

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, November 15, 1987, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

### **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.”

### **YOU ARE A GIFTED PERSON!**

I am convinced that the way God has provided for our new congregation to grow spiritually and numerically is for every Christian believer within the fellowship to discover, develop, and use his or her spiritual gift or gifts. In order to be the tools God can effectively use to reach our community, to bring people to Christ, and to incorporate them into our fellowship, we need to know ourselves better. And an important part of this self-knowledge and evaluation relates to spiritual gifts. We need to begin the exciting process of discovering the spiritual gift or gifts that God has given to each one of us, and then of putting these gifts to use for the health and growth of the Church. As children we all enjoyed going on a treasure hunt; so now you are about to embark upon the most exciting and important treasure hunt in which you could ever engage—that of discovering the spiritual gift God has bestowed on you!

This teaching with regard to spiritual gifts is something that has come into prominence only within the last 15 to 20 years. When I was at Seminary, no one ever spoke about spiritual gifts. When I was being examined for ordination, no one ever asked me if I knew what my particular spiritual gift was. And I dare say you haven’t heard too much about this subject either; but since it is so vital to the ongoing health and growth of the Body of Christ, I want to devote a series of sermons to a detailed consideration of these gifts, because I want you to know what your spiritual gift is, and how you may develop and use it to the glory of God and the up-building of the Body of Christ. We hope to supplement the series of sermons by holding, some weekend, a Spiritual Gifts Workshop, to help you zero in on the unique gift the Lord has bestowed on you, and which He wants to let loose through you for the blessing of souls.

As we begin to study what the Bible says about spiritual gifts, we find that there are three key passages in the New Testament that speak about this subject. They are Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4; and the first thing to notice is that each of these passages speaks about spiritual gifts in the context of the Body of Christ; but none of the three passages defines what the Body of Christ is! So, it is necessary at the outset to discover the meaning of the Body of Christ, and take that to help us interpret these passages.

The meaning of the term “the Body of Christ” is found most specifically in two places—Ephesians 1:22 and Colossians 1:18, and these two verses say almost exactly the same thing. Here they are:

“And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be Head over everything

for the Church, which is His Body...”

“And He (Christ) is the Head of the Body, the Church...”

So it is the Church which is the Body of Christ.

Now, there is a double sense in which the Church as the Body of Christ is used in the New Testament:

1. It is the term used to describe all the people who have ever followed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord—all such are part of the universal Body of Christ.
2. This term is also used of the local congregation—this too is the Body of Christ; and 95 percent of the time we refer to the local congregation as “the Body” or “the Body of Christ.” This is where the rubber meets the road so far as spiritual gifts are concerned. They happen and are exercised within the local congregation.

Now the Church, the Body of Christ, was designed in heaven by God, and God designed it in His Own perfect way. Notice:

- He did not choose to make the Body of Christ a dictatorship where one person rules and everybody else follows.
- Nor did He choose to make the Body of Christ a democracy where everybody rules.
- Rather, God chose to make the Body of Christ an organism with Jesus Christ as the Head, and every member of the Body functioning with a spiritual gift. This is the way God has designed the Church.

Let me now give you a working definition of a spiritual gift:

**“A spiritual gift is a special attribute, given by the Holy Spirit, to every member of the Body of Christ, according to God’s grace, for use within the context of the Body.”**

Notice that phrase “according to God’s grace.” The Greek word most commonly used for a spiritual gift is the word “charisma,” from which we get the word “charismatic.” But the first six letters of the word “charisma” are “charis,” which is the Biblical word for “grace.”

Now Ephesians 2:8 reminds us that it is by grace that we have been saved, and our salvation is the gift of God—we can’t earn it and we don’t deserve it. God’s unmerited favor is the source of our salvation. And that same unmerited favor of His is the source of the spiritual gifts He bestows upon us—we don’t deserve them and we can’t earn them—He freely lavishes them upon us by His grace.

**How many people have spiritual gifts?** The answer is **all Christian believers.** Listen to our text (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.”

In verses 8, 9, and 10 of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul gives a list of spiritual gifts, and then in verse 11 he says, “All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He [the Holy Spirit] gives them to each one, just as He determines.” This is reinforced in verse 18 where Paul says, “But in fact, God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.” He has given each body two eyes, one liver, ten toes, and so on. God is the One Who has designed the human body and given it its various functions through its members—the hands, the feet, the ears, the stomach, and all the rest. Likewise, God is the One Who by His grace causes the Body of Christ, the Church, to function in a healthy fashion by bestowing upon its members, you and me, spiritual gifts which we are to use as the human body uses its eyes and ears and hands and feet and all its other parts in a harmonious pattern of activity.

Now God in His providence has chosen to bring new members into the Body of Christ through human instrumentality. New people hear the Gospel through human beings. God has no celestial public-address system! Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38). In a word, God gives the increase, but He doesn’t reap the harvest Himself. Christians do the reaping.

But on the contrary God has not used human instrumentality to distribute the spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ. He has chosen to keep that prerogative to Himself. And when you think about it mathematically, He is the only One smart enough to do that! There is not a computer in the world capable of programming the distribution of the spiritual gifts throughout the whole universal Body of Christ. A mathematician was asked recently, “Suppose there are 25 spiritual gifts and there are so many millions of Christians in the world, how many combinations could you possibly have of those 25 gifts?” And his answer (no doubt worked out on a computer) was 90 dectrillion! Now I have no idea how many that may be, but it is an inconceivable number! I don’t think that even the Pope is smart enough to distribute these gifts perfectly to the Body. God has reserved that for Himself. These spiritual gifts are given by His grace to the Body as He sees fit to distribute them. And He has bestowed on you your unique gift or gifts.

### Now **why do you need to know about spiritual gifts?**

1. Well, in the first place, it will benefit you in your own spiritual life. You will be a better person when you discover what God has called you to be and to do as a Christian.
2. Again, the whole Church will benefit. When a congregation knows about spiritual gifts, it is a better Church than it was before, and it will function much more effectively.
3. And finally, it will help you to know God’s will for your life.

As a young Christian, one of the first great Scriptural passages to which I was introduced was Romans 12:1-2, “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present

your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” And I can remember praying, “Lord, that’s what I want! I want to lay myself upon the altar. I want to be wholly surrendered to Jesus. I want to do Your perfect will. Lord, I can’t pray enough, or read the Bible enough, or tell people about Jesus enough! Lord, let there be a complete transformation of my life!”

But, unfortunately, I didn’t go on in Romans 12! I stopped at verse 2! And when you think about it, Romans 12:1 and 2 are extremely abstract. What, after all, does it mean to a new Christian to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind”? What does it mean “not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world”? You really need a Bible commentary to understand these things.

But Paul, when he wrote this chapter, had something very concrete in mind, and the concrete part doesn’t come in verses 1 and 2; it starts with verse 3, which tells us that there is no room for pride in our lives: “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment”—that is so important. To do the will of God you must have a sober, realistic evaluation of yourself. You have to know who you are. You have to know the gifts God has bestowed upon you to make you an effective Christian. How do you do this? How do you know, under God, who you are? Paul tells us; he says, “in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Now “faith” in this context does not mean “saving faith” in Christ; rather it denotes the spiritual power, the spiritual gift given to each Christian for the discharge of his special responsibility to God within the Body of Christ. What Paul is saying is this: “You will really know yourself when you discover the spiritual gift God has given you.”

He then goes on to say, “Let’s think about physical things. Think about your body, that body that looked back at you from the mirror this morning when you were getting dressed. If you can understand that body, you’ve got the key to understanding spiritual gifts.”

You see, you don’t have to take a college course in anatomy! All you have to know is that your hand is not your ear! If you can understand that your hand is not your ear, you have a key to understanding the spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ. You have to know that your hand can do things that your ear can’t do, and vice versa. Yet they both work together in harmony for the benefit of each other, and for the benefit of the whole body.

For example, you’re walking down the street, and a big barking dog comes out behind you. Your ear hears the dog, and you take your hand out of the way and the dog doesn’t bite your hand. In that case your ear helps your hand. On another occasion you are sitting reading, and all of a sudden, your ear begins to itch, whereupon your hand reaches up and scratches your ear—and does that ever feel good! This time your hand has helped your ear! Now the members of the body work that way; they help each other. They don’t do the same things, but they help each other for the benefit of each other and for the benefit of the whole body.

Paul says in verses 4-6, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and

each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us”—so here we are into the spiritual gifts.

We all want to do God’s good and pleasing and perfect will, and in order to do that we need to soberly evaluate ourselves and seek to discover the gift or gifts God has been pleased to bestow upon us. Then, and only then, are we completely equipped to accomplish the ministries God has carved out for us.

So, at this moment, three of the most important goals of your Christian life should be to discover, develop, and use your spiritual gift, or gifts.

Don’t forget—these gifts are received, not achieved. You will not get them by praying for them. They are given at God’s discretion.

I hope and pray that in this introductory sermon God has whetted your appetite so that you will yearn to discover the way in which the Lord has endowed you. We will not be returning to this subject until after Advent and Christmas, but then we hope to have a complete series of sermons on the gifts. In the meantime, read often and carefully and prayerfully the three important passages on the subject: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4; and may God richly bless you as you embark on this most exciting Treasure hunt!

**AMEN.**