*Doing Spiritual Good to One Another Pt. 2*

1 Peter 4:7-11

4/16/23

We looked at the first half of this paragraph before Easter, and we will finish our inquiry of it today. Let us remind ourselves of the context. Vs. 1-6, call us to live for the will of God in a world that is hostile to us. Enough time has gone by to engage in the sinful desires of the world. Now we are to live for the plans and purposes of God. Vs. 7-11 carry the theme of living for the will of God forward by focusing on our involvement in church life. The church, manifested in local congregations, sits at the center of God’s plans and purposes for the world. An important element of doing God’s will is engaging in the lives of God’s people.

Now, remember that the church is not the programs and activities of the entity known as FBC. The church is God’s people. The formal gathering plays an important role in the life of the church; but it is not the church. We see that in the four commands in this paragraph. All of them focus on how we treat one another, not on what we do when we gather. The NT teaches that our life together should spill outside of our formal gatherings into our daily lives.

The first command is to keep our wits about us for the purpose of prayer. The believer’s mind is to be engaged, allowing God’s word to control their actions, set the course for their service, and ultimately engage them in prayer. The second command is the chief rule for the church: we are to love one another fervently, for love covers a multitude of sin. The love here is a covenantal love that says we are committed to doing good to one another no matter what.

The final two commands of the paragraph are extensions of the command to love. They put hands and feet to this command. It is one thing to say you love God’s people, it is another thing to demonstrate love in tangible ways. These commands help us know how to express love.

The command of vs. 9 is to be hospitable to one another. In its simplest form, hospitality means to show love towards strangers. Initially, the church used this word to talk about meeting the needs of traveling preachers. A great example of hospitality in the early church would be Lydia, who welcomed Paul and his companions into her home and cared for their needs while they ministered at Philippi. Her house became the base of operations for their church planting efforts. But hospitality is not limited to showing love to strangers. Peter wants the church to be hospitable *to one another.* That means the other members of the church. As believers suffered persecution, it created opportunity for believers to express their love for one another by meeting tangible needs.

At its core, hospitality is opening your life to someone, oftentimes by opening your home, so you can minister to them in some way. We often equate hospitality with having someone over for dinner, but it certainly is not limited to that. Hospitality can be expressed in many ways; but it always includes opening yourself to someone else because you desire to do good to them. We are to do so without complaint. Hospitality takes work, and it can be expensive. It is seldom convenient to be hospitable. Yet God commands us to open our lives, our homes, and our resources to one another as an act of love.

You will find the quality of hospitality included in the qualification list of elders (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8); but it is not a quality limited to pastors. Peter instructs all Christians to demonstrate hospitality as an expression of love for one another. So I have a challenge for you. I regularly hear the phrase *I don’t know who that is* in conversations with members of the church when I mention someone else. That is in large part because God, in His kindness, has brought many new people into our fellowship, for which we praise Him. It takes time to get to know one another; but our church is a size where we can know everyone. So, look around the room. Find a person or family you don’t know and take them out for lunch after service; or invite them over for a game night; or go get ice cream and play in the park. Open your lives up and let people in. As you do so, look for ways to do spiritual good to one another, for that is an element of hospitality. Do not wait for someone else to initiate. Before I was a pastor, we would invite people over probably 10 times for every invite we received. If we all wait for someone else to initiate, it will never happen. Demonstrating hospitality requires adjusting your schedule, initiating an interaction, and making it happen. But as you begin to do it, you will establish deeper and more meaningful relationships with other Christians, which most of us are looking for.

This brings us to the fourth and final command in the text, which is to serve one another. Peter has more in mind here than the general meeting of needs that would fit in a category like hospitality. He is opening the subject of spiritual gifts here. The Bible teaches that every believer is given a unique gift of service by the Holy Spirit that they are to use for the good of the church. As we think about this large subject, let us note several things about spiritual gifts.

First, everyone has at least one spiritual gift. Vs. 10 says *each one has received a gift.* 1 Corinthians 12:7 says *to each one is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* And 1 Cor. 12:11 says *one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.* Finally, vs. 18 of that chapter says *now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body just as He desired.* These verses all teach the same thing. Each Christian is given a spiritual gift that is to be used for the greater good of the Church.

Second, our spiritual gifts are different than our natural aptitudes. Each of us has strengths and skills that are a part of our natural disposition. These qualities are to be used for God’s glory and the advance of the church. But they are not spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are Holy Spirit given and Holy Spirit empowered. They are not something we can do on our own, like we can with our natural aptitudes. They are gifts of the Spirit, meaning they are things that He does in and through us that He should get the credit for, not us.

That leads to a third observation. Spiritual gifts are to be used for the good of others. Vs. 10 commands us to employ our gifts *in serving one another.* 1 Cor. 12:7 tells us that they are given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12 uses the illustration of how a body has many different parts, each with a vital function to the overall wellbeing of the body. Each believer is placed in the body for the common good of the body. Ephesians 4 tells us that *the proper working of each individual part causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* This reminds us yet again that a Christian’s desire is to do spiritual good to fellow believers. So we seek to discover what our spiritual gifts are so we can employ them for growth and edification of the church. This requires a substantial shift in our thinking away from being spiritual consumers, which our culture trains us to be, to be spiritual providers, which is God’s design for each of us.

Finally, we use our spiritual gifts as good stewards of God’s grace. Having received God’s grace in salvation, our desire should be to steward that grace for His glory. One thinks here of the parable of the three servants and the talents found in Matthew 25:14-30. The talents there are not abilities they have, but a monetary amount. In that parable, three servants receive varying amounts of money from their master *according to their ability.* Two of the servants took their master’s money, put it to work, and doubled the amount. The third servant buried the money he received in the ground. When the master had the servants give an account of their management, the two who turned a profit were told *well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.* But the slave who did nothing was called a wicked and lazy slave who ultimately was ‘cast out’ of his master’s presence.

This parable illustrates how Christians steward the grace they have received from God. A steward is a manager of someone else’s resources. They work for the benefit of their master. Peter says we are stewards of the manifold grace of God. We are to work as servants of His kingdom, so that His glory might be made known, and His purposes advanced in the world. We do not want to be like the wicked slave who did nothing with his master’s gift; rather, we want to discover our spiritual gifts so we can steward God’s grace for His glory and the good of His people.

It is common for Christians to not know what their spiritual gift is. Part of the challenge is how the church handles the subject. Spiritual gift surveys, in my humble opinion, tend to confuse natural abilities with spiritual gifts. Thus, an effective businessperson often scores high in the ‘spiritual gift’ of administration when that is not their Holy Spirit empowered gift. It is an ability God hardwired in them at birth. The issue is also clouded by the debate over whether the ‘sign gifts’ are still in effect today. Finally, there is debate over whether the lists of spiritual gifts given in the Bible are exhaustive (listing ever spiritual gift possible) or representative (given as examples of the kinds of gifts we can have). These challenges can make discovering and using our spiritual gifts challenging.

That is why I love how spiritual gifts are presented in vs. 11. Instead of listing specific gifts, Peter gives two broad categories. He talks about speaking gifts, which would be those gifts and ministries that place people in front of the church doing things like teaching and leading. And there are gifts of service, where needs are seen and met. It is my observation that a smaller percentage of Christians have speaking gifts, while the majority have gifts of service.

How do we discover if we have speaking gifts or serving gifts? By serving! We discover our place within the body by seeing needs and seeking to meet them. As we serve, we learn how God bears fruit through us. Gifting will be confirmed by others in the church who see God working through us. This is how I discovered I had the gift of teaching. I am not a teacher by nature. I could never be a schoolteacher, or an instructor at work. Yet, as I was a teenager, I was given various teaching opportunities. People noticed gifting, encouraged it, and gave me further opportunities. This is the normal way we discover gifting. This means we need to help one another discover gifting by giving people the opportunity to try different types of service and encouraging them when we see fruitfulness. This is a part of the body being the body in one another’s lives.

So worry less about whether you have the gift of *mercy* or the gift of *helps*, and try first to discover if your gifts lay in the realm of speaking or serving. Those who speak, are to do so *as one who is speaking the utterances of God.* Those who are given the mantle of leadership and the responsibility to teach must remember that it is not their leadership or their message that people need. Their job is to make known the word of God. Nothing more and nothing less. Leaders are nothing more than under-shepherds whose job is to point people to the true Shepherd and Head of the Church: Christ Jesus. Their job is to lead people into expressing the life of faith defined in God’s word. There is no room for personal agenda or platform building. Those who speak are to be like John the Baptist: desiring to decrease so that Christ might increase in people’s sight.

Then there are those who serve, which is most of us. They are to do so *as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies.* Here Peter touches on a real concern. It is easy for people to serve in their own strength, relying on their own capacities and resources. Yet that is not how spiritual gifts work. They are manifestations of the Spirit, who empowers and makes effective our efforts. In the same way a faithful pastor regularly asks God for help in preaching, congregants should also seek to serve in the strength that God supplies, recognizing that anything good that comes from their efforts is a mark of His grace, not their own capacity.

The speaker proclaims the word of God, and the server works in the strength God supplies because they want to see God glorified. We purposefully engage in our unique place in the body of Christ because we want God glorified and the salvation of Christ held forward beautifully in the world. We are to labor in such a way that men may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven, for He possesses all glory and dominion forever and ever. We want to be a compelling community in the world, not because we possess charismatic ethos among us, but because the greatness and glory of God is seen in us. We want people to know that God is in our midst because they see God at work among us. But this requires us keep our wits about us so that we live God’s way not our way; it means we keep our love for one another fervent as we strive to overcome sin. And it means that love is displayed in the way we open our lives to one another and service one another for God’s glory.