

• *How to live while waiting for God's intervention*

Peter is giving a string of sharp and short exhortations to his persecuted Christian friends in Roman Asia Minor, telling them how they should live while they are awaiting God's intervention into their predicament. 'The end' is always near. They need to be steady in their praying. They must maintain love towards one another, not least in practising hospitality.

Now there is one more thing. The Christians should be ministering to each other; God has given spiritual gifts to enable us to do so.

1. Use the gifts God has given

1. **Christians are given gifts of ministry.** Peter implies that every Christian has a spiritual gift of some kind; no Christian is totally lacking in spiritual giftedness. '*Let each person, in the way that he or she has received a gift, use it for the other people, as good stewards of God's varied grace*'^{□1}. A gift is any ability experienced in unusual degree that God gives to us by the Holy Spirit for benefiting his church. Every Christian has a spiritual gift.

□1 4:10

2. Gifts for the sake of others

2. **Gifts of ministry are not to be used selfishly but for the sake of others.** It is easy for certain gifted people to use their gifts for themselves, for their own fulfilment, for getting praise and appreciation from others. Using one's gift is generally enjoyable, so many are tempted to use their gift simply for the sheer pleasure of doing so.

But Peter says 'Let each person ... use it for the other people'. This means our gifts have to be brought under control. We do not use them simply for the joy of doing so. We restrain ourselves and control ourselves to ensure that the gift we have really is doing some good in the church. Joseph in the Old Testament at one stage was using his gift simply for himself^{□1}. Preachers enjoy preaching; administrators enjoy organising; singers like singing. But the question is: do we truly love the people for whom we are using our gift? Or are we simply enjoying ourselves and using others to do so?

□1 Genesis 37:5-11

• *Not simply for personal enjoyment*

3. Gifts are very varied

3. **Gifts are very varied.** There are many 'spiritual gifts' mentioned in Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 28–30; 14:1, 13, 39; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10. Even this is not a complete list and it is possible to think of gifts that are not specially mentioned in the Bible **as gifts** at all (singing or hospitality for example). Even a single gift varies a great deal among different people who have the gift. No two preachers are alike. No two church administrators are alike. Peter says 'Let each person, in the way that he or she has received a gift, use it...'. Each gift must be used in the way it has been given. Each person must be himself in the use of the gifts God has given him.

4. Two categories of gifts

• *Speaking*

• *Serving*

4. **Gifts fall into two categories.** Each person must use the gifts they have as stewards of God's varied grace. '*Whoever speaks should do so as one who utters oracles of God. Whoever serves...*'. Peter divides gifts into two categories: speaking and serving. By 'speaking' he has in mind such things as exhortation, teaching, prophesying. By 'service' he has in mind such matters as gifts of administration, of showing mercy, gifts of helpfulness, gifts of giving.

5. Speaking oracles from God

5. **Gifts of speaking should bring the church oracles from God.** There are two types of giftedness. The one who has a gift of speaking of some kind should use his gift 'as one who utters oracles of God'. In other

words, the person with the gift of speaking should be sure to use his gift in such a way that what he says is truly a message from God, both in its content and in its timing. His speaking should be a form of the word of God, for the people.

• *Words should be tested first*

In 'inspired' speaking, the level of inspiration will vary. No Christian today can add to Scripture, or present new doctrines, or ask that his words should be received without testing. No one can speak words from God that are on an equal level with Scripture. 'Speakers' need to have their words tested. In Berea the words even of an apostle were examined 'to see if these things were so'¹.

¹ Acts 17:11

• *The right words from God for the people*

In Scripture the 'oracles' (inspired messages) were given under the leading of the Holy Spirit and had a God-given relevance to the needs of the people. No one today can speak new doctrines, or claim to have the authority of Scripture, but one can look to God to say what is exactly right for the people. One can look to God to be given exactly the right words.

6. Gifts of service should be done with God-given strength

6. Gifts of service should be done with God-given strength. 'Whoever serves should do so out of the strength that God supplies...'. All ministries need God-given strength, but Peter mentions this in connection with gifts that may be especially tiring. 'Service' – including administration, hospitality, the conduct of worship, settling disputes, ministering to the needy – will often require special strength. The Christian should not try to draw purely on his own strength; he or she should look for additional strength from above.

7. Gifts of speaking and of service should bring glory to God

7. Gifts of speaking and of service should bring glory to God. Peter wants every message and every piece of service done with God-given strength to bring about admiration of God. He continues: '... so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen'. The reason why God should be admired and our ministries should bring admiration of God is that 'the glory' is His already. He already has a radiant shining character that the Bible calls 'the glory' of God. He already rules over everything. When God gets glorified it is simply a matter of what He is, becoming more widely known, more deeply appreciated. This is what all ministries should do: they should bring God to be more widely known and more deeply appreciated.



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