

OpenTheo

1 Peter 4:1 - 4:11



1 Peter - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses 1 Peter 4:1-11, highlighting practical ways believers can live as God desires. He reminds his audience that believers should not be surprised by persecution, but should instead focus on living for God and not pleasing men. Gregg emphasizes the importance of love and hospitality, and how believers can use their spiritual gifts to minister grace and perform service. Ultimately, he encourages his listeners to approach even mundane tasks as a way of serving the Lord.

Transcript

We are now turning to 1 Peter 4, which begins, like so many other portions, with the words, therefore. When Peter has lapsed into some discussion of some conceptual theology, he always sees some upshot from that, practically speaking. He says, therefore, Since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind.

For he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

They will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. Now, these first four verses, well, I'd say it's the first verse, primarily, that has given people a lot of trouble, especially the last line, which says that he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. What is this saying? Is this saying that living a holy life is the result of suffering in the flesh? In other words, that if you want to cease from sin, you need to suffer.

So, if you've suffered, then you've ceased from sin. In other words, your suffering is the means of sanctification. Of course, Christians want to stop sinning, and many times, Christians have difficulty stopping sinning.

Many times, Christians have sins that plague their lives for years after their conversion. And if they're serious about God, they wish they could quit. And when they read a verse like this, it says, wow, when someone has suffered in the flesh, they've ceased from sin.

So, that's the secret. So, that's how you can stop sinning, is by suffering more. Is that what it's saying? Is it saying that sanctification comes through suffering? Well, let me just say this.

Sanctification does, in some measure, come through suffering, but that's not the point that's being made in this sentence. There is a sense in which suffering works for us an eternal weight of glory, Hall said. There is a sense in which suffering plays a role, especially if we respond in a godly way to our suffering, in making us better people.

And, in fact, it's probable that some forms of suffering will even cause us to cease from some forms of sin. Especially if it's a very severe kind of suffering, and it's seen to have a direct connection, cause and effect connection with some sin in our life, there's a very good chance that suffering will cause us to stop that sinning. But, that has nothing to do, in my opinion, with what this verse is talking about.

Those are separate issues. Those can be expounded on from other passages of scripture, and even from experience. But, I don't think that Peter, here, is talking about how we overcome sin in our lives.

And, first of all, it wouldn't be entirely true. Not everyone who has suffered has ceased from sin. Suffering sometimes happens, and you still sin.

So, that doesn't seem to be what Peter would be saying, unless he's out of touch with reality, and he is not. He's very much in touch with reality. Some feel that we should understand, he that has suffered, the one who has ceased from sin, he who has suffered is a reference to Christ.

Christ is said to have suffered. He says, at the beginning of the sentence, therefore, since Christ suffered for us, in the flesh, so he's the one who has suffered. Therefore, at the end of the sentence, he who has suffered would be Christ, has ceased from sin.

But, that doesn't work, because in order to cease from sinning, you have to have previously sinned. You can't cease from an activity that you never engaged in. And, therefore, Christ can't be the one who has ceased from sin, unless we want to argue that he formerly engaged in sin, and then stopped, because he suffered.

That's not, certainly, biblical theology, and Peter doesn't hold that view. So, what does it mean, he that has suffered has ceased from sin? Well, actually, the whole section, verses 1 through 4, seem to tell us what Peter is talking about. He is saying that you have ceased from sinning.

You have ceased from living the way that the Gentiles live. The way that pleases them. They are displeased with you.

They don't understand it. They think you're strange. They think it's a strange thing that you don't continue with them.

Your ceasing from sinning has brought suffering upon you at their hands. They speak evil of you, because they think it weird that you're not doing the same thing. You've ceased from that.

In other words, ceasing from sin is not a reference to an absolute cessation of all moral failure in your life, so that you're sinlessly perfect. But, rather, you've given up on sin as a way of life. The new RSV says that you're finished with sin.

When you come to Christ and you repent, what you're repenting of is your life of sin. You're finished with it. That doesn't mean you never will fall into sin, or you will never have further sanctification required.

It just means that you've made a once and for all commitment. You're done with it. You're not going to live that sinful way anymore.

And that's clearly what he says in verse 2, that you no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh, that means in your lifetime, for the lusts of men, which means to please men, what men desire for you to do. Remember, lust means simply desire. You're not living to please men anymore.

You're not going to do what they desire, and that's going to make you the brunt of their persecution. But you're living now for the will of God. He says, because we've spent enough of our past lifetime doing the will of the Gentiles.

See, the point of verses 2 and 3 is we used to do what the Gentiles were pleased with, the pagans. We used to be them. We used to live like them.

We were comrades with them. Our way of life only encouraged their way of life, because we were yet another person affirming it by our own behavior. But when we stopped affirming it, when we said, I'm not going to do that anymore, I don't go to those kind of parties, I don't do that anymore, what you're saying is, I think that's wrong now.

Now, your friends who are still doing those things, they can't help but understand you're saying you're doing the wrong thing. When you were doing what pleased them, what they did, the drunken parties, the revelries, the licentiousness, the abominable idolatries that he lists there in verse 3, that was doing the will of the Gentiles. And it was your way of affirming that way of life by doing it yourself.

You were never saying that they were wrong to do those things, because you were doing

those things. But as soon as you stop, well, why would you stop unless you think it's wrong? Of course, your very repentance and your withdrawal from that kind of lifestyle, that ceasing from that sinfulness, is what has caused the suffering in your life. If you've suffered, it's because you've ceased from sin, is what I think verse 1 is saying.

The wording is strange, because it makes it sound like anyone who has suffered has ceased from sin. But I think what he, he that has suffered, I think he means he among you. He's writing to specific people who are being persecuted for their faith.

He says, you, any of you who are suffering, it's because you've ceased from sin. Which means you should be able to have a clean conscience, as was recommended in the earlier verses. At the end of chapter 3, he says, it's better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

He said in chapter 3, verse 17. In verse 16 of that chapter, he said, having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, they're going to be ashamed because of your good conduct in Christ. The idea here is, you should be willing to suffer, knowing that it's because you're being good, not because you're being bad.

And that's why chapter 4 begins with, therefore. Because of this philosophical outlook, that it's better to suffer with a clear conscience for doing good than to suffer without a clear conscience for being bad. He says, therefore, you should be encouraged by the example of Christ, who suffered for us in the flesh, knowing that your suffering is being brought on because you have ceased from sin.

Not because you are sinning, but because you've stopped doing that. You're not pleasing the Gentiles. They're not happy with you, and that's why they're picking on you.

That's why you're suffering. Now, he says there in verse 1, that you should arm yourselves with the same mind, the same mentality. As what? Well, of Jesus.

He says, insofar that Jesus suffered for us in the flesh, we should arm ourselves with the same mind he had. That is, that we're prepared to suffer in the flesh for doing the will of God. He did.

We should too. Our mindset should be one of expecting and embracing suffering. This is very hard for Christians in the 20th century in Western civilization, where there really isn't that much suffering brought upon us for our faith.

Sure, we suffer. Even in the modern world, people die of cancer. They get injured in accidents.

They get paralyzed. They're maimed, and they're killed in acts of war or terrorism or whatever. There's a lot of suffering, even in our world.

But there's not very much suffering we have for being Christians. There's not much persecution. It seems, perhaps, that we are living at a time, unusual in our lifetimes, where the suffering for being a Christian is becoming more realistic, just because the outward hostility toward Christians in our culture is increasing.

It just seems to be a trend. And it may well be that we will know something of what Peter's readers knew. And that is a suffering that comes on you because you're standing for Christ.

The fact that it has not done so in previous portions of our lives so much is a strange thing. It's not strange that you suffer. It's strange if we don't.

In terms of church history, it's the unusual time when Christians can live a godly life for God and no one is offended by it. Throughout most of church history and most of the world, and even most of the world today, if you get outside of the West, if you go into the Muslim world, the communist world, you know, any place where corrupt governments are and Christians are standing for righteousness, you'll find that people suffer for being Christians there, even now. And that is the mentality that Christians are supposed to put on.

It's hard for us to put that on because it's foreign to our experience. We just haven't suffered. Now, because of that, we don't expect it.

We don't expect to suffer. And when it happens, it catches us by surprise and we may be unprepared for it. I actually, I've told anyone who's heard me much knows this, when I was a teenager, among the books I read besides the Bible, I didn't read very many books other than the Bible, but the ones I did were mostly biographies.

A lot of them were biographies of modern Christians in Romania or Russia or places where there's persecution. And I remember in my teenage years, reading Richard Wurmbrand's books about tortured for Christ, his experience 14 years in a communist prison being tortured, or Corrie ten Boom's books about her experiences in Nazi concentration camps for righteousness sake, or brother Andrew and him carrying the Bibles into countries where persecution of Christians had driven the true church mostly underground. I read Foxe's book of Martyrs.

I remember someone gave me as a gift Foxe's book of Martyrs when I was 16 or 17. I didn't read it for a long time, so I didn't want to, but I eventually picked it up and when I read it, it was very encouraging. I was surprised.

I thought it was going to be gory. There's plenty of martyrs in there, but the stories are of their victory and their courage and the grace of God given to them in their martyrdom. The point is that in my formative years as a Christian, what was always before my eyes is Christians are suffering in communist countries.

Christians have suffered recently under Nazism. Christians have suffered throughout history. So that to me, it never seemed very strange when in my life I suffered some things.

I usually didn't suffer for my faith, but I often suffered though I had done nothing wrong. Sometimes the people who brought my suffering were not, I didn't bring it on myself by anything I'd done to them. I can't really say I was being a martyr for my faith, but it was nonetheless unjust what happened to me.

But to me, when unjust things happen, I think, well, isn't that kind of what Christ suffered? He suffered unjust treatment. Isn't that what Christians around the world suffer? That mentality was easy for me because of my conditioning reading about these martyrs and so forth in my formative years. But I know a lot of Christians have never even been mindful of the fact that Christians, even as we speak, are being tortured for Christ in certain countries and have been throughout history.

And Peter said, we should put on that mentality. He said, arm yourselves with that same mind. Interesting that he speaks of it as if that's an armor for your soul to have that mentality.

Paul talks about the armor of God, you know, faith and righteousness and salvation and the truth are our pieces of armor. What are they? They defend us against spiritual defection, spiritual loss. Well, another thing that will protect us in this spiritual battle against spiritual loss is arm yourself with the mind of suffering for Christ.

Christ did let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Paul said in Philippians 2. And one of the things in Christ's mind was he's here to go to the cross. He's here to do the will of the father.

He's here to go through the meat grinder for God. If that's your mentality, you'll do well in this battle. If it's not, then you're not going to do so well.

You're going to be unarmed, unprepared for the actual nature of the battle that faces us. And we in America are most likely to be unprepared because we aren't armed with this mindset. Early Christians were.

They saw it all around them. They saw the suffering, the persecution, and we have to be reminded of it by reading about it because we're not experiencing it, really. The time may come when we do experience it, and this armor on the mind, this mentality of Christ will be very necessary.

But he says, the reason you're suffering, I think he's saying in the flesh, is that you've ceased from sin so that you no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh for the lusts of men. You're not pleasing men, not doing what they desire, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles when we

walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, abominable idolatry.

He's assuming Christians don't do that anymore. The sad thing is in modern America, a lot of people who call themselves Christians do those things recreationally. They fornicate, they get drunken, they go to parties and do all those things.

But the early Christians didn't. It was understood when you become a Christian, that's what you give up. You live a holy life.

You live for God. Modern Christians often are not aware that they're supposed to be living for God, or if they are, they don't think it's absolutely mandatory. It is.

These early Christians, it was so mandatory that they give these things up that they did so even at the cost of persecution that they received for doing so. Their abstinence was an acted condemnation of those behaviors. Not that the Christians were being nasty about it toward those who were still doing it, but their just withdrawal from it was saying that's wrong.

And when you're saying to your old friends, what you're doing is wrong, that's why I'm not doing it, it's wrong. Then they don't like it. In fact, they don't even understand it.

It says in verse 4, In regard to these, they think it's strange. Well, what do you mean? You were doing this yourself last week. What's changed now? Why aren't you continuing to be with us about this? What has changed? Well, you've changed.

And your perception of those behaviors has changed. And you can't approve them anymore by act or word, and therefore, even if you say nothing, your very absence is saying they're wrong. And you don't run with them in the same flood of dissipation, and therefore, they speak evil of you.

But they, not you, will give account, well, you will too, but they'll suffer when they give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. We'll all stand before God, and so will they. And of course, Peter's saying that is, what he's saying is God's the final judge.

They are judging you and punishing you. Well, they'll have to answer to God too, and they'll get their punishment in due time. But verse 6 is very confusing.

Now here, this is interesting. It says, for this reason. For what reason? Apparently, for the reason that, because Christians have forsaken the way that pleases the Gentiles, they've experienced negative judgment from the Gentiles.

They've been judged by men, perhaps even put to death. And that's why they're the dead. Those who are now dead had the gospel preached to them, so that even though

they would die or be judged at the hands of men, they would nonetheless live to God.

Now here, it's a hard verse, because on the surface, it sounds like when people were dead, someone went to them in the place that they were and preached to them there. And it seems to go along with some people's interpretation of chapter 3, where Jesus, through the Spirit, went and preached to the spirits in prison. Both of these statements seem to say, at least as read a certain way, it seems to say that while people were in Hades who are dead, who are in prison, that these people were visited and preached to in Hades.

As we saw when we were teaching, when we were talking about chapter 3 in verse 20, I don't think that's what it's saying. When it says the spirits in prison, I think we're trying to understand the spirits who are now in prison. They were preached to when they were alive.

They're now dead and their spirits are in prison and they are therefore those whose spirits are in prison were preached to, but not when they were dead, but when they were alive. That was a long time ago. So now their spirits are in Hades.

And likewise here, it sounds like it's saying when these people were dead, they were visited and preached to. It says, for this reason, the gospel was preached to those who are dead. This could simply mean an earlier generation of Christians who have died under the judgment of the pagans, under Nero's persecution, perhaps, or similar persecutions in their own local areas.

They're dead now, but they had opportunity to hear the gospel so that even though they would be judged and killed by the heathen, they might nonetheless have salvation and live according to God. Now, the expression according to, which is in those two phrases, they were judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. It's really hard to know how that prepositional phrase is to be understood.

However, several translations, for example, the English Standard Version and the New Living Translation and also the Revised Standard Version, these versions all rendered the word according to, in both places, simply as like. They say that these people were judged like men in the flesh, but live like God in the spirit. So that they had occasion to hear the gospel in their lifetime so that when they came under the judgment of men and actually were maybe killed as martyrs, though they were judged like men physically, they aren't really defeated.

They live on in the spirit like God. And that is their life continues in the realm of the spirit where God is. This is, again, the wording is difficult.

I don't deny it. The overall appearance of the statement raises curiosity as to exactly what he means. But I think it's likely that neither this verse nor chapter 3, verse 20 are

talking about people in hell hearing the gospel there.

Now, if it is talking about that, this is the only place in the Bible that would tell us about it, these two passages in 1 Peter. And one would have to wonder where did Peter actually get the information from. If we think of Peter as writing from direct inspiration like a prophet, then he could have gotten that information from God.

But for the most part, the epistles, the writers of the epistles don't claim to be prophets getting direct revelations. They're just sharing Christian truth that the Holy Spirit has shown them in a normal fashion. And usually, about historical situations, they're referring back to things that can be historically verified from records.

We don't have any record elsewhere in Scripture of anyone who was in hell being preached to down there. So either Peter is the first one who's understood this, or else that's not what he's talking about, even though the wording may sound like it on the surface. We'll pass from this verse leaving some things mysterious about it, but I think what he is saying is that these people are vindicated spiritually after death, even though they face condemnation, judgment, and death at the hands of their persecutors.

Verse 7, But the end of all things is at hand. Therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers, and above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

As each one has received a gift, this is a gift of the Holy Spirit he means, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as of 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. Now, it's interesting here, just as he said in verse 8, finally, and yet it wasn't the final thought, there's more that came afterward. He seems to say, when he says in verse 7, the end of all things is at hand, we would tend to understand this to mean the end of the world.

Now, reading this in the 21st century, where many Christians feel like we really are living at the end of the world, see, there's confirmation, we're living at the end of the world, Peter even said so. It's right here in my Bible, the end of all things is at hand. But of course, we have to remember Peter was saying this 2,000 years ago to people who lived 2,000 years ago, and he was communicating that thought to them, his readers.

And in what sense the end of all things was at hand when he wrote this to his readers is certainly a question that should be raised and maybe explored somewhat. What does he mean by the end, and what does he mean by all things? First of all, the word end here, tell us, does not mean the termination. It means the goal.

You know how we say the end justifies the means, or to what end have you done this? It means for what goal, what are you seeking to accomplish? The word end can mean a goal, or it can mean, in other settings, it can mean a termination. In this case, it has the concept of a goal in mind. The goal of all things is at hand.

Well, what is the goal of all things? Now, if he's thinking of people as individuals, perhaps the goal of the Christian is to die faithful to God, and everyone's, our death, no matter how young or old we are, our death is not too far off. We have, within our lifetime, something to deal with that's not too many years distant from now, and that's our death. And that could be the end that he's thinking of.

The goal of our life is to die faithfully and go on to be with God. But he may not be speaking that way. He seems to be thinking more collectively.

The end of, or the goal of all things. All what things? Of course, it could mean the world. Taken in its most literal and most expansive and absolute sense, it would mean the end of the world is at hand.

But if so, Peter was missing it by a few thousand years, and I don't think that's the case. I don't think that Peter was wrong. It doesn't have to be a reference to the end of the world.

It could be the end of all prophesied things. Now, the reason I say that is because Jesus said that. And he said that about A.D. 70, which had not yet come when Peter wrote this, but was near.

Peter wrote this in the 60s A.D. And in A.D. 70, of course, the temple was destroyed and the Jewish order was destroyed. The priesthood was ended. The Jews were scattered.

The Jewish state, the Jewish religion, was abolished by the Romans and has never really been reestablished. Although the Jewish state has been, the temple and the priesthood and the Jewish religion has never been reestablished. Now, what's interesting is that Jesus predicted that this would happen and made an interesting comment that might be relevant to Peter's wording here.

In Luke 21, we know that this is the occasion when Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple. In Luke 21, verses 5 and 6, it says, Then as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, Jesus said, As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. So he predicts the destruction of the temple, which, of course, did occur in A.D. 70, 40 years after he made the prediction.

Verse 7, And they asked him, saying, Teacher, but when will these things be? What things? When will not one stone be left standing on the temple? When will the temple be thrown down? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?

Again, the same things. You predicted some things to happen, the destruction of the temple being the core of it. When will those things be, and what sign might there be to alert us that these things are about to happen? They're asking about the timing of the destruction of the temple, and Jesus gives a long discourse, in the course of which he says in verse 20, But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, as some of the disciples would live long enough to do, the Romans would surround Jerusalem.

He's answering their question. They're saying, when will this be? What sign will there be that this is about to happen? He says, well, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. This destruction of the temple I've talked about, the desolation of Jerusalem, is near when you see this sign.

That's the sign that these things are about to take place that you asked about. He said, Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let none of those who are in the countryside enter her, for these are the days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

Now, that's interesting. Then he says, if you look down considerably further, verse 32, he says, Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass until all things are fulfilled. All things? This generation? It did happen in that generation.

The temple was destroyed. All things in this case means all the things predicted. He says, as we saw in verse 22, When the Romans come against Jerusalem, these are going to be the days of vengeance that all things that are written, that is, that are written by the prophets, all things that are written, predicted by the prophets, will be fulfilled.

And he says, this generation won't pass until all things are fulfilled. And so Peter was there listening to that. And Peter says to his readers, The end of all things is at hand.

All things? All things that are written. This generation will not pass before all things are fulfilled. Certainly all things doesn't mean all things absolutely in the universe.

In the context, Jesus was predicting that the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the Jewish state, the destruction of the temple, all of that was the end of all things that were predicted. And very well might be what Peter has in mind. He says, the end of all things is at hand.

If he was speaking of the same all things in 1 Peter 4, 7, that Jesus was speaking about when he said all things, and certainly it's possible that he was, then he was quite correct. At the time he was writing, the end of those things was at hand. Now it says in verses 8, this is 1 Peter 4, verses 8 through 11, he basically, especially 8 through 8 and 9, he gives a list of different, again, qualities, sort of like he did back in chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, Christian qualities.

Back in chapter 3, verse 8, he said, finally, all of you be of one mind, have compassion,

love his brothers, be tenderhearted, be humble-minded. Here he's got a similar kind of list. Above all things, be fervent in love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.

Be hospitable. The word hospitable in the Greek is *philosenos*. It means love of aliens or love of strangers.

Hospitality is showing generosity and love toward people who are not necessarily part of your family. They're strangers to your family. They're alien to your home.

Bringing them into your home is hospitality. Now, he says, show hospitality to one another without grumbling. Lots of people will open their home to other people, but either verbally or in their heart, they'll be grumbling about it.

Of course, my wife is truly an exception to this. My wife and my mother both. I would say that of the women I've known, I hardly can imagine two people more hospitable in this respect than my mother and my wife.

Both of them have opened their homes and they're just so cheerful and they never, no matter how long their guests stay, no matter how much trouble they are, just remain cheerful. This is a gift. This is a spiritual gift.

And yet, even though not all have the same gift, all have the same duty to be generous towards strangers, to open their homes in many cases. Remember, Jesus said, I was a stranger and you took me in. And they said, when did we do that? And he said, when you did it to the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me in Matthew 25.

So, hospitality is a Christian virtue. It is part of loving one another. And he says there in verse 8, love will cover a multitude of sins.

Now, here he's actually probably quoting Proverbs 10, 12. What does it mean love covers a multitude of sins? It doesn't mean that if you're loving enough, God will overlook your sins. It's sort of like you kind of, you kind of get a pass for your sins because you've done the good deed of loving other people.

It means that your love for people will cover their sins in your mind. That is, people can sin against you, but your love for them makes it as if they haven't. You just kind of forgive them.

You just, you give them a pass in a way. Now, you don't always have to give a pass because there are times when Jesus said, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him.

There's times when someone's sins perhaps are such that they need to be confronted because maybe it's a pattern in their life that's damaging relationships. Not just injuring

you, but their behavior is just bad. It's injuring everybody they come in contact with.

And therefore, to confront somebody about certain sins is definitely a loving thing to do. Say, hey, do you know that this behavior, this habit of yours is, you know, is not glorifying God. It's making enemies all over the place.

It's injuring people. So confronting people about sins is a healthy and loving thing to do in certain circumstances. But a lot of times, there's a multitude of irritations.

It's not like a person's really got habits that are going to ruin other people's lives. Just a little irritating at times. And love for people absorbs that kind of thing.

It covers a multitude of those kinds of sins that are merely not so much that it's a kind of way of life that's destructive. It's just something that's difficult for you to put up with. Something irritating from people.

Well, loving them makes it possible for you to put up with them without being so irritated. Basically, it covers a lot of otherwise annoying things in someone else's life. Of course, God's love for us is what causes him to cover our sins, too.

And to atone for them by sending Christ. So, covering of sins is really one of the functions of love. Both God's love for us and ours toward other people.

Now, in verse 10 and 11, he actually gives something about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this, too, there's some parallel. Not exact parallel, but similar subject matter in Ephesians.

In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about how at Christ's ascension, he gave gifts to men. In Ephesians 4, 11, he says he gave some to the apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ. So, there's these different gifts of the Holy Spirit that are given for the building up of the body of Christ, Paul says in Ephesians 4. Paul actually gives a somewhat longer treatment of the gifts.

In Romans chapter 12, I think around verse 7 is where he might begin, where he says, well, let me actually turn there because there's considerable more verbal similarity between Romans 12 and Peter than there is even between Ephesians 4 and Peter. But Paul, in both Romans and Ephesians and, of course, 1 Corinthians also, talks about the gifts and Peter gives probably the most succinct summary of teaching on the gifts. But in Romans 7, excuse me, Romans 12, excuse me, 7, that's not really where I want to start.

I should start in verse 6. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us. Now, this is important. The word gift in the Greek is charisma.

The word grace in Greek is charis. Same word, shortened. Charis, C-H-A-R-I-S, means

grace in Greek.

The word gifts is charisma. Just add M-A at the end of charis and you've got the gifts. As any lexicon will point out, the word gifts, charisma, means a gift of grace.

That is to say, God gives you an enabling grace that enables you to do something for the kingdom of God that you would not be able to do without that gift. Everyone has gifts. These are manifestations of the grace of God.

And he says, and Peter's going to use that language too, but in Romans 12, 6, he says, Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith or ministry, which means serving, let us use it in our serving. He who teaches in teaching, he who exhorts in exhortation, he who gives with generosity or liberality, he who leads with diligence and he who shows mercy with cheerfulness. Now Paul's exhortation here is that whatever gift you have, use it diligently in the service of the body of Christ.

Paul gives a longer list of gifts which we won't look at right now in 1 Corinthians 12, where he gives nine gifts to the spirit. In Romans 12, which we just looked at, he gave seven. And there's no overlap between the seven in Romans 12 and the nine in 1 Corinthians 12, except for prophecy.

Only prophecy is in both lists. The rest are totally different. Interestingly that the ones in 1 Corinthians 12 are mostly about speaking, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, prophecy, judging prophecies, tongues, interpretation of tongues.

For the most part, not entirely, but the longer list, which is in 1 Corinthians 12, is mostly things you say, speaking gifts of various kinds. Where in Romans 12, most of the gifts listed have to do with helping or doing service. The gift of ministering means serving.

The gift of giving. The gift of showing mercy. The gift of leading.

These are services performed, not necessarily inspired utterances. You can see that Paul, in his lists of gifts, recognizes two different kinds of gifts. Primarily, those that have to do with speaking, and which therefore serve the spiritual needs of feeding spiritually the church with the words of God.

And those that have to do with doing something, which mostly serve the physical needs of the church. The gift of helps. The gift of giving.

The gift of showing mercy or compassion. It's like what the good Samaritan did. He helped out a person who had fallen among thieves.

That's showing mercy, according to scripture. Therefore, God gifts some people to talk. And he gifts other people abilities to do things.

Like the old saying, those who can do, and those who can't, teach. And so I'm a teacher, that's because I can't do much of anything else of value. But some people actually have real jobs in the body of Christ, and actually do things that are of great value to people's personal and even physical needs.

Now, Peter, when he talks about the gifts, distills his whole teaching into two verses, but says as much as Paul does, only more condensed. He says in chapter four, verse 10, as each one has received a gift, a charisma, minister it to one another, that is serve the body of Christ with it, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. In other words, you have a gift, manifold means many faceted.

There's the many faceted grace of God is manifested in this gift of grace to you, a different kind of gift of grace to someone else, a different kind of gift of grace to somebody else, a different charisma. The many faceted grace of God is manifest in various gifts of grace distributed to the body of Christ, to steward. If you've received a gift of grace, you have a stewardship.

You have something of God to manage for him. Do you have the gift of giving? That's because he's given you money to give. Do you have the gift of helping? It's because he gives you skills to help with.

You have the gift of showing mercy. This no doubt is very much the same as hospitality, helping those who are in need at your own inconvenience. Do you have the gift of leading? If you're a natural leader, well then serve the body of Christ with it.

Every gift is to be used to serve the body of Christ and in doing so, he says, as you minister it or serve one another, you will be a good steward as opposed to being a bad steward of that grace of God that's been given to you. The gift that's given to you is a certain bestowment of grace, a particular aspect of God's grace that manifests in a certain kind of divine activity in your life. And he says, if you don't use that to serve each other, you're not being a good steward of it.

You've got something from God to manage, you're not managing it well. If you use it to serve each other, to minister one another, that's being a good steward of the manifold grace of God. Then verse 11, he breaks it down to the two categories we mentioned.

He says, if anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers or serves, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies. So there's two kinds of gifts.

There's speaking gifts, which include teaching and prophecy and evangelism and exhortation and word of wisdom, word of knowledge, tongues, interpretation of tongues. These are all gifts that have to do with what comes out of your mouth. And it is supposed to be edifying to the church.

If you have a speaking gift of any kind, he said, speak like the oracles of God. And the

oracle means like a direct word from God, as if you were a prophet. Now, this is interesting because it suggests that anyone who speaks in a pulpit, anyone who speaks for God as a vocation, as a calling, who has that gift, should be very cautious not to just use the platform to promote whatever their personal agendas are, their pet peeves or whatever, but to speak at least as much as they know to do as a mouthpiece of God, that the Holy Spirit is giving these gifts.

The Holy Spirit should speak through you. If you have a speaking gift, whatever the nature of it should be, that you see it as God is speaking through you. You're like an oracle of God, which means like a prophet.

And so the person who speaks to the body of Christ should minister to the body of Christ in such a way as to consciously be endeavoring to give what God himself would say, as if he was standing there speaking through your tongue, because that's supposed to be happening. That's what a spiritual gift is. The Holy Spirit should be able to speak through you, just like I think Peter earlier said that the prophets in the Old Testament, the Spirit of Christ testified through them.

Or even Noah preaching to his day was the Spirit of Christ preaching to those people. So when a Christian minister speaks, certainly not less than in the Old Testament, but more so. When a person speaks to the congregation, you should be speaking, it should be the Spirit of Christ.

Christ should be addressing the church through those gifted members who speak in one way or another. But there's not only those who speak, there's the other category. As the one who speaks should do it as the oracles of God, there's that other category.

If anyone ministers, which means serves, this would be more the practical gifts of helps, of hospitality, of showing mercy. Anything that meets the physical needs or provides a service that is necessary for the well-being of the body of Christ. Well, if you have one of those gifts, because that's another category of gifts he's suggesting, let them do it with the ability which God supplies, so that God, in all things, may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Now what's it mean? Suppose you're gifted as an auto mechanic. Maybe it's even your job.

Maybe you're a very skilled auto mechanic. But in addition to making your living at it, you want it to be your ministry, because you feel like God's gifted me to serve people. I have a gift of serving, and this is the service I know how to perform.

I'm good at this. Well, of course, I've known auto mechanics like this who actually have a regular business in auto mechanics they own, and then they've kind of worked on other certain cases for free. Poor people, missionaries, things like that.

When it's actually, there's a part of their job that's also going to be a service they perform to the body of Christ, which they don't charge for, because you're a servant, you don't treat them as customers. You treat them as members of the same body as yourself. And so a minister gives his services, whether he's a servant or a speaker, he gives his services to the body of Christ, even though his abilities might even be something that has use in his regular career.

But the point is that the mere ability to fix cars doesn't mean you have a gift of helps. It might mean that you'll be called on to help from time to time, but the gift is a spiritual gift. A person can have a natural ability to fix things.

He might not even be a Christian, but it's not a spiritual gift, it's just his aptitude. Something becomes a spiritual gift when God calls you in the use of that thing and uses that as the Holy Spirit works through you to bless other people in it. I think of people who are janitors in churches that I've known in the past.

Some of them are just grumpy old guys who get mad at the kids who are running through the hallways and they'll do what they're asked to do, but it's just a job to them and it's no blessing asking them to do anything for you. Other people, like Steve at the church I attend, he's just a blessing. He serves, he's a real deacon of sorts.

He's mostly a janitor and maintenance man at the church, but I feel spiritually enriched through his attitude and through just his spirit. Serving can be so uplifting to people in a spiritual way, not just in the sense that you've met their physical immediate need, but you've blessed them, that God has blessed them through you doing this because you're gifted. It's a spiritual gift, it's a grace.

And you minister grace as you perform the service. I was talking about hospitality a moment ago. Some people welcome people in their home, but you just don't feel that they've got that gift.

You don't want to touch anything, you don't break anything, you don't want to get any dirt on their carpet, and that's just being considerate to your host, of course. But the thing is, there are other people who in the same actions, you just feel spiritually uplifted. You feel like, wow, I feel like I'm in the spirit of God dwells here.

I remember one of the houses, a Christian house that I lived in when I was a teenager, in a Christian ministry house. People would come into the house just as visitors, say, well, I just feel the presence of God here. There's something that along with the physical thing that's being provided, there's this other spiritual thing that's happening with it too.

There's people whose service to you feels begrudged and you almost don't want to ask them to do it and you just feel like, can't wait till this is over with because it's awkward. But other people when they provide the service, they're obviously serving Christ and the

Holy Spirit in them has gifted them to do what they do as of the ability that God gives them. A natural ability isn't the same thing as a spiritual gift.

There are people who are much more eloquent, let's say, than many preachers, than me. There are guys who aren't even saved who are more eloquent than I am. There are orators, politicians, college professors.

There's lots of people who can really speak well. It's a natural gifting they have. They're just articulate.

They're gifted but not spiritually gifted because in many cases, they're not even saved. It's just a natural aptitude that some people have. If a person has that aptitude but does not also have a spiritual gift, they may be in a pulpit and impress everybody with their oratory, but no one's going to experience a spiritual growth because nothing spiritual is happening.

The spiritual giftedness that God gives people is in addition to a natural ability, in addition to a natural aptitude, it's more like an anointing of the Holy Spirit that comes upon natural abilities so that when the thing is being done, there's this spiritual thing happening that God is doing through it. God is working through the members of the body of Christ through these gifts to minister to the other members of the body of Christ. I've certainly been in churches where the pastors themselves were very polished speakers, but I would have to say that after months or years in their congregation, I didn't feel like I grew spiritually under their ministry.

Other times, I've been with people who were very poor public speakers. I think of Lonnie Frisbee, the first preacher I heard at Calvary Chapel. He could hardly read.

He was not articulate at all, but when he spoke, it's like you felt the presence of God. You felt like God was convicting you or something. There's something that's hard to define because it is spiritual in the exercise of spiritual gifts.

A person who has a spiritual gift might also have a natural aptitude in the same kind of activity, or they might not. They might not have any natural aptitude in that, but God gifts them so that in that activity, God is working. God's spirit is ministering.

There's an anointing on what they're doing that the body of Christ is edified because of what they do. That's what Peter is saying. If you have a speaking gift, speak as if it's the oracle of God.

If you have a helping gift, a ministering gift, do it as of the ability that God gives, not just naturally, but trusting God to enable you to do the thing in a way that actually produces spiritual results and spiritual fruit. That can be done, believe it or not, even if you're doing a very mundane kind of a chore, if that's your gifting and you're doing it unto the Lord. He says, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom

belong the glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. This comes to a break, a natural break. Chapter 4, verse 12 introduces a very short portion at the end.

Then chapter 5 is a very short chapter too, much shorter than the others. I don't know that I will intend to or expect to take the rest of chapter 4 and all of chapter 5 in our next session. That might be nice if we could do that, but I don't want to rush it.

We have the possibility of taking two more sessions. We'll just see how the time goes.