



A BETTER RESISTANCE | THE CHURCH AT ITS BEST (13)

April 25, 2021

1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ 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.

BACKGROUND

As Christians reflect and think deeply about the hope of the gospel, they can't help but live differently. This is because Jesus' life, death and resurrection opens the door to a new future that Christians see a glimpse of through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. In the same way, those who belong to Jesus also experience that same power of God for new life—both here and now and in the life that is to come. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christian community can be a glimpse and a foretaste of that reality. To that end, Peter describes that community in this passage. The community he describes is beautiful and attractive as it shows forth the power of God to change lives and renew all things.

PURPOSE

To understand the connection between following Jesus and loving and serving others

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Based on verses 8-11, how does Peter describe the community of faith? What attributes and characteristics do we see in this passage?
2. In a place like New York City, community can be very challenging. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced in building deep relationships? How can we at Central better reflect Peter's description of Christian community? How does faith in Jesus enable us to do this?

LEADER'S NOTES

Question 1: (v.7) "The end of all things is at hand" does not mean Peter was expecting Christ to return in a few weeks or months. It means, rather, that all the major events in God's great salvation plan—culminating in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost—had already occurred. Therefore, Christ's return could happen at any time: it was "at hand" in Peter's day, and it still is today. But the imminent arrival of the end is not a call simply to look into heaven and wait for Jesus' return. Instead, believers are to be self-controlled and sober-minded, so that they may be devoted to prayer and maximize their usefulness in God's kingdom.

(v.8) Enduring love for others testifies that a person is living in light of the future. True love covers a multitude of other people's sins (Proverbs 10:12). Where love abounds, offenses are frequently overlooked and quickly forgotten. (from the ESV Study Bible).

(v.9) The word “hospitality” in the original language of the NT literally means “love for the stranger.” Such generous and sacrificial love was a very powerful witness to the love of Jesus in the ancient world. It means that all people were welcomed and embraced with the love of Jesus (Matt 11:25-30).

(v.10-11) Finally, Peter writes that all Christians receive spiritual gifts from God for the purpose of building up the community of faith. Peter divides spiritual gifts generally into speaking and serving gifts. Those who have been given the speaking gifts are able to faithfully declare God’s word. Similarly, those who have been given the gift of service are able to serve—not merely based on their own ability—but on the strength of God through his Holy Spirit.

Question 2: The phrase “one another” in the New Testament shows a picture of what living out the gospel in community looks like. This means that many aspects of the Christian faith cannot be practiced in isolation. We have the greatest opportunities to practice these and encourage each other to grow in Christ in our community groups.

It’s in the context of committed community that Christians can “keep loving one another earnestly.” This means we need to cultivate strong relationships within community groups, bible studies and other means of community that is based on a completely different mindset. Christians look to community, not merely to get their “needs” met, rather, it is a place where we can help meet the needs of others. But this can only happen as Christians experience the love and service of Jesus for them. In this way, the gospel enables us to enter into community with a focus (not on ourselves but) on how we can love and serve others in response to how Jesus has loved and served us. This is the mark of spiritual growth and maturity. Because of our inclination towards selfishness and sin, we need love to preserve our relationships.

Biblical hospitality means that Christians extend the love of Jesus to all people including strangers. This means that we as a community should strive to look for the “outsider” in our midst so that God might use us to share the warmth and embrace of Jesus, which Christians themselves have experienced. Furthermore, hospitality means that our church building and our home should be a space that is used with the purpose and intention of bringing new people into the community. The gospel makes us a people who are “not for ourselves” but for the good and benefit of those around us. This is the church at its best.

Finally, all Christians are called to ministry. God gives different gifts within the community, so that, together, they represent a full picture of Christ. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13) Our community reaches its fullest potential when every Christian is using their spiritual gifts in service to God. Such a community gives glory to God through Jesus Christ!