

**10/26/25 Prophecy and the Priority of Edification
1 Corinthians 14:1–19**

Welcome...

On behalf of all the pastors here, Pastor Dan, Adrian, Steve, our intern Steven, and myself, thank you for your encouraging words, kind cards, and generous gifts for Pastor Appreciation Month. We are so blessed to serve as your pastors!

We are returning to our study of 1 Corinthians. Our passage is sandwiched between the beautiful and powerful truths of the Great Love Chapter (1 Corinthians 13) and the equally profound truths of the Great Resurrection Chapter (1 Corinthians 15).

Some may be tempted to skip over chapter 14 especially because at first reading it seems confusing. The apostle Paul explains prophecy and the priority of edification for the church and specifically confronts the use and abuse of the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. So, fasten your seatbelts and be ready to fully engage your minds in a very thought-provoking Bible text this morning.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 14:1-19...

My father was born in Belgium and grew up in Germany; in Belgium he spoke French and of course in Germany he spoke German. My mother was born in Colombia, South America but grew up going to a private French school. My father immigrated to the United States and so did my mother, and they met in a French Club as students at the University of Florida. They got married and had six children.

Growing up in our household, sometimes at the dinner table my parents would want to say something privately to one another. Instead of leaving the room to talk they simply changed languages. My father learned my mother's native tongue, and so the conversation at the table would suddenly switch to Spanish. That worked until their children learned Spanish and could understand what the parents were saying. My mother learned German. So, then if there was a private conversation between my parents, it would be in German. However, two of my sisters learned German and could interpret what Mom and Pop were saying. So, then my parents changed their private language to ... yes, you guessed it, they changed to speaking in French.

My parents succeeded in communicating to one another, but the rest of the family could not understand a word that was being spoken.

What we find in the church in Corinth is a person would speak in another tongue, another language, there would no interpretation and no one else in the church would understand and be edified.

Paul says in verse 4 that person speaking in a tongue (glossa – a foreign language) is only edifying himself, whereas the one speaks the truth of God's Word in the language of the people is edifying the whole body, the local church.

Main point: 1 Corinthians 14:1-19 describes three ways that God calls His people to use their spiritual gifts to promote edification of the church body, not personal glory.

Pursue Love that Edifies the Church in verses 1-5

Present God's Truth So Others Understand It in verses 6-12

Practice Spiritual Gifts with Your Heart and Mind in verses 13-19

That's my prayer, that we pursue love in the exercise of our spiritual gifts, that we prioritize edification and present God's truth in preaching, teaching, counseling and in prayer with the desire that the Bible is understood and helpful for edification, exhortation and consolation.

Before we dive into verse 1, it is important for us to review a bit of church history. Historically, none of the great spiritual movements that occurred in the church, like the Protestant Reformation or the First and Second Great Awakenings, involved speaking in tongues. But when dawn broke on the 20th century, the modern tongues movement was born.

It started in Topeka, Kansas on January 1, 1901. On that day Agnes Ozman, a student at Charles F. Parham's Bethel Bible School, sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Brother W. J. Seymour took this experience to Los Angeles. He established the Azusa Street Mission in L.A. in 1906.

Many church denominations have their spiritual roots in what has come to be known as "the Azusa Street Revival" that took place from 1906 to 1909. Those denominations include nearly all branches of the modern Pentecostal movement and many parts of the Charismatic movements.

Here are some of the main ones that have their roots directly or indirectly in the Azusa Street Revival:

1. Church of God in Christ
2. Assemblies of God
3. The Pentecostal Church
4. International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (founded by Aimee Semple McPherson)
5. The Vineyard Movement
6. Calvary Chapel

In short, the Azusa Street Revival of the early 1900's is often regarded as the birthplace of the modern charismatic movement around the world.

By the way, the terms "Pentecostal" and "charismatic" are not synonymous, but they are closely related. A Pentecostal is a person who believes that the experience of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, is normative; that is, every Christian must, subsequent to conversion, have his own personal Pentecost, at which time they say he receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the evidence of which is the ability to speak in tongues.

A charismatic is one who believes that all the gifts of the Spirit, including the supernatural gifts of tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, healing, and the discernment of spirits, should be operative in the church today in worship (certainly in personal worship but usually in public worship as well). Both Pentecostals and charismatics tend to believe that if you don't speak in tongues, you are not Spirit-filled.

I shared in an earlier sermon how Paula's charismatic Bible study leader encouraged her to stop dating me since he considered us "unequally yoked" since Paula spoke in tongues and I did not. I will share with you part 2 of that story a little later in my sermon.

But let's consider point 1 this morning that we see in verses 1-5:

I. Pursue Love that Edifies the Church

Look at verse 1...

There are two commands in this verse. The first command is to pursue love and the second is to desire earnestly spiritual gifts, especially prophecy.

Notice the order.

Love comes first.

Love is the governing principle for all use of spiritual gifts.

Chapter 13 just reminded us that without love, even the greatest spiritual gifts are nothing but noise.

The Greek verb “to pursue” means to follow, hunt, or chase after with intensity like a hound dog on a fox hunt or a runner in a sprint race to the finish line. Above all else, as Paul emphasized in chapter 13, the Corinthians should pursue love toward one another in how they practice their spiritual gifts. What we learn about love has to guide the way that we exercise our gifts.

One commentator on this passage, Richard Lenski puts it so well he says that what Paul is saying here is that, “spiritual gifts are the hands through which love serves.” Our love should direct our gifts.

Selfishness and lovelessness was by far their greatest problem in the church at Corinth, to which all of their other problems were related in one way or another. The only strong affection many of them had was for themselves. Paul here commands them to pursue love. What does that look like?

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 says, “Love is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own.”

Agape love, unconditional, sacrificial, Christlike love should be the great motivator of every spiritual ministry and of the proper use of every spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are not for self-promotion but for the building up of Christ’s church in love.

So, Paul continues in verse 1 with the second command, “Desire spiritual gifts.” It’s not wrong to want to be used by God—He wants His people to serve through the gifts He’s given. But the motive matters.

Verse 1 says, “desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

Prophesy is a keyword in chapter 14 occurring 7 times (verses 1, 3, 4, 5, 24, 31, 39)

Verse 1 says “Especially that you may prophesy” is in the plural form, indicating not that only individuals should desire to prophesy, but that the whole church should desire that gift to be used in their assembly.

What is the gift of prophecy? The Greek word translated “prophesying” or “prophecy” means to “speak forth” or declare the truth of God. Many people misunderstand the gift of prophecy to be the ability to predict the future. While knowing something about the future may sometimes have been an aspect of the gift of prophecy, it was primarily a gift of proclamation (“forth-telling”), not prediction (“fore-telling”).

Those who prophecy may speak forth God’s word (and in that sense it is similar to preaching), but it differs from preaching and the gift of teaching since the one who speaks isn’t working from a written text; they are not expositing and explaining the Word of God. Those who prophesy in the New Testament don’t proclaim God’s word from a written text but convey what God has revealed to them. The function of delivering immediate, unwritten revelation is no longer needed today since the complete written Scripture is available.

But the theme here in chapter 14 should still be practiced today, and that is the idea that the Word of God, the Bible, is paramount to our edification, our spiritual growth.

Why desire prophecy? Because prophecy builds up the church and helps the church mature in the knowledge of likeness of Christ as we heard Larry read earlier from Ephesians 4:11-13, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Verses 2-3...

The Greek word translated in verse 2 as “a tongue” is glossa. The word is used thirty-three times in the New Testament to mean “language” as in an earthly language that is spoken by some group or nation on this earth. The gift of tongues is the God given supernatural ability to speak in a foreign human language that you have never learned before.

In Acts 2, the gift of tongues is clearly human languages, because people from all over the world hear the apostles “speaking in their own language” (2:6), and “each one” heard them “in their own native language” (2:8). The apostles were declaring the works of God “in our own tongues” (2:11). Those from all different parts of the world heard the apostles speaking in their own languages.

Therefore, the gift of tongues is speaking in a language the speaker has never learned in order to minister to someone who does speak that language. In verse 6 of our text we read, “Now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will it profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?”

According to the apostle Paul, and in agreement with the tongues described in the book of Acts, speaking in tongues is valuable to the one hearing God’s message in his or her own language, but it is useless to everyone else unless it is interpreted/translated.

That was unique about tongues: it is the only gift that needs a corollary spiritual gift to complete its function as a gift. There was a “gift of interpretation of tongues” (that is, the Spirit enabled some to explain what a tongues speaker was saying, even though that person had also not learned that foreign language).

But in Corinth, it seems that this gift of tongues was so exalted, it was so prized, it was considered so valuable, that those who had it, and those who tried to have it, were speaking out, even when no one was there to interpret. What was happening in Acts 2 was NOT happening in Corinth. When the gift of tongues was utilized in Corinth, no one understood what the speaker was saying.

It seems quite clear that tongues in Acts refers to speaking in languages unknown by the speaker, but many Christians think that speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 12–14 refers to speaking in ecstatic utterances instead of in other languages but that does not fit the context for later he states that these tongues can be interpreted.

Look at verse 21...

Here Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11–12. Isaiah was prophesying the Assyrian takeover of the Jewish people. His point was that God had tried to speak in the Hebrew language to call the nation to repent, but when they refused, God brought a people speaking another language; it would be a real human language, but one the Hebrews would not understand as a sign of God’s judgment.

Look at verse 3...

The purpose of prophecy is to build up by edification, to encourage through exhortation, and to comfort through consolation. Spiritual gifts are meant to accomplish something spiritually and practically worthwhile, and are always meant to be of benefit to others,

Notice the three benefits of prophecy.

1. Edification: building up to maturity in Christ by right doctrine ... so there is a strong instruction aspect.

Acts 20:32 — Paul says, “I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.”
→ Paul’s teaching and the Word itself edify believers.

Colossians 3:16 — “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... teaching and admonishing one another.”
→ Mutual instruction among believers leads to spiritual growth.

2. Encouragement: or exhortation... it is an application aspect... putting into practice what you have learned; So, “Here is the truth of God; now obey it” or as Jesus said in John 13:17 “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

3. Consolation: or comfort... to bring a word of consolation that brings joy in the midst of suffering and sorrow

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

We are called to do this for one another: to edify, exhort, and comfort one another with the Word of God. In Romans 15:14 Paul writes, “I am convinced, brethren, that you are able to admonish (*noutheteo*) one another.”

What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? The building up of the body, the spiritual growth of believers, until we reach maturity in Christ.

Paul says in verse 4 “The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.”

There’s the contrast. The purpose of spiritual gifts is not self-edification but church-edification.

Tongues, when not interpreted, build up only the speaker. Prophecy—speaking forth God’s truth in a clear and understandable way—strengthens, encourages, and comforts others.

We can summarize Paul’s point this way: The measure of a spiritual gift is not how it makes me feel, but how it helps others grow in Christ.”

Verse 5 continues...

When Paul writes the words, “but even more” he shows his clear preference for prophecy in the church.

To prophesy is the greater gift for it is speaking in the hearer’s native language and needs no interpreter and thus it has the greater benefit to the church. The goal is not about edifying oneself (as tongues might do, in addition to “elevating” self) but about edifying the body of Christ, for as Paul has said earlier in 12:7 “to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

The deciding factor for Paul at all times was, "Will the church be edified?" If the answer was yes, a spiritual gift's exercise was proper and desirable.

But Paul's point here in verse 5 is that the gift of tongues itself was perfectly valid and valuable when used for the right purpose (14:22). It was misuse of it that brought damage in the church of Corinth.

Ask yourself: When I speak, serve, sing, or teach—am I using the truth of God's Word to bless others or to be seen by others?

Is my goal to build up the church, or to build up my own reputation?

Paul says, "Pursue love." That means we don't just use our gifts; we use them lovingly, intentionally, for the sake of others' spiritual good.

Pursue Love that Edifies the Church. Second:

II. Present God's Truth So Others Understand It

Paul's point is that the church needs to understand what is being said and he will go on to illustrate that with two examples. The first is in verse 6...

Paul uses himself with a possible glance back to his initial ministry in Corinth. He could have come proclaiming his message in the tongue of a language which they did not know but it would have produced only disinterest at best or at worst, confusion and contempt.

Imagine the great Apostle Paul were to come to visit Cornerstone Community Church. We would probably not have enough seats let alone enough parking! He comes into our worship service on the Lord's Day and begins speaking in Koine Greek without any interpretation at all... everyone would be bewildered and frustrated.

Inn our presence we have the greatest theologian in the history of the church, the man who WROTE THE BOOK OF ROMANS! Here at our church service... but we cannot understand his words!

It would be of no value if he did not bring the three things I just gave you: INSTRUCTION, EXHORTATION, and CONSOLATION

Verse 7 -9 is the second illustration...

Musical instruments don't exist to make random sounds; they are intended to actually play music that has melody and meaning. Sounds that are random and chaotic to the mind will never move the heart.

An even more pertinent illustration involves the military bugler. A soldier must always know whether the bugler is sounding retreat or attack.

What one word response would you have for this bugle call? (make the sound) Charge! But how would you respond to this bugle sound? Confusion!

If the bugler is not sure whether he is calling "Retreat!" or "Charge!" you can be sure none of the soldiers will know what to do either. Half of them will rush forward, while the other half will run back! The call must be a clear one if it is to be understood.

Paula and I were outside of Paris staying at an Airbnb closer to the airport. When we got in the morning to take a bus to the airport to catch our flight back home, we realized we were in an Arab neighborhood. When we walked

to the bus station, we did not know which bus would get us to the airport. So we took our best guess, stepped onto the bus, and I asked the driver if this was the bus to the airport. Arab music was playing from the radio, and while the driver spoke French she did not understand or speak English. In fact, it appeared that no one understood our language and we did not understand theirs. But thankfully, an Arab flight attendant saw our predicament and came and affirmed that we were on the right bus.

In verses 9-11, Paul speaks of the variety of known languages in the world, noting that every language has meaning that can be understood when properly heard or interpreted. Verses 9-11...

If I play a flute or a harp without distinct notes, no one recognizes the melody.
If a trumpet gives an unclear sound, the army won't prepare for battle.
If you speak words no one understands, you're just making noise.

The point is simple: For worship to be edifying, it must be intelligible.

Worship isn't meant to be mystical confusion; it's meant to communicate truth. God is a God of revelation—He speaks in His Word to be understood.

Then in verse 12 Paul brings it home...

Paul doesn't rebuke their zeal—he redirects it. Be zealous for what strengthens others not just what makes you feel good!

You see it is possible to be passionate about worship and yet miss the purpose of worship. Emotion, enthusiasm, and experience are not the measure of true spirituality—edification (helping others understand and apply God's Truth and mature in Christ) is the measure.

Whether it's preaching, praying, singing, exhorting, teaching, or consoling, the question is always: Am what I am saying help others understand and apply Scripture, and I helping them understand God better and see Christ more clearly?

Paul reminds us: the goal of worship is not self-expression, but clear expression of God's truth that others can understand and respond to.

Pursue Love that Edifies the Church in verses 1-5

Present God's Truth So Others Understand It in verses 6-12

III. Practice Spiritual Gifts with Your Heart and Mind

The word "therefore" in verse 13 signals that Paul is drawing a conclusion from the analogies he just listed.

Verses 13-17...

A key word that Paul uses is the word edify. Edification, being built up (verse 17), always comes only through the mind and understanding.

When believers come together for both worship and teaching, clear understanding should rule the day. The ultimate goal is the edification of the church. D.A. Carson rightly says, "Edification in the church depends utterly on intelligibility, understanding, coherence."

Paul says in verse 15, “I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind. I will sing with the spirit, but I will also sing with the mind.”

True worship engages the whole person—heart and head, emotion and intellect.

Worship that bypasses the mind may feel spiritual, but it isn’t edifying. 12:2 says, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Paul then gives a remarkable statement in verses 18-19...

What a contrast! Five understandable words that help someone know Christ are more valuable than ten thousand impressive words that no one understands.

Five accurate clear words can change your life forever: “Jesus rose from the dead!”

I was getting my blood drawn on Friday morning and I spoke with the nurse about the blood of Jesus. In the Old testament the blood of bulls and goats sacrificed were a “reminder” of sin, but 1 Peter 1:19 tells us of “the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” paid in full the debt of sin we owe to God, and we need no further sacrifices for sin. Romans 6:23...1 Peter 3:18...

What about you? Have you turned from sin and your own selfish agenda and come to saving faith in Jesus Christ? Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30...

I promised I would tell part 2 of the story of my wife. When she became a Christian she went to a charismatic Bible study where she was told that she must speak in tongues to give evidence that she was filled with the Holy Spirit. With much coaching and much pressure, she was taught to speak in an ecstatic utterance. She never understood what she was saying and no one interpreted it. One day in Bible study with a Navy chaplain, we studied our text today. Suddenly, Paula understood that what she was doing was not a spiritual gift. She will tell you that was the last day she spoke in tongues, and it was the beginning of a journey of incredible spiritual growth in her life as she learned how to study the Bible and be edified by sound teaching.

The test of Spirit-filled worship is not how mystical it feels, but how clear it is. With the help of the Holy Spirit, our goal in teaching, singing, and serving should always be clarity that leads to understanding, that leads to humble adoration of Christ, and faithful obedience to God.

The mature believer values clarity over display—building up others over showing off self.

Paul’s message is simple but profound:

Pursue love—let love govern your use of every gift.

Seek understanding—make truth clear and meaningful.

Practice Spiritual Gifts with your Heart and Your Mind.

Build up the church—use your gifts to strengthen others.

The Holy Spirit never gives gifts to make us performers.

He gives spiritual gifts to make us servants.

Let’s pray...

“Lord, thank You for the gifts You have given to Your church.

Teach us to pursue love above all.

Help us to use our gifts, not for our glory, but for the good of Your people.

May every word we speak and every act we do be for the building up of Your church,
so that Christ would be known and exalted among us.

In His name we pray, Amen.”