

1 Corinthians 14:1-25 PM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 May 2024

Preacher: Rev. Ben Roberts

[0:00] Well, hello, my name is Ben Roberts, if I don't know you, and I just want to clear something up right from the start, which is that we haven't heard any tongues yet this evening. Those are just weird accents.

This is not the same thing. Not a tongue. We'll see if Aaron lets me preach again. And it's good to start with a joke, but I have to start by saying that many of us have had some real difficulty around some of the things in this passage.

Perhaps particularly we've seen it misused. And I know that personally. So as a baby Christian right out of the gate, my first steps of faith were in a Reformed charismatic church, which is an interesting combination.

And at 17, I did a gap year between university and high school at a Pentecostal church. And I saw God do wonderful things there.

But in the years following, I saw the founders of both of those denominations that I was a part of, they were exposed for things that were illegal and ungodly and extremely damaging.

[1:10] And so that left me not really knowing what to think. And then after that, I went to Wheaton College. It's near Chicago. And it's the other end of the spectrum. And people joke at Wheaton that people at Wheaton worship the Father, Son, and Holy Bible.

And so they don't know what to do with the Spirit at all. And I spent four years at Wheaton trying to figure out kind of what had come before and how that related to what I was doing there.

And I think this is the irony. The irony is that the Lord's answer to all these questions is actually right here in this passage in 1 Corinthians. And so the very texts that are so often misused are the place that we should be looking.

This is the place that we should look to learn to grow peacefully together in the gospel. So instead of avoiding or kind of just, you know, wishing this passage wasn't in the Bible, actually, we ought to dig into it.

We need to ask questions of it. We need to study and pray and do what Jesus says to do here. And as we do, we ask that the Holy Spirit would help us actually come to see what are the Lord's priorities here?

[2:19] Because they actually run a lot deeper than tongues and prophecy. And this chapter is showing us a lot about, very practically, how to love each other.

In this chapter, it shows us how we practice love, how we build each other up with clarity and organization as a church. And any gifts that the Spirit gives us serve the same exact purpose. He gives us gifts so that we can build each other up. So this chapter reframes what is spectacular. We might think that tongues sound pretty spectacular. The Corinthians certainly did. But this chapter is saying it's not what's flashy. That's not what counts. The thing that's spectacular to God is this really simple, disciplined commitment to build up the person that's sitting next to you in the pews.

That's spectacular in God's eyes. Okay, so we've got three points. The first point is building up. The second point is speaking up. And the third point is speaking out.

[3:25] Okay, building up. So it'd be great if you opened your Bible. So chapter 14, verse 1. That's a good place to start. It says, Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

Do both. Pursue and desire. Now, chapter 13 defined love. You remember that last week. So defined love.

Now we have to pursue that love. Pursue is the same Greek word as persecute. Don't you just love that? I love that. So we're supposed to chase after love.

We're supposed to hunt it. Not to do harm. But to keep it in our sight. Always running after love. To do others good. So before Paul met Christ, you remember he persecuted Jesus' followers. Now, he says, persecute or pursue love as you build up Jesus' followers. This beautiful reversal happening in Paul's life itself. And this is because, as we know from last week, without love, our grand words, our really long sermons, our sacrifices, our gifts, all of that is nothing without love. [4 : 39] And so if we want to achieve anything or build anything, love has to govern what we do. It has to govern our life together. So we take our money and our time and our words and our deeds and our spiritual gifts, too, and we enlist them in this chase that we're on after love.

We desire spiritual gifts. We desire them. But we desire them in order to love better and better and better. So the issue here, as you saw, the issue in Corinth is tongues and disordered worship. This is all happening. But the main point here is actually how we love. How do we pursue love together? How do we use our gifts to serve? Now, I don't know how you think about love. I think commonly, maybe in movies or in books, we think about love as just kind of like letting go. Like you just kind of have to let go of caution, throw caution to the wind, give in to your desires, and that's kind of what love is like.

But Christian love is very different than that. Paul uses the image here of building to describe love. Building. So look at verse 3.

[5 : 48] The reason Paul recommends prophecy above tongues is because it brings up building. Encouragement and consolation. All right, verse 5.

He says, so that the church may be built up. Verse 12. Strive to excel in building up the church. Verse 26. Let all be done for building up.

So we pursue love by building. Have you ever built anything before? Raise your hand. It's kind of like making disciples, right? Have you built something before?

That's good. I love building stuff. Building demands dedication and discipline, doesn't it? If you're going to build something big. You've got a plan. You've got to organize. You've got to get all your tools.

When I was young, I built a fort. And it was in the bushes. It was in the back corner of our property. And we had a barn. It was kind of a little bit rural.

[6 : 48] So I found any scrap wood I could find. Pieces of metal. Nails. I had no plan. And it ended up that the fort was just miserable. It was totally a shack.

And I was telling you. My wife said this is her favorite part about the fort. Is that it didn't have a door. It just had like a hole. Like I thought in my mind. Like there's going to be a trap door in the roof. It's going to be awesome. But it was like a hole in the roof. And it was totally non-functional. The floor was dirt. It smelled like mildew. And I could barely fit in it.

None of my friends wanted to go in it with me. Rats and mice loved being in there. Which was not great. But the really ironic thing is that that's the fort that I built for myself.

But about 20 feet away my dad had built me a tree house. And it was like the envy of the neighborhood. He made an actual blueprint.

[7 : 46] He would spend summer evenings. He would bring a chair out into the yard. Set the chair out. Get out a sketchbook. And he would like draft. Like a draftsman. Like plans for the tree house. And then he bought lumber.

And everything he needed. And he spent more than a year building it. And it was a work of art. And like everyone in the neighborhood would come to play in the tree house. And it was a work of love. For us as children.

And so. When we're called to build up. That's what we're called to do. We're called to build like that. We're called to build the tree house. You could call my fort fort feelings.

That's what I would call it. Right? It was impulsive. It was childish. It was self-centered. I nailed together whatever I wanted. I had no idea what I was doing. It was terrible. But the tree house that Paul is talking about here.

The tree house that my dad built. It's like what Paul talks about in chapter 3. Talks about the church being like a cathedral. He said. It's like a wise master builder.

[8 : 45] Building on the foundation of Christ. And he's building a building that is so amazing. That it's going to survive a fire. And it's going to come out stronger. And that actually we're all working.

We're all part of this. We're all strengthening the building. We're all. In chapter 12 it says actually we're like a body. We're interdependent. We're alive. The strong are caring for the weak. We're all

playing our part. Everyone's using what they have.

They're building, building, building. And all of that actually requires love. A lot of love. We practice together through humility. We have to be organized. We have to share the same plans.

We have the gospel in front of us. We have the word of God. The Bible in front of us. We have the same architect. We have Jesus Christ. He's telling us how to build. And as we do it.

We're all working on communicating together. We're listening to each other. Right? We're communicating. This is what we're trying to do. And I guess the point that I'm trying to make here.

[9 : 42] If you've gotten lost. Is that we're disciplining ourselves in that work of building. Right? It's not just. It's not just what I want. We're serving the Lord and his project.

If we're all just building our own little forts. Instead of God's church. We're fostering disorder and division and dysfunction. And when we come together. It's a disaster. And that's what's happened in Corinth. So when we come together.

It always reveals what our priority is. And in Corinth. Their priority was just promoting themselves. Looking good. And it caused damage and disorder. And we've seen how this has been really deadly.

When they gather around the Lord's Supper. It's been terrible. And here the disorder in their service. Is also around how they're using tongues. Tongues. And it's taking the center stage over everything else.

So in Corinth. How they're using tongues. It's brought the building project to a complete halt. That there's no building happening. In these tongues. It seems they're not human languages.

[10 : 44] They're perhaps angelic. Paul says. They're not understood by anybody. In the gathering. The tongues. Paul says. They speak not to men. But to God. And the result is that.

Some of them are only building themselves up. He says. They're building forts. That's the way we would put it. Right? Everyone else is completely lost. They have no idea what's going on. The gatherings were chaotic.

And competitive. And a few people were kind of doing their thing. It's because of the way. That they're practicing tongues. They're lacking common understanding. So this is in verses 6 to 12. If you look there. Paul gives all these fantastic. Kind of analogies. He says. It's like trying to sing a song. Without the melody. Just random notes. He says. It's like trying to command a bunch of troops. With random horn blasts.

They're not going to listen. It's like trying to communicate. Without speaking the same language as someone. You've done that before. Right? You've tried to like. Hand mime with someone. In a different language.

[11 : 41] You have no idea. What's going on. His point here. Is that all of this. All these tongues. Are a noise. That doesn't accomplish anything. For the gathering. And here we learn something fundamental.

That our worship. When we're here together. It's not just a bunch of us. Kind of in the same room. At the same time. It's actually communal. We're doing this together.

Sometimes with little kids. They talk about. If they know how to collaborative play. Or they're doing parallel play. Does anyone know what I'm talking about here? Like parallel play. Is when they're just like playing. They're just next to each other.

They're in the same room. Just playing. Collaborative play. Is like when they're handing each other blocks. And they're actually doing it together. That's what we're doing in worship here. We're actually doing something together here. We want to be able to say amen.

When something's happening. We want to be able to know. What we're praying. And what we're singing. And what the preacher is talking about. And we want to understand. What God is saying. To his people. So that we can.

[12 : 39] Follow him together. And so. I can. I can pray at home. In whatever language I want. Paul even talks about it in Romans. He says that sometimes he groans.

It's deeper than words. And that the spirit is involved in him interceding. That we can do that. That's great. But that's not why we're here. We don't come here as individuals.

To just kind of consume some spiritual goods. And then. Go home. We're here to build. You're here to build. You're here to share.

What God is doing. With everyone else. We're here to love. And learn. And encourage. And listen. And serve. And so that's the heart of it. Love demands. That we are in this building project.

Trying to build each other up. And building requires that we understand. What is going on. And to understand. It has to be clear. And in a language we all understand.

[13:37] Okay. Does that. Are you guys all with me? Yeah. Slow nod. Okay. So. That was point one.

Don't worry. The points get progressively shorter. Let's talk about tongues and prophecy. This gets after it.

So. I want to start by saying this. The Lord that we serve. Is alive. Jesus is alive. His spirit dwells in us.

His spirit dwells here. He's doing things. And often. Jesus' work. Is surprising. And delightful. And challenging.

And one of the things about. What the Lord is doing. Is that he's giving gifts. He's giving gifts in his time. In his way. As he chooses. And so. Not all Christians.

[14:35] Can expect all gifts. At all times. There's no spiritual gift. That everyone has to have. God gives the gifts. As he wills. For our common good. And Paul says.

That we should want. Any gift. That God wants to give us. Which is great. Makes sense. Doesn't it? And we want those gifts. So we can take them. And then. Submit them to love.

And build other people up. That's why we should want gifts. Is to build up other people. People. And so. This paints a picture. Where God is in charge. Of organizing. How he gives gifts to people. And to his church.

He says. You're in charge. Of organizing yourselves. For love. God gives the gifts. We take the gifts. And organize ourselves. To love each other. And build each other up. So our job in this. Is not to. You know. Decide who gets the gifts. Or why. Or when. Our job is discernment. And care for each other. How can we honor. What the Lord has given us. Together. Together. Okay.

[15:35] Tongues. Let's talk about tongues. So Paul says. There are various kinds of tongues. Both foreign. Foreign human languages. And angelic. Unknown languages. Both types appear.

In the New Testament. These tongues can be controlled. So that means that believers. Can choose. Not to speak them. That's what he's saying here. He's saying. In the church gathering. It's best. For them not to be used. Except. When the tongue speaker. Can interpret. What it is that they're saying. So if it's. If there's not an interpretation. The person should not be.

Speaking in tongues. In the gathering. Tongues are not. The evidence. Of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You might have. Heard this before. It's not the evidence. Paul. Says in verse five. He'd be really happy.

If all the Corinthians. Spoke in tongues. Which means. Ironically. That not all of them do. And the reason. That not all of them do. Is because it's not up to them. It's up to the Lord. The Lord gives gifts.

[16:28] Jesus. So remember. The mark of the spirit. We learned this in chapter 12. The mark of the spirit. The. How we know. That the spirit. Of God. Is within someone. Is that they confess.

That Jesus is Lord. Not just saying those words. But living a life. Of trust. In Jesus. And it's the spirit. Who opens our eyes. To see Jesus. And so that's.

In a sense. The first and greatest gift. Of all. That the spirit. Gives us. Okay. So verses 13 to 19. If you look down there. They describe. Tongues. As a kind of heart worship.

So it's. Singing. Or kind of. Internal singing. Or prayer. It's a spiritual expression. To God. That is not really. Understood mentally. And this doesn't mean.

That they're unreal. But it does mean. That they're not. An end in themselves. So he. He talks about. How tongues will cease. He also says. That he speaks in tongues. More than all of them.

[17:22] But not in church. In church. He says. It won't build other people up. So I'm not going to do it. And you can just imagine. What the Corinthians. Might have been doing here.

I mean. You've got a bunch of proud. And puffed up people. And they're just. Maybe. They're kind of. Maybe just dominating. Being attention hogs. Through all this. Unintelligible. Singing and speech.

And there's all these other people. That have no idea. What's going on. But what. So we can see. How it's a problem. But what's interesting. Here is that. Even in private. Paul says.

That tongues. Should be. Paired with this. Desire to understand. And I think. This is the principle. That love. Demands articulation. Love demands.

Articulation. So. My family. Hopefully. They know. Hopefully. I think that they know. That I love them. I think they know. But they know it. But. Yeah.

[18:17] I've got a kid out there. So maybe she. I don't know. I think she knows. She knows. I'm embarrassing her. They know better. If I use words. Right.

Like. I could guess. Whether they know or not. But they know it better. If I use words. And when I take the time. To use words. To tell my family. That I love them. I actually understand it better too. I have to articulate. My love. What it. Well why. How. What does it mean. And this is kind of what Paul is talking about here. That we need to frame our feelings for Christ.

With the knowledge about Christ. So that our hearts and our minds can be fruitful together. It's good to say that we're more. We are more than just minds.

Right. Sometimes we get locked in our heads. We want to love God with what we feel. And desire. And do. But. We are also transformed by the renewing of our minds.

[19:13] Paul talks about that. Right. So. That means that God builds us. Through understanding. We need to understand. To grow. I've known many Christians over the years.

That have said something like this to me. I was sitting and reading my Bible. I was praying. All of a sudden I was speaking in tongues. I believe that it's possible that this is the gift that Paul is speaking of here.

I don't know. I don't know. I know there's been sustained disagreement around this. Between Christians. But I think this is why Paul's advice is really helpful here.

That we pursue love. That we seek order when we're together. And that we work to build understanding. Both in the gathering and in our own lives and minds. So we always pursue prayer and praise and thanksgiving with our minds.

No matter how else we're praying. And that builds a prayer life for us that's fruitful. Both for our hearts. But also for other people. Because we're practicing articulating things to God in prayer.

[20:16] So. We pray that God would give us gifts. That would more directly build the body. And. Generally the best way to love other people.

And build them up. Is not to use tongues. When we come together in a gathering. And in this we pursue love. You guys still with me? Aaron's with me.

Okay. Now we've got to do prophecy. Okay. Prophecy is God speaking through a person to his people. So. Dr. Packer. He. I found this really helpful. He says.

Prophecy is forth telling. More than foretelling. So it's not primarily about future events. That's sometimes how we think of prophecy. But it's God speaking forth his purpose.

To his people within the present. He's calling us to hear and obey. That's what prophecy does. And we see it in a lot of different ways across the Bible. So. If you've read the Bible. You see.

[21:15] Sermons. Dreams. Revelations. Symbolic actions. Crazy symbolic actions. If you read Ezekiel. Prophecy is also how the Bible came to be.

So it's. So the Bible is God's word written. Right? Well it's God's word coming through prophets. Written down and recorded. First through the Old Testament prophets. And then through the New Testament apostles.

That select group. That Jesus. Directly taught. So. So Paul tells the Corinthians. To seek prophecy. More than tongues. And the reason is that he wants them.

To listen to God's word together. So the tongues are a gift from God. But they're using that gift. To speak over. Or cover over God's word. So they're filling the room.

Essentially when they worship. With so much noise. That God's voice can't be heard. He says in verse 20. Don't think like children. Children are really noisy.

[22:18] You guys notice that? My house is noisy. We're all talking at the same time. And the reason that kids are noisy.

I think is because they're excited. Definitely. But also they're a little bit self-absorbed. Right? You know. We know this. Right? And growing up.

Growing up and becoming mature. Is actually taming your voice. And listening to other people. Building together. And when we prioritize God's word.

In the church. We are built up. And encouraged. And consoled. That's what verse 3 talks about. We are instructed. That's what verse 19 says. We're convicted.

We're converted. We're led to worship. Our hearts are laid bare. God's presence becomes apparent. In our gathering. This is what happens. When God's word is lifted up. Within the church.

Paul commends them to weigh prophecy.

[23 : 17] You see that in verse 29. And in other letters too. He clearly says. That prophets need to submit. To apostles. He says that in verse 37. And so this means. That the prophets in Corinth.

Whatever it is that they're doing. They're not speaking for God. As it were. Not the same way. That the Old Testament prophets. Or the apostles do. Their speech stands under.

An established authority. Which we know. Call scripture. One of the really interesting things. About prophecy. Is that Paul says. This gift can be. It can be given.

To any Christian person. He uses the word all. All over the place. And it's described. In both women and men. In the New Testament. It's given. Sometimes people that preach.

Sometimes those that don't. And whatever this looked like. In Corinth. Honestly. I really. I have. I really don't know. Aaron will. Aaron will tell you. Next week. The rest of the chapter.

[24 : 12] Talks a little bit more. About the ordering. But whatever they were doing together. When they were prophesying. What's really clear here. Is this principle of authority.

That prophecy stands under. The prophets. Capital right. Stands under scripture. And so that's what we do as well. God has spoken. And he still speaks.

Through the Bible. Because the Bible. Was generated by the spirits. Prophetic gifting. And it's still. Spiritually energized. And it's. Encouraging.

And comforting. And convicting. And teaching us. God's will. And so. I think we should be really expectant. About this. Whenever we open. God's word. So when we preach.

Or teach. Or when we're studying it. On our own. Or we're sharing it. With someone else. When we're facing. Something difficult. And a piece of scripture. Pops into our mind. Or someone is telling us.

[25 : 07] What's going on. And we say. I'm thinking of this. I'm thinking of this scripture. I think that's God. Speaking prophetically. Using his word. And God surely speaks.

In many diverse. Wonderful ways. Through his people. But he's spoken. Perfectly. And authoritatively. And clearly in scripture. And so that's how we test. Everything that is said together. And it's where we rest.

So. This is the heart of Paul's exhortation. Build each other up. As we share. And listen. As we listen. As a community. And in this.

We pursue love. Okay. That's the second point. Don't worry. They get shorter. One more page. This is just. I just want to finish up.

By giving you one thought. To go out with. This is speaking out. My final point. Verses 20 to 25. So the way. That we end up behaving.

[26 : 06] When we get together. Directly affects our witness. That's what Paul is saying. In these last verses. So how we speak here. Affects what people hear.

Out there. Or when they come to visit. And this is. Really the most exciting part. Of the building project. Because we're building. Metaphorically. We're all building each other up. In different ways. But we're also building.

Literally. God is adding new people. To his body. And these verses. Give a warning. That we could behave together. In such a way. That our use of spiritual gifts.

Is actually driving people. Away from the church. So in the Old Testament. God judges people. By using speech. That they don't understand. And when our practices in church.

Are unintelligible to outsiders. It works as judgment. Against them actually. So Paul is very blunt here. To carry on being chaotic. And unintelligible. Makes our neighbors think we're crazy.

[27 : 02] It makes them think. They already think we're crazy. But this could make it worse. Right. They could miss Christ. In the gospel. So. When we come together. How we do this together. How we worship together.

It's not about our own needs. It's about seeking. To build other people up. And we should have that in mind. This idea of welcome. And inclusion. And encouraging people. That are new.

Looking out for them. And speaking with them. As we do that. The word of God. Has a chance to work. In our hearts. And in our community. So.

Let's pursue love together. Let's desire more and more. Spiritual things. In order that we could use. Our gifts effectively. And build this cathedral together. Submitting our lives to Christ.

Amen. And then. Thank you. And again. Change that sword. The answer. And wife.wig.

[27 : 58] And live my life. I can stand there. Wait a second. I'm coming down. That's again. I'm coming down. retrospective. I can't stand there. I can stand there. I can stand there. I can stand there. That's fine.

I can stand there. And even if you do that. Are you happy? That's fine. I can stand there. I can stand there. I can stand there. I can stand here.