

15. Four and One

5/27/2004

When we studied about the rapture in Matt 24 on several Sunday mornings ago, we have learned that God made all the generations to think the rapture would happen in their very generations for the sake of readiness. We, too, believe that we are the final generation. In my opinion, there are many great reasons why we can say that we are that generation which will experience the rapture of the church. We will get to that in more details in a moment.

Instead of beating around the bush, Apostle Peter tells us directly in four commands for one goal. He wants us to learn and practice, so that we can be ready for anything.

A. STARTING WITH A WARNING

1Pet. 4:7a But the end of all things is at hand;

Two thousand years ago, Peter thought that the end is near. This is one of the areas that skeptics would go haywire. They say, "Yeah, Christians have been saying that the end is coming all time. Maybe it will go on another two thousand years." Maybe so. After two thousand years of Jesus' birth, how much more the time is ready for that curtain call, the coming of the Lord!

Many thought that Nero or Hitler were the antichrist. They were two of antichrists, not "the" antichrist. Several prophecies had to be fulfilled for the antichrist to show up his ugly face.

1) Israel had to become a nation again according to the Word in Ezekiel 37.

From Rome destroyed Israel in 70 A.D. until 1948, there was no such a nation called "Israel" under the sun. There were many Jews living in just about any country around the world. But God brought the whole nation back together in the original place just as He prophesied.

2) According to Daniel in the Word of God, men's knowledge had to be increased and people would go to and fro.

Should I remind you "Internet", "E-mail", "E-Commerce", and traveling a half way around the world in 12 hours or less? The mankind even try to be a creator like God by using DNA to create another being, but without a spirit.

3) The Word says that people become more exceedingly wicked and violent in latter days.

They defy against God's truth and His Son. If you don't believe me, just watch 6 o'clock news. By the way, for your comfort, Tucson is the leading city in crime per capita in the nation. It will be a matter of time for those criminals to move down to Sahuarita and Green Valley to contaminate these peaceful towns.

4) The rapture must happen before the antichrist reveals his identity.

2 Thess 2:3-12 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be

revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

What can we learn about the end time?

Jesus told us about the end time:

Matt. 24:3-8 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Apostle Paul also warns us about the end time:

1Tim. 4:1-6 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

Doing dumb things

Often we hear of sincere people who go "off balance" because of an unbiblical emphasis on prophecy or a misinterpretation of prophecy. There are people who set dates for Christ's return, contrary to His warning.

There is a tremendous amount of fascination about the identity of the antichrist. As a matter of fact, many people come up with their own formulas and to guess who the antichrist is. For those people, I have this question: "Why do you want to waste time to look for the antichrist?" He is a scum bucket. He is not worthy of our time and efforts. But Jesus IS worthy of our time. Spend that time to seek Jesus' way and His heart. You will be richly rewarded.

Living with consciousness of the last day

As I've mentioned this before, throughout the church history, the church lived with consciousness of the last day. You might think that you are going to live a healthy and wealthy life. Our days are limited.

Ps. 39:4 "Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am.

We need to make each day worthwhile for the Lord. Each day is given to us by God. We should never take it for granted, but to be thankful that He chooses us to use us in His master plan. He not only gives us another breath to take, but also His mercy is new every morning to forgive us from our sins.

B. COMMAND NO. 1 - PRAY HARD

1Pet. 4:7b therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

We need to pray with sound judgement and self-control. We must give ourselves to serious prayer. As we see the weight of eternity rushing towards us, we dare not take the need for prayer lightly. We must not only give ourselves to watchful prayer, primarily having our hearts and minds watching and ready for the return of Jesus Christ, but also watching ourselves and watching this world, measuring our readiness for Jesus' coming. Are you praying for each other in our church?

C. COMMAND NO. 2 - LOVE FERVENTLY

1Pet. 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

1) Love is the badge of a believer

We need to love one another as the Word tell us to do. Not just putting up with another. Love is the badge of a believer in this world. Especially in times of testing and persecution, Christians need to love one another and be united in heart.

When Peter says, "love will cover a multitude of sins.", it was coming from his own experience with Jesus. After he denied Jesus for three times, he was crushed. Yet, Jesus reinstated him as one of His own and encouraged him to go on.

2) Fervent means 'strained'

The word "fervent" comes from the Greek word *ektené*. Literally, it means "strained." It is used of athletes straining to reach the tape or clear the bar. We see these track runner running toward to the finishing tape and he literally runge himself to the tape with everything he got. It speaks of eagerness and intensity. Christian love is something we have to work at, just the way an athlete works on his skills. It is not a matter of emotional feeling, though that is included, but of dedicated will.

3) Christian love is forgiving

Christian love is forgiving. Peter quoted from Proverbs 10:12.

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.

This verse is alluded to in James 5:20 and 1 Corinthians 13:4 and 7. Love does not condone sin. Because, if we love somebody, we will be grieved to see him sin and hurt himself and others. Rather, love covers sin in that love motivates us to hide the sin from others and not spread it abroad.

Genesis 9:18-27 Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated. And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said:

"Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren." And he said: "Blessed be the Lord, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant."

4) Where there is hatred, there is malice.

Where there is hatred, there is malice. And malice causes a person to want to tear down the reputation of his enemy. This leads to gossip and slander. Sometimes we try to make our gossip sound "spiritual" by telling people things "so they might pray more intelligently."

Nothing is more disruptive to the unity of the body than Christians who are stirred up against one another and causing strife. Nothing is a poorer witness. Mahatma Gandhi once said: "I like your Christ, but I don't like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ." What is Christ like? He is characterized by forgiveness.

An insightful person once said, "We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive."

D. COMMAND NO. 3 - BE HOSPITABLE TO ONE ANOTHER

1Pet. 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

We should notice that in "ONE ANOTHER" does not give any exception of those who are not so friendly and lovely. Yes, that is including grumpy ones.

What kind of hospitality are we talking about around our neighborhoods? Getting to know our neighbors and let them see Jesus in our lives. Yes, hospitality requires our time and expense. God will help us on that.

E. COMMAND NO. 4 - SERVE ONE ANOTHER

1Pet. 4:10-11 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1) Jesus showed them by His example

On the night of the last supper, Jesus' disciples were arguing who is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. I am sure that Peter reminded all of them that he is the main spoke person, and John and James reminded the group that they are the sons of thunder nicknamed by Jesus.

In the midst of all this arguing, Jesus, without a word, got up and started to wash His disciples' feet. After washing their feet, Jesus told them to be the greatest in the kingdom, he should be the servant of all. Jesus didn't rebuke them for wanting to be the greatest. Actually, He showed them how.

2) Speaking and doing by His power

We must notice two very important points in the Apostle Peter's teaching:

v11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies

When we speak, it shouldn't be our own opinions and philosophies about life. Rather it should be "the oracles of God." It means that it should be the Word of God.

The things we do should not be perspiration which means we generate with our own strength, but the inspiration which means the ability and strength which God supplies.

F. ONE GOAL

We need to serve one another with the gifts from God, so that God gets the glory, not us. If it was done by our strength and resources, we would take glory instead of God.

In several places in NT, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are mentioned: 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. Let's make one thing very clear. The gifts of the Holy Spirit is for the glory of God, not to show off how many gifts or what kind of gift you have. One thing I won't allow in the service is that anyone try to show off spiritual gifts for his or her own exaltation.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) When we keep His glory uppermost in our minds, it's amazing how much else falls into place.

Since He gets the glory, we're more comfortable leaving the results with Him in His hands and in His time.

2) Each Christian has at least one spiritual gift that he must use to the glory of God and the building up of the church.

We are stewards of God's provisions for us. God has entrusted these gifts to us that we might use them for the good of His church. He even gives us the spiritual ability to develop our gifts and be faithful servants of the church.

There are speaking gifts and there are serving gifts, and both are important to the church. Not everybody is a teacher or preacher, though all can be witnesses for Christ. There are those "behind-the-scenes" ministries that help to make the public ministries possible. God gives us the gifts, the abilities, and the opportunities to use the gifts, and He alone must get the glory.