

# Live In Light Of The End

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Date: 19 April 2026

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[ 0 : 00 ] 1 Peter 4, let's begin reading at verse 7. Peter writes, Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks as one who speaks the 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 be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. When my brother Jonathan and I were of age, mom and dad used to leave us at home by ourselves.

Do you remember that point in your life when your parents finally trusted you to be at home alone so that they could go away for a couple of nights? I remember clearly the first time that mom and dad did that.

I can't remember exactly where they went. Maybe it was a marriage retreat or something like that with the church. But instead of sending us to stay at someone else's house, they let us stay at home by ourselves.

[ 1 : 25 ] And as you can imagine, what would typically happen is those days would be filled with all kinds of indulgences that maybe were ordinarily limited or otherwise restricted.

But mom and dad always made their expectations clear. Their expectations as to how we were to handle ourselves while they were away. And of course, their expectations about what condition the house should be in upon their return.

And it was funny, in the early parts of those time frames, Jonathan and I didn't think much about that. We just enjoyed ourselves. All the things that you're not typically allowed to do. Stay up as late as you want.

Eat whatever you want. Don't clean it up. Whatever you want to do, that's what we decided to do. But as it got closer and closer to mom and dad coming back, we grew more keen to prepare for their arrival.

Sometimes we were staying up late at night not because we wanted to anymore, but because we'd made such a mess that we really had to kick it into high gear to make sure that when the judgment came, we would be able to stand.

[ 2 : 38 ] And you might say that our time at that point stopped being lived for what we wanted to do. And it started being lived according to what mom and dad's expectations were.

The imminency of their return shaped the way that we behaved. And that's similar to what Peter's on about in this particular part of chapter 4.

It's indicated by the very first phrase. If you just want to set your eyes on it again. He leads with, the end of all things is at hand, therefore, and he continues on in a number of exhortations.

Now, all of the instructions that Peter gives here in this paragraph, they're all flowing out of that opening phrase. That because the end of all things is at hand, because it's near, because it's here, there is a particular way that he expects Christians will then live.

We are in the last days. These days are leading to the return of Christ. And the return of Christ means the final judgment.

[ 3 : 51 ] And that reality is to shape the way that we are living now. Before we jump into the specific exhortations, there's four of them. We're going to go through two today, and we'll go through the other two in a couple of weeks.

But before we jump right into those exhortations, I think it would be good for us just to linger for a moment on this opening indicative, this opening truth. The end of all things is at hand.

And I want you to think about the way Peter is bookending this paragraph. In verse 7, it's the end of all things. But then in verse 11, it sounds very different than that, doesn't it?

In verse 11, we have this idea of glorifying God forever and ever. Now, here's the question. How can there be both an end and a forever?

The Bible speaks of human history in two stages. We call it a two-stage structure of human history. There is this age, and there is the age to come.

[ 4 : 57 ] Now, there are many examples of this in the Scripture. Let me give you two. The first one is in Matthew 12, 32, if you want to write that reference down. Matthew 12, 32. Jesus says, Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.

But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. And then he says, Either in this age or in the age to come.

In other words, there's not only consequences for this sin now, there are consequences for this sin in eternity, forever. Let me give you another one. Ephesians 1, verse 21.

Paul writes that God exalted Jesus far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named.

And he says, God has done that not only in this age, but also in the one to come. There's many other places we could go to to point this out.

[ 6 : 01 ] We have this two-stage structure. There's this age and there is the next age. Now, we've just spent some time praying for John Piper and desiring God. So I want to use one of his resources for you now.

I'm going to borrow this from him. It's just a helpful visual that I think will help us wrap our minds around this. It's a series of them. If you just put the first one up for us there, Ashlyn. We need to see we have first this age, and then just above it we've got the age that is to come.

Now, the question is, where does the transition happen? At what point do we move from this age to the age to come? That's where the next part of the chart comes in, Ashlyn, if you'll move to the next thing.

That happens when Jesus returns. That's the official transition according to the Bible, that right now we're in this age, the age of this world, but notice that the transition from one to the next happens at the return of Christ, and the return of Christ brings about the great resurrection.

That is not just the resurrection of believers, but also the resurrection of unbelievers, and we all stand in the final judgment. We stand before the judgment seat of God, and it's at that time that all of us will answer to God for the way that we lived our lives.

[ 7 : 17 ] Those who have trusted Christ, those who have followed him as Lord, will then enter into his eternal glory. The age to come for those who are God's people is the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God.

But those who have not trusted Christ, who have not followed him, will enter into eternal judgment and hell. So the age to come for them is not the glory of Christ, it is separation from Christ, as Andy prayed just a moment ago.

So the return of Christ when Jesus comes back is the consummation of the age to come, or the consummation of the kingdom of God.

Now, there's still another piece of this that we need to understand. Now, as Peter does here, the Bible often speaks of the end of all things, or the last days, or the final days, or the coming judgment of God.

We see it over and over in the New Testament, right? But what does it mean? The end of what, right? The last days of what?

[ 8 : 33 ] It's the end of this age. It's the last days of this age. Put that one up, Ashlyn, if you don't mind. All right, so here we are.

And this is where we are now. So you have this present age. That's Adam and Eve. That's creation until Christ's return. But then we've got the last days, the end, the final days.

That's where we are now. The New Testament teaches that the end of all things is not a point in the future, but it's actually a span of human history in which we now live.

And it's progressing. There are things that are going to change and grow and progress in that time, and there will be an end of the end. But when the Bible speaks of the end, it really is speaking of this span of time.

Now here's another question. When did this time begin? Well, it began with Christ's first coming. So we would say when Christ returns, you can put the last one up, Ashlyn.

[ 9 : 43 ] When Christ returns, that's kingdom consummated. That's the age to come brought to completion. But when Jesus came the first time, that's the kingdom inaugurated.

It has come in the person of Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus preached. Remember Mark 1. Jesus is baptized by John. He goes to the wilderness temptations, and then he comes back into the region of Galilee.

And what's the message that he's preaching? He's preaching the kingdom of God is at hand. It is here. Remember, repent and believe the good news. The kingdom has come in the king, the presence of the king, in his incarnation, and then of course in his death, in his resurrection, in his ascension.

That's the inauguration of the kingdom. And what is true is that while his eternal kingdom will be consummated when he returns, it has indeed in some sense already come.

It has begun even now. Now just look at chapter 1 of 1 Peter. We've seen he's already pointed this out to us, hasn't he? Look at chapter 1 in verse 20. Jesus was foreknown before the foundations of the world.

[ 10 : 59 ] He was chosen by the Father to be our Redeemer before he even created the world. But he was made manifest when? In the last times for the sake of you.

Now the last times in chapter 1 in verse 20 is the same span as chapter 4 in verse 7, the end of all things. It's the same epoch in which we live now.

And if the king has come and he has inaugurated his kingdom, the glory of the age to come is breaking through even now.

I want you to think about that. We often think about the age to come and we think about the glory of the kingdom. But the Bible teaches us that since the king has already come, it is beginning to break through into this age even now.

But in what way does it do that? It breaks through as God's chosen people, his church, whom he has called and whom he has redeemed with his precious blood of Christ, it breaks through as they live in this age for the glory of God that is to be on full display and fully consummated in the age to come.

[ 12 : 20 ] Now I say all of that to say this. That's what 1 Peter is ultimately about. 1 Peter is about this exile. It's about living in the last days and all the problems that come with the last days but belonging to the age to come.

Knowing that this age is not what our life is for. Knowing that this world and this kingdom is not really where we belong. We belong to a different king and to a different kingdom and we are to represent that king now in this age.

And this is the context in which Peter is issuing the exhortations of this text. He's essentially saying, church, remember, the end of all things is here. Jesus is about to return.

Therefore, it is essential if we bring it together with the previous paragraph. It is essential that you cease living for human passions. Stop living for what you want.

Stop living for this life and begin living for God's will and God's glory even now. Just like Jonathan and I preparing for our parents to get home, Jesus expects that his people will live in light of the end even as they now wait.

[ 13 : 39 ] And how is it that we are to do that? What should mark us as Christ people in this age? And Peter, at least at this point, gives us four things.

We're going to cover the first two. Here's the first one that he gives. One thing that should mark us is sober prayer. Sober prayer. Look again at verse seven.

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Now we've seen throughout this letter that Peter is seriously concerned about what we might call spiritual sobriety.

Spiritual sobriety. A disciplined and rightly focused mind we've seen again and again is essential to thriving in exile, to living faithfully as God's people here in this age.

Now I want you to look at two places before we jump back to this one. Flip back to chapter one, verse 13. We saw this word there. Peter says, therefore, preparing your minds for action and being, here's the repetition, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[ 15 : 00 ] In other words, in chapter one, Peter says, you need to be sober-minded so that your hope will be fixed and set on the grace of Jesus Christ that will be brought to completion at his

return.

Now we want you to look at chapter five. Chapter five and verse eight. You probably have this verse memorized. Notice what Peter says. Be sober-minded.

There's the repetition. Be watchful. Why? Because your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Resist him, Peter says, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brothers throughout the world. Now what's that about?

Well, in 1.13, Peter says, be sober-minded so that your hope is set on the grace of God. And then in chapter five, he says, be sober-minded so that you will recognize the work of the devil and you will be able to resist him and to flee from the temptation.

[16:08] Now those instructions make a lot of sense in this letter, don't they? These Christians were suffering and the suffering they faced was producing spiritual anxiety and sinful temptations to compromise.

And without self-control and sober-mindedness, we learn that we are in immediate danger, immediate danger of abandoning the faith because we don't have our minds set on hope or in immediate danger of falling into sinful passions that wage war against our souls because we're not being sober-minded in relationship to our enemy.

But then when we get to this verse, self-control and sober-mindedness are for something different. They are for the sake of your prayers, for the sake of your prayers.

In each of these instances, spiritual sobriety is not the goal. It is a means to a greater goal. Hope, holiness, prayer.

But what does that actually mean? How does sober-mindedness, self-control affect our prayers?

What does it mean for the sake of our prayers?

[17:27] Does that mean that if we're not self-controlled and sober-minded that God will refuse to hear our prayers? I don't think that's exactly what Peter means to say here. So what is this about?

What exactly is the link between these characteristics in prayer? And why is it necessary that we give ourselves to it in light of the fact that we are at the end of the age?

Well, it's pretty simple, I think. The one who lacks self-control will not give themselves to prayer in any meaningful way. Okay. A disciplined prayer life takes discipline, right?

And someone who lacks that discipline and self-control is not going to give themselves to prayer.

But the one who lacks sobriety, if they pray at all, will not pray the right way.

And in either case, genuine communion with God is absent from their lives and they stumble through life like a drunk who cannot reasonably function.

[18:35] And in relationship to the Christian life and the suffering that we're dealing with in this letter, we become filled with unnecessary anxiety.

What is it that the hymn says? Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer?

We begin to be filled with doubt in our sufferings. We become overcome by temptations. And the primary antidote to these things, the anxieties and the doubts and the temptations, is prayer.

And so when they say, well, we believe that God is sovereign, right? Well, what really is the point of prayer if God is sovereign? Well, what if the point of prayer is not so much to change our circumstances?

What if the point of prayer is to fill our greatest need? Our need for Him? Our need for God? What is it that happens?

[19:48] I think there's something supernatural that takes place in genuine communion with God in this way. And you'll understand what I mean, I think, when I say that and what I don't mean when I say that.

I don't mean that prayer is like a magical incantation that if you say the right thing the right way the right number of times that suddenly things will just work out and God will finally do what you're asking but you just gotta hit the button just in the right sequence to get there.

That's not how we're to understand prayer. No, I think there is something supernatural happening in prayer in that when I pray with whatever anxieties I have the anxieties themselves and the situations that are producing the anxieties don't change.

What changes? I change. The doubts that I have and that I'm wrestling with as I come to the Lord in prayer the doubts may not ultimately go away but do you know what changes?

my confidence in the Lord my peace and comfort in the Lord changes. The temptations that I face I'm probably gonna face them again but you know what happens in prayer?

[ 21 : 01 ] The Lord does a work in me that gives me strength to resist the devil and to flee the temptations. Prayer is not so much about what is happening around you it's about what God is doing in you and Peter knows that and he knows it's essential that if we're gonna thrive and we're gonna be faithful to the Lord in this time of exile and in our times of suffering he knows it's gonna require that we actually have a genuine prayer life genuine communion with God on a regular basis because God is not only sovereign over the things that happen he's sovereign over the means by which those things come about and prayer indeed is part of God's means he does hear us and he does answer us according to his will and he beckons us to pray he commands it but he also invites it and we need to give ourselves to that

Peter knows it but he knows we can't do it if we're not self-controlled and we're not sober minded now I think the best example of this in the scriptures is in the garden of Gethsemane just before Jesus' arrest what is he doing he transforms the Passover to the Lord's Supper they make their way to the Mount of Olives and they go to the garden of Gethsemane maybe a place that he frequented for prayer most of the disciples he leaves at the entrance of the garden he takes a few of them with him a little further in and then he goes a little further than that and he begins to pray it's the greatest moment of struggle that Jesus the man had in his earthly ministry and his earthly life it all came to a head at this point and what is it that he gave himself to in those moments prayer genuine communion with the father but do you know what he told the disciples to do Mark chapter 14 verse 38 he tells the disciples who went with them into the garden he says watch and pray stay awake be alert keep an eye out and pray why

Jesus says so that you will not enter into temptation and then he adds this the spirit is willing I know you don't want to be tempted I know you don't want to give into temptation but your flesh is weak so stay awake and pray and then he models it he does this is so amazing I want to go preach that passage now it's so amazing what Jesus does he tells the disciples watch and pray and then what does he do he goes and he watches and prays it's almost as if he's saying do what I do that's exactly what he's saying and why is he saying it because it was so necessary in that moment well what did the disciples do they went to sleep they didn't do what he said they lacked self-control in that they kept falling asleep they showed a lack of sobriety as they could not see the urgency of the moment they couldn't even see in Jesus the urgency of that moment and hear the urgency and what he's commanding and they're not they're not sober-minded they're not thinking clearly and the result is that they did not pray and when the moment of danger and temptation arrived what did they do every one of them did the same thing they forsook the Lord they fell in temptation they left him in his most vulnerable moment and they ran why because they did not watch and pray and here's Peter who was in that group who did not only forsake the Lord he took it a step further and outright denied the Lord now he's writing to a group of Christians who are suffering and the temptation is going to be it's dangerous there's doubt now as a result of this the world seems to be against me I'm losing my friends and I'm losing my job and I'm losing all of these things in my life because of my faith and the temptation is going to be to doubt and it's going to be to be anxious and it's going to be to give in to the temptations and the sins and the human passions and he says you need to watch and pray Peter Peter says the end is near hang in there just watch and pray but do you pray we have to ask that question now don't we do you pray do you really pray not just to express gratitude for your meal though you need to do that Jesus told us to do that but do you have time where you pour your heart out to

God when you're tempted what's your reaction typically it should be prayer do you see the urgency of the moment in your life and with your kids and with your grandkids or are you're a bit spiritually drunk and and you're a little more focused on this life than maybe on the age to come it'll show in the way we pray so Peter says look the end is coming pray second sacrificial love first is sober prayer and then there's sacrificial love and we get this in verse eight above all Peter says keep loving one another earnestly!

[ 26 : 42 ] since love covers a multitude of sins now you'll notice in the next three exhortations each one of them is a one another command we're told to love one another earnestly we're told to show hospitality to one another and then we're told to use our gifts from the Lord to serve one another meaning they specifically concern how we are to live with and treat other Christians now it's not that we shouldn't do all of those things for non-Christians we certainly should but Peter is especially

concerned with how we live with one another and how we treat one another remember in the context of this letter we represent God and his kingdom not primarily as individuals but primarily as the church as his people plural in the world and how we exist together is of immense importance in the New Testament and Peter of course reminds us that the most necessary mark of our relationships with other believers is earnest love he's already explained it in chapter one and he's bringing it up again here he said it in chapter two as well he's bringing it up again here earnest love and Peter's taking his cues directly from Jesus who said that the world will know that we are following him specifically by the way we love other

Christians now it's amazing that Jesus said that and it must be true because Jesus said it why then does it seem like the church of all places is so divided we're so against each other Jesus says this earnest love that's going to be the supreme mark that you're my people in chapter one Peter wrote that sincere and earnest love for other believers is the natural fruit of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work in our lives which means that if you do not have a trace of love it's not that you're perfect in this but if you don't have a trace of love for other believers specifically because they're other believers then you're just not a Christian because this is something that God does in us as his people he begins it and he progressively strengthens it and perfects it throughout our lives we want to see a trajectory of this growing but here Peter grounds this pursuit of love in a very specific thing and it's amazing he says that we are to pursue this love keep pursuing it because it covers a multitude of sins covers a multitude of sins what does that mean well at least four things first earnest love prevents us from sinning against other people earnest love prevents us from sinning against others that's why

Jesus said that the second most important commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself he said all of the law hangs on those two commandments loving God and loving other people because when you really love someone you don't want to steal from them when you love someone you don't want to abuse them or cheat them or slander them or hurt them or see them hurt because what you're pursuing with them is an earnest love and this is the kind of love that we are to pursue in the church a love that desires to bless and not to harm so Peter says love one another because it covers a multitude of sins it's going to prevent you from sinning against one another if you just love each other second earnest love is willing to let petty offenses go earnest love is willing to let petty offenses go now we have to be honest here there are problems that arise in our relationships with other

Christians sometimes and they stem from serious sins that have to be confronted if that wasn't true Jesus and the apostles would not have taught us about church discipline would they there are some things that can't just be let go they have to be dealt with and as we'll see in just a moment that's part of this love but at this point I think it's worth considering that most of the time that's not where our offenses come from most of the time our offenses stem from just being overly sensitive to being offended a short fuse thin skin it's pride that keeps us from letting things go but earnest love will cause us to assume the best in others to give others the benefit of the doubt and it will refuse to hold petty grudges against people that's what love does now if you want to check me on that go to 1st

Corinthians 13 Paul gives us a whole chapter on it that's what he spells out love knows how and when to let things go for the sake of peace and unity the truth is God is too good and life is too short to be offended by everyone and to be offended by everything sometimes we just need to learn to let things go go it's okay not everything has to be addressed not every offense even has to be spoken of most of the time you need to let it roll which brings us to the third thing love covers a multitude of sins in that it stands ready and willing to forgive others when they do sin against us ready and willing to forgive having a disposition of forgiveness that just quickly acknowledges and lets it go and you don't even have to confront it right that's part of being a forgiving person a merciful person but there's more to this isn't there because sometimes people really do sin significantly against us in a way that it wouldn't be healthy for you or for them to just let it go!

[ 33 : 27 ] has to be dealt with and unfortunately that happens all the time in our relationships with other believers what love does is it pursues mercy and it pursues forgiveness now understand that in one sense forgiveness is transactional isn't it that though we stand ready to forgive forgiveness the transaction of forgiveness isn't brought to completion until the one who sins seeks!

it right just think about the gospel Jesus stands ready to forgive but you only receive that forgiveness when you come to him for it and our personal relationships are the same way aren't

they it can't really be brought to a final conclusion and put to death until that transaction takes place however there is a part that we have that we must stand ready to forgive!

and Paul helps us with this a lot of places help it with this Jesus models it supremely but Paul told the Ephesians that love produces the kind of forgiveness that's modeled after the forgiveness that we have received from God which is to say there's nothing as a Christian that you can't forgive! Nothing! Because there's nothing that Jesus is unwilling to forgive and Paul says we are to be tender hearted toward one another forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us that's what it means to love that's what it means for love to cover a multitude of sins but there's a fourth one fourth love covers a multitude of sins and that it pursues the wayward sinner to bring them back to Christ James helps us!

in fact if you just flip maybe one or two pages over in your Bible to the left James chapter five verses 19 and 20 James says my brothers if anyone among you wonders from the truth and someone brings him back to the truth let him know that is the one who brings him back let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wondering!

[ 35 : 46 ] will save his soul from a multitude of sins same phrase now what's that all about James is just speaking of another facet of Christian love Christian love like the shepherd with the hundred sheep sees the one who wonders and is not content for them to wonder out of love they pursue the wondering sheep they call them to respond in repentance and in faith to return to the Lord and to repent of the sin that they're living in earnest love is willing to humbly confront the sin of others in order to encourage their repentance and faith okay well why did we call it sacrificial then why didn't we just call it sincere love or whatever well the reason is because loving someone in each of these ways comes with an enormous cost love is costly refusing to sin against others often requires a denial of self doesn't it because typically in our flesh what we want is what we want and a sinner will stop at nothing to get what he wants which is to love the self well it takes a great cost to actually love people and not sin against them it will cost you your pride to let something go forgiveness by definition is a willingness to live with the consequences of someone else's sin without holding anything against them

Jesus called it a debt that to forgive is to say the debt is satisfied and to live with the loss that's forgiveness that's costly to pursue the sinner will probably cost you more than you ever imagined where do we see this kind of love supremely modeled where do we get this idea we look to the cross don't we it's in the gospel that we see this modeled for us Jesus the righteous one lays down his life for the unrighteous so that God shows his love toward us in that while we were sinners that is while we were actually his enemy actively against him we did not want him we were not interested in him he still loved us enough to send his son to pay our debt and to forgive our sins and all of that is flowing out of what earnest love for

God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever will believe in him will not perish but will have everlasting life the model for this love is hanging on Calvary's tree love love and it is when we look at the gospel that we actually learn what it means for love to cover a multitude of sins my love for you can provide no atonement for you his love for you provides complete atonement surely as his people we can have a lesser!

love than that the end of all things is at hands Peter says we're living in the last days we're just waiting for Jesus to come back now that reality might tempt some of us to have a bucket list kind of way of living that we've got all of these things that we want to do in this life and experience in this life before Jesus comes back and robs us of the opportunity remember thinking as a teenager you know and you really start to think girls are pretty now and now you think oh man maybe marriage would be kind of fun you think you know Lord if you just wait and come back until I can at least get married first and experience that and have some fun with that we think about Christ's return that way sometimes don't we it's a completely carnal way of thinking it says age to come that could possibly compare to what

I could experience now and we live for this life and we do the opposite of everything Peter is saying to do in this letter but what God calls us to is a life that's focused entirely on the age to come rather than living for what we can get out of this life we are to live for the glory of God and the display of his kingdom on earth and that begins with sober prayer genuine communion with God that's focused on his will and his word as we endure this exile but it's marked supremely above all Peter says by a love that covers a multitude of sins because it's in that kind of love that we most display what Jesus has done for us in the gospel especially in our relationship with other Christians it ought

to be our instinct in our relationships with one another to love in that way and the model for all of it is the

[ 41 : 30 ] Lord Jesus who persisted in prayer in the garden who laid down his life for our sins on the cross out of his eternal infinite love so thriving in exile then means in some sense living in light of the end and seeking to be found faithful when the Lord does return!

to be to be to be the