

XXXIX. I Peter in Biblical Perspective

The Elect in Exile

“The End of All Things and the Beginning of Everything – Part 4”

I Peter 4:7–11

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We are back at this unbelievably rich paragraph in I Peter 4:7–11. This is God’s Word and our fourth and final look at this paragraph. I Peter 4:7–11 says [7] *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.* [8] *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.* [9] *Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.* [10] ***As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied (multi-faceted) grace:*** [11] *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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This past week was the week of the NFL draft. I happen to be reading something with mindlessly the television on as they had pictures of these coaches calling the athletes who had been drafted on the team. The general manager and the coach gets together as they design this pool of athletes who have certain abilities and how they fit in as they choose the athletes they want. Then the coach gives the athlete a call which and when the athlete gets the call he knows he has been selected to be a part of that team for a vital reason. At that very moment I received a phone call. I looked at my phone and it was Frank Reich the coach of the Indianapolis Colts. I picked it up and said ‘Frank?’ and he said ‘Harry?’ ‘Yeah you just called me.’ He said ‘Oh I’m sorry that was an accidental pocket call’ and my dream just went out the door. We talked for a few moments and even though the call came from an NFL head coach during draft week I was not to be drafted.

Although, you are about to get a call. As we go through this study I’m going to give you a call on behalf of the Lord and it’s not a pocket call. It’s not an accidental call but a providential call on purpose. It is God’s team, the body of Christ, His Church. He not only has a place for you in it but He has designed you for a special purpose that absolutely no one else can do like you can do because He has gifted you especially for it. He calls you onto that team into the body of Christ and you are to be a part of it.

I’m going to take a few minutes to review with you the context of this epistle. This Peter who is fulfilling the mission the Lord has given to him. After the Lord restored Peter from his three denial, the last thing the Lord said to him was ‘Feed My sheep, tend My flock, nurture My lambs’ and that’s what Peter is doing even though he has never been to these churches in Asia Minor. He does know what Christ would have them know in serving, loving and following Him. He does know what they are going to face, who they are and what they are supposed to do.

So he starts off by reaching into the Old Testament imagery of the people of God being set free in the Exodus through the wilderness to get to the Promised Land. He tells them they are elect exiles, pilgrims, sojourners. Who they are in Christ are the elect and he enumerates 14 marks of God’s sovereign grace secured in Christ at the cross for the believer. He has also given

7 Gospel commands of what you do for Christ as exiles on the journey Home to serve Christ in this world. First he tells us who we are because of Christ before he tells us how we are to live, lest you think how we live is what makes us who we are in Christ. No, we are who we are because of what Christ did on the cross and then sent He sent His Spirit to bring us to Himself. Now that same Spirit is compelling us to fulfill these Gospel commands because we love Him and He says in His Word that if we love Him we'll keep His commandments.

Then Peter takes almost half of this epistle to tell us what to expect as we serve Christ who has secured us as elect exiles in this world. He tells us we will encounter Christian suffering for every true Christian (not nominal) to some degree at some time in some way will suffer persecution, not parades, either upon livelihood or upon lives. Jesus says in Matthew 5:11–12, *[11] Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* James, John, Jude and Paul also say this. Paul says in II Timothy 3:12, *[12] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* And in Philippians 1:29 Paul says *[29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.*

How are we to respond to this suffering? Peter deals with this from I Peter 3:13 all the way to I Peter 5:11 and he does this to equip us as to how to handle Christian suffering. This is not Christians suffering simply because we live in a broken world, but this is Christian suffering because they own Christ and speak for Christ. You are always ready to give an account of the hope that is within you. We are now at I Peter 4:7 in which we have the seventh Gospel command which is to pursue and cultivate a sound and sober mind marked by a life filled with prayer.

Then when we develop a mind for Christ because of heart from Christ it will be sober and sound. Sober is when we see life with clarity and it will be sound where we see life accurately. It is because our mind is not being conformed to the world but transformed by the renewing of our mind through the preaching, teaching, studying, singing, meditating and praying of the Word. When you become a Christian you get a new heart, a new family, a new record and new life but you don't get a new mind. You do get the Word of God and the Spirit of God whereby you can renew your mind so that you can begin to think with the mind of Christ. Your life will be marked with sobriety and soundness and will be filled up with prayer.

Peter's premier priority for the elect exiles is above all things, not instead of all things or in spite of all things or a summation of all things, to love one another. You can almost hear him listening to Jesus as Jesus said to him 'by this they will know you are My disciples that you love one another.' In John 13:34–35 Jesus says *[34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

The Apostle John when he was dying at Ephesus, we are told from extra Biblical history that they brought him into the church there, lifted him up off the cot, and he could barely get any words out, he repeated three times 'love one another.' Peter through the rest of chapter 4 he is telling us about two kinds of love – redemptive love and serving love. In redemptive love your brother is going to sin, now what do you do? Sin brings guilt and guilt brings shame. So you want to love your brother away from the shame back to the cross because it is there that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). You want to lead them to mortify their sins and not manage their sins. Every believer is a sinner saved by grace so when we sin we don't manage sin like it's a syndrome, we kill it.

We don't shame our brother when he is caught up in an entangling sin. We love for love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). It doesn't mean we ignore it. The Bible tells us in Matthew 18 if our brother sins go to him and to bring one or two with you if that doesn't work. The Bible says to bring the elders if that is necessary but we don't expose one another. We deal with one another with proportionality and then we love earnestly. We keep stretching in love and it's the very word that is used in a horse race when at the end the horse stretches out to get across that finish line. This is the word that describes fervently, earnestly in how we love. We are to stretch out ourselves in love as in a race. Then we are to show hospitality without grumbling. We are to be marked out by hospitality and the Bible says through such you have entertained angels.

Then he turns from redemptive love to serving love. As each one has received a spiritual gift we are to use it in serving one another. This is where I want to touch on these last two verses in I Peter 4:10–11 which says *[10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied (multi-faceted) grace: [11] 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.*

From these two verses I am going to give you two precepts, two practices, two parts and two principles. The first precept is each Christian has received a unique spiritual gift from the Lord by the grace of God. The reason I know it's by grace is because you didn't come up with it or originate it or create it. The same grace that saves you is the same grace that equips you. Each one received so it was something that was given to you as a testimony of God's varied grace. None of our gifts are alike. They are all unique.

The second precept is that you have been given this spiritual gift to employ it, to use it. Each Christian is to use their gift in concert with one another in the body of Christ. You are saved personally to be joined to the body of Christ. You are given a spiritual gift personally but you weren't saved to live privately and you weren't saved to live isolated. As you are joined to the body of Christ you are to use your gift to serve one another and that's why you have been given the gift. It's not for your own personal use. You have been given the gift to satisfy others, to serve one another. Praise the Lord that it is more blessed to give than to receive. So when you start blessing others with your spiritual gift you're going to get a blessing, but the point of your gift is not your blessing but to equip you to be a part of the body of Christ to bless others.

I'm struggling because this is so rich. I don't have time to preach on spiritual gifts but I will at some point but if you want to study spiritual gifts read I Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and I Peter 4. When you read the writings of Paul on spiritual gifts he always follows it with a chapter on love, but Peter doesn't. Why? I don't know but I'll ask him when I see him. But Paul and Peter are in absolute agreement that each believer has a gift and it was given sovereignly by the Holy Spirit. God sovereignly has saved you, gifted you by His grace as He wills and He has uniquely fashioned you like no one else in the body of Christ to take your place. I don't know what part you are but you're a part of the body of Christ.

There is also the team metaphor where you fit on the team in a certain way to do that which He has equipped you to do that nobody else can do. So those are the two precepts and this is followed by two practices.

The first practice is to use your spiritual gift you have to develop a servant's heart. You are to use your gifts as it says in I Peter 4:11 to *serve* one another. You have to have a servant's heart to use your spiritual gift. In other words, it's not 'here I am church, what are you going to

do for me?’ It makes me think of what JFK said which I think he borrowed from someone else, ‘Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.’ I’ll add to that by saying ask not what your church can do for you but what you can do for your church. I understand about preaching the Word and all but don’t enter into by saying ‘who is going to be my friend, who is going to do this or that,’ but rather ‘who will I love, who can I minister to and who can I serve?’ The problem is that we all love to talk about servanthood as long as we’re talking about someone else. We all like to talk about servanthood until someone treats us like one. You have to cultivate the heart of a servant to embrace servanthood.

The second practice is stewardship – the rules of the house. We know about stewardship where we’re not going to rob God so we bring the tithe in worship to praise God, and what do you think would happen in the church of Jesus Christ is everyone tithed. It would be astounding. There are also offerings that we will bring as well. I will use my home for the Lord. My children and spouse belong to the Lord. I have a job, responsibilities and influence so I want to be a good steward. What is required of a steward? It is one word – faithful. We are to be faithful to the Master’s directions in the house and you are His house. His church is His house, the gather of God’s people. Lord, I want to be faithful and I want to use according to Your Word not only my resources but my spiritual gift. I want to be a good steward of my unique, varied gift of grace that You have given to me.

Thirdly, there are two parts, categories of spiritual gifts. There are speaking gifts and there are serving gifts. I want to be clear here. The Bible is not saying there are two gifts but there are two categories of gifts and it’s reflected in the ordained offices. What are the two ordained offices in the church? There is elder who is apt to teach and there is the deaconate or deacon which is the serving of the tables of the church. They are not summations of every gift but they are different parts. If you go read the passages I mentioned earlier (Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12) you will see as you list the gifts how they fit in those two categories of speaking and serving and then how the officers of the church are to oversee them.

Now should elders serve? Yes. Should servants speak? Yes. So if your gift is speaking it doesn’t mean you’re not a servant and if your gift is being a servant it doesn’t mean you don’t speak. They are interdependent but he gives you direction in terms of categories as to where you speak but here is what Peter is really getting at. If your gift is focused upon speaking in the body of Christ then your gift must always be committed to speak the Word of God, only the oracles of God and not the philosophy of the world or the spirit of the age. If you’re a servant in the body of Christ you can’t do that on your own dime for you need the Holy Spirit, for you need the strength which God supplies.

Finally, there are two principles. Principle one is you have been saved and gifted by the grace of God in Christ. Many times God’s gift is in direct opposition to your life apart from Christ. I was an abject blasphemer and now I get to speak and teach the Word of God. Before Paul was saved he killed Christians and then he was saved and became an evangelist. Paul destroyed the church before and then he became the greatest church planter. It is amazing how the evidence of God’s grace shows up in a Christian’s life by how God changes them. God not only forgives us but equips us and many times delights in taking people from their vices in rebellion against Him and using that to create the virtues of how they can serve Him.

The second principle is you have been saved and gifted for the glory of God in Christ. Why has God called you to this? It is in order that in everything that God may be glorified and God is glorified through the preeminence of Christ for to Him be dominion forever and ever, amen (I Peter 4:11b). That is what He had done in our life. So let’s finish up with some

takeaways from this passage. I know these takeaways are going to seem obvious but I'm trying to do what my granddaddy used to do. He was a carpenter and he would always tell me 'son, go back and set a nail' so I'm trying to set the nail for this in your life and not just hammer it down.

The first takeaway is that each Christian has received a spiritual gift by God's grace. I was initially going to have everyone who had confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior to stand but I am going to ask you that when you finish reading this to go stand for Him. The reason I was going to ask you to stand was because I wanted to tell you face to face, and heart to heart that you have a place on the team and it's an important place. Nobody else can take your place. There is no one gifted like you. You are a testimony for God's unique fashioning for ministry. Now all of us are supposed to worship, share the Gospel, disciple, grow, love one another, pray and lead but some of you are gifted to pray. Some of you are gifted in worship. Some of you are gifted in evangelism and some are gifted in leadership. Not only that your gift of leadership is not repeated in the lives of other leaders. Whatever your gift it is a very special gift.

One man pictured this like a snowflake. Every snowflake looks like a snowflake but when you put it under a microscope there is no snowflake that is like another one. They are all unique. So we all have the gifts to serve the Lord with worship, evangelism, love and prayer but we're shaped in a certain way that no one else is. Another thing we know about snowflakes is that they change their configuration as it comes down from the clouds to the earth. Your gift is not only unique but it's not static. Philip is a deacon who ends up as an evangelist. Stephen was a deacon who ended up as a preacher. Your gifts develop throughout your life and each Christian has one. There is no useless Christian. There is no gift-less Christian. There is no exception for every Christian has a unique and important gift in the body of Christ that is at work and no gifts are superfluous. Everyone's gift is crucial. All of them.

The second takeaway is each Christian is responsible to develop and deploy their spiritual gift. You are to develop your gift as a good steward and you're supposed to deploy your gift as a servant. Paul said to Timothy in II Timothy 1:6-7, [6] *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame (stir up) the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, [7] for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.* Develop and work on the gift within you. Stir up that gift that is within you that it might be used, it might be effective, it might be there to serve the Lord. It's always developing so keep developing it. The best way to develop your gift is to start using it.

You can turn a ship that's moving a lot easier than one that's sitting still in the harbor. Get engaged. Get feedback from people. So when you find out the gift God has given you then you use it as a servant. As you do hospitality you want your home to have an open door and a shared table. In servanthood just look to Jesus. Live with the basin and the towel. When I graduated from Westminster South Seminary and I walked across the stage the dean gave me my diploma written in Latin, and a towel with my initials on it. He said "Congratulations, you are now qualified to wash feet and serve." Therefore it hangs in my office to remind me that I wasn't called to be at the top of the heap but I was called to the order of the basin and the towel. When we do this then we start watching those gifts work.

Here is an illustration. In my first congregation we started small groups and there was a man with a wife and kids who said he loved small groups and would like to lead one. I said to him 'I'm starting a small group so why don't you come and help me and then I'll hand it off to you.' So we started with six couples which counted my wife and me, plus him and his wife. It grew to about 18 by the time we finished. So I handed that group off to him and I went on to start another small group. About three months later one of the couples from his small group

asked if they could come to mine. I told them to stay in the one they were in but they said they weren't meeting anymore because it went down to about two couples and we quit meeting. I went and rescued 'Joe' and we tried to start again and the second group ended up going down to nothing after I handed it off to him.

I know if you keep doing the same thing and you have failure then it's not a very smart thing. This time I told 'Joe' that we would start it again but that I would lead it and he and his wife would host it in their home so that we could kind of work through it. It was unbelievable because that small group became the multiplier of small groups in our church and it was because 'Joe' and his wife were unbelievable hosts.

Here is what happened. 'Joe' loved small groups so he assumed he had a speaking gift as a small group leader but the reality was he has a servant gift of being a host and he became host par excellence. He became the man to train hosts because that was his gift. The two worked together – speaking and serving – but he had to find out. When did he find out? He had to get in the game to find out where his strengths were. That is how you begin to develop them as well. So get in the game as a good steward with a servant's heart.

The third takeaway is each Christian has received a unique and useful gift so no need for jealousy and no room for pride. "I wish I had their gift." Yours is important and no need for pride about your gift. You should just be amazed at it. I'll use football here as an example. Go look at a quarterback who gets 'most valuable player' award and they get a lot of money. Go find out what he does. At the end of every year that quarterback will find something to go buy and give to that lineman – perhaps a Rolex watch, a 58' corvette. He will find something to give to those linemen because he knows that without that blindside tackle or that pulling guard etc., he is nothing. The linemen don't get the fame or the headlines but the quarterback knows without them he is nothing. The more visible actually understands those less visible are more important or he couldn't function at all.

When people come to church here and find a nice place to sit down, come join me on Tuesdays when I go around and meet the people who make those rooms happen for you and me. Without them we would be scampering every single Sunday and Wednesday to get things set up but no one knows the names, but you do. We're all important.

This morning I got up and got ready. In the shower there is a deposit of hair. My hair is falling out. I look in the mirror, comb it and then leave to go to church. I'm thinking about my hair that is falling out. If my hair falls out every single day will I live? Yes, I will but I don't ever remember looking in the mirror and saying 'I wonder how my liver is doing?' When your liver falls out you're done. We look at the visible but even in the body of Christ that is the metaphor for the church. What is more important – what you see or what you don't see? The heart, lungs, liver are the things that are crucial. So here are the last two takeaways.

The fourth takeaway is the functional use of our spiritual gift is for the common good of the body of Christ. You have been saved and gifted personally and uniquely to serve and steward your gift for the benefit of the body of Christ. And you need to show up. My friend Al Davis says it this way, 'God is going to get His work done so you either use it or lose it and we have to quit playing drive-by church where you will come to church if it fits into your schedule.' The church is the body of Christ where we are committed one hundred percent in the community of believers to minister to one another and it doesn't stop at 12:10pm for it carries us right on through. So I want to challenge you to realize your functional use of your salvation and your gift to the glory of God is to care for one another and show up.

When I was a kid my mother used to give me one dollar to go downtown on Saturdays. It cost me ten cents round trip on the bus. For five cents I could get a pea shooter with a bag of peas. I can't tell you how much fun that was. There was no air conditioning and when I was on that bus with the windows down as the cars drove up beside the bus, you can fill in the blanks for how much fun that was. It cost me 25 cents to go to the movie and I was able to get a hot dog, an orange and popcorn. A dollar went a long ways in those days.

What I remembered about that was when I left my mom's work to go to the theater I always passed this restaurant where this man was out front who had no legs. He had a leather saddle that was under his two stumps. He would be blowing on a harmonica and people would walk by and throw coins in his hat. Every once in a while the quarter would miss his hat but he didn't miss that quarter because he would grab two blocks of wood, put them on his hands, push himself up and walk on his arms to get the quarter, put it in the hat and go back to where he had been sitting. So he made due.

Sadly, that's the way we are in the church many times. We have a lot of arms that are doing the work of legs because the legs just aren't showing up. Now God with the strength that He supplies, we'll get it done to the glory of God but you miss the blessing if you don't show up and we don't do it as well as we could if you did because nobody is gifted like you. If you were to ask the man without legs if he could still get around he would say yes I can still get around but if he had the choice to have the blocks of wood or two legs you know what he would say. If we could have the two legs together working with the arms and hands and every joint supplying that which God has gifted us to do it would be glorious.

The fifth takeaway is the ultimate use of our spiritual gifts is for the glory of God. Our spiritual gifts are there so that in Christ He would receive all the glory and dominion now and forever more. People will use their gifts and it will bless you and you with Christian gratitude are going to thank them and tell them how much it meant in your life. More than likely they will say to you 'Praise the Lord.' That's not false humility, that's really their heart and that ought to be my heart. When someone says to me 'Pastor thank you for the sermon' I say 'Praise the Lord' and that's not false humility for I am astonished that I get to preach. I'm amazed that God allows me to serve and when He uses it that's astonishing. So praise the Lord.

That is the heart that we develop. I read the biography of Billy Graham and I was grappling with a call to the ministry. People asked Billy 'what is making your success, is it Cliff Barrows, the hymn Just As I Am, the alter call?' He said 'no' and gave the name of a lady who in her retirement would get the list of his crusades and a week before every crusade she went and rented a hotel room and prayed the week before, the week of the crusade and stayed the week after to pray for the follow up. He told them that was the key to his success. Nobody knew her.

There are no little people, no little gifts for you are uniquely gifted. Be a good steward with a servant's heart to the glory of Christ and work in concert with the body of Christ. Come on and get on the team. Let's play the game together and may Jesus be exalted. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. God, I thank You so much for this rich word from Peter for Your people. Old Christians, new Christians, young Christians, mature Christians, male, female, it doesn't matter for we're saved by grace and we're gifted by grace. You have put each of us in the body where You desire us to be. Give us servant hearts and make us good stewards. As we minister with one another and to one another may

Christ alone be exalted and we can say ‘Praise the Lord, praise God from whom all blessings flow.’ Holy Spirit just speak, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

GOSPEL COMMAND #7

Pursue and cultivate a sound and sober mind marked by a life filled with prayer.

PETER’S PREMIER PRIORITY FOR ALL ELECT EXILES

Above all things love one another.

REDEMPTIVE LOVE – SERVING LOVE

SPIRITUAL GIFTS – SERVING LOVE

I. Two Precepts

- Each Christian has received a unique spiritual gift by God’s Sovereign Grace.
- Each Christian is to use their gift in concert with one another—The Body of Christ.

II. Two Practices

- Servanthood
- Stewardship

III. Two Parts

- Speaking
- Serving

IV. Two Principles

- Saved and gifted by the Grace of God in Christ
- Saved and gifted for the Glory of God for Christ

LIFE TAKEAWAY

1. Each and every Christian has received a spiritual gift by God’s grace.
2. Each Christian is responsible to develop and deploy their spiritual gift.
3. Each Christian has received a unique and useful gift so there is no need for jealousy and no room for pride.
4. The functional use of our spiritual gift is for the common good in the Body of Christ.
5. The ultimate use of our spiritual gift is for the glory of God.