

*Gifts of Grace*  
1 Peter 4:10-11  
5/15/16  
Randy Lovelace

We turn tonight in God's Word to the Book of 1 Peter as we've been walking together through this book. This evening we come to the last couple of verses in the section we've been looking at together for the last number of weeks, chapter 4:10-11. Hear now God's Word.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. [1 Peter 4:7-11, ESV]

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

Father, now we ask that as we spend a few moments in your Word, that you would feed us by your Word through the work of your Holy Spirit, calling us in the use of our gifts to glorify you. May it be a preparation, oh Lord, as we also celebrate this supper together as a tangible evidence of your gift to us in Jesus Christ, the salvation through him, through his body and blood, for the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So this being Sunday evening, normally this is a homily. So I'm going to do my best to do a homily this evening so that we're not here for too long and we won't be able to make it to lunch afterward anyway. So let's look together. In the outline, you'll see in this portion of God's Word, in verses 10 and 11 specifically, what Peter is drawing our attention to is the use of gifts among those who call themselves believers, who profess Christ. We see there is the reception of the gifts. There is the scope of these gifts. Ultimately, there is a reason to the purpose these gifts are given. Reception, scope, and purpose.

So reception. It's important that we see in verse 10 as he says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another." That word *gift* there is the word *charismata* in Greek. It means, literally—it is made up essentially of the idea of *charis*, or grace, which is the Greek word for grace—and so these are gifts of grace. It is meant to be seen, as he says there, to use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Put it this way—the reception of gifts is to understand that these are gifts as a manifestation of God's multifaceted grace. The multifaceted nature of this grace is seen in the multiplicity of these gifts among individuals as a part of the body of Christ.

What's important to note is—and we can't overlook it; it's important—is that at first, it is a gift. But we also understand it as a charismatic gift. It's important to note that the phrase "charismatic" or charismatic gifts ought not to be seen as simply just a few gifts that are given—meaning speaking in tongues, which is translated from the Greek word *glossolalia*, meaning known languages, as you heard earlier this evening. The gospel has been translated and received in a multiplicity of languages. But to understand the charismatic gifts, it's not just the gift of being able to speak in other languages, or the healing of illnesses, or prophecy.

If you have a gift, as Peter outlines here—in either way, it could be used in service or as a speaking gift. By speaking gift, don't think it's just those of us who are up here called to preach God's Word. While it's certainly means that, it means much more than that. It encompasses a much larger group of people—

indeed, the whole body of Christ. If you have a gift in which you use to serve others, if you use your mouth to speak to other people, that is a charismatic gift. It is a gift of grace.

But because it is a gift, it means, therefore, it's not on your ability that you have it, or on my ability. I don't have the gift of speaking before other people because I had good DNA or because people spoke in public in my home. They didn't. There is no other public speaker in my household. I have this gift not because of any innate ability on my own. I've been called to this, because it has been given to me as a gift. Therefore, it's not based on my ability or my DNA or my upbringing; therefore, it is a gift of grace, which calls each of us away from how so often gifts and abilities and talents are seen in the world.

Therefore, they are received with humility and not hubris. Their use is not for self-focus or bringing attention to our abilities or our identity. Rather, it is for the purpose of serving others. That's the other side, the gift, the *charis* part—grace. It is the multifaceted nature of God's character, which is grace. His whole character, his whole being, emanates grace. That means the gifts that you have—whether they are in serving or in speaking—they are then used as the presence of grace in the lives of other people. When he says here in these verses, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies." So here he focuses on speaking and on serving.

This idea of reception of gifts of grace applies to everyone. Let me show you. It definitely encompasses those who teach the Word of God, the oracles of God. But it is far more than that, because it can be taken in this way of application. Look again at the verse, if you have your Bible with you. I'll speak it and translate it as we go along. "Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God," meaning our speech ought to be shaped, seasoned, empowered, and reflecting the oracles of God, the Word of God, because in the Word of God we learn the character of God—his grace, his love, his mercy. Therefore, as we speak, our speech is shaped, influenced, strengthened, and reflecting the character of God as it is revealed in his Word. And, yes, as I preach, I ought to be preaching the Word of God and not simply the opinion of man or my own ideas. But the basis for what we teach is the Word of God as our authority. But it also goes to all of us. It shapes how we speak to one another.

But also in serving—"whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies." That is the reminder that if you are serving, or you find yourself in a place of service where you feel ill-equipped or just not gifted to do that, you're missing and forgetting—it's not about what I can do or what you can do, but about the one who strengthens us to serve. It's not about how well we do it. It's not about how we feel about doing it. Rather, it is the one who is behind our doing it, who strengthens us to do it. And that has impact on every aspect of what we do here in ministry to one another, whether it be teaching or serving. But also, the case in our places of work and our places of enjoyment and in our neighborhoods.

The point is, every single talent you have, every gift that you have, not just the spiritual gifts—friends, there is so much more in view here than the spiritual gifts. The Bible talks about the spiritual gifts. Paul talks about the spiritual gifts. Peter is talking about surely that, but much more than that. If you have a gift, a talent, a passion, something that God has given to you, it is a gift that is empowered and shaped by grace to this next point, to understand the scope of our gifts.

The scope of these gifts is personal, meaning this: when it says here, that "each has received a gift. Use it to serve one another as good stewards," or good managers, "of God's varied grace." So you are a manager of the gifts that you have been given, but is—the scope of it is very personal. This idea of "to one another" is the Greek word which literally means, "You give to each one." So the gifts that you have been given are used and meant to be seen as not serving ourselves, but serving the other, whomever God brings into our orbit and into our lives. We use our gifts to serve them.

But secondly, not just that there's a personal nature of the scope of the use of our gifts. As he says here, we're to be good managers of the grace. But it's also something else. It is incredibly expansive.

Notice he says later in the verse, the second half of verse 11, he says that, “in order that, in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

Now, let’s just walk down a quick application. “In order that only in church God is to be glorified in Jesus Christ.” Only in serving in the nursery or youth ministry or community groups, on Sunday service? No. The scope of the use of our gifts to bring glory to God is in every square inch of our lives, whether it is in mowing grass, cleaning bathrooms, ironing shirts, cooking meals, or serving in the church, or as a physician in a hospital—or a physician on the highway with your toddler, and you see an auto accident happen right in front of you. And you knew that day would come. That happened in the life of one of our folks this past week. It was an emergency situation. Their training is not in emergency medicine. A motorcyclist being pinned underneath at truck. Nobody else there. She has a toddler in her back seat. Now what do you do? Every square inch, with the strength that God provides, she pulls over, crawls underneath the automobile, and comforts the person who is still alive. Another person who has medical training pulls over, and they stay with those who were affected by the accident until the paramedics came. Those are gifts of grace, and their scope may be someone that you love that has been in your life your entire life, but it also may be, if God so wills, a complete and utter stranger that you may never meet again. It will be inconvenient, unplanned, and you probably don’t have the strength. But the scope is expansive, because they’re gifts of grace for the other.

But there is also not just the reception, and not just the scope, but the purpose. We have received these gifts that God has given to us in Jesus Christ. He’s given them to us that we might bless others and not ourselves. But how do we measure our success? Because he tells us, “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.” The purpose why we’ve been given these gifts is not to please ourselves and to pad our resume, but to serve the other. But how do we measure success?

First, if we get this wrong, we miss the gospel. We first begin to measure success as we begin to not measure how well the performance is going, but asking that the Lord by his Spirit would empower us by the Spirit to enable us to see that when we serve, wherever we are that we are serving Christ—okay, so that’s the purpose. We’re to serve Christ. As we seek to love and speak to others and serve them, we serve as though we recognize we’re serving Christ. When we give water or we give food, we’re feeding them as if we’re feeding Christ.

But what about the motive? You see, we can seek to serve Christ. We can even understand that we’ve received these things as gifts. We can even understand that the scope of these gifts is expansive. But if we get the motive wrong, we render the gospel null and void. And here is the motive. And I was reminded of this as two things happened. First, as I was coming to this passage, I was reminded of a sermon Tim Keller preached a number of years ago on a completely different passage. But I also saw a movie this week that had Madonna in it. Stay with me. Because he quotes Madonna in the sermon. There’s the connection. So watch, and here we get at the motive.

Now, see if you recognize yourself in what Madonna says about her motives and the use of her talents. She said this in an interview. She said:

And all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy. I’m always struggling with that fear. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I’m mediocre and uninteresting. And I find a way to get myself out of that. Again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that’s always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I’ve become Somebody. I still have to prove that Somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will.

How incredibly vulnerable and how incredibly true of many of our hearts. Much of our motives seep down is that if we can use our gifts to perform for others and to perform for God, that somehow the verdict will come back, "Well done, good and faithful servant." In some way, we're trying to do good. We're trying to be good. We want to be seen as valuable and as somebody. And how quickly our gifts then become very self-referential and begin to expose just how much we can become self-aholics.

But the motive of the gospel is completely upside-down. Keller writes this. He says: "Do you realize that it is only in the gospel of Jesus Christ that you get the verdict before the performance?" The atheist might say that they get their self-image from being a good person. They are a good person, and they hope that eventually they will get a verdict that confirms that they are indeed a good person. Performance leads to the verdict. For the Buddhist, too, performance leads to the verdict. If you are a Muslim, performance leads to the verdict. All this means is that every day you are in a grand courtroom, and every day you are on trial. That is the problem.

The reality is, in Jesus Christ, the verdict is already in, and now our performance, the use of our gifts, are based on the reality that the verdict has already come. It is based on the grace and the mercy that already precedes our reception of these gifts. Because he loves me and he accepts me, I do not have to do things just to build up or pad my resume. I do not have to do things that make me look good. I can do things for the joy of doing them. I can help other people just to help other people—not so that I can feel better about myself, not so that I can fill up an emptiness, but because of the fact that Jesus, who was somebody, became a nobody to make a people out of a broken, lost group of self-aholics to make us the hands and feet of Christ, to pour out grace through our gifts to others, that we might be able to say, "Not to us, Oh Lord, not to us, but to your Name, be all the glory." This is why we believe as a reformed church, going back to the reformation, this Latin phrase: *Soli Deo gloria*, to God alone be the glory. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your Word that gives us the reminder that all that we have and are is a gift from you, but not for ourselves—for others, that you might receive glory. We thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for us, that we might be a redeemed group of self-aholics rescued from our selfishness and made a people to be poured out with the strength that you provide so that others might see Christ. Now, Lord, do this, and make us a church increasingly of pouring out inexhaustible grace to others. In Jesus' name. Amen.