



1 Peter 4:7-11

7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

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

9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 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.

Last week, we began to look at these verses, and in particular we went over the meaning of verses 7-9. We saw how Christians should be living their lives here on earth in a way that shows that they are eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus Christ, and want to be found keeping his commandments and doing good works when he returns. They do not do this out of a slavish fear, but out of love to Him.

Peter has told us that one of the best ways that we can be about the service of the Lord is in lovingly serving His children here on earth. Because believers are spiritually united to Christ, when we do something to them, it is as though we are doing it to Jesus. That is why Christ said to Paul on the Damascus Road not "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *my church*?" but "why are you persecuting **Me**?" It is also why Jesus himself told us that in the final judgment He will say to those faithful servants who served the poor and needy of the church: "***Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.***" (Matt. 25:40)

Now as we also saw, Peter expects these acts to take place in the context of the assembly of the saints, the church. That church is supposed to be so closely knit, so marked by fervent love, that it is properly speaking a family, or a household as Paul puts it in Gal. 6:10 "***Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.***" And that is one of the many reasons why the modern mega-church which takes its cues not from the family but from the impersonal and individualistic modern business world doesn't provide the right context for this kind of service.

So let's talk about the church as the household of God, and the role that you play, brothers and sisters as members of that household. Now who is the head of the household of God? Now I'll give you a hint, It's not the Pope, it's not the King, and it's not even James Dobson. Jesus is the head of the church. And it is His concern that His household would be growing up into a Holy Temple of the Lord. So to that end, he has given gifts to his people, both spiritual and material, so that they might minister to one another.

Therefore understand this, if you are a Christian, you *have* received gifts from God. And we are going to talk about how God wants you to use the gifts you have been given. But in doing that we are going to be going against many of the modern misunderstandings of spiritual gifts that exist in the church.

For instance, how many of you have ever seen or taken one of those **spiritual gifts tests**? Ok, that's an example of a misunderstanding of the spiritual gifts, and I'll try to unpack what I mean by that in a moment, but let me give you a quote from the late Ed Clowney that gets to the heart of the biggest problem with the modern spiritual gifts movement, namely its direction:

“Peter’s focus is often lost today. Christians eagerly discuss spiritual gifts, but in a way that would surely distress the apostle. Their concern is not how they can serve others and bring glory to the Lord. Rather they seek self-fulfillment. They want to discover their gifts so as to establish their own identity. In a Christian context, they want to do their own thing. That gifts are granted for service is often lost from sight.”- Ed Clowney

Brothers and Sisters, all of the Lord’s people have received some gifts from Him but the purpose of those gifts is that you might use them to serve God and his people, and to build up and strengthen the household of God, not to build yourself up. And that is true not only of your spiritual but your material gifts. So Peter makes that explicit as you have received, minister it to one another.

Now you may be experiencing some difficulty at this point, it’s similar to what happens when you introduce children to the topic of share, the principle sounds good to them in theory, but the actual application is a problem. They like the idea of “share your toys”, but hey wait a minute, if I give you what I’m playing with then I can’t play with it anymore. The same thing happens in the church when it comes to ministering your gifts, theory nice, application difficult. I also see it in marriage counseling when I talk to husbands and wives about how their calling is to minister to their spouse. ***Wait a minute if I’m ministering to her, how do I take care of me, I’m gonna get ripped off!***

Four things should make this idea of ministering your gifts to others much easier to you:

- 1) **Remember that it is a gift**, you did not earn it, you did not merit it, all of them flowed from the undeserved grace of God. And these things were given to you to act as Stewards, a Steward was the chief slave in a household, like Joseph in Potiphar’s household. The steward was given charge over his Masters goods to disburse them for the good of the household. The steward who held on to those gifts and used them for himself was considered a bad steward, a corrupt steward.
- 2) **You are a member of the household you are building up**, ultimately you profit from being part of a stronger household. Who would be so foolish as to argue he shouldn’t help fix the roof he is sleeping under? Also remember we all have different gifts, some of us are good with roof repairs, others foundations, if we don’t exercise them equally, we will find that portions of the house are strong while others are weak. Let me give you an uncomfortable example of that. Generally speaking, the women of this church do a good job of ministering their gifts to one another, generally speaking the men do not, so we have strong fellowship amongst the women and weak fellowship amongst the men. Now the women exercising their gifts even more will not make up for that, making the ROOF super strong and extra watertight is not going to fix the walls.
- 3) **If all of us are naturally ministering to one another out of love as we are enabled by God to do so, and none of us are keeping an account, then none of us is getting ripped off.** One day you minister to someone, the next they minister to you. It becomes something so natural you don’t even think twice about it. After a while the church functions like a family, and in a well ordered family all the members help one another almost without thinking which is as it should be. *“Oh I’m sorry, I’d like to change your poopy diaper, but you haven’t done anything particularly cute to please me today.”*
- 4) **Most importantly you will be called upon to give an account of all the gifts you received**, in the parable of the talents we see that we are called upon to take those gifts we have received and

use them in ministering to others, if we bury them, we have *misused them* and the Lord will not be pleased. Now our salvation is not based upon our good works, but that parable and others show that our rewards in heaven will be. And besides what true believer is looking to just barely make it into heaven “under the wire” so to speak. I mean brothers and sisters, who is going to be in heaven boasting “*Yeah, I was the weakest Christian I knew! Barely did a thing for the household of God, but I made it in anyway. WOOHOOO!*”

So now that you are encouraged to serve, Peter wants you to be certain that as you serve, you aren’t doing it merely out of blind zeal and to the wrong ends. He wants you to know how and who to serve. So in verse 11 he identifies two of the primary modes of ministry in the church.

First ministry related to speaking. And these would things primarily be related to teaching. Under this we can think of preaching, teaching, evangelism, the things that would be associated with the ministers and elders in the church. But they aren’t limited to that, think also in terms of **admonishing**, as for instance the older women are called upon to admonish the younger women in Titus 2. And also the needful work of exhorting one another and stirring one another up to love and good works.

Now when you exercise these verbal gifts, you should not be doing it as an exercise of rhetoric or intellect any more than when I preach I should be giving you just a string of helpful opinions, sprinkled with interesting anecdotes. Your speech to one another should be based on the word of God. Aren’t you sometimes saddened by how little biblical communication there is between us? We talk of work and family, and politics and the economy, but it is far too seldom that modern Christians actually minister the word to one another. The same unfortunately can be said for much of the preaching that goes on in the church. And that ought not to be. Brothers and Sisters, we have these pictures on the side of the wall to break up the white space, not because we worship the Great Christians of the past.. But they remind of something, these were men who were great precisely because they took pains to return the word of God to its primacy in the church. They made sure to plainly speak and make known to God’s people nothing but what they were persuaded to be His truth. And I’m reminded that a good ambassador is one who conveys not his own message but the message of his king. They remind me that I will someday be called to account for my ministry, and on that day I need to be able to say with Paul “*I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*”

The Second mode of ministry is that related to *service*. The word *ministers* in verse 11, if anyone ministers is actually *diakonei* meaning serves. It’s the word we get deacon from and in it we are reminded that this kind of ministry as well is done via God’s gifts and with His Power. What Ed Clowney says here is vital to remember, particularly for those serving as deacons or planning to serve as deacons – and remember that is no less a ministry than being an elder: “*Peter’s exhortation is no less needed for service than for teaching, Christians may be more tempted to undertake diaconal service in their own strength. They may agree that the ministry of the word needs special grace, but waiting on tables, collecting money, or caring for the sick is just a matter of rolling up one’s sleeves and getting the job done. Not so. If God is to be glorified by ministry in his name, it must be ministry performed in his strength. Paul speaks of the cheerfulness that God gives for showing mercy. ... Anyone who has served in a ministry of mercy will know the need for patience and strength to carry on. Peter would have us look to the Lord from the very beginning of every such ministry. Only when it is performed, not just in the name of Christ, but in the Spirit of Christ, dos it bring praise to God.*”
– Ed Clowney

Finally, what is the end of all of this ministry? It is the Glory of God. Too often a ministry begins in the name of Christ, and then ends up becoming a vehicle to puff up the person at the center. Too often brothers I have seen the gifts that God gives people used for their own glory and not gods. The Pharisees did it when they gave to the temple treasury with great show and pomp. We do it today when we make sure everyone sees our giving, or ministries where the gospel is entirely eclipsed by the minister. Everyone shows up to see and hear Benny Hinn or Joel Osteen *not to hear about Jesus*. There they are just repeating the error of the medieval papacy. Calvin warns:

“God does not adorn us with his gifts, that he may rob himself and make himself as it were an empty idol by transferring to us his own glory, but that, on the contrary, his own glory may everywhere shine forth; and that it is therefore a sacrilegious profanation of God’s gifts when men propose to themselves any other object than to glorify God. He says through Jesus Christ, because whatever power we have to minister, he alone bestows it on us; for he is the head, with which the whole body is connected by joints and bindings, and maketh increase in the Lord, according as he supplieth strength to every member.”

So however you serve, remember you do it through the power of Christ, and to the glory of God. Make your motto therefore, that of Bach who wrote at the bottom of all of the beautiful pieces of music he wrote: SDG – *Soli Deo Gloria – to God alone be the Glory*.

Finally, an application that a member of the church encouraged me to make

Ok, why have I do I pour myself out

Because I love you, because I know I will give an account for your souls some day

But also that you might do likewise

Here I have no fear that I will exceed the efforts of the Puritans, Apostles – if it ever looks like a lot a think that may have something to do with how little is expected these days.

And mostly importantly, I do it following the example of my Lord who came to serve and not be served: ***Luke 9:57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."***

He laid aside that glory that he had with the father to serve us to the uttermost, how can I hold back? But if you want your minister and his family to do less, well then set yourselves to service and there will be less for me to do. If there is one thing I could beg you to do, it is to minister to one another in word and deed. Preach the gospel to one another, take care of one another’s needs. And whatever you do, do all to the glory of Christ.