

Back in my high school days, there was a young man named Randall Schoemann. He is still my friend on Facebook. Randall played football. He weighed around 270 pounds, and was a fullback. A tough fullback. He loved to mow over linebackers. He got the nickname in high school, Showboat. He got the name because everyone came to see him play, crush defensive players and lead our Seminary cardinals to victory. Showboat is not a good nickname. It tends to mean that someone wants a lot of attention. It gives the impression that the person likes to show off his talents and make others oo and ah at him or her.

Nobody likes a showboat. That applies to every aspect of life. Whether it's on a football field, the workplace, the classroom, or even church, God's Word reminds us that the Lord does not look with favor on showboats. And so the Lord offers his Word to us today as instruction and encouragement for our Christian living. This morning Paul teaches us: CHRISTIANS ARE NOT SHOWBOATS. 1) We Use Our Gifts to Worship our Lord, and 2) We Use Our Gifts to Build Up Each Other.

Corinth was the largest of the mission congregations Paul had served. It was a troubled congregation. They suffered with cliques because many of them played favorites with their pastors. Many of the Christians were lawsuit happy and dragged one another to court. Like many Americans who make too much of their "rights," there were many Christians in Corinth who abused their Christian freedom. They advocated perverse immorality, and tolerated disorderly worship.

Still, St. Paul loved these people. He reminded them that God also loved them. It was God who brought them together through a common faith in Christ Jesus. Just as a human body has many parts to it, so does the body of Christ – the assembly of believers. Every Christian has spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of Christ's church.

In the chapter before us, chapter 14, the apostle focuses on two specific gifts that were given to the church. Paul mentions them: the gift of tongue speaking and the gift of prophecy.

Now, the Corinthians were extremely proud of their gift of speaking in tongues. It seems that this was the "en vogue" experience Christians turned to in order to authenticate their genuineness as a believer. If you could speak in tongues, you had arrived spiritually. Others were like 2<sup>nd</sup> class Christians compared to you.

Paul, who himself spoke in tongues, describes the experience: "for if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful." It seems that this was a legitimate gift that God had bestowed on Christians, but the apostle Paul explains that it was only beneficial for that particular person. The mind was unfruitful. It was disengaged. Perhaps this tongue-speaking experience could be compared to something we do all the time. While we take a walk or wash the dishes or whatever, we may hum or even sing a favorite song. We do so without even thinking about the words. We have the words memorized so we can sing them without even consciously pondering them in our minds. We can say that we are singing "with the spirit", but

the mind is detached. Is such an activity worthless? Of course not. It can be uplifting, but the fact remains that our mind is fruitless. That's how St. Paul described this gift of tongue speaking.

So what does Paul conclude? He says: So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. It's best to engage both the mind and the spirit when worshipping. When we pray, when we sing, we worship. Worship is to benefit us and others. Our worship is to actually engage us, not simply to entertain us or tug on our emotions. Unfortunately, we live in a world where many churches resemble Corinth. Today, worship focuses more on emotion than instruction. Many so-called "Christian songs" today have nice music and pretty words, but say virtually nothing about clear, biblical truth.

Showboating our emotions in place of solid Christian instruction is not God pleasing. We worship God because he's revealed his heart to us on the pages of the Bible. We come to worship God because he has demonstrated his grace to us in his Son. When we gather for worship God's love is to be proclaimed clearly. For example, consider the following hymn verse: Salvation unto us has come by God's free grace and favor. Good works cannot avert our doom. They help and save us never. Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all the world atone; he is the one Redeemer. That one verse says more than most hymnals do. That one verse is specific: Christ is your Savior from sin ... Christ, and Christ alone. Remember it is Christ's love for us that moves us to love him. And we express our love towards God in the way we worship.

That means we will want to worship in such a way that we build up one another. Listen to the apostle Paul on the matter: If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who does not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

For example I could recite Genesis 1:1 in Hebrew. Who could translate? Someone who knows Hebrew could. The sound of the Hebrew probably didn't edify you. I may have even confused you. I may have even appeared to be a showboat –exaggerating my knowledge. But when I say that verse in English – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" – then those words are uplifting and meaningful. "Yabadabadoo!" is an emotional phrase. It may bring a smile to your face. It may engage your spirit. You may be reminded of your childhood days – images of silly cartoons – Fred Flintstone jumping in the air. But "Yabadabadoo" doesn't do anything for your faith. In contrast, the phrase, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God" does edify.

Now we are the church. And the gifts we use must build us up. And so Paul says we need to focus on the greater gifts of the tongue: 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 talks about the greater gift than of the tongue. It is the gift of

prophecy. Prophecy is sometimes understood as the receiving of direct messages from God, which the prophet then passes on. That was the case in the Old Testament. But in this chapter St. Paul defines prophecy as speaking to others “for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3). This has nothing to do with special, hidden revelations from God. This has nothing to do with showboating. When any Christian addresses others and brings words of encouragement and comfort, based on the Bible, he is using the gift of prophecy. Not every Christian has that gift – the ability to take the written Word of God and speak it to other Christians for their strength and encouragement. But it is a gift that is to be eagerly desired. It is the greater gift.

The gift of prophecy is among us. The gift is evident in our worship. We hear the Word of God in the Scripture readings. It is clearly proclaimed to us in hymns and songs. It is applied to our lives in sermons. The greater gift of prophecy is present in our Bible classes as we dig deeper into God’s Word for ourselves to learn better the plan of God’s grace.. This gift of prophecy – proclamation and instruction – has an impact on our congregation as we reach out to others. A pastor simply counsels someone in need by offering clear instruction from God’s Word. When we pray for others we prophesy because our prayers are based on the hope of the truths we know on the basis of God’s Word. And so God’s clear Word must be proclaimed to us again and again.

Paul concludes our text: Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. Little children are very impressed with their own accomplishments. A three-year-old can’t wait to show off what he’s made. If he learns a new skill, he has to show Mommy or Daddy right away. The Corinthians were so infatuated with the gift of tongue speaking that they were demonstrating that same kind of immaturity. They wanted everyone to see their gift so that others could admire them. That is childish.

The definition of a showboat – a boat with a theater and troupe of actors who play river towns. This church is not a showboat – actors who strive to entertain. This nave, this ship, is more of a tugboat. We’re not impressive, not geared for entertainment but for service. Our captain is our risen Savior. He is leading us forward in his clear Word. The very Word that promises the forgiveness of sins to our hearts is the very Word that motivates us to serve God and to build up one another. By God’s grace that will be the message this “boat” desires to show to the world. Amen.