

Eternal Impact

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Sermon by Ps Bijoy

Let's read the passage, 1 Peter 4:10, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." And then in verse 11, we read: "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

These verses in 1 Peter 4 outline simple yet profound principles of ministry within the Church: every Christian possesses a gift – not limited to pastors or elders – bestowed by God's grace. It's our responsibility to employ this gift, directing it towards benefiting others and glorifying God. This service is most impactful when carried out with the strength that God provides.

In Ephesians 4:12, Paul says that these gifts are given "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God." What Paul is stressing here is the aim of strengthening the whole body, not just the parts.

Still, this serves as our initial example of how service can be mishandled. Individuals who believe they are entitled to serve based on their perceived gifts, and who worry that their Christian fulfillment depends on serving in that specific way, have misunderstood the true message of this passage. The true goal of service is to build up the body of Christ, rather than just seeking personal satisfaction. Therefore, it's important to serve where the body of Christ requires strengthening, while also considering our own calling and giftings.

How are we supposed to serve?

First, we should serve in God's strength and with great joy. Our goal should not be mere good deeds, but good deeds done in a spirit that comes from a joyful dependence on God's help -- this is what glorifies God in particular. Going back to 1 Pet. 4:11, we read -- "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength of God."

what matters to God is not merely that we use our gifts, but how we use them – in cheerful reliance on him. This is the attitude that we should have when we give our time or money or energy to the church. In 2 Cor. 9:7, we read: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Regrettably, there are instances where our giving lacks genuine cheerfulness and is instead driven by a sense of guilt. We find ourselves donating out of obligation, a behavior that contradicts the essence of this verse. However, the Bible encourages us not to give out of guilt, but to view giving as a remarkable opportunity to actively contribute to the advancement of God's kingdom.

This illustrates a flawed approach to service: performing acts driven by guilt rather than by genuine appreciation. It reflects a lack of understanding that these actions are contributing to something far more precious than what we might have chosen to do otherwise.

Serve by faithful giving.

This is the attitude that Paul talks about the Macedonian churches in their giving. In 2 Cor. 8:2-3, he says of them: “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.”

Despite occasional challenges to our joy and less-than-perfect motives, we mustn't avoid church service. Scripture commands us to give of ourselves. While aiming for joyful and grateful service, we must acknowledge our human flaws. Just like other aspects of our Christian journey, our service may be imperfect. Nonetheless, we strive to progress under God's guidance. We should pray for joyful service through God's strength and pure motives. When our attitude falters, we should promptly seek forgiveness and repent.

Beauty and unity in diversity.

Paul underscores that the very presence of the body of Christ is reliant on the diversity we sometimes fail to recognize when we compare ourselves with others. So, he says in 1 Corinthians 12:17: “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If

the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? And then he says in verse 19: "If they were all one part, where would the body be." Well, the body would not exist. What makes Christ's body function is the very diversity of gifts amongst its members.

More importantly, in response to the claim of uselessness, Paul points out God's sovereignty in the matter. In verse 18, he says: "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." So, God is sovereign in his designing of all the parts of the body, and he does it for the best interest of the body of Christ. If we say we are useless or feel discontent, we not only say no to the idea of the body, but worse, we express discontentment at how God has placed us in the body.

What does this mean for us? We should serve in the church where we can; we should thank God for the gifts that He has given us; and we should not feel useless or discontent merely because we are not serving in some particular way or capacity. There are so many ways to serve in this church that are crucial to the health of the church. And different parts of the body serve in very different but important ways. Car park, flower ministry, prayer ministry, food bank, media, Sunday school, alpha course, worship ministry, evangelism are the few areas where you can consider serving in this church.

And now, I'm not merely discussing the utilization of spiritual gifts, but also the application of the tangible blessings and gifts that God has bestowed upon us. Some members have an abundance of time, while others have substantial resources or valuable relationships. Those who have an excess of time can contribute significantly by engaging in acts of service that strengthen the community. Those blessed with financial resources can make a significant impact by providing financial support to the church. Similarly, individuals with rich relationships, such as families with children, can play a crucial role in nurturing and guiding younger members, thereby enriching the community. All the members of the body are useful and integral in the church. And we should be content with every gift that our sovereign God has chosen to give us in his wisdom and love.

All contributions are equal in the sight of the Lord.

Some individuals give up on serving because they underestimate the importance of their contribution. Our perspective on service to God should not stem primarily from its

temporary outcomes -- but because of what the sacrifice says about God's value to us. Which did Jesus say was more valuable—the widow's two copper coins or the thousands of the wealthy?

Scripture indicates that it is good thing to earnestly desire spiritual gifts that we don't have. In 1 Cor. 14:1, Paul instructs the Corinthians to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts.” Is it possible to long for spiritual gifts that we don't have without regarding the ones we do have are useless, or by coveting those that others have? I think so. This is the balance between contentment in the gracious sovereign provision of God and the dissatisfaction of holy yearnings and prayer.

So, we should be content with the gifts God has given us. But we also should be eager for more—say, the depth and breadth of our understanding of God's word; with the purity and holiness of our lives.

Serve in Humility.

In 1 Corinthians 12:21 we read, “the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you.’” Those in positions of greater responsibility or visibility in the church are not to Lord their authority over others or carry out their duties in with an air of superiority. Unity in diversity is impossible without Christ-like humility. And the place that it is needed most is in those who seem to have the most responsibility or prominence in the church. Look how Abraham served the Lord with a heart of humility.

Finally serve with eternal perspective.

People are serving primarily not for church but it's for themselves. Because God uses it for their own growth, fellowship and with an eternal reward. If eternity has touched your heart, then serving the Lord is the ultimate pleasure and Joy. Because everything you do for the glory of God has an eternal value and reward. May the Lord use us for his glory. Amen!