

1 Peter 4:7–11 still has in mind the theme of suffering that was introduced in 3:13. Peter has told his friends how to face injustice and how to be encouraged by the triumph of Jesus over all evil forces<sup>□1</sup>. He has shown them how suffering helps us to make a break with sin<sup>□2</sup> and ended by pointing to the day when believing people will enjoy the resurrection life of Jesus forever.

□1 3:13-22

□2 4:1-6

Now for a few verses he gives some sharp and short exhortations to these Christians<sup>□1</sup> before coming back to the subject of suffering again<sup>□2</sup>.

□1 4:7-11

□2 4:12

### 1. The end is near

• In the sense that God is ready to break into our situation

1. **He points to the nearness of ‘the end’.** The Bible is constantly telling us that the end of the world is near. 1 Peter 4:7 begins: ‘*The end of all things is near*’. This might well puzzle us. How can the Bible say repeatedly even hundred of years **before** Jesus came that the end of the world is near? The answer seems to be that ‘the end’ is not the final date in the calendar – for that might not be near at all – but the readiness of God to break into our situation. In the Old Testament great crises were regarded as ‘the day of the Lord’. They were previews of the end of the world. ‘The end is coming on the four corners of the land’, said Ezekiel<sup>□1</sup>. In this sense ‘the end’ is always near. God is near at hand at any point to end **our** world if not to end **the** world. In a time of suffering we need to know God’s nearness in this sense.

□1 Ezekiel 7:2

The persecuted Christian can know that ‘the end’ is near. In one way or another God is about to break into his predicament.

### 2. The need for prayer

• Not impulsively

• Methodical and deliberate

• Prayer helps us to keep right attitudes

2. **Peter points to the need for prayer.** Peter is still giving instructions that relate to opposition and persecution. ‘*Think clearly therefore and give attention to prayers*’<sup>□1</sup>. He asks them to ‘think clearly’ or ‘be sober’. The Christian is not to be a person who acts on impulse. Peter wants them to clearly think about this matter so that they are men and women controlled by principle and by godly habits. It is not to be a matter of ‘When the Spirit leads me, I’ll pray’ – although that is a good principle in itself! – but there is to be something steadier than that, something more orderly, methodical, deliberate. ‘Be sober’ says Peter. Give thought to this matter.

□1 4:7b

How vital it is to pray! What mistakes we shall make if we fail at this point! Who can stand amidst persecutions without prayer? Amidst trials and troubles and oppositions it is prayer more than anything else that keeps our heads cool, that keeps our attitudes free of resentment and bitterness, that enables us to control our tongues.

• Prayer is the essence of knowing God

Prayer is the very essence of knowing God. I do not mean ‘saying prayers’. I do not mean following traditional patterns, whether they are catholic-like patterns of formally recited ‘prayers’ or pentecostal-like patterns of letting the tongue loose to utter anything. I do not mean following traditional patterns at all – of any kind! Prayer is not getting into a mindless routine – of any kind! I refer to talking to God as a Father and friend, turning our minds to Him, getting a conscious realisation that we are in His presence, and then addressing

ourselves to Him in worship (verbally expressed joy and admiration of what He is like), thanksgiving (gratitude for what He does every day and what He has specially done for us recently), confession (admitting what He has said to us about our sins), petition (requests for what we need in order to grow in godliness and achieve His will for our lives), or intercession (requests for the need of others). These five ingredients will give us the 'headings' of what we want to talk about with God. **Worship** is adoring His character, recognizing His greatness. **Thanksgiving** is appreciating His generosity, responding to His goodness. **Confession** is admitting our accountability, repenting over our sinfulness. **Intercession** is appealing on behalf of others, requesting for those known to us. **Petition** is asking for mercy and revealing our personal needs. Give attention to prayers!

- *Worship*
- *Thanksgiving*
- *Confession*
- *Intercession*
- *Petition*

### 3. Maintain love towards one another

3. It is necessary for them to maintain love towards one another<sup>1</sup>. Peter could have thought of hundreds of ways to advise his friend in times of conflict and persecution. But he puts it all in a few vital exhortations. It was inevitable that he should ask them to show love towards each other. 'Above all love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins'<sup>1</sup>. As always, the Bible incorporates hundreds of things that could be said by putting it in one all-embracing principle: love each other deeply. Then he adds a few words: 'because love covers a multitude of sins'. It is one of those short simple phrases that can be taken in more than way one. Does it mean 'God is merciful to those whom he sees showing love'? Does it mean 'Love does not expose the sins of others but wants them dealt with without disgracing the other person'? Does it mean that the love of God among His people will obliterate sins of aggressiveness among them? It means all of these things and more! Love brings down the mercy of God upon us. Love does not want others exposed. Love works at removing barriers between people.

- *Love covers a multitude of sins*

*Multiple meanings*

<sup>1</sup> 4:8

### 4. Hospitality

4. Peter adds a very practical point: the need for hospitality. It is a way of making love very practical. The ancient world did not have the kind of 'hotels' that Christians would want to stay in. Peter says: 'Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling'<sup>1</sup>. Freedom from a complaining spirit when others require our time and our attention is one way in which the reality of our love is tested.

- *Practical love*

<sup>1</sup> 4:9



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