

The Church and Its Growth

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[0 : 0 0] We're in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, so keep your Bibles open. We're going to be spending a lot of time in there. And I'm going to say up front, this is quite a dense passage. You're going to have lots of questions.

You come to it with lots of questions, lots of concerns. And by the time I'm done, I probably will have created more questions for you and not solved too many of them. So I'm sorry about that.

If you have any questions after the service, feel free to find Aaron somewhere back here. He's a genius. Talk to him. One of the great gifts of the gospel is that when Jesus Christ died and rose again and then ascended into heaven, he didn't just leave us as orphans.

He sent the Holy Spirit upon us. The holy and life-giving Spirit filled God's people on the day of Pentecost, Acts chapter 2. And on that day, not only were we filled, but because we were filled with the Holy Spirit, we were gathered together into one body, the body of Christ.

And not only were we gathered as that body, but we were all given gifts so that we could build up this body and serve one another in the body.

[1 : 2 0] And one of the brilliant things about 1 Corinthians, especially chapters 12 to 14, is that Jesus doesn't just give us his Spirit and then say, all right, have fun finding out your gifts and figuring out what to do with them.

He gives us his Spirit. And then in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14, he tells us, all right, now here is actually why I've given you gifts. And this is how you're supposed to use them.

And so we get this beautiful window into what the gift of the Holy Spirit actually is about. And what being the church and serving one another actually is about in our passage.

And it's a beautiful thing. And so I want to tackle this passage with, sorry, I'm just feeling echoey here. I want to tackle this passage with three major questions.

Why, what, and how? Why does the church gather together? How does the role of tongues prophecy fit within the church's gatherings? And then how do our gatherings relate to unbelievers?

[2 : 2 9] So why do we gather? What is the role of tongues and prophecy? And how does this relate to unbelievers? Why does the church gather? To put it simply, the church gathers.

We do this together and we gather in little pods throughout the week to build up the church. 1 Corinthians 14 makes it very clear, and Paul makes it very clear to us, that the purpose of gathering is building each other up.

To build up is the purpose of gathering. This word build up occurs seven times in our passage. Let me walk you through a few examples. Verse 5. Look at verse 5 with me. Paul says that tongues should be accompanied with interpretation, so that the church may be built up.

Verse 12. Paul exhorts those who are eager to have manifestations of the Spirit. And he says, strive to excel in building up the body, the church.

And then skip down to verse 26. Paul says it most clearly here. He says, when you come together, each one has a hymn, each one has a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation.

[3 : 3 9] This isn't a comprehensive list. He's just saying you all come with different gifts to offer. But look at what he says. He says, the main point is, is let all things be done for building up.

Everything you do, make sure it's building up. So that's why we gather together. When we come together as Christians in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, we gather together to do spiritual construction.

This is a construction site. Bring your hard hat next week, because it gets intense. It's an amazing thing. It's a beautiful thing.

We're here to build each other up. And this ultimately makes sense of why Paul starts in verse 1 with a command to pursue love.

Look at verse 1. Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. Pursue love.

[4 : 40] And this word pursue love is in the present active continuous. So it's not just like a one-time deal. It's not a one-time event. This is meant to be a particular way of life.

It's meant to be, it's keep on pursuing love. Never stop pursuing love. Continue striving after love. It's an active thing.

It's a dynamic thing. We're supposed to do it tenaciously. Pursue love, says Paul. Now why? Why does he start with love? It's all the way back to chapter 8, verse 1.

He says, Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Love builds up. So we're supposed to pursue love because love builds up.

And this is absolutely essential for us to get. Because if we don't get this, then we won't build each other up. Spiritual gifts not used in love don't build up the body of Christ.

[5 : 43] And don't build up the church. This is Paul's whole point in chapter 13. That you could be the most gifted person in the world. And you could be the most gifted church in the world. And 1 Corinthians church was that.

But if you don't have love, it's no good. Go home. If you don't have love. Look at the beginning of chapter 13 in 1 Corinthians.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love. I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge.

And if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love. I am nothing. If I give away all I have. And if I deliver up my body to be burned.

But have not love. I gain nothing. I don't know about you. But those words put the fear of God in me. I lived with a guy named Nathan McClellan.

[6 : 53] In a community house when I went to Regent a few years ago. And he once told me a story that when he lived in New Zealand. He had a. He went to a church with this pastor who would often consult him about things.

And one time he was sitting in the pastor's office. And the pastor was going on and on about. Why won't the people listen to me? I'm seeing so little spiritual fruit. And so little is happening.

And he was utterly frustrated. And a tremendously, tremendously gifted guy. And my friend Nathan looked at him. Had the audacity to look at him and said.

Because you don't love the people. You don't love them. That's why. And I was lucky enough to have a mentor growing up. Who I would walk into his office.

Just as I was discovering how to study the Bible. And I'd come with all these intense theological questions. That I was very earnest about. He'd pat me on the back. And just tell me to chill out pretty much every week.

[7 : 51] Which is great. But one thing that I always remember him doing. Is that whenever I was leaving his office. Having just talked for 45 minutes. I'd be leaving his office.

And he'd say, Jordan. And I'd turn around. I'd be like, Jordan. Listen to me. Don't forget to love people. No matter what you do. Just don't forget to love people.

And week in, week out. I'd come with theological questions. And I would leave being told. Don't forget to love people. And it's not that theological questions are bad. It's just that my pastor understood something.

Is that you could be the most gifted person. But if you don't have love. Then you don't have anything. You could be the most eloquent preacher. The greatest academic.

The most diligent administrator. The most vigilant servant. The most consistent volunteer. The most sacrificial giver. And the most passionate worshiper. And it doesn't mean anything without love.

[8 : 51] And I think there's three ways. In which our spiritual gifts. Tend to deteriorate. When we don't have love. Is they. Will often turn into private. Spiritual selfishness.

So. It's all about me. It's all about my maturity. And it's all about my personal. Experiences. Private. Spiritual selfishness. Or. Our gifts can turn into.

Public. Spiritual pride. It's the second thing. It's all about how others view me. I serve so I can be seen. I. Speak.

So that I can be noticed. I volunteer. So that I can be praised. And I had to repent of this. This afternoon. Because I wanted to stand up here. In front of you. And speak.

So I could be noticed. Public. Spiritual pride. Third thing. That it can. Deteriorate into our spiritual gifts. Without love. Is lazy spiritual routine.

[9 : 48] So we can have all these tremendous gifts. But we either don't use them. Or when we do use them. It's just we're going through the motions. We're checking off the box. Lord. I've done my thing. It's out of my hands.

Spiritual gifts are given to the church. So that we may use them in love. And so that we may build each other up. So love has to be the guide of everything we do in the church.

Building up is the purpose. And love builds up. And this is important friends. This main point is so important. Because it tells us that when we gather together as the church.

We're not at a sporting event to be spectators. And watch other people do the work. We're not at a concert watching people entertain us. We're not at a mall going to consume all the spiritual experiences we have.

As much as we want at whatever store we feel like it. Our gatherings are not about private.

Individual. Spiritual. Experiences. Paul says no to that.

[10 : 56] Says our gatherings are about the community being built up. So when you come here on Sunday evenings. When you go to your Bible study. And you go to your home group.

And you meet with your prayer book. I mean your prayer book. Your prayer group. That's good too. Do that as well. When you do that.

It's not about you. It's about the person sitting to your left. And the person sitting to your right. It's about the person sitting in front of you. And the person sitting behind you.

It's about the person sitting across the aisle from you. And way in the back. As well. That's who it's about when you gather together. It's about building up the body of Christ.

And I wonder what that would look like for us. I wonder what it would look like for us to come here 10 minutes early. And pray God help me to build up your people.

[11 : 55] I wonder what it would look like for us to listen to the sermon. Not thinking just how does this apply to my life. But what is what's the good news for my neighbor. And then after the service you turn to him and you say I got good news for you.

I wonder what it would look like that at the end of the service. Instead of getting our running shoes on. And I know some of you are tying them right now. And sprinting out the door.

Or just staying in our little huddles with the people that we're most comfortable with. I wonder what it would look like to find the person that's suffering and console them. I wonder what it would look like to find the person that is hurting and encourage them.

I wonder what it would look like. Oh how I dream that someday St. John's evening service would go from 3 home groups a week to 10.

Because people care so much about building each other up during the week. I wonder what it would look like. That's the why.

[12 : 59] That's why we gather. Number two the what. What is the role of tongues and prophecy in this gathering. Notice I haven't talked about tongues and prophecy yet.

That's intentional. Because we have to get first things first. It's about building up. And now we can talk about tongues and prophecy as it slots into that. So I'm going to tackle these.

Create a lot of questions. But I'm going to do my best. First tongues. Let me give a brief definition as much as I think this passage allows us to. The gift of tongues is a spirit inspired language of prayer and praise to God.

That is unintelligible to other people. And therefore only edifies and builds up the person speaking in tongues and not other people. Now it's really important to hear what Paul says here.

Paul does not say that tongues is bad. He says that nowhere in this passage. He says tongues is actually a good gift from the good and living God. Look at verse 5 with me. Now I want you all to speak in tongues.

[14 : 12] Verse 18. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. He doesn't say tongues is bad. He says it's a good gift. And nor does Paul ever say that tongues is forbidden in church gatherings.

Rather he says it's to be limited and interpreted. Interpretation makes tongues understandable to people so that they can actually build up. Look at verses 27 and 28.

I know it's not in our passage but it's okay. Don't worry. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or three at most.

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.

Tongues is a good gift. And we need to hear that. But, and this is a big important thing. Paul makes it very, very clear that prophecy is to be preferred when we meet together.

[15:19] Because it does a whole lot more to build up the body of Christ than tongues can and ever will do. So prophecy is to be preferred. Look at verse 1.

Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. Verse 5. Now I want all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.

Verse 19. In the church, I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue. So prophecy is to be preferred.

So let me give you a brief definition of prophecy as much as our passage allows, I think. The gift of prophecy is a spirit-inspired speech or word to other people that is intelligible to those who hear and therefore builds up, encourages, consoles, and instructs the church.

See that? Tongues is this direction. Prophecy is this direction. Tongues is unintelligible. Prophecy is intelligible.

[16:31] Tongues builds up the individual. Prophecy builds up the other. See the direction? Prophecy is important. It's important. It's taking the old truth of the gospel.

It's taking the truth of God's word and speaking it into people's lives, into our specific church context, where we are today, in a special way that makes God's truth applicable and fresh to us.

So it's not saying new things. Rather, it's taking the good old truths and saying them in a fresh way into the context and lives of people where they are at right now.

Let me give you an example. And this example is not meant to be restrictive. It's meant to be to illustrate, basically. When I lived in that house, that house of a bunch of region students, a few years ago, we would have kind of a weekly prayer night together where we'd share, you know, share what we want to pray for, and we'd pray for each other.

And one of the nights, in particular, in the middle of people praying for me, one of the women in my house that lived there said, said, Jordan, you know what? I think God wants you to know something in particular.

[17:47] I'm getting the sense you need to hear this, you need to hear this scripture. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

And I'm getting the sense that you feel like you're in a whole room of light, and there's this one little cupboard that's locked shut, and it's full of darkness.

And you need to know that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. And she had no idea that that cupboard was full of a secret sin that I had not dealt with, that I had not told people about.

And it was eating away at me because it was secret, and nobody knew about it, and it was the darkness. And I had another friend in that moment proclaim Romans 8, 1 and 2 to me.

He said, Jordan, you need to know there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus our Lord. The spirit of life has set us free in Christ Jesus from sin and death.

[18:52] And you need to know that. And there was this moment where all of a sudden the chains of sin were broken for me. It wasn't that my friends said anything new.

It's just that they took the good old scriptures and they spoke them into a particular context of my life in order to build me up. The living God spoke to me.

And I like the way Anthony Thistleton describes it. He says, To bring home the truth of the gospel in such a way that the hearer stands under the verdict of the cross.

So we should focus on prophecy because it does exactly that. It proclaims God's good news in an intelligible way to our brother and sister.

Now, Paul gives many reasons why this is important.

[20:01] But we're not going to go into a whole lot of them here. But one of them that I want us to look at in particular is look at verses 2 and 3 with me.

For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but speaks to God. For no one understands him but he utters mysteries in the spirit.

On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. So the prophetic voice is dominant in the church.

It has the greater capacity to build up the church. So that's the why. We gather together why to build up the church. And what?

What do the gifts of prophecy and tongues have to do with? They have to do with building up the church. And prophecy is to be emphasized over tongues for that very reason. Now, the how.

[21 : 03] How do our gatherings relate to other believers? Well, we see this in the final paragraph of our section. And the first point is really, really obvious.

Paul makes it clear. And this is verses 20 to 26 for those of you that are wondering. Paul makes it really clear that believers are meant to be present. Unbelievers are meant to be present in our gatherings together.

Have you ever thought about that? Like, Paul just assumes that people who aren't Christians are going to be in our gatherings. And they're going to be friends with the people in our gatherings. And they're going to be welcomed there. And they're going to be cared for in that place. Paul just assumes it. He doesn't even have to say it. Worship and evangelism in the church are mingled together.

What we do here is not just a fun little family huddle. It's not just doing family private business together. What we do here is public witness to the whole entire world.

[22 : 08] And one of the difficulties, actually, of having architecture like this. I love this building. Not slamming the building. One of the difficulties is that we have these massive walls. And it seems like we're enclosed together.

With no relationship to the outside world. What we should have is just have rows of windows. And lots of doors. So that there's this sense of fluidity.

There's this sense of people can come and go. And there's ebb and flow. People are welcome in this place. And so in verse 20, Paul exhorts the believers.

Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking. But be infants in evil. But in your thinking, be mature. He wants them to be mature because unbelievers are in their midst.

And you've got to be mature because you've got to know what to do in this context. And what to do in this situation. And so he tells us exactly what to do.

[23 : 10] Look at verse 23. He says, When unbelievers come in your midst, they hear you speak in tongues. And they think you're mad. Like, they don't understand what you're saying.

So what ends up happening is because they don't understand what you're saying. They don't know that they need to turn from their sins. They need to repent and turn to the true and living God.

And thus they're not saved. So in a very context where people should hear the good news about God's grace, what ends up happening is they hear tongues, don't understand, don't know how to respond, and they can't turn to the living God.

So Paul says to them, That's not what we're about in this gathering. Because that's not what God is about in the world. God is not about people not understanding.

God is about people being saved. People being able to turn and worship and repent and believe.

And so Paul says, Put the emphasis on prophecy. Prophecy is the God-given means to bring about conviction and conversion.

[24 : 17] Look at verses 24 and 25. But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all.

He is called to account by all. And the secrets of his heart are disclosed by all. And so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

It's through this clear speaking of the truth of God's word into each other's lives on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis that provides the context for unbelievers to have conviction that they are in sin and actually convert and turn to the living God.

And so we see at the end of this passage that this whole discussion in 1 Corinthians 12 is not just about us. It's not just about the church building itself up.

It's also about those who do not yet believe. God wants them to turn. God's heart is for those people. And he has ordained it in all of his wisdom and insight that we, through our spirit-inspired prophetic words, would be the means by which he would affect the miracle of salvation for people.

[25 : 36] As we speak, and spirit comes with power upon people. And so brothers and sisters, I urge you, by all means, prophesy.

By all means, build up the church of the living God. By all means, speak the truth of God to each other. We want worshipers.

We want people who come in to turn and worship the true and living God. And know that God is in our midst. That's what we're on about when we gather.
May this be so. In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.