

**Message #61****I Corinthians 14:1-12**

If you look carefully at this text, you will notice that one word shows up five times in these 12 verses: It is the word “edify” (14:3, 4-twice, 5, 12). This word literally means to build up a house. There are lots of things a believer can do in a church and there are many ways to serve, but Paul’s point here is that the greatest objective for which a believer can strive is to build up the family of God.

It is possible to be very gifted (13:1); to have great knowledge (13:2); to make great sacrifices (13:3); and still be self-centered. If we are not developing an others-oriented agape love, we are nothing. Certainly God wants us to know what our spiritual gift is and He wants us to utilize it for His glory (Rom. 12:1-8). Certainly God wants us to develop greatly in our knowledge (II Pet. 3:18). Certainly God wants us to be very sacrificial (Phil. 2:5-8). But God wants us to do all of these things in the context of building up His church.

**BELIEVERS SHOULD CONTINUALLY PURSUE THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGAPE LOVE AND CONTINUALLY SEEK TO USE THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFT TO BUILD UP GOD’S CHURCH.**

**THOUGHT #1** – The continual pursuit of the church should always be that of agape love and a clear understanding of God’s Word. **14:1**

The verbs “pursue” and “desire” are present imperatives, which means that the believer has been commanded to continually pursue the highest level of love and continually seek to discover and utilize one’s spiritual gift in the context of agape love.

This exhortation is needed because after reading chapter 13, one might come to the conclusion that discovering one’s own spiritual gift is insignificant when compared to the development of God’s agape love. Actually, in this verse both are commanded and to refuse to strive after agape love or the discovery of one’s own spiritual gift is to live life in a way that is opposed to the revealed will of God. At the end of **verse 1**, Paul qualifies the character and quality of the type of spiritual gift for which the believer should strive, namely, not one of the sign gifts but the type that builds up the body of Christ by communicating to others the revelation of God.

The church is to place a high priority on love and a high priority on clearly understanding the revelation of God. These two things build up the church.

**THOUGHT #2** – The logical reasons why the church should always strive for agape love and for a clear understanding of God’s Word. **14:2-4**

**Reason #1** - The no-profitability reason. **14:2**

If a person speaks in a foreign language that no one else in the church understands, only God knows what is being said. To men it is a spiritual mystery and in church it is meaningless.

Spiritual gifts are given in order that we might minister to others for God, not so we can minister for God at the expense of others.

**Reason #2** - The profitability reason. **14:3**

We should continually strive to develop our gift so that we can clearly communicate the truth of God to others. For example, a gift like prophesy that clearly communicates the revelation of God, does three things for people:

- 1) It edifies them—the Word of God builds up people.
- 2) It exhorts them—the Word of God challenges people.
- 3) It consoles them—the Word of God comforts them.

It is clear communication of God's Word that will influence and impact the lives of people.

**Reason #3** - The productivity reason. **14:4**

The person who speaks in tongues builds up himself. On the other hand, the one who speaks clearly the revelation of God, builds up God's church. Again notice what it is that God claims builds up His Church: a clear communication of the revelation of God.

**THOUGHT #3** – Paul's ultimate desire for the church was to be built up through the clear understanding of God's Word. **14:5**

When he says he wishes that "all spoke in tongues," he is saying I wish all of you really knew your spiritual gift and used it. By using tongues and prophesy as an example, he demonstrates the purpose of any spiritual gift: to build up the church.

There is no doubt from this verse that Paul believed one who could accurately communicate God's revelation was greater than one with a sign gift, because it is the clear communication of God's Word in the known language that will build up the church.

**THOUGHT #4** – Paul's practical illustrations to the church to show that there is no meaning without understanding. **14:6-11**

**Illustration #1** - The illustration of gifts. **14:6**

Spiritual gifts are only profitable when they are understood.

Paul's point is if the Word of God is not communicated and taught in the known language, there is no benefit to it because it cannot build up the church because no one understands what is being said.

**Illustration #2** - The illustration of music. **14:7-9**

Music is only profitable when it is understood.

In order for a spiritual gift to be profitable, people must be able to recognize it and understand it or else it is nothing more than just noise in the air.

**Illustration #3** - The illustration of language. **14:10-11**

There are many languages in the world and all are important for people to communicate with each other. To Paul, tongues was a foreign language. It was not gibberish; it was a known foreign language.

**THOUGHT #5** – The primary objective of the church is to seek to use spiritual gifts in a way that build up the church. **14:12**

Every believer ought to continually seek the ultimate ideal of God; to build up others in His church.

The primary objective or ultimate ideal of the N.T. church is to do what we personally can by God's grace to build up others in the ways of God.

The foundation on which to build anything positive is the foundation of Jesus Christ!