



A movie about lego people came out a few years ago that has a scene in which expert builders are talking about all the amazing things they can do. Then its one insignificant construction workers time to share what he was able to do. He wasn't a super-fancy expert builder like others around him. But he proudly explained that with his inventive mind he had once come up with the idea of a double-decker couch. The scene then pauses after he explains his seemingly ridiculous idea. The other lego figures say things like "that is the dumbest idea I have ever heard." And "That idea is just the worst." Later in the movie the antagonist adds the remark: "A double decker couch? So if you're sitting on the top, you'd have to climb down. And if you were on the bottom, would you have to watch through dangling legs? So who would want to be on the top or bottom? That is the lamest thing I've ever heard of." They didn't care about how cool the idea was. They immediately jumped to how useless it was. They recognized that a double decker couch was entirely impractical. Although, I have seen some for sale online and did once try to convince my wife that we needed to build one. Impressive? Maybe. Practical and useful? Not really. Have you ever tried putting this same test to spiritual gifts? This morning we continue our series asking, "What does it mean to be spiritual?" And we see this morning that it means more than just having a gift, it means making it useful to build each other up.

Imagine if you were to **walk into a worship gathering at ancient Corinth**. Just like believers today they would gather together regularly to worship. This time of worship would have included using the word of God along with the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. They would have sung Psalms, hymns, and prayed together. From what we can understand from Paul's letters you would have found body of believers with various spiritual gifts. There were those with the gifts of prophecy, those with the gifts of working miracles, and those who could do very impressive things through the Spirit's working. There was a problem, however. Instead of everyone using their gifts to build each other up they were starting to use their gifts to one-up each other. Like children on the playground bragging about who has the better race car toy they were showing off their spiritual gifts to build themselves up.

Some were **showing off with one of the more vocal gifts: speaking in tongues**. Speaking in tongues is mentioned a few times, but mostly it is found in this section of Scripture. Many times the expression for speaking in tongues clearly means speaking in other human languages. The Spirit poured out this gift on the day of Pentecost so that the believers could share the gospel in various languages. In this sense speaking in tongues was a way for the Lord to unite people who were once divided by the division of languages given at Babel. Another type of speaking in tongues appears to include speaking in what Paul refers to in the previous chapter as "tongues of angels." It is speaking in a heavenly language that no one can understand with the gift of interpretation. It seems even the speaker didn't always fully understand in his mind what was being said. This gift could build up the speaker in spirit. But used in the wrong setting and wrong way it could actually cause confusion and division. That is what was happening in ancient Corinth. People with the gift of speaking in tongues were using it as part of their public worship. It may have made an impressive display of a gift, but it didn't build up anyone in faith.

The **question of what is and isn't useful and good in worship** is nothing new. The gift of speaking in tongues, as Paul seems to indicate in the previous chapter, is not a gift which God continued to pour out in abundance in his church. But if someone did have the gift today they would have to ask "Is this gift useful for public worship?" Regarding that Paul says, "I'd rather speak five intelligible words to instruct and teach in the church than a myriad of words in tongues." Paul calls those who speak in tongues in worship childish in their behavior and thinking. People today will have different ideas on what is or isn't good for worship besides speaking in tongues. But the same principal applies. "Is it useful for building others up?"

It can be **hard to apply that principle to our worship**. "Is it useful for building others up or is it just useful for impressing people?" If we went to the extreme and our only goal was to impress people we'd spend most of our money on audio and visual gimmicks, crank up the volume, add a full piece band, dim the lights, toss in a few dry ice foggers, get a couple of visual lighting technicians, and only use the latest and greatest fads in design and architecture. Maybe a few flamethrowers could help too. That can impress people. You'll see it in many places from the movie theater to the concert hall to the super bowl halftime show. If you want to simply impress people with a display of greatness there are books for that. If you have a spiritual gift you could use it to that end. But what if you want to build people up in faith? For that you need only the gifts of the Spirit which are meant for building people up: teaching, preaching, and the like. Everything else is secondary and can even begin to lose track. Don't misunderstand. I'm not saying that we shouldn't make use of the arts and spiritual gifts that involve the arts. But we have to always ask. "Does this build people up? What message is it sending? Does it point to sin and grace? Does it lead people to better know Jesus?"

**Why is it hard to apply that principal?** Sometimes we'd rather show people what we are made up of and impress them than build them up. And please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying it is wrong to share a gift with this church. If someone has a gift to share and wants to glorify God by their gift, they ought to share it. But we have to be careful not to fall into the same sinful trap that the Corinthians did. We don't want to get into a competition or struggle simply to prove ourselves as great. It's easy for me as a pastor to begin to think any spiritual gift I have is to build up myself in the sight of others. If I as a pastor made it my goal to share a bunch of language parsing lingo and tons of Greek or Hebrew tidbits in my sermon what would I

be accomplishing? It might fool you into thinking I'm actually smart, but it wouldn't necessarily help you grow in faith. If I as a pastor were to rely on my wit and humor and speaking ability what could go wrong? I might make it my goal to impress people rather than build them up in faith. I ought to cringe a little inside at my pride when a person leaves church saying, "He's a great speaker," instead of saying, "We have a great God." Doesn't every church musician have a sinful nature that says, "People will really be impressed with this moving song." Meanwhile their new self rightfully says, "Any moving song can make people feel emotional about something. I hope that people catch the words to this song and hear what is powerfully proclaimed in song about Jesus." Does the Sunday school teacher or Christian school teacher say, "I hope the Children are impressed by me as teacher." Or do they first say, "I pray that the children are awed by the God I'm teaching them about."? And we could go on and on about every type of gift or service. Are we seeking praise or only to praise our God?

This **struggle will always be found in the church**. It was evident in ancient Corinth and it is still evident today. What congregation can say they have always perfectly put building up others in faith as the top priority? I must confess that there are times I've been so concerned about sounding smart that I failed to focus on sounding like a disciple of Jesus. And sometimes our goal for a Vacation Bible School or church group gathering can become, "At least they all had fun" instead of "At least they grew in faith." When it does, haven't we fallen into the same mindset of trying to impress instead of trying to impress Jesus on hearts? In the past some churches used to print out the total offerings given by each family. I can only look back at that and say, "that is the dumbest idea I have ever heard" and "That idea is just the worst." Can you believe that churches actually thought that was useful and good? They were clearly turning the gift of giving into a competition and a boasting arena. Churches eventually learned that is not a good idea and not useful for the gift of giving. But we still seem to struggle to use even the gift of giving without wanting others to know how great we are! And we still struggle in all other areas. For the Corinthians it was the gift of speaking in tongues. What might it be that our struggle is centered on today?

Just imagine **how easy it would have been for Jesus to come to simply impress** people. When he walked this earth he could reveal truths of wisdom and prophecy like none before him. As the Son of God he would walk on water, walk through crowds, and turn stone to bread. He could have made himself look awesome. But when he walked this earth he never used his divine power and glory for such purpose. In fact, you often see him telling those he heals and those he helps to not tell others about it. His miracles were all for the benefit of others. When he did his first miracle none of the wedding guests knew what he had done. And when he walked on water it wasn't when he was teaching the crowds. It was only to teach his fearful disciples who were stuck rowing in the dark, "Do not be afraid." He calmed the storm to calm the panic in his disciples. When he did do a miracle in public it was never simply to receive praise, but to heal, help, and show people why he came. He fed the 5000 because they needed it, not because he needed them to make him into a king.

Though being in very nature God, grasping after greatness was not his goal. **His goal was to win salvation** by taking on the sin of a boastful human race. In greatest humility he hung in shame. He did that to die the death that we all deserved for wanting to be first and greatest. He faced the hellfire that you and I and all this boastful world should have faced. He did the most impressive act in history through humility. And when he rose back from death he didn't do it to terrify his foes or shame his doubting disciples. He did it to proclaim, "peace be with you. Your sins are forgiven. Now share this good news."

That same Jesus now sends out his Spirit to pour out gifts on his people. He now **calls on his disciples to use their gifts with a good purpose**. We use our gifts to point to the one who lived and died and rose again to save us. Our living Jesus continues to shower us with his gifts for this good purpose. Gifts, you see, aren't bad. Not at all. They are a blessing. Paul isn't saying speaking in tongues is bad. In fact he mentions he is thankful that he has the gift of speaking in tongues. But the setting and circumstances change how he views such a gift. "in the church... I would rather..." We are gathered together as a body of believers. The first test for everything we do as a church needs to be, "Will this build up others in faith?"

There is an iconic scene in the Indiana Jones movie series. Indiana is being chased through the streets of Cairo by a bunch of goons. There was one lengthy fight scene in which Indiana Jones was supposed to fight against an expert swordsman just by using his wits, his fists, and his whip. Harrison Ford and the Director Steven Spielberg were on set to film in Tunisia and were all getting ready to wrap up and go back home. The swordsman actor had spent months rehearsing the scene in which he displayed his swordsmanship. It all would have been about three more days of shooting in order to complete the scene. But apparently Ford had enough of it and made the suggestion that Indiana Jones just pull out a gun and shoot the swordsman. The director agreed. The scene ended up as a swordsman introducing himself with a few fancy moves followed by Indiana Jones simply pulling out a gun and shooting him. It only took only five minutes to film. But it was much more enjoyable for most viewers than any repeated fancy sword-slinging, whip-slashing fight scene would ever have been. That's what Paul means when he says he'd rather speak five intelligible words than a thousand words in an unintelligible tongue. It's not how good you are or how hard you work. It is more important that you do something useful. With our use of our gifts in the church we could be slinging our gifts around and turn into into a three-day shoot that makes a fancy scene. Or we could get to the point, **use our gifts to produce what is of benefits others, and come much further ahead**.

What does it mean to be spiritual? It means: 1) Recognizing there is a diversity of gifts in the church. 2) Using that gift as part of a team. 3) Letting love be the motive for all you do. 4) Doing everything with the goal of building up others. Being spiritual means you build each other up.