

Letters From My Father
Week 17
1 Peter 4:7-11
“Christianity 101”

Introduction

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sakes. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your pride in Christ Jesus may be abundant because of me by my coming to you again. **Philippians 1:21-26** (NASB)

It is so easy to get caught up in the cares of this life only to lose focus on what really matters. There are literally millions of day to day distractions that can captivate our attention and cause us to miss out on the best of things. We can go from the significant to the insignificant in a matter of seconds. I truly love what Peter has to say on the subject. There is to be a continual mindset of the Believer in the wake of Christ’s return, and frankly, if we are honest, Christ’s return is often the furthest thing from our minds.

So, exactly how is the Christian supposed to conduct themselves in the midst of such confusion and distraction? How exactly do we keep our priorities in line with God’s priorities? Is there a formula or a prescription that we can take to order our priorities? In the end, it all comes down to connection. The more connected we are to the primary source of power, the more efficient our *systems*, if you will, can function. Try using your computer when your internet connection is not working properly (happens to me a lot lately), and you will begin to understand what I’m talking about.

So for us to have the proper mindset, the right Christian attitude, we need to have a strong connection to Christ. To allow Him to guide, as well as, remind us when we become too distracted to function with any sense of purpose. Everything in this world is destined for destruction, and only by remaining in constant connection with Christ are we able to produce what He called “*fruit that will last*” (**John 15:16**).

Sadly today, there seems to be an ever-increasing number of Christians that are spinning their wheels, as it were. They may be very effective at making a living, but not very effective at life. Paul said, “for me to live *is* Christ..”, meaning that his very existence on this earth was to bring glory to Christ in all that he did. I wonder just how many Believers today have that same attitude. Is Christ the reason we live, or is He more of an afterthought? Convicting question, is it not?

So today, as we study this passage in 1 Peter, I would like for all of us to focus on what really matters. To take a hard look at our priorities, examining our own hearts in order to make the necessary adjustments. Are we following Christ in order to serve Him, or are we hoping that Christ will follow us around and serve us? I hear more and more bad theology being taught these days that seems to suggest (or even boldly proclaims) the latter. I think many people have forgotten what the word “*LORD*” actually means. It means Master, Ruler, Sovereign. Doesn’t actually sound like some subservient genie in a lamp now does it?

Peter knew full well what Christ expected from him. In fact, he had no rosy misconception that following Christ was all about the so-called “easy life”. He expected to be in a war against the powers of darkness. That is why he encouraged his readers to “suit up” for battle (**1 Peter 4:1**).

Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding — because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin — in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God’s will. **1 Peter 4:1-2**

So in order to be properly “armed” as it were, the child of God must first possess the appropriate Christian attitude. He must have his *Head*, his *Heart*, and his *Hands* in full servant mode, so that he may glorify God in all that he does. And this is Simon Peter’s “*formula*” for the balanced and prioritized Christian standard of living. Please allow me to explain.

Head (vs. 7)

The end of all things is near, therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer.

1 Peter 4:7

Peter wanted the Believers in his day to be completely focused upon the return of Christ. The apostle was also fully aware that he would not be spared from death by the rapture of the church. For Christ had told him that he would be called upon to die a martyr’s death (**John 21:18-19**). Peter knew this all too well. Therefore, he wanted to preach and encourage others while he still had time.

I think it is right, as long as I am in this bodily tent, to wake you up with a reminder, since I know that I will soon lay aside my tent, as our LORD Jesus Christ has indeed made clear to me. And I will also make every effort so that you are able to recall these things at the time of my departure.

2 Peter 1:13-15

The words that Peter used translated “alert” and “sober-minded” in the CSB are “*sophroneo*” and “*nepho*” and both carry meanings of firmly entrenched mental attitudes that should be the mindset of each and every Believer. *Sophroneo* means “of sound mind”, to exercise control over one’s emotions, while *Nepho* means to be “sober and circumspect”. Both are essential elements of rational thinking. Peter’s point being: The Believer in Christ needs to know how to “*think*” properly in order to know how to *pray* properly.

There is no shortcut to proper thinking. Wisdom comes from the careful and consistent study of God’s Word. If you want to think as God thinks, then you must spend time in His Word. For it is there, that His ways are revealed to us. And when your thoughts align with God’s thoughts, you will know exactly how to pray. Too many people these days like to put words in God’s mouth, as it were. They think they can rationally discern how God feels because of the way that *they feel*. God has plenty to say about that in His Word.

You have done things, and I kept silent; you thought I was just like you. But I will rebuke you and lay out the case before you.

Psalms 50:21

Or:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways.” This is The LORD’S declaration.

Isaiah 55:8

So, in order to think like Christ, we must first listen to what Christ says. Your emotions will deceive you, but He never will. And the mindset of the Believer must be constantly bearing in mind that the return of Christ is imminent. Peter has already established in his writing that our minds should be “prepared for action” (literally girded up for our departure when Christ returns. **1 Peter 1:13**). If this is to be our mindset, then how differently would we conduct ourselves, if this were so? What would you do differently, if you knew that Christ was returning this week?

I remember many years ago, when I first felt the call to ministry. I was speaking with my younger brother (the quiet one, me and my youngest brother are quite boisterous), and I told him I was struggling with knowing what to do. I will never forget what he said to me. He said, “If Jesus were to come back next week, what would you be ashamed of *not* doing?” Those words struck me like a bolt of lightning in my spirit. So, the very next Sunday, I went forward in church and surrendered myself to the gospel ministry, for it was in that moment that my mindset was made clear!! I became sober-minded, if you will, and I knew that in the light of Jesus’ return, nothing else mattered, except my obedience. That is what it means

to have your head in the right place, when it comes to Christ. It means to live as if He is coming back at any moment. You will be surprised at how many things will cease to be important in the light of this reality.

I have had the opportunity over the years to counsel a great many Believers whose lives have somehow gotten off track. They all have this one thing in common. Something or someone has corrupted their minds. They are not at all focused upon the return of Christ or giving Him glory, but instead, they are being tossed about by every wind and wave that blows against them. Simply put, they are not right, because their head is not right!

Many years ago, I used to raise horses. And if anyone has ever done that, you know that a horse can be very strong-willed, and therefore, hard to control. I had the opportunity to spend some time with a really good horse trainer, a *"horse whisperer"*, if you will. And he taught me that in order to gain control over an animal, it wasn't necessary to physically force them to do what you want, but rather, you must get inside the animal's head in order to bring about an attitude of submission. You break down its mind, and you break the horse. For as goes the head, so goes the rest of the body.

Now, this isn't an equestrian class, so I will not bore you with the details of how this is done. But I will tell you this. Most of the defeated Christians that I have met, have been defeated in their minds by the enemy. He has so many tools by which to accomplish this, and if he can get your brain to submit to him, then he can get your body to do whatever he wants. So if you are to overcome his schemes, you must submit you mind to Christ. **Live in His Word**, so you can know **His** mind and follow after Him, as if He is returning at dawn tomorrow morning... for He very well may be! Get your head back in the game. Be sober minded! Jesus is coming soon, or as Peter would say, "The end of all things is near..." If it was near then, just imagine how much nearer it is today!

Heart (vs. 8-9)

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. **1 Peter 4:8-9**

Once again, to find true joy in your Christian walk, you must learn to love God and to love others. *Love isn't a feeling, but rather it is a choice. We choose to love. We do not have to hate.* So in order to be as Christ is, not only do our heads need to be re-aligned, but our hearts as well. Peter says we must love "above all". This means that love is our priority. I cannot tell you over the years how many so-called "church splits" that could have been avoided, if people would simply learn that loving one another in Christ is more important than winning an argument. You can be perfectly right in your opinions, but still go about expressing them in the wrong manner. We have to learn to love first, then everything else will fall into place.

This is one of the main reasons that I don't preach on giving very often. I would rather have you fall in love with Christ, for if you do this from your heart, then your wallet will follow thereafter. Good old fashioned "agape love" makes everything else fall into place. Again, as most things are, its a matter of perspective. Can you imagine how different churches would be if they did everything because of love, as opposed to a sense of moral superiority. Self-righteousness seeks to condemn you, but love wants to lift you up and to set your feet on a better path.

Peter is quoting from the Book of *Proverbs*, when he says that *"love covers a multitude of sins."* Listen to the entire verse in its context:

Hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers all offenses. **Proverbs 10:12**

So many people have tried to make Peter's use of this verse controversial, but I cannot for the life of me understand why! So what exactly is he saying? He is saying what the Proverb is saying: If you love someone, you'll learn to overlook and forgive their shortcomings. Anyone who has ever raised a child knows exactly what this means. It means, as the old adage goes, *"You don't throw the baby out with the*

bathwater.” As Christians, sometimes we disagree, but we should never stop loving. God has made us a family. And family stays together through thick and thin. Or at least... it’s supposed to.

I am reminded here of a story that goes right to the heart of the matter. Two little boys named Johnny and Timmy were playing in the front yard as Johnny’s mother watched them through the kitchen window. After a few hours of good times, a fight broke out between the two boys. And it was a knock down drag out, resulting in Timmy packing up all of his toys and riding his bike back to his house. While Johnny stormed into the house angry and crying.

The very next day, Johnny was going out to the garage to get his bicycle when his mother asked, “Where are you going?” “I’m going over to Timmy’s house to play catch!”, he replied. “But I thought you and Timmy were fighting?”, she said. “Oh its ok mom,” Johnny replied, “Timmy and me are good forgetters!” Now, listen to Peter’s words once more: “...***Love covers a multitude of sins.***” You want to have joy in this Christian life? Get you heart right. Learn to be a ***good forgetter*** and maintain a constant love for one another!

Peter also speaks of being “hospitable”. The word in the Greek literally means “a lover of strangers.” Make sure to set your heart to be continuously open to welcome new people into the fold. Too many people develop a circle of friends and then determine that the circle is full. As members of Christ’s body, our circle is ***never*** full. There is always room for one more prodigal to return home to The Father’s house. We too must welcome those into our own homes. Hospitality is a Christian trait, and it should not be lightly forsaken. Open your hearts to others, and that means open them ***all the way***. Don’t place a bouncer at the door of your heart to screen out the less-desirables. We are not a nightclub. We are The Church of The Living God!

Hands (vs. 10-11)

Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God’s words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength that God provides, so that God may be glorified through Christ Jesus in everything. To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10-11

Not only do our heads and hearts need to be fully committed to Christ, but our hands (and feet) as well. To each and every Believer there has been given at least one “spiritual gift” according to The Scriptures (***1 Corinthians 12:1-30***). These gifts are intended to be used to build up (edify) the body of Christ. To refuse to use, or even misuse, our spiritual gifts is to grieve The Spirit of God. And we will all stand before the Judgment seat of Christ to give an account of just how we employed these various gifts in the service of The LORD (***2 Corinthians 5:10***).

Each of us has been not only gifted in this manner, but we have been gifted differently. Peter calls the gifts “varied” in ***verse 10***. The word he used means “multifaceted”, so just like snowflakes, every child of God is wired a little bit differently. But to use one’s natural abilities in conjunction with one’s spiritual giftings is to find the very meaning of this life! I am so saddened when I hear Christians in their so-called “golden years” who still cannot tell you what their spiritual gift is. It is incumbent upon us not only to discover our gifts, but to USE them!

Peter mentions two of the three categories of spiritual gifts in this text, for they are the most relevant in Christian service. He mentions the speaking gifts, which are teaching and preaching God’s Word. He admonishes those of us with these particular gifts to speak as if we were speaking God’s own message. This is why it is so important for pastors and teachers to teach truth, seasoned with love, grace and mercy. For if I love those I am teaching as I should, if my *heart* is in tune, and if I am preaching like the return of Christ is imminent (my *head* is in tune), then the only purpose of my preaching/teaching is to see others receive the free gift of grace that God has provided through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. And as I offer correction, it should come from a place of love that sincerely desires to see them on the right path!

The other sets of gifts that Peter mentions are the *servicing gifts*. These are the gifts that many Believers have in order to be the hands and feet of Christ's love. They work diligently in the body to serve one another so that all will feel the love of Christ in a tangible way. Thank God for those who offer of their time and resources to show true agape for all who would come our way. They are the hospitable people that Peter has spoken of earlier.

And let everything be done for the glory of Christ within His church. We preach and teach to His glory, and we serve for His glory. He is to be the only reason that we do what we do. This is another way of knowing for sure that our head and our hearts are right before Him! If we serve one another for the sole purpose of bringing Him glory and honor, so that all will see *Him in us!*

So there it is. The "formula" for joy and purpose in this Christian life is: to have our heads, our hearts, and our hands in tune with kingdom purposes. Do not let the enemy distract you, for nothing except these things will endure in the end. Or as our LORD Himself has said, **"abide in Me and bear fruit... fruit that will last!"**

TRUTH!!!