

Sermon 70: The Proper Function of Corporate Worship: 1 Corinthians 14:1-19

Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-19

- **14:1** "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy..."
- **14:12** "Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church..."
- **14:19-20** "In the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men..."

Introduction:

- **This passage gets to the heart of why we are commanded to gather as a body.**
- **It addresses why we should exercise our spiritual gifts in the body.**
- **By seeing how Paul addresses the use of tongues and prophecy in the church, we can see how he views the church's function in our lives.**
- **The key term in this section is the term οἰκοδομή:**
 - It is a construction term, used to describe how a structure is raised up and built out.
 - In the context of people's lives, it describes how our lives are built up and thoroughly furnished.
 - The word is generally translated "to edify."
- **Our lives are built up and thoroughly furnished out by the proper use of Scripture:**
 - **2 Timothy 3:16-17** "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works..."
 - **Ephesians 4:11-12** "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..."
- **Some logical inferences:**
 - Truth must be accurately communicated.
 - The truth must be understood and embraced.
 - This is the point of Biblical preaching.

Part 1: Three Forms of Communication:

- **Genuine Prophecy:** Direct revelation from God that is understood by the one who is communicating it and to the one receiving the message.
 - Direct revelation from God.
 - It is through a person who understands what he is saying.
 - It is understood by those receiving the message.
 - In principle, this is no different than reading scripture to the church, the only difference would be that the text was transmitted to someone else, written down, and then preserved through copies.
 - This communication is fully authoritative.
 - In principle this is similar to preaching with one significant distinction, the preacher's interpretations or scripture and applications are not infallible, though when they are properly aligned with scripture, they are fully authoritative to the extent that they rightly divide the word of truth.
- **Genuine Tongues:** Direct revelation from God that is unknown to the one giving the message as well as to the ones receiving the message.
 - This is also direct revelation from God.
 - It is through a person who does not understand what he is saying but understands that God is speaking through him.
 - It is not understood by the ones receiving the message, unless it is translated or interpreted, so the one giving the message and the ones receiving the message are built up by the message.
 - In principle, this is similar to preaching in another culture where those hearing the message do not speak the language of the one preaching. Unless the message is translated, it will not build up the listeners.
- **An unknown experience:** Private speech that is unknown to the speaker but directed toward God in private.
 - **We do not know for certain what is being referenced in this example.**
 - Paul used the same Greek term here as in the other places, but the context seems to be slightly different.
 - **One context is public worship while the other seems to be private:**
 - **14:2** "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries..."
 - **14:4** "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself..."
 - **To put it into perspective this third potential example seems to be an extremely empty exercise.**

- **Those who insist on speaking in tongues privately are arguing there is value in God speaking to Himself through a person who does not understand what they are saying.**
- **This violates Paul's encouragement to the church in at least three ways:**
 - Pray with understanding
 - Speak in a way that the church can understand
 - Use your gifts to build up the church, not promote self.
- **This seems to be an emotional experience similar to what was experienced in the pagan contexts they were saved from that would make the speaker feel good, be directed from the emotions to God, but have no life-building quality.**

Part 2: The guiding principle of Christian love: 14:1 "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy..."

- **Exercise your gifts in a way that truly loves the church:**
 - **Speak to the church: 14:2-3** "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort..."
 - **Direct Application:** Speaking to people without understanding on the parts of the speaker and body, is hollow and unloving to the body.
 - **Secondary Applications:**
 - Everything we do in the church should promote doctrinal clarity, so people's lives are more firmly built upon the Scriptures.
 - The purpose of gathering is not to put on a show for God to watch, but rather to build up people by appealing directly to their minds so their hearts will be engaged and they will genuinely worship God.
 - **Speak so they can understand God's word: 14:4-5** "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying..."
 - **Direct Application:** You are wasting people's time when the clear meaning of God's word is clouded by the means used to communicate it.
 - **Secondary Applications:**

- We need to remove the distractions that hinder the direct communication of God's word to the church.
 - Our emotions should not drive our worship, but rather flow out of proper reflection on truth.
- **Realize there are real-life consequences when you do not follow this principle: 14:6-12**
 - **Their time is wasted: 14:6** "What shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?"
 - **What should be communicated is not communicated: 14:8-9** "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air..."
 - **Your zeal needs to be channeled in the right direction: 14:12** "forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church..."
 - **Direct Application:**
 - When people gather, that time is precious and should not be wasted.
 - There are things they need to hear from God, and you are responsible to communicate truth to them in a way they can understand.
 - If they do not hear these truths, it will negatively affect their lives.
 - There are limitations to the channeling of our energy, so we need to prioritize what builds people's lives.
 - Prioritize prophecy.
 - **Secondary Application:**
 - When people gather, that time is precious and should not be wasted.
 - There are things they need to hear from God, and you are responsible to communicate truth to them in a way they can understand.
 - If they do not hear these truths, it will negatively affect their lives.
 - There are limitations to the channeling of our energy, so we need to prioritize what builds people's lives.
 - Prioritize Biblical preaching and teaching.
- **Realize that true worship is not just an emotional experience: 14:13-19**

- **Speaking without understanding is empty if it is done in private or in public: 14:13-15** "Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then?"
- **Any expression of worship without an engaged mind is empty: 14:15-19** "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue..."
- **Direct Applications:**
 - Speaking in tongues in a private setting is empty, because it does not engage your mind.
 - In the corporate setting it is empty if it is not interpreted to you and to the church.
 - Every expression of worship in the church must engage the mind.
- **Secondary Applications:**
 - The reading of scripture and careful exposition must be at the center of our worship.
 - We need to engage the heart through the mind rather than directly through the emotions.
 - We need to think about what we are doing in every expression of worship whether public or private.
- **The most loving thing a faithful pastor can do is faithfully expound the whole counsel of God and call the whole church, including himself to submit to its authority.**
 - **2 Timothy 4:1-2** "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine..."
 - **2 Timothy 2:14-16** "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane

and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness..."

- **Colossians 3:16** "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord..."

Part 2: The guiding principle of spiritual maturity: 4:20-25 "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men..."

- **Have the maturity to understand the true purpose for tongues: 14:21-22**

- **This sign was meant to warn people with an Old Testament background: 14:21** "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people..."
- **It was meant to warn them, because they had hardened themselves against the signs that pointed to Christ:**
 - **14:21** "Yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord..."
 - **Isaiah 28:16** "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste..."
- **It was a sign gift, not a gift given to build up Christians' lives: 14:22** "Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not..."
- **Direct Application:**
 - Realize that the gift of tongues did not primarily serve a function in the church or in private.
 - It was primarily meant to be practiced in a specific context where unbelieving first century Jews would witness the gift being properly practiced and then consider what it meant.
- **Secondary Application:** We need to understand the primary function of any gift we utilize in the church, so it will be used effectively.

- **Have the maturity to understand that prophesy is for believers: 14:22** "But prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe..."

- **There is a clear order:**
 - We must preach the gospel calling people to repentance and faith.
 - We disciple believers.
- **Explanation:**

- **1 Corinthians 2:14** "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned..."
 - **John 16:8** "When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment..."
- **Have the maturity to understand that misusing gifts in the church is detrimental to the church and to evangelism: 14:23** "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"
 - **Direct Application:** The church's testimony is undermined by chaos rather than order.
 - **Secondary Application:**
 - When non-Christians come into a church gathering, there should be something very compelling about that context.
 - They should see order and reverence.
 - They should see people responding to the authoritative preaching of God's word.
- **Have the maturity to understand that prophecy when properly utilized can benefit both the church and the unbeliever: 14:24-25** "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."
 - **Direct Applications:**
 - Prophecy is not given directly for the benefit of unbelievers, because their primary need is to hear the gospel and be called to repent and believe.
 - A proper use of this gift in the church and a healthy response to it proclaims a compelling witness.
 - God word is fully authoritative, and His people humbly submit to it.
 - This is a place where truth is being expounded and everyone needs to hear more.
 - **Secondary Application:**
 - The regular preaching and teaching ministry of the church is not given directly for the benefit of unbelievers, because their primary need is to hear the gospel and be called to repent and believe.
 - A proper use of preaching and teaching in the church and a healthy response to it proclaims a compelling witness.

- God word is fully authoritative, and His people humbly submit to it.
- This is a place where truth is being expounded and everyone needs to hear more.

Final Thoughts: Love and maturity need to shape how we serve in the church.

- **In the immediate context of the Corinthians church:**
 - **Attitude matters:** They were not serving out of love and their selfish motives needed to be exposed and corrected.
 - **A healthy view of the local church:**
 - They should not use the gathering to push their own agendas or build up their own credentials.
 - They needed to serve so others were built up.
 - **A healthy view of worship:** Their worship needed to be orderly, focused, and centered on God's word.
 - **A healthy view of the gifts:** Tongues was a sign gift for unbelievers while prophecy was a gift meant to build people's lives on God's word.
 - **A healthy view of church order:** Unbelievers indirectly benefit from the way that truth is proclaimed and embraced.
- **In the normative life of the local church:**
 - We must minister out of love for others, not self.
 - Our services must be centered on rightly dividing truth, so the body is built up and furnished out by the truth.
 - We must emphasize the ordinary, normative means of building up the body.
 - We must order our services in a way that removes distractions, focuses our attention on the gospel, and create a sense of genuine reverence.