaks to all disciples, not officeholders. Nonetheless, the two main categories of gifts, speaking and serving, do correspond to the two principal church offices.... Teaching and ruling elders lead the ministry of words, and deacons lead the ministry of deeds.... Preachers can and must prepare, yet we must pray that the Lord will excise what is false, improve what is true, and apply all the truth, even things hinted at rather than articulated, to receptive hearts. At best, when a congregation hears Christ proclaimed, according to the pattern of Scripture itself, they hear more than explanation and application; they hear Christ Himself, imploring them to believe and live by grace.

(5) Serving (4:11b)

...whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—

Gardner: *If anyone serves* is another rather general idea. Peter may be thinking of those with gifts in looking after the poor or administration or even care of the sick. The list could be very long. The idea that serving should be done with the strength God provides indicates that serving others may often be tiring and the strength and desire to serve may easily wane. God, who gives all the gifts in the first place, will also provide the strength to carry on for those who serve and turn to Him for help. In Philippians 4:13 the apostle Paul wrote, 'I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.'

MacArthur: *Whoever serves* will minister through areas such as administration, prayer, mercy, or helps.... Any serving gift is to be exercised, not by human power, but *by the strength which God supplies* (cp. Phil. 4:13), that is, by dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Dorani: 1 Peter 4:11 also mentions those who serve. They give to the poor and needy, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and visit the sick and the prisoner. Some of them do the work; others organize it. Servants are also stewards of grace. Our service has greatest effect when it is performed not with grim resolve but *with the strength God provides*. If servants know that their strength and resources come from God, they will not condescend or patronize. Whether we speak or act, we focus on God, who is the source of all strength and every accomplishment.

3. The Exaltation of Christ (4:11cd)

a) *Glorify God (4:11c)*

—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Gardner: Peter knows that in the end the goal of all God's people is *that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ*. The English word *praised* is a little weak here. The Greek uses the word 'glorified,' which links directly with the next sentence: *to Him be the glory...*'.

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Glorifying God involves praising and worshipping and honoring Him. It implies that we are always to point Him out and draw attention to God in what we speak and how we serve. Whatever Christians do or say should not be about themselves but drawing attention to the one who has given them gifts and then given them strength to deliver good works with those gifts. Our glorifying of God is made possible by the work of Jesus (*through Jesus Christ*). He has incorporated us into the church and He is the one who presents us to the Father, thus enabling us to bring glory to God.

MacArthur: As is the goal of everything for believers, the purpose of their fulfilling the obligations of Christian duty in the midst of a hostile world is that *God may be glorified*. These final clauses of the passage constitute a doxology—an expression of praise and glory to God (cp. Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Eph. 3:20-21; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25), which Christians can correctly utter only *through Jesus Christ*. *In all things* refers to all matters of Christian responsibility.

b) *Glory to God (4:11d)*

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Gardner: This leads naturally into the doxology, for eternal *glory* and *power* belong *to Him*. Often a doxology of this type is specifically talking about glory being ascribed to *God*.... However, the immediate context suggests he has in mind *Jesus*. Literally here we read, ‘...through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory...’. For Peter to be thinking here of all glory in the end being attributed to *Christ* by His servant people is not strange. In 1:21 Peter wrote of Christ’s glory given to Him at the resurrection, and in 3:22 he had written of Jesus’ ascension to heaven at God’s right hand. Of course, glory and honor and power are to be ascribed to both the Father and to the Son as we know from other passages in Scripture (compare Revelation 4 and 5). Here Peter is going on to speak of Christ’s sufferings as a model for suffering Christians. They can be encouraged as they suffer, for our of His sufferings came His glory.

MacArthur: Commentators have long discussed whether *to whom* refers to God or Jesus Christ. It is best to view the designation as a blessed and inspired ambiguity—the *glory and dominion* belong to both God in Christ and Christ in God, *forever and ever*.... Believers should want to glorify God in all they think, say, and do.... Peter closes this passage with the familiar *amen*, a term of affirmation that means ‘so let it be.’

McKnight: Peter concludes his exhortation to use all gifts from God in a way that brings Him glory with a doxology. This is a short prayer of praise to God—or is praise ascribed to Jesus Christ? Because it would be unnecessarily redundant to ascribe praise once again to God (4:11c does that), it seems more probable that this doxology has Jesus Christ as its object. God glorifies Himself through His Son, and the Son is at work in the prayer and loving ministries of the church.

For next time: Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

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Lesson Summary

XI. Christian Living (1 Peter 4:1-11)

Aim: To live our lives with the mind of Christ according to the will of God, in contrast to the world and in love and service to one another within the church, to His praise and glory.

A. Living in Light of the Past (4:1-6)

Peter contrasts Christian living according to the will of God with his readers' former lives of indulging in sinful passions according to the will of the Gentiles. Forsaking that former lifestyle may open Christians up to suffering, but we are called to lives of obedience through the Spirit.

1. Context (4:1a)

- We are not only to be encouraged by Christ's suffering, which has been transformed into vindication, but we are also to embrace His suffering as well
- Living the Christian life means that suffering may happen

2. Commands (4:1b-2)

- First, *arm yourselves* with the mind of Christ, with His same attitude toward suffering; In troubles, we have 'a steadfast hope for vindication' and entrust ourselves to God, who judges justly (2:23)
- This is a fundamental break with our former (unconverted) lifestyle, *for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*; suffering for Christ means we have chosen to forsake a sinful lifestyle and seek to live a life of obedience (doesn't mean sinless perfection, but a consistent lifestyle)
- Second, that for the rest of our earthly lives (*the rest of the time in the flesh*) we are to let go of a lifestyle of *human passions*
- Third, this means that we live *for the will of God*, including the pursuit of holiness (1:14-15) and the honorable conduct and good deeds of a beautiful life' (2:11-12)

3. Contrast (4:3-5)

- We no longer live our lives (as we once did) according to the will of the Gentiles
- The way of the Gentiles is *living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry*; a fundamentally different religious philosophy that is incompatible with the mind of Christ and the 'good life' of the Christian
- Former friends are at first surprised at the new Christian's abandonment of this life style; their worldview cannot comprehend departing from sin
- Surprise turns to ridicule guilt transforms into slander (*malign; blasphemēō*)
- But the pagans will be judged for their sin; *they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*

4. Comfort (4:6)

- The judgment, which is a terror to the wicked, is a comfort to the righteous, for even though they are judged according to the flesh, they are vindicated so *they might live in the spirit the way God does*
- The gospel was preached to some who have since died; those who believed in faith are *alive in the spirit*
- Thus the importance of gospel preaching – it is the only way to life

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B. Living in Light of the End (4:7-11)

Peter turns from our past to our future—the end of Creation when Christ comes again, prompted by the reference to judgment in verse 5-6. His exhortations here reflect how the Christian community is to live in light of the last days.

1. The End of All Things (4:7a)

- The *telos* ('end,' 'goal', 'aim', 'purpose') of God is near; we are in the last days; the only event left on God's redemptive calendar is the Christ's return / final judgment

2. The Exhortation to Christians (4:7b-11b)

- First, self-controlled, 'clear minded,' 'sober judgment' (*sōphroneō*) and sober-minded, 'sober spirit,' 'self-controlled' (*nēphō*); guidance in our prayers
- *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly*; fervent love *covers a multitude of sins*, i.e., overlooks minor hurts and faults, forgives, lives in harmony with the brethren
- Next, show *hospitality (philoxenos) to one another without grumbling*
- Finally, be good stewards of spiritual gifts, using them to serve one another, whether in speaking or serving

3. The Exaltation of Christ (4:11cd)

- Do all of the above (indeed everything) for the glory of God through Jesus Christ
- Peter's doxology closes the main central portion of the epistle (2:11-4:11); *To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

1 Peter 4:1-11 contains two paragraphs at the end of Peter's central exhortation on Christian living that give us two different perspectives on the Christian life. In verse 1-6, Peter's focus is on our present life in light of the past. Before their conversions, his Gentile readers lived pagan lives full of sinful passions, according to the will of the Gentiles. However, they have now been saved by Christ and are called to arm themselves with His mindset, forsaking their former sinful lusts and live according to the will of God. This will likely set them up for suffering, as their former friends move from surprise to slander. Having suffered for Christ, Christians are committed to new lives of obedience. They can be comforted, however, knowing that they will ultimately be vindicated. Their oppressors will have to give an account of their lives to the just God who judges all, just as they will. However, that judgment brings no fear to the Christian, because we have been called to eternal life in the spirit. Those Christians who have died before us have already entered into their heavenly reward.

Having ended the previous section with a reference to the final judgment, Peter proceeds in verses 7-11 to consider present Christian living in light of the future. We now live in the last days, and the end (*telos*) of all things is near; i.e., Christ could return at any time. Therefore, we are called to be: 1) self-controlled and sober-minded in our prayers; 2) fervent in our love of one another, forgiving one another in love; 3) hospitable to one another without grumbling; and 4) of service to one another in the application and use of our spiritual gifts through the power of God. We are to live in a loving, close-knit, service-oriented family, one to another. In everything we do, we are to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ, for to Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.