

- I. I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
 - A. I Peter 4:7 . . . The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.
 - B. Pray

- II. Sound Judgment and Sober Spirit for the Purpose of Prayer
 - A. Beliefs about the end times since the early days of the church
 1. Within a short time following Christ's ascension, it was believed by most of His followers and new converts that Jesus was going to return soon. In fact, some were saying that He would return approximately thirty-three years after leaving, for that was the number of years He lived on the earth before dying, rising from the dead, and ascending into Heaven.
 2. From those earliest days of the church, it was also taught that since Christ's return was coming soon, Christian's should devote themselves to living a godly life, for two important reasons:
 - a. First, no one should meet Christ – face-to-face – ill-prepared for the meeting, and living a godly life from this day forward is the best preparation one can make. John wrote about this in 1 John 3:2-3 . . . Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [3] And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.
 - b. Second, OT prophecy and Jesus' teaching made it clear that the time leading up to Christ's return would be trying at best, and terrible at worst, and the best way to remain faithful to Christ during such times was to nurture a strong faith and solid allegiance to Christ now. And this is best done by pursuing holiness, like God's holiness, in all our behavior from this day forward.
 3. James, John, and Paul affirm what I have just said, and their affirmations are found in three scripture passages dealing with the end times.
 - a. Romans 13:11-14 . . . Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer

to us than when we believed. [12] The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

- b. James 5:7-9 . . . Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. [8] You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. [9] Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.
 - c. I John 2:18 . . . Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.
4. The point here is that if we are going to remain faithful to our Lord and Savior during the end times – or any trial or time of tribulation – we must nurture strong faith, godly values, critical thinking, keen observation skills, a practical understanding of scripture, a calm attitude, and a good sense of realism so that we can remain faithful to the end during the worst of times.
 - a. And of course, we must anchor our faith in God’s nature, His word, and His revealed will.
 - b. Therefore, Peter says two of the qualities we will find very helpful are sound judgment and a sober spirit – both of which will enable us to pray wisely and specifically leading up to and during those days.

B. What the end times are predicted to be like

1. According to Jesus’ prophetic words about the end times and what we read in the book of Revelation, it is understood that the end times will be hard times for all humanity. But in addition, it will include a more universal persecution of Christians than has happened in the past or is happening now.
2. In Matthew 24:3-13, Jesus said that at the beginning of the end times, many will claim to be Jesus Christ, and will do their best to mislead even Christians into following them. There will be an increase in wars and rumors of pending wars – between people groups within

a single country, and between nations. Jesus went on to say that there will be famines and earthquakes in some places.

- a. After these kinds of happenings get a good start, Christians will begin to be hated, persecuted, and even put to death, on an international basis.
 - b. During this time of persecution, many Christians will fall away from the faith, and even turn against one another.
 - c. False prophets and respected preachers will come forward and mislead the church concerning what is happening, why it is happening, and how we Christians ought to respond.
 - d. Lawlessness, the world over, will increase, and love for one another and between one another will noticeably decrease.
3. In Matthew 24:22-24, Jesus said that unless those days had been cut short, no one would be alive at the end of them. And during those days, people will claim that Christ has returned and can be found in this place or that place. In addition to that, false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even God's people.
 4. In Revelation 8:6-12, we read that a third of the earth will be burned up, and a third of the trees will be burned up, and all the green grass will be burned up. A third of the sea will become blood, and a third of the creatures which are in the sea will die; and a third of the ships will be destroyed. A third of the waters will become bitter, and many will die from drinking the bitter water. A third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars will go dark – effecting daylight and nighttime.
 5. And finally, Jesus said in Matthew 24:36-39, that the time of His return is unknown to anyone other than God, including the angels, and even Jesus himself. Therefore, many will disregard the prophecy and the signs of Christ's coming so that they will be caught off guard in the same way many disregarded Noah's warning and were caught off guard when the flood began.

C. So what is the point of all this?

1. Those whose faith is weak, whose allegiance to God is inconsistent, and who treat holiness as more optional than necessary – those kinds of religious folks, be they Christians or not, are not likely to endure these end times to the end of their life or to the end of the end times, which ever comes first. And if they pray during these days, it is

- improbable that they will be asking for whatever they need to strengthen their faith and treasure God so as to endure to the end.
2. Those who see God as preventing them from enjoying life because He is a prude in relation to sin, and who see God as a mean old judge who gets some kind of sick pleasure from punishing sinners, who see God as someone who could prevent hard times, wars, and disasters such as famines, droughts, earthquakes, wild fires, floods, and the like, but doesn't, and who see God as not caring about them because He isn't doing enough to make their lives better, will be the ones easily misled into following the false Christs and false prophets. And if they pray, it is probable they will be asking for easier times, more earthly goods, or whatever else their body needs to continue on, rather than giving proper thought to what their soul needs in order to walk with God through these times.
 3. Those who reject God and God's truth, will live in and some even through these last days just like those who lived through the years that Noah was building the Ark, died in the flood as the Ark floated away. And if they pray, it will be too late.
- D. This brings us back to I Peter 4:7, where Peter tells us that the end of all things is near; therefore, we are to be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.
1. Sound Judgment: speaks of being levelheaded, rational in our reasoning, competent and thorough in our thinking so that we are able to accurately interpret events in light of God's word and God's will, and make godly choices in response.
 - a. The opposite of being of sound judgment is to interpret and respond to circumstances and events in an irrational or in a fear based or in an emotionally based way, leading to unwise and even foolish choices and responses that work against us and the good of those around us.
 - b. Unfortunately, we are prone to careless thinking, to treating assumptions as fact, to a superficial interpretation of events, and to giving too little time to learning how to think and to properly preparation for dealing with difficult times.
 - c. Therefore, if we Christians are going to be of sound judgment for the purpose of prayer, that is, for the purpose of praying more specifically – as opposed to making generalized prayers, and praying more wisely – as opposed to praying almost thoughtlessly, then we must start now to do what is required to build the

strength of faith, the proper understanding of God, and the quality of thinking that is required to be of sound judgment.

2. Sober Spirit: speaks of being solemn, sincere, thoughtful in demeanor, attitude, and intention, as opposed to being careless, negligent, insincere, hypocritical, fake, or disloyal in intention.
 - a. You might get a clearer picture of what I am describing in relation to being sober of spirit by considering these words from Ecclesiastes 7:2 . . . It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.
 - b. Or, to give you another example, consider the difference between musing about something and being amused.
 - (1) The word muse means to think deeply and to ponder what you are thinking about over a period of time.
 - (2) The word amuse comes from the root word muse with an “A” attached to the front end. But that “A” completely changes the meaning of the word, for the “A” adds our word “NOT” top the word muse, which means “NOT TO THINK DEEPLY OVER A PERIOD OF TIME.” This is why we use the word amuse to describe entertainment or activities that please our senses but require little or no thought on our part.
 - c. My point here is that if the idea in having a sober spirit is found in Ecclesiastes 7:2 and in the word MUSE, and it is, then that means we are not naturally prone to having, or even wanting a sober spirit.
 - (1) Most of us would rather have amusing moments and even amusing hours and days than spending our time musing our way through life.
 - (2) But Peter is telling us here that musing or a sober spirit makes for far better praying. And far better praying is essential for facing and remaining faithful through the end times, and for being part of God’s larger purposes during the trials and tribulations expected during the end times.

E. For the purpose of prayer:

1. How important is prayer to living a godly life in the face of trials, tribulation, and even persecution?
 - a. Peter puts prayer first in his list of Christian qualities and activities important for remaining faithful to the end, and especially as we face the soon coming of Christ.

- b. And notice the items in Peter's list following prayer:
 - (1) fervent love,
 - (2) hospitality,
 - (3) using spiritual gifts to serve one another and speak God's truth to each other .
2. Jesus said we ought to pray always and not lose heart if the answer does not come as quickly as we would like (Luke 18:1). And He told His disciples to be vigilant and to pray so that they would not be overcome by temptation, because though their spirit was willing to do what is right, their flesh was weak (Matthew 26:41).
3. The value Paul puts on prayer is such that he exhorts us to pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17), and to pray at all times (Ephesians 6:18).
4. You see, prayer is not only for asking things from God, it is for talking with God, and holding tight to God, and walking through life's circumstances hand-in-hand with God, and prayer is for simply being in the presence of God even if you have no request or longing other than enjoying or gaining comfort from His presence.
5. Now I want to make clear that prayer is not a substitute for pursuing holiness in all our behavior. But on the other hand, seeking holiness in all our behavior will not be accomplished without a lot of prayer. But you will find that the more you die to self and your flesh, the more you will see the importance of prayer, and the more you will experience the intimate presence of God in prayer, and the more you will intimately experience and enjoy and find comfort in God's presence.

III. Conclusion

- A. So, value prayer as you ought, but also value being of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer so that your prayers are of such quality that both you and God get from your praying as much as is humanely possible to get in this life.