



1 Peter 4:7-11 (Part 1)
Love Will Cover a Multitude of Sins

7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

[While I have read all of these verses in order to keep the context, I will be preaching primarily on verses 7-9 today, and then next week we will finish up with verses 10-11]

Some of you will have heard this anecdote already, but many years ago while I was still in seminary I asked a missionary who had preached much in both India and in the United States if it was harder to preach the gospel in India or in the United States. His answer which surprised me was that it was easier to preach the gospel to the poor in India, because here in the United States many people don't see the importance of the gospel because they don't fear the need to escape the judgment to come because they don't really believe they are going to die. On the other hand the poorest Indians don't need to be convinced they are going to die – often they need help just to live a few more days or weeks.

But it isn't just modern unbelieving Americans who have difficulty believing they are going to die. The great danger for Christians in every age is that they allow the cares and things of this world to so preoccupy them that they begin to act and believe as though they are going to spend the rest of eternity in this world. They become sleepy and content, and often everything they know they should be doing as Christians becomes something to get started on *tomorrow*. The idea that *today* might be the day they die or that the day upon which the trumpet will sound and Christ will return never really comes to mind.

Now Peter knew from personal experience in the garden of Gethsemane the importance of not sleeping when you should be watching and praying, and I'm sure he never forgot all of those warnings that Christ gave about the blessedness of his servants being prepared for His return. For instance, turn with me to Luke 12:

Luke 12:37 "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them."

38 "And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

39 "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

40 "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Notice that Peter is listening and worried about the implications: **41 Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"**

Clearly, if we think we will see Christ at any moment, that will change the way we live our lives. And so Peter reminds us *the end of all things is at hand* – and that is very true for all of us. Sooner than you think either you shall see Christ returning, or you shall *put off your tent* as Peter put it in 2 Peter 1:14 and go to be with the Lord.

If we really believe that, as Christians it will make us very serious about our faith, it will make us very serious about things like bible reading and prayer. We will put off the worldliness that characterizes so much of modern Christianity and adopt a view that says I want to start doing what I'm supposed to be doing as a Christian *today*, right now while there is still time. I want to be found serving Him and His people. And that leads you to ask **how can I do that?** And Peter in verses 8-11 answers that question. But I want you to understand that there is a context in which he tells us how to do that, not by ourselves, but within the community of faith, the assembly of the saints, the church.

This is a community that stands out from the world because of the fervent love the members of that community have for one another as Peter puts it in verse 8 and as Christ himself said again and again: John 13:35 **"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Now I know this will be unpopular, but you know, I don't care because Christ's ministers are to deal in the truth, not be popular, so here it is. Modern evangelicals are becoming so sleepy and so *this worldly* that our churches are becoming places where by design the kind of fervent love and ministry that Peter is speaking of *can't occur*.

Let me try to explain to you what I mean by means of an analogy. We know that one of the most important things the church does is to feed the sheep. Twice Jesus commissioned Peter, **Feed my Lambs, Feed my Sheep**. Well let us imagine two different settings for actually feeding people. The first is in a home, in the context of a family, the second is in a restaurant.

In a family, you all sit together, you know one another, you love one another, you talk to one another, there usually isn't entertainment – but that doesn't matter because there is a warmth and fellow feeling that makes it unnecessary, you don't usually get to choose what you eat but the meals are hearty and filling because the Chef (usually Mom) knows the diners and knows what they need and when she is done cooking she comes and eats with you and shares in the conversation, and there is something that everyone can do to help with the meal. Some set the table, do the dishes, make the salad, whatever. Now admittedly it can be intimidating for an outsider to eat in such a setting, but once they are there they gradually become more and more a part of the family, cared about, known, nurtured, fed, loved. Yes there can be disagreements but they will seldom end up causing a split in the table

In a restaurant, you all eat at separate tables, you don't know the other diners. You may recognize some from the outside world, but there really isn't a fellowship or fellow-feeling amongst the diners.

To make up for that, and to prevent boredom, there is often entertainment. You the consumer decide what you want to eat, and if you don't like the food, you go to a different restaurant. You get what *you want*, not what *you need*. So restaurant dining is often the e-ticket to being unhealthy. In any event the chef doesn't know you, he doesn't know what you need, and you'd probably freak out if he left the kitchen and pulled up a chair and started eating and talking familiarly with you. Also, the diners do not help with the meal. They give money, but that's generally it. People can come in and out as they please, the management may become familiar with them so they are "recognized" but never really known. And that is good, because the fear is that if the other people in the restaurant really knew stuff about you, they'd gossip about you, and then you'd have to go to a different restaurant. Sometimes that happens. So everyone works hard to put on a public face at the restaurant.

Sometimes the food at the restaurant is very tasty and well arranged and the entertainment is good, and the restaurant is wildly popular and very busy, always active. But the bigger and more successful it gets, the less fellowship there is amongst the diners, the more impersonal it becomes, the less likely the manager is to know even the "regulars".

Brothers and Sisters, the modern mega-church is like the restaurant *by design* and while they are popular, little or nothing about what Peter is talking about here can go on there and the bigger the more impossible it becomes. There is a reason in the bible why you will find marriage and family used as analogies for the relationship between God and his people, and why you never find Restaurants, inns, or businesses used as the analogy. Families and Marriages are supposed to be placed where you find fervent love one for another, and while your neighborhood business may say they love their customers, don't expect them to pick you up at the airport at 1:00 AM or put you up for the night unless that is what they get paid to do.

And brothers we need fervent (that is intense, burning) love, because we are sinful people. You know what love you need the most? You need God's love. Because it is God's love towards sinful people that saves us from damnation. As *Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

It was his atoning blood the covers and pays for that great multitude of sins we all bear. That is the love we need first and foremost. But once we have been saved through faith alone in Christ, once we have been reconciled to God and the vertical rift has been restored we still need that fervent love of our brothers and sisters in Christ, because we do not stop sinning the moment we are saved. And brothers it is only if we love one another, that we will forgive one another for those sins, and bury them, and preserve one another's honor, and act kindly towards those who have sinned against us. If we hate one another, not only will we spread about every sin, gossiping to our hearts content, we will invent new sins and blow existing ones entirely out of proportion doing all we can to run each other down.

It is only if we love one another that we will be able to be transparent with one another and confess our sins and seek forgiveness, and accept one another's admonition. If we do not know or trust one another, what happens is that we tend to waste all of our precious time concealing our own sins, and spreading abroad other people's.

Also, if we love one another, and think of one another as members of the same family, then serving Christ's people becomes so much easier. One of the main ways to do that, and a way that actually

increases your love and fellowship to the brethren is hospitality. Hospitality is becoming a lost art amongst Christians, but it is so beneficial. To share our food and accommodation with our brothers and sisters in Christ enriches us. I was commenting the other day, that the Christians of Apostolic age were constantly breaking bread together. They followed the example of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus who often made the Master welcome in their own homes.

A word about that though, as you serve one another, and exercise that hospitality, do so *without grumbling*. To offer hospitality graciously and without expecting anything in return is a wonderful thing, but it is possible to become like Martha and take what should be an opportunity for edification and make it an opportunity for grumbling and complaint. As Calvin counsels “***Peter adds, without grumbling, for it is a rare example that one spends himself and his own on his neighbor without any disparaging reflection.***” Do not keep an account brothers and sisters, all too often people give secretly expecting service in return, or worse refuse hospitality because they do not want to be “in someone’s debt” how can families speak of debts to one another? I watched a silly movie a while back about a Father who presented his son with an astronomical bill for the cost of raising him. Well brothers and sisters, the idea of members of the body of Christ being in debt to one another is equally silly.

In closing let me ask: ***Do you have trouble with that idea?*** Well think for a moment about your own debt to your father in heaven. That sin debt you owed was astronomical and getting larger every day. If you worked at all your life, you would never have paid it off. Who paid it for you? Christ did, by laying down his life at the cross. His final word was τετέλεσται – It is finished. That was something merchants of the time wrote on an account that had been paid in FULL. “It is finished – no more is owed.” If you have been forgiven so much, how can you charge anything to the account of your brothers and sisters, and begrudge them forgiveness? Brothers and Sisters, there is only one debt we have to one another, Paul tells us what that is in Romans 13: 8 ***Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.***