

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

Will you join me this morning by taking your Bibles and turning to 1 Peter chapter four? I want to share a few thoughts from verses seven through 11 in a moment as we conclude this series that I have been bringing to you with respect to the heart of love. It has been a very fascinating as well as a challenging journey. I have heard from a number of you and I truly rejoice in the love that I experience here in this church. One would have to look long and hard to find a more loving group of people. And I say that from the bottom of my heart, a love that you have for Christ and for one another. It is a very loving group of souls in this place.

Now that is not to say that we might be more fond of some than others. That is human nature, isn't it? And that is not to say that we don't have room to grow in the area of love. There is always room for improvement. And so one final time I would like to preach to you on this most important topic that we might abound more and more in the Lord's new commandment that we have studied in John 15 to love one another just as I have loved you."¹

Before I read this text may I remind you, again, that in John 13 we learned how Christ loves, that he loves self sacrificially and that he loves with self humiliation and self control. After that we went to 1 Corinthians 13 and we learned a number of characteristics about what it means to really love one another. And we saw that the greatest gift of all spiritual gifts is that gift of love. It is the gift that never fails because it is eternal.

Then next we examined what it means to love one another with respect to fellowship, with respect to spiritual needs, and in Romans 14 and verse nine we learned the importance of pursuing the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. In Galatians six we learned more of what it means to help restore our brothers and sisters in Christ who might be caught in some type of a sin that we should restore them in a spirit of gentleness, help bear their burdens and, thus, fulfill the law of Christ which, once again, is this law of love towards one another.

In Romans 15 we learned that we are to be in relationship with one another and therefore as people that are filled with goodness and knowledge we are to admonish one another when the time arises that we need to do so. We also learned in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 24 to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Now the question before us is: Will we be obedient to these commands? Or will we be merely hearers of the Word rather than doers? Each of you must answer this before the Lord. And if you answer in the affirmative, then the fruit of that answer will manifest

¹ John 15:12.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

itself on the vine of your life. Others will experience that love. Others will see your love for Christ and that love will be a contagious love that other will want to emulate as well.

Now to challenge you to this end, I want to take you to this passage in 1 Peter chapter four. And here we are going to examine five marks of a mature Christian. And I really want you to measure your life against this standard. Unless these characteristics are dominant in your Christian life, all that you have learned about what it means to really love one another, frankly, will not amount to very much. So these are some other very important truths that need to be fundamental and foundational in our life.

Let me read this text to you, 1 Peter chapter four verse seven.

He says:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.²

Peter is speaking to many homeless and suffering saints that were scattered abroad during the first century, trying to encourage them, trying to strengthen them. Imagine what it would be like if you were wandering around someplace with your family trying to avoid persecution. You have been run out of your home, persecution for your faith is mountain. You need encouragement. And this encouragement now comes by this inspired writer. He is now fanning the flames of what it means to really understand the glorious nature of our salvation, the benefits of it. And so he has done that. In the verses prior to this he has called them to holy living. He has reminded them of the inestimable importance of feeding upon the Word and growing by the Word. He has taught them the importance of submission. He has also given them practical ways to avoid unnecessary persecution. And now he is going to remind them of some very important attitudes that they must have in order to endure suffering and persecution, especially should the Lord call them to suffer and die on his behalf. This is the proper reaction to suffering.

Now, you might say, “Well, pastor, we are not suffering like that today.” Well, no we are not necessarily, but there are many within the sound of my voice who are. And I do believe that the day is coming in which our suffering is going to increase and I believe that what the apostle is telling the first century saints here are just as important to us here at Calvary Bible Church today. And I want you to be reminded, too, beloved, that here the faithful apostle who will soon hang upon a Roman cross—he is very aware of this—

² 1 Peter 4:7-11.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

this apostle who would soon be martyred is writing to many people who would also soon be martyred. And he is instructing these dear saints that are scattered abroad about these marks of true maturity. And I wanted to share them with you today as we close out this study on the heart of love because, once again, unless these marks are growing on the vine of our life as well, then our endeavors towards loving one another will never amount to very much.

So there is five consuming priorities that should characterize our life that flow from this text. Let me give them to you. Number one, a continual watch for the Lord's return; secondly; a consuming passion for holiness; thirdly, a committed love for fellow Christians; fourth, a consecrated love for the Church; and, finally, a contagious zeal for God's glory. And, once again, I challenge you to measure your life against this standard this morning.

First of all, notice the importance of having a continual watch for the Lord's return in verse seven.

He says, "The end of all things is at hand."³

It could be translated, "near."

Now some would say, "Boy, he missed this by about 2000 years and counting." No, not at all. That would be wrong. You see, the term "end" *telos* (tel'-os) in the original language does not necessarily mean the end or cessation of some chronological period of time, but rather it is the idea of fulfillment, of achievement, of completion, of consummation. It is the idea that an objective is about to be obtained, something that is being fulfilled, a goal that is about to be reached. And in this context it is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, he says, at hand.

The idea there is that the Lord's return is forthcoming. It is impending. It is on its way. It is approaching. And certainly we are much closer to it today than when these words were first penned. And also in the original language this is in the perfect tense. So it is the idea here that the fulfillment or consummation of an objective is approaching. You might use the term imminent with this. It could happen at any time. You see, beloved, this is the profound incentive for each of us to love the Lord and to love those that he loves because the Lord is coming.

Ask yourself right now. Does this really mark your life? Do you have a sense of watchfulness in your life? Do you live in anticipation for the Lord's return? This verse could be paraphrased, "The completion of the Church age is on its way, that glorious time when the Lord Jesus Christ will return for his own."

The Lord reminds us in Luke chapter 12, beginning in verse 35:

³ 1 Peter 4:7.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them.⁴

So, indeed, the end of all things is at hand. Frankly, the end began when the Lord first came. The Old Testament prophets, you will recall, really looked ahead and saw two mountain peaks, two mountain peak events in close proximity, that is of the first and second coming of Christ. They did not understand the period of time in the valley between them, so they saw them all at once. They saw it all as the end of the age, that is, the completion of God's ultimate plan of redemption.

Now, to be sure, Peter lived with a sense of divine urgency. And he is calling on the saints to do the same, to live in the same way. He knew that the Lord's return is imminent. And we know today that it is imminent. It could happen at any time. The Lord could come and snatch us away in that glorious rapture and then the second phase of that return would be him coming in power and great glory.

You will recall that Peter asked the Lord in Matthew 24, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"⁵ "The *parousia* (par-oo-see'-a), your appearance. Tell us about that." So Peter lived with eager anticipation for the ultimate consummation of redemption history, for all of that to finally come to fruition. And he thought that might even be one to see it. And I have to say I am quite confident that we will see it even though we can't say for sure.

Likewise, the apostle Paul lived in light of that glorious transformation that will occur when the Lord returns. You will recall in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 51 he says:

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.⁶

Paul also spoke of that glorious snatching away in 1 Thessalonians four, the rapture of the Church where we read in verse 15.

We who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the

⁴ Luke 12:36-37.

⁵ Matthew 24:3.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.⁷

So Peter begins this section by challenging his readers to share his vigilance here, to realize that the end of all things is approaching. And it is as if he is saying, dear friends, let the exhilaration of this promise cause your heart to be ignited with praise and service and anticipation. Let these truths incentivize your obedience. Live your life in light of the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Paul said in Titus two, we are “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us.”⁸

Indeed, dear friends, some day—and I believe some day soon—the Lord’s spiritual reign in the hearts of men will suddenly be transformed into that physical reign where he will establish himself upon this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords for 1000 years. We don’t know the exact date, but we know it is coming and it could happen at any time. Don’t be lulled to sleep by the things of this life.

Child of God, what an inconceivable joy to think of the rewards that await those of us who love him and who have loved his appearing. And I have to ask you. How will he find you? Will he find you watching? Will he find you waiting? Will you be vigilant in service?

It is so tragic to think how many Christians just kind of float through the Christian life. They really never get a hold of the idea of living in light of his return. Their service is nominal. They are rather indifferent towards the Lord’s return. The disciplines of the Christian life are really not in their life and, as a result, there will be loss of reward. How tragic. So, beloved, I would challenge you to get serious about your walk with Christ. The end of all things is near.

A mature Christian will not only be driven by continual watch for the Lord’s return, but, secondly, a consuming passion for holiness. Notice he says, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”⁹ “Sound judgment” in the original language *sophroneo* (so-fron-eh'-o) means to be sound in mind. It literally has the idea of being in your right mind. It is the idea of having a proper perspective of yourself, to see yourself as you really are, not as how you think you really are, ok? And many times that can be very different. It is the idea of having a balanced perspective on your life and exercising self control and moderation and so forth.

As I was thinking about this text I was reminded of a time when I was called in to consult with a Christian organization that was suffering from conflict. And in the course of that

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

⁸ Titus 2:13-14.

⁹ 1 Peter 4:7.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

period of time I interviewed a number of people, especially the person that was at the top and I asked the person who was basically in charge, the director of the organization to describe himself and to just use three words that would describe yourself. And the words were “disciplined, leader and wise.” Ok. Well that sounds good. But when I asked the coworkers to describe this same gentleman, instead of disciplined they used the word “perfectionist.” He drives everybody crazy. Instead of leader, they used the word tyrant. And instead of wise they kept using the word arrogant.

Now the truth was probably somewhere in the middle, but the point is he was lacking sound judgment with respect to himself. So we need to have a proper perspective of ourselves. We need to be ruled by our mind, not by our emotions. We need to exercise discernment especially regarding ourself. So this is the mind that maintains spiritual priorities. This is the mind that would be committed to self examination, to obedience, to righteous living. This would certainly include a biblical world view. This would be a mind that will not be easily distracted by all of the fleeting pleasures of this world and all of the man centered philosophies.

And, frankly, this is the only way a man could be committed to holiness. He uses a similar term here. He says, “Be sober in spirit. Have a sober spirit.” The term here means to have a clear head, to keep a clear head, to be self controlled. It is the idea even of being free from spiritual drunkenness, to be serious minded, to be spiritually alert, to be vigilant and watchful in our lives. Peter spoke about this in 1 Peter chapter one verse 13. He said, “Prepare your minds for action. Keep sober in spirit. Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ And Jesus also warned in Matthew 24 and verse 42, “Be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”¹¹

So the Christian who is sober in spirit will be one who has his priorities straight. He will have a proper perspective of himself and the world around him. He is not going to be seduced by the things of the world. He is going to live separate from the world. He is going to live in light of eternity.

If I could make it real practical, this is the type of Christian that is, frankly, going to be repulsed by much of what Hollywood produces, especially all of the reality shows that do nothing more than exalt sin. So this is the type of Christian that is looking for the Lord’s return. He is watching for it. He is anticipating it. He is longing to see the Lord face to face, but he is also consumed with his personal pursuit of holiness. He is guarding his heart and his mind from temptation. He is separated from sin unto God.

In Leviticus chapter 11 verse 44 we read, “ I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy.”¹² And he went on to add, “You shall be holy for I am holy.”¹³

¹⁰ 1 Peter 1:13.

¹¹ Matthew 24:42.

¹² Leviticus 11:44.

¹³ Leviticus 11:45.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

Beloved, is this what you pursue?

If I can digress for a moment, remember holiness is the all encompassing attribute of God. Believers must grasp this. Holiness is the complete otherness of God, the transcendent glory of God. And this is why this is so important. And, frankly, a man will only be able to see his own sin in proportion to his willingness to see the holiness of God.

If you have a shallow view of the holiness of God, you are going to have a shallow view of your own sin. But the more you see God in all of his glory, the more overwhelmed you will be by your own sin. You will be like Isaiah who would stand in the presence of God's glory and say, "Woe is me. For I am undone."¹⁴

The apostle Paul attested to this when he proclaimed in Romans chapter seven and verse 22, "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man."¹⁵ In other words he is giving an acknowledgement of his deep love and respect for the holiness of God that is manifested in the law and the Word of God. And yet because of his knowledge of the holy one, the corrupting presence and power of indwelling sin was made even more apparent to him and it caused him to go on to say in verses 23 and 24, "But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."¹⁶ To which he lamented, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"¹⁷

So, dear friends, I would challenge you to ask God to help you comprehend his holiness that you might grasp your own sinfulness and grasp those needs where you need to grow. Ask the Spirit of God to help you literally crave to know more of the holiness of God. Beware "lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,"¹⁸ Hebrews three and 13.

You know, the great danger of sin is in its ability to deceive. We all have 1000 justifications for the sins we commit, don't we. We can rationalize and justify virtually anything. But, you know, even the ones that we see are merely the tip of the iceberg.

In his classic work *The Nature of Power, Deceit and Prevalence of Indwelling Sin*, the great Puritan theologian John Owen addressed the powerful principle of indwelling sin in the believer. Here is what he said and I quote, "It always abides in the soul. It is never absent. The apostle twice uses that expression, 'It dwells in me.' There is its constant residence and habitation. If it came upon the soul only at certain seasons, much obedience might be perfectly accomplished in its absence. Yea, and as they deal with usurping tyrants whom they intend to thrust out of a city, the gates might be sometimes shut against it that it might not return. The soul might fortify itself against it. But the soul

¹⁴ Isaiah 6:5.

¹⁵ Romans 7:22.

¹⁶ Romans 7:23.

¹⁷ Romans 7:24.

¹⁸ Hebrews 3:13.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

is its home. There it dwells and is no wanderer. Wherever you are, whatever you are about, this law of sin is always in you, in the best that you do and in the worst.”

He went on to add, “Men little consider what a dangerous companion is always at home with them, when they are in company, when alone by night or by day all is one, sin is with them. There is a living coal continually in their houses which if it be not looked unto will fire them and may consume them. Oh, the woeful security of our poor souls. How little do most men think of this inbred enemy that is never far from home, how little for the most part does the watchfulness of any professors answer the danger of their state and condition,” end quote.

But, dear friend, the mature saint will be ever vigilant with spiritual eyes straining to look within his own heart to see his sin, constantly straining to see any expression of grief from the face of the Savior. He will have a secret devotion to God. He will be of sound judgment and sober spirit.

And why is this important? Peter goes on to say, “For the purpose of prayer,” in verse seven. Think about it. Holy living not only requires prayer, but it longs for it. It is not merely some duty that we perform because we are supposed to. It is a desire that swells up from the very core of our being as we long to come into the presence of our most holy God and cry out to him for discernment, for conviction, for repentance, for strength to bear the fruits of holiness. Prayer is to the Christian what air is to the body. We cannot live without it. It should be something that our hearts long for. This prayer is the storehouse for all of our spiritual resources.

Often I hear believers say, “Pastor, I have such a hard time with a disciplined prayer life.” Well, may I submit to you that one of the reasons you are having a hard time with your prayer life is because of what I am saying so far. You are not having a continual watch for the Lord’s return. Secondly, you don’t have a consuming passion for holiness. Moreover, the other three marks that we will look at are also absent in you because if all of these are there, believe me, you will pray. You will pray passionately and regularly.

The third deficiency that we must guard against has to do with love for fellow Christians. Therefore the mark that we need to have is, thirdly, a committed love for fellow Christians.

Again, isn’t this precious? Peter is telling these suffering saints, “Folks, have a continual watch for the Lord’s return. Have a consuming passion for holiness, but also have a committed love for one another.” Notice verse eight. He says, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”¹⁹ You see, here Peter reminds the saints of the Lord’s new commandment, once again, to love one another just as he loved us.

The term “keep fervent” in the original language has the idea of something strenuous,

¹⁹ 1 Peter 4:8.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

something intense, to be zealous, even fanatical about something. It carries with it the idea of an Olympic runner that you can see in your mind's eye that is straining to be first across the finish line. That is the idea here. This is how we should love one another, with every fiber of our body.

This isn't this schmaltzy kind of sentimental type of love that we typically experience in our culture, this fair weather love, this, oh, boy, I really love you as long as we are getting along, this convenient type of love. No, no, no, no. That is not the kind of love this is. This is that *agape* (ag-ah'-pay) love. This is that love of choice, that self sacrificing love that demands no reciprocation. This is that love that we studied in 1 Corinthians 13 that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, that love that never fails. It is the love that attempts to imitate the love of Christ in everything that we do.

Charles Spurgeon commented on the extent of this love when he said, quote, "We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. But we are to love our fellow Christians as Christ loved us. And that is far more than we love ourselves. Christ loved us better than he loved himself, for he loved us so much that he gave himself for us so that now no one of us is to say, 'I am to love my friend, my brother, my fellow creature as I love myself.' But to interpret Christ's command, thus. I am to love my fellow Christians even as Jesus Christ who died for me has loved me."

He goes on to add, "This is a nobler kind of love all together to the love which we are to manifest to our neighbors. That is the love of benevolence, but this is the love of affinity and close relationship and involves a higher degree of self sacrifice than was enjoyed by the law of Moses or that would have been understood by the bulk of mankind to have been intended by the precept which bids us to love one another even as we love ourselves," end quote.

Beloved, this, again, is the kind of love that can only be a fruit of the Spirit. We can't conjure this up. We can't pull this off. This is something that must be borne within us by the Spirit. He must produce this kind of love. Unlike our unsaved neighbors and fellow believers, we are family. We have got to understand that. We are united by grace to share in a brotherhood for the redeemed that is going to endure eternally.

You see, we must see one another in a different light than even the people that are in the world. Again, we are family. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ. We are part of an inner circle that the rest of the human race cannot comprehend. They cannot enjoy. Think about it. We are born of the Spirit. We are born again of, not of a corruptible seed, but of one that is incorruptible. We have been placed into a sacred circle of electing love that transcends all boundaries of nationality, all boundaries of culture.

Isn't it great when we have our Russian brothers and sisters over here or our African Sudanese brothers and sisters and so forth. There is an immediate kindred spirit there. We are a people of like precious faith. And so, therefore, that love that we should have for

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

one another should be one that exceeds all other kinds of brotherly love. Because of the Lord's grace that he first loved us we should love one another for his sake.

I often sign my letters to other believers, "In the bond of his grace," because I can think of no greater thing that binds us together. We are the redeemed that commune together as members of this mystical body of Christ. What greater bond could there be? What greater reason could there be to love one another?

So, beloved, our love for one another is no ordinary love. In fact, Peter goes on to say it is a love, at the end of verse eight that, "covers a multitude of sins."²⁰ Oh, I am so thankful for that. I am thankful that you love me in that way because my sins are many.

Think about this. Peter had been a recipient of this very kind of love, hadn't he, having rejected the Lord three times. And yet Jesus still loved him even to the point of death. Peter also knew that the bond of love would be even more crucial as the age draws near and as persecution mounts, as his own suffering would increase. The battle for the truth is intense, beloved. It is intense. Ministry is war. Please hear me. We need each other. We need each other. Love is the perfect bond of unity, Colossians 3:14. You see, we can't do battle with the enemy if we are fighting amongst ourselves. Well, what a despicable thought and what joy that must bring to the enemy when he sees that happening in our family. It must not be.

Think of all the Lord has for us to do. Think of all the ministries that we have even in this church. How can we possibly be faithful to all of these things if we have members of our family that aren't getting along? How sad to endure some burden of hostility and guilt because of some broken fellowship when we come together as a church family. I might add, if that is you—and I know there are some of you that don't get along well with each other—you simply must deal with this before the Lord because this is reprehensible to the body of Christ. This is dishonoring to the Lord. You will be chastened unless you deal with these things. And, frankly, I will pray that that will be so, because I want you to be reconciled not only to your brother, but be reconciled to the Lord. In Romans 12 and verse 18 we are told, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."²¹ You see, this is the kind of love that is so crucial in the body of Christ.

Whitefield thoroughly disagreed with Wesley on Bible doctrine. If you know anything about your Church history, you will say, "Boy, that is an understatement." And once a partisan asked Mr. Whitefield, "Sir, do you think that we when we get to heaven shall see John Wesley there?" "No," said George Whitefield. "I do not think we shall." The questioner smugly nodded and smiled with agreement. But when Mr. Whitefield went on to add something, the smug partisan changed his face. Whitefield went on to say, quote, "I believe that Mr. John Wesley will have a place so near the throne of God that such a poor creature as you and I will be so far off as to be hardly able to see him," end quote.

²⁰ 1 Peter 4:8.

²¹ Roman 12:18.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

That is love, isn't it? Beloved, never let our differences with each other destroy our love for one another because by this all men will know we are the Lord's disciples if we love one another.

So in verse eight he says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."²² He goes on to say, "Be hospitable to one another without complaint."²³ "Without complaint" could be translated "without whining." This begins to address some of the physical needs. There are so many one anothering passages that address that, but certainly we are a very hospitable church, but we are to be that way without complaint.

Hospitable, by the way, literally means to be fond of guests, not to just tolerate them, but to be fond of them. It is to be a lover of hospitality. It can even be translated to love strangers. And, of course, this expands this admonition to exceed even the bounds of just Christian hospitality, one toward another, but also beyond that to non believers which has profound implications with respect to evangelism.

On several occasions Jesus praised believers that provided food and clothing and shelter to those in need and certainly this is consistent with our passion here at the church with respect to benevolence needs. But he is said in Luke chapter 14 beginning in verse 12, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner..."²⁴

Let's stop there. We can all identify with that, can't we? A luncheon, a dinner, ok?

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.²⁵

Now we get the point, don't we?

This is crucial for evangelism. And this is part of what it means to love one another. But, dear friends, I would submit to you once again that this type of love will seldom be a mark in your Christian life unless you have this continual watch for the Lord's return, a consuming passion for holiness, a committed love for fellow Christians, but also a fourth priority and that is a consecrated love for the Church.

Notice in verse 10 he says:

²² 1 Peter 4:8.

²³ 1 Peter 4:9.

²⁴ Luke 14:18.

²⁵ Luke 14:12-14.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.²⁶

You know, this must have been so encouraging to these saints. Each one has received a special gift. Think about that. We all have. God has uniquely endowed us with certain spiritual abilities to help function within the body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12 verse four the apostle Paul says, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.”²⁷ “Varieties” there means distributions or allotments, apportionments of gifts. It comes from the word charisma. It is the plural for gifts. In other words there is a multiplicity of divine gifts. These supernatural abilities distributed at salvation amongst the saints. Every believer has them, supernatural endowments that are given to us.

I am not going to take time—I was going to, but I must refrain—I was going to take you through some of these general categories of gifts, but I must change course. But let me say that there are 18 general categories of spiritual gifts that we see in Scripture, found in the New Testament and they are in four groups. The first group would have to do with gifts that are not operative today. These are what we would call revelatory gifts, gifts that provided revelation of previously unrevealed truths and the ability to communicate these truths in inspired messages. Then there was a second group of gifts that are not operative today, what we would call the confirmatory gifts. These provided confirmation of the divinely inspired messages during the first century. But then there are gifts that are operative today. They really fall into two categories. I will just give them to you briefly. There are the speaking gifts and the serving gifts.

The speaking gifts would be those gifts that benefited the Church not only in its infancy, but also during its continued growth and it will continue on until the Lord returns. That would include the gift of evangelism, teaching, the pastor teacher exhortation. And then in the fourth group of gifts you have the serving gifts which provide support for the speaking gifts to make them more effective.

You have the gift of helps which is really a gift of ministry, that of showing mercy, that of giving, that of governing or ruling. And all of these gifts, dear friends, are given to us to put the Holy Spirit on display, not ourselves. We must see that these general categories of gifts like the basic colors on an artist’s palette that can be mixed and matched into a myriad of different colors. The master artist does this with each of us so that he can paint the masterpiece of Christ and his character on the tapestry of the Church.

²⁶ 1 Peter 4:10-11.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:4.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

It is important, by the way, when you think of your gifts—and, again, this is not the time to really study them—but the real key with your gifts is not so much what do you like to do. It is not even so much the type of thing that other people have told you you should do. But the real issue is where are you affirmed? Where are you bearing fruit?

I have been on a number of para church and Church board organizations, different types of boards and whenever you see confusion, whenever you see frustration, disunity, inefficiency, you can be certain that somewhere in that mix will be one or more people who are what we would call a square peg in a round hole. They are really functioning outside the realm of their giftedness. But isn't it great to know that the Lord has gifted us all and when we find those places where we are truly affirmed in the body of Christ and we are bearing fruit to the glory of God, my, what an amazing thing to watch that happen in a church. But, beloved, never expect an eye to do what only an ear can do. You must keep that in mind with respect to your own giftedness.

So Peter says in verse 10, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” “Manifold” referring, you could say the multifaceted, the many colored grace of God. And, again, we all have a responsibility to develop and use these spiritual gifts. And you do that by getting involved in the Church, of course.

And then he breaks down the two distinctions here. “Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God.”²⁸ In other words, it is not man's wisdom, but God's wisdom. And “whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies.”²⁹ Again, it is the Spirit of God that is empowering that gift within us. And so here you see the two primary categories of gifts that are operative today, two general categories, speaking gifts and serving gifts.

And mature Christians, now, will develop these gifts and they will see where they are being affirmed. The body of Christ should be forthcoming with respect to where a person is affirmed or where they are not. And in the context of using that gift, what will happen? They will love the body as they should.

Well, one last priority that must drive us and I close with this is a contagious zeal for God's glory. Notice how Peter closes here in verse 11. “So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”³⁰

Oh, child of God, this is what it is all about, isn't it? This is our reason for living. This is the supreme goal for all that we do, all that we think. This is the doxology of our soul. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”³¹

²⁸ 1 Peter 4:11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Five Marks of a Mature Christian

1 Peter 4:7-11

And this should be our contagious zeal. And isn't it contagious when you are around somebody that is absolutely sold out to the glory of God? Don't you want to be like that person? Don't you find yourself saying, "Oh, what a testimony to God's grace. My, how I want to be like that person. How I want my life to bear that kind of fruit."

And as we do, as we live to the glory of God, what will we do? We will automatically love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. And we will love our neighbor as ourselves.

So I challenge you to have your life orbit around these essential priorities, especially during these days of uncertainty, during these days of trials for many of you. And, again, when you do, the Christ like fruit of love will grow rich on the vine of your life.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these truths. Cause them by the power of your Spirit to be manifest within our hearts that you might be glorified, that sinners might be converted and that saints might be loved. This is the passion of our heart. We commit it to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcript Explanation: Each transcript is a rough approximation of the message preached and may occasionally misstate certain portions of the sermon and even misspell certain words. It should in no way be considered an edited document ready for print. Moreover, as in any transcription of the spoken word, the full intention and passion of the speaker cannot be fully captured and will in no way reflect the same style of a written document.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Olive Tree Resources.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Dr. David Harrell. © Olive Tree Resources. Website: olivetreeresources.org