

Many Gifts, One Priority

1. Intro & Context

- Paul is writing to the church in Corinth that is prideful, messed up, divided over a number of issues
- One of the issues within the church is that there is this obsession they have with speaking in tongues that is causing them all sorts of problems
- Paul started addressing the issue in chapter 12 saying that all Christians have spiritual gifts because all Christians have the Holy Spirit
 - God gives **all** Christians spiritual gifts
 - because all gifts come from God ... there's no room for division
 - In fact he urged the Corinthians to celebrate the great diversity of spiritual gifts because the church is like a body with many parts
 - Just like there is one body but many parts, so the church is one body with many gifts
- In chapter 13 Paul goes on to explain that the foundational motives for using a person's gifts and resources is love
 - Without love
 - no matter how good
 - no matter how impressive
 - no matter how spiritual
 - If our gifts and resources are not used in love ...
 - If love is not the attitude with which we serve others
 - ... then we're nothing and they are nothing
- Now in chapter 14 Paul continues to address this issue of spiritual gifts
 - how they're to be understood and
 - how they're to be used within the church community
- And as we look at what Paul has to say we will see when it comes to using gifts ...
 - Priority of building

- Priority of understanding
- Priority of mission

2. Priority of building [SLIDE]

- Throughout Ch 14 Paul is constantly comparing and contrasting these two spiritual gifts
- And as he does he's making the point that to the Corinthians that the need to be less fixated on pursuing the gift of speaking in tongues because as he says in v4
 - *He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.*
- Word edifies = builds > our English word edifice / building
- See Paul uses this word a bit throughout the passage
 - Twice in v4
 - v5 > *I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be **edified**.*
 - v12 > *try to excel in gifts that **build up** the church.*
 - v17 > *You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not **edified***
- Paul's concern is that the gifts God gives to people are to be used to build / edify the church
- He wants the Corinthians to tone down their obsession with speaking in tongues ... because while tongues builds up the individual ... prophecy is much more effective in building up the whole church
- **Application**
- There will be some here this morning who do speak in tongues
- There will be others thinking ... I've got no idea what you're talking about

- Before we move on, let's just clarify what Paul means when he speaks of tongues and prophecy
- Speaking in tongues
 - Is a form praying to / praising God that **some** Christians do that's unintelligible to most people
 - It's not meaningless babble, but it's generally not comprehensible or identifiable as a human language
- Prophecy
 - When we think of prophecy we think of people like Nostradamus predicting the future
 - But NT prophecy is not predicting the future
 - It's a form of divinely inspired revelation or teaching whose primary purpose, according to v3 is for the *strengthening, encouragement and comfort* of its hearers
- As chapter 12 & 14 make clear ... not everyone has these gifts ...
 - Some will have them and many will not
 - So it's okay if you don't speak in tongues > I don't
- But what is the principal for us here?
- The principal is ...
 - Tongues is a good gift from God to edify a person
 - Therefore those who don't have it or have never heard it ...
 - are not to ignore it or dismiss or be skeptical of it
 - However, as Paul says in v5 & 13, unless it can be interpreted, then
 - it's not appropriate to be using this gift in the gathering of others
 - and it's best expressed in private as a means of prayer or praise
- Because if 1 Cor 13 exhorts us to use our gifts in love ...
 - Then the loving thing to do is to only use our gifts in way that is for the edification of others

- That's not me being anti-charismatic
 - This is Paul
 - As Paul says to the Corinthians in v18 "*I speak tongues more than all of you*"
 - Yet even as gifted as Paul was ... he knows the better thing is to use our gifts for the building of others rather than the building of ourselves

- I recently heard of one church pastor who says to those who approached him wanting to be part of the music team / worship band
- He would say "Great! You want to be part of the worship band, meet me here next week an hour before church to help set out the chairs"
 - Reason he would say this is because he wanted to see how willing they were to serve others
 - Because that's what playing in the band is about –
 - Serving others with your gift ...
 - Not performing for everyone to see and admire
- That pastor wanted gifts to be used by those with servant hearts ... those who want to build the church, not those who want to build themselves
 - He said it was surprising how many didn't come the next week to stack chairs!
- Because the priority for using gifts is building the church not about building individual

3. Priority of understanding [SLIDE]

- Paul goes on to say ... the reason why prophecy is more effective in building the church is because it can be understood
 - Intelligibility is key
- Look at v2
 - *For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one **understands** him; he utters mysteries with his spirit {or by the Spirit}*

- The nature of tongues is that what's being said is not understandable to others who might hear
 - It requires interpretation
- As Paul says in v9
 - *Unless you speak **intelligible words** with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.*
- Or in v19
 - *But in the church I would rather speak five **intelligible words** to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*
- You see his point?
 - Unless people understand what's being said ... there's no way they can be built up and edified
 - Speaking in tongues is great for the individual who is praying to or praising God
 - But it doesn't matter how praise-worthy or true or wonderful the things that are being spoken
 - If others can't understand what you're saying ... then it does nothing for building the church

[SLIDE]

- It would be like if Mike and Katie Taylor > missionaries in Tanzania who were with us recently ...
 - Imagine if while they were with us ... every time they spoke they spoke in Swahili rather than in English
 - Unless you speak / understand Swahili ... then no matter how
 - Insightful Mike's preaching
 - Heartfelt their prayers
 - Encouraging Katie's kid's talks ...
 - It would have done nothing for building and edifying the church
- This is Paul's point ...
 - Unless what is said and done when the church gathers is understood

- Unless it is intelligible, then it is useless of the building of those who are there

[SLIDE]

- **Application**

- It's interesting thinking through what this means for us as church
 - Because our church culture is very different to what Paul is dealing with here with the Corinthians
 - We're not a church where we have half the congregation spontaneously calling out in tongues or declaring they have a vision from the Lord and plunging the gathering into chaos
- That's partly due to our
 - Anglican tradition > we tend to be less charismatic than other Christian traditions
 - Nothing right or wrong about that ... that's just who we are
 - Aussie culture > understated > uncomfortable with emotional expressivism (especially men) > contrast this with Italians or Greeks or South Americans
 - C@P not really a church that needs to be reigned in when it comes to being out of control
- However there have been situations in recent times when churches have been plunged into chaos like the Corinthians were in Paul's time
- **Toronto Blessing**
- In the mid-1990's a church in Toronto, Canada experienced what some might call a spiritual revival that spread to various places around the world
- Became known as the Toronto Blessing > heard of it / experienced it?
- It was characterised by people
 - laughing or crying uncontrollably

- rolling around on the floor
- roaring like lions or barking like dogs
- I don't know whether the Toronto Blessing truly was from God, but 1 Cor 14 teaches us that
 - If it doesn't build up the church
 - If it's not intelligible and able to be understood ... then it ought not to be done
- This principle of intelligibility or understanding is just as applicable to us here at C@P
- This is why the Reformers in the 16th insisted that the Bible be read and church services be conducted in the language of the people rather than in Latin
- For the ordinary German merchant or peasant ... priests reading the Bible or reciting the liturgy in Latin would've been as useful to them as the Corinthians speaking in tongues
 - Completely incomprehensible and useless in edifying them
- This is why the Anglican Church no longer uses the Book of Common Prayer
 - It was a wonderful way of doing church in its time ... but if ran church using the BCP today, it would be completely foreign and unintelligible to most people
- It's one of the reasons why we don't read from the King James Bible
 - The language is archaic
 - *1 Cor 14:1-2 (KJV) - Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*

- It would be a mistake to insist we use the KJV on this principal alone
- The Reformers coined the phrase – “Reformed and always reforming”
- What they meant was ... our theology is reformed, but we always need to be reforming the way we do church
 - This has been one of the problems of the Anglican church
 - Until the 1970’s it was still using the Book of Common Prayer as it format for church
 - BCP was written in 1662!
 - That’s 400 years without change!
 - What happened? Society moved and churches failed to move with it
- That doesn’t mean our theology or our beliefs change
- But the way we do church and what we say in church has to be done in ways that is comprehensible and understandable
- It’s really important we
 - Avoid religious jargon when we preach or lead or pray
 - Use every-day language,
 - Don’t assume everyone knows that story in the Bible or where to find the Obadiah in the OT
- In other words, making church as accessible to all, without watering down or changing the message
- Now there are limitations to that
 - We’re not going to make church look like Sunrise or Q&A or The Project
 - But the priority of understanding means we must only do those things that are helpful for building the church
 - For that to happen ... it must be understandable

4. Priority of mission [SLIDE]

- The final reason why prophecy is more effective in building the church ... is because it is missional

- See that in v21-25
- These verses are a little tricky but once we understand them, we'll get what Paul is saying
- Here Paul considers the effects of tongues and prophecy on the outsider or the unbeliever who enters the church while all this is going on

- In v22 he says - *Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.*
- The key to understanding this is v21
 - Here Paul is quoting from the OT prophet Isaiah who warns Israel of the judgment of the impending Assyrian invasion
 - Because Israel refused to listen to the word of God from Isaiah ... he tells them God will speak through '*strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners*'
 - The tramp of the foreign army and the sound of language not understood would be a sign of doom and judgment for them
- And so in this example – the '*strange tongues*' are a negative sign ... a sign of judgment

- Paul uses this as an illustration of the same effect that a congregation speaking in tongues will have on the one who comes into church who is an unbeliever or does not understand > ESV = Outsider
- If all they hear is the babble of tongues, they will conclude they're all stark raving mad and out of their minds
- And the effect on the outsider therefore, like the Israelites in Isaiah's day, will be they reject the word of the Lord
- And Paul's example illustrates how the OT quotation would be fulfilled
 - The outsider won't repent and obey the word of God, instead they will be repulsed and continue in disobedience to God

- Because any outsider who comes into church and sees everyone speaking in tongues will think they have all gone berserk or are possessed and make for the exits as quick as they can
- But if the outsider comes in and hears something intelligible (like prophecy) that is strengthening, encouraging and comforting
 - Paul says – *"he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"*
- So here we see a new dimension in our understanding of what it means to use our gifts and resources for building the church
 - Building the church is not just a case of maturing believers > not just for building people **up** in their faith
 - Building the church is **also** about reaching **outsiders** > as in building the church **out** so that its base gets bigger (so to speak)
- It's like a pyramid
 - To build a pyramid you need to build out as well as up
 - The church is built both out ... as well as up ... as its members use their gifts in love
- In other words, the purpose of our gifts and resources is for **both maturity ... and** for mission
 - For building insiders and outsiders
- **Application**
- For the Corinthians they wanted to use their gifts build themselves
- They weren't so interested in building up insiders or outsiders
- Their pride and selfishness meant they used their
 - To build up themselves

- To build their self-esteem
- This is the real issue ... isn't it?
 - It's not tongues or prophecy per se
 - That's just the presenting issue
 - The real issue is their proud, selfish desire to boost their self-esteem by using their gifts in a way that was all about themselves .. not the insider or outsider
- I'm sure you've come across people who will act in certain ways in order to build their own self-esteem
 - The person who's constantly cracking jokes
 - The person who always has to tell you their experience of the thing you've just talked about
 - The person who hears what you say then tells you how they did it better
- Often its behaviour that seeking to build their self-esteem
- We can do that in life ... and we can do it in church
 - Use our gifts out of selfish pride for our own self esteem
- But I think we can also do the opposite ... and not use our gifts out of selfish pride for our own self esteem
- The person who won't use their gifts because
 - They're more concerned what people will think of them
 - if they fail
 - if they're not very eloquent
 - if the outsider rejects them and the things they have to say
 - They're trying to preserve their self-esteem > trying to protect it > because they're fearful of it taking a knocking
- The person who won't use their gifts because

- It will cost them > time, money, energy
- The concern for themselves is greater than the outsider who needs to hear the gospel
- To do that is to be just as proud and just as selfish as the one who's seeking everyone's accolades

- Whether you're Christian or not ... behaving in ways that's driven by my need to build or protect my self-esteem is crippling
 - We become self-focused
 - We have the constant nag of insecurity
 - We struggle to show empathy to others
 - Because what I do is all about me ... not about others

- And so what do you do?
 - How do you overcome that this need to constantly build up your self-esteem?

- The way to do that is ... like all things is to look to Jesus and the cross
- Because what do we see at the cross?
- We see one who was so secure in his relationship with the Father
 - He was willing to let go of his glory so you and I could have glory
 - He was willing to take the knocks from God you and I don't have to

- Before he left his heavenly throne Jesus was on the inside with God and we were on the outside ... desperate to hear the word of truth that would save us
 - But Jesus gave up all that ... so we would no longer be outsiders failing to understand
 - He was willing to let go of being an insider with the Father ... in order to welcome all the outsiders like you and me and make us insiders with him

- As you begin to grasp that ... as you look to the cross and see all that Christ has done, you can begin to grasp that when you come to Jesus ... you ought to have all the esteem you ever need
- In Christ ... you don't need self-esteem ... you have Christ's esteem
 - For in Christ, you know that he esteems you so much that he was willing to
 - become and outsider to welcome you as an insider
 - let go of his glory so you could have glory
 - to take the knocks to himself so that you don't have to
 - And so we don't need to behave in ways or use our gifts to give us the self-esteem we crave ... we have it in abundance in Christ
- On the flip side, we don't need to protect or preserve our self-esteem by withholding our gifts
- Because
 - No matter how much you fail
 - No matter how many people reject your words or mock you
 - You know ... his esteem for you can never be shaken or lost
- You know what that means? It means you can use your gifts ...
 - not to build up yourself by building up and protecting your self esteem
 - ... which brings attention to selves and excludes the outsider ...
 - You're actually freed from the pride and selfishness to serve in way that seeks to build up others and welcome outsiders into the kingdom.

PRAY