

Peace not confusion

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 00] So our first reading this morning is from Psalm 19 and that can be found on page 547 of the Bibles. The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor are there words whose voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

[1 : 23] The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned. In keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors?

Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me.

[2 : 29] Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. The second reading is taken from 1 Corinthians, chapter 14, verses 26 to 40.

And you can find it on page 1156. What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.

But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

[3 : 45] If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.

And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the law also says.

If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or was it from you that the word of God came?

Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.

If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues, but all things should be done decently and in order.

[5 : 01] Welcome, everyone. Good to see you here. As we continue our series right at the end of our little series of talks in 1 Corinthians 11 to 14.

So, if you are visiting this morning, we are delighted you are with us, but you will have to bear with us as we finish our series of talks in 1 Corinthians 14. But nonetheless, I trust it will be helpful and useful.

Why don't I pray for us as we start? Thank you. Psalm 19, verse 7.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. Heavenly Father, we praise you for your perfect, sure, certain word.

Thank you for the freedom we have to read it together, to hear your word explained together. And we pray that you would indeed this morning revive our souls and make us who you know we are simple, we are spiritually simple.

[6 : 11] Please would you make us wise in your sight. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. 1 Corinthians 14, verses 26 to 40.

See, those who were here last week will remember that 1 Corinthians 14 shows us the principles that we need to have in place if church is going to be, if a church service is going to be pleasing to God.

And you'll remember if you're here, if you're here, if you're here, if you're here, the overriding principle was that of edification. In other words, building up. We should be built up. That our gatherings should be understandable.

That we engage our minds. Services which are both for those who are disciples of Jesus Christ already, as well as for those who are looking in on the Christian faith as well.

Now, someone asked a very good question last week at the coffee, which was this. Surely we don't simply go to church to build others up. Surely we also go to church to be built up ourselves.

[7 : 12] Now, I think the answer to that is yes and no. I think it's yes in terms of the outcome of church. In other words, all of us should leave. We trust having been built up and encouraged and so on.

But I think it's no in terms of the mindset of church. In other words, the mindset that we bring to church. Because I think this is the question, you see. If we all come to church thinking, right, the reason I'm here this morning is because I want to be built up by others.

Well, who is going to be built up in that kind of situation? If what I'm thinking about is that I want to be built up and if you're thinking about what you're thinking about is that you want to be built up.

Actually, no one's going to be built up. Because, you see, we're all going to be thinking about ourselves.

But if we come to church, all of us, with the mindset, I want to build others up, then, of course, who's going to be built up? Well, we all are. Because I'm going to be thinking, how can I build others up? And we're all going to be thinking, well, how can we build one another up? So the outcome is that we are all built up. But the mindset is that we come to build up others.

[8 : 18] But there's one more thing that church services should be if they are to edify and build up. And that is orderly. Look at verse 33. For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.

And verse 40. But all things should be done decently and in order. Which doesn't sound very exciting, does it? Surely we might think spontaneity is better. You know, surely a sermon without notes is more spiritual, better than a sermon with notes.

But, says Paul, a sign of the Spirit at work is order, not spontaneity and disorder. Just think about the rest of life for a moment.

When someone you love has a birthday coming up, do you plan in this ordered way? Or do you just do things spontaneously? Do you plan to buy a card, to get a present?

Perhaps you plan a party? Or do you just think, oh, well, if I happen to walk past a shop that sells cards, I'll buy a card. You know, if there happens to be the ingredients that make a cake in the cupboard, then I might make a cake in the cupboard if I haven't got too many other things on.

[9 : 27] Well, I guess there may be some who do birthdays spontaneously. I don't know. We're not asking for confessions at this point in the service. But I reckon planning is good.

Order is good. Or just think about Southern Railway. What people have been crying out for in the last few days is order, I take it, isn't it? Rather than sort of spontaneously thinking, well, we'll run one or two trains here and there if we feel like it.

No, order is a good thing. And order is good in church as well. So we mustn't think to ourselves, you know, spontaneous is good. Order is bad. I think it's very easy to think like that.

Now, two aspects of order. You'll see them both on the outline. First of all, order and participation. Secondly, order and authority. First of all, order and participation.

Now, because the point is participation, I want us to do some participation. So will you turn to your neighbor in just a moment and look at verses 26 to 33 again. And just discuss with your neighbor, do you think this is a list of things that was good about the church in Corinth?

[10:29] Or do you think this is a list of things that was bad and going wrong in the church in Corinth? Just turn to your neighbor and discuss that. Well, do come back together.

Hopefully you've concluded that what Paul is talking about here is things that have gone wrong in the church in Corinth. Okay? As throughout the letter, actually, he is problem fixing.

So what he's doing here, he's not giving us a manual which tells us how to start a church completely from scratch. So, for example, he doesn't mention in these verses or in the whole chapter preaching or praying.

He's tackling the problem areas. Firstly, verses 26 to 28, where the use of tongues is chaotic. And if you're not sure what the use of tongues is, then I touched on it last week. So do listen to last week's talk.

Verse 26. So the principle of building up means order.

[11:49] Can you see that? A maximum of two or at most three. And you'll remember, if you were here last week, that Paul envisages virtually no circumstances in which tongues will be spoken publicly in a main church meeting like this.

But if they are, then each speaking in turn and only if there is an interpretation. Prophecy is similar.

Verse 29. Let two or three prophets speak and let the others weigh what is said.

If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. Again, just two or three, one at a time, for the benefit of others. They may be built up. Paul is really treating them, isn't he, like a bunch of six-year-olds in year one at school.

You know, calm down, everyone. We'll have people speaking just one at a time. Freddie, you can stop speaking now because Annabelle's got something to say as well and we want to hear from her as well. I think that's the sort of general tone, isn't it, of what Paul is saying here.

[12:54] Now, Vaughan Roberts, in one of his books, uses this analogy in terms of what's going on here in Corinth, which I think is very helpful. He says, imagine a church in the first century which has many, many members, all whom have the same gift.

And that is the gift of playing the bassoon. And they're proud of this. And they give the impression that because they have the gift of playing the bassoon, they are sort of first-class Christians, so to speak.

And those who don't have the gift of playing the bassoon, well, they regard us as second-class Christians. And that's how those without the gift of playing the bassoon rather perceive themselves as well. And therefore, what the Apostle Paul writes is to correct this abuse.

Because actually, their services are chaotic with 50 people every Sunday all wanting to play the bassoon. And so what's he do? He affirms the gift. He says, it's a good gift to have.

Indeed, he says, I too have the gift of playing the bassoon. But he says, remember, you're a body. We all have different gifts. And therefore, what actually you need to do is to limit yourself to two or at most three bassoonists every Sunday.

[13:59] And make sure as well that you value those who have other gifts. So they're not left thinking as if they are second-class Christians. Now, here's the question. How would we react 2,000 years later if we discovered that letter?

Would we panic about the fact that we don't have people in our music group who play the bassoon? Would we draw the conclusion that actually we're not a very spiritual church?

Of course not. Because what Paul is doing is that he's writing to fix problems. You see, he's not giving us a blueprint here in 1 Corinthians 14 for what every church service should be like.

Rather, what he's trying to do is to bring order out of chaos so that the church can be edified. Now, before I move on, I want to do what I said I'd do this week, which is to spend five minutes or so thinking about what prophecy is and what prophecy isn't.

For the simple reason that we saw last week, that for the Apostle Paul, prophecy is important and is valuable. And therefore, I want us to spend five minutes just thinking about what prophecy is and

isn't.

[15:11] And you'll see there are some bullet points on the outline to help us with that. First of all, New Testament prophecy is not the same as Old Testament prophecy. So in the Old Testament, the prophet, such as Isaiah, how does he begin what he's going to say?

He says, thus says the Lord. How does Jeremiah begin what he's going to say? He says, the word of the Lord came to me. In other words, what the Old Testament prophet says, God says.

You do not argue with an Old Testament prophet, what they say, God says. Which means, of course, the New Testament equivalent of an Old Testament prophet is not a New Testament prophet, but a New Testament apostle.

It's just what Paul says here, if you look at verse 37. When he calls on the Corinthians to acknowledge that what he writes is a command of the Lord. New Testament prophecy, by contrast, has less authority than Old Testament prophecy.

Which is why we'll see in a moment that Paul says it needs to be weighed. It needs to be tested. In other words, you and I should always be suspicious of those who say they've received a prophecy and that God has told them to do something.

[16:24] Because, of course, by couching it in that language, this is what God has told me to do. It doesn't allow others to weigh it, to test it, to disagree with it.

Secondly, New Testament prophecy isn't preaching. Now, it can have a similar effect to preaching. So, look back at chapter 14, verse 3. Chapter 14, verse 3.

As we saw last week, prophecy builds up. It encourages. It consoles. But, strikingly, do you remember back in 1 Corinthians 11, a few weeks ago, where Paul was encouraging women in the public ministries of praying and prophesying?

And yet, strikingly, he says in 1 Timothy 2, verse 12, I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man and to do so in the public arena like this with a mixed congregation of men and women.

In other words, we can all be in favor of women prime ministers. But, you see, women should not have an authoritative teaching ministry where they are teaching a mixed congregation of men and women.

[17:32] And, again, if you missed that talk in 1 Corinthians 11, then it is online. So, New Testament prophecy has less authority than preaching. In other words, the church which I visited some time ago, where there was a sermon followed by a time which was called prophecy, prophecy, when we were given the impression that that was when we were really hearing God's voice and doing so in a more real and more immediate way, actually had got things completely the wrong way around.

Because the direct, clear, certain word of God is in the Bible. That's been our theme all the way through this morning, hasn't it? This is the direct, clear, certain word of God.

Prophecy is not because it needs to be weighed and tested. Next question, has prophecy ceased? Well, we touched on this in 1 Corinthians 13. Do listen again to the talk online. My own view is that none of the New Testament gifts have ceased. But, nor does the New Testament seem to be saying that all the gifts it mentions should be in every church at any one time.

Nor is the New Testament giving us a definite list of gifts. It doesn't mention, for example, the gift of music and other gifts as well. Other things which I guess we would regard as gifts.

[18:57] They're not mentioned. But, is the gift of prophecy less important today, in 2016, than it would have been in around 55 AD when 1 Corinthians was written?

Now, I think we have to say it is less important today. And that is the simple reason that at the time Paul was writing the New Testament was not complete. The church was particularly dependent upon the ministry of prophets because they didn't have a completed New Testament.

To teach them the fullness of the gospel and the fullness of the implications of the gospel and apply it to their lives. And that is why when we look at the letters that were written towards the end of the New Testament era, Paul and the other apostles do not say, Look, we apostles are now dying out. And therefore, what do you need if you are to guard the gospel going forwards as a church? What you need is more prophets. He doesn't say that. No, what he says time and time again is that you need to guard the deposits that we apostles have been entrusted with.

And you need to pass that on. So keep a finger in 1 Corinthians and turn on to 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy on page 1197.

[20 : 24] So here's the issue you see. As the apostles die out, should the church be looking for new words of God and new revelations from God? Or should they guard the teaching of the apostles? Well, page 1197.

2 Timothy chapter 1, verses 13 and 14. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, from Paul, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. And then chapter 2, verse 2. And what you have heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

In the letters of 1 Timothy and Titus, what's the one gift? There are lots of character qualifications. But actually, what is the one gift that a church elder, a church leader should have?

It is the gift of teaching. Not the gift of prophecy, but the gift of teaching. Just imagine for a moment that you've been a fan of the Great British Bake Off over the years.

[21 : 34] And you've gradually collected a whole bunch of Mary Berry recipes. And some of them you've kind of written them down on the back of an envelope. Others are kind of emails which people have sent to you.

And whenever you've got someone coming around for a meal, you kind of rifle through all these scraps of paper. And you decide which one you're going to produce. But then one of your guests, very kindly, gives you a copy of this.

And it's Mary Berry's complete cookbook. Now, from now on, this is going to be your first port of call, isn't it? When you have people coming around for a meal.

This is what's going to take pride of place. All those scraps of paper, well, they may be useful. But actually, the real clue, you see, is in the title.

Mary Berry's complete cookbook. You have the complete cookbook. Just as the Bible is complete. And therefore, although you may turn to those scraps occasionally, you may value them.

[22 : 39] But actually, you won't value them in the same way that you were beforehand. Because you have the complete cookbook instead. Well, it's a simple analogy.

But in the same way, prophecy, it seems to me, must now be less significant than it was when 1 Corinthians was written. Because we have a completed Bible. But it's still useful. As we see throughout 1 Corinthians 14.

Verse 3, 1 Corinthians 14. It builds up. It encourages. It consoles. Verse 19. It instructs. Verses 24 to 25, as we saw last week. It can bring people to a true knowledge of God.

So it's still useful. In fact, it sounds very much, doesn't it, like the effects of the gospel as the gospel is then applied into people's lives. Yes, it can be spontaneous.

But it can be prepared. It's not ecstatic the speaker is in control of what they're saying. Now, isn't this precisely what is happening? I take it Sunday by Sunday.

[23 : 42] Perhaps over coffee, as we seek to encourage one another in the light of God's word. As we seek to build one another up over coffee with God's word. Isn't it just what happens perhaps before we start at 10.30?

If someone arrives, as you say to them, what kind of week have you had? And they say, I've had a terrible week. And what are you trying to do? At that point, you're trying to prophesy, in a sense, aren't you? You're trying to console them. You're trying to build them up.

You're trying to encourage. Or perhaps in the church council, as someone speaks words of insight and wisdom. In terms of the direction they feel the church should go. Or in a prayer triplet, as we try and bring biblical wisdom to bear on one another's lives.

Or in growth groups, as each member contributes their understanding of the Bible passage. As others weigh what is said. As the group then together seeks to think together about what it might mean in practice.

All these things that surely fulfill exactly what Paul says here is prophecy. We may not call it prophecy. I think we probably should call it prophecy. But it's probably happening far more in practice than we imagine.

[24 : 47] Now, it may be there's a place in the kind of formal part of our service for something that looks more like prophecy. Perhaps if someone shares something about how God has been at work in their lives.

Or an answer prayer or something like that. And it'd be useful, I think, for us to be discussing over coffee whether that would be a helpful thing to do or not. So, order and participation.

Secondly, order and authority. Have a look at verses 36 and 37. Or was it from you that the word of God came?

Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.

Now, I think these verses really help us to understand what was going wrong in Corinth. And that is they are beginning to move away from Paul and the other apostles. Paul asks, in a pretty biting tone, don't you think?

[25 : 46] And I think this came across well as Clive read it to us. Do you who think you are spiritual, if you are really spiritual, just check, are you? You really think, do you, that God has revealed to you things he hasn't revealed to anyone else?

That God has spoken to you in some special way. That's what you really think is it, you Corinthians. Well, that is not the work of the Spirit. Quite the reverse, verse 37.

The mark of being a prophet, of being a truly spiritual person, is that you acknowledge and accept the authority of me, the Apostle Paul.

That what I am writing, the Apostle Paul, is indeed the Word of God. Here, then, is a test of a Spirit-filled person.

Now, sadly, I'm sure we'll be all too aware there are plenty of churches and plenty of church leaders who reject Paul, or at least reject the bits of Paul they don't agree with. In other words, he'll read 1 Corinthians 13 and say, oh, yes, we love what Paul has to say about love.

[26 : 52] But actually, they'll read other bits of Paul, and they'll just reject it because they don't like it. But, verse 37, to reject Paul is to reject the Lord Jesus.

And that is very foolish, you see, as verse 38 makes clear. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. To ignore Paul, you see, is to run the risk of being ignored by God.

Which means, I take it, that neither should we recognize church leaders who won't recognize themselves that what Paul writes is the Word of the Lord.

The point is, it's God's Word. The Bible is the benchmark with which to test and weigh prophecy.

Now, I assume that it's in that context that Paul writes verses 33 to 35.

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the law also says. If there's anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home.

[28 : 01] For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Now, at first sight, this seems fiercely sexist. But remember that back in chapter 11, Paul encouraged the public ministry of women in the mixed men and women assembly in terms of praying and prophesying.

So, this cannot be a blanket ban on women speaking in church. My own view is that Paul is forbidding women from testing or weighing prophecy that is given publicly.

Because, of course, if they were to do so, then they'd be putting themselves in a similar position as those who have teaching authority. Just as in 1 Timothy 2, Paul doesn't permit women to have teaching authority over a mixed gathering of men and women.

Now, do feel free to ask more about that over coffee. The main point is simply that prophecy should be weighed. It should be tested. I wonder if you've seen the new TV show called Fake, the Great Masterpiece Challenge.

Now, apparently the inspiration for the program is that apparently the average arts museum visitor spends less than 30 seconds in front of each picture or portrait or painting in an art gallery.

[29 : 16] At which point I thought to myself, I think that probably includes me. I think I probably spend longer reading the little blurb at the side than I do at the actual picture. Anyway, the program is aiming to correct what they see as this attention deficit disorder.

And the program producers have replaced seven paintings across the country. So, Edinburgh, Cardiff, London and elsewhere. Seven paintings in top galleries with fakes.

And the idea is that you go and you visit all the galleries. You try and spot the fakes. And then there's a competition to find Britain's top fake art spotter. Well, just as Paul says, prophecy needs to be tested.

It needs to be tested. It needs to be weighed against the authority of the Bible. Which means, of course, that we need to be willing to challenge people's experiences. And to challenge the way in which people feel God is leading them.

So, someone says, the Lord is telling me to leave my wife and to go off with someone else. Well, at which point those of us who are more sensitive by nature, who are by nature more wanting to affirm and encourage, need to learn to weigh and to test and to challenge.

[30 : 31] And ultimately, very strikingly, prophecy is something that can be ignored. It's just what the Apostle Paul did in Acts chapter 21. I put Acts 21 there on the outline. Do look it up later on.

Some will remember when he looked at Acts several years ago, how the prophet Agabus pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He said that Paul would be arrested when he got there. And he was. But Paul ignored him. Because, you see, prophecy doesn't have the same authority as the Bible, nor the same authority as Bible teaching.

It can, at the end of the day, be ignored. Well, let's conclude these two talks on 1 Corinthians 14. This chapter does not describe everything that should take place in a church gathering.

I hope that's clear. Nothing is said about corporate prayer. Nothing is said about the reading of Scripture. There's no mention of the regular week-in, week-out teaching ministry, even though regular week-in, week-out teaching is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a church elder.

[31 : 39] In other words, it's very important, I think, that we don't go away from 1 Corinthians 14 thinking that because Grace Church Dalich does not call itself a charismatic or Pentecostal church, it's very important that we don't go away thinking, well, we must be missing out in some way, therefore.

Sometimes, I think it's probably a matter of language. Perhaps we should use the language of prophecy more than we do. Perhaps that would be a helpful thing. But I think it is also a challenge to the way in which we think about church.

There are some aspects of our church meetings which are characterized by greater spontaneity, building each other up, sharing something which encourages from God's word, all that the Lord has been doing in our lives.

There are other characteristics of our church meetings which are more formal, which are more ordered, such as Bible reading, teaching, corporate prayers, and singing, and so on. And it just so happens that the way we organize our church meetings is that the formal bits generally start at half past ten and generally runs on to around ten to twelve, whereas all the informal bits generally happen from around ten to ten thirty and then from about ten to twelve for the next hour or so as people chat over coffee.

You see, it may be that we just need to change the way in which we think about church. How about thinking of church as being from ten till about twelve thirty? There's a real mixture, isn't it, in that time of both the more formal things and also the more spontaneous, informal, building one another up, prophesying, as Paul says.

[33 : 14] So let's not simply think church is ten thirty to ten to twelve, because then we'll be thinking grace church is very stuffy and formal and so on. Let's instead be thinking actually church starts much earlier as people arrive and it goes on much later as people stay on for some until almost lunchtime and then use that time to do with each other what Paul describes here as prophecy, to encourage each other, to console each other, and to build one another up.

1 Corinthians 14 verse 3. Well, let me pray. Then we've got time for one or two questions, and you'll see as well I've put some further application questions on the outline.

Let's pray together. The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

Heavenly Father, we praise you very much indeed for this wonderful picture of the body, the church as a body, that the Apostle Paul gives us in these chapters in 1 Corinthians. And we pray again, as we've prayed in the past, please would you help us, each one, to play our part in building up the body, and especially in the light of 1 Corinthians 14, to prophesy to one another, to seek to encourage and to build up and to console one another.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.