**HEALTHY CHURCHES EDIFY ONE ANOTHER**

**(1 Corinthians 14)**

When I think back and compare the experience I had in church growing up with what I see taking place in the church of today, I see some glaring differences. There are some things that are missing in the contemporary church that used to be there, and I am not thinking about the singing of hymns. It is much more than that. Let me give you some words that I rarely hear today.

* One word is *burden.* People used to talk about having a burden for souls.
* Another one is *soul-winning.* Few people talk about winning souls for Christ.
* Another word that seems to have fallen into disfavor is *repentance*. Many people talk about believing in Jesus, but far fewer stress the importance of repentance.
* How about *hell?* When was the last time you heard a sermon on hell? One evangelical figure today lamented that it seems we have air-conditioned hell.
* I’m sure there are many others, but one word I rarely hear today is the word *edify* or *edification.* One reason we don’t hear that word is because it is a KJV word, and most people use newer translations.

Over the last several months, we have been examining 1 Corinthians and seeking to discover what healthy churches do and don’t do. As we have stressed, the church in Corinth was not a healthy church. Paul was not holding them up as an example and saying, “Be like this church.” He was, however, corresponding with them after having spent a considerable time in Corinth. He was trying to bring them into a healthy state. In some ways they serve as a negative example, and what Paul taught them can also be used for our benefit.

Today, we are going to look at several verses in chapter 14 that addresses this idea of edification. My version uses the words “builds up,” “built up,” and “building up.” To edify is to strengthen, to benefit, to build up. A healthy church focuses upon and practices the ministry of edification. I am going to identify four things from this chapter.

1. **WE WILL EDIFY ONE ANOTHER AS WE MINISTER THE WORD.**

Look at vv. 3-5. At the end of chapter 12, Paul lists various spiritual gifts. In chapter 14, Paul focuses on the use of two of those gifts. The first is what we call *tongues,* and the second is *prophecy.*

There are different views as to what tongues are. Some say they are human languages used in different parts of the world but unknown to the speaker. Some say they are not human languages but heavenly languages. Some say they are a private prayer language, and when the speaker uses that language, he is not aware of what he is saying.

According to 12:7, all of the gifts were given for the common good. When a true spiritual gift is being used people other than the user of the gift will be blessed. If no one other than the user of the gift is being blessed, then a true spiritual gift is not being used.

The best example of the use of tongues is what happened on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. On that day the people of God received the Holy Spirit, and the many people from different lands each heard the witness of the believers in their own language. Those were actual languages, and although the speaker didn’t know what was being said, the hearer did.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul teaches that whenever the gift of tongues was used, someone was to give an interpretation, so that everyone would know what was being said.

The Corinthians believers, however, were not using the gift of tongues in that way. Some people prided themselves on being able to speak ecstatically. They didn’t know what they were saying, and no one else did either.

Paul contrasts that with the true use of prophesy. New Testament prophecy is not what many people think it is. When some people hear of prophesying, the immediately think that someone is foretelling the future. Prophesying, however, is simply declaring a message that God has given the one doing the prophesying. He knows what he is saying, and everyone else does as well because he is using the language both he and the hearers understand.

In Corinth, the end result of the use of the gift of tongues was that the speaker built himself up, but the end result of the gift of prophecy was that the church was built up.

Prophecy is all about ministering the word of God to God’s people and to those whom God is calling to be His people. When you hear the word of God rightly taught and preached, you can’t help but be built up.

The English born evangelist, John Stott said:

The most important gift today, measured by Paul’s principle that we should excel in those that build up the church, is teaching. Nothing builds up the church like the truth, and we desperately need more Christian teachers all over the world.

God wants all of us to use our spiritual gift, and we all have at least one gift that God chose for us to have. When you use your true gift, God’s people will be blessed. Paul clearly teaches that the one gift that best builds up His people is the gift of ministering God’s word.

I have heard school teachers who when asked what subject they teach answer, “I don’t teach a subject; I teach students.” That is a good response for a school teacher. They should be all about teaching students.

I am your preacher. You come hear me Sunday after Sunday. But unlike a school teacher, my main task is not teaching and preaching to those who happen to come when I am speaking. I teach and preach the Bible. I herald God’s word. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to take what I say and bring it home to the hearts of the hearers. I am a seed slinger. I do the best job I can in trying to plant the seed, but it is the Holy Spirit who prepares the soil and causes the seed to grow.

Haven’t you had the experience of listening to a sermon, and suddenly it feels as if the preacher is preaching straight to you. You think he’s been reading your mail. That’s not the preacher; that’s God. That is what happens when the word is being ministered and the Holy Spirit shows up.

If you want to grow and be built up, make yourself available to the preaching and the teaching of the word of God. This Book is the best source of edification, and it doesn’t just happen when it is preached. It happens in Sunday School. It happens when you listen to a podcast or a broadcast or when you pick up a Christian book or best of all, the Bible.

1. **WE WILL EDIFY ONE ANOTHER IF WE MAKE THAT OUR GOAL.**

Notice what Paul wrote in v. 12. Listen to that verse in The New Living Translation, “Since you are so eager to have spiritual gifts, ask God for those that will be of real help to the whole church.” If you have the gift of mercy, that is great for those who are in need of comfort, but if you are riding high and things are going well, you don’t need mercy at that particular moment. You will at some point need mercy, and you will be glad that person comes along when he or she is needed, but when mercy is not needed, you will not be built up by the person with that gift.

Opening up the riches and wonders of God’s word, that gift will always be needed, and every person will benefit from the exercise of that gift. It doesn’t matter what stage or circumstance of life he is in presently.

A few weeks back we looked that the last parable of Matthew 13. It is about the scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said he “is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matthew 13:52). In my message on that passage, I said:

The steward of Kingdom truth takes the unchanging truth of God’s word and the varied experiences of life and brings the two together so that you can see how God’s word addresses where you are in life . . .

In a sense, the Bible is a thesaurus. It is a treasury of stories, and the one who is sufficiently familiar with Scripture can use it to find just the right story to communicate just the right truth to fit the present need.

We need to be intentional about doing the things that build people up.

John Maxwell is a former poster, a sought-after speaker, an author, and a recognized leadership guru. He has written numerous books about leadership. He was being honored at a conference for his lifetime of Christian service. He was given a few minutes to speak. He told the crowd about what he considers to be the most important thing for people to do. Everywhere he goes and every day in whatever he is doing, he tries to do this one thing. He said he tries to add value to people. He sees the purpose of his life is to add value to others.

I believe that is what we are to be about as the people of God. Adding value to people is what edification is. We do that be encouraging someone, by complimenting them, by giving them a pat on the back, by coming alongside them when the road is rough and the day is long.

Let’s be a church that adds value to people. Let’s be intentional about building up our brothers and sisters. We ought not to just leave it chance and hope that it happens. We have to take responsibility, make it our goal.

How many of you are intentional about brushing your teeth in the morning after breakfast and a night before you go to bed? You don’t have to wait for someone to tell you to do that, do you?

That is the way we should be about building up our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

1. **WE WILL EDIFY ONE ANOTHER IF OTHERS UNDERSTAND US.**

Let’s look at v. 17. This verse is part of a larger section. Look at vv. 13-19. We need to be able to speak in such a way that people understand us, that the get what we are saying.

Thirteen months ago, I went to Mexico on a mission trip, but I don’t speak Spanish. Just a few months ago I went to Russia, but I don’t’ speak Russian. Fortunately, when I was in Mexico, we had an American who speaks fluent Spanish serving as our interpreter. When our team was in Russia, we had a Russian who is fluent in English serving as our interpreter. Those two ladies helped us to understand and to be understood.

There were times in both places when conversations were being had in my presence and the interpreter was engaged elsewhere. I understood practically nothing at those times. It is possible that life-changing truths were being exchanged. It is possible that pearls of great wisdom were being displayed, but it benefited me not because I didn’t understand what was being said.

I believe the same thing can happen even when the speaker and the hearer speak the same language. For example, have you ever read a contract that was written by a lawyer in legalese? It is written in English to be sure, but it may as well be written in Swahili because it is all Greek to you.

Have you ever heard two doctors talking about your own health, and they are using medical terminology with which you are not familiar? They are speaking English, but they might as well be speaking Cantonese.

We need to make sure we don’t confuse people by using religious jargon. Let me offer a few things we say that don’t communicate well with people who are not regular church-goers:

* Have you been washed in the blood?
* We need to see more people walk the aisle.
* We want to see the waters of baptism stirred.
* We need to bear fruit for the Lord.
* Let’s ask God to raise up workers for the harvest.
* Are you sitting under the word?
* We just need to love on others.
* Have you joined a small group, and do you have an accountability partner?

If we don’t speak plainly, we may do more harm than good. In the last church I pastored, we had a very informal worship. In some ways, the sermon was more of a dialogue than a monologue. People could ask questions and often did when I preached, and I asked them questions, and they responded. Do you think that might be helpful?

1. **WE WILL EDIFY ONE ANOTHER BY EACH ONE USING HIS GIFT.**

Focus on v. 26. In chapter 12 Paul likened the church to a body, and each member is a part of that body. Each member is important and has a role to play. If the body is be healthy, and if it is to function well, each part has to do is part and play its part. There is not a single part that is unimportant.

In the latter verses of chapter 14, Paul shows that a worship service consists of more than just the preacher preaching a sermon. I believe our services should be more participatory.

Instead of everyone facing forward with all the action taking place upfront, I wish our services were in the round with people able to see the eyeballs of others and mutually ministering to one another.

I believe the church service has become too pastor-centric. It should not be all about me and what I have to say. We should come to worship ready to contribute something that will be beneficial to one another.

Daniel Taylor, in his book, Letters to My Children, answers a series of questions asked by his kids. His son Matthew asked, “Church is getting boring. Why do we have to go to church?”

Listen to his dad’s reply:

Think about it. If a friend of yours called and said that a famous athlete or singer was going to be at his house, and asked if you wanted to come over, wouldn’t you go? And wouldn’t you be excited? Of course! And so would I.

Well, church is the place where God will be, every time you go. Of course, he is with you whether you’re in church or not, but he can be there in a special way when many believers gather to celebrate him together.

“Sounds great,” I hear you saying, “but then how come you fall asleep so much? If God is really there, I mean *really* there, then how come we aren’t bug-eyed and breathless most all the time?”

That’s a very good question. I wish I had a very good answer. Part of it is that God knows we can’t take very much of him. It’s like when you hold Fluffs, our hamster. If you squeezed very hard, Fluffs would be on his way to hamster heaven. You have to hold him gently, talk to him quietly. Well, God has to be sort of like that with us.

Truthfully, though, the biggest reason might be that we don’t want very much of God. We want God to stay in his cage like Fluffs does. We are afraid of losing control of our own lives. We just want him to help us a little here, and forgive us a little there, and let us handle the rest. And so, we try to make church a safe place where we can get a little bit of God but not too much.

We don’t like surprises, not even from God, so we make our churches places where surprises aren’t likely to happen. We ask God to come, but only if he will be polite. And therefore, little kids and adult kids often fall asleep—even if they keep their eyes open.

And yet, at the very same time, church is a wonderful place. God has chosen it . . . to be the place where he will meet his people, the place from which he will send his people to all parts of the world to preach the good news about him.

Let’s let God make Liberty Sothern Baptist Church the church He wants it to be. Among other things, it will be a church that edifies, a church that builds up people. There is enough tearing down of people going on in the world. That has no place among a people that have been called by God to build up.