

Standing orders for service

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[0:00] 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 7 to 11, which is our passage that we'll look at for a few minutes! This morning together, which says, the end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. Let us pray.

O Lord, thank you for this morning. The people we're able to recognize and appreciate, the prayers we're able to pray, and for being here together. Please help us to hear you speaking to us this morning. Help us to learn what it is to be your people. Help us learn all the things that Christians ought to grow in as we listen to your word. Please help me to speak your word as we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. I've chosen this little passage because I think it gives us standing orders for service. Standing orders are orders that are given in an army or to the navy, which you just always apply. You don't have to be told them again. They always apply. And these few words, I believe, are standing orders for service. And I'm simply going to point out some of the features of these sentences for us to reflect on this morning. So number one, please note the bookends. Bookends are when you have, well, I'm thinking it's a bookend there and a bookend there and the book in the middle, or the books in the middle. So the bookends here, I think, verse seven, the end of all things is near.

So he's talking about the end of everything. And then verse 11, to him be the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. So that seems to be looking forward to the end of everything. The end of all things is near and there will be an end of everything and then there'll be a forever and ever. Amen.

And he seems to sandwich the rest of it in between those verses. And that makes me think that what he's put in in between is everything. He's thinking, you know, let's, the end of everything is near.

[3:46] What can I say in just a few verses that covers everything that we need to know now? I think that's the sort of verse this is, covering everything in between. And everything in between is us.

He's not writing it simply and only for his first readers 2,000 years ago, but we are still waiting for the end, aren't we? The end of everything is still coming up. So it's us.

So notice the bookends. Number two, notice the pervading context. Brenda is our resident expert on Pilates. Some of you will have practiced Pilates. I went on a course to learn Pilates.

I was not a good student. Pilates is when you recruit these inner muscles here. You could just imagine yourself sitting and doing this now. I was told you can do this when you're driving a car when you're riding a bicycle. Recruiting it. But yeah, you've got to remember to breathe.

That's the bit I always get wrong. I'm so busy recruiting these muscles. I'm so busy concentrating. I forget to breathe. You must remember to breathe. That's right, isn't it, Brenda? And if you're doing Pilates, you have to remember to breathe. It's quite an important thing. I think you will agree with me on that. And there are some things here that he refers to which are just like remembering to breathe. The things that Christians always do. And you shouldn't concentrate on something so much that you forget to breathe, that you forget to do these things. And here they are. He says, be

clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. So first thing you mustn't forget, you mustn't forget to pray. You mustn't focus on anything so much that you forget to pray. It's as important as breathing. He says, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can do the thing that you mustn't forget to do so that you can pray. And he says, how do you keep not forgetting? He says, be clear-minded and self-controlled. You could look those words up, but they mean something like having a healthy mind, being clear-minded, not being dazzled, confused, messed about mentally so that you've lost the plot. You need to be clear-minded and the other word is much the same. I've forgotten which one's which, but they almost mean the same sort of thing. You're thinking clearly. Interesting that he should say that, isn't it? Clear thinking, you might say, and on the lookout so that you can pray. Interesting that sometimes people make spirituality, they say the less thinking you do the better. Or the less clearly you think, the better. They say that's more spiritual. At one point, the Apostle Paul says, we are fools for

[7:07] Christ. And people take that verse and say, do something really stupid because that's really spiritual. That's not what Paul meant. That's not what Peter means. He says it's important that you have your head on when you go to church. There's a story of somebody that John Stott once met who said, when I go to church, I love to take my head off and leave it at the door and I just go in and feel and I'm all just the emotions of it. And the Apostle Peter would say, please don't take your head off and leave it at the door. Bring your head with you. Be clear-minded, on the lookout, eyes wide open, as it were, so that you can pray. And we've been praying this week, haven't we? I think that's a good thing for us to do as a church. I was very struck on one of the evenings that we said, how many people were here praying last time we had a week of prayer, which was actually two years, there's been a two-year gap. And half the people put up their hand and said, we weren't here last time you prayed. When we prayed those two years ago, we prayed for more people to come.

And God has answered that prayer because half the people that were praying this year were answers to the prayer that were prayed two years ago, which I thought was quite remarkable. So he says, don't stop breathing and don't stop praying. Let's continue to pray. Let's be focused and thoughtful as we pray.

That was the first thing not to forget. The second thing he says not to forget is this, verse 8, above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. He says, this is important. You mustn't forget to do this. You mustn't forget it. He says it's actually above all. This is something so vitally important. You know, you could almost say, if you get everything else, don't forget this. I'm not going to say that because he doesn't say that, but he does say this is so important. This is of first importance. And what is it? To love each other. When you go on a foreign trip, what do you have to remember? Well, I think you have to remember three things. Money, ticket, passport.

[9:36] Do you do that when you go? Nobody else, just me. Money, ticket, passport. Money, ticket, passport. Okay, don't leave, don't get to the airport without your money, ticket, passport. We had a student staying with us who was extremely well organized. Money, ticket, passport. He had it so well organized that he had his passport out on the table in his room so that he would not forget it. Went all the way to Gatwick and left the passport there on the table. So I had to get in the car and chase up there and deliver it to him. Don't forget money, ticket, passport. Above all, above all, love one another deeply. And the word deeply is a sort of, it's not a down deep word, it's a sort of stretching word.

It's a sort of keep on stretching that effort, like stretching out a rubber band. Just keep that going. Keep the pressure on. Like blowing up a balloon. Do people blow up balloons nowadays or do they have an app to blow up balloons for you? Let me just explain to you in case you don't know about blowing up a balloon. You have the balloon and you have to keep blowing. You have to keep doing that, you see.

If you stop, then it blows back into you or it goes like that. You've got to keep the pressure up until the time when you tie the knot off and then it's all finished. Just keep the pressure up on that

balloon and he says, keep loving one another in this sort of pressed, stretched out, keep it up sort of way. Love one another. What does our translation say deeply? Well, love one another, keeping on with that. Keep loving. And he says there's a good reason for this because it covers over a multitude of sins.

You might not have noticed this yet, but actually every single person in this room is a sinner. Every single person in this room fails the Lord. The only person who has lived the Christian life and not sin is the Lord Jesus. Even the people who came up to the front that we applauded and prayed for, they're sinners too. We're a community of sinners and sin is going to spick and spock and speckle what we do. Words are not going to come out right. Things are going to be said that need to be forgiven.

There's going to be faults and flaws and we need to cope with that. Do you have, you don't have to answer this question. This is a theoretical question.

[12:17] Do you have damp patches and mold in your bedroom, in your bathroom? Bathroom. Do you have, do you ever, do you ever find that that on the shower there's bits of mold and they pop up and sometimes we had on our wallpaper. You don't want to know this, do you? But it's, it's difficult to get rid of. You know, you try and paint it and it comes back again and it's quite, quite difficult to, to cover that over.

But Peter says, I've got something that can cover over effectively all the little spicks and spocks and speckle of sin and what it is, is love. And it covers it effectively. You're not just covering it over in a, in a sort of make do way which doesn't really work. He says, it does work. If you live in a community where there is love, it covers over, it compensates for it, makes it possible even when you've got sinners in part of that community. So second thing that we're not to forget is to love one another. It enables us to cope with the deficiencies, the disappointments, the allowances we have to make for one another. It covers over a great number of sins. Did I put the word for that?

No, it comes up later. So love one another. Third thing not to forget, he says here, hospitality. Verse 9, offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Just notice what he's saying.

One day this world's going to end. The end of all things is near. One day there's going to be power and honor and glory to the Lord Jesus. And in the middle of that, be hospitable to one another.

It's a very interesting thing for him to say, isn't it? Be hospitable to one another. The word for hospitality, now you must, you must never trust preachers who try and make things out of Greek words. You just, just be a little bit careful about this. I'll tell you what the Greek words are.

[14:29] Philo, which is to love, like Philadelphia. Philosophy is love of wisdom. Philo is a sort of love.

And xenos means stranger. We have it in English. Xenophobia is fear of strangers or actually fear of foreigners. But he says, I want you to love strangers. I want you to be hospitable.

Now, actually, he doesn't say, well, he just says, offer hospitality to one another. So perhaps he's not thinking of complete strangers. But he's saying, don't you know, don't be strangers to one another. Be hospitable. And it's interesting that he should say, the world's going to end.

The world's going to end. Therefore, make sure you have a cup of coffee with somebody. Isn't that an interesting thing he says? The world's going to end. Therefore, see if you can get somebody around for beans on toast.

Now, perhaps in your personal situation, it's a bit difficult. Perhaps it's a bit difficult to invite people around. Or perhaps in your situation, it is possible to invite people around.

[15:42] But you can probably do something, can't you, to be hospitable. You can probably do something. And being hospitable is something sociable.

It's something that involves a degree of generosity. And it involves a degree of sharing. And he says, the world's going to end. So be hospitable. And just in case you're worried about hospitality, it doesn't have to be posh.

It's not a competition. It's not... Nobody who comes to your house for a cup of coffee will have in their back pocket a copy of a design magazine and they will be quiet...

Or a food magazine. And as you present your beans on toast, they'll be looking this up and thinking, hmm, it isn't on a bed of something drizzled with something else. They're not going to say that...

Just being hospitable doesn't have to be posh. It doesn't have to be foodie. It doesn't have to be sumptuous. It just is being together with other Christian people.

[16:45] And he says, don't forget to do that. That's so important. And he adds the word, without grumbling. Now I think, what sort of grumbling does he have in mind?

Well, I can think of one sort of grumbling that people have. They say, I invited them over, but they never invited us back. As if it was a sort of contract that you had to balance.

And I think Peter would say, it's not a contract you have to balance. Don't start worrying about that. Just be hospitable without counting it up.

Just giving and giving and giving without grumbling. The end of all things is coming. Therefore, have a cup of coffee with somebody or beans on toast with somebody.

It's so practical and down to earth, isn't it? So these are the three things that he says. Don't stop breathing. Don't stop praying. Don't stop loving. Don't stop being hospitable. Now let's go on to the thing that he says next, which is about gifts, which is verse 10.

[17:51] Everyone should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. Faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. So notice please now the assumption that everybody has a gift.

And does he say that? He says, whatever gift he has received, each one. Everybody, every Christian man or woman, boy or girl, has some contribution to make.

It may not be the thing that you think you contribute. It's really more a question of what other people get blessed by from you. But each one has received a gift. It's like the same thing as saying each one is part of the body.

So nobody should say, nobody should say, oh well, in that church, they're all so gifted and talented. They don't miss me if I don't come because I've got nothing to contribute.

Nobody should say that. Nobody should think that. Nobody should leave the meeting of God's people and thinking, well, you know, it wouldn't have made any difference if I wasn't there.

[19:03] Nobody should think that because your contribution, it might be, you might even not realize you're making it. There might be a smile or an acknowledgement or a little word on this or maybe some help you can give with that or some advice you can give with that or maybe that prayer that you thought made you look so stupid because it didn't come out right was actually a great blessing to somebody else.

Everybody has something to give. No one should say, I have nothing to offer. So that was the assumption that everybody has a gift. Now notice now the division of gifts. He says, each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God supplies. So he divides it into two big groups, speaking and serving.

So the speaking gifts and the serving gifts. He says, the end of all things is at hand. Let's just put this in its simplest form. Some of you speak things.

Some of you serve things. Some of you do an overlap. It's two sensible big categories, words and deeds. Words, gifts, serving gifts.

[20:22] They may be an overlap, but nobody has nothing. Nobody has no gift. And he talks about the diversity of these gifts.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Now there's a word there about various forms. And it crops up other places where people come along with various diseases.

So they don't all come along with some disease of the throat and they don't all come along with problems with their feet. They come to Jesus with just a huge range of diseases.

And that's a rather negative connotation, but here it's a positive connotation. There's a whole range of gifts. My Greek dictionary implied that there was something in connection with the idea of being multicolored, which is rather a lovely thought, isn't it?

[21:33] Did you ever have, when you were a child, or maybe you still have, one of those things with little pieces of colored plastic or colored glass in it, and you look in it and you twiddle it around? That's

the one.

Yes, a kaleidoscope. Anybody ever have one of those? They're fantastic, weren't they? I thought they were fantastic. There you go, you see? You twiddle it, you hold it up to the light and you get this fantastic, multicolored, ever-changing, beautiful patterns.

And he says, God's grace in the church is that multicolored, multifaceted. It's always, there's a sort of beauty and a richness as the gifts sort of tumble around and people change and move into situations and take opportunities and so on.

He says, this is how God's grace operates. Each one should use whatever gift is received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its multicolored forms.

And it is grace. Worth pointing out that he says it's grace. Grace is God's kindness in operation.

[22:48] It's not a contract. It's not a payment. It's not so many hours at such and such plus VAT and if you pray by credit card, you're going to pay another 10% on top of that.

It's not that sort of thing. It's generosity. It's grace. And whatever is achieved, you say, thank you, Lord. That was your grace. Interesting thing.

One of the things I learned, it took me a few years to learn this. I went to a conference and I heard a guy saying, in my church, he said, I've seen just amazing growth and I thought it was all down to me and then I had another few years when nothing happened at all.

I was in a tiny little church doing exactly the same thing and I thought, why is that? And the answer is, it's grace. If God chooses not to do very much, we thank him for that because it was all by grace anyway.

If God chooses to do a lot, we thank God for that because it's by grace and he can give and he can withhold. It's entirely up to him because it's his kindness in operation. It's all of grace.

[23:54] My friends in Sri Lanka have this expression, how are you? By God's grace, I am well. How are things going? By God's grace, things are going well. What a truthful way to speak.

How are things with you? By God's grace, I'm doing okay. Anyway, it's all of grace and maybe one day we should write it over the top of the door.

All of grace. Everything that you see, all the people that you see, all that we've done, all that we've been praying about, all that we hope God might be pleased to work in the future. All of grace.

God's grace in its various forms. Let's move on. Now note the use of gifts. We've got the speaking gift, we've got the serving gift. And he has two pieces of advice that cover each of these two areas. The speaking gift. He says, if you are speaking, it might be standing up and speaking, it might be going with the children, speaking, it might just be talking to somebody, all sorts of speaking gifts.

[24:53] and he says, if you are speaking, verse 11, if anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

Speaking God's truth, speak as one speaking the very words of God. Very in this sentence, meaning actual, the actual words of God.

How does one speak the words of God? Well, what comes to my mind is that one should speak the words of God conscientiously, not flippantly.

Conscientiously. In one's conscience, I'm saying something that's serious and important and weighty. I don't want to just make a joke of it or just trot it off conscientiously.

With weight, not unconcernedly. God is a God of weight and gravitas and gravity and his words are weighty words and they should be spoken with weight and they should be spoken reverently, not hypocritically.

[26:08] it's not always easy to speak God's words because God's words deal with things that are outside our own experience, concerning death, for example, concerning the world to come and things that go within us about sin and the terribleness of sin and when we speak of those things, we should speak of them reverently and not hypocritically.

Dead easy to see other people's sin and have a go at them but you can't do that if you're speaking the words of God because the finger points back at you. You can't speak about other people's sin without realising that you have sin as well.

So speak of speaking the words of God and then in serving, second half of verse 11, if anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God supplies or God provides.

Key thought here, isn't it? Serving. Okay, there's a, the church is full of serving, it's a community of serving and how does one serve, answer, with the strength that God supplies.

So you've had a hard week perhaps, there have been many demands perhaps, physical demands, you're tired, mental demands, your minds going round, emotional demands, you might feel wrung out and yet you are called to serve and how do you do that?

[27:47] It'd be rather nice to say, Lord, if I pray, would you just come and do that for me? Like, you know, like the Olympics, you don't do the Olympics yourself, you sit down and watch other people do the Olympics and it would be quite nice if God made services in his church like that, sort of a spectator sport, you know, you pray and God does it but he says, I'm not going to do that, I want you to do it, if you're serving, I want you to serve but what God does say is, I'll supply the strength and that is a call of faith.

So, you look at a list of things and think, oh, all of those things have got to be done, heart sinks. God says, I want you to do those but I'll supply the strength and he does.

That's the way he works. God doesn't do the work for you but gives you the strength for you to do it and to get to the end and to say, Lord, I thought I could get through all that lot but you supplied the strength, thank you for that, it's all by grace, I have yet another week to testify that God supplies the strength.

And notice, fourthly, the end result of the use of these gifts. Well, he does say that people are served, that's, he said that earlier in the, in this little section, but he now says that in all things God may be praised, that's in verse 11, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

That's the end result of these gifts. So, is the end result that, that really, we were just looking forward to being up on the stage and giving a round of applause because people think we're great.

[29:39] Absolutely not. The end result is not so that people think how great we are. is the end result that people enjoy themselves and have great experiences?

Well, perhaps, perhaps they do. Perhaps they do. But that's not the end result that he has in view here. The end result is that people say God is great.

Do you follow that? The end result is that people would say God is great. God is to be praised. God is to be honoured.

He's done that. He used those people. He put it in their hearts. He gave them the strength. But, He's done it. That God may be praised through Jesus Christ. What have we looked at?

We've looked at the fact that this passage is us. We've looked at the things in the context that we mustn't forget. To pray, to love, to be hospitable.

[30:36] Let's keep doing those things. We've looked at this sort of big overview of the gifts without which the church is nothing and cannot operate. He assumes everybody has a gift.

He makes this classic distinction between word gifts and service gifts and he says it's all multicoloured grace. It's all multicoloured grace.

Speaking God's words as God's words, serving with God's strength. And let us take this on board. I don't think it's revolutionary.

I don't think it's anything we haven't heard before in a sense but what an encouragement just to confidently, quietly, persistently, patiently, graciously serve one another and to God be the glory so that in all things God is praised.

Amen. Let's sing together. number 568. Five hundred and sixty eight. Five hundred and sixty eight. Five hundred and sixty