

Do
THIS

WHILE EVIL MEN
WAX WORSE AND
WORSE

**“BUT THE END OF ALL
THINGS IS AT HAND: BE
YE THEREFORE . . .”**

Over the last few decades, things in this world seem to have gotten worse. That is, in my opinion the world is in a moral decline. But how can I, or anyone for that matter, measure such a statement?



Love Your Enemies and Bless Them That Curse You

Compassion For Your Enemy

Dirk Willems, Asperen, 1569

No story of an Anabaptist martyr has captured the imagination more than the tale of Dirk Willems. Dirk's crime was to lead a handful of people to the LORD and baptize them in his home. This action, plus his continued devotion to his new faith, led to his condemnation by the Roman Catholic Church.

Dirk was caught, tried and convicted as an Anabaptist in those later years of harsh Spanish rule under the Duke of Alva in The Netherlands. He escaped from a residential palace turned into a prison by letting himself out of a window with a rope made of knotted rags, dropping onto the ice that covered the castle moat.

Seeing him escape, a palace guard pursued him as he fled. Dirk crossed the thin ice of a pond, the "Hondegat," safely. His own weight had been reduced by short prison rations, but the heavier pursuer broke through.

Hearing the guard's cries for help, Dirk turned back and rescued him. The less-than-grateful guard then seized Dirk and led him back to captivity. This time the authorities threw him into a more secure prison, a small, heavily barred room at the top of a very tall church tower, above the bell, where he was probably locked into the wooden leg stocks that remain in place today. Soon he was led out to be burned to death.

Some inhabitants of present-day Asperen, none of them Mennonite, regard Dirk as a folk hero. A Christian, so compassionate that he risked recapture in order to save the life of his drowning pursuer, stimulates respect and memory.

John S. Oyer and Robert Kreider, *Mirror of the Martyrs* [Good Books, 1990], p. 36–37.

IS OUR WORLD REALLY GETTING DARKER, AND IF IT IS, WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

First, we need a reliable measuring stick to gauge one's distance from one point to another. This of course is the problem. Everyone has their own measuring stick and none of them are the same. The result then is mixed. Some say things are getting better, while others say things are

getting worse. There may even be those who say there is no change.

Of course, I believe the true measuring stick is the Word of God. With it, we can compare individuals, groups, and nations to see how close or how far they may be from God and His standard.

When we open the pages of Scripture, the first thing we learn is that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and when we look a little closer we also find that

"... evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" – 1 Timothy 3:13.

In every generation, there has been evidence of the encroaching darkness. Some eras were worse than other. Scripture attests to this fact when it says,

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof . . .” - 2 Tim 3:1-5

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” - 1 Tim 4:1-3.

In our day, we can measure some of the movement away from God by evaluating the three institutes God ordained: the family, the church and government.

1. How does Peter’s exhortation “But the end of all things is at hand,” (1 Peter 4:7) serve as an incentive to those 1st Century Christians suffering for their faith?

ANSWER:

“But the end of all things is at hand.”

That is quite a statement, and it is a true statement. All of history is moving towards one goal. Every day we are moving closer to that end. Think of this in biblical terms.

For 120 years Noah warned the people that the end was near, but none believed his message. They might have argued, “Why should I believe this? Has not everything been the same for the last 1,650 years? Why should anything be different now?” However, the answer is simple, when God says something will happen, it will happen. Time does not disqualify God’s Word.

As the 1st Century AD approached, the Jewish people had been waiting 2,100 years for the Messiah to appear. If we count from the first time the Lord made the promise of the coming Messiah (Genesis 3:15-16), then the waiting period is even longer, some 4,000 years.

When we view this in light of God’s Word, then it does not take long to discover that the changes over the last 20 years are not favorable. Furthermore, the measurable movement away from God this time is not isolated to a few regions or nations, but it is occurring on a global level.

So how are we to live in this period of change and decline? How are we to make the most impact in this world for the LORD? What can we do to counter the ungodly trends we see?

If the contemporary church is ever going to make an impact on this world, it urgently needs spiritual revival, and that will occur only when believers go beyond their personal desires and long to think, speak and live in the ways Scripture outlines. When they do, the church will be more than a crowd; it will become spiritually powerful before a hostile world. To that end, the apostle Peter instructs us to examine three very basic aspects of our spiritual walk in 1 Peter 4:7-11: that is, our incentive to walk close to Christ, his instruction in how we should walk and our intention behind this walk.

Many men grew weary, because of the length of time. So when the Messiah finally appeared, the Jewish people did not regard the reports made by angels, shepherds and prophets as true. Even when Jesus appeared on the scene, many still rejected Him. But the promised Messiah had arrived. He performed amazing miracles. At His death, the renting of the vail in the Holy of holies took place. It indicated that a new and living way was made. Then came the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. God temporarily set aside Judaism and the Aaronic priesthood and formed the church, the royal priesthood of believers.

The verb “at hand” in 1 Peter 4:7 means “approaching.” He is referring to the imminent return of Christ for His church. That event can happen at any moment. It is the anticipated hope of the early church and of the saints throughout the ages. With biblical history in mind, and the additional promises of God, Peter writes, “The end of all things is at hand.” It is one of the themes of his letters. For example:

1 Peter 1:7b – That the trial of your faith . . . though it be tried with fire, might be found unto the praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:13 – Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 4:13 – “When His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

1 Peter 5:4 – “When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Furthermore, in other places in the New Testament we find the apostle Paul asserting that the characteristic of every true Christian is a desire to please the Lord.

“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” 2 Cor. 5:9-10.

All Christians will stand before Christ at the judgment seat. There, they will give an account for their lives. He will not judge them for their sins because His sacrifice on the cross has already cleansed those away. At that judgment the Lord will reward all believers for works that were good, assessing their effectiveness, dedication, devotion and usefulness in serving Him. A realization of that future reality ought to instill within every believer a desire to constant purity.

If this does not stir us to seek purity, we ought to ask the question why? Is it because of sin? Is our inaction due to a lack of belief that the end of all things is imminent? What is it that has dulled our senses? Where is the prodding of the Holy Spirit that is promised to all true believers? Our incentive ought to be **“THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND.”**

Along with the incentive to follow and obey Christ, Peter gives us instruction in how we are to conduct ourselves in these last days. These directives cover three areas: our life: our personal walk, our mutual love and our service.

2. What three items are we to daily practice (1 Peter 4:7b)? Discuss what we can do to cultivate these items in our life. Also discuss what we have done to cultivate a godly walk.

Part One: Cultivating Personal Holiness:

a. We must be sober

Sober defined: It means “sound judgment,” and it comes from the Greek term to “be in one’s right mind” or “to be under control and not be carried away by an errant view, emotion or uncontrolled passion.”

Have you not seen Christians doing things that are entirely out of sync with God’s Word? We call that act insane. We would say, “why are you doing an insane thing like that?” There are several reasons why a Christian may not use sound judgment. Peter boils it down to two words in our passage. Our failure to do these things will eventually lead to foolish conduct.

b. We must be watchful

1) Watch defined: It comes from the Greek word “*nepho*” which means to be “spiritually observant.” It is similar to the comments Jesus made to his disciples when He told them to “watch” or “be on alert.” We are to keep on alert. We must spiritually keep a watchful eye out.

2) Christians are prone to let their guard down. We do this in many areas. One realm that may hinder our vigilance is the electronic age of movies, videos, and music. Have you ever watched something in the movies or on TV and then found yourself recalling that scene over and over again.

Now imagine what happens if we over load our thoughts with teaching and images that are contrary to God and His Word? What will this do to us over time? How many times do we have to hear and see something before it becomes part of our thinking? If not guarded, these things have the ability to desensitize us to things like violence, graphic images and more. If we are not careful, this can lead to a lack of compassion, and a soul so noisy with the things of the world that we no longer hear the Spirit speaking. It can eventually desensitize us to sin. Therefore, we must be on guard and be of sound judgment and spiritually observant — vigilant.

c. We must be sober and watch for the purpose of prayer

1) “Unto prayer” could be translated “for the purpose of prayer.”

Prayer is our access to all spiritual resources, but we cannot pray properly if our minds are unstable due to worldly pursuits, or we are ignorant of divine truth, or indifferent to divine purposes. We can find profound truths about God when we seriously study Scripture. Yet this is it. We must study God’s Word to find these truths and to have the mind of Christ. Prayer is the essential element in our relationship with God. Holy living comes when we read and meditate on God’s word and commune with Him in prayer.

3. What items in 1 Peter 4:8-9 are we to daily practice in order to cultivate mutual love within our homes, churches and with those souls we daily touch? Discuss what we can do to cultivate these items in our lives. Also discuss things we have already done it to cultivate mutual love.

Part Two: Cultivating mutual love – 1 Peter 4:8-9

“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. ⁹ Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”

- a. We must cultivate mutual love.

“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves”

The phrase, “and above all things” is of supreme importance. Good doctrine without love is worthless. In fact, it is deadly. Our conduct speaks volumes about our faith. The world does not judge us by how much doctrine we know, it judges us on how we practice our faith.

- b. We must forgive one another.

“for charity shall cover the multitude of sins”

My parents loved me despite the number of sins I committed. It wasn't that they let me get away with sin. I was disciplined for my sinful deeds. The sin itself was not covered up, but I was covered by their selfless love towards me.

- c. We must regularly practice hospitality.

“Use hospitality one to another without grudging”

Christian hospitality isn't about glamorous table settings or platters of picture-perfect food; it's about practicing servanthood. More importantly, it's about loving others through Christ and making people feel special.

Spiritual Gift or Scriptural Mandate?

While not everyone feels comfortable at the helm of a social event, some folks have a natural talent for making guests feel special. You might think those hospitality genes are inherited, but that's a myth. Hospitality takes on added dimensions and new definitions when seen through the lens of Christianity.

Some Christians possess hospitality as a spiritual gift. The Bible tells us that every believer is given at least one spiritual gift for the purpose of building up God's church and serving the body of Christ. In other words, our gifts are given not for our own benefit, but for the enrichment of others. We should be serving those around us, including the body of believers, family and friends.

Romans 12:13, however, encourages us all to practice hospitality, whether it is our spiritual gift or not. In fact, the Greek word *philozenia* is actually a combination of two words—*philos*, meaning "affection" and *zenos*, meaning "stranger." While usually translated to mean hospitality, *philozenia* signifies affection toward strangers.

One early church father upheld that "hospitality maintains a prominence in the living (Christian) tradition . . . the guest represents Christ and has a claim on the welcome and care of the community." In other words, if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected within us and is showered on those with whom we come in contact.

The Book of 1 John makes it plain that when we love others, we are showing our love for God. He loves us completely and unconditionally. Equally, when we love and serve others in the community through hospitality, we are also serving God.

Whether we have the spiritual gift of hospitality or not, it can be a part of our way of life.

Hospitality: Open Hands, Open Hearts, Open Doors

None of us deny that it's easier to share hospitality with family and friends than with the stranger on the street. But the New Testament teaches us that Christianity is the religion of open hands, open hearts and open doors. When we open our hearts as well as our homes, we're practicing Christian hospitality.

While the art of hospitality may come easy for some, it may be quite difficult for others. After all, it's not always easy to give of ourselves, much less our hard-earned gains. And like most things in life, hospitality isn't done perfectly the first time. But when we do it over and over, it truly becomes a comfortable part of our nature. It's all in perspective.

Many people choose to focus on what they don't have instead of focusing on sharing the blessings of God. We should give it a try. Somewhere along the way, we'll realize that people are not in our home for the unlimited entertaining budget. Rather, they sense lovingkindness and genuine concern. That's the moment when our home becomes a sanctuary for those God sends our way.

Changing Your Corner of the World with Hospitality

Just think: if Christians would practice true hospitality, we could play a significant part in changing our corner of the world. After all, we are living miracles and have so much to share.

The bottom line is that God can use us to touch lives. It doesn't matter if we rent or own a house or an apartment; our homes are an extension of ourselves. When we practice hospitality, we have the opportunity to touch lives in an intimate, personal way. We must be bold: God has not only given us the roof over our heads, but He also gave us the love and wisdom needed to open our home to others.

With a little planning and preparation—and a good measure of prayer—anyone can be prepared to share their home with friends, neighbors and even the strangers God may send our way.

- 4. In 1 Peter 4:10-11a we are told to cultivate our spiritual gift(s). List the spiritual gifts. Discuss which spiritual gifts fit into the categories of speaking gifts and serving gifts. Also share with others what your spiritual gift is, and how you use it.**

Part Three: Cultivating our Spiritual Gift

“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth”

There are actually three biblical lists of the “gifts of the Spirit,” also known as spiritual gifts. The three main passages describing the spiritual gifts are Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28. The spiritual gifts identified in Romans 12 are prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy. The list in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 includes the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. The list in 1 Corinthians 12:28 includes healings, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues.

Peter categorized these gifts into two areas: speaking gifts and serving gifts. Some of the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians, such as tongues (that is speaking or understanding a known language without learning it before hand), interpreting of tongues, healings, and miraculous powers have ceased in our day as active gifts. It seems around 70 AD with the destruction of the Jewish temple, and after Christianity became established that they faded off the scene. God is still in the business of doing the miraculous. The remaining spiritual gifts are just as supernatural. It seems that in our day the Spirit has not appropriated to individuals the special gifts of healing, miracles and tongues as he did in the 1st Century. What we are seeing are those with the speaking gifts such as prophesying (as in authoritative preaching), teaching, encouraging (exhortation), perhaps words of wisdom and knowledge; and serving gifts such as helps, giving, faith, mercy, leadership (administration, government, and discernment).

5. As Christians, what should be our intentions? - 1 Peter 4:11c Discuss how we can develop right motives?

Why do we do what we do? Why do we guard our hearts? Why do we live different from the world? Why do we abstain from certain things? Why do we risk reaching out to the lost? Why? It should be that our intention is to glorify God.

Our Intention – 1 Peter 4:11c

“that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

6. Sometimes people call the practice of genuine biblical Christianity, “radical Christianity.” Why do you think they say this?