LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 14

Spiritual gifts, decently and in order

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

We're back with our study in 1 Corinthians. We're in chapter 14. So open your Bible there, please, as we get ready to tackle these verses. We might have a slightly longer study for this session because we're going to cover the entire chapter. It's all part of really the same theme that Paul is giving.

And just a couple of things going into chapter 14. Remember that chapter 14 comes directly on the heels of chapter 13 where Paul has exhorted the church in Corinth about their need to love one another. Spiritual gifts are fine, but do not elevate or emphasize them above love. And so now that he has established that foundation of love and basically told them in the last chapter, listen, if you exercise all these spiritual gifts, but have not love and you don't love each other, you're nothing. You are literally nothing.

And what you've done is for no good. Those were heavy duty statements, but Paul made them. He made his point, laid that foundation. Now we're going to move on and we're going to talk about the exercise of spiritual gifts. What we learn from reading this chapter is that the Corinthians were into verbal gifts like prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, and speaking in tongues.

They loved it. In fact, they elevated it to the place of some kind of superior spirituality. That's the best we can tell from the way Paul deals with it in this chapter. I need to prepare you also for something. Remember that this letter is written not to an individual, but to a church.

So in this chapter, Paul is going to address the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church. However, he will make statements that apply to the usage of some spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues in the private usage area. And I'll talk to you about those when we come to them, and I'll show you how he's differentiating the usage of that gift between public and private usage. So let's go through and we're going to read. I think I'm going to read a good portion of this for starters, then we'll pray, and then we'll come back and we'll get through the whole chapter.

Verse one, pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God. For no one, excuse me, 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. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets so that the church may be built up. We're going to stop there. We will get through the whole chapter, but I think we better pray. Father, open our hearts, open our spiritual ears, open our spiritual eyes.

Help us to see you in this and help us to gain a heart of wisdom. We ask God for the ability to have discernment in understanding. Lord, give it to us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, in this first section of this chapter, Paul begins by saying, pursue love.

That's what chapter 13 was all about. And that's what he wanted for them to focus on above all else. Pursue love. Now, at the same time, he did not say, so just kind of chill on the spiritual gift thing and just pursue love. He didn't say that.

He said pursue love and still earnestly desire spiritual gifts. So he tells them to, yeah, spiritual gifts, wonderful. Go for it, but make sure that you're focusing on spiritual gifts that aren't just meant to make you look spiritual or to make you impressive in front of other people, but pursue spiritual gifts that are going to build up the church, because that is the usage of gifts in love. And that's why he says, if you're going to pursue a spiritual gift, pursue one like prophecy. Because if someone speaks for the Lord, which is what prophecy is, that's a benefit to the entire body of Christ, right?

He goes on to say in verse two, that the one who speaks in a tongue, in other words, who speaks in a supernatural and unknown language to the speaker and presumably to everybody else in the room, he says, that person speaks not to men, but to God, okay? Very important. Tongues is not a message for men. They can benefit from hearing what is being said in tongues, but it's not for them specifically. It is spoken to God.

Listen, tongues is praise. It's glorifying God. In Acts chapter two, when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples, what did the pilgrims hear those disciples saying in their own native languages? What did they hear? It says they heard them praising God, speaking of the glory of God.

They were glorifying and praising God. It's kind of like the Psalms, if you will, as if someone were reading the Psalms, you know, great are you Lord God of the universe, creator of heaven and earth, things like that. That's what is being said, magnifying God. And that's why Paul says here, one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God. The reason I point this out is because in a lot of Pentecostal churches today, and I know this because I've been there, there are messages that are given in a tongue, a supernatural tongue, and then someone will interpret supposedly that message.

And it's a message to the body of Christ. That's not an interpretation of tongues. What that person is doing is they're prophesying. They're giving a prophecy in the name of an interpretation. But an interpretation of tongues is always going to be praise when it is interpreted for the body.

We're going to see this a little bit later in the chapter. So hang on, if you disagree, I'll have some more evidence for you. Notice that Paul goes on there in the end of verse two and says that the person who speaks in tongues, he utters mysteries in the spirit. Now, the reason he calls them mysteries is just because they're unknown. You can't understand him, right?

It's not mysteries from the standpoint of things that we don't really have, like they're extra biblical or no, no, no. Mystery simply means we don't understand what he's saying because it's not our native language. Verse three, on the other hand, the one who prophesies, which again is giving a message from God, he says that person speaks to people for what? Their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. So you learn right there what every prophecy should include.

I mean, not all of these necessarily, but it should either be something that builds up, right? Not tears down, but builds up. It encourages and it consoles or it consoles. These are what prophecies include. Now, he goes on once again to compare these two gifts to say in verse four, the one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, okay?

And the reason, he's not saying that that person is being selfish. I've heard people say that. It's selfish to speak in tongues. All you care about is building up yourself. No, he's saying that there is an edifying element to having the gift and using it.

And speaking in tongues is encouraging. It's edifying, right? To simply allow the Holy Spirit to have that control of my tongue and so forth. But that's not really good for the church, is it? If I focus on spiritual gifts that only edify me in the church, then I've come there just to kind of for myself.

But I should be coming to church for others to build them up, to encourage them and so forth. And so, he says the one who prophesies... builds up the church. That's consistent with love, what he's been talking about in the previous chapter. Now, he says, verse five, I want you all to speak in tongues.

He's basically saying, I'd love it if you all spoke in tongues. I don't have a problem with speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is not a bad thing, but he says even more, I would rather have you prophesy because the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues in the church, right? Unless someone interprets so that the church may be built up. You have to understand every comment Paul is making about these two spiritual gifts, prophecy and tongues are in conjunction with the church.

Okay? If you don't see it that way, you're going to come to conclusions that are wrong. To simply say that someone who speaks in tongues is inferior to someone who prophesies is not true unless you understand it in the context of what is needed to build up the church. Okay? Now let's keep reading.

Verse six, now brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge that or prophecy or teaching? If even lifeless instruments such as the flute or the harp do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? Just using an example there. And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? Bugles were used even back then to rally the troops for battle.

But if somebody doesn't give any sort of a distinct sound on the bugle, they're going to go, what was that all about? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, and that would be the gift of tongues minus an interpretation, right? How will anyone know what is said? In other words, how will that build them up? How will that encourage them?

Just to hear you ramble on in a language they don't understand, you know, how's that going to be good? For you will be speaking into the air as far as they're concerned. He goes on to say, whoops, two pages there. There are doubtless many different languages in the world and none is without meaning. But if I do not know the meaning of the language, which I wouldn't if someone speaking in tongues, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker, a foreigner to me.

So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. He says, if you want spiritual gifts, wonderful. Focus on ones that build up the body of Christ. Focus on spiritual gifts when you come together that are going to help people that are going to bless them, encourage them and so forth. Therefore one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.

Now again, he's still talking about life in the church. Okay. For if I pray in a tongue, listen to this, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. I don't understand even what I'm saying when I speak in tongues. So he says, what am I to do?

I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also. I will sing praise with my spirit. So here he's saying that in tongues you can even sing, but I want you to notice that he says, if I sing praise, remember I told you that tongues is praise. The gift of tongues is praise. I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.

Otherwise if you give thanks with your spirit, and again he's talking about the gift of tongues, but he refers to it as giving thanks. There's that idea again of praise, giving thanks with how? With your spirit. He says, if I give thanks, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say amen to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? In other words, you're giving thanks well enough.

That's great. That's all good. But he doesn't know that. He doesn't know what you're saying. So think about benefiting him.

Think about loving him, right? And that's what he goes on to say in verse 17, for you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless in church, that is key. You might highlight or underline that.

In church, I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others. And by the way, when we say instruct, that refers to teaching because teaching is instruction. So what he's saying is nevertheless in church, I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to teach others than 10 thousand words in a tongue. So this is an important statement. What is, what should be the focus of our church services?

Speaking in tongues? No. Teaching. Instruction. Paul says, again, I would rather speak five words of instruction than 10 thousand words in a language you don't understand.

Okay. This is really telling us what should be the priority of our coming together as the body of Christ. I think personally that what Paul is saying is so important that we understand that teaching is to be the priority of our church services. Verse 20, brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil.

That's fine. If you're going to be an infant in anything, make sure it's in evil, but in your thinking, your rational working through of these issues, he says, be mature in the law. It is written by people of strange

tongues and by the lips of foreigners. Will I speak to this people? And even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.

Thus tongues are assigned not for believers, but for unbelievers. Okay. Tongues in a, and again, he's still talking about in the church service. If someone speaks in tongues, that is going to get the attention of an unbeliever, but it's really not going to function to help a believer in any way, unless there's an interpretation. You get the impression here that what was happening in the Corinthian church is what is also happening in a lot of Pentecostal churches today.

And that is during the worship time, everybody's just speaking in tongues and there's no interpretation. And they're, they're, in fact, they're being encouraged. Let's just all speak in tongues now. And, and, oh dear. I think that's what was happening in the Corinthian church.

And Paul is essentially rebuking them here and saying, it's not for you. This is not for believers. If tongues is used in a church service, it's for unbelievers to get their attention and, and to draw them to the gospel, to get them to think something supernatural is going on here, you know? So of course, not everybody's going to say that, but hopefully for those that are truly seeking the Lord, they will recognize it as a supernatural thing. He says, they're assigned not for believers, but for unbelievers.

Okay. Well, prophecy is assigned not for unbelievers, but for believers. Prophecy is for the church. Okay. For believers.

If therefore the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, which I think was happening in their church and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you're out of your minds because you're all speaking in tongues and there's no interpretation. There's nothing given that's going to, you know, be beneficial to the church and they're thinking, well, what is this all about? These guys come together and they speak in languages that nobody understands. And that's really all that happened in church today. It was crazy.

It was weird. But if all prophesy verse 24 and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all. He is called to account by all. The secrets of his heart are disclosed. And so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare, God is really among you.

As he hears, as that person hears God speaking to his people, God speaking to his church, he's going to be convicted and he's going to fall to his knees and say, God is really among you. All right. So now Paul in the latter part of this chapter is going to talk about keeping things in order because the Corinthian church

was out of order. Unfortunately, a lot of churches today are the same, out of order. So he says, what then brothers, when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, tongue or an interpretation.

Let all things be done for building up. We're not getting up in church and saying something or doing something for me. It should be for you, right? Let it be 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 so that there would be something beneficial to it.

But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church, listen to this, and speak to himself and to God. In other words, let that usage of the gift of tongues be private, okay? This is where he starts talking about private usage of these gifts. And so what we learn from this is that this is something that someone who has the gift of tongues can do at home, just between them and the Lord. They can pray, they can sing with their spirit in tongues, and yeah, they're not going to know what they're saying unless they interpret, but there is an edification process that takes place.

As Paul said earlier, the one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself. That's not a bad thing, and we can do it privately. And Paul says right here, if you're in church and you don't know for sure that someone has the gift of interpretation, then don't speak in tongues. Don't do it, right? That's what he's saying.

Now he moves on to prophecy in 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. He's just talking about order here. Don't talk over the top of each other.

Wait your turn. Let things be done in order. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. Listen to this. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

What does that mean? It means that when somebody has a prophetic message for the church, they can hold it. It's not some—how do I describe this? It's not something that comes over them that they just have to start speaking, like it's bubbling over like a teapot bubbling over. When someone receives a message from the Lord, they can wait.

I've talked to people who've received a message from the Lord and waited days before they actually gave it. So he's saying, if someone else is talking, if someone else is teaching, if someone else is singing a song, if we're all singing a song, you don't have to interrupt what's going on to give your prophetic message. You can wait until the proper time. It should be done in order. Why?

The reason is given in verse 33. Look with me there. For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. Now in the NIV, this verse says, for God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. And that's essentially what that word means that is translated here in the ESV confusion.

God is not a God of disorder, confusion, chaos. He's a God of order. And do you know what order brings? Peace. Have you ever had a room in your home that was just super messy?

Maybe it was like your bedroom when you were growing up and you hate cleaning up your bedroom. Maybe your parents finally got on you and said, Hey, you don't leave this room until it's picked up. And so you finally got to it. You picked it up, you cleaned it up, you got it in order. And wasn't it nice?

Wasn't it peaceful to be in a room where everything is where it should be? It's the same in the church. When there is order, there is peace. When there is disorder, there's chaos. Okay?

Very important thing to remember. Verse 33 is truly critical. It goes on saying, 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, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Now, we need to understand what Paul's saying here.

The women were actually, again, the theme here or the context is disorder. The context is not women speaking in church. It's disorder. The women were asking questions of their husbands out loud in church. And it's very possible that the early church adopted the same form of seating that was practiced in Jewish synagogues.

And that was for the women to sit in one area and the men to sit in another. And if that was the case, if the women were separated from the men, you can imagine how distracting it would have been for a woman to yell out to her husband, what does he mean by that? Or what did he say? We couldn't hear him back here or something like that. And that's why Paul says that if there's anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home.

So this was a matter of order, okay? And keeping things peaceful and not chaotic. Verse 36, 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.

You'll see how spiritual someone is if they're in agreement. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy and do not forbid speaking in tongues. And this last verse is so critical. It's the key verse to the chapter, but all things should be done decently and in order.

So spiritual gifts can take place in the church. They should be done in order. Unfortunately, in many churches where spiritual gifts are embraced and encouraged, things are not done in order. And that's sad because it's a clear violation of God's word. And it's really unfortunate.

It is possible to find a church that believes in spiritual gifts, but is a place of peace and order. I should know. I pastored one for 35 years. This has been a great chapter. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you so much. We thank you for your goodness. We thank you for your love. We thank you, Lord, for the revelation in this chapter of who you are, a God of order, a God of peace, not of confusion and chaos. Lord, help our churches to be in order.

Help us to be in order. And Lord, I pray that we would not despise spiritual gifts, but that we would recognize there's a place for them as we walk in the order of the Spirit. Be with us. Strengthen our hearts. Through the authority of Jesus, we pray.

Amen. you