

End-Time Ethics

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[0 : 0 0] Uh, Russ, would you please come and serve us this morning?! Uh, uh, we sang that last song together, and that's one of my favorites, and it's like it's my birthday, but it's not actually my birthday today. It's Russ's birthday today, and so Russ is going to serve us by reading 1 Peter chapter 4, starting at verse 7 and down through verse number 11.

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind, so that you may praise. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have to receive to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength of God's truth finds, so that in all things God may be created through Jesus Christ. To be him, be the glory and the power forever and ever. Father, thank you for the privilege of gathering together for worship. Thank you for our brother Russ. Thank you for the wisdom and the grace and the kindness that, uh, you have given to him and that he blesses us with. Would you please continue to watch over Russ and his family? Encourage him, keep him faithful to you, help him to honor you in all of the things that he thinks and says and does. Thank you again for your kindness in giving him to us. As we turn our attention to the preaching of your word, Father, we want to hear those things that you have for us.

So would you please teach us from your word? We want to see our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to understand what you've written to us here in this particular portion, and we want to be faithful and obedient. Help us also to be discerning and careful in our listening. We ask all of this in Jesus' name and for your glory. Amen. In 1988, a man named Edgar Wisenant published a little booklet called 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Happen in 1988. Now, as a former NASA engineer with an interest in Bible prophecy, Wisenant claimed that his prediction was based on 23,000 clues that he had discovered in scripture and other varied sources. And the sources are wildly varied. Wisenant's book gained major attention within certain Christian circles, including the church that I was growing up in. 300,000 copies of this little booklet were sent for free to churches. And get this, this little booklet sold 4.5 million copies back before you could buy books on Amazon like you buy a pack of gum at the checkout line.

Wisenant was so confident in his prediction that the rapture would occur between September 11th and September 13th that he said this, only if the Bible is in error, am I wrong.

Narrator voice, he was wrong. When the rapture did not occur in September, as he had predicted, he revised his prediction, publishing additional booklets in 89, 93, and 94. His third booklet.

[4 : 0 1] I have to tell you this. His third booklet, the one published in 1993, was titled this way. 23 Reasons Why a Pre-Tribulation Rapture Looks Like It Will Occur in 1993.

23 Reasons Why a Pre-Tribulation Rapture Looks Like It Will Occur in 1993. I don't recommend this book at all. But if you want a piece of Christian publishing history, you can pick up a used copy right now on Amazon. You ready? For about \$3,000.

But I don't recommend it. When you think about the end times, it is so very tempting to get caught up with prophecy and prediction. We want to know when is the next event going to happen? When is the next thing in redemptive history going to occur? We want to know what it will look like so that we don't miss it, as if that could be a thing, you know? This text that Russ read for us clarifies the purpose for Bible prophecy, and it is not so that we can create speculative charts and sketchy predictions. The purpose of Bible prophecy is motivating Christians towards obedience. The future, the future shapes the faithful. Look down in your Bible and notice our text, verse number seven. It begins with this phrase, the end of all things is at hand. Some of your Bibles may say the end of all things is near. Now, I don't know about you, but I hear or read that word end, and I do

immediately think the end of the world. And I suspect that this is one reason why some folks doubt the truthfulness of Scripture. I mean, after all, Peter wrote this text almost 2,000 years ago, and here we are still here.

How is it that the end of all things can be at hand? Let's look a little more closely.

[6 : 20] The Greek word translated end is the word telos, but it means more than just the finish.

It speaks of the goal, the resolution, the intended outcome of all things. If you think about this word telos in terms of archery, archery is not just wherever your arrow would happen to land. The telos in archery is the target. It's what you're aiming for. It's the whole purpose that you're shooting the arrow. You're not just randomly shooting the arrow. You are shooting it towards its intended telos, its goal.

When you bake a chocolate cake, when you bake a chocolate cake, putting it into the oven, that is not the telos.

That's not the end. The telos includes what? All of the baking that has to happen so that when you put this batter in, it comes out all nummy, yummy, and moist, and delicious.

In a novel, I know some of us are readers, in a novel, the telos isn't just the last page. No, it's how the author begins to pull together all of the themes, and all of the character arcs, and all of the conflict resolution to finally arrive at the telos of the story, the end of the story.

[8 : 13] Peter uses the same word earlier in his letter, and this is helpful for our understanding as well. So just note this. If you happen to be taking notes in your Bible, back in 1 Peter 1, in verse 9, he writes this.

Obtaining the outcome. That's that same word, end. Telos. Obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

So when we read about the end of all things being at hand in verse number 7, Peter is not making a prediction about the end of the world. He's simply reminding readers that we live in the end.

In that period of time after the resurrection, and before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are living in the end.

And that's why he can say, the end of all things is at hand. And why this particular text can apply, not only to those Christians then, but Christians like us now, and to our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, if the Lord does not return, this text will still be true.

[9 : 26] You are living in the end, in that period of time after the resurrection and before the return. So, since we live in the end times, then like a student who is working towards a diploma, we should keep learning and growing and maturing to get to that end, that diploma.

Like an archer, we should keep our eyes on the goal, the outcome of our faith. Like a baker, we should remember that the cake is still in the oven, and what will come out someday will be so much more tasty than what we put in.

Verses 7 through 11 mark the end of a section of 1 Peter that began back in chapter 2, 11, and 12. So, if you were in small group this week, and we were talking about the you are statements, and you saw that back up there in 2, 9, and 10.

It also extends down to verse 11, right? You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood. Then verse number 11, I urge you as sojourners and exiles.

This text, verses 7 through 11, marks the end of this portion of the letter. So, since you are sojourners and exiles, and since the end, the telos of all things is at hand.

[10 : 57] Therefore, verse 7, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

I confess that it is hard not to become emotional about the state of the world that we live in. Do you feel that? That anxiety seems like a very natural response to the things that are happening around us.

But, mindful that we are living in the end, Peter's first command pushes back against this natural tendency to be drug around by our emotions.

Instead, Peter says, be self-controlled and sober-minded. Don't be irrational. Don't be hasty. Don't make foolish predictions.

Don't act like an alcoholic who has lost control. I don't know why it is so hard to maintain a healthy rhythm in prayer, but I know that I should pray more.

[12 : 07] And I suspect that that may be true of you as well. Notice this. Notice how Peter links prayer with self-control and sober-mindedness.

If we're not praying the way we should, perhaps it's because our thoughts are spiraling rather than being self-controlled.

Perhaps our lack of prayer is the result of getting drunk on emotion rather than being sober-minded.

If you want to pray more, and I do, then let's start by being mindful about what is on your mind.

And if you catch yourself saying, I have so many things on my mind, that may be a very risky position to be in and also a perfect opportunity to obey this text and to say, Holy Spirit, would you please help me to be self-controlled and sober-minded about the things that are on my mind so that I can pray?

Put your attention on God and His promises rather than on the world and its chaos. But faithfulness in the end does not stop with prayer.

[13 : 35] The Christian life is not just about staying calm in a chaotic world. It also involves moving towards others. So if verse 7 keeps us grounded by keeping us focused on God and His promises, then verse 8 keeps us gracious with one another.

Look in your Bible. Verse 8. Above all. Love that. Above all. You might circle that in your Bible.

Keep loving one another earnestly.

Since love covers a multitude of sins. Above all. Most importantly. Chiefly. Make loving one another a priority.

Why? Why should we do this? Because love covers a multitude of sins. What an interesting phrase. It seems that this originates from Proverbs chapter 10 and although Peter is not quoting this text, it doesn't seem like, it certainly sounds familiar.

[14 : 47] Look at it. It's up on the screen. Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 12. Hatred stirs up strife. But love covers all offenses.

We have similar words in the book of James. Notice the parallelism here. In other words, notice how these two phrases, you can spot this easily with Proverbs, notice how these two phrases work together.

On the one hand, you have hatred that will result in what? Strife. Right? Dissension. Disunity. Division.

And on the other hand, we have this idea of love. And love will what? It will cover offenses. In other words, what? It will keep us from dissension and disunity and division.

That's how the proverb works. And that's how Peter uses it here in 1 Peter. Sometimes we are going to rub one another the wrong way.

[16 : 01] We do and say dumb stuff sometimes, don't we? We're thoughtless when we should be thoughtful. We're careless when we should be careful.

We're forgetful. We're forgetful when we should be mindful. Sometimes we are self-centered instead of being concerned about the needs of others.

Any of these behaviors could lead very quickly to dissension and disunity and division. And so Peter calls us to this keep loving one another earnestly.

This love that he calls us to is a forbearance. It's a forbearance that does not allow a spark to turn into a flame. Love covers sin before it begins to burn as bitterness and anger and gossip and division.

A faithful man named Clement who was a church father in the first century described this love in this way. It is long-suffering to the last.

[17 : 18] That's good, isn't it? Long-suffering to the last. Matthew uses this same word covers. That's what it says in our text.

Love covers a multitude of sins. Matthew uses it in chapter 8 to describe the waves covering over the disciples' boat so that it was almost swamped.

What does that teach us about this word? Here's the word picture. Say I say something very thoughtless to Corey. Rather than getting angry at me or gossiping about me or allowing this to burn up inside of him and turn into bitterness towards me, Corey controls his thoughts and he controls his emotions by the Spirit's power, of course, and he says, I think Jeremy's had a very bad week.

I don't know what he might be going through but there's something going on there because that doesn't seem like it's normal behavior. I know he didn't mean to say it that way to me.

What happens? Corey's love washes over that offense. It's like dumping a five-gallon bucket on a little candle and it's gone.

[18 : 44] He chooses not to remember it. He chooses not to focus on it. He chooses not to use it as a club against me in the future. This is love covering a multitude of offenses, a multitude of sins.

Maybe you review the schedule for midweek gathering. This is so, so close to home and the pairings aren't even. Maybe they don't seem all that fair but rather than being discouraged and then pulling away from other Christians because you didn't like the way the schedule worked out.

Love covers that offense and you graciously choose not even to bring it up knowing that in just a few short weeks the schedule is going to change and it's all going to be just fine.

Maybe there's a decision that gets made around here and you feel sort of left out. Maybe no one even talked to you about the decision and it's not that big of a decision but you're still sort of feeling bad and you're tempted to wonder what's going on.

Maybe no one cares and the devil starts talking in your ear. Don't listen to him. He's a coward and a liar but you're tempted anyway. You wonder does anybody care about my opinion and then you choose to let love cover that sin.

[20 : 06] before we move on let me state this clearly. First Corinthians 13 says this love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth.

I know this could feel like semantics so there's wisdom that's involved here so just just hear me say this love covers a multitude of sins but it does not cover up sin.

It does not cover up abuse. It does not cover up injustice. How would you ever know?

How do I know whether this is something that love should cover or whether I need to go and speak with that person? Well you can ask yourself this question. If I can't stop thinking about this situation if I can't stop focusing on it if I'm not able to move past this please go and speak to your brother your sister and make this right.

We have other biblical teaching that can help you there right? Go and speak to them. Tell them what they've done. Allow them the opportunity to repent and seek forgiveness and make restitution if they can.

[21 : 28] If you're tempted to gossip about how you've been wronged same thing stop gossiping go speak with the person who has wronged you. Give them the opportunity to make it right.

If you find yourself unable to joyfully worship and serve alongside that other person if you're tempted to stop coming to small group or to church on Sunday and you just don't want to be around them anymore go and speak with that person.

Follow the other biblical teaching that we have and deal with that sin that way. let me make one final comment before we move.

If a person's relative weakness has been exploited by the misuse of power or position or trust a person's relative weakness has been exploited by the misuse of power position or trust in addition to that being a sin that very well may be abuse and notifying a safe person in authority would be an appropriate next step.

Peter's commands shape the faithful those living in the end times keep loving one another and one way that we demonstrate this love is in verse number nine.

[22 : 53] Show hospitality hospitality to one another without grumbling. I suppose no one thinks that showing hospitality is complicated but that doesn't make it easy does it?

certainly hospitality would include inviting brothers and sisters over for a meal and yet if you notice here in this text verses eight nine and ten each have that phrase one another this could suggest that Peter is talking about hospitality specifically in the sense of hosting worship gatherings perhaps Peter even has in mind something like our midweek gatherings and if that's the case then certainly this phrase without grumbling or without complaining helps us understand that we might very well get tired of having people in our homes showing hospitality will create plenty of opportunities for love to cover a multitude of sins won't it?

This is very practical hospitality will often mean unthanked unnoticed work beforehand and afterwards setting up and cleaning up there's going to be messes there's going to be inconvenience there might be broken toys or TVs who knows what's going to happen if you host people in your home in Peter's time you might even be known as the house where the church gathers this could result in additional persecution for you no wonder Peter says gives this clear command show hospitality Peter wants readers to know that showing hospitality is worth the work and it's worth the risk a warm welcome an ordinary meal and time together this is a beautiful way to keep loving one another earnestly notice notice how

Peter's final command gives direction for how we relate to each other when we gather together verse number 10 as each has received a gift use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies followers of Jesus God has gifted you with some skill some ability a gift that the church desperately needs Peter doesn't list every gift here you can find lists elsewhere Peter gives two broad categories speaking gifts and serving gifts and all of the gifts seem to fall into one of these two categories

Peter's concern is not so much what the gifts are his concern is whatever they are that they get put to use do you see that so if your gift is leadership then you will use that gift by serving the church if your gift is mercy you will use that gift by serving the church if your gift is discernment or faith you will use those gifts by serving the church if your gift involves speaking then be as certain and careful as you can be that you speak those things that are of God and from God and if your gift involves serving you are going to get tired but God will supply you with all of the strength you need it's good to want to know your gift!

[27 : 39] grace and grace! your gift is there is no room for boasting about it remember it's a gift and not only that it is specifically a gift of grace you did not earn it and furthermore as Peter says you are only a steward a manager of it it has been given to you to use for the good of the church and the glory of God doesn't belong to you at best you're a steward a manager of whatever you've been given the gift is not for your own personal benefit not for your own advantage use your gift for the good of the church and the glory of God verse 11 again whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything God may be glorified through

Jesus Christ to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever amen do you see that the gifts that we have are for God's glory in order that in everything God may be glorified even though we are in church and even though we are talking about the end of all things I refuse!

to offer you 88 reasons why the Lord may come back in 2088 I hope you're okay with that but I do know this Jesus will return and his return is the blessed hope of all Christians living in the end times this is the telos of the story the end of the story when he returns Jesus will swallow up death he will right every wrong he will make all things new I wonder are you ready for that day if not then a good question to ask would be why am I not ready for that day perhaps you are not yet a follower of Jesus let me invite you to trust him right now as Peter writes he himself Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree

I know you have sins because I have them to come to Jesus and be saved perhaps you are not looking forward to Jesus his return I wonder if you would ask the Holy Spirit to stir up this blessed hope in your soul here's why when you believe that all things are moving towards that day when Jesus returns when you believe that all things are moving towards that day it will give you fresh perspective for today and that's important the future shapes the faithful so let's live like those who know how the story ends let's pray with clear minds let's love with full hearts let's welcome with willing hands let's serve with the strength that God provides these are not survival tactics these are end time ethics they are the marks of a community that is waiting in hope walking by faith living by grace and longing for the day when we receive the outcome the telos of our faith the salvation of our souls these are community preserving commands and this is the kind of community that this world desperately needs to see a people that is anchored in hope a people known by our love a people recognized for humble service the cake the cake is still in the oven but that cake is rising and you can begin to smell the aroma in the air the end of all things is at hand this is not a moment for panic this is not a moment for predictions this is a time for practical obedience so let's be prayerful loving welcoming and serving because this glorifies

God and he deserves all the glory and the dominion forever and ever amen let's pray father we are grateful to receive your word thank you for teaching us from it this morning thank you for the clarity of your word to us thank you that these commands are clear and obvious they are low hanging fruit they are on the bottom shelf it's easy for us to see them to understand them to interpret them and now gracious father and blessed holy spirit we need so much help just to obey these commands thank you for this beautiful body this expression of faith this expression of your church that you have provided for us to be growing in thank you for the way this church models so many of these commands so well

[33 : 43] I'm grateful for your kindness to me and to my family and I'm grateful for your kindness on behalf of each of my brothers and sisters gathered here together would you please help us as we read elsewhere in your word to do these things and where we have found that we are doing them would you help us to do them more and more to be abounding in obedience to these commands father we also recognize that as we look at simple commands like this there there may be one that that cuts close to home something that we realized oh that that has been a problem for me recently so would you please holy spirit please please work in our hearts as we take a few moments to be quiet before you in preparation for the Lord's supper!

point us towards the cross of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ grant us repentance so that we respond again by repenting and believing the good news of the gospel thank you Lord Jesus for your death thank you for bearing our sin in your body on the cross so that we might live to righteousness would you please help us to be faithful in our obedience to you as we live here not at the end but in the end help us to be faithful we ask this father for your glory and for our good in the name of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ Amen