

Building up the Church 1 Corinthians 14v1-25

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- [0 : 00] Which is on page 1154 and Kirsty is going to come and read. Thank you. Okay, that's 1 Corinthians chapter 14 and starting in verse 1.
- Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.
- Indeed, no one understands him. He utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.
- He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.
- He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may be edified. Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?
- [1 : 19] Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?
- Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?
- You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly, there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.
- So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. For this reason, anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.
- For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind.
- [2 : 36] If you are praising God with your spirit, how can anyone who finds himself among those who do 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. 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 10,000 words in a tongue.
- Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil, be infants. Tongues then are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers.
- Prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?
- But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all.

[4 : 06] And the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, God is really among you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Kirsty. Please keep your Bible open there to 1 Corinthians 14.

Before I pray, just one comment, and that is it's a large section we've just had read. There's a lot of questions that may arise out of it, so please do come back to me, ask me anything afterwards.

And on the table as you came in, there was a little pamphlet, which is called Building Up the Church, Tongues and Prophecy. I made them available last week. There's a couple left, which goes into detail a little bit more about the chapter.

So if you haven't read that, it might be helpful for you to read it. And if there's no more copies left, ask me and I can forward them to you or email you a copy. Let's pray.

[5 : 14] Our Father God, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for your Holy Spirit. And so we pray now and ask that you would speak to us a clear message that we may understand with our minds that it might drive deep into our hearts, that it would change us as a church more and more into the people you call us to be.

May you build us up in our faith, and may we be a people so that when unbelievers come among us, they will say, God is among you.

Father, please help us speak your word into our lives, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, if you could have any spiritual gift you wanted, what kind of gift would you choose?

These are some of the things we've been looking at over chapters 11 to 14. Imagine the gift of healing, being able to pray for someone and seeing their illness removed.

Or imagine the gift of miraculous powers, the power to change a circumstance supernaturally. Imagine the gift of faith, that ability to step out and achieve great things for God.

[7 : 12] Or imagine the gift of tongues, speaking in an unknown language that only God can understand what you're saying.

What about the gift of encouraging and comforting? Coming alongside someone quietly and speaking words to them that build them up.

Any takers for the gift of encouraging? Well, look at verse 18. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

But in the church, that is, when the church gathers together just as we are right now, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue.

You see, the church in Corinth believed that the more spectacular your gift was, well, the more spiritual you were. And in particular, if you could speak in tongues, well, you were seen to be part of the spiritual elite.

[8 : 26] And if you couldn't speak in tongues, well, you were spiritually inferior. You were a kind of second-class Christian. Well, such thinking was destroying and dividing the church.

As he reminded us back in chapter 12. Have a look at chapter 12, verse 18. Whatever gift we might like, we do not get to choose what gift we want.

Look at chapter 12, verse 18. But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Verse 29. Are all the prophets? Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?

Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? The answer is obviously no. God is the one who gives gifts to his church, just as he determines.

- [9 : 38] However, those who are spiritually mature, verse 31, but eagerly desire the greater gifts. Those who are mature in faith are to desire the greater gifts. Well, what are the greater gifts that we should desire?
- Well, that's what chapter 14 is all about. Three things we learn here about the greater gifts that we should desire.
- First, desire gifts that build up the church. Look at verse 1, chapter 14.
- Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Now, why is he encouraging us to desire the gift of prophecy?
- [10 : 48] Well, the value of our gift, whatever gift we might have, is not measured by how it benefits me, but in how it builds up the church.
- So look at verse 4. The person who speaks in a tongue, that is, in an unknown language, edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies or builds up the church.
- You see, the gift of tongues or the ability to speak in an unknown language is only of value to self. It builds up just one person.
- The gift of prophecy, however, is of greater value and worth because it can build up the whole church, many people. So he encourages us, verse 12, since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.
- That's why Paul has begun this whole argument in chapter 14 with the command in verse 1. He starts off by telling us, follow the way of love, verse 1.
- [12 : 09] You see, love is not self-centred. Love is others-centred. Love is not self-seeking or self-promoting. Love doesn't come to a gathering like this on a Sunday and wonder, what is somebody going to do for me?
- Or what can I get out of this for me? Love comes and reaches out for the good of others. So in love, we are to eagerly desire spiritual gifts that are others-centred.
- Gifts that build up the church rather than building up self. Now, one example of a gift that builds up the church is the gift of prophecy.
- But what is the gift of prophecy? Well, it's hard for us to be absolutely sure what prophecy is, as Paul doesn't actually give us a clear definition.
- It's one of those things that we're scratching our head, like, what does it actually mean? Well, we are given the goal or perhaps the aim of prophecy and we're told what that is.
- [13 : 28] So have a look at what the goal of prophecy is. Maybe that helps us to understand a little better what it is. So look at verse 2. In contrast to tongues, he says this.
- Verse 2, for anyone who speaks in a tongue, that is an unknown language or an unlearned language, so it's not something like Spanish or Russian or Chinese or anything else like that.
- It's an unknown, unlearned language. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. So it's like a private prayer to God.
- Indeed, no one understands them. He utters mysteries with his spirit. But, everyone who's prophesied speaks to men and women for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort.
- We see something similar. Have a look at verse 31. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.
- [14 : 40] So, from those few verses, we can see that the goal or the aim of prophecy, the outcome of prophecy is to strengthen, encourage, comfort, and instruct.

In fact, as we'll see in a minute, it can actually lead an unbeliever to faith. Have a look at the end of verse 25. So, this is in the context where somebody has prophesied and look what happens at the very end of verse 25.

he will fall down, the unbeliever will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, God is really among you. Now, as we think about that, if we are people who are going to strengthen, encourage, comfort, instruct, and lead an unbeliever to faith in Christ, well, then the only way that's going to happen is by speaking the truth of God's word into people's lives.

Of course, prophecy may be more than that, but at the very least, it is speaking truth from God, applying the scriptures, applying what God has given to us into each other's lives so that the church is built up.

Have a look at verse 5 of chapter 14. So I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.

[16 : 17] Here's the reason. He who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

So, we are to desire gifts that build up the church, especially the gift of prophecy.

The second big thing, as we think about greater gifts, desire gifts that use intelligible words. Desire gifts that use intelligible words.

Verse 6. Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you, and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you? You're not going to understand what I'm saying.

What good will I be to you, unless I bring to you some revelation, or knowledge, or prophecy, or word of instruction? Now, again, we can have lots of ideas as to what they actually all mean, the gifts that we have there in verse 6.

[17 : 26] We're not told exactly what each one are. But what we can say for certain is that revelation, a word of knowledge, or prophecy, or word of instruction, they're all word gifts that communicate a clear, intelligible message.

So, if we're going to be people who build up the church, then we should desire gifts that communicate with intelligible words.

There should be clarity, not confusion. Verse 7. Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, or as in our case today, a guitar and the beat of a drum box, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?

How would we know what to sing if it's just the same chord that's played the whole way through? Just as music brings clarity and produces a recognisable tune, so our words should bring clarity to one another.

Or verse 8. Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So this is going back to ancient times, times where the person would blow the bugle and it would send a clear message to the troops to get ready for battle.

[19 : 02] Well, in the same way, our words should send a clear message that is easily understood. Verse 9.

So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? it will be just as if you are speaking into the air.

Now I am sure we have all heard the expression. I heard it just last week. Preach the gospel and if necessary use words. Do you know what verse that comes in?

What part of the Bible? Anybody know? It is often quoted as if it comes from the Bible. It is not actually in the Bible. And the biblical writers, including Paul, would completely disagree with preach the gospel and if necessary use words.

The point is we cannot preach the gospel and we cannot build each other up by comforting, encouraging and strengthening and leading someone to Christ without using words.

[20 : 13] Our words communicate a clear and intelligible message that will strengthen and encourage comfort and instruct. So, verse 12, so it is with you, if you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

Desire word gifts like prophecy because they will cause the church to grow and be strong. Now that doesn't mean that everyone has to be a preacher. Or that you have to have the ability to teach at Munster Bible College or to be able to lead a Bible study with a group of people.

But it does mean that we as individuals can begin to speak the word of God into each other's lives. What would that look like?

Well, it might be that you've been reading your Bible through the week and there's some scriptures in your mind and you're thinking, that will really be helpful for and I'm going to share that with them.

Or I'm going to send a text message to them or an email. Or it could be that in the course of conversation with someone, the Spirit brings to mind and prompts you with a word of encouragement.

[21 : 35] You might not even be aware of what's going on in the person's life, but the Spirit prompts you and gives you a word from God to encourage them and comfort them and build them up.

So here we are encouraged to speak intelligible, clear words into each other's lives so that we are growing and become strong.

So clarity, not confusion. But we must also use our mind. Well you say, well what about this gift of tongues? That's a word gift, isn't it?

Shouldn't we encourage people to use that gift in the life of the church? Well that was the problem in the church at Corinth. They thought that to speak in tongues and unintelligible language was far superior and Paul is arguing through this saying, no all it does is bring confusion.

Have a look at verse 13. For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue, an unlearned language, should pray that he may interpret what he says.

[22 : 55] So if someone in the church such as a gathering like this, if you have the gift of tongues and you've got a message of encouragement or comfort for someone, to make it profitable and beneficial for the person or for the whole church, at that moment they should be asking God to enable them to speak clearly and intelligibly, to interpret so that they are speaking words that people will understand.

That's how Paul uses his gift of tongues. Look at verse 14. He says, For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, so the spirit is at work in my life, but my mind is unfruitful.

I don't know what I'm saying and nobody else will understand what I'm saying. Verse 15. So what shall I do? Well, 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. In other words, we don't leave our minds at home when we gather on a Sunday. We use our God-given minds so that people will understand with their minds what is being said.

Verse 18. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. So Paul is not saying the gift of tongues is wrong, because he clearly uses it, so it's not a wrong thing.

[24 : 27] But if anybody does have the gift of tongues, it should be used for personal and private use, not for public or corporate use.

That surely is what he's saying in verse 19. But in the church, as the church gathers, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

God's word gift. So let me encourage us when it comes to our tea and coffee time. How many times have you heard it said, speak to each other and encourage each other?

How many times have you heard that? Well, in case you haven't heard it, let me say it again. When you have tea and coffee, it's a great opportunity to put into practice our word gifts.

As the spirit prompts you and equips you over tea and coffee, the spirit will give you that courage to actually go up to somebody and not just say, oh, isn't the weather lovely or what did you think of the match?

[25 : 40] I'm sure that is helpful. But does it encourage us in the faith? Speak these words that the Lord is giving us. Maybe somebody is down and they need comforted.

Maybe somebody is struggling and they need encouraged. Maybe somebody is walking away from Christ and they need instructed. It isn't just the preacher up front who has to do that.

So desire word gifts like prophecy so that together we can build up the church. church. So desire gifts that build up the church, desire gifts that use intelligible words, and desire gifts that communicate the gospel.

This is where it's all heading. Look at verse 20. Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. Would you grow up?

stop thinking in this spiritually immature way. Of course, verse 20, in regard to evil, be infants, so have an innocent mind about things that are evil or not of God, but in your thinking, be adults.

[27 : 02] Be spiritually mature. When it comes to desiring gifts, desire prophecy over tongues because it will build up the church.

In fact, prophecy can lead an unbeliever to faith in Christ. Let's see how that's true.

First, unintelligible words lead to unbelief. Look at verse 21. In the law, or in the scriptures, that's the Old Testament, it is written, through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners, I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.

Well, what's all that about? Well, we need to go back to Isaiah chapter 28. So, keep your finger in 1 Corinthians 14. Go back to Isaiah chapter 28, which is on page 7-1-1.

because what we just read there is a quote from the prophet Isaiah in chapter 28. So, go with me, we're going to follow a few verses there.

[28 : 19] Isaiah chapter 28, page 7-1-1. So, this is God speaking through the prophet Isaiah with a clear, intelligible message to the people of Israel.

And the big message through the whole book, like much of the prophets, is calling the people to repentance and to come back to God. Stop following your ways of idols, turn back to the Lord.

That was the clear, intelligible message to the people. But how do the people respond? Well, look at verse 7 of chapter 28.

And these people, these also stagger from wine and reel from beer. Their priests and their prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled.

What a great word. Befuddled with wine. They reel from beer. It seems that they're far too busy drinking beer and wine and slurring their own words rather than listening to God's clear word.

- [29 : 43] In fact, they just laugh at Isaiah. Look at verse 9. Who is he trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk?
- To those just taken from the breast? What Isaiah says, it's all baby talk. Did you ever hear him? Goo, goo, goo? Verse 10.
- For it is do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there. What's all that about? Well, it's actually, if we know that our Old Testament is written in Hebrew, it's trying to get across a translation, which is actually better if we do read Hebrew itself.
- So at the bottom of your page, you'll probably see a little note at the very bottom in Hebrew. Do you have it there? Can you follow with me? Don't normally do this. I'm not an expert in Hebrew.
- I'm only reading what's here. But you see, it gives the Hebrew for verse 10. It says, sav, la sav, sav, sav, cav, cav, cav, cav. So we can understand that as they're listening to Isaiah, they're just simply mocking Isaiah the prophet as he brings his clear message.
- [30 : 59] Do you ever hear what he says? Sav, la sav, sav, la sav, blah, blah, blah. On and on he goes, cav, la cav, cav, la cav, yap, yap, yap. A silly message and they don't want to hear.
- But what is God's response? Chapter 28, verse 11. Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues, God will speak to this people to whom he said, this is the resting place, let the weary rest, in other words, come back to me, and this is a place of repose.
- But they would not listen. Because of their refusal to listen to the clear message of God, God is now going to speak through foreign lips, through a foreign language.
- That great nation, the Assyrians, a people who are going to speak a different language, and then that mighty nation who comes in, and we know for history they did invade Israel, will come and destroy you and defeat you.
- So he's warning them and saying to Israel, when you hear the Assyrian soldiers walking down your street, and you cannot understand what they're saying, you will know that God's judgment has come upon you.
- [32 : 34] With foreign lips and strange tongues, God will speak to this people. Back to 1 Corinthians chapter 14.
- You see, it's important that when we read our Bibles, we get the context of what's actually being said. tongues, so back to verse 22. Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers, but for unbelievers.
- It's a sign for those who have no belief, or those like Israel in the past who ignored the word of God and refused to believe what God had to say.
- It was almost like a judgment had come upon them. There was nothing more that they could hear from God. It was all gibberish. Verse 22.
- Prophecy, however, is for believers, those who will believe, not for unbelievers, or those who will refuse to believe God's message.
- [33 : 47] Now, all of this is applied to the local church, when we gather. And that is, intelligible words leads to belief. So look at verse 23.
- If the whole church comes together, just as we are right now, and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand, or somebody who's not yet a believer, or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?
- the only conclusion they will come to is that the church has gone completely mad. Rather than lead people to believe, it will cause them not to believe, just as it was for Israel.
- It was like a hardening of their heart. They didn't know what was going on anymore. They couldn't hear God's clear message. Verse 24.

But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in, while everybody is prophesying, that is, people are encouraging, comforting, instructing one another, they will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare.

[35 : 04] The person, the unbeliever, who is part of the gathering will hear the clear, intelligible message of God, they will begin to hear through people's conversations, the truth of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

That God has forgiven us of all of our sin, that he's adopted us as his children into his family, that he's guaranteed us an eternity in his good and perfect kingdom, that we can enjoy God and know his love in our lives.

And as people talk and build each other up with God's words, so unbelievers will hear the truth of God be convicted of their sin and come to face in Christ.

Isn't that incredible? That over a cup of tea, that someone could overhear your conversation with someone else, or in a little group or as you meet up with friends during the week, as they hear you talk with somebody else about your faith and how God has helped you, that God could use that to turn someone to Christ?

They will fall down and worship God, exclaiming God is really among you. So, as we come to the end of this section in chapter 14, the encouragement is to us all to desire gifts that build up the church.

[36 : 41] Yes, God gives them, but we can ask, we can pray, and as we ask for gifts that build up the church, desire gifts that use intelligible words, word gifts like prophecy, asking, and desire gifts that will communicate the gospel clearly to those who do not yet believe, gifts like prophecy.

May God encourage us, comfort, strengthen, and instruct us through one another as we speak God's word into each other's lives.

Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you that you have spoken a clear, intelligible message to us through your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by your Spirit you have opened up our minds so that we can understand all that you have given to us.

And it's our desire, Father, would you please fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit. Would you give to this church gifts that build one and build one another up?

No matter how timid we may feel, no matter how self-conscious we may feel when we speak, Father, give us words that we can speak into each other's lives, that will encourage and build up and instruct and comfort those who are struggling, leading people back to Christ, so that we are built up together as your people.

[38 : 46] So, Father, do your work amongst us. Pour out your Spirit, we pray, and we ask this for your honour and for your glory, that people will come to faith and that we will go on to follow Jesus.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing together, connected to what we've been thinking of this morning.

Speak, O Lord. It's a prayer that God, as we read the word, as we're listening to him, that God would speak to us, so that we in turn can speak to one another.

Let's stand together as we sing. speak, O Lord, as we come to you, to receive the fruit of your holy word.

take your truth, plant it deep in us, shape and flesh it up in your likeness.

[40 : 20] That the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us all your praise.