

1st Peter 4:7-11; Prov. 10:12; James 5:20

The Highest End Time Priority

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins – v. 8

In our last study we considered what I called *end time priorities*. *The end of all things is at hand* Peter writes in v. 7. The very fact that this world is coming to an end and that a day of judgment is coming and that a new heaven and new earth will be ushered in – all of these things should factor in to a Christian's worldview. They should also factor in to how a Christian lives.

It is the Christ-rejecter and the secularists and the atheists that live under the delusion that all things are going to simply carry on the way they always have in this present evil world. Peter makes mention of this atheistic mindset in his 2nd epistle when he writes in 2Pet 3:3,4 *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

I can still see in my mind's eye an exhibit in the Creation Museum which contains a cross section of Noah's Ark and shows Noah's sons working on building the ark and opposite that display there's this motorized mannequin that has a scowling look on his face as he shakes his head back and forth and you hear him expressing his skepticism as he says nothing's going to change. All things continue just as they always have.

It's the same kind of skepticism that fills the culture of our day. As Christians, however, we do know and we do believe that the end of all things is at hand. The point that Peter is making is that the fact that we know this should impact the way we live. So a few verses later in that same 3rd chapter of 2nd Peter we read in v. 11 *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*

It's with that kind of end time awareness in view that Peter writes in his 1st epistle 3:7 that *the end of all things is at hand*. And because the end of all things is at hand the Christian should be sober as opposed to being frivolous and he should also be much engaged in prayer. So we read in v. 7 and we considered these exhortations last week - *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*

I made the point last week that other English translations capture the close connection between being sober and engaging in prayer. *The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer* (NAS). These are matters of crucial importance – being sober and watching unto prayer. And the degree to which you recognize and appreciate that the end of all things is at hand can be reflected by your prayer life. Those that live as if all things are just going to keep going the way they have for many years will not feel terribly compelled to pray. Those that do understand and

appreciate that the end of all things is at hand will be characterized as those that give themselves much more to prayer.

So these things are important end time priorities; but as important as they are we see very clearly in the next verse (v. 8) that Peter assigns an even higher priority to something else. Notice the opening words of v. 8 *And above all things*. As a matter of the highest priority, you could interpret it to mean. As a matter of high priority above all things *have fervent charity among yourselves*.

One commentator makes a very good observation when he notes — *not that "charity" or love is placed above "prayer," but because love is the animating spirit, without which all other duties are dead*. Does that remind you of anything? – a very well known chapter in the Bible that addresses the matter of charity or love?

1Cor. 13:1-3 *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

It's no wonder, then, that Peter makes this a matter of the highest priority, even the highest end time priority. I want to consider this exhortation that way this morning. I've given this message a title:

Peter's Highest End Time Priority – Have Fervent Charity Among Yourselves

Let's begin by considering first:

I. The Urgency of the Command

Have fervent charity among yourselves – that's the command. *The end of all things is at hand* – that's the urgency behind the command.

Now if you're anything like me – you're ready for the end of all things to come. To use Paul's terminology in Romans 8 – you groan from within. So he writes in Rom. 8:22 *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*. Paul has in view the consummation of redemption in these verses. We are so ready for that new heaven and new earth to come because we know it's going to be so much better than this current evil world.

And when you consider all that's wrong in this world – the sin and the crimes committed and the tragedies that arise from the behavior of sinful men. When I think of Abby Williams and Libby German, those two young Indiana girls that were murdered, whose

murderer is still at large – these things lead me to groan from within for redemption to be consummated.

And when I think of my own sins and failures and how feeble my own striving for holiness can be and how cold I can become in my praying and how negligent I can become in utilizing the means of grace – these things compel me to groan and long for the day when the end will come and we'll be made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God when Christ returns. How my heart cries out with the apostle John at the very end of the book of Revelation where he writes *Even so come Lord Jesus*.

We do look and long for better things – but on the other hand, as bad as things are now, these days afford us opportunities that we won't have when the end comes. It is during these days, you see, that we have the opportunity to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. We live in what may arguably be called the dispensation of investment, spiritual investment. Christ places great emphasis in making spiritual investments when He tells the parable of the talents and the parable of the foolish rich man who devoted himself to the pursuit of this world's treasures instead of seeking to become rich toward God.

And how do we become rich toward God? Peter tells you how – *have fervent charity among yourselves*. Christ Himself spells this out in Mt. 25 when He speaks of those that are on His right hand on that judgment day.

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

You see how you invest in heaven? You see how you store up treasure in heaven? These verses in Mt. 25 amount to a description of the people of God having fervent charity among themselves. And there's an urgency about the matter, because the end of all things is at hand. When that last trumpet sounds and Christ returns and this judgment scene plays out, then will come the end when all things will be subjected to God and the opportunities that we're afforded even in this present evil world will be gone.

If you take Peter's word (which is ultimately God's word) that the end of all things is at hand to heart then you'll sense the need to give due and diligent attention to this command to have fervent charity toward other Christians. Oh believer in Christ, take the matter to heart, for not only is the end of all things at hand, but you don't know what a day may bring forth for you. You don't know when your heavenly call will come. There's simply no place for putting these matters off when you consider that your end in this world may be even nearer than the end of all things.

So that's the first thing to consider about this highest end time priority. There's an urgency to having fervent charity among ourselves because the end of all things is at hand. But let's consider next that not only is there an urgency to this command but we see next:

II. The Fervency of the Command

Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves. That word *fervent* brings the idea of earnestness or intensity to our minds. This charity that we're to have among ourselves is something, in other words, that is to be had wholeheartedly. You're to be passionately engaged in this activity.

Paul demonstrates this kind of fervency in a number of descriptive ways:

When he lists among his catalog of afflictions the care of all the churches he writes in 2Cor. 11:29 *Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*

1Th 2:8 *So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*

2Co 12:15 *And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.*

This idea of fervency draws a close connection to the way we pray for each other and so we can say that there's a close connection between vv. 7,8 in the matter of being sober and watching unto prayer. Our prayers, in other words, become animated and fervent when they're driven to this charity that we're to have for one another.

So we read of Epaphras in Col. 4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* And then there's the familiar verse in James 5:16 which says *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Now there's a sense in which love for other Christians comes naturally to any true Christian. John makes that a point of emphasis in his first epistle.

1Jo 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not [his] brother abideth in death.*

1Jo 3:16 *Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren.*

1Jo 3:17 *But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels [of compassion] from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

1Jo 4:20 *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

You could say that a key purpose behind John's first epistle is to minister assurance of salvation to Christians. And he lists two basic things that are tied to the Christian's affections. There's a love for God's Word and there's a love for God's people. This is why I say that this fervent charity that we're to have among ourselves is something that comes

naturally to every true child of God. What company do you like to keep? I've known men that profess to be Christians that seem to have a way of finding fault with any and every church they would attend to worship Christ. This church is unloving, that church is filled with hypocrites while the other church is filled with fanatics. The irony is that these same professing Christians never seem to have any trouble keeping company with those that are in the world. So it does become a test to measure the validity of your profession of faith. What kind of company do you keep? Who do you like to be around? Are you more at home in the world than you are among God's people? If so then you have good cause to examine yourself whether you be in the faith.

So this is a matter that comes naturally to the Christian but on the other hand it's also a matter that needs to be tended to by the Christian. So John gives the exhortation in 1Jo 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*

I'm reminded of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian Christians. You know, of course, that often times when Paul wrote his epistles he did so with the aim of correcting things that were wrong in the church. To the church of Thessalonica, however, and especially on the subject of brotherly love, there was no need for Paul to write. He admits this in 1Thess 4:9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: And then he brings out the same truth that John brings out in his first epistle when he adds: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. 10 And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia.*

But lest they should become complacent on the subject of brotherly love he then goes on to exhort them in v. 10 *but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.* Do you get the drift of Paul's meaning here? It's the same as John's and the same as Peter's. Don't ever think that you've arrived. When it comes to the matter of brotherly love you should strive to increase more and more. Paul didn't need to write to them on the subject except to say to them that there's always room for improvement.

So have fervent charity among yourselves, Peter writes. There's an urgency to the command because the end of all things is at hand and there's a fervency to the command for we're to have fervent charity among ourselves. Let's consider finally that there's also:

III. The Reason for the Command

Listen to the words of v. 8 again: *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

That's a very interesting statement isn't it? *Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.* This is one of those statements, I'm sure, that's easy to misapply and abuse. Some would say or think based on this statement that there's no place for discipline in the church. I suppose you could take it so far as to say that there should be no discipline in the home either. I've heard men say (and I suppose this text would provide them the basis for such a statement) that if you have to choose between discipline and love, choose love.

It's a wrong and dangerous dichotomy to draw between discipline and love. It's certainly not a dichotomy that God Himself draws. Heb 12:6 *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* What then are we to make of this statement *charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

From a practical perspective you could take it to mean that love doesn't go searching for sins and love doesn't make a bigger deal out of sin than it needs to. You could say that where fervent charity is being practiced between Christians that Christians will choose to think charitably toward other Christians instead of thinking critically toward them. Where fervent charity is being practiced there will be no slander or malicious gossip. There will be instead prayer as v. 7 points out. And there will be the particulars that follow our text – hospitality without grudging (v. 9); mutual service or ministering to each other as good stewards of the grace of God (v. 10). And the aim will always be that *God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen* (v. 11).

So these are a few very brief and practical ways in which the fervent charity will cover a multitude of sins. But I'm not sure that we can really get to the heart of the matter of fervent charity covering a multitude of sins without contemplating a more basic question which is simply this: How did Christ manifest His love and cover a multitude of sins? And the answer is, of course, that He did so by His atoning death.

So we read in Isa 44:22 *I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.* And in the previous chapter of Isaiah Isa 43:25 *I, [even] I, [am] he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.* And in Ps 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, [so] far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

This is how your sins and my sins are covered – they're covered by the blood of Christ. They've been removed or expiated by Christ's atoning death. They've been purged, as the author of Hebrews puts it which is another way of saying that they've been cleansed. And isn't it interesting to note how Peter writes that fervent charity covers the multitude of sins. How many sins make for a multitude? Certainly more than we count. That's a good thing to think about isn't it? Think of your sins of omission and your sins of commission. Think of the sins you commit by your deeds and the sins you commit by your words and the sins you commit by your thoughts.

What a multitude of sins have been covered by the blood of Christ. I love the way John puts it in his first epistle - 1Jo 2:2 *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world.* The value of His atoning blood is more than sufficient for you. It's sufficient for the sins of the whole world. What a multitude of sins have been covered then by the blood of Christ.

But what does this mean for you and me on a practical level. Christ did something, you see, that you and I could never do. Because of His infinite greatness and the infinite value of His blood Christ could cover a multitude of sins. But could you and I cover a multitude

of sins? We could not atone ourselves for one single sin that we've committed much less a multitude of sins. So what can we take away from Peter's statement about fervent charity covering a multitude of sins?

I would suggest to you that we can apply the text this way – and it's really very simple. You remember Christ. You remember what He's done for you. You remember that He's atoned for you sins which are many. And you especially keep His cross work in mind when it comes to loving others and loving your brothers and sisters in Christ in particular. Do you find it hard to love some of your brethren because of the way you feel you've been treated by them? Perhaps they've been cold toward you; perhaps they don't speak to you the way you perceive they speak to others? Perhaps you feel they don't really take you to heart; maybe you think they even sin against you.

Question: Have you sinned against Christ? Do you sin against Christ? Do you measure up to all that law of God demands? Do you transgress God's law? And if so, how does God treat you? Does the Holy Spirit not point you to the cross? Do you not take comfort in the love behind the words of 1Jn. 1:9 that *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?*

This is how we practice fervent love that covers a multitude of sins – we keep the cross of Christ ever before our eyes. You remember at all times how much you've been forgiven and you seek to minister Christ to others in your dealings with them. And in this way your fervent charity can increase more and more because you are always mindful of God's grace and love toward you. And your awareness of that grace and love will keep you humble and keep you grateful and when you're humble and grateful then you're also enabled to manifest that same fervent love toward your brethren that Christ has manifested toward you.

Have fervent charity among yourselves, Peter exhorts us. The matter is urgent because the end of all things is at hand. The matter must be put into action wholeheartedly or fervently. And the matter must be practiced with the cross of Christ in view because ultimately it's His fervent charity through His atoning death that has covered the multitude of our sins.