



DISCIPLES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Four instructions for exiles awaiting the end

By Dr. Gary G. Hoag

WHEN PETER, A DISCIPLE OF JESUS, addressed the first of his two letters to Jewish believers dispersed throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, he referred to them as “exiles.” They had been displaced from their earthly dwellings, driven from their homeland and scattered among pagans who were largely hostile to Christianity.

I refer to them as “exiles awaiting the end” not because they were doomsday preppers, but because Peter told them “*the end of all things is near*” (1 Pet. 4:7). How should they live? His marching orders for the exiles (and us) appear in 1 Peter 4:1-11. This text contains four instructions about personal accountability for application today.

1. Embrace Suffering. This point is personal and painful, but with the pain comes great gain! We are on this earth for purposes far greater than fulfilling fleshly desires. The exiles needed to remember this as they found themselves in some pretty crazy places. We do too!

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough

time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit” (1 Pet. 4:1-6).

The exiles (and we with them) have been saved from self-destruction for a higher purpose: to live out God’s will. Notice what happens to sin when we adopt Christ’s attitude toward suffering. When a person wrongs us, the pagan response is retaliation. Instead, Christ calls us to forgive. When we do, we put an end to sin. Think about it. In forgiving instead of fighting back, we suffer the wrong the person committed, and in so doing, end the cycle.

Jesus didn’t avoid suffering. He endured it. Sometimes verbal, other times physical, but it was always painful. Elisabeth Elliot notes: “We want to avoid suffering, death, sin, ashes. But we live in a world crushed and broken and torn, a world God himself visited to redeem. We receive his poured-out life, and being allowed the high privilege

of suffering with him, may then pour ourselves out for others" (*A Lamp unto My Feet*, Regal, 1985). The watching world takes notice when we welcome suffering. It's living proof of the gospel.

Sadly, many Christians try to avoid suffering at all costs. When each of us gives an account to God someday, the ones who focused on dodging suffering will have to report self-preservation and the pursuit of comfort. Only recently have I grasped the wisdom of embracing suffering.

- **Are you armed with the attitude of Christ toward suffering?**

2. Wake up and Pray. Peter uses strong language because time is short, and the spiritual battle has intensified. *"The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray"* (1 Pet. 4:7). This means making time in our clogged calendars to talk with and listen to God. Personal prayer is not about asking God to give us what we want. I have learned the best way to hear God is to sit in silence.

John Piper explains: "Until you believe that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for. Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission" (*Let the Nations Be Glad!*, Baker, 2013). We've never been closer to the end than we are today. It's crunch time. We need to wake up and pray!

- **What does prayer look like in your life?**

3. Love Others Deeply and Hospitably. Christ fulfilled the law for us and gave us one command: Love. Peter relays this central teaching and adds that we must love with the right attitude. *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling"* (1 Pet. 4:8–9).

Loving others deeply is hard. Those closest to us tend to step on our toes, don't they? Guess what? We get to forgive them. In reminding the exiles (and us) that love covers a multitude of sins, Peter likely recalled that Jesus had taught him to forgive *"seventy times seven"* or 490 times (Matt. 18:21–22, NASB). Consider putting a sign up at home or work with "490" written on it as a reminder!

Hospitality moves us one step further. It implies that when people enter our "space" we put their needs ahead of our own. How did the exiles do? Selfless service became the reputation of the first Christians. Tertullian reports by the end of the second century A.D. that the Romans often observed: "See how these Christians love one another." There was nothing on earth like Christian love and hospitality!

Could such a widespread movement overtake the world again? Shane Claiborne suggests, "When we truly love our neighbor as ourselves, capitalism as we see it today won't be possible, but Marxism won't be necessary. What we are talking about is a movement of people loving their neighbor as themselves" (*"Generosity in Community"* in *Giving: Growing Joyful Stewards in Your Congregation*, ESC, 2016). It would require each of us to do our part.

- **Are you committed to loving others deeply and hospitably?**

"CAN GOD TRUST YOU?"

4. Use Your Gift to Dispense God's Grace. Peter concludes this section saying that each steward has received *a gift* (singular) of the Spirit to participate in the dispensing of God's grace. This connotes that no one person has all the gifts. Each of us has something to contribute as we collaborate on mission.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 4:10–11).

Ever been on a team where one person does not do their part? It weakens the whole team. See why accountability is so important! As Dwight Robertson puts it, "You are God's plan A and there's no plan B" (*You Are God's Plan A*, David C. Cook, 2010). Some speak God's words, and some serve with God's strength. Each one of us plays a part in making known God's undeserved favor to the world!

- **Are you using your gift as a faithful steward to dispense God's grace?**

"DISCIPLES OF ACCOUNTABILITY"

In my travels as ECFA International Liaison, I have met many saints who care deeply about personal accountability. For example, Angelito Gabriel of CCTA (Christian Council for Transparency and Accountability, Philippines) asked this question to an audience of church and ministry administrators: "Can God trust you?" What would your response be?

On another trip, Valentine Gitoho of AfCAA (African Council for Accreditation and Accountability) stirred my heart when she proclaimed: "As God's servants, we must be disciples of accountability."

Let's be "disciples of accountability," shall we? Embrace suffering. Wake up and pray. Love others deeply and hospitably. And use our gifts to dispense God's grace. The world is watching. More importantly, God sees everything and someday will reward the faithful when they give an account. ●

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