

equip the saints  
work of ministry  
building up the body

Let ALL things be done for  
**BUILDING UP**

unity of the faith  
mature manhood  
fullness of Christ

Christians are selfish. I don't mean that we always want our way or we're greedy and materialistic, even though these things may be true. We're selfish in the sense that we make the Christian life too individualized. It's far too much about us and our needs. Christianity has become a consumer culture. Which church has the best youth programs? Which church has the best worship band? We once had a guy attend for a while but then he told us that he was going to let his five year old son decide which church to attend. Apparently, little Johnny wanted to go somewhere else.

We even do this with our spiritual gifts. We have turned spiritual gifts inside out and upside down and we make them about ourselves. When do I get to use my spiritual gift? Why don't I get recognized more for how I serve the church? Why did I get passed over? It's pretty bad when we make service for others into a selfish endeavor. It doesn't happen all of the time but it happens enough in our churches to be concerned about it.

We have been looking at spiritual gifts in Ephesians chapter four. This is a fairly small section on spiritual gifts but 1 Corinthians has three entire chapters dedicated to the subject. Chapter 13—the well-known love chapter—is rightly placed in the middle of the discussion to center all use of gifts on love. But chapter fourteen also has an excellent summary on the subject. *Let all things be done for building up* (1 Corinthians 14:26). That's our guiding principle—let all things be done for building up. Building up whom? One another. We exist to build up one another. We don't exist for our personal fulfillment and satisfaction. We don't do church in order to get our needs met. You don't use your spiritual gift to feel better about yourself. Let all things be done for building up. There is no other way.

Of course this agrees with other parts of Ephesians.

4.16—*when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

3.10—for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Last week we focused primarily on one word in Ephesians chapter four—the word apostle. I showed how a relatively few people have taken that one word and built a following of tens of millions of people around the world based on Ephesians 4:11. This week we want to cover a little more than one word in the text!

But before we do that, I want to finish talking about the world apostle, or rather the gift of apostle. If you heard last Sunday's message, I clearly denounced what is called the New apostolic reformation as pure false teaching—some of the most dangerous false teaching out there. I told you what apostle was not but I did not tell you what it is.

Most spiritual gift inventories I have seen defined it this way. “The gift of apostleship is the divine strength or ability to pioneer new churches and ministries through planting, overseeing, and training.”<sup>i</sup> If there were still apostles, this definition would not be too bad. Last week I told you that there were only about fifteen and no more than twenty apostles in the early church. It was a vital role, a foundational role but not a common role. Therefore, describing the gift is not easy. The few apostles did pioneer new churches but they also exercised ultimate authority over people and wrote Scripture. In this sense, at least the false teachers within the New Apostolic Reformation have a Biblical understanding of Scripture. But they wrongly apply it to themselves. So if you remove authority over people and authority to write Scripture, all you are left with is a vague definition about planting churches. It makes sense that they define it this way because that's all they have left to go on.

That's why I think this definition of an apostle is wrong. You could say that someone who “pioneer new churches and ministries through planting, overseeing, and training” is apostle like, but I don't believe they have the gift of apostle. But if apostles have authority over people and authority to write Scripture, then there are no apostles left today. They were the foundation of the church and are no more. I would guess that people like this probably have the gifts of faith and leadership but they do not have the gift of apostleship. We've got to use Biblical categories and Biblical definitions. We can't just make up any definition of apostle that we want. But neither can we allow false teachers like I talked about last week to run amok and lead believers astray.

Speaking of false teachers, Ryan found a CNN article on Aaron Rodgers and sent it to us last week. When Rodgers first entered the NFL there was a gospel tract written about him telling of his faith in the Lord Jesus and how important it was to him. Many of us have wondered what happened to his faith since then. The article described a friendship Rodgers has with Rob Bell. Bell fed Rodgers all kinds of lies disguised as Christianity. This allowed Rodgers to reject basically everything he was raised to believe. It also may be a reason why he is estranged from the rest of his family. The danger of false teachers knows no end.

The next gift on the list is the gift of prophecy. Once again, I usually see this gift defined something like this. “The gift of prophecy is the divine strength or ability to communicate God's truth and heart in a way that calls people to a right relationship with God.”<sup>ii</sup> This would mean that a prophet is essentially the same thing as a teacher or a preacher. But the Bible presents the gift of prophecy as something different from teaching and preaching. For this we need to go to 1 Corinthians.

As I already said, chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians all have to do with spiritual gifts and prophecy plays a prominent role in those chapters. This is the main reason why I believe that the gift of apostle has ceased but the gift of prophecy has not. There is absolutely no instruction in Scripture about how to use the gift of apostle. I believe this is because the gift of apostle has ceased and the leadership role has been replaced by elders. But there is lots of instruction regarding the gift of prophecy.

One clear statement is found in 1 Corinthians 14:1. “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” This is a vital verse because it follows on the heels of chapter 13, the love chapter. This chapter is probably the most common Scripture read at weddings. But the context was not marriage but rather the use of spiritual gifts. It’s such a beautiful chapter that it is easy to forget why it was written. I’m not saying it does not have application to marriage and all relationships, because it does. But it was written to instruct the church on how to use spiritual gifts.

If I speak in the **tongues** of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have **prophetic powers**, and understand all **mysteries** and all **knowledge**, and if I have all **faith**, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I **give** away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

There are six spiritual gifts listed here. Presumably, Paul could have listed more, but these six served as sufficient examples. Tongues and prophecy were listed first because they took prominence in the church in Corinth. The Corinthian believers thought that they were super spiritual because so many of them spoke in tongues. That still goes on today in some church, does it not? But tongues are not the only problem. Any spiritual gift can cause pride within a person. Paul said it was possible to deliver up your body to be burned at the stake and still not have love. That’s an incredible statement, isn’t it? It may not be common in such cases but he was saying that it is possible—that even giving your life could still be all about you.

But it’s never about us. *Let all things be done for building up.* If your gift is not others-centered, it’s being used wrongly. Now let’s get back to 1 Corinthians 14:1. “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” Paul said “pursue love” because that was a summary of chapter 13, the love chapter. But the next phrase is very important here—earnestly desire spiritual gifts.” This is important because he is still to make liberal use of your spiritual gift. Yes, without love, your spiritual gift is useless, but that doesn’t mean we throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. Earnestly desire spiritual gifts. Go after them. Pursue them. Use them.

Do you? Do you earnestly desire to use your spiritual gift for building others up in their walk with Christ? Is that your heart’s desire? Is there proof that this is your desire? Is there actual evidence that you are using your spiritual gifts to build others up? If not, why not? I don’t say this to put you into a guilt trip but rather to bring Scripture to bear in your personal life and decisions.

I can think of a few reasons why you may not be regularly using your spiritual gifts.

- You don't know what they are.
- You have not been equipped to serve.
- You just don't want to

Season of life...?

We are to earnestly desire spiritual gifts—and then Paul added, “especially the gift of prophecy.” Why did Paul insert the word “especially”? Is prophecy the superior gift? Is every believer supposed to earnestly desire this gift? The reason Paul wrote “especially the gift of prophecy” is because he was about to emphasize the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues. The gift of prophecy is superior to the gift of tongues. But doesn't that violate the principle that we are all members of the body? How can one gift be superior to another? Here's what Paul wrote later in the chapter.

“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” (1 Corinthians 14:18-19)

Prophecy is superior because prophecy builds up the body but tongues do not. That's why he said five words of a prophecy are better than ten thousand words spoken in tongues. *Let all things be done for building up.* Prophecy builds up but tongues do not. This is not to say that tongues are wrong. He said, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.” Paul spoke in tongues all the time. Now this could have been a heavenly prayer language or it could have been other foreign languages, That is not our concern this morning. The point is that tongues were not understood by the church. He said, “Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” That's the difference. When the church gathers for mutual building up, prophecy was always superior to tongues.

This is so important because it means that Paul spent an entire chapter on this one point. *Let all things be done for building up.* Whether you mop the floor or give a sermon, it must be for building up one another.

But we still have not defined the gift of prophecy. Here's my working definition. Prophecy is a revelation from the Lord spoken directly to a believer which is then discerned by others in order to be used within the church body for building up one another. This comes directly from 1 Corinthians 14.

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For

you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

First of all, prophecy is a revelation. The context here is the church gathered for corporate worship. There is a natural form of sharing happening—"one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." We know that revelation is the same thing as a word of prophecy because of verses 29-30. "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent." The revelation is made to the prophet—which is a person who has the gift of prophecy.

Now this word revelation can sound a little scary. It might sound too much like what the false apostles are doing, that I talked about last week. They believe that God speaks to them and you'd better listen or else. But we should not be afraid of the word revelation, because this is what is happening. A revelation—you can call it a word from the Lord—is given to a believer and he or she is supposed to in turn give that word to the church body.

If that makes you nervous, here's the safety net. "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said." Those who weigh what is said are the ones who have the gift of discernment. Prophecy must always be discerned by others so that it matches with Scripture and God's will. This is a consistent teaching in regard to prophecy. Notice how prophecy and discernment relates to tongues and interpretation in 1 Corinthians 12.

- to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues
- to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits

Tongues must be interpreted. Everyone agrees with this point. But in the same way, prophecies must be discerned. They must be weighed against Scripture and discerned for Biblical accuracy. So you could say that interpretation is to tongues what discernment is to prophecy. If prophecies are not discerned, they should not be spoken to the church.

The same principle is seen in 1 Thes. 5:19. "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good." The Holy Spirit gives prophecies, therefore, they should not be despised or outright rejected. But once again we are told to "test everything." We are to hold fast to what is good but the assumption is that we are also to reject anything that is not good, that is not Biblical.

This should make sense to us because this is exactly what we are to do with any kind of teaching. We are to be good Bereans and search the Scriptures to see if the teaching or sermon accords with God revealed truth in the Bible. The same is true for prophecy except that it is an immediate word from the Lord as opposed to a prepared teaching or message.

Now let me again give you my definition and see if it accords with Paul's teaching. Prophecy is a revelation from the Lord spoken directly to a believer which is then discerned by others in order to be used within the church body for building up one another. Furthermore, prophecy is not the same thing as teaching because the gift of teaching is stated separately. Preaching is not listed as

a spiritual gift per se. Now it's quite possible that someone who is teaching or preaching will be given a word of prophecy in the middle of the teaching.

Paul wrote that we are to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Does that mean that every believer is supposed to earnestly desire this gift? Two quick thoughts. First, remember that Paul is not saying that prophecy is better than every other gift. But he is saying that it is better to have than the gift of tongues. That's why he singled it out here. Second, the command to earnestly desire the gift of prophecy was written to the entire church. He's not saying that every believer should pursue it but as a church body, we should. We need this in our body because it helps build up the body. We are missing something very vital if we do not have the gift of prophecy operating among us, just as would be the case if we did not have other gifts being used for mutual benefit of all.

Speaking of missing out on the use of gifts...

Pastor Tom Nelson tells a story about a woman in his Denton, TX congregation. Joy Brown, who at the time was already in her 70s, was known as a godly woman whose life exhibited many of the characteristics we discussed in the last chapter. She had received Christ at an early age and had personally been in attendance to hear some of the greatest preachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She had also been an eager student of the word for years and through its sanctifying influence had matured into a true lover of God as well as a loyal wife, mother and friend. "But Joy," the pastor asked her one day, "are you making disciples?" "Me?" she answered. "I don't know if I'm ready." Hearing this, we might wonder, *Ma'am, if you're not ready, who is?* But how many of us, whatever our age or experience, could be asked the same thing and feel the same way? "Me? I don't know if I'm ready."

Not long after hearing this response, Pastor Nelson pulled aside the church's director of women's ministries. "I don't want Joy Brown enrolled in any more Bible studies. She already knows more than anybody there." He wanted this enormous wealth of knowledge, experience and perseverance, to be shared with a younger generation who could use what a woman like Joy could teach them. "Get ready," he told Joy, "You're about to go into the ministry."

He assigned her to teach a small group of teenagers. She was scared to death. What would those young people possibly want to hear from an old lady like her? She dived into the assignment by studying Scripture, filling up notepad after notepad, and developing detailed lesson plans. Six months into her meetings with those girls, Joy had hardly touched her pages of notes. The teens were so full of questions about life, parents, sex, sin, school, marriage. Joy drew from her knowledge of the Word and the experience of her long life (including her weaknesses, imperfections and struggles) to respond to their questions, seeding those young hearts with Biblical wisdom and perspective. She continued teaching that way until she was well into her 90s. The generations of young women who had sat under her teaching became known around church as the "Brownies" and they tagged around behind her like ducklings following their mother.

**Rich Maurer**  
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<sup>i</sup> <http://giftstest.com/allgifts>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://giftstest.com/allgifts>