

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
Living in God's Will for God's Glory

1 Peter 4:7-11

August 5th, 2018

Main Point

Last week, we saw that Jesus approached suffering with a mindset that refused to escape His pain through sin. As we follow His example, we need to be reminded that the call to follow Christ includes joining His work through prayerful, loving acts of service for the good of others and the glory of God.

Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the best gift you have ever received? What made it so special?

Did that gift change your life in any way? Have you been able to use that gift to change the lives of others? How so?

It's not unusual to buy something for ourselves or to buy a gift for someone else. But it's not as common for these gifts to have the power to change lives. Yet spiritual gifts can do just that. These are specific gifts God gives all believers to equip us to serve Him and the body of Christ.

Observation

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer Read 1 Peter 4:7-9.

What key words of phrases stand out to you from verses 7-9?

What two things does Peter tell his readers to do and why in verse 7?

Some of the key phrases in these verses include: "the end is near, maintain an intense love, love covers a multitude of sins, and be hospitable." Believers in Peter's day lived in anticipation of Jesus' return. In fact, most of them believed He would come back during their lifetimes. Peter encouraged them to let their anticipation guide them to love one another intensely.

How does he tell believers to love one another? For what reason does he tell them to love one another?

As the first and essential priority (“above all”), believers were to maintain an intense love for each other. The Greek term rendered “intense” comes from a verb that means “to stretch out,” “to exert energy.” The noun conveys the sense of fervency. Believers’ love for one another was to be unfailing and kept at full strength. The Greek word translated “love” is agape, the distinctive Christian term for God’s kind of love. Agape is sacrificial, self-giving, determined good will that acts in others’ best interests. Believers are to extend this distinct love to all others—even to enemies—but especially to other Christians.

Why did Peter declare that maintaining intense Christian love for one another is crucial for building community?

Peter stressed the reason believers were to love one another: because love covers a multitude of sins. Interpreters have presented various suggestions concerning Peter’s meaning: (1) Christians who consistently demonstrated love would receive mercy at their judgment. (2) Believers were to remember God’s love covered their numerous sins. (3) God’s kind of love does not look for others’ flaws and sins but seeks to help wrongdoers. (4) Genuine love does not publicize others’ sins but forgives repeatedly, shielding the offenders from exposure and condemnation. Love forgives others readily and repeatedly (see Matt. 18:21-22). Love is not blind to others’ sins, but it covers them in the sense of letting the offences go rather than hanging on to them. In other words, we are to show other people the same grace God has shown us.

In what ways can and do Christians today express biblical hospitality to others?

One expression of love is forgiveness; a second expression is hospitality. Hospitality was crucial in the Christian enterprise’s early years. As itinerant missionaries traveled in their work, they depended on local Christian families for lodging. Early churches had no buildings constructed for believers’ use. Christians met in homes. These “house churches” played important roles in Christianity’s spread. Thus, hospitality was much more than courtesy; it was a vital ministry. Devotion to loving one another will help Christians live in genuine, grace-marked community.

Why is it hard to show hospitality at times? Why is it important, and how is it an extension of grace?

Hospitality reflects our love for other believers and a sign that we are living in community.

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11.

All believers are given gifts to serve God, and Peter challenged his readers to use their gifts wisely—to be good managers. What two gifts did Peter mention specifically in verse 11?

Peter focused on two spiritual gifts as examples of God’s varied grace: speaking and serving. Those with the gift of proclamation should speak God’s words. In teaching or

preaching, they were to allow God to speak through them. Here, the word 'serves' may imply practical acts of kindness. It could include, however, a range of ministry from menial tasks to leadership roles. Only in reliance on God's help could believers use their gifts effectively to contribute to community.

What did Peter declare that believers were to do with the spiritual gifts God gave them?

Peter encouraged believers to use their gifts to minister to others. Even as each believer received a divine endowment, he or she was to use it to serve others. Believers were to minister consistently, and they were to be good managers of God's varied grace. Managers were stewards who handled an owner's affairs. These endowments of God's grace were not self-generated but were stewardship responsibilities to be discharged faithfully in service for God. In other words, they were to turn grace into grace.

The purpose of speaking and serving was that God would be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. God, not the speaker or the servant, was to receive praise as the Provider of the gifts and of the strength to exercise them. The phrase through Jesus Christ may point to Christ as the Mediator of God's gifts or to God's redemptive work in Christ proclaimed in the gospel believers had received.

Peter mentions God's varied grace. What does he mean here? How does God's grace come in different varieties?

In verse 11, Peter identifies two categories of serving. What are those two primary categories of serving? How does Peter instruct people to exercise their spiritual gifts?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What situation have you faced recently in which you practiced (or needed to practice) forgiveness or forbearance toward another believer? How did God's love motivate you in the situation? What happened?

What are some practical ways believers can maintain intense love for each other?

Another way you might turn grace into grace is by suffering well. Describe a time when you saw God's grace on display through another person's suffering. What did you learn from that person?

What is a spiritual gift you have, and how are you using it to show God's grace to others? How would you advise another believer to discover his/her spiritual gift?

Discuss ways God could receive glory through our service. How has God led you to demonstrate love for others through serving them.

As you consider the spiritual gift or gifts you think God has given you, how would you use them differently if your primary goal was to love and serve others?

Prayer

Close in prayer, asking God for the courage to be faithful stewards of the gifts He has given you. Thank Him for His many blessings and gifts and pray that He will help each of you live with a fresh commitment to not waste a single opportunity He has given you. Pray and look for the opportunity to get involved in the life and ministry of the church.

Commentary

4:7. All the major events in God's plan for redemption have occurred, and all things are now ready for Jesus Christ to return and rule. The word *therefore* connects this doctrinal word to the behavioral and ethical consequences that ought to be demonstrated in the believer's life and in the life of the church. One of the proofs of being a Christian is not simply having a hope for the future; the proof is having a hope that makes a difference in our lives today, in the present. As we live in the expectation of the second coming of Christ, some things need to take priority in our lives.

First on this list of priorities is purposeful prayer. Such prayer must be clear minded and self-controlled. To "be clear minded" suggests that believers pray intelligently or that they think about and evaluate their situations in life maturely and correctly as they begin to pray about them. Considering the context, perhaps Peter was cautioning them against giving way to eschatological frenzy and panic. To be "self-controlled" as one comes to prayer suggests that believers are to pray with a mind that is focused and alert. In other words, prayer should not be practiced nonchalantly or flippantly. Believers are to take prayer seriously.

4:8. The second priority is forgiving love. Above all, love each other deeply burns into our minds the supreme importance of love as the controlling factor in all relationships in the church (see 1:22; 2:17; 3:8). This kind of love (agape) can be commanded because it is primarily a decision of the mind, not a feeling into which a person falls. The goal of agape love is always to seek the good of the other person. The evidence of agape love is action, not words. The extent of agape love is sacrifice. Thus, believers are to love each other "deeply." This word means "to be stretched." True agape love is constantly being stretched to the limit by the demands made on it. This is precisely where agape love shines, because it is not exhausted when it becomes difficult or inconvenient.

One of the most difficult and inconvenient times to extend love is when someone in the church has hurt or wronged us. We must demonstrate a love that is willing to be stretched because love covers over a multitude of sins. "Covers" means "willing to forgive." The present tense indicates that which is to be constantly true in the life of the believer.

Love does not ignore the reality of personal sin any more than it justifies or condones sin. Confrontation of sin is appropriate and necessary, especially when we demonstrate love. However, it is just as important to demonstrate a willingness to forgive and then to move on. Forgiveness, like love, is an act of the will, a personal choice. A person chooses either to forgive or not to forgive.

4:9. Believers should put action into the love command. Hospitality among Christians is an important and tangible expression of love. In the first century, hospitality was a common courtesy that even nonbelievers extended to others. Scripture lifts Christian hospitality to a higher level. A believer's attitude toward the necessity and courtesy of hospitality should be without grumbling. This expression speaks of murmuring and of repeated words of complaint. Such words were often spoken, not quietly to themselves, but to others. Obviously, the arrival of guests in any century can be inconvenient for a variety of reasons. Even the best-behaved guests can overstay their welcome. Therefore, Christians are to provide hospitality without complaining or whining about the time and expense involved. This is an expression of agape love.

4:10–11. One final priority remains for believers who live in the light of Christ's second coming and who wish to demonstrate agape love toward one another. This priority can best be summarized as intense serving. Every believer is to heed this injunction. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.

Every believer in every church has received a spiritual gift from God for use in the life of the church. Within the body of Christ, love for each other finds expression in the use of spiritual gifts, not for self-advancement or as an attention-getter, but for the benefit of others. Every Christian, then, is capable of ministering to others within the body of Christ.

“Gift” (charisma) literally means “a gift of grace.” When Christians receive God's grace in this way, we have the responsibility to share this gift with other Christians. Through such sharing we are faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. What has been given to the individual as a gift of grace has also been given for the benefit of the body. Believers are agents of God in passing on the benefits of his grace in our life. God does not grant us gifts of grace for our personal use; he gives them for the benefit of the body of Christ.

Verse 11 illustrates this point by dividing the many gifts of grace into two broad categories: speaking and serving. Speaking includes not simply preaching or teaching, but many kinds of gifts involving speech, such as evangelism, speaking in tongues, prophecy, encouragement, and leadership. Serving includes any type of assisting or encouraging ministry that directly targets the benefit of others within the body of Christ, such as contributing to the needs of others, healing, miraculous powers, showing mercy, and encouragement.

Believers are to take these gifts seriously and to exercise them with an attitude of dependence on God (speak the very words of God, do it with the strength of God). When the gifts of grace are applied in this way, the attention and praise shift from the individual believer to God, the one who has gifted the believer in the first place.