

1 Corinthians 14:12b-20

What matters **more** to you? Would you rather **receive** attention from other people, or would you rather **give** help and attention to **others**? Sometimes we need to ask ourselves questions like that in order to have a **clear focus** on our **priorities**. Each of us has **abilities** which have been given to us by the **LORD**. Let's just take a moment to **think** about the various **skills** with which we have been **blessed**. What are we **good** at doing, and what do we **enjoy** doing? We're **not** all the **same**. Some are better in the areas of **math** and **science**, while others are better at **hunting** and **fishing**. Some excel in the areas of **music** and the **arts**. Maybe you're a good **organizer** or **teacher**. Or maybe your talents line up better with **sewing** and **crafting** or **cooking** and **cleaning**. Every skill is **valuable** and is **needed**, but of all the different **skills** we have received from the LORD, how can we know which ones should have the highest **priority** in our lives? It's not **easy**, but in our text for today, the Apostle Paul gives us a **guideline** to follow. He tells us to seek to excel in gifts that **Build Up The Church**.

Paul applied this truth to the believers in the congregation at **Corinth**. He knew they were "*eager to have spiritual gifts,*" and he **also** knew that they **gravitated** toward one **particular** gift - the gift of speaking in **tongues**. This was a gift which some of them may have been exposed to on the day of **Pentecost** when the Holy Spirit gave the **disciples** the ability to speak in **languages** which they had not previously **learned**. Although this was a gift which served as a great **blessing** on that day, and which held great **interest** for the Corinthians, was this a gift which the Corinthians **needed**? In our text, Paul makes a pretty good case **against** that idea. He said, "*Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that **build up** the church. For this reason anyone who speaks in a **tongue** should pray that he may **interpret** what he says.*" In other words, if a message can't be **understood** by the people who are **hearing** it, then the message serves **no purpose** for them. If I were able to preach a sermon to you in **Russian** or **Swahili**, it would serve **no purpose**, because if you can't **understand** the words, then they basically have **no meaning** for you.

However, we also need to recognize that Paul was **not** saying that the gift of speaking in other languages was **completely** without value. It was still a gift from **God**, and it had value for Paul **personally**; but when he looked at that gift on a scale of how well it benefited **others**, it wasn't very **important** at all. Paul said, "*I thank God that I speak in tongues more than*

all of you, but in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.” Five **clear** and **understandable** words from the Bible, are able to do what **10,000 words** in a language we **don’t** understand **can’t** do - they **Build Up The Church**. That’s the **key** to what Paul was saying to the Corinthians. What **Builds Up The Church** should determine our **priorities** when it comes to using our **time** and **talents**.

But what does it **mean** to **Build Up The Church**? Paul **isn’t** talking about building a **building**. He’s talking about building up **people**. Paul had just finished talking to the Corinthians about how every one of them was a **part** of the body of **Christ** - the **Church**. Each and every part is **important** - because if every part is not **used**, or if the parts are not properly **assembled**, the body will not **be** what it is supposed to **be**, and it won’t be able to **do** what it is supposed to **do**. The **Church** is the body of **Christ**. He is the **head** of the body - the **brains** behind it all. So, Jesus is the one who makes it **possible** for each of us to **function** as the various **parts** of His body. When we put our **trust** in Him, we will never face **shame** for our sins and shortcomings, because Jesus died to **atone** for them all. Because of Jesus we have the certain hope of **eternal life** in heaven. He is the **Lord** over all things. God wants His people to be **strong** in faith - to be **firm** in the face of our trials and temptations - to grow in **love** for one another - to be fervent in our **care** for each other. He wants us to be good “fishers of men” - **testifying** about our Lord Jesus Christ to those who do not yet **know** Him.

This **building up** of believers happens by the power of **God’s Word**. Whom has God called to **speak** His Word - to **build up** the believers? Well, certainly **I’m** part of it as a **pastor**, since one of my responsibilities is to publicly **preach** the Word to the congregation. In Ephesians 4 Paul wrote, “(Christ) gave some to be **pastors and teachers**, so that the body of Christ may be **built up**.” But then Paul **also** went on to write, “From Christ the **whole body** grows and **builds itself up** in love, as **each part** does its work.” That means **each one of us** has work to do, using God’s Word in **Building Up The Church**.

The Holy Spirit has given each of us gifts to use to **build up** our fellow believers. Some of us are gifted to **speak** the Word, whether it is **preaching** a sermon, **teaching** children in Sunday School, **inviting** a new friend or neighbor to come to church with us, or even **using** Bible passages we’ve **memorized** to speak words of encouragement to help someone work

through a difficult **problem** in their life. Others would be **petrified** at the thought of **publicly** or even **privately** speaking to others, even about such an **important** subject. But there is also the gift of **supporting** the speaking of God's Word, by **praying** for the success of the Gospel, by **volunteering** to **plan** events where God's Word can be shared, and by **giving generously** to provide what is **needed** for those events - whether they take place **right here** in our midst, or **far away** where we can ease the **suffering** of victims who have experienced a natural disaster, and give them **hope** for a better future.

But the **Corinthians** were not **interested** in those kinds of gifts. They were totally focused on one of the **less** important gifts - **speaking in tongues**. In that sense they were like little **children**. Children are attracted to things that are **bright** and **shiny** - things that are **fun** and are **cool** to use. They are much more concerned about gifts which **they like**, rather than on gifts which are **useful**. Think back to your younger days. When your birthday came around would you rather have received the **toy** that all your friends were talking about, or some new **underwear** and **socks**? The **toy** would be a lot more **fun**, but the **underwear** and **socks** would be a lot more **useful**. The **Corinthians** were interested in the gift of speaking in **tongues** - it was like a shiny new **toy** - it would make them **look** and **sound** really cool - but it really wouldn't be very **useful**.

Do we sometimes **share** in their childish ways? Think about **this** for a moment. We're always trying to find ways to bring more people, especially young families, into our **worship** services and Christian **fellowship**. What are the best ways to **accomplish** that goal? I'm sure you've looked around at what **other** congregations are doing. Have you ever thought, "Their parking lot seems to be **full** all the time. Whatever **they're** doing, that's what **we** need to be doing"? What if they're doing an annual blessing of the **animals**, or maybe they're really good at **clown** ministry? Things like that might be a lot of **fun**, and they might fill up a parking lot, but they certainly aren't where our **priorities** should be. We need to concentrate on things that will build up the **faith** of people - things which will **Build Up The Church**.

In today's Gospel we heard the disciple **Peter** say to Jesus, "*Go away, for I am a **sinful** man.*" Peter knew that couldn't hold a candle to **Jesus**, who had just enabled him to catch a **boatload** of fish, in the most unlikely **place**, and at the most unlikely **time**. Maybe there are times when **we** feel that unworthiness too. But the truth is that God **knows** all the evil things we've done, all the **hurt** we've caused and all the **thoughts** we've felt - and in spite

of it all, He has **not** gone away from us. In fact, the **heart** of the Bible's message is that God **came near** to us in His Son, **Jesus**. He took on our humanity, and lived **among** us to **save** us from our sins. He didn't go **away** - He went to **Calvary**. And from the cross He spoke - not **five words** but **seven sentences** including, "*Father, forgive them,*" and, "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*"

Everything Jesus ever said or did on earth was for **building up** the lives of others. He didn't come to **be** served, but to **serve** and to give His life as a **ransom** for sin. He has **comforted** us with His Word through the difficult times of life, so we can comfort **others** through similar troubles in their lives. He has taught us the lessons of the Bible in church and Sunday School, so we can pass those same lessons on to our **friends**, and **children**, and **grandchildren**.

Paul wrote, "*Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.*" God wants us to **grow up** concerning our **understanding** of life, and our **purpose** in life. It's **not** about having **fun** - it's **not** about getting **attention** - it's about **building up ourselves** and **others** with God's **Word**, so we can grow in our **faith** in Jesus, and stand **solid** in His love and salvation. Dear friends, may it always be said of us that we are using our gifts to **Build Up The Church** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.