

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, November 27, 2011**

## **GRACE GIFTS FROM GOD**

**1 Peter 4:7-11**

### **GOT CHARISMA?**

Not everybody has charisma. At least, not in the way the word is commonly used. Some people have got it, and some people don't. The way people usually think about charisma, either you've got it, or you don't. And if you don't have it, you can't just stop at your neighborhood charisma store to get some.

Charisma generally refers to a kind of personal magnetism or charm, a force of personality that gives an individual the power to influence, inspire, or lead large numbers of people. Martin Luther King, Jr. had it. So did Billy Graham. John F. Kennedy had it. So did Ronald Reagan. Mother Theresa must have had it. President Obama's charisma was evident in his presidential campaign in 2008. Oprah has it. Regis Philbin has it, too. Brad Pitt has it. So does Julia Roberts. Some people have it, whether or not they are famous. And some people don't.

### **CHARISMA AS A GIFT OF GRACE**

That is how it is with charisma, in the most common secular use and understanding of the word. But for Christians, the word *charisma* has a different meaning and significance. The word comes from *charis*, the Greek word for *grace*. *Charisma*, then, refers to a gift of grace, or grace gift, specifically, a gift of God's grace, or a grace gift from God. In writing about *charismata*, the plural of *charisma*, both Paul and Peter teach that every Christian is given at least one of the grace gifts. (We often refer to these *charismata* as spiritual gifts.) Every believer is given at least one. Which means that in the church, in the fellowship of Christian believers, it is *not* the case that some people have it, and some people don't.

### **GIVEN TO EVERY BELIEVER**

In his teaching on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says: "Now to each one" (that is, to each and every believer, to every true follower of Christ, to every member of the body of Christ) "the manifestation" (or gift) "of the Spirit is given for the common good" (12:7). Not to some, but to all. Not to a few or to many, but to each one. To all of us. If you are a believer in Christ not just in name but in truth, then you've got charisma! If you have been born again by the Spirit of God, then you have been given some *charisma* or *charismata*, some grace gift(s) from the Holy Spirit. Peter reinforces the teaching of Paul in our reading today from 1 Peter when he says in verse 10 that each of us should use whatever gift (or gifts) we have received to minister to others, "as good stewards of God's varied grace" (ESV). We don't all have the same spiritual gift(s). As Paul puts it in Romans 12:6, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us" (ESV), we are to use the particular *charismata*, the

particular spiritual gifts or grace gifts, God in His sovereign wisdom and grace has chosen to give us.

There are two foundational truths about these grace gifts that stand out in the teachings of both Paul and Peter. First is the point I have already emphasized, which is that every person who truly experiences the saving grace of God by faith in what Jesus, the Son of God, did for us on the cross to make payment for our sins and to restore us to a right relationship with God the Father – every true believer and follower of Christ – is given some *charisma* (or *charismata*), one or more of these grace gifts from God the Holy Spirit. Some spiritual gift is given to each and every person who belongs to Christ by faith. No exceptions. If you know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of your life, if the Lord Jesus has made His home in your heart, if He occupies the throne in your life, I will say it again: You’ve got charisma. Not necessarily the kind of charisma the world seems to crave and even worship. You’ve got the kind of charisma that is given by the Spirit of God to the people of God.

These grace gifts which are given to us as followers of Christ are not the same as natural talents or innate abilities with which we were born. Sometimes our spiritual gifts dovetail with the natural talents or aptitudes we were born with, whether it is musical talent or athletic ability, the ability to work with our hands, the ability to fix things that are broken or to imagine and invent something new, or the ability to solve complex problems. Sometimes, but not always, there is an obvious connection between our natural gifts and talents, and the spiritual gifts – the grace gifts – which we are given by virtue of being born again by the Spirit of God. Whether the connection is obvious or not, you can be sure that God has a good reason and a gracious purpose for whatever *charisma* or grace gift He chooses to impart to you.

### **GIVEN FOR THE COMMON GOOD: TO SERVE OTHERS**

The second foundational truth or principle has to do with the purpose for which God gives us these grace gifts. Do you know why God has given you your spiritual gift(s)? God wants you to use the spiritual gift(s) He has given you for what purpose?

So you can make a lot of money? I don’t think so. (Not that it is inherently wrong to make a lot of money. It isn’t. It depends on how you get it, what you do with it, and what it does to the spiritual condition of your heart.)

Is it to make you feel better about yourself or to boost your self-esteem? No, that’s not it.

Is it so other people will look up to you? No.

So you can become famous? No.

So you can be catered to and served by others? No.

Listen again to Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7: “To each one” – to each of you – “is given a manifestation” or gift “of the Spirit *for the common good*” (emphasis added). You and I are

to use whatever gifts God has given us for the common good – that is, for the blessing and well being of the church fellowship as a whole and of one another, according to one another’s needs.

Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 4:10: “Each of you is to use whatever gift you have received *to serve others ...*” (emphasis added). We are to use the gift(s), the *charismata*, given to us by God to serve God by serving others. To serve God by ministering to one another. Literally, we are *to deacon* each other and whomever God calls us to serve. The word Peter uses in verse 10 – and again in verse 11 – is *diakoneo*, from which we get the word *deacon*. The office of deacon in the church is a spiritual ministry of caring, compassion, and loving service to members of the church family in times of need, to which particular members of our fellowship are called and set apart by ordination. I am so thankful for the deacons of Faith, and their acts of caring love, generosity, and Christ-like service to others in our church family – service that often takes place behind the scenes, and nobody, or hardly anybody, knows about it. We are richly blessed by what the deacons do, and by the love of Jesus that is so evident in their ministry. And in their lives.

But Peter’s exhortation to use whatever gift(s) we have received to serve others is not just for the deacons of the church. It is for all of us. Each of us and all of us are to use our particular grace gift(s) to minister to others. We are to do it in the name of Jesus. Listen to Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” We are to do it, as Peter says in verse 11, with the strength God Himself provides. Ultimately, the reason we are to use our *charismata*, our spiritual gifts, in service to others is “so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11) – so that, as it says in *The Message* (MSG), “*He’ll* get all the credit as the One mighty in everything – encores to the end of time.”

### **FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**

The grace gifts of the Spirit and their use are not about me. They are not about you. They are not about us. First, foremost, and above all else, they are about God and His glory. They are given to us as He chooses, to be used for the honor and glory of His name – which is really the purpose for which we were created in the first place. After all, what is the chief end (or purpose) of mankind, but to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever? (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1).

### **THE DIVERSITY OF GRACE GIFTS**

Paul gives a list of grace gifts in Romans 12, which we read last Sunday. The list includes prophesying (which has to do with preaching or telling forth the message of God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit to a particular audience at a particular place and time), serving, teaching, encouraging, giving or contributing to the needs of others, leadership, and doing acts of mercy (12:6-8).

Paul gives another list – in fact, two more lists – in 1 Corinthians 12. The first list, in verses 8-10, includes the special word of wisdom, the special word of knowledge, the special gift of

faith (not the gift of saving faith, which every believer has, but a special endowment of faith for God's service), gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

The other list in 1 Corinthians 12 is in verses 28-30, where Paul speaks of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, those with the gift of helping others, those with the gift of administration, those who speak in different tongues, and those who interpret those tongues.

Paul gives one more list of spiritual gifts, this one in Ephesians 4, where he says in verse 7 that each one of us has been given some gift of grace (*charis*) as Christ determined it for us. Again, not to a chosen few or just to some, but to each one of us who has been redeemed by His grace. Then, in verse 11, Paul mentions four gifts with which the Holy Spirit endows some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors, and some to be teachers.

The reasons these gifts are given, it says, beginning in verse 12, are:

- To prepare the saints (us) for the work of ministry (4:12).
- To build up the body of Christ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, "efficient and graceful in response to (Him), fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ" (4:12-13, NIV and MSG).
- To speak the truth in love and to grow up in every way into Christ, who is the Head of the body. "His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love" (4:15-16, NIV and MSG).

Obviously, none of these lists is complete by itself. It may be that when you put all the lists together, you still don't have a complete list of the variety of grace gifts God gives to His people.

## **TWO KINDS OF GIFTS**

Peter, God bless him, boils it all down for us to two different kinds of spiritual gifts: speaking gifts and serving gifts. Some gifts primarily involve the use of words. Some gifts primarily involve acts of mercy, help, loving kindness, or service to others – to one another in the fellowship of the church, and to others whom God places in our path for us to serve in the name and love of Jesus.

Whatever gift(s) you have been given, Peter wants you to know, it is a gift to you from God. God is the source and giver of whatever spiritual gift you have. It is a gift of His grace. You didn't earn it. So, whether yours is a speaking gift or a serving gift – maybe God has given you one of each, or more than one – whatever the case, use your gift(s) to glorify God and to serve others. If God has given you a gift that involves speaking, let God speak through you in grace and truth and love. If God has given you a serving gift, find the place(s) where God wants you to serve, find the place of ministry for which God has shaped you, and serve with energy, enthusiasm, wisdom, joy and love. Do it, as Peter says, with the strength God provides (4:11), because if you do it in your own natural strength, you will run out of gas.

Try to do it on your own, and sooner or later, you will get discouraged and maybe even give up.

God does not give us His grace gifts in order to frustrate us or discourage us. He does not give us His gifts to stress us out or wear us out. His grace gifts are expressions of His grace to us. They are blessings He gives so that we can bless others, and so that His kingdom purposes may be accomplished in us, to the glory of His name.

### **WHAT NOT TO DO**

In thinking about the *charisma* God has given you, do not complain or grumble about some spiritual gift(s) you don't have, but wish you did. Do not fall prey to the sin of gift envy, wishing God had given you what He gave someone else. Do not think that God does not, must not, and cannot love you as much as He loves someone else because someone else has more or different spiritual gifts than you. It isn't so. Regardless of the gifts you have or don't have, there is no way God could ever love you more than He already does, because His love is perfect. And there is no way He will ever love you less, because His love is unchanging. Got that? So, do not think less of yourself than God thinks of you.

On the flip side, as Paul warns in Romans 12:3, do not think of yourself (and your spiritual giftedness) more highly than you ought. Do not think you are better or more important than you really are. Do not let pride take hold in your heart. Do not think that you are too important, or too gifted, or too mature to invest yourself in any ministry where there is a need that God can use you to meet. Do not think you are indispensable. Do you realize that cemeteries are full of people who thought they were indispensable? And someday, all of us who think we are indispensable will join them.

Have a sober estimate of yourself and your gifts. See yourself as God sees you. And see others the way God sees them.

I was in New York the week before Thanksgiving for a pastors' conference, and one day as I was wandering around in the book and gift store operated by the host church, my eyes were drawn to a plain gray T-shirt with this message in small lettering across the front: "I'm the wretch the song refers to." That's all it said. The song, of course, is *Amazing Grace*. The words were written by John Newton. I looked at the shirt and thought about buying it but didn't. But it is true: It was – and is – amazing grace that saved a wretch like me. I really am the wretch the song refers to. But that is only part of the truth about me. That is who I used to be. Helpless, hopeless sinner that I was, Jesus died for me. He bore my sins in His body on the cross. His blood has washed away my sin – Thank You, Jesus! By the grace of God, I am not the wretch I once was. I am an adopted child of God, a member of God's own family, a new creation in Christ, with an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade being kept for me in heaven. I have a Heavenly Father who loves me with an unconditional, unchanging, and unfailing love, not because of who I am or anything I have done to deserve His love, but because of who He is. And what He has done to show His love for me is truly amazing.

I have no illusions about being indispensable. Or about my gifts being better or greater, or making me more important, than someone else. It is God and the gift of His grace which have made all the difference in my life. What is true of me is also true of you.

In my life, in your life, or in the life of the church, it is not about how important any of us think we are. It is all about God and His grace to us, including His grace gifts. It is about using the gifts He gives us, whether speaking gifts or serving gifts, to serve Him by serving each other, to minister to the needs of others with His grace, to bless and build up His body, the church, and above all, to declare His greatness and to give Him the glory, honor and praise He both desires and deserves.

Don't waste your life. Don't waste your gift(s). Use the gift(s) He has given you. For the glory of His name. Lord, let it be so in us. Let it be so in the life of Faith Church. Let it be so in Your church, and in the lives of Your people everywhere. Amen.