

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

1 Peter 04: 07-11

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 7 to 11.

Peter writes to the saints who are in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, among whom are both Gentile believers and Jewish believers who have escaped from Jerusalem for safety. Peter refers to them as "sojourners," recognizing that the hope of Christians is an eternal one, a heavenly homeland; our days on earth are temporary. Despite being sojourners, God does not abandon His children as orphans; He desires His children to come together and live a church life. In verses 7 to 11, Peter paints a beautiful picture of church life for us. We have already read verses 7 and 8 yesterday, so today we will not go into detail again, but rather quickly review them as a reminder.

Verse 7: "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers."

This is a common reminder for the saints: we are sojourners on earth, and everything on earth is temporary, with a destined end. The day of conclusion is drawing near. Therefore, we should not desire the comfortable and easy life on earth, but instead, we should be self-controlled and alert in prayer, awaiting the Lord's return.

Verse 8: "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'"

The saints should come together to live the church life, walking the path of holiness together. On an individual level, we should be nourished by the milk of God's word,

leading to spiritual growth and maturity. On a collective level, we are all to be transformed into living stones, suitable for the building of a spiritual house. In this process of growth and construction, the most important thing is the mutual love among the saints, which reveals a purified soul. Of course, everyone's level of spiritual maturity varies, leading to inevitable differences of opinion and views during the building process. Therefore, we must learn to embrace one another in love, forgiving each other. This way, even when offenses occur, they can be cleansed through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, without disrupting the harmony of church life, for love can cover a multitude of sins.

Verse 9: "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling."

Peter describes church life in a very practical way, emphasizing hospitality and avoiding grumbling. At that time, many Christians were facing hardships, especially Jewish saints who had relocated from Jerusalem and had to start over, often couldn't take care of their basic living necessities. Therefore, Peter tells the saints to be hospitable, sharing good food and resources with one another, always ready to help fellow believers in need. This is a concrete expression of mutual love; when love is lacking, grumbling easily arises.

Peter's instruction not to grumble, in my understanding, does not mean suppressing complaints forcefully, but rather avoiding situations that lead to grumbling. The church should not be governed by external regulations but by each person willingly offering themselves out of love for the Lord and the church. This willingness comes from inner spiritual guidance and soul submission, leading to outward actions. If grumbling begins, it indicates a misalignment at the source. It's best to pause outward actions and address the discontentment within the soul.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7-8, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." The promotion of various ministries within the church, including mutual hospitality, should ideally follow the

principle of giving willingly. The fundamental spirit of giving is to give cheerfully: not forcing or making difficulties; this way, both the giver and the receiver can ultimately be blessed.

Of course, there may be saints in the church who are lazy and often like to take advantage of others. Regarding such individuals, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

Paul, in his ministry to the church, did not tolerate such behavior; he addressed those who took advantage directly. This is also a responsibility that elders in today's church must take on—to oversee and address unhealthy behaviors. If various unhealthy factors can be appropriately addressed, the saints can enjoy mutual hospitality without grumbling, coming together to help one another. This is a beautiful picture of church life.

Verse 10: "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

This verse is a proverb or key verse for church life that all saints should take to heart. However, there is one inaccurate word in the Chinese Union Version translation. It should be translated as "a good steward of God's manifold grace." Therefore, the verse should be directly translated as, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

Firstly, this is addressed to every saint—each one should use the gift they have received. Peter is confident in telling us that each person has received a gift. So, what exactly are these gifts? In the New Testament, the term "gift" is translated from four different Greek words, with three of them forming a group and the fourth standing alone. Therefore, gifts fall into two major categories.

The first category is related to life. Life is something that can grow, so within this group, there are three Greek words: *dorea*, *dorema*, and *doma*. These gifts correspond to the parable Jesus told in Luke 19:11-27, where a nobleman goes away to receive a kingdom and entrusts his ten servants with ten minas, giving each one a mina. This mina represents the gift of life, which everyone has, and initially, everyone receives the same. Life's gift will grow, and when the Lord returns, some will have earned five minas, and some ten minas. The Lord will reward them proportionally: those who earned five minas will be given authority over five cities, and those who earned ten minas will be given authority over ten cities. This pertains to gifts related to life. The gifts mentioned in 1 Peter 4:10 belong to this category, we won't delve into it further now. Perhaps next year, if God leads us to study the Book of Romans, we can discuss life's gifts in more detail then.

The second category is related to abilities, typically described by the Greek word *charisma*. This corresponds to the parable Jesus told in Matthew 25:14-30, where the kingdom of heaven is compared to a man going on a journey who entrusts his servants with talents—some receive 5000, some receive 2000, and others receive 1000 talents, each according to their abilities. In this example, everyone has talents, but the quantity varies based on their abilities.

Here, we need to note that serving in the church is not about using our natural abilities; rather, our natural abilities need to undergo redemption. It's like talents being given according to abilities, and after undergoing the redemption of talents, they become gifts from God. When the Lord returns, those who use their gifts in the church, regardless of the size of their gift, will receive the same reward. However, those who do not use their gifts will be cast outside, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Therefore, in this verse, Peter is saying that each person's gifts should be used to serve one another in the church, being good stewards of God's manifold grace. The Greek word for grace is *charis*, and the word for gift is *charisma*, which is formed by adding *ma* to the end of *charis*. The Greek suffix *ma* indicates reaching an optimal state, meaning it has been formed or shaped. For example, the word "optimize" in

Greek becomes "optima" when it reaches its best state. Grace (charis) becomes gift (charisma) when it is shaped or developed in us.

For instance, if you enjoy singing and are good at it, this is a grace from God. You should use this grace in the church, practicing and developing it into a gift that can be used to serve others. Similarly, if you enjoy cooking and are skilled at it, this too is a grace from God. You can use this grace to serve in the church's food ministry, developing it into a gift that can be used to serve others. The same principle applies to children's ministry, youth ministry, cleaning ministry, and various other ministries in the church: we should develop and shape the life-giving grace that God has bestowed upon us into gifts that can be used to serve in the church.

Therefore, every saint has received different graces, which can be developed into their gifts to serve one another. In the church, there are manifold of graces, and these should be developed into manifold gifts. Christ is the head of the church, and we all are stewards. When God calls us to join the church, we become stewards who develop our received graces into gifts.

Peter says that each of us must be a good steward of God's manifold grace. This means you must develop your grace into a gift to serve the church; otherwise, you are not a good steward of God's grace. According to Peter's perspective, every saint in the church must rise up to serve and develop the grace they have received into gifts, without exception. If everyone does this, every person in the church can fulfill their ministries, and every person in the church can become royal priesthood. Since God grants manifold graces to the church, the church should develop manifold gifts to meet every need within the church.

When discussing the gifts of the church, we must look to Paul because his ministry was to build up the churches. What kind of gifts does the church need? In Romans 12:6-7, Paul lists seven gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy. These were the needs of the Roman church and the gifts God bestowed upon them. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Paul lists another nine gifts that address the needs of the Corinthian church, including wisdom, knowledge, faith,

healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues.

In 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, Paul even arranges the importance of different gifts in order for the churches. Paul received excellent Greek and Jewish education, and he logically and clearly organized his thoughts. Having established many churches among the Gentiles, he was very aware of the diverse needs of the church. Therefore, he could methodically list the gifts needed to build the church. This helps saints consider what grace they have received and what gifts they can develop.

Of course, Paul's list reflects the needs of the church at that time. Now, over 2000 years later, society has changed significantly, and the needs of the church have also increased. Therefore, the types of gifts will also increase accordingly. In principle, as long as there are needs among the saints in the church, the Holy Spirit can develop gifts according to His will to meet those needs.

Peter and Paul were different. Peter served the church with his life and encouraged the saints through his letters. He may not have been able to list various gifts one by one like Paul, but from his life experiences, he derived principled classifications. He divided the gifts of the church into two main categories: speaking gifts and practical gifts—simple, straightforward, and clear.

Verse 11: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Here, it begins by saying, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracle of God." The term "speaks" here is not accurately translated in Chinese Union Version. Generally speaking, in Chinese translations of the Bible, the term "preach" is used, which corresponds to "prophecy" in English, or more directly, "speaking as a prophet." The original text here is actually about speaking, as seen in the KJV translation: "If anyone speaks, let him speak in the oracle of God," which directly

translates should mean that one to speak should speak for God and speak forth God." Speaking encompasses a broader range than just preaching. Of course, those responsible for preaching are speaking for God and must speak His words to meet the needs of the church. Speaking includes not only preaching but also teaching Sunday school, youth ministry, and children's ministry—all are using words to serve the saints and should be the outlets for God. Additionally, counseling and advising also use words to serve the saints and should likewise speak God's words to meet their needs.

To be able to speak for God, one must be familiar with the Bible; this is basic equipment. On the other hand, understanding people's needs requires timely guidance from the Holy Spirit. Peter categorizes speaking as the first type of gift and serving people as the second type. Serving people, if translated more directly, means "doing things," and it should be done according to the strength given by God. If one serves according to their natural abilities, these abilities can easily run dry, and when they serve, it may carry personal traits that lead others to elevate them. Peter emphasizes here that service should be done according to the strength given by God because the source is from God, and men are vessels used by God to transmit His grace. In this way, those being served will naturally give glory to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, our natural abilities are given by God; they are our talents. However, these talents must be redeemed in order to serve others. Therefore, service in the church must be connected to God; the ability to serve must come from God, using our talents to meet people's needs—this is true service. Our service, whether through speaking or doing, should ultimately bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. The final purpose of our service is to glorify God. Moreover, it is to glorify God through Jesus Christ; in other words, the source, motive, and ability of our service are completed through the Spirit and Jesus Christ, supplied to our souls, and then distributed through our natural talents, ultimately bringing glory to God through Jesus Christ. This is not a simple matter.

We often verbally attribute glory to God, but many times, those we serve give thanks and praise to us, which actually steals God's glory. Therefore, we must often examine ourselves to see if the source of our service is from God, if our motives in

serving are for God, and if our abilities in serving come from God. If so, when others are helped through our service, they will naturally give glory to God.

Here, Peter concludes with praise to God, acknowledging that glory and power belong to Him forever and ever. Amen. Throughout this passage discussing how we should live as temporary residents in this world and the beautiful picture of church life, Peter's burden is lifted, leading him naturally to offer praise to God. Dear brothers and sisters, during our temporary stay in this world, God has prepared a spiritual home for us where we all learn to serve one another. Whether through speaking or doing, we can develop our gifts according to the grace God has given us. As we use these gifts to serve the church, the ability comes from God, ultimately bringing glory to Him. This is the beautiful picture of church life.

Let us pray together: Lord, bless the church I belong to. Help every believer in the church to recognize the grace we have received from You and to develop these grace into gifts to serve the church. May the church I belong to not only be a spiritual home but also a place where every believer can fulfill their role, making the church filled with mutual love and service, ultimately bringing glory to God. May this sweet church life be the best testimony. Bless the church I am in, I pray in Jesus Christ's holy name. Amen!