

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

Holiness

1 Peter 4:7-11 - Lesson #22

Dr. Bruce Bickel

Friday, July 3, 2015

Bruce: Don, do you want to bring some semblance of order to our meeting?
(*Laughter.*)

Don: I'll try. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: Let's go before the Lord and know that He is God and rest in His grace.
(*Music.*)

Eternal Father, strong to save, You are the One who through Your grace makes it possible for us to be in Your presence, to stand in the grace that You redeemed for us. Father, we pray that as we celebrate this day that we would be honoring You by our attitude toward You and Your grace. Father, we pray that You would not abandon our country because of our moral decadence, that You would be pleased to honor Yourself and revive us again. In my mind, Lord, I think our national anthem should be that wonderful hymn, “Revive Us Again.” And may it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Continuing in our study of the book of 1 Peter, on the theme of holiness, we come to a passage of Scripture which is extremely insightful for us. It's found in 1 Peter chapter 4, beginning at verse 7 through verse 11, in the section referring to being stewards of God's grace. Remember, the definition of grace is God's resources at Christ's expense. And we are stewards of that.

A steward is somebody who manages something else that somebody owns. And we manage it according to his direction. And so we come to this passage found in 1 Peter chapter 4 beginning at verse 7.

“The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks, as one who speaks 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.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen and Amen.

Now the study of eschatology, which is the study of end times, can be one of the most exciting, stimulating doctrines of Scripture. But it's also one of the most abused. It's one of the more abused ministries of the Person and work of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scripture.

Entire denominations have been formed based upon their particular view in holding to the doctrine of the end times. If you're not a member of their denomination, you're not a believer because you don't understand eschatology correctly. Denominations have been

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

formed because of their views of the dates and times of the Lord’s Second Coming. Oftentimes pastors are hired, or not hired, in a church to be the shepherd of a flock based upon their position of what they hold as a doctrine of the end times, rather than their understanding of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the content of the Biblical gospel. They are hired because of how they understand a certain position in eschatology.

Now the Scripture does not give us specific or detailed information on the date and time of Jesus’ return. But the Scripture gives us a lot of information on how we should live until He returns.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s what we’re going to talk about today. Countless books have been written to help us understand how to interpret the signs of what’s going on in our culture and the world—how to interpret floods, how to interpret tsunamis, how to interpret wars. Books have been written all over the place to teach us how to interpret the signs of what’s going on in the world in view of the Second Coming of Christ. But there are very few books that teach us how to live in the meantime.

That’s what Peter is going to do for us today. If you look at our passage today, we’re going to see that no matter what position you may hold in the doctrine of eschatology or the end times, one thing about which we must be completely clear is this, that the Lord Jesus Christ will return in all of His glory. He will return in all of His glory. And the important thing is to live in the expectancy of Christ’s return, anticipating His return in all of His glory, because we shall see Him one day and stand before Him. All of us must agree upon that. We may not agree on all the details, but we must agree on one central fact. The Lord Jesus will return in all of His glory. We will be held accountable and we will stand before Him.

How we live today and how we serve today, and not our view of eschatology, will determine how God will view us when we stand before Him at His Second Coming. We may not agree on all the terms and details of the Second Coming, but we must agree on the demands of His coming and that we shall stand before Him in all of His glory.

Now since Christ’s first coming, there’s not much to expect except His second coming. And so we must live with full expectancy, awaiting Christ’s return with anticipation, eagerness, dependability and responsibility. And the attitude of expectancy should not turn us into being what I call “lazy dreamers,” as recorded in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 6. Or we should not become zealous fanatics about details of the end times.

Peter describes for us some very practical issues, men, about how we are to live until the Lord does return in all of His glory.

Follow along as I begin in verse 7. He gives us about ten different things when you look at verse 7 all the way to the end of the chapter, down to verse 19.

Notice. First of all, he says, “Be sober” in verse 7. Now he’s teaching us to anticipate the Lord’s return. He is going to come in all of His glory. And the issue is how are you living in expecting the Lord’s return? The first thing is “be sober.” We’re going to explain that today in verses 7-11.

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

In verse 7, be prayerful. In verse 8 be loving fervently, or earnestly. In verse 9 be hospitable. In verses 10 and 11, be using your spiritual gifts.

In verse 12, be thinking right about persecution. In verse 13, be rejoicing. In verses 15 and 16, be not ashamed of Christ. In verses 16-18, be glorifying God. In verse 19, be committed to God.

Now notice. Look at all the things he says to be. He doesn't say that you have to be right. He says that you have to think right. And if you and I do not think right about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in all of His glory, we will never act right.

Look at these things. Be sober. Be prayerful. Be fervently loving. Be hospitable. Be using your gifts. Be thinking right about persecution. Be rejoicing. Be not ashamed of Christ. Be glorifying God and committed to Christ.

Now we need to study eschatology not as a test of our fellowship, but to learn how to live a life that is pleasing to God. You see, men, that's why you study the doctrine of the Second Coming, to understand how it is that you and I can live a life that is pleasing to God until He does return. And the purpose of eschatology is to motivate us to holy living, not to figure out the date and the time. The purpose of eschatology is to motivate us to holy living—to watch, to work, to wait and to witness. That's what we are to do in anticipation of Christ's return—to watch, to work, to wait and to witness.

Now Peter's purpose in verses 7 to 11, the ones we just read, is to teach us that when a person realizes the nearness of Christ's Second Coming, he is bound to live a certain style of life that is pleasing to God. Now Peter is going to teach us in these verses today several things that we are to preserve. We are to preserve certain things and we are to practice certain things. So let's take a look at the three things that Peter says we need to preserve.

First of all he says to preserve your sanity. That word means sound judgment or a clear mind. Literally it means “to keep safe the mind.” Notice verse 7. “The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded.” In other words, you need to make sure that your mind is clear. You keep your mind safe.

The great characteristic of sanity is to see things in their proper perspectives and proper positions. Now I think the King James Version in the translation of this verse 7 uses one word, the word *sober*. But the New American Standard and the English Standard Version use two words that describe the same concept. But the idea, generally speaking, is one of sanity. It means to be a clear mind that sees what is important and what is not important. You and I need to understand, as we recognize the Second Coming of Christ, what the important things are in our lives. We need to discern the difference between the important and the urgent.

The urgent is everything that everybody else wants you to do. The important are the things that we know that God demands that we do. So we should not be swept away with sudden emotions or sudden enthusiasms as we anticipate the Second Coming of Christ. But keep your mind clear. Be sober.

When you and I see the affairs of earth in light of the eternity of Christ's return, we're going to keep everything right, in the proper perspective. And when God has His proper place in our minds, than all these things will have their proper place in our lives. If we

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

don't have God in His proper place in our minds, we will not hold the important things in the proper place in our minds.

The second word that can be described in this concept of being self-controlled and sober-minded would be the concept of *sobriety*. It's the idea of sober-spirited or self-controlled. It means to act soberly and have things under control. It's the opposite of mania. Don't get maniaized, if I can use that word, over the doctrines of the Second Coming. You need to be self-controlled.

Now that doesn't mean that we get lost in gloominess. Nor does it mean that we get swept away with emotions. But what it does mean is that we take things seriously because we are aware of the real importance of being prepared to stand before the Lord when He comes in all of His glory. We take life seriously. And that word *sobriety* is a wonderful word. Sanity is a wonderful word to describe self-control and sober-mindedness.

Now notice. Those are the two things that he says you must keep preserved if you're going to have a good prayer life. Notice. “The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your *prayers*.” In other words, men, if you and I are not thinking correctly, we're not going to be praying correctly.

Here's how one theologian describes this sober-mindedness. He says this. “When a man's mind is unbalanced, when he lets his own prejudices run away with him, when his approach to life is frivolous and selfish and irresponsible, he obviously cannot pray as he ought. He will not know in such a case what he ought to ask, for he will ask for the wrong things, because he is the center of his prayer life.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: “We only learn to pray when we take life so wisely and so seriously that we begin to say in all things, “Thy will be done.””

“The first necessity of prayer is the earnest desire not to get what we wish, but to discover the will of God for ourselves by being self-controlled and sober-minded.”

Now Peter says this, men, as you consider the Lord's return. Take it seriously. The Lord is going to come back and you and I will stand before Him. How do you anticipate living a life until that comes? Are you going to spend all your time being motivated to find out the date and time and look at all the news and see what's going on? Or are you going to understand this. I need to have a clear mind so I discern the important things in life. I need to be sober-minded. My life is under control so I discern the difference between that which is important and that which is urgent.

You see, that's what impacts our prayer life, because if you don't have your mind under control and you're not practicing sanity and sobriety, you're not going to pray right because your focus will not be correct. So the first thing that Peter says is this. You've got to preserve the sobriety of your mind, the self-control, the sanity of your mind. You've got to be thinking right because that's going to impact your prayer life.

And so the third thing he says that we need to preserve, in addition to being self-controlled and sober-minded with sanity and sobriety, is that we need to preserve our prayer life as we anticipate the Lord's return. Literally this word, “for the sake of your prayers” literally means this. Be calm and collected in spirit with a view of giving

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

yourself to prayer. Be calm and collected in your spirits—self-controlled, sober-minded in your spirit—so that you can give yourself to praying correctly. That doesn’t mean the right words; it means the right attitude. You and I preserve the attitude of prayer by being sober-minded and self-controlled.

We’re not talking about being English majors and giving the right words. That’s not what we’re talking about. He’s talking about the inner spirit of the person, being prepared to preserve your spirit, your mind. Keep it clear so that you can pray correctly.

Now I find it very, very fascinating that Peter is an example of the very thing that he is asking us to do. Consider Peter’s life. Some cross references for you would be Mark chapter 14, verses 34-40 and Matthew 26, verses 36-56.

If you look at the Matthew 26 passage, you’ll understand this, that Peter was not clear-minded. He didn’t exercise sound judgment. He did not exercise self-control. And he was not what? He was not praying.

And here’s the situation. This is when the officials came to arrest Jesus. Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane praying. And He tells Peter, James and John to pray until the events happen. So Jesus is off praying and Peter goes off and does what?

Men: Falls asleep.

Bruce: He falls asleep. Peter was not self-controlled. He was not sober-minded. And Peter was not praying.

So then the officials come and they take away Jesus. When we look at John 18, we see that Peter responded out of trepidation or fear. Fear is the feeling of not being able to control things the way you want to. Fear is the act of losing control. It’s the fear of not having your needs met.

And so what is it that Peter does? He draws his sword out and he cuts off the ear of the high priest’s slave.

Now notice. That’s a response out of trepidation. Jesus had a response to the same situation, but His was one of preparation. He was in prayer. There you begin to see a good definition of prayer. Prayer is preparation for the right response.

There are many ways to define prayer. In this context, we can say that prayer is preparation for a right response. You see, Peter wasn’t clear-minded. Peter didn’t exercise self-control. Peter did not exercise self-judgment. And he was not praying. And who’s the one who tells us to be self-controlled and sober-minded? Peter is speaking from his own failure. But men, sometimes our greatest failure becomes our greatest teacher.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: In my own life I would have to say that it’s not my theological understanding, it’s my failures that God uses to teach me the greatest lessons. And who does He have to write this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? It’s the one who failed and the one who is telling us, “Don’t do that because I was there and I’m telling you it doesn’t work.” That’s what Peter is telling us.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: He’s the perfect example of why he’s saying in verse 7, “Be sober-minded. Be self-controlled for the sake of your prayers.”

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

Fear, not being able to control how your needs are being met. You see, Peter wanted God to redeem Israel politically and nationally. And what had Jesus just done by going to the cross? He'd just redeemed Israel. When Jesus was captured, fear motivated him. It motivated Peter.

And notice what motivated Jesus in Matthew chapter 26 verse 56. It was the Scriptures to be fulfilled.

Contrast Peter who was not clear-minded, did not exercise sound judgment, and was not praying. Contrast that with Jesus who was watchful in prayer, responded with sound judgment and self-control so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled.

Now here's another good description of our prayer definition today. Not only is prayer preparation for a proper response, but prayer can be defined as the process of depending upon God in order to please God by fulfilling the Scriptures. That's the contrast that you see in the life of Jesus versus the life of Peter.

That's why Peter says this. “Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” Men, as we anticipate the Lord's return, we need to be men of prayer. We need to be people of prayer. But the only way you can do that is to keep your mind clear with sanity, sobriety, self-control, sober-mindedness. We need to take things seriously. Don't take life flippantly. We're not here to be entertained. We're here to be prepared for the Lord's return in all of His glory.

And so I think Peter was probably amazed as he sat down and wrote these words and said, “Why are You using me to write these words because I'm the one who blew it?” But that's exactly the one God chose to use because Peter could speak from his own failure experience. He reminds us from his own failure, from his own life, that when you and I consider Christ's return, we're not to give in to eschatological frenzy,--

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: But to practice self-control and prayer. That's what we do as we anticipate the Lord's return. We should have an expectant attitude towards Christ return which involves a serious, balanced mind and an alert prayer life. Yes, please?

Participant: Having an alert prayer life, Bruce, (and this is kind of a confession time for me),--

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Participant: And maybe you can help me from your own experience. How do you prevent distractions, other thoughts from coming into your mind when you pray? Your mind wandering, that kind of thing, or becoming mechanical sometimes in prayer?

Bruce: That's a great question, Don. I'll need your help when you answer that. I'll give you some of how I try to manage it because when you ask me what the least powerful part of my life is, I'd have to say it's my prayer life. Oh, I love to study the Scripture! I love to do word studies. I love to study historical background. I love to study doctrine. But do I put the same emphasis in prayer that I do in my study? No.

You see, I would honestly have to say, men, that the weakest part of my own disciplines in my Christian walk is my prayer life.

Participant: Here, here!

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

Bruce: Because it is so difficult because you get so distracted. I need to study more! No, I probably need to pray more. I need to preach more! No, I probably need to pray more.

For me, some of the things I have to do, sometimes, Don, is to say this. Lord, if you don't remove that thought from my mind, it will be a disaster.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: One of the things that I try to do to enhance my prayer life is study the Scripture first. Study that passage of Scripture and then pray that Scripture back to the Lord and then move into prayer as the Holy Spirit leads you to do that and pray for other people.

So there are several things that we have to do. But Don, you've really hit upon something that is really critical. We just have to realize that it's a battle of the mind. And that's why Peter uses those two words. “Be self-controlled and sober-minded.” That is an effort. That is something you have to work at. It's not something that's done easily. Yes, sir?

Participant: It's spiritual warfare. That doubt that pops into your mind during your praying, or your mind wandering, or the phone ringing, or whatever it may be, that is spiritual warfare, where we're supposed to take every thought captive so the foothold is not given to the enemy.

Bruce: Amen. Remember, Satan's greatest tool is to get us to think that we're doing well. Yes, please?

Participant: Recently, I heard the best example I can think of for what prayer can and did do. In 1746 the French sent an armada of about thirty ships over with fourteen thousand Marines. And their mission was to go down the coast and dispose of this nation before it was a nation and bombard every city there. And the clergyman in what is now the Massachusetts area got his church together and said, “Now we're going to pray.” And they prayed for more than two days until it began to rain. And the wind began to blow and it threw those ships up against the docks and every one of those ships sank. And a thousand of those Marines were rescued by the people that were on shore. But their prayers were answered.

Bruce: Amen. I'll tell you a prayer that's answered every day that just blows my mind, that God could use me. That's a miracle. Corky and I were talking about that just before we started. Do you believe in miracles? Then God can use us. That's a miracle, men. God does not need to use us, but He chooses to do that in His own mercy. That's why we are M-8s—mission-minded members of a movement motivated by mercy for ministry in the marketplace. That's a miracle that God can use us.

And what is the strength of all of our support? It's our prayer life.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We need to take our prayer life seriously. “Be sober-minded. Be self-controlled.” You see, if you don't do that,--Don brought up the point—if you're not sober-minded and self-controlled, it's going to be a battle. It's spiritual warfare, because the last thing Satan wants is people who are prayerfully minded. He does not want that.

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

He wants us to be entertained and to feel good rather than fighting the fight. We need to be men of prayer.

But Peter says this. As you look at the Lord’s return, take that seriously. Don’t get hung up on the time and the date. Get hung up on your responsibility, realizing this, that one of these days you’re going to stand before the Lord.

And what will He say? I know one of the things He’s going to say to me, perhaps. “Why did you say that? Why did you say what you said? Was it to get a response?”

Charles Spurgeon has an interesting comment. Did some of you read *Grace Gems* the last couple of days? He has a little blurb there called “Feeding the Sheep Or Entertaining the Goats?” (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Oh, yes.

Bruce: Feeding the sheep or entertaining the goats? He says, “I don’t see in the gospel “Go into all the world and preach the gospel. If they don’t show up, entertain them so they’ll come.”” (*Laughter.*)

Now he said that in 1840! (*Laughter.*) In 1840 he said that! “Go into all the world and preach the gospel. If they don’t show up, entertain them so they will come.” Incredible! That’s 180 years ago!

I say the same thing. What do we have in our culture today? We don’t preach the gospel because they won’t come. Let’s entertain them so they will come.

You see, as a pastor and a teacher, I think that one of the things the Lord is going to hold me accountable for is “Why did you say what you said? Why did you say it? What was your motive behind it, not the words that you used? What was the motive behind what you said?”

Men, take seriously the Lord’s return. Be self-controlled. Be sober-minded so that you can give attention to your prayer life. That’s what Peter says. Preserve those three things.

And when you preserve those three things, you need to practice three things. In the next verses he gives us things to practice.

First of all, in verse 8, practice what is called *earnest* or *fervent love*. “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly.” Your Bible may say “fervently.” It means stretched out in the sense of being constant and consistent—stretched out, to be constant, to be consistent, fervently loving one another.

Now he’s referring to Christian people here. He’s talking about us inside the family of God. We need to be fervently loving one another as we anticipate the Lord’s return, because he says this, that love never fails. It means to be stretched out as a runner as a runner stretches out to run a full race. It’s the idea of this: strenuous and sustained effort. “Above all, keep loving one another” with a strenuous and sustained effort. You and I need to work at loving one another in the body of Christ.

Christian love is something that we must work at like an athlete works at his athletic skills. It’s not a matter of emotional feeling. It’s the matter of a dedicated will. It’s not a sentimental reaction. It demands every spiritual and every mental nerve and every muscle that you have, trusting God for His grace through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Do it fervently and love one another.

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

So how far are we to go in this concept of loving one another? Well, you know, I believe that’s why it’s possible for us as believers to love the unloveable, because you choose to. That’s why you can do it, because you choose to, because you’re using strenuous and sustained effort to love the brothers and the sisters in the body of Christ earnestly, fervently. And the reason you can love the unlovely is because you’ve got a dedicated mind to do it. Not because you feel like it, but because you have to be self-controlled, sober-minded. You’re praying about it and asking God to give you the grace and you do it by matter of choice. That’s how you and I can do it, through God’s grace.

So how far are we to go? Well, Peter quotes Proverbs chapter 10 verse 12 when he says this. “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers up a multitude of sins.”

“Love covers up a multitude of sins.” Now let me make something clear here. Love does not condone sin or overlook it. That’s not what we’re talking about. If you want to know how to deal with sin in the body of Christ, read Matthew 18. It tells you how to do that very specifically and how to exercise church discipline when a member is sinning. So we’re not talking about covering it up with love and saying, “Oh, we’re just going to embrace everybody and cover up their sin.” We’re not talking about that. Please understand what I’m not saying.

But love covers sin in the sense that love motivates us to hide that sin from other people so that we don’t gossip about it. We don’t spread rumors about it. We don’t intensify their sin by speaking about it to people who shouldn’t know anything about it. When one believer truly loves another, he will not broadcast the other’s failings or the other person’s sins. But we’ll try to cover them up, to bring some balance so there will be no gossip or no slander.

You see, Peter is talking about inside the body of Christ. One of the things that is a cancerous disease that destroys the fellowship is slander and gossip.

And Peter says this. When you see a brother or sister sinning, cover it up in the sense that you love them, to bring balance to it. It could be something like this. “Boy, that guy is really irritable! He’s really an angry man!”

Now we might say this. “Yes, he is. But do you understand the pressure that he’s under with his family?” Now you see, that’s covering up. You’re not condoning the sin. You cover it up so that you can deal with it. Peter is eliminating the possibility of slander and gossip in the body of Christ so that you can work with that person *and* their sin. You can restore them. That’s what he says what love covers up. And you work at that for the sake of the glory of God and the body of Christ and the protection of the believers. We love earnestly.

Let me give you an example. Go to Genesis chapter 9, verses 18-27. We read that Noah got drunk and shamefully exposed himself. Ham told the rest of the family. He repeated that event and told the rest of the family. But in loving concern Ham’s two brothers discovered their father and covered up his shame.

You see, that’s what we do. “Love covers a multitude of sins.” It doesn’t condone it. It doesn’t cover it up in the sense that we don’t deal with it. But what it does is that it prevents us from talking about it to other people and expanding the implications of that sin to other people who don’t need to be impacted by it. It prevents slander. It prevents

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

gossip in the body of Christ. We don't do that because love covers up a number of sins. And what we do is that we earnestly love one another because we're anticipating the Lord's return. So, "love earnestly," Peter says. "Love fervently," Peter says.

Let me give you a couple of insights about this kind of love, how it implicates us. First of all, I think, love forgives. We need to imitate God in the completeness and swiftness of His forgiveness because love forgives. And when you forgive somebody it means this. You may still remember the act, but you don't hold it against them anymore.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You don't hold it against them anymore. When I say to somebody, "I forgive you," that means I am giving up my opportunity to hold that event against you anymore.

Now will I remember that sin? Probably. In fact, I know I will. I can tell you all of the sins that people have done to me the last fifty years. There's quite a litany of them. But I can't hold it against them anymore.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Because there is immediate, complete forgiveness. That's what it means to have complete forgiveness. It doesn't mean that you won't remember it anymore. It means this: that I won't hold it against you anymore. That's the completeness of forgiveness.

And so I can't say, "Look what you did last Tuesday at four o'clock." No, I'm not going to hold that event against you anymore. And fervently, love covers up a multitude of sins in the body of Christ. We need to do that for the protection of God's glory and for the sake of our being able to deal with that person's sin in his life by bringing balance to them.

Love avoids giving occasion to sin. Not only does love forgive, but I think that it avoids giving occasion to sin. We don't do certain things or talk about certain things that may incite sinful attitudes in other people. Don't talk about certain things that are going to incite sinful thoughts in somebody's life. Don't use words that are going to do that.

How often do we use colloquial words to describe something that might incite something in somebody else's life? Don't talk about smut! Don't talk about garbage to people, because what is that likely to do? It might incite sinful thoughts in them. Love doesn't do that!

Love not only forgives quickly and completely. Love also doesn't talk about things that might incite sinful thoughts in somebody else because you love that person enough to protect him. So watch what you talk about with people. "Love covers up a multitude of sins."

I think that love is quick to discern some positive quality to put on that fault in order to balance the scale so that we can work with that person in dealing with their sin and restore them and do that graciously.

Love rebukes with great tenderness. Yes, Don?

Don: Yeah. It says in 1 Corinthians 13 that "love does not rejoice in evil but rejoices with the truth." And sometimes I have to turn the news off because all it is is gossip basically. I think, for example, of what happened with President Clinton. I mean, how many weeks was that going on with him and Monica? You know, I had to turn it off

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

because people were rejoicing in this, even so-called conservatives were rejoicing in this. And “Oh, this is great! Look what’s happening to him! He deserves it!” No, love does not rejoice with evil.

Bruce: Amen to that. And sometimes, men, we have to be very, very careful of what we talk about and what we take in. What you take in you’re going to take out with the words that you say. I’m with Don. Sometimes I don’t watch the news very much anymore because all it is is a description of evil that’s going on in the world.

Now we need to be sensitive to the world. We need to be “in the world but not of the world.” So I’m not saying that we should become recluses. That’s not what I’m saying. All I’m saying is that you’ve got to be careful about what you take in in your spirit because you’re likely to give that out. And when you give that out that will cause somebody else to develop sinful thoughts.

We have a responsibility to one another because “love covers a multitude of sins.” Love is the motivation that prevents us from doing that. So love is quick to discern some positive quality.

Participant: Hey, Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, sir.

Participant: I think the events at the AME Zion Church in Charleston really showed that.

Bruce: Oh, my!

Participant: I mean that was an opportunity in all the culture wars and everything going back and forth, to see the power of love—

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: And the power of forgiveness. And everyone has stood up and taken notice that God’s light is shining in the darkness of that dreadful disease. And I think that as Christians, we should all learn from that event how love covers over a multitude of sins and doesn’t allow things to get out of control, but allows for healing. And a lot of good things are coming about as a result.

Bruce: The only people that didn’t catch that? The media. (*Laughter.*) They didn’t catch it. We did, because we know the cause of it. We know the source of it. It’s God’s marvelous grace. Forgiveness is complete and quick.

Notice that woman. She was so quick and so complete in saying, “In every core of my body I’m hurting. But I forgive. I must forgive him because that’s what will set me free. I’m no longer a victim when I am free, because I forgive.”

We understand that, but the media didn’t say anything about that. We shouldn’t even expect them to.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: We shouldn’t even expect them to. They don’t think the way that we do, men! We can’t expect them to. They can only act like idiots because that’s who they are! (*Laughter.*) Because that’s how they think. I guess that’s a hate comment. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: That’s an observation.

Bruce: That’s just my observation. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: What’s in a word? (*Laughter.*)

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

Bruce: One more thing about love that “covers a multitude of sins.” Love forgives. It avoids giving occasion of sinful thoughts to other people. It’s quick to discern the positive qualities. I think, also, that love rebukes with great tenderness. Did you ever have a sore or a blister on your body? As you cover it up, it could become deadly and more serious. It needs to be lanced, or it needs to be cut. But it needs to be done with tenderness so it can be cured.

Love also deals with rebukes but does it tenderly. So if we have to rebuke somebody because love covers up a bunch of sins, let us do that graciously and tenderly. We restore with a spirit of meekness, not with a spirit of anger. Restore with a spirit of meekness.

Peter says this. Look! Observe these three things—self-control, sober-mindedness, and your attitude towards prayer. And when you do that, practice these things.

The first thing to practice is fervent love, a strenuous, continuous effort to love one another for the cause of Christ.

The second thing he says to do is to be hospitable (verse 9.) “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

“Oh, you mean I have to have them come over tonight?” (*Laughter.*) “They didn’t have me come over. Why should they come here?” You see? Be hospitable without grumbling. That’s the critical issue.

Now what do we mean by hospitality? Hospitality in the early church literally means being friendly to strangers. Without hospitality the early church could not have survived. Traveling missionaries stayed in private homes. Peter stayed with Simon a tanner in Acts chapter ten. Paul stayed with Mnason of Cyrus, an early disciple, in Acts chapter 21. For two hundred years the church had no buildings. They met in large homes, like the house of Aquila and Priscilla in Romans chapter 16 verse 5.

You see, when you and I consider the end times, we are not to be recluses and sit back on our haunches and be excited about dates and times and do nothing. But we need to reach out to show our love for God by participating in hospitality without grumbling.

Let me give you some verses and insights into the Scripture about hospitality. Here’s a verse dealing with everyone. Romans 12, verse 13. “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

How about for the elders of the church? 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 2. “Now the overseer” (or elder) “must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.” Leaders need to demonstrate that. Hospitality is something elders should be doing. Yes, Bob?

Bob: Bruce, I just want to comment. You’ve taught us before that we’re to be aggressive responders, that we’re to take action when we see it. And in my journey, you’ve taught me to do this and I do it more often than OI used to. But I still have a problem. I don’t always do it with a joyful heart. That’s the piece that I’ve got to get through.

Bruce: Amen.

Bob: That’s the last piece that I’m struggling with.

Bruce: Without grumbling.

Bob: Yeah. I just don’t have a joyful heart.

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

Bruce: How do we do that? Let’s back up to what Peter said. “Be self-controlled. Be sober-minded.” Watch your prayer life and pray about it. That’s how we begin to prepare ourselves for the right response.

We need to show hospitality. Yes, please?

Participant: (*Unclear.*) I’ve heard it said that loving is giving and not expecting in return.

Bruce: That’s the heart of a servant—doing something for someone else and not expecting anything in return. Yes, sir?

Participant: Bruce, as we prepare to celebrate America’s 239th birthday, I want to thank you for cautioning us to be sober-minded, because my grandsons are in town and we’re going to have fireworks and we need to practice safety first. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: Amen to that. (*Laughter.*)

What do you do to visitors in your church when you see them? Do you wait for somebody else to greet them? One thing I appreciate about Sig.

Participant: Oh, boy!

Sig: Can you say that again? (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Not two, but one.

Bruce: It’s only one, Sig. (*Laughter.*)

Notice how he greets the visitors.

Participants: Amen!

Bruce: Do we do that in our churches? When you see somebody you don’t know, do you say, “Oh, Betty Lou will go visit them. I don’t have to. John will go do that. I don’t have to do that.” No, you see, part of our responsibility is to be hospitable. That’s a demonstration of the body of Christ.

When I was pasturing my church in Chicago, in my first couple of years I was trying to teach my congregation how to do this to develop the attitude in them. So I made comments. I would say, “If you’re a visitor in our church today, we are such a friendly church that I would venture that before you get out the door, two or three people will invite you out to lunch.” (*Laughter.*) Well, I took a lot of people out to lunch the first year. (*Laughter.*)

And then, all of a sudden, the congregation began to realize this. “Maybe I ought to do that.” And people would come. We had a whole group of people who would say, “If you’re a visitor, would you like to have lunch with us today, just to visit and get to know you and invite you to come back to our church?” That’s practicing hospitality.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And after eighteen months, one of the things that helped us grow in numbers and expand in numbers was the hospitality to people who came for the first time. Two things people are most interested in asking me questions as the senior pastor are these. Why are your people so hospitable? And why don’t you take up a collection?

See, we never took up a collection. We just had baskets at the head of the church and said, “Look. Giving is just a response to what God has given you. If God has done something in your life and you would like to use it for the kingdom of God, there’s a

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

basket and you can just give as the Lord leads you.” They were more interested in why we were so hospitable than in why we didn’t take up a collection. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, do you think that hospitality ends with just people that are new? Or do you think that hospitality should be reaching out into our friendships, into our marriages, into our relationships?

Bruce: Absolutely. It starts with being hospitable to strangers but carries on to all aspects of our lives.

Let me give you a couple of other references. I gave you Romans 12:13 and 1 Timothy 3:2. How about Titus 1:8? “Elders, rather, must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.” Again, for leaders, that’s something that church leaders ought to be doing. We need to be hospitable. If they’re not hospitable, they’re not qualified! Do you realize that? If they’re not hospitable, they’re not qualified to be elders. They might be qualified to be the CEO’s of their company, but not to be elders in the church because they don’t have the qualifications of being hospitable, which is one of the demands upon a leader of the church.

Here’s the significance. Hebrews chapter 13, verse 2. “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” Offer hospitality to one another. As you wait for the Lord’s return, be hospitable.

And the last thing I want to call your attention to is that Peter says to practice this, not only fervent love and hospitality but also service to the body. Look at verses 10 and 11.

We need to be excellent stewards of the gifts that God gives us. And he gives us two examples. “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards.”

The spiritual gifts that God gives us, men, you and I are stewards of that. God owns them. The gift is for His glory and the benefit of the church, not for your reputation and personality development. It’s not for your marketability. It’s for the glory of God and for the sake of the body of Christ. That’s why you’re given spiritual gifts, and he says to be good stewards of them. And he gives us a couple examples.

Notice what he says first of all. “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.”

He gives two examples, one of speaking and one of serving. We don’t offer our own opinions. We speak, literally, utterances which come from God’s mouth. That’s what we speak. If you’ve been given the gift of teaching, the gift of proclaiming truth, then make sure you’re proclaiming that which God says, not your own opinion.

Participant: Amen!

Bruce: My opinion is irrelevant and so is yours. The only thing that matters is what God has told us to say through the Scripture.

That’s why I take so seriously that one day the Lord is going to ask me my motive for saying that. That drives me up a wall sometimes because I have to check my own motives. And sometimes when I leave this session with you men, I say, “Lord, were my motives correct? Did I say the right things with the right motives? If I didn’t, then

“Living For His Glory While Awaiting His Return”

remove those thoughts from those men’s minds so they’re not contaminated by my improper attitude.”

You see, if you’re going to speak this, speak what God says, not your own opinion.

Secondly, in serving, we do it with a dependency upon God’s help by the Spirit. Notice what he says. “As one who serves, by the strength that God supplies.” That word *supplies* is a very, very interesting word. It means lavish provision of strength. God will give you a lavish provision of strength when you serve for His glory.

So what do we preserve? Sober-mindedness, self-control and an attitude of prayer. What do we practice? We practice fervent love. We practice hospitality. And we practice service to the body under the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: May God be pleased to use those aspects in our lives. And together we can say this. “Come, Lord Jesus!”

Men: Amen!

Bruce: Come, Lord Jesus! Let’s pray. Father, thank You for clarifying the muddle that we make of eschatology. May we realize our responsibilities to preserve and to practice these things that you’ve preserved in the Scripture for Your glory and our good. May we pray, Lord, that we would prepare ourselves to please You in order to fulfill the Scriptures. And we say all of that together. All of us say, “Thank You,” and “Amen. Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus!”

Men: Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

Participant: Thank you, Bruce! (*Applause.*)