

**The Body**  
**1 Corinthians 12:1-31**  
**February 21, 2010**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson pastor of the marvelous First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina said in a sermon two weeks ago, “the greatest privilege and highest honor given to any human being in any part of the world is the privilege and honor of being a part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Do we believe that? Paul portrays the church as the body of Christ with Christ as the head of the church and it makes it plain in all of his proclamations that to belong to Christ who is the head of the church is to belong to His body. The first belonging to Christ is the result of a radical act of the grace of God on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus and the latter belonging to the church is the Spirit led response of all who have truly received and responded to the grace of God. How do I know that someone is a believer, that they belong to Jesus? Well at least one way I know is that they belong to the body of Christ and are involved both purposefully and passionately. But how does this body of Christ work? What does it look like in its effective operation? That is the question for this morning as we turn our attention to 1 Corinthians 12. What we want to see this morning is how the Spirit of God works in the church of God to bring glory to God, to bear witness to Jesus and to build up the body of Christ.

Now in order to accomplish the goal I need to invite you to look at this chapter with me as if we were looking through the lens of a camera. We are going to begin with a wide angle view of this passage, not as wide as we could expand the lens but wide enough hopefully to help us bring this passage into a more clear focus. Then we are going to zoom in a little closer until we are looking what I hope will be clearly at the contents of this chapter. So, let’s put our eyes to the camera and get going. 1 Corinthians 12 is found in the middle of the next to last section of this first letter of Paul to the church in Corinth. No church which he founded floundered more than this one. None that he started had more struggles than this one. This was a torn apart church in a very tough town. Paul we know wrote at least three letters to this church; we have two of them. They are not letters of affirmation and commendation but the kind of correspondence whose intent is to bring corrective discipline to this divided and divisive church. We have looked at this material enough for you to know what some of the problems were

but I what I want us to revisit is the fact that Paul addresses the cause of all the problems in chapter fifteen: this church was confused about the Gospel. They had made it into something less than it is and thus their lack of clarity about the Gospel had brought confusion to the church. And it could be seen in a church that was not ordered according to the Word of God and thus was in disorder and disarray. That is the big picture, the wide angle view. Now let's close the lens a little and look more closely.

1 Corinthians 12 is the first of two chapters that are framed by two chapters all four of them addressing the disorder that was in the church. 1 Corinthians 11 is all about the issue of right order and so is 1 Corinthians 14. I want you to see this in the text. The arguments about the right order of the church begin in 1 Corinthians 10:23 and the focus of this introductory paragraph is the foundation for the church in Corinth or for any other church. Why do we do what we do? Why do we organize as we organize? The answer is given in this paragraph and particularly in verse 31. We do what we do even denying ourselves what is permissible to us in order to bring glory to God. And Paul wants us to know that bringing glory to God in and through the church begins with a church being rightly ordered so he addresses this issue at the beginning of this section, 11:3 and 14:37-40. So why would Paul call the women in the church in Corinth to be silent? Because they could not speak in church? No. Because they were speaking in church in a way that disrupted the order that God had established and God has established His church so that it is governed by the Spirit of God through the Word of God with men being called of God to give both spiritual oversight and administrative oversight to the church. This is God's order. The goal of the church is to bring glory to God. We accomplish this goal by ordering the church in the way that God has designed. This is the essence of what Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14. But the soul of the church is found in the exercise of the gifts of the believers who make up the body of Christ. And the exercise of these gifts is always done in the awareness of the higher gifts and the more excellent way, 12:31.

Now let's zoom in and focus our attention on chapter twelve where Paul reminds us first and fundamentally that the church is made up of people who have made the true confession, 12:1-3. You need to know that the word "gifts" in verse one is supplied in every translation. The actual Greek word could refer to things or people. The essential meaning of the term has to do with spiritual

realities and the fundamental spiritual reality of the church is that the church must find a way to make membership in the body truly biblical. Meaningful membership is regenerate membership. The church should be made up of those who by the Spirit of God say that Jesus is Lord, He is the sovereign of the universe before whom the world bows and before whom I bow. He is the one who owns my lie and rules my life and controls my life. I have no other reason for being and breathing but Jesus. He is what gets me up in the morning and He is my reason for living through the day. That is the simple version of what it means to say "Jesus Lord." Those who say Jesus antithema would be those like the man living with his step mother or the believers taking other believers to the secular law court thinking that they can do those kind of things and still say that Jesus is Lord. So, Paul begins his treatment of the church as the body of Christ operating through the spiritual gifts of the people by making sure that we understand what it means to be a member of the church. Then he turns to a treatment of the spiritual gifts.

He wants us to know first of all that the gifts are Trinitarian in their essence, 12:4-6. There is one Spirit who distributes gifts to believers as He wills. And he does this "for the common good," 12:7. The word "common good" is a term that has to do with both profit and advantage. We are helped in understanding the meaning of this term by 10:23. God gives us gifts through His Spirit to profit the body of Christ in our work in relationship to one another and in our work in the world. And they are given for service so that they are never used to bring glory to the gifted but to exalt the Lord Jesus for whose glory the gifts are given and then Paul tells us that the energy and power for the expression of these gifts comes from God. Here is the Trinity at work in the giving of the gifts and in the expression of the gifts. And they are all to bring profit and advantage to the body of Christ for the exaltation of Jesus and the glory of God. The Spiritual Gifts are Trinitarian in their essence and they are multiple in their expression.

When you read the New Testament you will find that God has given us lists of spiritual gifts in three places. The most extensive is here in 1 Corinthians. And then we have a list in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. When I read the New Testament this is what I see about the Spiritual Gifts. First, all the gifts can be grouped into three categories: leadership, speaking, and serving. We see these categories in 12:27-30. We also see these clearly in 1 Peter 4:10-11. Second, I do not believe that any list in the New Testament is exhaustive. We do not have all

the gifts that are useful in building up the body of Christ and bearing witness to Jesus in the world in the New Testament lists of the gifts. Third, I do not make a distinction between what some would call a natural ability and a spiritual gift and I do not do that because there is no ability that you have that you did not get from God. Whatever it is that you excel in is that which is given you by God and what makes it a gift and not an ability is how you use that which God has given you. And those who belong to God want to use what God has given them through the church and in the church for the glory of His Name.

Now there are very clearly three categories of gifts in this list in 1 Corinthians. Paul begins in verse 8 with speaking gifts. Understanding God's Word is a gift; being able to apply it to others is a gift. The first is knowledge; the second is wisdom. The word for "another" in verse 9 means "another of a different kind." Not a different kind of person but a different kind of gift and these are service gifts: faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits. Some are given by God an incredible gift of faith that is not normative for most of us and there are those who are used of God to bring healing even in miraculous ways but those who exercise these gifts that are of the Spirit would never call attention to themselves and what they do. You may not even know their names. Most of the power of God at work through people with these gifts happens in prayer closets and private places where all the glory can be given to God alone. And there are those who can discern true from false prophecy and distinguish the work of the Spirit of God from demonic deceptions. These gifts are operative in the body of Christ and are used of God to bring glory to His name and to build up the body. Then there is a third category that Paul mentions as a legitimate gift of the Spirit but he lists here as a different category because it was the gift that was creating the most confusion in Corinth: the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Everywhere in the Bible the gift of tongues is used for the advancement of the Gospel for the glory of God so that God raises up people in the church and gifts them with language that is not their own so that to the praise of God they can proclaim the Gospel to the people whose language they now speak. The gift of tongues is the most delightful and dangerous of the gifts; it is delightful because it demonstrates the great power of God; it is dangerous because those to whom this gift is given need to be packing their bags for mission work among those whose language they now speak.

The goal of God through the gifts of the Holy Spirit is unity in the body through the diversity of the gifts. Just as the body has many parts that work together to make the body work, so the church is made up of many members with different giftings to make the body be what it is called and commissioned to be. The goal of God for the body is that we are to serve together and we are to share life together, 12:25-26. And in our serving we are to recognize two realities.

First, we are to know that there are higher gifts and there is a more excellent way. Paul addresses the issue of the higher gifts at the beginning of chapter fourteen. Nothing is higher for us than the proclamation of the Word of God whether that happens in this pulpit or in a Sunday School Class or on the streets of this town. All that we are and do should be done for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus to others. You can sing like the angels or speak in a thousand tongues, you can have knowledge of the Bible that emerges out of the Greek and Hebrew and wisdom to know how to apply it, and you can pray with the power that pulls heaven down to earth but if your passion and priority is not the proclamation of the Gospel then the gifts no matter how glorious are misappropriated. Second, we are to live the more excellent way which is the way of love which recognizes as profoundly true what Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 13.

Now the picture should be in focus. If you are a believer you have been given gifts that are to be used in and through the church for the glory of God and the advancement of the Gospel. And these gifts are to be expressed in such a way that the exercise of them shows how much we love God and how much we love one another. It is then that we are the body and it is our greatest privilege and highest honor to be a part of the body.