

“Christmas Gifts” (1 Peter 4:10-11)

My three children love Christmas.¹ They began anticipating this Christmas (2006) on 12/26/05. Of course, my children, like most children, count the days leading up to Christmas because they want to receive gifts. They tear into gifts like savage beasts tear into a carcass. Yet, I have observed a change in the last two years. Now my children enjoy giving gifts as much as they enjoy receiving them. It is a glorious sight to witness each of them especially excited to give a gift to a family member or friend. My children are slowly but surely learning the lesson that “*it is better to give than to receive.*”

Likewise, in the spiritual realm we need to be reminded that “*it is better to give than to receive...it is better to serve than to be served.*” In Peter’s first letter, he writes to “aliens” (1:1) scattered all over the Roman map who had settled in Asia Minor. These refugees were poor—probably the poorest of the poor. No college graduates here. No wealthy merchants. Yet, the apostle reminded these believers of spiritual “gifts” God had given them. In 1 Pet 4:10-11,² Peter will share three principles that we need to bear in mind as we celebrate the Christmas season and prepare for the New Year; “**so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**”

1. We have been given at least one spiritual gift (4:10a). Peter writes, “**As each one has received a special gift...**” When a person believes in Jesus Christ, he or she “receives” at least one spiritual gift. Some Christians receive a “gift-mix” that includes more than one spiritual gift. The word “gift” (*charisma*) literally means “grace gift.” The gift is undeserved, unsought, and sovereignly provided by the will of God. Thus, the natural outcome of receiving such a gift should be to use it to bless others.

2. We are responsible to put our gift to work (4:10b). Peter says that we are to “**employ it [our gift] in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God**” (4:10b). The word “serving” (*diakoneo*) is the verb form of the noun “deacon” or “servant” (*diakonos*). The point being each believer is a servant who is called to use his or her gift for the benefit of the body. One’s gifts are not to promote self-satisfaction and spiritual pride. The word “stewards” further emphasizes the servant nature of these gifts. A “steward” really has nothing of his own. He manages perhaps the entire estate of his master, but the riches at his disposal are not his own. His success is measured in how well he manages these riches. Likewise, the steward in the church has a gift or gifts and is judged a good steward on the basis of his effective use of those gifts in service to others. Peter also refers to the fact that we are stewards of the “manifold grace of God.” Originally, this word meant “many-colored, variegated.”³ This suggests that the church is not to be gray, dull, drab, and blah. As believers we are free to serve in creative ways that utilize our unique personalities, passions, and gifts.⁴ As we exercise our spiritual gifts in service to one another, God’s “manifold” grace is evident.

In 4:11a, Peter continues his exhortation: “**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.**” Peter divides spiritual gifts into two general categories: speaking and serving. By doing this, Peter makes the point that word and deed are both necessary and of equal importance for a fellowship to function properly. The one who is gifted in speaking is to be true to the Scriptures. This applies to the preacher, teacher, counselor, small group leader, and children’s or youth teacher. We must not speak forth our own thoughts or experiences. Rather, we are called to declare the full counsel of God’s Word. Those who serve are to rely on God’s strength because serving can often be challenging. With speaking gifts there is usually some encouragement along the way; however, in serving behind the scenes there are often no accolades whatsoever! Therefore, it is especially important that those who serve do so with the Lord’s strength. This leads to our final point...

3. We must glorify God with our gifts (4:11d). Peter concludes with the ultimate purpose God intends in giving us gifts: “so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” God wants to be “glorified” in “all things.” He wants us to show Him off in every exhibition of our spiritual gifts. This can only take place when our “serving” is “through Jesus Christ.” Finally, the reason that we are to glorify God is because He already is the owner of “glory and dominion.” It belongs to Him already!

It seems a bit odd that Peter utilizes the above benediction (see 5:11) before he is officially finished with his letter, until one realizes he is trying to say something significant to us. What is Peter telling us? Quite simply, that all the glory and dominion that results from utilizing our spiritual gifts should be funneled back into God’s glory. That is the true test of service.

This Christmas will you be generous with the gifts God has given you? Will you see yourself as the steward you are and give your gifts away? “*It is better to give than to receive...it is better to serve than to be served.*”

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Notes

¹ At the time of this writing (12/24/06), my children were 9, 7, and 5.

² This passage is strikingly parallel to 1 Corinthians 12-14. Both passages insist that the purpose of spiritual gifts is to minister to the saints.

³ See BDAG s.v. *poikilos* 2a, Electronic Ed.

⁴ It is worth noting the marvelous balance between graces (1 Pet 4:7-9) and gifts (4:10-11). Graces are those aspects of Christian living that we are called to display. Gifts are specific God-given abilities given to individuals by the Holy Spirit to serve God and others. All Christians are to pray, love, and be hospitable. Each and every Christian should be practicing these three actions. Conversely, the gifts mentioned in 4:10-11 can only be exercised by those who have been gifted by God in those particular ways (see also Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28; and Eph 4:11). Note the following unique emphases. Romans: Using our gifts because we have given our bodies to God; 1 Corinthians: Responding to God's grace in giving gifts by using them properly; and Ephesians: Equipping the whole church through the gifts of people.