

## 1Peter 4:7-11

### Good Stewards of Manifold Grace

*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God – v. 10*

Whenever I think of a good steward there's a scene that comes to mind from the Old Testament. It's the character Joseph in the book of Genesis. Because his brothers were envious of him they took him and were about to kill him but decided instead to sell him into slavery. He was, after all, their brother, so they reasoned.

As a slave Joseph ended up in the household of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guard (Gen. 39:1). Even though he was treated unfairly by his brothers and did not deserve the punishment of slavery, yet Joseph devoted himself to serving the God who was with him. There's a statement about Joseph that occurs twice in Gen. 39. I've referred to it on numerous occasions because of the setting in which you find this statement. Listen to the words of Gen. 39:2 *And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*

Do you get the drift of that verse? Can you see the irony in that verse? Joseph was a prosperous man, we're told. And yet in the same verse in the setting of the verse we find Joseph as a slave, a slave in the house of his master the Egyptian. He's a prosperous man and yet he's a slave. How do we account for that? The only way you can account for that is note what it says in the first part of the verse which is that *the LORD was with Joseph*. Do you get the lesson now from such a statement? If the Lord is with you then you too are prosperous, no matter what your circumstances are.

And because Potiphar has the wit to see that the Lord was with Joseph he commits the running of his household to Joseph and Joseph, as a good steward, oversees the household of Potiphar. Now if you know the story of Joseph and you know chp. 39 from the book of Genesis then you know that things go from bad to worse for Joseph. Potiphar's wife casts her eye on Joseph and when Joseph refuses to be seduced by her she falsely accuses him of the very sin that she was guilty of. And so we find Joseph going from being an exalted slave in Potiphar's house to a prisoner in an Egyptian dungeon.

And in the setting of that Egyptian dungeon we read again of Joseph in Gen. 39: 21-25 *But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. 23 The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.*

You would think that Joseph would have had every right to be angry and bitter and to feel sorry for himself. It wouldn't be hard to envision him engaging in the hard labor of a prison with a scowling look on his face being driven by the negative energy of deep resentment over how unfairly he's been treated first by his brothers then by Potiphar's

wife, but we don't find him that way do we? Instead we find him knowing the Lord's presence and finding contentment in the Lord's presence so much so that he could devote himself to being a good steward with everything that was committed to him, whether it be the household of a high ranking Egyptian Captain of the guard, or whether it be the oversight of lowly and despised criminals in an Egyptian dungeon. I get the impression that you just couldn't get this man down.

And I bring this character Joseph to your attention just now because the Christians that Peter is addressing are like Joseph, being subjected to all manner of persecution and fiery trials and yet Peter is calling on them to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. And through Peter's epistle, the Lord calls on you and me to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

So that's what I want to direct your attention to this morning – this exhortation from Peter to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. In a word:

### We Must be Good Stewards of the Manifold Grace of God.

How is this to be done? How do we become good stewards of the manifold grace of God? Consider with me first of all that we become good stewards of the manifold grace of God:

#### I. By Seeing it As Our Duty and Obligation

The point I want to drive home under this heading is that the exhortation applies to everyone. There are no exceptions. Notice how v 10 begins: *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Underscore the phrase *every man*. This applies to every man – i.e. to every man and woman and boy and girl that is a Christian. It's interesting to note here that in the original Greek text you don't find the definite article *the* in the phrase *the gift*. *As each has received a gift* (ESV); *As each one has received a special gift* (NAS) and in this translation the word *special* is in italics which means it's a word being supplied by the translators.

This is one of those verses that falls into the category of spiritual gifts. And the idea is that each person has received some spiritual gift. I'll come to that idea a little later on – the thing I'm wondering just now is why did the translators of the AV see fit to use that definite article and translate the phrase *every man hath received the gift*? And the thought that strikes me is just this: Could it be that the translators of the AV weren't so much taken up with spiritual gifts so much as they perhaps had in view that one very special and definite gift that is common to us all which is the gift of salvation?

It's interesting to take that word *gift* and trace it through the New Testament and note the things that are listed as definite gifts that we all have in common. In the book of Acts, for example, mention is made of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 2:38: *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Paul makes mention in Romans chp. 5 of the free gift which is obviously the gift of salvation. Ro 5:15 *But not as the offence, so also [is] the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, [which is] by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.*

In that same chapter he mentions the gift of righteousness: Ro 5:17 *For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)*

And in Ro 6:23 it's called the gift of eternal life: *For the wages of sin [is] death; but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* And in 2Co 9:15 Christ Himself is referred to as a gift: *Thanks [be] unto God for his unspeakable gift.*

These are gifts that we have all received. They are definite gifts. They are gifts that are bestowed by God's grace. They are the gifts that make up our so great salvation. And it is to those that have received these definite and particular gifts that Peter's exhortation is addressed. *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Have you received the gift of the Holy Ghost? Have you received the gift of eternal life? Have you received the gift of salvation, the gift of righteousness, the unspeakable gift of Christ Himself? If so, then this exhortation is for you. God has bestowed these invaluable gifts upon you with a definite aim in view which is that you become a good steward of the manifold grace of God.

And you'll notice from v. 10 that the realm in which this manifold grace is to be ministered is in the realm of God's people or Christ's followers. *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another.* This is how the church is meant to function. This is how the church tends to itself.

Paul gives a vivid illustration of this truth through the metaphor of the body in Eph. 4. I've often been struck with how vivid this illustration is and how inclusive it is when we read in Eph. 4:16 *From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

Every joint and every part – does that not correspond to the point that Peter is making when he writes *As every man hath received the gift.* The point that needs to be stressed, therefore, is that every follower of Christ has a vital part to contribute toward the increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Each member is vital. There is no such thing as a Christian who isn't important to the body of Christ. Some members of the body may be more visible; some members may given higher rank than others but every one has a contribution to make.

And often times that battle that must be fought and won in each and every heart is the battle to be convinced that you really do matter – you really are very important. In your humility you may be tempted to think otherwise but that’s why you have to be careful to distinguish between true humility and carnal humility which springs from the flesh and is spurred on by the devil.

So away with the notion that you don’t count or that you’re not important. Paul and Peter are in complete agreement that when it comes to the edifying of the body or the ministry of the manifold grace of God, everyone has something to contribute. And this leads to my next point. Not only must we see our duty and obligation to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God but:

## II. We Must See Our Peculiar Qualifications to be Good Stewards

And under this heading, now, I want to consider for a moment this idea of spiritual gifts. I read to you earlier a more literal rendering of our text, a rendering that leaves out the definite article. Listen to that reading again: *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace (ESV); As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (NAS). Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms (NIV).*

I think the context makes it clear that what Peter has in mind pertains to the same kind of spiritual gifts that Paul elaborates in 1Cor. 12. Peter doesn’t break it down in as great a detail as Paul does but he does break it down to speaking gifts and serving gifts. Look at v. 11 *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth.* In this statement you find what may be considered a good definition of a spiritual gift. Notice how Peter writes that it is *an ability which God giveth.*

The challenge comes to many Christians, then, in the exercise of determining your spiritual gift. In our membership application for our church we ask the question – *Do you have any peculiar gifts that you’re willing to utilize in the church?* The most common answer that we receive from most applicants for membership is – NO. And then there some times follows a statement that reads something like this – No, but I’ll do what I can. It brings to mind the unnamed woman in Mark 14 who brought the alabaster box of precious ointment and ointed the head of Jesus and when she came under criticism by Christ’s disciples the Lord Jesus defends her by saying *she hath done what she could* (Mk. 14:8).

I think that statement by our Lord probably provides the best kind of guidance you can find when it comes to the matter of your spiritual gift. I listened to a sermon on spiritual gifts by one well known preacher of our day and I really liked his approach. He broke out of the mold that usually has Christians examining themselves about what they feel they can or can’t do. Instead he focused on the way spiritual gifts are meant to function by calling attention to the example of Paul in Romans 1.

Listen to what Paul writes about his desire to visit the Christians who are at Rome. *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers* he writes in Rom. 1:9 *Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you* (1:10) and then in v. 11 he explains why it is that he wants to come to them: *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established* (v. 11). And then lest he leave them with the idea that his coming to Rome would be a one sided kind of affair he adds in v. 12 *That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*

He understands, you see, how the church functions. He understands that in the fellowship of the church each member has something to contribute so that there is a mutual benefit to each and every member. Now in order to understand spiritual gifts, it's important to note the purpose that they serve. And so look again at v. 11 *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.*

The Greek word for *established* is an interesting word. It's the word "στηρίζο" I may be guessing when I say this but I think it would be accurate to say that our word "steroid" probably is derived from this Greek word. And what does a steroid do? It strengthens you. This is what all the fuss is about in the world of sports. There are illegal and dangerous steroids that strengthen muscles but in the long run are damaging.

Well here is a legitimate steroid; it's a spiritual steroid and there are no negative side effects. Paul's desire was to strengthen the saints at Rome and to strengthen them spiritually. So when it comes to the matter of exercising spiritual gifts the thing to do is not to get all wound up internally trying to psyche yourself into some kind of ability you may or may not have. But rather look around you. It shouldn't be hard to discern that there are people around you that are in need. We all fit into that category. There are no exceptions to that. We are a needy people. The ones who would try to take exception to that are most likely the neediest people of all but their pride blinds them to their needs.

And as you look around you and consider your brothers and sisters in Christ then certain people will come to your mind who may bear particular needs. And the question to consider is this: *What can I do to strengthen or encourage that brother or sister in Christ?* It may be something as simple as a word to that person letting them that you'll pray for them. Or it may take the form even of silent empathy in simply arranging to spend time with that brother or sister. Job's friends, back in the book of Job, were at their best when they simply came to their needy and distressed friend and spent an entire week just being with him and empathizing with him. In that case it wasn't until Eliphaz decided that he had to speak and answer Job that their whole ministry degenerated into digging a pit for their friend which only deepened his anxiety and distress.

Maybe you perceive a brother or sister in Christ being tempted in such a way that he or she is about to do serious damage to themselves and so you warn them and by God's grace you're able to keep them from caving in to temptation. Well, there you go, then – that

becomes your spiritual gift. Or maybe you're able to encourage a brother or sister by sending them a card or having them to your home. Perhaps your gift is the gift of hospitality. Peter speaks about such a gift specifically in v. 9 *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.*

The point I'm trying to make just now is that rather than tying yourself in knots in your ongoing quest to figure out your spiritual gift, focus instead on needs you see in others and ways, even small ways – it doesn't have to be great things, it's better to be many small things, and then devote yourself to that ministry and in the process you'll discover things you can do and you may discover things that you may not be able to do as well as others.

You need to keep in mind that even though some Christians are better able to do certain things than some other Christians, that doesn't excuse us from obligations that are binding on us all. Some may be much better equipped to show hospitality than you. That doesn't excuse any of us from being hospitable. And some may be able to communicate more effectively than you – but that doesn't excuse you or any of us from obligation to communicate the gospel.

I think that when it comes to the exercise of spiritual gifts there's a danger to be avoided and there's a positive practical precept to follow. You should avoid trying to imitate someone else. There have been occasions when I've been given advice as to how I should deal with certain people in certain circumstances and there have been times when after considering that advice I've had to say to myself – No – I can't do it that way. I can picture the one giving the advice doing it that way but I'm not that person and for me to try to be that person just won't work because that's just not me.

So the danger to be avoided is the danger of trying to be someone that you're not. On the other side of the coin you should strive to be the best version of yourself that you can possibly be. That's a good prayer to take before the Lord, you know. *Lord, help me not to be someone you never meant for me to be but help me, rather, to be the best version of myself that I can be with your help and guidance.*

And by being needs focused instead of self focused your spiritual endowments will reveal themselves and will be manifested as you exercise them. You are gifted. Don't you dare dishonor God by thinking otherwise. He's the One who made you and if the exhortation to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God applies to everyone (and it does) then you are gifted. God made you the way He made you and He made you that way for a reason. Don't ever harbor the notion that God made you for the purpose of setting you aside so that others could be good stewards of the manifold grace of God but all you do is bury your gift the way the person in the parable of the talents buried his gift. In the end people of that description only prove that they're not really Christians at all.

So we're to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. How do we do it? We do it by recognizing that the exhortation applies to everyone – bar none. And we do it by discerning our peculiar qualifications to minister to each other. Let me add a word briefly

about where our focus must be in the exercise of our mutual ministries by pointing out to you that we become good stewards of the manifold grace of God:

### III. By Keeping in Mind Our Ultimate Aim in All Things

That ultimate aim is given to us in the second half of v. 11. Notice what it says there: *that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

This is the end for which we live. This is why we were created and this is why you were redeemed, that you might glorify and praise Jesus Christ and be used for the extension of His dominion. This text would be a fitting proof text for our very first shorter catechism question – What is the chief end of man? – Man’s chief end is to glorify Christ and to enjoy Him forever.

I’ve thumped this question and answer often and I’ll thump it again today since it pertains to the very purpose of your existence. And I’ll thump into the heads of parents with the hope that they’ll drive it home into the heads and hearts of their children – you were created and redeemed in order to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

And young people – when you recognize that truth then you gain something that too many people in this world don’t have. You gain a sense of purpose. That’s something that has always concerned me when it comes to young people in this world and even when it comes to young Christians in this world. Too many have no sense of purpose. This is especially true of those that are lost – no sense of how they got here, what they’re doing here, or where they’re headed when they leave here.

This is what gives you purpose and when you have a sense of purpose, especially when that sense of purpose arises from God’s purpose for you, then you’ll also have stability in your life and you’ll always have a sense of meaning in your life. And you’ll be delivered from defining yourself in a way that you should never define yourself. Often times people define themselves in terms of what they can do best. The problem with that kind of definition is that when you are no longer able to do what you can do well now you’ll be tempted to think that you have no purpose.

I remember some time ago when we watched the documentary film about the life and ministry of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones – there was something in that documentary that I found very encouraging and it pertained to the time when Lloyd-Jones eventually had to retire from preaching. There were those in his family that were very concerned that when he was no longer able to preach he would sink into despair for he wouldn’t feel any sense of purpose. Lloyd-Jones dismissed that kind of notion by pointing out that he never defined himself in terms of what he did or what his calling was. He saw himself, rather, as a sinner saved by grace whose purpose it was to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

And so long as our focus is right and our purpose is defined by God’s Word then you’ll be equipped to be a good steward of the manifold grace of God. So hear Peter’s exhortation this morning as God’s word to you. And may you be enabled to apply yourself

to it by aiming for the honor and glory of Christ to whom be praise and glory and dominion forever, Amen.