

"ACT- OLOGY"

1 Peter 4:10-11

INTRODUCTION

1. When I was a boy, I loved to play baseball. Almost every summer day after breakfast, I'd recruit neighborhood kids to play a pick-up game at an elementary school nearby. We'd play in the morning, go home for lunch, play in the afternoon, go home for supper, and play until dark.

We played so often that large dirt spots formed around the bases and the pitcher's mound. We were so committed to baseball that we were able to figure out how to play with just four people – two on a team. Try that sometime when there is supposed to be nine players on each team.

I used to listen to radio broadcasts of the Chicago Cubs. My heroes were players like Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, Don Kessinger, and Ferguson Jenkins. I used to dream of the day I'd walk out onto Wrigley Field in Chicago for a big game. I listened to announcers named Jack Brickhouse and Harry Caray call home runs hit by the Cubs.

2. I only had one problem with baseball. I couldn't hit. I was afraid of the ball when it was pitched. My Little League coach called me one of the best fielders and worst hitters he'd ever seen in his life.

3. Professional scouts evaluate talent based on five qualities: the ability to field, run, throw, hit, and hit with power. At best, I could only do two of those well, so the pro scouts were never interested in signing me to one of those big contracts.

4. Do you know what's great about the church? When you're on God's team...when you've decided to give your life to Jesus Christ...He equips you with all you need to play for Him. He gives you the ability to succeed for Him.

5. Let me ask you a question: *"How many of you volunteer in a ministry on the team here at Grace?"* Raise your hand! I discovered something this week. The word, "volunteer," is not in the Bible.

Now don't misunderstand. It's not a bad word. But the Bible never uses the word, "volunteer" to describe those who are a part of God's team. Do you know the word that's used? It's the word, "servant."

Frankly, we don't know much about what it means to be a servant today. Do you know that word is used over 1,000 times in the Bible? That means it's a very big deal to God. Characters like Abraham, Moses, David and Job were all called, "servants of God. "

In fact, when the writers of the New Testament introduced themselves to their readers, they often used the word, "servant."

In Romans, Paul writes:

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus..." (Romans 1).

When Peter writes his epistle, he doesn't say, *"I'm Peter, one of the big dogs in the church."* He says,

"Simon Peter, a servant an apostle of Jesus Christ..." (2 Peter 1:1).

When James wrote his little epistle, he didn't identify himself as the half-brother of Jesus. Instead, he wrote,

(SLIDE 7)

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...” (James 1:1).

6. Let me ask you this: *“Do you see yourself as a volunteer or a servant?”* There is all the difference in the world between those two. A volunteer picks and chooses when and where to serve. A servant serves no matter what. A volunteer serves when it’s convenient; a servant serves even when it’s not.

7. Peter talks about this in his first epistle. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, let me encourage you to turn to 1 Peter 4.

We’re involved in this series we called, *“Grace Anatomy.”* We’ve been studying how grace influences the values of our church. We learned two weeks ago that grace helps us grow in our relationship with God. We learned last week that grace enables us to reach out to people around us who are without God in their lives. Today, we want to learn how grace impacts our commitment to act on behalf of others. We’ll learn how grace shapes our lives when we are servants of Jesus Christ. Notice what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:10:

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).

With this verse in mind, I want you to see four characteristics in the life of a grace-filled servant of God. These are 4 qualities that will be demonstrated when we’ve been gripped by the grace of God. The first characteristic of someone who serves out of a grace-filled heart is...

1. GENEROSITY

The early followers of Christ were notorious for their generosity.

Look at these verses from Acts chapter 4:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need” (Acts 4:32-35).

If you know anything about the first century, you know that early Christians struggled to survive in the Roman Empire because their lives were constantly threatened. They had every reason to live in isolation and seclusion and to be self-centered. But they didn’t do that! Do you know why?

We just read the answer: *“...much grace was upon them all.”*

Last week, we learned that grace could be defined as...

“The loving relationship that God offers to us through Christ so that He works in us to make us what we can not be by ourselves.”

When you and I are gripped by the grace of God, it impacts how we use our time, our abilities and our money.

An appreciation for grace creates an attitude of giving.

After all, when I understand grace, it's not my time; it's God's time. When I really understand grace, my skills don't belong to me; they belong to God. When I really understand grace, my money is not mine; it's God's.

When I've been gripped by grace, generosity will show up in all kinds of ways in my life.

As I look around this church, week after week, I see people who serve generously. That's evident with those who work with our children. It's evident with those who work with our students. It's evident with those who work with adults.

Eg. Two weekends ago, 275 people attended the Kalahari retreat. Dozens of adults went to serve the students. Two of those adults were Scott and Cathy Simms. Folks, through the work of Scott and Cathy Simms and others like them, our students and their families were saved about \$9,000 at Kalahari! When I've been gripped by grace, I'll serve with a spirit of generosity. I'll also serve with a spirit of...

2. IMPARTIALITY

After the church in Jerusalem was established, Jesus wanted His followers to take the Good News about God's love and forgiveness to the Gentiles. Acts 11 tells us how that happened:

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:19-20).

First, the Gospel went to the Jews, then it was shared with Gentiles. The message didn't change. The message was still about Jesus, His death and resurrection...but the method changed. At first, the Church was only filled with Jewish converts. But later, Gentiles became followers of Christ because grace produces a sense of impartiality.

James says it like this in his little epistle:

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism" (James 2:1).

The grace of God knows nothing about discrimination and prejudice.

Eg. When I was a boy, our family would visit my grandparents who lived in Jackson, Mississippi. I didn't understand it then, but in the heart of the Bible Belt, in the middle of the summer, the public swimming pools were closed because blacks and whites were not allowed to swim in the same pool.

Folks, that kind of racism is a denial of grace!

Eg. Author Ron Sider writes,

"Ultimately, racism in the church is a denial of the Gospel. It is a heretical, disobedient rejection of God's purpose in Christ..."

Eg. In his book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, Jim Cymbala writes,

"Because I had been a basketball player, it never dawned on me to evaluate people on the basis of color. In America, it would appear that there is more openness in the gym than in the Church of Jesus Christ."

Folks, that's a tragedy! One of the characteristics of a grace-filled heart is a willingness to serve out of a spirit of impartiality.

Eg. You heard a wonderful story earlier of four women who have shown the love of God to kids in our children's choirs for over 15 years. They have shown the grace of God to hundreds of kids through their commitment to serve Christ.

Eg. When I've visited other countries of the world, I'm most touched when I hear Christian music written in the musical culture of that country. I don't mind hearing music we've sung in America translated into other languages, but I love to hear nationals singing original songs about Jesus in their musical styles. That's what happens when we're gripped by grace. There is a spirit of impartiality that permeates what we do.

When my heart is filled with the grace of God, I'll also serve in the spirit of...

3. LIBERTY

I love what Paul writes to the Corinthians in these words:

"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life....Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:5,6,17b NASB).

Don't misunderstand. Careful handling of God's Word is essential. We have to study it correctly and communicate it clearly.

But when my heart is gripped by grace, an attitude of compassion will permeate all I do.

In his book, *Grace Awakening*, Chuck Swindoll says it like this:

"It's not uncommon for me to meet people who have come out of...ministries where they were bruised and wounded by a grace killer who presented Scripture in such a rapid-fire, harsh manner, they felt beaten by the 'letter of the law' rather than led and comforted by the Spirit of liberty."

Swindoll goes on to say,

"Why are we so intolerant of and impatient with each other? Where is the grace? Think of what others have to put up with when it comes to you and me! Think of the things in your life that aren't cleaned up yet!"

"Rather than reminding people of all the things they're not, how great it would be – how full of grace, actually – to give them all the room they need to fail and recover, to learn and grow."

If my life has been gripped by grace it will be characterized by generosity and impartiality, liberty and...

4. MERCY

I love what Paul writes to Timothy:

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him, even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with

the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:12-14, NLT).

Do you realize the apostle Paul had every reason to be ashamed about his past? He was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and even a murderer of Christians. But, God’s grace covered all that. Blasphemy had been a part of his past – but grace super-abounded! Violence had been a part of his past, but grace super-abounded!

It’s no wonder when Paul wrote to the Romans, he said,

“Where sin increased, grace increased all the more!” (Romans 5:20b).

I hope you get this: What if Paul said he had been an ex-addict, or a financial failure, or an ex-con or a former homosexual? Grace is still stronger! Where sin abounds, grace abounds more! Grace releases people not only from sin, but also from shame!

Do you know what? It’s easy for Christians to be better at promoting shame than promoting grace! Have you ever heard somebody say, *“You ought to be ashamed...”*

I understand that there is a proper place for shame, but often shame adds disgrace to what’s already been done. It holds down rather than lifts up. It steals hope instead of offering encouragement. Shame is a classic grace-killer!

Chuck Swindoll says it like this:

“Christians can be such shamers! We not only make people ashamed of their wrongs, we shame them for being different. I know a few Christians who have been made to feel ashamed because they never married...or because they made a lot of money the right way...or

because their sickness didn’t go away...or because their depression didn’t end quickly.”

A Christian counselor named, Earl Henslin, contrasts shame-based spirituality with healthy spirituality. I want you to look at this chart for a minute. Shame-based spirituality says...

1) Having problems is sin.

- Healthy spirituality says, *“I can bring my problems to God and my fellow Christians.”*

Shame-based spirituality says...

2) Emotions are sinful.

- Healthy spirituality says emotions are neither good nor bad. It’s what I do with them that matters.

3) Shame-based spirituality says having fun is sinful.

- Healthy spirituality says there are different ways to delight in God’s goodness.

Shame-based spirituality says...

4) Spirituality equals perfection.

- Healthy spirituality promotes grace not legalism.

Shame-based spirituality says...

5) Sexuality is sin.

- Healthy spirituality says sexuality is a part of who we are to be celebrated in a God-honoring way.

Shame-based spirituality says...

6) Becoming a Christian fixes everything within me.

- Healthy spirituality says accepting Christ in my life empowers me to face the issues of my life.

Shame-based spirituality says,

7) If I'm not healed, it's due to a lack of faith.

- Healthy spirituality says having illness is not a sin. I can seek the best treatment and God's power in my life.

Perhaps no description of a grace-filled life is more graphic than the one Paul gave us in 2 Corinthians 9:8:

"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

What the world desperately needs is men and women who have been transformed by grace, who serve out of a heart of grace and who reflect the characteristics of grace. More than ever, followers of Jesus Christ need to be characterized by generosity, impartiality, liberty and mercy.

CONCLUSION

1. If my heart has really been gripped by grace, it will influence how I serve others. Jesus said it like this:

"...when you've done everything you were told to do, you should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we've only done our duty'" (Luke 17:10).

2. In other words, if I've really been gripped by grace, I won't feel like anyone owes me something when I serve.

I'll just serve because my heart has been transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Eg. Lorne Sanny, the founder of the Navigators, was once asked how we could really know when we have the attitude of a servant. His answer was to the point::

"You know you're a servant by how you act when you're treated like one."

Eg. When David Livingston returned from Africa after 33 years, he was welcomed home as a missionary super star. But I want you to listen to his words:

"People talk of the sacrifice I've made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay?"

It is emphatically, no sacrifice. Say rather, that it is a privilege.

Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger...may make us pause and cause the spirit to waiver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. I never made a sacrifice."

Folks, that's what it means to be a grace-filled servant characterized by generosity, impartiality, liberty and mercy.