

# God Is All

1 Peter 4:10-11 | Bryce Beale

God is all.

I do not mean that all things are one with God, so that each rock and tree is part of a great oversoul. A church official in India decades ago told of seeing Hindus tap on trees and stones, asking in a hushed voice, “Are you there? Are you there?” They were seeing if the gods would speak.<sup>1</sup>

God is not there—that is, the rock and tree are not gods. And yet, God is there. He is there inside the rock, around the tree, above and below the world, everywhere around us.<sup>2</sup> He is an omnipresent being, and there is no crevice in a distant mountain not filled completely with God’s presence.

You thought you wept your tears in silence on that lonely night, when your hope was given its mortal wound. But more than the four walls heard your sobs, for God was there.

You did not pass invisibly under the radar of the Almighty when you drove home on another day, laughing out your happy heart, contented with life.

God is everywhere; God is all.

But God is all in another manner. Not only is he everywhere, but he is more important than everything else.

He is the reason romance matters. He is the reason matter exists.

A shaggy mountain goat leaps across an unwatched mountaintop; God has supplied the energy for the jump. Without the mountain goat, God would remain unchanged and unharmed; without God there would be no mountain goat.

You have made some money. God gave you the skill or the circumstance to make it. You have a family—who knit each member together in the womb?

What are oceans and marriages, continents and crowds and arenas and civilizations? What are the highest and the lowest moments in your life, what is a presidential election, a world war? When set beside God,

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 75-76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

these towering statues of Ramses are dwarfed and dissolve back into dust.

Time is the best test of importance. One famous poem tells of a ruined statue, once a monument to some great conqueror, now decayed so much by time that only the stumps of legs remain standing in a desert, its decapitated head half sunk in the sand. And on a pedestal are these words:

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!<sup>3</sup>

Despair indeed—man in his pomp is like the beasts which perish, their tent cord is plucked up within them.

But God—the glory of it—he is *all in all!* Yahweh is, ever was, ever will be, his works alone survive to tower over the wrecks of time.

So Christians sometimes ask, “Is it wrong to watch this movie, or attend that sporting event?” I do not say they are all wrong—but I do say they are all nothing. They are like a corporation that continues to sell stock, but never once returns a dividend to its stockholders. Why invest?

But God, he is all in all! He is behind all, the source of all energy, the maker of all matter, and is himself all that matters. He is the end toward which the whole universe leans on its continuous course. Invest in him!

The apostle Peter takes this principle and applies it to the church. God has designed his church in such a way that he might be seen as all in all for her. And he has done this by giving her spiritual gifts.

Read with me in 1 Peter 4:10-11.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Do you not see in these words a healthy view of life? Our abilities are simply the product of God’s varied grace; and when we use them, we bear in mind that they are simply God’s work through us. And once we have used them, we turn our hearts to praise the God who has done all

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<sup>3</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ozymandias,” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 2, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1986), 691.

his work through us as his instruments, and we pray he might receive all the glory and dominion he is due.

## The gifts

But it is not enough to say these things. The intention of the message this morning is to assist us in knowing God's word *as it ought to be known*. That is, God—and no other—must through his word, as we think on these things, give us an understanding that leaks down through our minds into our hearts. It must change us. And of course, for that, we look to God himself.

And we look to his word.

So then, consider with me the first part of this passage, and think more carefully on it. Verse 10 reads, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

We recognize that when one places his or her faith in Jesus Christ, looking alone to his work upon the cross for innocence in the sight of God, that the Holy Spirit makes that individual new. The old man with his evil practices passes away; behold, all things are new.

But there is one act further that the Spirit accomplishes, and which we may easily forget. For when the Spirit of God blows upon a man, he not only renews him, but gives him a gift—or, perhaps, several gifts.

What are these gifts? There are five lists of such gifts in the New Testament,<sup>4</sup> and put together they give an example of some possible gifts—though I do not at all think they list every gift that could be.

The spiritual gifts named in Scripture are these:

- The gift of apostleship
- The gift of prophecy
- The gift of evangelism
- The gift of shepherding
- The gift of teaching
- The gift of the word of knowledge
- The gift of the word of wisdom
- The gift of faith
- The gifts of healing
- The gift of working miracles
- The gift of discerning spirits
- The gift of speaking in tongues
- The gift of interpreting tongues
- The gift of helps

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<sup>4</sup> Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 28-30; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10.

The gift of administration  
The gift of serving  
The gift of speaking  
The gift of exhortation  
The gift of contributing  
The gift of leadership  
The gift of doing acts of mercy

Now, almost all evangelicals agree that at least one of these gifts has ceased, and that is the gift of apostleship. Evangelicals are divided on whether certain other of the gifts, which seem tied to the time of the apostles, have also ceased.

We respect those who differ, but we do believe those apostolic gifts were unique to the time of the early church, to confirm the word of God before it was clearly written down, and consequently those gifts are no longer needed.<sup>5</sup>

If this is true, our list of gifts for the modern church is shortened.

It is also likely that some gifts fall under the category of other gifts. For example, look at our text today, in verse 11: “whoever speaks,” there is one gift, and “whoever serves,” there is another. Yet every gift might fall under either speaking or serving, so these are better seen as categories of gifts.

Taking all of this together, we say the gifts given in Scripture for today are as follows:

Gifts of Speaking  
The gift of teaching  
The gift of evangelism  
The gift of exhortation

Gifts of Serving  
The gift of shepherding  
The gift of leadership  
The gift of administration  
The gift of faith  
The gift of helps  
The gift of contributing  
The gift of doing acts of mercy

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heb. 1:1-2 “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

The list is imperfect, but it must be, for Scripture does not give us every variation of gift. That would be impossible. After all, the variety of gifts are as rich as their source, in verse 10: "God's varied grace."

But it is ok to have an incomplete list, because the list is not about us, but about God.

Some have treated the spiritual gifts as a sort of personality test of the Bible, like a sanctified Meyers-Briggs. I do not think personality tests are all unhelpful, but they are not what God meant to give us in these lists of spiritual gifts.

Because often personality tests become excuses for inactivity. We see a need, but say, "Ah, I don't think that's my thing." So we sit idly by, while the body of Christ suffers lack.

You ought to discover how you are gifted, but that is no end in itself. You discover your gifts only so that you may meet the needs of others in the church.

Look again at our text in verse 10: "As each has received a gift, *use it to serve one another.*" If you want to know in what ways you are gifted but do not know, then begin serving in whatever ways are needed. As the proverb reads, "In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty."<sup>6</sup>

So toil. Love will compel you to toil, to exert yourself for another's good. And in the process of meeting needs, you will discover, "Wow, I enjoy this, and am able to do it well for the good of others." That is your gift. But you did not find it by a questionnaire. You found it in the dirt, when both hands were busily digging.

"But," you object, "if this is not about us, but about God and about the good of God's people, why does God only give each of us certain gifts? Why not make us competent in every area, to meet every need?"

See the end of verse 10: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, *as good stewards of God's varied grace.*"

Oh, the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God! Here is a splendid mystery, a ray of beatific light shining from the genius of God.

The Spirit has wisely distributed gifts to each person, giving one gift to one, another to another, so that none of us would boast. Not one member of Christ's body can say, "I have no need of any other." In his letter to the Corinthians Paul makes the point vividly: "The eye cannot

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<sup>6</sup> Prov. 14:23.

say to the hand, 'I have no need of you' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"<sup>7</sup>

We are all cogs in a great clock, and our usefulness depends upon the turning of every other cog. If one stops, we cannot move. In this way God undermines our proud desire for autonomy and independence. You need the body of Christ—this is why when you see a young Christian begin to distance himself from the church, when he stops coming to weekly events, when she only makes it to Sunday mornings occasionally, you can count on the fact that the devil, that prowling lion, is ready to pounce upon this straggler at the back of the herd.

You cannot continue faithfully apart from the body of Christ, his people.

And why is this important? We return to our introductory statement: God is all in all. And how better to ensure that his people understand this fact than to build dependence directly into their communal life?

For by our dependence on each other we realize we cannot go it alone, we are too weak and limited. But this causes us to search even further for our source of strength than each other, because we also see quite clearly that we fail each other. And in seeking what is behind our gifts, we find this: "God's varied grace."

None of us are strong in ourselves—we are mere stewards given a trust. We are entrusted with gifts, given us freely, which are empowered by the Holy Spirit. And since all is from God, we happily return all to God also.

That is why those who speak are not to speak from themselves, but, verse 11, "as one who speaks oracles of God."

Faith Bible Church has nothing to offer this world that has not been said already. We teach nothing new. Read the Scriptures, and you will find our same message written over and over. Search the history of God's faithful people, see what they taught—it will match ours in most its points.

This is because we do not speak from ourselves; we offer no clever inventions of the human mind. We preach Christ and him crucified, as entrusted to us through the apostles and prophets. We have set our hearts like Ezra to study the word of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules.<sup>8</sup> God is the source of our message, we are not. He is all in all.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. 12:21.

<sup>8</sup> Ezra 7:10.

Verse 11 continues: “whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.” God is also the source of any good work we may do. We cannot take credit.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins, unconcerned with the need of our neighbors. We would leave the wounded man on the road to Jericho, and say like Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Selfishness drove us on like Jehu driving furiously his chariot. We refused to stop long enough to do any truly good deed from the heart.

But then, while we were yet dead in our sins, Christ died for us, and by the Spirit our eyes were opened to his love, and his blood was applied to the doorposts of our souls. The angel of death passed us by unharmed, and a candle was lit within our dwelling for the first time.

Suddenly the desire for every good work was within us.

Will we take credit for our newfound desire to serve? It is not native to our hearts; it was placed there by another. Let him have the glory!

## That God may be glorified

Peter agrees.

See verse 11: “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

This is the end for which God created the world.<sup>9</sup> This is the spring from which the river of our universe flows, and it is the ocean into which it empties.

The glory of God is the reason for each rock that fills our gravel lot; it is the cause for your physical frame. Every page of Scripture cries, “Glory!” Every honest description of human history says the same to those with ears to hear it.

Egypt rises as a great empire under the Mediterranean, the Pharaoh sits over his mighty nation with scepter in hand, and all at once his land is devastated by plagues and his army broken by walls of water—why? That God may be glorified.

Nebuchadnezzar crushes nations, and then falls; Cyrus the Persian takes in hand the kingdoms of the earth, and then disappears from its face; Alexander the Great sweeps across to India, and dies as he returns; Napoleon takes his turn, and Hitler his. This is no secular history; God is getting his glory in every case, by raising up and by striking down.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jonathan Edwards, “A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World.”

Your life fits within this framework. Paul elsewhere speaks of the church of God, the body of Christ, and how each part proffers its portion to make the whole healthy and functional. But all energy, and all direction, in this case come from the head, from Christ. Thus all glory belongs to God through Jesus Christ.

Pastor Lee of God's Love Church in Seoul, South Korea, many years ago had a son born with a disease that placed him in a vegetative state, requiring constant care. And yet now Pastor Lee's love for the abandoned has led him to adopt more than ten other children, all unwanted and all with special needs.

Do not look at Pastor Lee. How can he love and serve in this manner? By the power that God supplies him. It truly is God's love which works through the man to reach these children. And the outcome is that God is glorified, when the young American director who traveled there to make a documentary of Pastor Lee came to Christ through Lee's tireless love.

Some are surprised by the benefit they receive from my preaching, seeing as I am so young and weak by appearance. I am not in any way a great man, as even a brief acquaintance will make obvious. So if some are helped by what I say, we must declare together that they are helped only because God speaks, in a sense, through me. My message, insofar as it is faithful to his word and directed by his Spirit, reflects the oracles of God.

Ernie enters a room and brings with him life and joy. It is a gift, and it does not spring from himself, but from God in him. Dan and Caleb can organize a summer camp with excellence—but it is not them. When Mike stands up to lead us as we sing praises to God, we know his ability to play is not his own, his heart and words are not the mere products of his mind.

Our secretary Marianne juggles many administrative tasks with finesse, Jimmy and Angie apply their knowledge to our finances, Carl keeps our facility pristine. The leaders of the lady studies speak, and women are built up; small groups are guided in such a way that lives are altered to more resemble Christ. As I speak some are employing no small gift in watching babies and young children, so that you might hear the word of God.

Some in our midst rebuke in love, preventing many sins. Others encourage the feeble knees, so that the joint put out of place is recovered and not lost forever in despair. There are too many of you employing too many gifts for one to mention all.

My first response is to marvel at how well you all do what I cannot. But then we must remember, it is not you. Like the apostle Paul you must

say, “By the grace of God I am what I am...I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”<sup>10</sup> Or as Jesus urged, “when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Let me end as the apostle ends this section of 1 Peter: “To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Oh to have eyes to see that God is all in all!

Has a saint refreshed you lately? Thank that saint, certainly, but do not be mistaken—your benefit is from Christ. Recognize his glory in the matter, for so loving you that he would give you a gift through another.

Maybe you have lately been snatched from the fire by a strong word through a believer. God has called you from the ledge of the abyss; you have hardly escaped the flames of hell. But you have escaped them by the oracle of God. Glorify him!

Someone has contributed some of their money to meet your need—God gave the willingness, and gave the funds.

If the way the church functions is but a small picture of the kingdom of God burst upon a dark earth, imagine what will be when his kingdom is all there is. It makes us cry out, “Your kingdom come!” To him be the dominion forever and ever.

Are you far from Christ today, a stranger to his gifts and promises? Know that the rich and textured grace which equips his people for their many services, is rich enough to reach and nourish you. He opens the door and welcomes you into this family. The blood of Jesus Christ has fallen to the earth, and already there grows a tree of life where the ground has been watered. Come, take, eat, live.

Turn your eyes to God as the source of salvation, that he might in everything be glorified through Jesus Christ.

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. 15:10.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 17:10.