

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan Jr.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Sermon Title: "Every Christian Has a Gift" (A Journey through First Corinthians)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

June 18, 2017

{SLIDE 1} Paul takes a break from discussing the sin of that port city called Corinth. The troubling, intruding temptations that the Corinthian Christians had to deal with on a daily basis, Paul steers away from all of it to speak about some positive. Paul says a few words at first that sounds negative – “You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak” – but Paul doesn’t dwell on that for too long.¹ Once you were pagan, but now you are Christian. Once you were led astray, but now you are being led down the path of God. Once you listened to idols that could not speak, but now you listen to the voice of the one true living God.

{SLIDE 2} “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters,” Paul says, “I do not want you to be uninformed.”² It seems as though Paul has been writing a letter to the Corinthians in response to a bunch of issues that wanted to straighten out. The

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:2.

² 1 Corinthians 12:1.

Christians in that port city were trying to figure out what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be God's church, so they probably put a whole bunch of questions into some letter that they sent to Paul. And now he is writing back to them with what he thinks God wants them to hear.

One of those issues is spiritual gifts. What are they? What do they look like? Do I have a spiritual gift, or has God bypassed me on that issue? The Corinthian Christians wanted to know because they had a God they wanted to serve, they had worship they wanted to carry out, and they had a message of hope to share with others, who needed to be rescued from this lost and broken world. Paul graciously tells them that there are spiritual gifts. Those gifts come from the Holy Spirit. Although they may be different in character, it is the same Holy Spirit who offers each gift. Each gift is used in tandem with the others, and all these gifts coming together benefit the entire church of God.³ Paul then lists some of the gifts that the Spirit gives. This is not a complete list, for the Spirit may give many different spiritual gifts to many different Christians. There is utterance of wisdom and utterance of knowledge. There is faith and healing as gifts. The working of miracles, prophecy, discernment

³ Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:

of spirits, speaking in different languages, interpreting those languages, and the list goes on from there.

{SLIDE 3} Now, before we get too ahead of ourselves, this one thing needs to be said right now: every Christian has a spiritual gift. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you were given a spiritual gift. None of us can say, “Oh, no, not me. I have no spiritual gift. I’m too old. I’m too young. I can’t do anything productive.” Do you believe in Christ as your Savior? If you do, you automatically have a spiritual gift. When you accepted Jesus as Savior, you were given the gift of eternal life. You now have abundant life in God, and one day you will be face-to-face with God in heaven. The next thing that was given to you and me, whether we realized it or not, was that God gave us a call to carry out. As saved people, we are also disciples of Christ who have something we can do for God. The Holy Spirit gave us a spiritual gift to use, so that others might know who Christ is and might believe him to be their Savior.

{SLIDE 4} Look at it this way: if you receive a job to do something – construction, work in an office, serving burgers or ice cream, etc. – you not only get a paycheck for your work but you also have work to do. On certain days of the week, you carry out the task you were employed to carry out, and eventually you get money that you may place in the bank. You

cannot receive a paycheck by doing nothing. You can't just sit around all day and expect the boss to be happy with you and give you money. Faith in Jesus Christ is almost the same way: yes, we have everlasting life as our "paycheck" but we also have work to do. We have ministry to carry out. The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts to help us. The kingdom of God grows. In fact, we should be happy to carry out any task for God in joyful response to the salvation that God has given us. Every Christian has a spiritual gift.

{SLIDE 5} Maybe we cannot believe we have a spiritual gift or two because we cannot see ourselves in leadership positions. Maybe we think having a spiritual gift means we have to be really good at something, and we have to be really responsible for that something. We better be professional when carrying out that gift, or else things will fall apart.

Paul lists a few spiritual gifts in verses 8-10, and the first are utterance of wisdom and utterance of knowledge. That sounds like we should have some formal education like a college or master's degree. Sounds like we should have had some training and practice, so we could be an expert in these areas. Yet, if you turn to the Book of Job 28:28, it says that the fear of the Lord is wisdom and to depart from evil is knowledge. That doesn't sound overly difficult. As

Christians we want to be awestruck by what our God can do, and we want to steer away from anything to clouds our vision and keeps us from seeing God. So we would want to attach ourselves closer to God and shun all that would separate us from God. Some have the gift to see what is wrong and point it out. Some have the gift to understand the things of God and communicate them. It doesn't take a diploma to do so. The Holy Spirit sends them the gift and they carry it out.

{SLIDE 6} Another spiritual gift that Paul mentions is the working of miracle and prophecy. Those might sound too spooky for us. It might sound like we have to become magicians who know some deep dark secrets that can be revealed to nobody else. Again, we might think we should already have formal education to do such things. We should already have trained ourselves in such gifts in order to perform them.

Working miracles and prophecy are definitely gifts for which we do not train. They are given to us, if they supposed to be our gifts. The Holy Spirit gives us such gifts according to God's will for us and the Church. Those gifts like all gifts are used to benefit the church, and we may all grow in faith as they are practiced. We don't have to be professional to have such a gift. We do not have to know the deep dark secrets of the universe to have them. If God gives us such gifts, we

will just have them. The Holy Spirit will show us how to use them.

{SLIDE 7} Still, some of the spiritual gifts that Paul lists may sound like they are out of our range. We might not have such gifts – I know I don't have most of the gifts that Paul lists. So what about it? How is it that we as Christians have spiritual gifts, when none of them are listed in 1 Corinthians 12?

Well, there is always Romans 12:3-9. Paul speaks of spiritual gifts there. He speaks of prophecy but he also speaks of ministry. What Paul means is practical service, taking on a leadership role and carrying it out. It might be becoming an Elder of the church. It might be visiting food pantries and soup kitchens and giving food to the poor. It might be odd jobs done for neighbors or members of the church. God may have given us the gift to help people in practical ways. That doesn't take formal training as much as it takes an open heart.

Back in Romans 12 Paul also mentions teaching and giving. In teaching we are willing to learn about something, teach ourselves about things of God we never knew. Whatever teaching we receive, we hand off to somebody else. That may occur by taking on a Sunday School class: we do the formal studying of materials and then tell the class what we learned. Or, it might occur by helping with the youth group: we

don't have to study anything particularly, because Dock or Allen or Albert has studied the materials, but we can add our experiences and knowledge to a certain topic. We can still help the youth with understanding life and understanding God, since we may have been on the planet longer than they. The same could happen with Kids Club or VBS: we may not formally take on a class, but we can still be a teacher, sharing our experiences with little ones who haven't had too many experiences yet.

There is also the spiritual gift of giving. In giving, we choose to give something to somebody, especially if they need it. We are mindful of their needs and we do what we can to help. We could give anything away: a cooked meal, a new article of clothing, a toy, a tool, a piece of advice. We have a cheerful heart and the willingness to help somebody in kindness, and we just give away what we think is best. Teaching and giving might have different approaches, but each chooses to place another person above the teacher or giver. Teaching and even giving helps the other person learn that they are loved by God, that they are special in God's sight, that they may also believe in Christ and receive a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit.

{SLIDE 8} Every Christian has a spiritual gift. We cannot say that we don't. We cannot say that we are

too old or too young for a gift from the Holy Spirit. We have a gift, if we believe in Christ. We may already have been carrying out that gift without knowing it.

Spiritual gifts can be carried out in a formal setting such as being a teacher in a classroom or being an Elder on our governing council. They could be as formal as joining a team such as Worship or Fellowship or Building and Maintenance. They could be carried out as an official for Presbyterian Women or as a leader of a Life Group.

{SLIDE 9} But then, you don't have to find an official title in order to carry out a spiritual gift. Most spiritual gifts are given to us and we just carry them out. We just do whatever we can, since the Spirit is leading us to do ministry. When we are hospitable toward somebody, giving them something to eat and drink and making them feel comfortable, we may be carrying out a spiritual gift that was given to us. When we are able to give advice to somebody who approaches us with a problem, a spiritual gift is being used. When we can fix something that somebody cannot fix, when we research something that a person is unable to research, a spiritual gift is being used. When we are using our talent to help somebody else, when our talent benefits that person more than ourselves, then we are using a spiritual gift with which God has entrusted us. We are building up the people

of God and doing great wonders for the kingdom of God.

{SLIDE 10} Dare I say, since it is Fathers' Day, that a spiritual gift that the Spirit gives us, once we have children, is parenting. Something happens within a woman and a man that tells them they need to be more responsible, they need to be a little more organized, they need to step up their game now, because a child is coming into the family. Parenting has got to be a spiritual gift. There was no way that I could be a parent at the age of 20 or even 25. There were no children in my family yet, but then I was not ready for that responsible at ages 20 or 25. But at age 30, our son Parker was on his way. I was excited and I was scared. What was I getting myself into, having a child with my wife? And then something changed. Parker arrived, and the parental instinct was thrust upon me. I had the title of Dad, and I had a new spiritual gift. And then that gift was amplified when Amanda came along. I was now a Dad doubly over, and so the Spirit had to give me more fatherly skills, since having two kids is more work than having one. Parenting has got to be a spiritual gift, because not everybody has that gift until the time arrives to have children.

But then, it probably should be said that those who cannot have children may also receive the

spiritual gift of parenting. I know of folks who cannot have children, and yet they feel the responsibility, the burden, to be parents, so to speak, to children in the church who are not their own. They feel the need to be parents, so to speak, to nephews and nieces who may be having a rough time with their own parents. People who cannot have children may still carry out that spiritual gift that the Holy Spirit has given them. They may still bend down to the level of some child, and with the permission of the parents be a source of help, be a positive role model, be a spiritual counselor.

{SLIDE 11} Every Christian has a spiritual gift. How many more times does it need to be said? We have a gift, if we have Christ.

So, instead of wondering or even arguing about it, use it. Use that gift. Explore what it is. Amplify that gift with much prayer and more service. Use it to aid the church of God and all those who are a part of Christ's body. There is ministry to carry out. There are gifts to be used. All are better off. The kingdom of God expands.