

Serving Jesus by Serving His Church

1 Peter 4:10

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We are celebrating serving Jesus by serving his church today. We want you to know how much we appreciate and love all those who serve so faithfully and zealously at Bethel Church. Do you realize that God celebrates this too? In heaven, every act of service given to God's people is celebrated as an act of worship to God himself. Jesus said that in principle, "As you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Serving Jesus' church is worshiping Jesus and I think most Christians don't connect their holy sweat with holy worship.

We are moving ahead just a little in 1 Peter to a portion that says this very thing, 1 Peter 4:7-11. This completes a section of teaching begun in 2:11 about how to live as a faith community in exile. What should that look like? Peter now describes the nature of interpersonal relationships in the church...

"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)

We are spending two weeks on this text. Peter describes life in the community of faith in four essential categories: prayer, love, hospitality, and service. But then he gives the goal each local church should have in those four passions, "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." (Verse 11) The purpose of the four is to bring glory to God. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "Man's chief end is to glorify God."

"In everything." What everything? Every ministry, every service, every gift, every person doing what they are doing to glorify God in the doing of it. God is glorified by a praying church community, a loving church community, a hospitable and serving church community. All of these glorify God by reflecting within the church what God himself is like. God is self-controlled, loving, hospitable, and a serving God. Jesus embodies this as he gave his life to prayer, love, welcoming sinners, and serving the church by giving his life up for her.

As the church embodies these divine qualities within the fellowship, the church mirrors what God is like. God is glorified by the picture. This is easily illustrated in the way we honor who we love by displaying pictures. We had some family pictures done. Did we hide them under a bushel? No, we posted them on Facebook this week. The hallways of our homes are filled with pictures of family and loved ones. We honor them by honoring the pictures of them. God is honored in a local church as the members of the church reflect accurately the serving and loving attributes of God.

Peter is exhorting us to be a church that prays, loves, welcomes, and serves with such fullness and joy that it clearly mirrors God and brings him honor in this world.

Jesus himself served as a volunteer for the church. What role did he serve in? Dying Savior. How would that sign-up go in a local church ministry fair? The table has a sign: *Die for the Church*. Most would see it and say, *I think the nursery sounds just fine...* One of his most powerful exhortations is, *"even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). Jesus intercedes, watches over, and builds his church.

I take this to mean that the opposite is also true. A local church that is anemic in its prayers, love, hospitality, and service is a church that does not reflect God's character and does not bring glory to Him.

Do we want to be a church that pleases the Almighty? Yes, more than anything. Since the vibrancy of the Christian life is seen in how and why we serve each other, we'd better take serving Jesus' people seriously. Heaven does.

The center of this passage is verse 10. *"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."* Here is the exhortation. *Use your spiritual gift to serve one another.* This may be a new concept for you. Peter refers to it here. Paul goes into to detail about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14. Peter gives a very nice summary. Each has received a gift. Who likes to get gifts? Who never opens them? Who never uses that gift card? New golf clubs? New outfit? Nobody does that. Gifts are to be used and enjoyed. The same is true with spiritual gifts. Look what Peter says about them.

Every Christian has a Spiritual Gift

"As each has received a gift..." (Verse 10)

Paul affirms the same truth, *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

Each is given. Each has received a gift. What is a spiritual gift? *"A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church."* (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1016) There is debate about whether a spiritual gift can be a natural gift used for God in some spiritual way or if it is something you aren't naturally good at but gifted by the Spirit at the time of salvation to do. I personally think it can be both.

See that this ability is *empowered* by the Holy Spirit. This ramps up the excitement we should have about these gifts. God uses us and these gifts in supernatural ways. This is not to say it's in overtly miraculous ways. A gift of serving used to offer cups of cold water in Jesus' name isn't overtly miraculous. The gift is spiritual. The effect is supernatural. The Holy Spirit empowers the fruit of the gift to edify, encourage, equip, and build up the church. Only God can do that.

What I do every Sunday is a good example. Teaching and preaching are spiritual gifts. I believe this to be my main gifting. So I'm up here talking. I have a gift from the Spirit. My gift doesn't have an effect in the church. The Holy Spirit using the gift has the effect. These are just words. *Blah, blah, blah*. But the truth of God through the gift of God empowered by the Spirit of God has powerful effect in the people of God.

We love using gifts! If you get new golf clubs for Father's Day, what do you do the next day? You call for a tee time. You use the clubs. Using our spiritual gifts should be even more exciting to us. Using them brings us joy.

We should take no personal glory in our gifting or its fruit. *"In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 4:11) God empowers his gifts in his people for his people but the honor of the gift goes only to God who gave it in the first place. We are simply called to be stewards of the gift. How?

It must be used to serve one another

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another." (1 Peter 4:10)

Here is our privilege and responsibility. *"Use it to serve one another."* This is a command. Use it. How or where? To serve one another. He is writing to Christians so the "one another" is Christians and the church.

Now as we all know, when we serve others, they are blessed and we are blessed. Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35) This command to serve others is a means to our own happiness. I wish more people realized this. This would keep us from evaluating service for Christ in terms of our own convenience or comfort: *I'll try to work it in.*

Peter is calling service and gift-use to be a high priority for every Christian. Is it for you? You might say, *but I'm not saved by serving or any kind of good work.* No. We are not saved *by* serving, we are saved *for* serving. Listen to the balance in Ephesians 2,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Saved by grace? Yes. Saved to grace others? Yes! You were saved for this serving. God ordained our justification by faith and our sanctification by grace-motivated, Spirit-empowered acts of service in the church.

Serving Jesus is Stewardship and Worship

"...as good stewards of God's varied grace." (1 Peter 4:10)

Why might Peter highlight stewardship? It was Peter who Luke tells us asked Jesus about a parable. The parable was about a servant who thought his master would be gone a long time. This delay gave him license to be lazy, gluttonous, and irresponsible. But then the master shows up earlier than expected and finds the servant not stewarding his possessions. What will that master do? *"Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required."* (Luke 12:48)

The job of a good pastor is to prepare his people to die. Prepare them for the judgment seat of Christ and hopefully hearing those words, *"Well done good and faithful servant."*

Yes, you are given a gift. Yes, we are to use it for the good of one another. But realize we will all give an account for the quality of our service offered to Jesus. Last time I checked, he's not around. How do I serve Jesus when he is at the right hand of God?

"As you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40) This perspective on service is transformational. That challenging man in Celebrate Recovery is more than just a man struggling with something; he is an opportunity to provide service to Jesus himself. That child is not just a child; that child is a visible expression of something invisible and ministry to him or her, in Jesus' eyes, is ministry to him. If we can see the breadth of opportunity to serve Jesus personally by personally serving his church, we would all clamor for the opportunity.

Imagine that Jesus showed up here at Bethel physically and visibly. Besides being on our faces before him, how might the church respond? *Jesus, I'll do anything for you. You need anything? Do I have anything that might help you? Want to come to my house? Want to use my car? Want to use my money? Can I cook for you? I would like to serve you in any way you need. Name it.*

We have to have a right doctrine of the church and to realize the church is people and ministry to the people of the church is a high and holy calling.

So today we are celebrating gifts and those who are using them. In this, we are encouraging all of us to seek for increasing ways to use God's gift for God's glory "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:11)

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