

This gift of prophecy is evident in our worship today when we hear the Word of God in the Scripture readings, when it's clearly proclaimed in the hymns and songs, and when it's applied to our lives in the sermon. It's evident in our Bible classes and our small groups when we dig deeper into God's Word to learn better God's plan for our salvation. It's evident in our youth programs where children and teenagers learn the timeless truths of God's Word for their lives. It's evident when we pray, because our prayers are based on the promises God's makes to us in his Word. This gift of prophecy, this proclamation of and instruction in God's Word, is clearly among us in our worship and in our daily walk with Jesus today. It's so important, in fact, that God the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to say, **"Do not treat prophecy with contempt"** (1 Th 5:20).

Paul concludes by saying, **"Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."** Little children are easily impressed by their accomplishments, aren't they? A three-year-old can't wait to show off what he's made or what she's done. If they learn something new, they have to show Mommy or Daddy right away. The Corinthians were so infatuated by their gift of speaking in tongues that they were exhibiting that same kind of infant immaturity. They wanted everyone to see their gift so that they would stand out and be admired. That's childish. Paul says he could speak in tongues more than all of them, but he refrained from doing so. The ironic thing is that Paul probably was a poor public speaker. There are some who think that his **"thorn in the flesh"** (2 Cor 12:7) was a case of stuttering. Do you recall what he said back in chapter 2? **"When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"** (vv. 1, 2). The greater gift of the tongue, the gift of prophecy, was one that God used to build up others—way back then and still today.

The definition of a *showboat* is this: *a boat with a theater and troupe of actors who play river towns.* God's church is not a showboat. We're not actors who strive to entertain. God's church is more of a tugboat. We're not impressive; we're not geared for entertainment, but for service. Our captain is our risen and living Savior, Jesus Christ. He is leading us forward by his clear Word. The very Word that promises us the forgiveness of our sins is the Word that motivates us to serve God and to build one another up. By God's grace let this be the message that this "boat" continues to show to the community and to the world. Amen.

**1 Corinthians 14:12-20** – *Fully Equipped* – *A Servant Heart*  
10/02/16 – St. Paul, Muskego, WI – David Kuehl – 235, 525, 467

Do you remember back in 2003 when New Orleans Saints wide receiver, Joe Horn, was fined \$30,000 for using his cell phone? He had just scored a touchdown. To celebrate he pulled a phone from behind the padding on the goal post and pretended to make a call to announce his achievement. He was penalized for "unsportsmanlike conduct," and the NFL made it clear that it was serious about prohibiting such unsporting behavior in the end zone.

Whether it's on a football field, in the workplace or classroom, or even at church, no one likes a showboat. God reminds us in his Word that he doesn't look favorably on braggarts either. That's the message of our text today. As we conclude our study of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, *Fully Equipped*, we learn that:

### **Christians Are Not Showboats**

- 1. We use our gifts to worship the Lord.**
- 2. We use our gifts to build each other up.**

1. Remember that Corinth was the largest of the congregations Paul served. It was a troubled congregation. It suffered from cliques, because many of its members played favorites with their pastors. Many were lawsuit happy and dragged each other into court. Like many of us who selfishly make way too much of our "rights," there were many in Corinth who abused their Christian freedom. They championed perverse immorality and tolerated disconnected and disorderly worship services in their midst.

But Paul still loved these people, and he reminded them that God loved them, too. It was God who brought them together through faith in Jesus Christ. In chapter 12 Paul tells them, **"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ"** (v. 12). Just as our bodies have many parts, so does Christ's body, what we call the communion of saints. Paul then goes on to list various gifts God the Holy Spirit has given to his church, such as, apostles, prophets, teachers, and so forth.

In our chapter today Paul hones in on two specific gifts: that of speaking in tongues and that of prophecy. Last week we heard how important love is in the heart and life of the child of God. It's love for one another, patterned after God's love for us in Christ, that makes all the difference in the world. Without this love even the greatest of gifts and the noblest of deeds have no value at all.

Sadly, the Corinthians took great pride in their gift of speaking in tongues. It seems that they pointed to this experience to authenticate that they were Christians of a higher class. What they were doing was showboating. They were strutting about as if they were superior to others, and they weren't very kind or patient towards others who didn't have this particular gift of the Spirit.

Because of this ungodly attitude, Paul says, *"Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church. For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."* Paul explains that the gift of speaking in tongues only benefits the person doing the speaking. The mind is unfruitful; it's disengaged. Perhaps we can compare this to something we do all the time. When we take a walk or mow the lawn or do something familiar, we may hum or even sing a song without even thinking about the words. We know them so well that we can sing them without consciously thinking about them. We can say that we're singing "with the spirit," but the mind is detached. Is such an activity worthless? Not at all. It can be uplifting, but the fact remains that our mind is unfruitful. That's how Paul describes speaking in tongues.

So what does he conclude? He says, *"I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding."* In other words, both our spirit and our mind must be engaged when we're worshipping. Our worship is to engage us, not simply to entertain us or tug on our emotions. [By the way, the word *liturgy* means *the work of the people*. When we're working through the liturgy, we're engaged in our worship.] Unfortunately, we live in a world where a lot of worship focuses more on emotion than instruction. Many so-called "Christian songs" today have nice music and pretty words, but they say almost nothing about clear, edifying, biblical truth.

Showboating our emotions in place of solid Christian instruction does not build up. We worship God because he's revealed his heart of love to us on the pages of Scripture. We come to worship God because he's demonstrated his love for us in the life, suffering, and death of his Son, Jesus Christ. When we gather for worship, we want to proclaim God's love loudly and clearly. Remember, it's God's love for us that moves us to love him. *"We love because he first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19), we say with the Apostle John. And we express our love for God in the way we worship him.

2. What this means is that we'll want to worship God in a way that builds one another up. Listen to Paul as he addresses the matter. *"When you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified."* In all likelihood, this gift of tongues was the ability to speak in other languages. That's the way the Greek term, "glossolalia," is used all the way through the book of Acts. There's no reason to think it would be used differently here. Think back to Pentecost. On that day the disciples were given the miraculous ability to speak foreign languages, languages they hadn't previously known but which were understood by the folks who were in Jerusalem for the harvest festival. Through the languages they spoke—in Acts 2 Luke lists no fewer than 15 of them—the gospel was proclaimed. Charismatic churches today claim to be able to speak a non-human, ecstatic language that only God can interpret. Paul says that, if someone speaks in a tongue, the message must be interpreted. If not, it doesn't build up the church. And if it doesn't build up the church, it shouldn't be used. It's nothing more than showboating.

Let me speak Deuteronomy 6:4 in Hebrew. \_\_\_\_ Can you understand that? If you know Hebrew, you can. The sound of the Hebrew words didn't edify you. It may even have confused you. But when I say it in English, *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one,"* those same words are uplifting and meaningful. "Yabadabadoo!" is a fun phrase. It may bring a smile to our face. It may engage our spirit. It may remind us of our childhood days, but "Yabadabadoo!" doesn't do a thing for our faith. But *"the blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, purifies us from all sin"* (1 Jn 1:7) does.

We are the church, and the gifts we use must build up the church. That's why Paul says we need to focus on the greater gift of the tongue. He says, *"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."* Paul is talking about the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is sometimes understood as the receiving of a direct message from God and then passing it on to others. That was the case in the Old Testament. But in verse 3 of this chapter Paul defines prophecy differently. He says, *"The one who prophecies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort."* This has nothing to do with special, hidden revelations from God. It has nothing to do with showboating. When we address others and bring them words of strength, encouragement, and comfort from Scripture, we are using the gift of prophecy, the greater gift of the tongue.