

1 Peter 4:7

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

The end of all things is the framework for this part of our passage—especially the end of your sick attachment to your flesh and all that is dead and dying. Accordingly, each of us should allow the Spirit to transform our mind such that we are of sound judgment and we share the mind of Christ walking daily in the wisdom that He desires to give us. In addition, we should be of sober spirit, or balanced and reasoned in our emotions, not vacillating back and forth like the waves of the sea as one who lives in doubt. Because if we have sound judgment and a sober spirit then we will be able to know how to pray and how to seek the Lord during some very difficult and trying times. We will be strong, solid, stable, and one upon whom others can depend.

The end of all things is near; that is such an ominous statement to have hanging over our heads. Yet, the Spirit is always quite particular in His choice of words—there is not a single carelessly placed word in the entire Bible. So He wants us to give this some serious consideration and He wants it to impact our choices and decisions. He wants this truth to be a filter through which we process all that we go through and everything we feel. The end of all things is near. Accordingly, He moves from this instruction about prayer to once again addressing our relationships with one another. It may sound like you have heard this instruction before; and you have in **1:22**; **2:17**; and **3:8**. However, since we have not yet

entirely stabilized and secured our thoughts and emotions with the truth, sometimes we forget even the simplest truths when it comes to our relationships in this body. And keep in mind as you read this that the overall theme of late has been judgment—the complete annihilation of your flesh such that you might be quickened or made alive in the Spirit for the purpose of loving and caring for the body.

1 Peter 4:8-11

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Above all things, keep fervent, or be very intentional, in your love for one another; or more specifically in the Greek “in having God’s *agape* love for one another (“keep fervent” is in the *present active participle*). Once again we are reminded that it is God’s divine *agape* love that is to be the defining attribute which is continually shared amongst one another. The Spirit says, above all. This means above you and anything else you might think is so important. This responsibility to one another is paramount. Above all!

This love comes from God—it is His love—and it is to be what distinguishes our relationships from all others. Originating from the divine, this love is recognizable because it is inherently not selfish, it does not seek its own, and it considers what a person truly needs and not necessarily what they want. We have all come to understand that God expresses His love to us it is in so many varied forms; therefore, we must not try to limit the expression of this love through us as it will likewise have many varied forms. But mark my word, it will be fundamentally others centered. I have to say that because we can so easily deceive ourselves into thinking we are “loving” one another when in reality we are sharing varied forms of selfishness with one another.

Accordingly, we can access this love and be fervent in it only if we have intentionally pursued the design point. If we have not let the Spirit condemn our flesh under the waters of judgment, there is no way we will be anything but selfish and corrupt in our own expressions of love. *Agape* love is God’s love; therefore, it comes with His personhood. As we let Him have access to our being, through the crucifixion of our flesh, He will express His love through us. Still, the fact that we are to be fervent (continual and intentional) with this love brings it down to an active decision that we can and must make. We must settle the matter once and for all and make the decision to die to our flesh so we might live and be quickened in the Spirit. This is the way of love; there is no doubt about it, you know it’s true, this is the way of love: you have to die to live and you have to live to love.

Now, there is a reason the Spirit reminds us of our need for this love: God’s *agape* love has the amazing ability to cover a multitude of sins; and since the

context of our passage is the judgment or death of our flesh, there will be plenty need for our sins to be covered. The problem is that we just don't die very easily (at least to our flesh); in fact, we fight, we argue, we push back, we wrestle, we wrangle, we grab, we poke, we stick, we scream, we lie, we deceive, we coerce, we run away, and we even try and take others down with us. Thus, this whole "I have been crucified with Christ" thing is very, very messy and it seems that through the dying process many people tend to get hurt as sin is flying all over the place. But God's love through us covers this sin.

The Lord has called each of us to fight for peace in this body (which means that we fight for the complete submission of each person to Jesus). And, if you are one of the more mature people in this body, you are likely very active in helping others learn how and make the choice to die to their flesh. And without question you have been very hurt in the process; but it is the nature of the game. You did it to me and Sarah, so now it gets to be done to you: you know the whole circle of life thing—payback is beautiful—what a joy.

And now you get to make the choice to love and serve others regardless of how others treat you. You get to make the choice to trust to Jesus not just the people who hurt you but the ultimate outcome of their decisions. You get to settle on the truth that you are responsible to love and serve and they are responsible to choose Jesus; but you cannot choose Him for them and you also must not punish them for not choosing Him, or for taking their time in choosing Him. I know it is hard. We have definitely been taught this lesson and are still trying to learn it. But sometimes we get so invested in the lives of others that we tend to internalize their rejection of the Lord and react to them in a way that is not love and we hold their

sin against them. But true *agape* love covers a plethora of sins and simply refuses to hold one's sin against them.

God's love, expressed through our lives, has a very loose and open hand for it is not demanding of a certain response or outcome. A person with God's love trusts all results (good or bad) to Him. In fact, God's love in our lives is patient, kind, is not jealous, does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, it does not seek its own, is not provoked (now that is a big litmus test for *agape* love), does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and even endures all things. Love never fails. (**1 Corinthians 13:4-8**).

It is really quite amazing to see this love in operation through your own life and through the lives of others in this body. And when you are working with someone and walking them through the crucifixion process, all of these areas get pushed on in your soul. In fact, it seems as if the things that they say and do are for the purpose of testing you—to see if you will prove out His love for them. They are trying to discover (whether they are conscience of it or not) if you no longer live and Jesus lives inside of you. And, yes, that is what we are to intentionally and continually do: prove out His love for them by being patient, kind, not jealous, not arrogant or braggadocios, not acting unbecomingly, not seeking our own benefit, not letting ourselves be provoked, not holding their wrongs against them, and most definitely not rejoicing or supporting their unrighteousness, but rejoicing in the truth. A verse that tends to capture what we have been called to do in each other's lives is found in **James 5**.

James 5:19-20

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

When we help each other put aside our wrong belief and our unbelief and fight against the concessions that we tend to give our flesh, we are saving souls from death: for as we know, the mind set on the flesh is death (***Romans 8:6***). And in so doing we cover a multitude of sins. We let the love of God be powerful in our lives such that we don't have to internalize everything and we can let the personal offenses go. There is no reason to hold on to them, especially when we consider our own sin and our own struggle with the crucifixion process. I can honestly say that I don't believe that any of you, much less me, made this process easy on anyone. So in light of the Lord's love for our lives, His love in our lives, and His desire for that love to flow from our lives, we can and must let these offenses go.

This is a good time to ask yourself the following questions. Do I hold any resentment, bitterness, or anguish toward anyone else in this body? Am I harboring contempt toward someone because of how they have acted in this body or are even now acting? If so, then please don't deceive yourself. The love of God is not flowing in and through you. Ask the Lord to help you put this emotional offense to rest and to let it go. Ask Him to help you remember how much grace and mercy He and others in this body showed to you. Ask Him to help you get in touch with the intensity of what you took others through in order that you might have mercy on the person who has offended you. Ask Him to help you forgive and

be patient, kind, and resilient to provocation. This is the miracle He wants to do with you and through you; so just ask Him and I guarantee you He will act. If you ask, Jesus will give you another opportunity to put to death your flesh. And as we have learned, it is always better if you ask Him than it is to stubbornly wait until He confronts you with the ugliness of your flesh.

Before we move on, I want to reinforce this point. God's love, as it is expressed in and through our lives, covers a multitude of sins. His love allows us to be in relationship with one another and care for one another even if we have been hurt by them. His love puts a blanket over their sin so we are not manically focused and obsessed on their wrongs; but we are able to have a sound mind and be sober of spirit so we can see clearly to help them take the steps they need to put to death their flesh and know how to pray for them. His love allows us to set aside our own interests, even our own pain, for the benefit of another. It is hard and the temptation to let our hurt rule our souls is big, but that is why we must live surrendered to the Spirit willing to be dead to all those things knowing that they really do not matter.

As I said, "keep fervent in your love" is given to us in the *present active participle*. It is therefore to be continually demonstrated in the now; and if we truly are accessing God's love, it will cover sins (*present active indicative*)—that is to be understood as a statement of fact. This is to be the experience of others in this body. If that is not what is happening, then it is not God's love. One of the signs of a very sick body—or a sick soul—is if the sins of others always seems to be at issue. If that is your focus, let it go because it means you are blind to your own sin.

In addition to giving away the love which covers a multitude of sins, we are to be hospitable to one another without complaint. Genuine hospitality is a beautiful thing. It makes people feel cared for, wanted, and loved. And when it is without complaint, or when it is genuine, it can be received in a person's soul as a true act of kindness and a lovely expression of "*koinonia*"—the deepest form of Christian fellowship.

Fundamentally, hospitality is rooted in generosity; the willingness to practically give or share from what you have. As with God's divine love, hospitality is to mark our relationships. It is to be a natural expression which flows from our lives; it is to be how we are known in this body. I know that some of us in this body are most definitely marked by this trait, but others have a serious problem with it. They love when they are a beneficiary of someone's hospitality—that's a given—but they just are too selfish, too fearful, and too controlling to be the one who freely and gregariously serves in this manner. And this is because they still do not believe that God is their Provider or that He will actually care for them. Thus, they have to hoard, preserve, ration, measure, save, and protect what little they have or in some cases, the abundance they have been given. It is sad. God has freely given so that we might freely give. And He will be our Provider. Test Him in this area; He will prove Himself to you. It is not your job to hoard, preserve, ration, measure, save, and protect, what you have. Your job is to willfully share it with this body embracing a genuine hospitable spirit. It is time to stop taking advantage of those who are hospitable and start yourself being hospitable.

Joel and Sarah have continually been an example to this body of true hospitality. They have opened up their homes, condo, cars, food, money, and so

much more to all of us at different times and to all of us at the same time. And even though we have broken both of their couches, all of their wine glasses, a table or two, dishes, and done so much more damage than most of you even know or are willing to admit, they have found joy in being a source of hospitality to this body. They have truly given us a beautiful example to follow. But we need to follow. We must not just take and take; we need to give and bless others in the way they have so often blessed us. And don't start with the excuse that you can't because you don't have enough. Remember the story of the woman in the temple, she gave only a few pennies, but her offering will be remembered for all time. It was enough. The issue is never how much you have but it is always about your willingness to give.

Jesus wants you to give as an expression of His love and He wants you to give without complaint. That means even if others do not do you right and they take advantage of your hospitality, still you willingly give (again, Sarah and Joel have modeled this for you). If the manner in which others respond tends to dictate your choices, then your hospitality is not truly genuine; rather, it is a religious covering for selfishness—giving so you can be loved, wanted, and important. That is different. The Lord wants earnest hospitality to freely flow in this body.

In the same way that we are to be intentional about loving one another and be hospitable, we are also to be quite generous with one another with the spiritual gifts that God has given us. He has given every single one of us a gift (if not more) and He has given them to us for others and not for ourselves. Our spiritual gifts are never to be associated with any form of selfishness. The Spirit has given them to us so we can serve others and love them with the grace of God; that is a

powerful thought. You are to be an instrument of God's grace to others. And the interesting thing is that no matter how much we give away and use our gifts, our resources are never depleted for God's ocean of grace is deep and endless. And don't think that just because you have not completed the crucifixion process that you can't give. That is a lie from the enemy. Each one of you has received a special gift (that is a fact as "received" is in the *indicative*); you just have to decide that you will use it in serving one another.

Besides, "employ it in serving" is in the *present active participle*, so it is something you are to be doing and continually doing in your now. I want you to think about how much this passage is intended to shift the attention off of your obsessions with "you" and on to others. Love is intentional, being hospitable is intentional, not grumbling is intentional, and serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God is intentional. The Spirit knows how we love to take care of ourselves, especially when we are going through the waters of judgment; yet, He wants us to fix our minds and our emotions on the welfare of others. The time is past for us to obsess on ourselves; it is time to give up that way of living and adopt the Lord's way. I truly believe God gives us the call to serve and care for others as a pathway to bring quick healing into our lives and to quicken us in His Spirit such that we break our addictions and bonds with our *Old Sinful Nature*. I had to do this through my storm. When the waves were pounding the hardest, I had to still let God use me to care for those in my charge. I didn't get to just stop and obsess on myself. Don't get me wrong, I did plenty of obsessing, but I also had to make the choice to serve others and it was a radical expression of God's grace in my life.

Our attitude should be that of a steward or a caretaker of the manifold, or varied and different, gifts which are an expression of God's grace in our lives. In other words, we have been entrusted with supernatural gifts and we have been assigned the job of appropriately utilizing these gifts and not wasting them or misusing them. This is our job and the Spirit expects us to be busy about His work in the midst of our relationships.

There is a parable in **Luke 16:1-12** which helps communicate this truth. There was a rich man who had a manager and this manager was squandering the rich man's possessions by recklessly managing the estate. But when he found out that his boss knew he was being irresponsible, he got very busy to ensure he would not be removed from his position and punished. Now he did it out of fear and not out of true respect for his master; nevertheless, he did receive the praise from his master for being shrewd. Then Jesus added that the people of the world are more shrewd in relation to his own kind than are the Sons of Light. In other words, they know when they are blowing it and they kick it into gear and will do what it takes to set things right.

But the Sons of Light seem to care so little about the master's estate, about the affairs of His kingdom, and about their own kind. They are too busy worrying about themselves and obsessing on how things affect them. This is a sad reality; and I am afraid it is as true now as it was in Jesus' day. At the end of this story Jesus said: "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much" (**Luke 16:10**). Thus, if God has entrusted you with a manifestation of His grace, He desires you to faithfully use this gift to build up the body. He desires you to think about it,

consider it, and to be so submitted to Him that when it is right and authorized you will move in a way that is consistent with your kind—as a Son of Light doing only what your Father tells you to do. And when you are faithful with small tasks He will trust you with so much more.

The Spirit speaks of the expression of these gifts as the “manifold grace of God,” which just means that He has made available varied or different types of gifts that express God’s grace to our lives. This passage does not delve into the various types of gifts; nevertheless, I think it might be of some good for us to take a few minutes to review the types of gifts that are listed in the Bible. I have created a list and pulled from passages in **Romans 12**, **1 Corinthians 12**, and **Ephesians 4**. This list is by no means exhaustive as I believe the Spirit is very creative and gives us what is necessary and needed in the moment that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. But this list does give us a general understanding of the types of functions that are often used by the Spirit for the building up of the body.

With that said, I want you to know that the Spirit distributes these gifts to each person just as He wills (**1 Corinthians 12:11**). These gifts are given not based upon your talent, intellect, enthusiasm, or anything natural; rather, the Spirit gives these supernatural gifts according to His wisdom for your life. And I believe this is a statement not just for the individual but also for the overall body of Christ. Not every single church is given everything on this list. But the Spirit equips the larger body in a way that each fellowship has a different but complementary manifestation of the grace of God in their lives. And all together we make a beautiful and complete expression of God’s grace to this world.

Yet, even though they are distributed according to His will, we are also told to earnestly desire certain gifts, especially prophecy (**1 Corinthians 14:1**); but it is still up to the Spirit to decide on who gets what. For example, I have earnestly desired the prophetic gift for this body and God has abundantly answered my prayer. Now, I don't personally have the gift of prophecy, but this body sure does and so I am abundantly provided for. I have also prayed for the ability to see what is going on in the spiritual realms so we can be prepared and protected in the spiritual battles in which we always find ourselves. God has similarly abundantly answered my prayer through the prophets He has given us. I personally have very limited access to that realm, but through His wise provision I am amply equipped to prepare this body and ready us for war. I love the way God answers prayers; it is rarely just about the "me" but it seems to almost always be about the "we." I have found a specific reference to 17-types of spiritual gifts. They are as follows:

| | | | | | |
|----------|---------|----------------|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Prophecy | Service | Teaching | Exhortation | Giving | Leading |
| Mercy | Wisdom | Faith | Healing | Miracles | Discernment of spirits |
| Tongues | Apostle | Administration | Interpretation of tongues | Word of Knowledge | |

All of these are given for the equipping and building up of the body. They are not given so you can glory in your gifting and they most definitely are not given as a means of establishing hierarchy within the body (except for the offices which God has established: that of Apostle, Prophet, and Teacher). And they have been

given so they can be abundantly used. Some of you know how the Spirit has gifted you and some of you are not sure. But I can guarantee you this, if you embrace the spiritual trifecta found in **Galatians 2:20-21** that whatever gift you have will automatically be used in you; it will pour from your life. And others will know, quite often even before you know it. My point is that “knowing” your spiritual gift(s) is not essential; rather, submission to the Spirit, the rejection of your flesh, the hatred of evil, and the willingness to serve others in love is essential.

Now the rest of this passage actually speaks of the design point: it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. It also speaks of the intentional way we are to live with one another. But before I dive into those two issues, I want you to note that this passage is not qualified in any way. It is not limited to Elders, Pastors, Teachers, or leaders in the church. It is a general exhortation to the overall body. Therefore, if you speak, you are to speak as the utterances of God are coming from your mouth; and, if you serve, you are to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies. God in us will speak through us and God in us will serve through us, and so on and so on, if we are submitted to Him. He will give us the words we need and the strength we need when we choose to live by faith. But we must be submitted to the Spirit and follow His leading in all things. As it says in **Galatians 5:25**, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

In the body, as we speak to one another, we must be very intentional so we can know that Christ speaks through us. We must not speak carelessly, we must not speak to gain some benefit or advantage, we must not speak arrogantly, and we must not speak to injure or hurt another. All of this takes our being intentional. I know that sometimes our ego gets involved and we want to say the right thing so

others will be “blessed” and they will think that we have something to add to their lives. Yes, often when we speak the “things of God” our motivations are corrupt and are actually about advancing our own position before someone else. This is wrong; yet, every one of us has done this. And speaking is just an example; we can so easily and selfishly corrupt the use of any of our spiritual gifts. But we must be intentional to follow the Spirit’s leading in all things both in the what (what we do) and the when (when we do it).

Once again, the only way we can truly live such that God’s grace is manifest through our lives is if we let the Spirit take us through the destruction of our flesh. In fact, that is what **4:12-19**, which we will get to next week, is all about. We must settle on this matter and decide now that we want to die in order that we might live. Too many of you have not yet finalized that decision; thus, when God brings up opportunity after opportunity to put to death the desires of your flesh (those fleshly lusts of self-love and self-pity), you shun them. You act as if you truly love this life in your flesh. But here is the thing; you have been appointed for death. Therefore, I suggest that you make the decision to let the Spirit bring judgment upon your flesh. Then when those “opportunities” come, you will be ready to die and you won’t fight, resist, shut down, and run away. It is time for you to know what it is like to have Jesus’ power and His presence coursing through your veins. It is time to know what it is like to speak with His words, to serve with His strength, and to give yourself to others in His *agape* love flowing with hospitality.

And we do this so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Yes, you are to do all these things so that God may be glorified in you and through you. You are

not to seek your glory but His glory. Besides, if you do, He will ensure that your glory is fully manifest in Him. He has promised that the proof of your faith will result in praise and glory **1:7**; it is guaranteed. He has your back and He will ensure you are glorified with Him; therefore, you don't need to be self-seeking trying to be lifted up in this body and trying to be something important.

Rather, your entire focus should be on others and the Lord and not on you. So that in all things God may be glorified—in all things. Everything you do should be about His glory and not your own because only to Him belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. It is not ours; it is His. Let's choose to be a person through whom the manifold grace of God is expressed. Let's choose to be a person who loves and is hospitable. Let's choose to glorify Jesus in all things. Let that be your goal, your obsession, and you will know His power and strength like so few others for you will truly live as a Son of Light.

Let's Pray