

Excel in Gifts that Build Up the Church

✠ **Infants to evil**

✠ **Mature in the mind**

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Light, dear mirrors of God's grace in Christ:

Imagine a van pulling up to your house. A contractor hands hammers and crowbars to several children. Before you know it, siding is all over your lawn. Adrenalin pounding, you tear open the front door and start shouting, "What are you doing to my house?" While one smarmy kid looks surprised that you would ask, another answers, "We've got the tools to work. We'll send the bill tomorrow."

Imaginary, yes, everywhere but the church. That's how they were using their spiritual gifts in the congregation of Corinth. God the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to every Christian and He certainly wants each of us to get to work. But either we're nailing on the siding or we're tearing it off. With God's people in Corinth we too need to **Excel in Gifts that Build Up the Church**, first of all by being...

✠ **Infants to evil**

No one likes being told to "grow up!" And the older we get or the better we know the person saying it, the less we may want to listen and learn. But to young and old, men and women, the Lord's Apostle Paul sounds this Kingdom call: "**Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.**" (v.20) He's not just talking about thought processes up here. The Holy Spirit's choice of words puts mind and heart together from way down deep in the pit of your stomach. These are basic instincts for Christians, "gut reactions" to challenges. Head and heart are meant to work together to **Build Up the Church** of Jesus Christ, rather than making **Infants to evil** destruction.

Sadly many American Christians don't get it. Having never studied a foreign language, they have little sympathy for how hard it is for foreigners. "If they come to America, let them speak English" makes sense on many levels, unless you travel abroad. Try asking for directions to your motel while the sun is setting as we had to last Fall just north of Bologna, Italy. Friendly as they were giving directions, "Doblo" (sp?) doesn't mean much even with hand signals over the Autostrada if you can't understand "Dextra" to stay right off the freeway. What if Italians demanded we speak Italian or, "Chou!" (Bye-bye!)

And what should the people of Christ do if foreigners coming to America need help hearing God's Word? English is actually one of the most difficult languages to learn. We've borrowed from so many other languages, you really can't learn rules for English. We have the most vocables because of computers and technology; the next runner up is French with 2/3 as many words as English. Sometimes we're more concerned that people get to work, than that they learn how to get to heaven. If "America first" makes us **evil Infants** we're just spouting off foreign languages like the Christians in Corinth. Imagine our worship services if everyone had something to say but no one could understand?

"Grow up!" is the word for us here. **Excel in Gifts that Build Up the Church** by communicating God's Word in ways that people can understand. You don't want your pastor to fill the pulpit with big words just to sound educated. The Chinese have an expression for "PhD's" who mumble big English no one can understand. They say, "He speaks like a drunken American sailor." Whatever leaves anyone confused without Christ needs to grow up so that we become **Infants to evil** and...

✠ **Mature in the mind**

Language without meaning is like me playing the guitar. No matter how hard I strum away or how painfully you listen, you'll never figure out what song I have in mind. But when we **Mature in the mind**, every song we sing, every sermon we preach, every Bible class we attend, every Sunday School for

the children, every conversation for your loved ones, friends and neighbors becomes a launching pad for God's Word to souls redeemed by the blood of Christ. God wants so much for them to come home to heaven that He willingly sent His Son to suffer for the sins of selfish Americans along with proud and lazy foreigners. The perfect sacrifice of God's Son Jesus Christ washed away all the sins of immaturity we commit whether in church or at home, among our friends or in our marriages. ***"We have the mind of Christ"*** (1 Corinthians 2:16) by virtue of our Baptism. Now God's love burns with thanks from deep inside.

"For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says." If you have the gift of foreign languages, pray to be understood. ***"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."*** My most memorable experience with this was at Thanksgiving Church in Wuhan China, November 2005. It was very uplifting to hear hundreds of fellow Christians singing their hearts out in Chinese. Some had come a few hours early to practice the songs for singing to God. But God does not want our feelings to drop when the music stops. So Paul asks, ***"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."*** God always wants our hearts and minds fully engaged in praising Him. ***"If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who [is a visitor and does] not understand [agree with your worship and] 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."*** **Excel in Gifts that Build Up the Church.**

If the Apostle Paul were traveling in China today, he would understand them and be able to preach in Mandarin, Cantonese or whatever dialect necessary to be understood. If he preached at New Life, his English accent would be "Minnesotan" like ours. He had the gift of other languages more than anyone else because God equipped him for his calling as God's chosen missionary to the Gentiles, our ancestors of long ago. I'm convinced if I needed such a gift God would give it. But one pastor in training at Mount Olive Chinese Church told me a few weeks ago that he understands his Bible better in English than in Chinese because the Chinese Bible words are not used much in every day speech. He would understand less if we tried to teach him in Chinese. God's Word builds us up to be **Mature in the mind.**

"Five words" that make sense are better than ***"ten thousand words in a tongue"*** no one understands. For example, one word little children barely know anymore is "cassette." "CD"? Yes, but cassettes of the Bible are obsolete. Hosanna – Faith Comes by Hearing ministries is phasing out cassettes in favor of compressed (MP3) files for computers and CDs. After praying to the Lord for wisdom and understanding, one of their staff designed a digital player called "the Proclaimer" dedicated to playing the Bible in the local heart language wherever the sun shines. The Bible Scriptures programmed onto a microchip cannot be erased or wear out like cassettes. The battery plays 15 hours and can be recharged for playing the entire New Testament over 600 times. The Proclaimer charges the battery by sunlight on earth or on the moon. As long as there is a sun in the sky the Proclaimer will play the Son's Words in digital quality and loud enough for 300 at once. The cost of one New Testament Proclaimer is \$100, the complete Bible Proclaimer \$159. Now poor and illiterate Tonga in Central Africa can hear God's Word.

Mature in "the mind of Christ," God's people asked for the gifts to solve a desperate problem in order to **Build Up the Church** of Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit is giving us a tool today to build us up to excellence during the 40 Days of Lent. Beginning on or before Ash Wednesday, February 21st, we can use the free MP3 CDs we received last week and today to hear one of the readings dividing the New Testament into forty segments. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will make us **Infants to evil** and **Mature in the mind.** God gives us gifts of speaking along with electronic engineering and donations to **Excel in Gifts that Build Up the Church.** Older Christians in Sun City, Arizona, use garage sale money to help fund Tonga to Central Africa. Growing up at the foot of the cross, confessing our sins and receiving God's full and free forgiveness in Christ, raises us to newness of life in Him. No siding on the lawn, but souls bound for heaven and the great celebration of every tribe and language and people and nation loudly proclaiming God's praise for all eternity in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Amen.