

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Good Stewards of God's Grace

by Dan Trygg

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaint. ¹⁰ As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶ but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

1 Peter 4:8-16

The book of 1 Peter is a challenging letter written to believers who are “chosen exiles” dispersed throughout what is now modern-day Turkey, but which is applicable to all Christians throughout the ages. Throughout the book, it is clear that though we are born again now, we are called-out to a salvation that will only be fully revealed in the end, when Jesus returns. Now, however, we may be tested by various trials, which bring to light the genuineness of our faith. Consequently, we need to be clear and sober minded, setting our hope on the final salvation that will be revealed when Christ returns. This world is set against us, but we are called to holiness, ...called to *not* think and act like those who do not know Christ..., and to move away from those unprofitable, empty ways of living we were taught. Instead, we are to dedicate ourselves to loving one another with pure hearts. We are a chosen people, a priesthood for the King, a set-apart people, ...ones called out of the darkness to proclaim the excellencies of our God.

Again, in 2:11, Peter urges us as “sojourners and exiles” to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against our souls. We are exhorted to “keep your behavior honorable” so that the unbelievers will not have anything negative to say about us, but will instead glorify God for our good deeds. In this spirit, we are to be subject for Jesus’ sake to every human institution, including the emperor or governors (2:13). These authorities are sent by God to punish evildoers and to praise those who do what is good. God’s will is that, by doing good, we would silence the ignorance of foolish people. We are to live as people who are free, not using our freedom as a pretext for ill-will, but living as servants of God (2:16). We are to honor everyone, by how we live. Love one another. Fear God. Honor the ruler.

We are not to suffer for doing what is wrong. There is no benefit in that. If we persevere in doing good, even when we suffer for it, God will be pleased with *that* kind of faith and obedience. Christ left us the example to follow. He did nothing wrong, and did not negatively respond to those who attacked Him (2:22-24). He continued to entrust Himself to God. In the same way, we are to not return evil for evil, but turn away from evil and do good. We are to seek peace and pursue it. Peter asks, “Who is there to mistreat you for being zealous for what is good” (3:13)?

You can see many of these same themes in the passage at the top of the page. We are to focus on loving and serving each other. We can expect trials and difficulties that will test us. If we are suffering for Christ, we can rejoice. God will cause His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of glory, to rest on us. But don’t anyone suffer for being a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a troublesome meddler. (“Meddler” is an interesting term. It literally means “looking-over another’s responsibility” – like “armchair quarterbacking”. It is when we criticize other people for not doing what we would do, ...or what we *think* we would do..., when it is not even our responsibility! We *don’t* have all the facts they have, or have to deal with the realities they are facing, ...so we *don’t* really know what we would do, if we were in their place. It is interesting that this behavior is listed among those things that could cause people to look at us in a bad light and draw needless persecution.) But if we are suffering because we are faithfully following Christ, then we can glorify God and entrust our souls to Him while continuing to do what is good (4:18).

So, as we backtrack a bit, we find Peter mentioning spiritual gifts in verses 10 and 11, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” There are some key points here:

(1.) Each one of us in Christ has received a spiritual gift. This is the same thing we saw in Romans 12:3-6 and Ephesians 4:7-16. The gifts mentioned in all three of these passages were given to us at the time of our spiritual birth. Consequently, with regard to these gifts, **we don’t have to seek for them, ...we already have them.** It is like they are hard-wired into our very constitution in Christ. The challenge for us is to learn how to operate in our gifts.

(2.) We are to put it to work toward ourselves. The focus of the gifts is primarily for building up the other members in the Body of Christ. Again, this is consistent with Paul’s teaching in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4.

(3.) The function of our gifting is to be a *service* toward others. It is important to remember who we are: **We are servants of Jesus Christ, ...called to serve one another in the *Body of Christ*.** This fits well with Ephesians 4:12. There, the “equipping gifts” were given to prepare us (lit., to “fit out the saints”) for “a work of *service*, unto building-up of the Body of Christ.”

(4.) We are to see ourselves as “stewards”. A steward is someone who is given the responsibility to utilize the property or resources of another on their behalf. The word “steward” is a compound word, comprised of the word for “house” or “household”, and the word for “law”. Hence **the steward’s responsibility is to carry out “the law of the house”.** He is a manager of the master’s resources, and he is to use them according to the master’s will or desire.

(5.) We are stewards of God’s grace. In Romans 12 and Ephesians 4, Paul had talked about spiritual giftings as being the result of an apportionment of God’s grace. **We are responsible to utilize the grace apportionment we have received from God in accordance with His will.** At this point, it may be helpful to think a bit about what the scriptures say about stewards. In 1 Corinthians 4:1,2, Paul likens himself and Apollos as “stewards” or “managers” of the mysteries of God. They were responsible to rightly utilize the understanding they had received from God. He went on to say, “Moreover it is required of stewards that they be trustworthy.” A stewardship is a trust, ...a holy responsibility given to us by God. In Luke 16:1-8, Jesus told a parable about an unrighteous steward. It is important for us to observe that a steward will be required to give an account for how he carried out his responsibilities. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 describes three slaves, each of whom was entrusted with a large sum of money. They were given responsibility over the resources their master had given them. They were expected to put them to work, and to gain more resources for their master. Immediately, two of them went to work with what they had been given, and doubled what they had been given. The third slave, however, did nothing with what he was entrusted. He simply hid it away. When he had to give an account, his master was not pleased, and the slave not only lost what had been given, but was thrown out as “worthless” and “lazy”. We have to be careful what this means, because it is a parable, not necessarily a clear, straightforward teaching regarding eternal security, for example. But I think we can safely conclude that **God wants us to put the grace-gifting He has apportioned to us to work! He is expecting us to put energy, effort, risk and integrity into what we have been given. We are to employ our grace-giftings responsibly,** in accordance with His desires, standards, and methods. **We are to do His will with our gifts.**

(6.) The grace of God comes in diverse and multiplied forms of expression. The word translated as “manifold” means “multi-colored, variegated, of a great variety of expressions, diverse, of many kinds”. This is important, because **the grace of God is, by His creative design, very individual and personal in its outworking and expression.** That is part of the reason why there is not a specific listing or descriptions of the spiritual gifts, because **there is supposed to be wide latitude for God to do in you what is unique to you.**

(7.) Peter breaks the gifts down into two categories: Speaking and Serving. When you think about it, this makes sense. We saw in Ephesians 4 how a number of the “word gifts” had been given to equip all of the members of the Body for work of serving. The gifts listed in Romans 12 could also be categorized in these two general ways, as well. **It may be helpful to think in terms of these two very general categories regarding your own giftings. What is your motivation or prompting, ...to communicate ideas, or to help with practical concerns?**

(8.) We are to take very seriously the source of our gifting, and treat it with respect.

We are to deliver words from God, as though they really are words from God. This does *not* mean that we “bully” people with our words. The focus is on *us* as stewards. We are to be careful to handle the words God gives us to teach, proclaim or share with care, integrity and respect. **We are to do our best to accurately understand and communicate God’s truth and God’s heart in what we say.**

We are to serve in the strength which God supplies. If we are serving in the Spirit, our hearts and attitudes will remain positive and we will find joy in serving. We want to serve in the heart and strength that comes from God, so that people can see Jesus in what we do. That means that we will do what we do with integrity and graciousness. **We are to do our best to serve in the strength, vitality and creativity that is from God, so that people can see Him in us.**

The purpose of all this is to bring God glory through what He does in us. As we have seen throughout this letter, God has called us to be His special set-apart people. **He wants to use us to show and proclaim His glory, His goodness, His delightfulness and His love.** The way we live, the attitudes we have, the way we interact together, and the way we treat others all are opportunities to reveal Him through our lives. As we avoid worldly controversies and maintain a calm and loving composure in our dealings with others, ...as we walk in the Spirit and express His fruit in our dealings with others, the radiance of God’s inworking life is revealed through ours. **One more dimension of this is learning to express faithfully the grace-gifting of the Holy Spirit by what we say or do in service to others.** As you received a special gift, employ it in serving others as a steward of God’s grace, so that He will be glorified in YOU!