Sermon Series: The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith
Sermon Title: Blessing One Another

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 -- Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Introduction: **Paul Grabill,** a pastor in **State College, Pennsylvania**, interviewed **Eric Harrah**, a recent convert to Christ. **Harrah** had previously been **the owner and partner in 26 abortion clinics, making him the 2nd largest abortion provider in the country**. He placed his trust in Christ in **1997** in large part because of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit through a believer named **Steve Stupar**. In Harrah's own words: **A week before I gave my life back to Christ, we were sitting at a restaurant and Steve said the Holy Spirit had revealed 3 things to him and he wanted me to confirm them**. He said "**The name John keeps coming to mind. What does it mean to you**?" I said, "**That's my grandfather's name. He's dying with lung cancer**." Then Steve said, "**I see a girl in a plaid outfit and white shirt. Do you know who that is**?" As soon as he said that I knew it was my sister. I remembered the picture my grandfather had of a school photo where she was wearing those clothes. I wasn't too impressed because people knew I had a sister and everybody knew my grandfather so he could have seen the picture. Then he said, "**The Holy Spirit has revealed to me a plate holding blue pills with white bands. Does this mean anything to you**?" I denied knowing anything about it at first, but later called him and explained that a week before, I had come home with some joint pains. I took out some medication intending to take one. Then the thought occurred to me, "**Tonight is a good night to die.**" **So, I dumped all of the pills onto the plate. When I went to put the first one in my mouth, my dog barked and looked up at me as if to say**, "**What about me? Who's going to take care of me**?" I knew nobody would, so I put the pills back. **It was amazing to me that God had revealed that to Steve. That is when I knew it was time to follow Christ**.

Hearing a story like this certainly prompts the question, "How was Steve Stupar able to know these three things about Eric Harrah?" *It's clear that it wasn't based on his personal knowledge of EVERYTHING happening in the man's life. HOW COULD HE POSSIBLY KNOW*

ABOUT THE PILLS? **Steve attributed his special knowledge to the Holy Spirit, and that was enough for Eric to give his life to Christ. What do you think? Do you believe in that sort of thing? Many Christians would say that he was given a word of knowledge by the Holy Spirit that would ultimately serve as the impetus for Steve becoming a Christ-follower.**

In my third message on SERVING, I want to talk more about the variety of gifts that God gives to believers so that we can minister to one another. But before we talk about them, let me give you a little **background** regarding our passage for this morning. The church at Corinth had a problem with what were considered some of the more spectacular gifts such as TONGUES, PROPHECY, HEALINGS AND MIRACLES. **It seems that they were being given greater value and, at least for some, demonstrated access to a certain "wisdom" which was unobtainable by others who did not possess these gifts. The practice of these gifts then resulted not in glorifying Christ, but in glorifying the person using them**. That's why the Apostle Paul chose to address them in his letter. He did not want them to be UNINFORMED OR IGNORANT regarding the use of these gifts and their ultimate purpose -- to bring glory to God.

BY THE WAY, GOD DOES NOT WANT US TO BE IGNORANT EITHER AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT THIS PASSAGE AND A COUPLE OF OTHERS THIS MORNING IN OUR NINTH MESSAGE IN THE SERIES, "**THE FOUR BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR FAITH**" – WORSHIP, GROW, SERVE AND SHARE. **It is vitally important that we understand what Scripture teaches us about these "grace gifts" (from the Greek word charisma) and how we can use them to minister to others**. So, LET'S JUMP INTO IT AND PROVIDE SOME ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS THAT ARE FREQUENTLY RAISED CONCERING SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

WHERE DO THESE GIFTS COME FROM? As I said before, God is the PROVIDER of Spiritual Gifts. That's what we're told in **verse 11 -- All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. When someone becomes a believer, he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and at the same time given a spiritual gift at the Spirit's determination. It is to be used to bless the body of Christ and to bring glory to Christ**. Contrast this purpose with the experience of many of the Corinthians who IN THEIR FORMER DAYS BEFORE THEY BECAME BELIEVERS worshipped mute idols. **Though the idols did not speak (they were after all mute), they somehow inspired pagan worshippers to curse Jesus. This probably was the work of demons (1 Corinthians 10:20 – The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God). That's why Paul said this in verse three -- I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed. *The word accursed refers to a vessel meant for destruction***. The same word is used in **Galatians 1:8 -- But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed**. That is very strong language and we know that no true believer would ever dare say such a thing about our Lord!

Paul goes on to say that no one can say "**Jesus is Lord**" except by the Holy Spirit who we know came to glorify Christ -- **John 16:14 – He shall glorify Me**). So, the point is that God gives us a

spiritual gift, and whatever kind of gift we receive from Him, it is meant, not only to bring blessing to other believers but to bring honor to Jesus.

Notice what else Paul says. **One God does not equal one gift, one ministry or one demonstration of power. Listen to these words from verses 4-7 -- Now there are VARIETIES of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are VARITIES of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are VARIETIES of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. Christians are monotheists. That means we worship one God who exists eternally in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet one Spirit/Lord/God reveals Himself through a great variety of gifts and ministries**. **Paul is making the point that God has given many spiritual gifts to the church and we need all of God's people to put their gifts to good use. And don't worry, because God will empower them all in everyone**.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS? As I just said, they are meant to be used for the glory of the Lord and they are meant to be used for the COMMON GOOD. Paul emphasizes in **1 Corinthians 14** that they are meant to **EDIFY** the church **-- to** build up others in their faith. **Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12 is the same. It isn't the nature of the gift that we should be focused on, but the effect it has on the body**. In **1 Corinthians 13 and 14**, Paul addresses this issue head-on when he argues that all the gifts are for the building up of the community as a whole, not for the benefit of the individual. The emphasis in **CHAPTER 13** is the proper motive for the use of our gifts, which of course is LOVE -- **If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing**. **CHAPTER 14** discusses the inappropriate use of gifts when they are not motivated by love and thus fail to edify others.

In J**.R.R. Tolkien's** (*The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*) lesser-known short story "**Smith of Wootton Major**," he has a profound insight into spiritual gifts and God-given talents. As a young boy, **Smith Smithson** receives a rare gift at his small village's celebration—**piece of cake that contains a silver star**. As Smith wears the star on his forehead, it shines with light and it allows him to travel to magical lands and possess special powers and privileges. But one day as he travels home from one of his fantastic journeys, **Alf, the Master Cook** and baker of the cake starts walking beside Smith. **Unbeknownst to Smith, Alf is actually the king of all the land, and the one who chose to give Smith the silver star**. As they near Smith's home, Alf (or the King) says, "**Do you not think, Master Smith, that it is time for you to give this thing [the magic silver star] up**?" Smith replies, "**What is that to you, Master Cook? And why should I do so? Isn't it mine? It came to me, and may a man not keep things that come to him so, at least as a remembrance**?" The King says, "**Some things. Those that are free gifts and given for remembrance. But others are not so given. They cannot belong to a man forever, nor be treasured as heirlooms. They are lent. You have not thought, perhaps, that someone else might need this thing. But it is so. Time is pressing**."

WHAT ELSE DO WE KNOW ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

- **This isn't the only list of spiritual gifts. There are 3 chapters in the Bible that mention them (I Corinthians 12:8-11, 28; Romans 12:6-8; and 1 Peter 4:11)**. Some people want to add **Ephesians 4:11** to the list, but it seems more likely that Paul is speaking about specific offices in the church (**apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers**) than spiritual gifts given to the church in this passage. The list in **1 Corinthians 12:4–11** includes **the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues**. The spiritual gifts identified in **Romans 12** are **prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy**. The list in **1 Corinthians 12:28** includes **healings, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues**. Finally, **1 Peter 4:11** mentions **speaking and service**. As you can hear, there is some overlap. This should not surprise us given that the apostle had a different purpose in mind for each letter he wrote.
- **And there is nothing in the language that suggests these are the only spiritual gifts**. It is likely, in my opinion, that they are representative of the kinds of gifts given by the Spirit. There may be others. I think specifically of musical gifts given to lead the church in worship. **Who knows what else God might have given to one of His children as a gift to be shared with the body**?
- **Your gift may not be permanent.** (**1**) It is at least possible that your spiritual gift could change depending on the ministry to which you've been called by God. (**2**) It may also be possible that you could lose the gift if you are a poor steward of it. In the parable of the talents, this is what happens to the one who buries his talent in the ground. It is taken from him and given to another (**See Matthew 25:14 -- ff**). Let this serve as a warning that God expects us to use His good gifts for His purposes!
- **It is my conviction that every believer has a spiritual gift, although the intent of this passage is not to prove it.** The point of the text is not to imply that every person has a gift, but that each gifted person is meant to use it for the common good. The analogy of the importance of each member of the body seems to indicate that each person has a gift that brings value to every other person.

HOW DO WE DISCERN OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS? Here are some suggestions that may help you discover your gift(s).

- **Make sure that you are familiar with the spiritual gifts listed in scripture and have an understanding of how each gift is used to build up the body of Christ**. Ask yourself: what ministries get me excited? In what areas can I make a positive impact on my church? What tasks come natural to me? Someone who is gifted in the area of Administration is energized by tasks of administration. Someone without that spiritual gift can accomplish the same task but it will be draining and not come naturally. I have watched people who do NOT have the spiritual gift of teaching give great lessons but it required much labor, struggle and energy.

By the way, spiritual gifts are NOT excuses to omit things from the spiritual disciplines that Scripture outlines and requires ALL believers to practice. **Giving, evangelism, compassion, faith, wisdom, and service are examples of things that we are all called to do/practice**. Just because the Holy Spirit has not gifted you in the area of giving, doesn't mean you do not give. Another great example of this is evangelism – we are all called to share our faith. For someone who is not gifted in that area, it requires much effort. They sweat, the dread, they plan, they practice…and then they obediently share the gospel with someone. When it is finished, they are relieved. Someone who has the spiritual gift of evangelism can be sitting at a coffee shop one minute and sharing the gospel one minute later and never think about it. It comes naturally; it is the area of their giftedness. Make sure your class knows that they do not get a free pass just because they are not gifted in a certain area.

- **Take a spiritual gift inventory**. These are not failproof, but they often point us in the right direction. We offer one on our website under the heading **connect** called the Spiritual Gift Assessment.

- **Ask those who know you best**. If there is an area that you think you may be gifted in, ask people who know you what they think. Make sure you enlist friends who will be honest!

- **Trial and Error** – Pick an area, begin serving, and evaluate. I repeat: jump in and begin. Trial and Error – Pick an area, begin serving, and evaluate. I repeat: jump in and begin serving! Remember, that the area needs to be built up as part of the body of Christ. After doing it, ask yourself these questions: (**1**) Did I enjoy it or was it draining? (**2**) Did others enjoy me doing it? (**3**) What feedback did I receive? (**4**) Did my gift promote unity? (**5**) Did it bring glory to God?

Conclusion: Let me conclude by saying that spiritual gifts really matter. If they didn't, God wouldn't have given them to us and wouldn't care if we use them. I want to encourage you to discover your gift(s) and use them in service to the body for the glory of Christ. **The Stradivari Society of Chicago performs an important role in the music world**. The society entrusts expensive violins in the hands of world-class violinists who could never afford them on their own. Top-flight violins made by 17th and 18th-century masters like **Antonio Stradivari** produce an incomparably beautiful sound and now sell for millions of dollars each. **In fact, one just sold this week for 23 million dollars. It was purchased in 1993 for 2.75 million dollars**. The value continues to climb, making such violins highly attractive to investors. **But great violins are not like great works of art. They were never meant to be hung on a wall or locked up under glass. Any instrument will lose its tone if it isn't played regularly; conversely, an instrument gains in value the more it is used**. And so it is that those who own the world's most expensive violins are looking for very talented people to use them. **The Stradivari Society brings them together**. There is one requirement made by the investors. The musician must give the patron at least two command performances a year. **Like the Stradivari Society,**

God also entrusts exquisite spiritual gifts into the care of His children. Though they remain His property, He wants them to be used. God delights to hear beautiful music from our lives. He wants us to play for Him.