

“The End of all Things is at Hand”

1 Peter 4:7–8

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Leading verses: 1. Peter 4:7-8

1Pet 4:7-8: But the end of all things is drawn nigh: be sober therefore, and be watchful unto prayers; but before all things having fervent love among yourselves, because love covers a multitude of sins.

It may be well questioned whether we are as deeply conscious of the instability of things around and of the approaching end as were the early Christians. At the close of the year, or of any other period of time, we may be impressed with it; but it is very doubtful if we live daily with the thought that all things are rapidly heading up for the Lord’s interposition in power to establish His kingdom. The fact and the teaching of Scripture we are acquainted with, for the subject is often dwelt upon in conversation and in the ministry of the Word; and yet, somehow or another, we relapse into counting upon the continuance of all things as they have been from the beginning of the creation. The effect is that we cease to be actively looking for the return of our blessed Lord and Saviour, that we lose our pilgrim character, and contract the colour of the scene through which we are passing. There are few, we trust, who would dispute this, for on every hand the sad spectacle is seen of Christians with their hearts upon advancement, acquisition, and aggrandisement in this world, so that to be worldly is no longer a reproach even amongst Christians. A brief consideration therefore of the attitude and conduct of the early saints in regard to these things may be used to recall us to the reality of our departure and declension.

It is true that Peter writes to the “sojourners of the dispersion,” that is, to the believing Jews who were scattered through various provinces of Asia Minor. But they were Christians, and their very circumstances did but help to portray, to bring out into relief, the two characteristics that attach to all Christians, namely, that they were strangers and pilgrims. (See 1Pet 2:11.) They were strangers because, as with ourselves, they had here no continuing city, inasmuch as their home was on high; and they were pilgrims, or sojourners, because they were on their journey to the home for which they waited, and into which they would be introduced on the Lord’s return. Such being their character, it was, as long as they were true to it, an encouragement to be reminded that the end of all things was at hand. It helped them to gird up the loins of their mind, to be sober, and to hope to the end for the grace that was to be brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1Pet 1:13.) In the next epistle likewise, speaking of the coming of the day of the Lord, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, the elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein be burned up, he presses upon them in view of these things, with great solemnity, the question, What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

The same sense of the uncertainty of the continuance of the present system of things is very markedly expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is more there in contrast with the unchanging Christ, but it is still there, and again and again pressed home upon those to whom the epistle was addressed. “They [the heavens] shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.” Again, in another aspect, the apostle writes, “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry”

(Heb 10:36-37); and again he recalls them to God’s promise, “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.” There is indeed scarcely an epistle in which Paul does not bring before us the speedy coming of our Lord, and as preparatory to the pouring out of the wrath to come upon this poor world. Even then it was the “last days,” and John can write, “Little children, it is the last time” – “hour” is the word he uses, albeit he may signify a period; still it shows the light in which he regarded the day in which he lived. Whether Peter therefore, Paul, or John, the testimony is the same, that the end of all things is at hand. Unless, then, we have the sense of this in our souls, if our walk and conduct be not governed by this conviction, we are not, in so far, in communion with the mind of the Spirit of God.

Let us then enquire what should be the moral influence of this knowledge upon our souls. To answer the question we will not, on this occasion, travel beyond the scripture at the head of this paper. Peter then says, “Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer,” or, as it really is, prayers. By “sober” is meant that quietness and gravity of mind, that solemnity of feeling, which is produced by the Spirit of God in the hearts of those who enter into the character of the approaching end of all things. It is, on the other side, a mind freed from the intoxicating influences of this scene, and thus marked by an absence of all levity, and by the possession of that subduedness and reverence which flow from walking before God in the sense of the shortness of the present period, and of the coming judgments. The Lord’s own words may be cited in the same connection: “Take heed to yourselves,” He said to His disciples, “lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. ... Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” And it will be noticed that the Lord, even as Peter, presses constant prayer upon His disciples. In Peter it is “prayers,” showing, we cannot doubt, that he had the united prayers of the saints in his mind. How much need to remember his exhortation! Valuable as teaching or exhortation are in their respective places, in the prospect of the end of all things, if realized in the soul, prayers would be felt by all to be more suitable. It would be so if the end of life were before us, and much more will it be so in the contemplation of the dissolution of all things. We may well ask ourselves if we watch sufficiently unto prayers, watch against every hindrance to our being together for this end, and watch to lay hold of every opportunity for pouring out our hearts together in the presence of God.

One other thing the apostle emphasizes: “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” This exhortation clearly reveals that he has the saints in their mutual relationships in view, that he thinks of them as a company called out of the world, and indeed not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world. And the Lord also before His departure enjoined His disciples to love one another as He had loved them. Likewise the apostle desires that beyond everything they should be distinguished by mutual fervent love. This shows that Peter, no less than John, had drunk in, and lived in, the remembrance of his Lord’s exhortations before He departed to the Father, and that he was now led of the Spirit to write to his fellow-pilgrims, and to press them home upon their hearts, in view of the end of all things, on the ground, as he says, that love shall cover the multitude of sins. God’s love has “covered” the multitude of our sins, and that same love, acting through us in the power of the Spirit, will cover the sins of our brethren. In the absence of the manifestation of brotherly love, and when our hearts are chilled, instead of the love which is

not easily provoked, which imputeth no evil, which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1Cor 13), we become suspicious, harsh, and censorious; and then envy and strife springing up, there follow confusion and every evil work. Let us then lay to heart this injunction of the apostle’s, and especially now that so many premonitions of the end of all things are appearing on every hand, so that we may be marked by this fervent love, and thus be ever striving after unity and its expression in the circle of our fellowship.

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