

You and Church Involvement, Part 1

Jack Hughes

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We are doing a series on the Church. We've stopped doing our normal exposition of Luke, and we're look[ing] at the Church. We've been looking at different aspects so far. This morning, we are going to look at you and church involvement.

Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon entitled "Joining the Church," said:

Now, I know there are some who say, "Well, I hope I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church."

"Now, why not?" I ask.

"Because I can be a Christian without it," they say. Now, are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? Well, suppose everybody else did the same, suppose all Christians in the world said, "I shall not join the Church." Why there would be no visible Church, there would be no ordinances.

That would be a very bad thing, and yet, one doing it—what is right for one is right for all—why should not all of us do it? Then you believe that if you were to do an act which has a tendency to destroy the visible Church of God, you would

be as good a Christian as if you did your best to build up that Church? I do not believe it, sir! nor do you either. You have not any such a belief; it is only a trumpery excuse for something else.

There is a brick—a very good one. What is the brick made for? To help to build a house with. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick; until it is built into the wall, it is no good. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose; you are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.

That is a pretty serious little excerpt, isn't it? I was reading it, and I thought, "Man, who wants to be a 'good-for-nothing brick,' kicked about?" We're in our series on the Church, and our topic [is] you and church involvement. So far, we've learned about the definition of the Church, we've learned about the importance of committing ourselves to the Church, [and] why the Church is unique. This morning we're going to look at involvement.

I just want to say that a few people came up to me [after last week's sermon, and] they were pretty distraught because they thought I was teaching that you're saved by church membership. Sometimes people are struck with something they hear in a sermon, [and] it will convict [them], or they don't understand it [correctly]. It becomes like a bee in their minds, and [for] the rest of the sermon they're just kind of swatting at it and they don't hear anything else that's said. So, let me just say it again: no one is saved by joining the visible church, but by grace through faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

However, the Bible also says that Christians will love Christ and the things Christ loves [see Ephesians 5:25]. Christians will, as a result of sal-

vation, want to be part of the local church and be involved, and engage in corporate worship, and submit to the leadership. This is only normal. How can you say you love Christ if you don't love the Church Christ loves? How can you say, "I love Christ, I just don't like the people He died for"? How can you say you love Christ if you will not obey Him? You can't. You just can't do it. You can't call yourself a Christian if you don't love Christ and the things Christ loves. That was the whole point [of last week's sermon]. It's not that works save you, [or that] joining the church saves you, but that salvation does a work *in* you, making you long for the things of God. If your life isn't changed, if you're not born again, if you aren't a new creature in Christ [see 2 Corinthians 5:17], and you aren't longing for the things of God, I'm telling you [that] you're not a Christian, because God isn't weak to change people.

I also want to say this: I'm not telling you these things to lay a guilt trip on you. Some people think, "Man, you're making me feel guilty." Well, that's not the purpose. I don't want anybody becoming a member at Calvary Bible Church out of guilt—not a single person. If that's your motive, do not do it. If you're already a member because of that, get your name off the roll. You need to become part of the church because you love God, and you love the things of God, and you love the people of God, and you want to be blessed by obeying God.

I would be a bad shepherd if I were to encourage you [to think] that your salvation is sure if you refuse to submit to the things of God, you refuse to love the people God loves, you refuse to commit to the church, [and] you refuse to exercise your spiritual gifts. I just don't believe it. [It would be] equally disastrous if you think you're going to heaven because you are a member of the church. There are many people who are in hell, and [who] will be in hell, who died [or will die while] on the rolls of a church. Christians who love the Lord, love the local church, [and] the people of the church. [They] want to commit themselves to the local church [and] submit to the leadership. This is normal Christian behavior that God [works] into people when they are saved. If it's not there, member or not, something is

major[ly] wrong, and you need to find out what it is. That was the whole point [of last week's sermon].

This morning we're going to be looking at three fundamental doctrines related to spiritual gifts so you can understand what spiritual gifts are, their purpose, and how you can exercise your spiritual gifts in the context of the local church so you can be blessed, and so others can be blessed, and so God can be glorified.

The first point is this: You are gifted at salvation. Everyone has different kinds of skills and gifts, even unbelievers, so theologians like to divide [gifts] up into two kinds. The kinds of gifts that God gives to all mankind are called "common graces," or "common gifts." We all have read [stories] about some prodigy junior higher who is a wizard in mathematics, or music, or some other thing—[a] genius. We all know of people in the world who are just incredible number crunchers. You talk to them and they're calculating in their minds. You're thinking, "How do they do that?" They're just gifted. [There are people who are] gifted at building, at art, at communication, administration, leadership, [and] a million other things. God gives gifts to believers and unbelievers the same—these common gifts—so that society and the world can be blessed.

But there is something [that] believers have that unbelievers don't have: spiritual gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit at salvation so that they can be a blessing and [can] build up the Church. If you've ever done any art—most of us have done at least a little bit of finger painting—you can [take the] three primary colors and mix them together into [an] infinite number of hues. They're all made up of those three colors, but they're all different. Some are close, but they're all different. In the same way, the Church has gifted people, and some are very close [in the gifts that they have], but they're all different.

[If] you go up to a maple tree in the summer, and you look at its leaves, you [can say], "That's a maple leaf." You can pop one [off the branch, and say], "This is a maple leaf. This is an *acer palmatum dissectum*—Japanese maple. You can tell right here. 'Acer' of the family of maple, 'palmatum'

[meaning there are] five points to the leaves, [and] ‘dissectum’ [meaning they are] variegated at the end. They’re all that way. They’re all *acer palmatum dissectum*. That’s how you tell the tree apart [from other trees]. No problem.” [If] you look closely, though, every leaf [on the tree] is different. Every one is a little different, [and] though they all qualify and are all obvious[ly] of that same variety, they are all different. So it is in the church. We all have our different attributes. We are all gifted Christians, and [though] some of us are very similar in our giftedness, we’re all a little bit different.

If you want to learn about spiritual gifts, the New Testament is loaded with texts. We’re going to look at some [of them] this morning. The first, and the most primary, place you can learn about [spiritual gifts] is in 1 Corinthians 12–14, so turn to 1 Corinthians 12. It’s a good place to start. The Corinthian church had a lot of problems. One of [those problems] was with spiritual gifts. Different people were trying to get certain gifts they didn’t have. [They] were envious of others because they had more prominent, or up front, gifts, and [the church members] were envying each other. [Their] gifts were colliding and [the people were] jockeying for position. Paul spends more time [addressing] spiritual gifts than [on] any other thing.

The whole content of [1 Corinthians] 12–14, in a very concise way, [is]: [Chapter] 12, you have spiritual gifts, they all differ, [and] they’re for the edification of the Body. [Chapter] 13: Use those gifts in love. [Chapter] 14: If you have the gift of tongues, this is how it’s to be used. That’s it. That’s the summary of all three [chapters]. We’re just going to look at [1 Corinthians] 12. What I’m going to do is I’m going to go through chapter 12, and we’re going to kind of fly over at 60,000 feet. We’re not getting into the details. We are going to swoop down at one spot, but this is just so you can get a grasp of what a spiritual gift is—kind of an overview. Next week we’re going to be looking in a little bit more intimate way [at] how you can get involved in the local church.

Look at [1 Corinthians 12:]1. Notice what [Paul] says there: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.” Here we see that God wants you to understand spiritual gifts and not be igno-

rant about them. God wants you to know about spiritual gifts. So, there you have it. [Verses] 2[-3]: “You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’; and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” You’re thinking, “What does this have to do with spiritual gifts?” Well, obviously, what we didn’t get is the other side of the communiqué that Paul received. Some people [in the Corinthian church], apparently, had started merging idolatrous practices into Christianity, and some people were having these “miraculous signs” and they were cursing Christ. Paul says, “Listen, that’s not of God. If you’re up there cursing Christ, that’s not of God.” That’s his whole point there.

Look at verse[s] 4[-6]: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.” Here we see that gifts, ministries, and [the] effects of spiritual gifts are different and that there’s one Spirit, Lord, and God who is in charge of it all. Why does he say this? We’re going to see [this] in other passages as well. Why does he say that? For this reason: the people at Corinth were having division and disunity over their gifts. [They were saying], “I want to be an apostle. I want to be a prophet. I want to have the gift of tongues. I want to be this person. I want to be that. I don’t want my gift; I want your gift. I want to [do this] even though I’m not gifted [in it].” There was all this conflict going on in the church, and Paul’s whole point here is: “Listen, there is only one Holy Spirit, and there’s only one Lord, and one God, and I just want you to know [that] if there’s division among you over spiritual gifts it’s not God’s fault. It’s yours. So cut it out.” That’s his whole point.

Verse 7: “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” This is a critical verse because it tells us two huge things. First, [it tells us that] every believer has received a spiritual gift. You weren’t passed up. Second, [it tells us that] every spiritual gift is to be used for the common good, not [for] self. You talk to some people sometimes,

and they say, “I have my private prayer language where I speak in tongues, but only in private, never in public.” Well, it’s not a spiritual gift. It’s not of God. All spiritual gifts are for the common good and the edification of the Body—they are not for self. That is a critical point.

Look at verses 8–10:

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

Stop there. This list is not comprehensive, as we shall see. These are just samplings of different kinds of gifts that Paul is talking about—specifically those kinds of gifts [the Corinthians seemed to be] trying to grasp because they’re the more prominent, miraculous, up-front type of gifts. Paul’s point here is, “Listen, gifts vary.”

Look at verse 11: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.” This, too, is a critical passage. Why? Because it tells us that there is only one Holy Spirit. So, if your gift is conflicting with somebody else’s gift, it’s not the Holy Spirit’s will because one Holy Spirit gave you your gift, one Holy Spirit gave [that other person his] gift, and the Holy Spirit is one and not divided against Itself. Second, and even more critical, is that the Corinthians needed to know, and you and I need to know, that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to people just as *He* wills, not as we will. You don’t have a say. You’re born [with] blue eyes—it’s the way it is. You have straight hair—it’s the way it is. You don’t have any hair—it’s the way it is. You don’t get to change your height later, unless you wear stilettos. You don’t get to change the color of your hair *permanently*. It’s just the way it is. You get what

God gives you and it's over. You don't have a say in all of your physical attributes. Neither do you in spiritual gifts, so to sit there and [say], "Well, I wish I was blessed and six-foot-four," [doesn't work]. You just can't be. Not everybody is six-foot-four. (But I'm telling you, be glad, because when you're crawling under the house it hurts. I hit my head on a lot of things, and it's not fun.) You just get what God gives you. He gives you what He gives you as *He* wills, not [as] you will.

Verse 12: "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." Here, Paul introduces this analogy and he works it to the end of the chapter—the analogy of the body. Your body has all kinds of parts that make it work, and all of those parts need to function together to make your body everything God designed it to be. [It is the] same way in the Church—everybody has a different gift. Some are good in this, and some are good in that, and some are similar in certain things, but God gives people gifts because He knows what His Church needs.

Verse 13: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Just stop there. Here, we are not talking about water baptism—we're talking about spirit baptism. What is that? The whole point Paul is making is that when you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you are baptized, submerged into, placed into, this spiritual Body called the "Body of Christ"—the Church. Remember what John the Baptist said when he was baptizing people in the Jordan? He [said], "One will come after me who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire" [see Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16]. (If you want to know what that means, there's a sermon coming.) The whole point is that when you believe, you are placed into the Body of Christ. Now, a lot of times we have this Western mindset, and you talk to people and [say], "I have the Holy Spirit" as if you have your own, individual Holy Spirit, [and you're] saying, "My Holy Spirit is different than your Holy Spirit." That's the whole thing that Paul is arguing against here. There's

just one Spirit, and we've all been baptized into [the] Body by that one Spirit.

[Imagine] you have a swimming pool. Let's just say it represents the Body of Christ. Those outside the pool are dry; they are the unbelievers. Those inside the pool are wet. We'll just say the water represents the Holy Spirit. Now, when you're an unbeliever, you're outside the body of water—you're dry. But when you come to Christ, in you go—you are now placed into, submerged in, the Body of Christ. Yes, you are individually wet because you are in the Body, but you're only wet because you're in the Body. No one outside is [wet]. You have to be part of the Body of Christ. So don't think of it as, "I have my own Holy Spirit." Think of it [as], "I have the Holy Spirit in me because I am part of this corporate body—the Body of Christ." That is the biblical understanding.

Look at verse 14: "For the body is not one member, but many." All the members together make up the Body of Christ. This is pretty basic. You have a body, a physical body, and you have all these different parts.

Now, in verses 15–26 you can see [the Corinthians'] problem. You can see the things that Paul is trying to correct by the answer he gives them. Look at verse[s] 15[-26]:

If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the mem-

bers of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

“You can see how absurd it is,” Paul says, “to envy somebody else’s gift, to wish you were something you’re not, because the Holy Spirit gives just as He wills and you don’t have a say in it. So quit complaining about what you will never be, and quit envying that which you will never have, and just accept what God has made you.” Consider your ear. It’s just a little piece of flubbery cartilage, but would you like somebody cutting off your ear like Peter did to Malchus in the garden [see John 18:10]? Do you want your ear? Yeah, you want your ear. I mean, you want to be symmetrical. It’s not that ears are all that cute, either. They’re good for holding these little microphone things, [and] that’s about it, [but they’re still an important part of your body.]

You [also have] all kinds of parts that people don’t see. Have you ever had anybody come up to you, and say, “Hey, nice pituitary gland”? I’ve never seen one—except from a cut open cadaver. But, hey, you know, what’s the deal? Is [the pituitary gland] not important because no one sees it? Well, it’s all behind your thick skull. I’m telling you, if you didn’t have a pituitary gland you’d be in trouble. You need that thing—big time. We have all these pieces in our bodies that we never see, that no one ever notices, just like in the church. There are all these people who are behind the scenes doing things all the time to make it possible for the people who are up front—*moi*—to do what [they] do. If [those people behind the scenes]

don't do what they do, I can't do what I do. I need them because if I didn't have them, then I couldn't do what I'm supposed to do. So everybody has a place, everybody has a function—some are up front, some are behind the scenes, some are little, some are big, but all together they all make up the Body of Christ so it can all function like God wants it to. That's [Paul's] whole point.

Look at [1 Corinthians 12:]27[-31]:

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

This is pretty easy. His closing argument is just saying, "Listen, you all have different gifts, so just accept what you have because not everybody is going to be the same." There is one phrase here, [however], that we're going to look at a little bit closer because this has been misinterpreted by a lot of people. See that little verse 31 there, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts"? Some people have misunderstood that verse, and they read it just like it says, which is not very good in the New American Standard. [They think] it's like this: try and get those big, up-front gifts. Be up front, be popular, be in front, try, strive to get that gift. Well, that's not what it could mean. The whole chapter is teaching against that.

So what is [Paul] talking about? What does that phrase mean: "But earnestly desire the greater gifts"? If he's not saying, "Earnestly seek, and desire, and strive after certain gifts," [what is he saying]? If the Holy Spirit

gives [spiritual gifts] out, and He gives them to you at salvation, and you don't have a say, it doesn't do any good to try and seek a gift. It's too late. It's like saying, "Seek to be seven feet tall." It's too late. You either are or you aren't. So what does that mean? Well, it could mean that Paul is merely saying, "Listen, every local body of believers needs certain kinds of people. You can have less servants, and less of certain kinds of things, [but] there are certain things that are really critical, so seek those apostle-, prophet-, teacher-type gifts, those critical gifts, for your Body because you need those—not for yourself, but that God would raise [people with those gifts] up."

But that doesn't fit very well. The better way is to understand it [like] this: that little phrase "earnestly desire" is just one word. It's a present active imperative. I'm sorry to give you all this stuff because some of you don't even remember anything about grammar, and every time I say "present active imperative" what comes to your mind is like a snowstorm. It just means it's a command to do something. (I'm sorry about this, but I'll explain it.) Whenever you have a command, it implies a second person. Second person is "you," or "your," or "yourselves"—[it is a] second-person address. For instance, you tell your kid, "Take out the trash," and what you really mean is, "*You* take out the trash." All commands imply a second person "you."

This [verse] can also be translated, "But *you* earnestly desire the greater gifts." In other words, [it's] a bad thing. Cut it out! That's the whole argument of the passage. This fits the context perfectly because [Paul] is arguing against [the Corinthians'] desires to have these prominent gifts, and he's going down through the passage, and when he gets toward the end in verse 31, he says, "They don't all speak in tongues, they don't all have the gift of healing, but you are earnestly desiring the greater gifts." He says, "Let me show you a more excellent way"—last line. Then what does he do? In [1 Corinthians] 13 he gives three hypothetical examples of super gifts and super sacrifice, which fit that just perfectly. So that's what I think [verse 31] is saying.

Turn over to Ephesians 4, another text that tells us about spiritual gifts, [but] in a more concise way. [It's] a little less detailed than what we just looked at, but [we're going to see] a lot of the same themes. In 1 Corinthians 12 [Paul says] here are spiritual gifts, [in 1 Corinthians 13, he says to use them] in love, but in Ephesians [4]:1–3, there is an exhortation to walk according to your calling and to do it in love, and then [a discussion of] spiritual gifts.

Look at what [Paul] says in Ephesians 4:[4–6]: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” Again, the emphasis [is], “Listen, if you're having conflicts with your spiritual gifts, it's not God's fault because there is only one God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. If there are divisions, it's your problem, not God's. God isn't giving you conflicting gifts.”

Look at verse 7: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.” This is the same thing. Here, Christ is the one who is said to give us our gifts, and Christ sovereignly gives to each one a certain measure. So where two people may have the gift of teaching, one may have a greater gift of teaching. That's all he's saying: “But to each one is given”—each believer has a spiritual gift given to him or her sovereignly by Christ.

Look at verse 8: “Therefore it says. . . .” When you read this you're going to think, “What in the world does this have to do with anything?” Here we go:

“WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.” (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

These verses are complex, they're obscure, and I would love to just really go slowly through this passage, but I'm not [going to]. I'm just going to tell you what it means. What this means is—bottom line—Paul is saying [that] Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, who was in heaven, descended to the lower parts of the earth, was incarnated, lived a life here on earth, died, and set people who were held captive to sin and Satan [see 2 Timothy 2:26] free, and gave gifts to those people—spiritual gifts. This is not the same thing that's happening when Peter talks about Jesus going to the lower parts of the earth to make “proclamation to spirits now in prison” [1 Peter 3:19]. This is talking about Jesus' incarnation, the purpose of His life, His dying to set sinners free from Satan and sin, and then give them gifts. Remember, in John 14, He says, “It is of a benefit that I depart, for if I go, I will give to you the *Paraclete*, the Helper, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit” [see John 14:15]. With the Holy Spirit comes what? Spiritual gifts. Ah! So He gives gifts to men. This fits the context perfectly.

Look at [Ephesians 4:]11: “And,” what kind of gifts did He give? “He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.” These are some of the gifts, or you might even say, “offices” of gifted people in the Church. Then, Paul tells us the purpose of spiritual gifts. Notice how they are not for self. [In] verse[s] 12[-13], what are the gifts for?

For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

That is such a great [passage]. I could preach for a whole year on those two verses. They are great! Do you see what he's saying there? He's saying, “You have a spiritual gift as a believer, and your spiritual gift is to bless others in the Body so they can grow up to maturity and can reach the place

where they experience in their lives the fullness of Christ.” That is huge, and that is exciting. To think that you have been given something to help other people arrive at that place is just almost beyond belief. When you look at these passages—1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4—what do you see? [First], there is to be unity in the use of our spiritual gifts, not fighting, not envying, not jealousy. Everybody gets what they [get], everybody uses what they [get] for the glory of God and not for self. Second, every believer has a spiritual gift given to him or her by the Holy Spirit just as the Holy Spirit wills, not [as] he or she wills. You can’t change it. Third, each gift is different. Fourth, spiritual gifts are for the edification and building up of others. That’s what we see in these passages over and over.

What does this mean for you? First, if you are a Christian, know this: God loves you and He gave you a unique spiritual gift (or gifts, depending on how you look at it), so that you could be a blessing to others, bring Him glory, and bring blessing to yourself. Second, if you fail to use your spiritual gift, you are cheating yourself, you’re cheating others, and you’re cheating God of His glory. That’s just how it is.

Look at your walk. Is your walk [with the Lord] kind of dull? You just kind of struggle along, [you don’t have] much joy [or] happiness. You come to church, but it’s something you feel like you *have* to do. Reading your Bible is a real drudgery. Praying is just a trial. You’ve lost your spiritual joy. You think back to when you were first saved and how excited you were, but it’s just not that way anymore. Let me ask you this: Are you actively serving other people?

I was sitting in my office and I was thinking to myself, “OK, let me think of some people in the church who are really on fire. You know, those people who are just [panting and] frothing at the mouth.” [They are] the people you talk to after church who [say], “Hi! How are you doing? Oh, man, I read this in my Bible, [and] oh, man, I got to share it with somebody. Oh! I got to do this. . .” and they’re so excited, man, they’re psychotic. It’s like, “Quit drinking so much coffee.” They’re just out of control. And you know what? I don’t know a single person like that who isn’t involved in serving. There

is this deep joy, this deep sense of fulfillment and contentment in knowing you have a purpose in your life, when you're pouring [yourself and your gifts] into other people.

When Paul, in Acts 20, asks the Ephesian elders to come down to Miletus because he is going to give them some final parting shots, he lays a lot of heavy stuff on them. From verse 17 all the way down to verse 36, he says, "You know, when I was with you I went from house to house, and I publicly preached, and privately taught. You are to guard the flock. You're going to be held accountable for it. People are going to come in from outside, and shepherd the flock of God, and teach them the whole counsel, and don't leave anything out that is profitable. Teach them everything, and teach them consistently, and shepherd them, and love them, and watch out for them." I mean, it's just [like a series of punches], and you're just thinking, "Oh, man." You know what that makes elders want to do? They kind of go, "I don't want to be an elder," and they crawl under the table.

After [Paul] tells [the Ephesian elders] all of these things, he knows there's going to be a temptation, and it's a temptation every elder—every leader—has, and that's this: to be lazy, to kind of just [sit] back and let others do the work of shepherding. They just come to meetings and make decisions. And so, [Paul] says this in [Acts 20:]35: "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said," what? "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Bingo. That's it. Don't think you're going to lose out by pouring yourself into other people, because you're not. You're going to gain from it. It is going to be [a] blessing—"It's more blessed to give," and serve others than to serve self, hoard for self, keep for self, preserve self. It comes in giving yourself away. That's just what we got through reading in Luke for weeks in our series on dying to self.

You're out there, and you're thinking to yourself, "OK, I admit it, I haven't been serving, but I don't even know what my spiritual gift is, and I don't know how to find out what it is, and I don't know where to serve even if I did [know what my gift was]. What do I do?"

Second point: Discover your spiritual gift. I remember being a young Christian. I was just going to church. I [went] to this church and the Sunday school teacher said, “Next week, all of you are going to find out what your spiritual gift is.”

And I thought, “Well, cool!”

And he said, “We’re going to take a spiritual gifts test.” How many of you have taken a test like that? See! Yeah, they’re fine, they’re fun, but they’re like a broken clock that’s [only] right twice a day. That’s how accurate they are. But there is a way to find out what your spiritual gift is, and it’s not that difficult.

Here are four little steps you can take to find out what your spiritual gift is. First: Pray. Pray to God that He would help you discover your spiritual gift. You know [that] He wants you to use your spiritual gift. He commands it in the Scriptures, so you have to find out what it is so you can use it. So, you know He is going to answer your prayer because if you ask anything according to His will, He hears you [see 1 John 5:14]. Bingo. So pray about it.

Second: Consider your desires. Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.” Now, notice the sequence there. You delight yourself in the Lord, which means keep your sins confessed; pursue the things of God; stay in the Word; fellowship with believers; live like a Christian, pursuing godliness, delight[ing] yourself in those things; and He, that is, God, will give to you what? The desires of your heart. He will give you [those] desires. The verse isn’t saying, “If you delight yourself in the Lord He’ll fulfill all your lusts.” That’s not what it’s saying. It’s saying [that] if you delight yourself in the Lord, God will place in you your desires, which He gives you. He will place in you the desires you need to have. So, you pray about it, you delight yourself in the Lord, and consider your desires.

Maybe you want to teach. Maybe you think, “I like encouraging people. I like praying. I like administrative stuff.” Go to the youth department, and say, “Hey, I want to organize. I want to set up.”

Believe me, they aren't going to say, "Get out of here." They would love that. People love that kind of stuff. A lot of times you have these common graces that overlap with your [spiritual gifts]. Let's say you have the gift of serving, and you have certain common skills [that] you can use to serve people with—bingo—and be a blessing.

Third step: Find a place to serve in accordance with your desires. If you need some training, get some training. We already saw that God gives some as pastors, and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry [see Ephesians 4:12]. So, you may have to go to somebody, and say, "I have a desire to be a teacher, or I have a desire to be an administrator, or a desire to be an elder someday. I don't know how to get there. What do I need to do?" Get some training; get some discipleship. A lot of times, certain ministries require lots of training, so pursue that [training] and make sure that once you get into that ministry, you give it a good try. Don't just say, "Well, I tried it for two weeks and I'm obviously not gifted."

Fourth step: Evaluate. If you are gifted in a particular area, this is what you will discover. One: You like serving in that area. Two: Other people tell you that you're blessing them and they see you as gifted in that area. If you experience those two outcomes, you have struck oil. You're in! You've got it.

Keep in mind that most people are gifted in a variety of ways. This is where it gets a little complex. For instance, I like serving people. I like doing helps types of ministries. I love doing that. I like moving people, and digging dirt, and weeding, and raking leaves. (And, no, I'm not coming over.) But, I also know that I have gifts of preaching and teaching. Now, before I knew anything about preaching and teaching, or even knew I was gifted in [those] area[s], I almost [always] did service ministries because I didn't know anything about the Bible [and] I didn't have any training. I didn't know anything, and teaching involves training.

Some people come up to me and they ask me things like, "Do you like preaching better or teaching better?" I can't say. I like them both.

Now, some people say, "I like preaching."

And some people say, “I like teaching,” because that’s where their desires are. I like both. Teaching is a lot lighter. On Sunday night, we get to talk, and dialogue, and ask and answer questions—it’s discovering truths through question and answer and dialogue. It’s a whole different thing. It [also] takes less preparation. It’s a wider, more cozy, less in-your-face approach. Preaching, though, is different. See, whenever I preach, I have to obey all the commands in the Bible given to me as a preacher. I *have* to reprove, rebuke, exhort, correct, teach with all authority, let no one disregard me, and command the Scriptures [see 2 Timothy 4:2]. If I don’t, I’m sinning. So, if you ever wonder why I’m in your face, it’s because I have to be because that’s what preaching is. Preaching is very personal, it’s very confrontational, and a good sermon is hard to prepare. Which one is better, [preaching or teaching]? For me, whatever—I like doing both, and I would do more if I could prepare more, but I don’t have time.

So what do I do? I have these serving/helps gifts, and I have these teaching/preaching gifts. Which ones should I do more of? Well, this is when you have to sit down and you have to evaluate.

Samuel Rutherford, a Puritan who was known for letters he wrote to encourage people while he was in exile after being kicked out of his pulpit during the English Reformation, described the Christian life like a river. He said [that] everybody has [a] certain amount of water [in their river], and if you’re way spread out, the river is just trickling. It’s a quarter-inch deep and it’s trickling away slowly. But, [if] you take all that water in that big, wide river, and you narrow it down, it becomes a raging torrent. This is [where] you need to decide [what you’re going to do]. Some people get their hands in so many things [that] they are spread too thin, and they’re kind of just trickling. They aren’t really getting anything done. They’re very ineffective at everything, but they’re busy. What they need to do is [ask], “What is my primary area of giftedness?” Or, if they can’t see that, “What is the greatest need?” [Then they should] say “no” to four or five of the things they’re doing, and just narrow it down into that one thing, or those two things, and

get deep, and get raging, and get effective instead of being ineffective in a whole bunch of things.

Look at your life [and] ask yourself those questions. [I do that], and I say, “OK, [I have] teaching, preaching, [and] helps gifts. Well, a lot of people have helps gifts and [fewer] people have teaching gifts, and [fewer] people have preaching gifts. So, what am I going to do?” Well, I know that I have lots of training to preach and teach, and I know [that] the elders say, “That’s what we want you to do.” It’s over. (So, if you want somebody to move you, you have to call Edward Willis. He loves carrying pianos.) That’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to stay in my channel. It’s not because I’m not gifted in those other areas, it’s because I can’t do what the elders want me to do, what I’m most gifted in, what I’m most trained in, which [has] the greatest effect for the cause of Christ, if I do those other things. That’s it.

Let’s say you have a desire to do some ministry, but you tried doing that ministry and it seems like your gift is kind of a dud. You [decide], “Yeah, I’m going to teach.” You show up, you’ve got this Sunday school class, and after a month it’s just you and your wife, who is saying, “I love you, honey.” You’ve [wrecked] the class, and everybody just kind of trickles off. If that keeps happening, you should probably get a clue. You’re not a teacher. You may desire that gift, [but] it’s for the wrong reason. Just do whatever God has gifted you to do, [and] people [will] say, “You know what? You are good at this. You’re blessing me because of this. This is the area where you need to go deep and get raging.”

I just want you to know, though, that [with] certain kinds of gifts, because they require training, [it] may take you a while to get good at [them]. I mean, the first time I ever taught, I was pathetic. I wish I had a video of that first time, just so my seminary students could laugh at me and feel good about it. I was bad. I was just bad. I had no idea what I was doing. I didn’t have any training. Somebody said, “Hey, [do] you want to teach this adult Sunday school class while I’m gone on vacation?”

I said, “OK,” and [it did not go well]. They were glad to have me gone.

But what's interesting is [that] several people came up to me, and said, "You know what? I think you're gifted in teaching."

I said, "Really?"

"Well, yeah. You need to learn some stuff, but I think you have what it takes."

And I thought, "Really?" I just felt like crawling under a rock after the class. I thought, "[My lesson] didn't make any sense. I gave them way too much information. I didn't know what I was talking about. I didn't know what I was doing. Everybody looked at me like, 'Whoa! What's that?'"

So, just so you know, it may take you a while to develop your gift. Give it a shot, give it a sustained amount of time, make sure you have the training, and then if people who know say, "Listen, this isn't your thing," then just quit trying to be something you're not.

If you have desires, pursue them. Try it out, get the training, [and] if it doesn't work, try something else. But, whatever you do, don't just say, "Well, I'm going to wait until I get old, and after I'm too old to drive my motor home around the country, then I'm going to serve." No. Your gifts are for serving now because tomorrow never comes.

Third [point]: Exercise your spiritual gifts. Turn to Romans 12. Similar to the other passages [we've looked at, the] emphasis here is on serving. Paul addresses spiritual gifts again, emphasizing service in the context of the Church. Look at Romans 12:3. Paul says:

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

In other words, if you have a gift and it is a prominent gift, don't get all puffed up about it. Don't let it feed your ego. You received the gift because God gave it to you. You didn't have anything to do with it. It's all by God's grace, and so just chill out, [and stop] thinking you're something [big] when

you're not. We have the same ideas in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians [4]: Don't be selfish with your gifts. Don't be envious about gifts.

Look at [Romans 12:]4: "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." In other words, we're related. [Verses 5–8 continue]:

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

These verses remind us of the same thing we saw in the other [passages]. Everybody has a different gift and everybody is to use [their] gifts. Don't be envious; just use [your gift], and use it with excellence.

You're thinking, "OK, well, we already got the 'need to serve' thing, and the other points." That's right, and that's why I want to talk to you about what getting involved in church does not mean, because people have all these false conceptions floating around in their heads. Some wrongly think: [First], "If I become a member of the church, they will call me up and force me to serve in a ministry where I don't want to serve." There are some churches where [if] you walk in the door, and you're breathing, and your heart is pumping, it's like, "Hey! Get over here! You're now the parking lot attendant." Or, "You're now dealing with the youngsters over here—the ADD group." And, you [say], "I don't like kids!" They don't care if you are the round peg. They're going to put you in the square hole, and if you don't fit, they're going to beat on you and make sure you fit in that square hole. A lot of you have probably had experiences like that. This is not what the Scriptures teach. *You* pray about it, *you* determine your desires, and *you* pursue the ministry until you find your spiritual gift and then do it with excellence and go deep. That's it.

If anybody [at Calvary Bible Church] tries to pound you into a different-shaped hole, then you just run to Brad Kelly, the chairman of elders, and say, “This guy is trying to shove me in a wrong-shaped hole.”

I just want to say, however, that some people don’t think they’re gifted in a certain area but they’ve never even tried it. Some kids don’t like spinach because it “looks icky,” and then when they’re thirty-three, they try it and go, “This is good.” If you’re going to say, “Hey, I’m not gifted there,” at least make sure you know you’re not gifted [in that area].

[Also], sometimes you just have to fill in [during] emergencies. One time I preached at this church, and [a] guy [came] up to me, [and said], “These are all the songs we’re going to be singing.”

I said, “Listen, I’m a preacher, pal. You do not want me leading [music]. I can’t even read music, you know.”

He said, “Well, you’re the guy,” [and I did my best]. Now, I don’t make a habit of that, and I’m just glad there are a lot of people down the line between Edward and me, but you know what? If all those people died, I could do it, but we’d better all know the songs, and forget the music, and follow my hand. I want to let you know, I’m not making a habit of that, and that’s not my area of giftedness, [but] sometimes you just have to fill in. Don’t say, “Hey, I don’t want anything to do with you because I’m not gifted in that area. I don’t care if this is a crisis situation or not. I’m not even going to do it one time.” I’m not saying that, but don’t feel any pressure, any pressure at all, to get involved in any ministry under compulsion. Do not do it. It would be wrong. Tell them I said so. Give them the tape [of this sermon] if they weren’t here. Never serve in any ministry you know you’re not gifted in, that you can’t serve in with a cheerful heart. Just don’t do it because it will account for nothing.

You know, if people decided that [they] just didn’t want to take care of kids on Sunday morning, it [would be] OK if [the kids were] all in here, screaming in your laps. I can preach over them—just turn up the sound system a little bit. Yeah, it wouldn’t be convenient; it wouldn’t be easy. Yes, it would be distracting, but it’s not sinful. It’s not wrong. The Bible doesn’t

say, “Thou shalt have kids separated into the next building.” So, don’t feel bad about that. If you’re not gifted, [you’re] not gifted. There are a lot of things we do, programs that we create, that aren’t commanded in the Bible, and we don’t have to maintain them. Certain things are commanded, but certain things are optional. [Actually], almost all of what we do is optional. So, make sure you’re gifted, and don’t think [that if you become involved in the church] we’re going to try and shove you into some square hole if you’re a round peg.

Second, some people wrongly think, “If I decide to serve, it will gobble up all of my time, and I just don’t have any time to give!” You’re thinking, “Oh, man, my schedule is so full already. It is so full.” We live in a busy state, and a busy place in the state. We probably live in one of the busier parts of the country. People are rushing back and forth, and there’s all this stuff going on. There’s commuting, and on top of that there are sports, and events, and piano lessons, and grocery shopping, and paying bills, and doing laundry. Sometimes you just want to veg out. You just want to be still and know that He is God [see Psalm 46:10]. The thought of adding something to your life just makes you feel like, “If I became a member, if I got involved in this church, I’d explode. There wouldn’t be anything left. I’m already at maximum tire pressure. I can’t handle it.”

Well, just take a deep breath. Nobody, especially God, wants anybody serving in the church [when they are] anxious, frantic, or stressed out. God doesn’t want anybody serving like that in the Church. [There should be] no anxious, stressed out, worried servants. But, I would encourage you to consider your schedule. A lot of times we do all these little things that gobble up a lot of time, and we don’t even realize it.

Let me just have you consider this: Get rid of your new plasma TV, and every other TV in your house. Does that scare you? The Bible doesn’t say, “Thou shalt have plasma TV,” or any TV for that matter. Take your children out of sports. The Bible doesn’t say, “Thou shalt make sure [your] child is in sports and [you must] scream from [the] sidelines.” That poor daughter of yours, take her out of piano, ballet, voice, karate, fencing, acting, and

golf lessons. Realize that many godly women lived and did great things for the Lord and didn't have any of those lessons. They are optional. They are not important in light of eternity. [But] if you can fit them in[to your schedule, that's] fine.

Quit your job that you have to commute to an hour each way. You think, "What? This is California!" That's right. There are plenty of places close by you can work. "Yeah, but it doesn't pay as much." Well, let me ask you, [do] you commute an hour one-way to work? That's ten hours a week. Do they pay you for those ten hours plus the gas, plus the wear and tear on your car, plus hazard pay for being on the freeway during rush hour every day? No. I think a lot of people, if they just sat down, and said, "OK, if I got this closer job that paid less," and they figured it out, they would discover that they'd actually be saving money by taking a cut in pay to get a job five minutes from their house, plus they'd save nine hours and ten minutes a week. [Then] they could [use that time to] serve. Whoa! [What] a novel idea. Don't let this world, its pleasures, your hobbies, or anything else get in the way of you doing what God commands you to do. Don't let what is optional eclipse what is commanded and necessary.

Third false perception: "If I start serving in the church, it will take so much of my time, energy, and resources that I will be unhappy and miserable because I won't be able to fill all of my lusts." Lie. [That is] just a flat-out lie. We saw it, didn't we? Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than receive" [see Acts 20:35]. You are not going to be more miserable. It will not make you [less] happy. It will, [however], make you unhappy if you live for yourself, and you grow old, and you die and two people come to your funeral because all you did was live for self instead of [for] God and for other people.

Peter sums up all of what we've learned in two concise verses. Let me read them, and just listen to these two verses. They are great. First Peter 4:10–11:

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Here, Peter categorizes all spiritual gifts into two categories: the speaking gifts and the serving gifts. That encompasses them all. Those are the two great gifts that all the other ones hang on. He says, “Do it for the glory of God, not to be seen by men, not because you [are] under compulsion. Just be whatever God has you to be, do it with excellence, [and] don’t worry about what somebody else is.”

Spiritual gifts are given to all believers for the edification of the Church. If you are a Christian, you have spiritual gifts, so use them. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You for what we were able to learn this morning. And, Father, even though we covered a lot of text, how glorious it was looking at Your plan. As the body is composed of many pieces and all the parts work together for the good of the body, Father, so it is with the Church. Father, I pray for those here who have never committed themselves to the Church, who aren’t serving for whatever reason. I pray that You would encourage them, motivate them, help them to receive the blessing that is to be received by loving other people, by loving You, by giving You glory, by serving, and [by] sacrificing for others. Oh, Father, help everyone here to be a part so that Calvary Bible Church can be everything You want it to be. We pray this in the name of Christ, knowing it is His will, Amen.

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