

Dear Friends,

When preachers speak or write about the Biblical topic of preachers and preaching, they must carefully thread a fine needle. If we follow the Biblical mandate, we shall teach Scripture's principles, even as they/we are painfully aware that we do not fully measure up and that we need, oh so much, to grow closer to that perfect model. Every time I study this topic in Scripture, I find it both fearful and instructive. I've been working at this business almost sixty-eight years. The longer I live the more I sense my own shortcomings and my need to work harder than ever to learn and practice that model. So, as you read this week's Gleanings, please regard them as my personal self-admonition as well as my message to you.

If I were required to choose only one word that describes Biblical ministry in whatever manifestation it may take, that word would be "Stewardship." Every spiritual gift we have belongs to the Lord. He "Loaned" us its use for His glory and praise. But it ever remains His gift. As Biblical stewards always eventually answered to a superior, children of God who each has a personal spiritual gift answers to the Lord for our use of that gift.

I've lived long enough to see many preachers come and go, both good and bad. Never have I observed the absence of eventual accountability to the Lord. I've seen men who were praised as able gifts who slipped into their final years content, mellow, and blessed with an abiding portion of kind grace. I've also sadly seen men, equally praised as able gifts, who spent their final season lonely, bitter, and void of the blessings in their gift that once seemed so strong. As a young minister first observing this divide as men grew older, I literally prayed repeatedly for the Lord to forgive my failures, chasten me if necessary, and help me serve Him and His people so that I would end my journey still using my gift to praise and honor Him.

A common factor seemed obvious in my observations of these two classes of people and their spiritual gifts. Those who lived too much about self and gaining honor for self always ended their journey in that lonely, bitter, unprofitable class. And those who kept their passion for Jesus and His glory always ended their journey contented, peacefully joyful, and mellow with ever-increasing grace toward their brothers and sisters. The Lord gives each of us a spiritual gift, an ability to bless and to minister to other believers. The identity of that gift most often appears in the form of opportunities set before us to serve, to minister to and for others.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.* (Ecclesiastes 9:10 KJV)

This verse's message served as a major turning point in my life and in my ministry. If you struggle with knowing your spiritual gift, ponder its message. Stop fretting about what your spiritual gift is. Look around in your home church, your family, your workplace, or your neighborhood. Do you see something that needs to be done, something that you are able to do? Solomon's words say it nicely. Do it! Invest your life and energy doing it. In the process of doing it, if you do it in faith to the Lord, and think of it as His gift to you, you shall discover one of life's sweetest joys.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Wise Use of Spiritual Gifts Glorify God

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11 KJV 1900)

I am occasionally puzzled at sincere believers who were asked to speak briefly in a church service. With no sense of a spiritual gift, they describe their experience as “Preaching.” Speaking in church is not “Preaching.” Preaching is a God blessed and empowered message delivered by a man whom He has “Gifted” to preach the gospel. When someone approaches me with the thought that they believe they are called or gifted of the Lord to preach, I carefully observe their frame of mind and their motive. If they want to preach for personal reasons of any kind, they fail the basic Biblical test of discipleship, self-denial. Until they mature to “It is all about Him,” instead of “It is all about me,” they fail the Biblical qualities for any spiritual gift. When I sense a degree of self in their attitude, I try to encourage them to work on their discipleship.

In ministry of any spiritual gift, Peter affirms this quality in someone who rightly regards his work. “...**let him do it as of the ability which God giveth.**” If the Lord calls or gifts a man to a work, He will give the man the ability to do that work. For a church or pastor, discerning a spiritual gift to preach is a simple ask. First, examine his motives and perception of the work. If his attitude is right, to glorify the Lord and not to promote self, **and** if his lifestyle “Preaches” the gospel with integrity, give him an opportunity to speak briefly to the church. If he actually preaches, praise the Lord. Then an extensive season of teaching and experience under the pastor’s or a wise minister’s oversight should begin. What if he does not preach, even after several opportunities to speak? That is a pretty sound indicator that he is not called to preach, so the pastor and church should work with him to find a work in his faith that matches “**the ability which God**” gave him.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Peter's lesson gives wise instruction to each of us based on the gift the Lord gave us, not the gift we wish He had given us.

First, every spiritual gift, meaning the energy, work, attitude, and heart of the person blessed with it, is to **"minister"** that gift to other believers. If we honor the Giver of that gift, we shall devote our energy and efforts to honor Him. To **"minister"** means to use that gift to **serve**, not to lord ourselves over other believers or think/act as if we are superior to them. An authentic spiritual gift always casts us in the role of servant, not superior.

...as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. In this thought, Peter—inspired Scripture—gives us wise insight. The gift's benefit, our ability to **"minister"** to others, is not our private domain. Nor is it a personal entitlement. A **"Steward"** in Bible times was a trusted "Employee" of the owner of the property in question. The steward was given temporary trust over the property, but title never changed hands because of his stewardship. The property remained the property of the original owner. A critical feature of stewardship; eventually the steward must account for his stewardship to the owner. You see this accountability in Jesus' parable of the talents. When the owner returned, each steward was called to account for his stewardship. Every man who has been blessed with a spiritual gift must never doubt or diminish this truth. His ultimate accountability is to the Lord Himself. I fear that I have observed the Lord's calling a few men I knew to account for their ministry. Sometimes it appeared as a crown of blessings, other times as a loss of joy and whatever ability he may have had. Fear because I shudder at the many times I've struggled with my own responsibilities. At times, I've been impatient, with other believers, with the season or circumstance I faced, and even with myself. During my early struggling years with a young family, I tried to balance an impossible schedule. When I gave the time I felt necessary to ministry, I felt convicted for neglecting my family. When I gave them reasonable time, I felt convicted for neglecting my ministry. And mixed in it all was a demanding career which required more time and mental energy than I could always give. I've given some account, but my struggle isn't over. Every time a man walks into the pulpit, he gives account to the Lord. His time will bless the congregation if he gives a good account. It will leave the congregation not edified if his account was deficient. I've known formerly profitable preachers who reached a certain age and all but ceased their regular Bible study and meditation, and their preaching painfully-to-the-congregation showed it. Lord, please deliver us from ourselves.

...as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Underscore **"manifold"** in this verse. Yes, we believe wholeheartedly in salvation all and only by the kind and loving grace of God. But that Biblical truth is only one aspect of His **"Manifold grace."** Simply put, **"Manifold"** means multi-purpose or multi-use. An automobile with six combustion chambers requires an intake "Manifold" with six channels to conduct the gas-air mixture to each of those chambers, a manifold with six parts. Yes, we've been saved by divine grace alone. But that is only one of grace's many functions. Obviously from this lesson, grace is necessary for the profitable, edifying use of our spiritual gifts. Whether in the pulpit or the pew, the Lord has "Graced" each of us with a spiritual ability which we are to use for Him in ministry to His people. And we each need **His** grace to use **His** gift for the needs and blessing

of **His** people. Modern Christians typically ignore this basic principle of Biblical grace. They tend to think only eternal salvation whenever they see “Grace” in Scripture. Paul wrote a simple passage that affirms this manifold principle.

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.). Giving no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed. (2 Corinthians 6:1-3 KJV)

Paul wrote these words to a church, not to lost sinners. In the first chapter, he described them as, “...**the church of God which is at Corinth.**” They were already saved, but they needed Paul’s instruction to prevent their abusing—or neglecting—the grace of God given to them for service and ministry. Paul reinforced this point, “...**now** is the day of salvation.” His teaching was for the here and now, not for eternity. In the following verses, he also gave explicit teaching on how we think and act if we “**receive not the grace of God in vain.**” Conversely, if we fail to measure up to his teaching in the following verses, we do receive the grace of God in vain. His words, “**Giving no offense in any thing that the ministry** (And He who gave that ministry) **be not blamed.**” To learn the full dimensions of living responsibly and using God’s grace, not in vain, continue reading through Verse 10. If we study the full lesson, we leave it with no doubt about how to live to receive and use the grace of God wisely, responsibly, and “Graciously,” not in vain.

As a people, Primitive Baptists strongly hold to eternal salvation all and only by the loving principle of God’s grace, His undeserved “Graciousness.” However, when we choose to speak evil or harshly against our brothers and sisters, we fail to live by the same grace principle that saved us. We thereby receive the grace of God in vain. I seldom travel among our people now, but I occasionally observe people’s attitudes through their words in social media. Angry words, eager disputes, often all because of another believer’s different personal or political viewpoint or preference for a different political personality. And where, New Testament book, chapter, and verse, do we find that disposition, that breach of true Christian fellowship, taught or even allowed? If we truly believe the Lord saved us from our sins by His amazing grace, we are ethically bound to live by that same kind of grace toward other believers.

We could learn a needed lesson from Matthew and Simon the Zealot. Before Jesus called them to follow Him, Matthew was a tax collector. He might have performed this work for the Temple, but far more likely he served as a tax collector for the Roman Empire. By the title, “Zealot,” before Jesus called him, Simon was the mirror opposite of Matthew. The zealots despised the Romans, didn’t accept their rule, and worked to organize a military rebellion against the Roman occupation of their land. In their pre-Christian careers and state of mind, Matthew and Simon would have hurled the angry words non-stop at each other. Put them together, and you could guarantee an open war of words. However, after they left their careers and started their journey with Jesus, we can’t find a single verse in the

gospels about their arguing over political differences. Not a word. I've lived to see a lot of changes in our political world. Some I've liked and some I've disliked. The longer I live the more I am persuaded that no political personality or cause should ever be allowed to enter into the Lord's church or weaken or break its fellowship. Every Sunday I preach to "Red" and "Blue" folks from the political perspective. I see Jesus in both. I love both. I work with every fiber and mental "Muscle" I have to speak words of comfort, encouragement, and instruction to both. When either of them breathes their last, and people gather to say their goodbyes, there will be far more hope in Jesus and the resurrection than in either "Red" or "Blue" politics. We'd honor our faith to live more about Jesus and less about "Red" or "Blue." Neither "Red" nor "Blue" is a necessary component of Biblical faith. Jesus is!

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth. Try to expand your thought of spiritual gifts beyond the man who leads the hymns or the man who preaches. The speaking emphasis of the first point likely focuses primarily on preachers. A man who presumes to speak to the church must filter every thought, word, and deed by **"the oracles of God."** In Romans 3:1-2, Paul used this same word, **"oracles,"** to refer to the holy, inspired writings of the Old Testament entrusted to Israel through that age. We now have the New Testament in addition to the Old. Preachers, when you enter the pulpit, if you have thoughts, beliefs, or ideas outside Scripture, leave them in the pew. Better still, leave them outside the church. Train your message and your words to mirror the teachings of Scripture alone. I personally favor the solid style podium in most pulpits. As ministers of the gospel, we should do everything possible to hide self and to highlight the clear teachings of **"the oracles of God"** alone. I normally stand behind the pulpit, hide all of self I can and highlight all of Jesus I can. And that same principle should govern all believers in their personal dialogue and life with other believers. No manipulating others to gain their support or agreement with our ideas. No personal "Pulpits" in the lunchroom to promote our private opinions and ideas. No political campaigns to invade our spiritual time and God's house. Let all words and actions be done **"as the oracles of God"** teach.

Further, Peter teaches us to rely on **"the ability which God giveth."** I've known preachers who were professional salesmen of one sort or another. On occasion when I heard them preach, I felt almost like I was attending their sales motivational meeting, not church. Yes, we each possess certain natural abilities and proclivities. However, all those things should take the shelf when we speak in the Lord's house. We are His ambassadors. We are to speak for Him, not for ourselves. We are to deliver His message in the "Grace" manner which He taught us to teach it.

...that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. We must never forget, gift in the pulpit, gift in the pew, every spiritual gift which the Lord gives always belongs to Him. It never becomes ours to use as we wish. And our use of the gifts He has given us are to be focused on words and actions which contribute to Peter's inspired goal, **"...that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ."** If we deliver a message and people go their way telling others what a wise man we are, we have failed miserably and completely. Every sermon should urge our hearers to glorify God through Jesus Christ. Yes, He deserves the praise for the good news we deliver as His ambassadors. It is His good news, not ours. But don't overlook

Peter's second stated objective for our wise and right use of our spiritual gift. He also deserves "**Dominion.**" That means He holds the exclusive authority to tell us what to believe or not, how to speak or not, and how to live our lives; in short, how to use **His** spiritual gift which **He** gave us. We can't snub Him, chase our own windmills, and claim to be living according to His spiritual gift. God spoke to those three men who went with Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration.

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him.** (Matthew 17:5 KJV)

How can we "**Hear Him**" today? Take note. It is not by a "Burning in the bosom," or an emotional trigger. We "**Hear Him**" when we read—and believe—His words in Scripture. Paul affirmed this truth about Scripture in what has become one of my favorite passages, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The more we begin each day with "**Hear ye him**" the more likely we will use our spiritual gift that day for His glory and for the edifying spiritual growth and service of His people.

Elder Joe Holder