

1 Corinthians 14:1-40 Proper Church Protocol

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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This morning we're continuing to work our way through 1 Corinthians. Our recent studies have been a little more topical – we took the things we saw, picked them up, and explored them in-depth. This morning is going to be more like a walking tour - we'll pass through an entire chapter and provide a little commentary as we move along and understand the big idea of how spiritual gifts that God gives ought to be used in the church and how our church services ought to be characterized. But first, one more thought about love.

If you remember, God gives us a detailed description of love in Chapter Thirteen, verses 4-8. We saw eight things that love is not, and seven things that love is. They're things we need to keep coming back to on a regular basis, because the love we find in the Bible isn't the same kind of love we find everywhere else. So, this needs to be one of those heavily marked, noted, and stained pages in our Bibles as we learn, and keep learning what love really is. It's not something that just clicks for most, if any, of us. And so, the very first thing we see in Chapter, after a whole chapter describing love, is an admonition:

14:1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

Pursue love.

Is that shocking to you? It is to me. This section of our Bible is full of surprising statements. Remember the first thing chapter 13 said, in its definition of love? "Love suffers long" or "love is patient" and the do you remember the last thing? "Love...endures all things." And now we're told "Pursue love"?!!? What? I thought love was just something we fall into. I thought love found us. Why am I told to pursue love? Isn't it supposed to come naturally?

No. Lust comes naturally. Affinity, or friendship, having things in common with some people and therefore you like them, that comes naturally. But love? No. According to the Bible love does not always come naturally, it must be pursued.

Think about this: why else would it be God's greatest commandment? That we are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves? If that was so natural, if it came so easily, why would God say it was the most important thing for us to do?

Friends, we have a LOT to reconsider about our understanding our love. We need to pursue it, work at it, reflect on it because the natural tendency in every human heart is to turn in toward ourselves and grow in our selfishness instead of our selflessness. Ask anyone who's been married for several years. Ask any parent. Ask anyone who has walked

with God for more than a year or two, and they will all tell you, there are times when love feels easy, and there are times when love feels hard. Sometimes it's because the other person is making it hard, and sometimes it's just us warring against our own desires and feeling more selfish than giving on any particular day.

But this is where the very next part of the sentence helps us remember the big picture - [and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy](#). We need to remember that we don't have to generate this kind of love all by ourselves. God shows us this love, so we know what it's like, and then He fills us with His Holy Spirit and gives us gifts SO THAT we can demonstrate love toward Him and others.

That's where the Corinthians had blown it, remember? They were even making spiritual gifts about themselves instead of using them to love and serve others. So now, Paul is going to give them some instructions on proper church protocol in an effort to reorient them and get them back on track by showing how the gifts should be used and why prophesy is so much more important in large gatherings.

[2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.](#)

So, it appears that the gift of tongues can take two forms. God can suddenly enable you to speak to men in a language you've never learned, like German, or Arabic, or Swahili – that's what we see in Acts 2 at Pentecost. Or, God can give you the ability to speak to God by praying in a language you've never learned and that you don't even understand. It's not necessary. It's not 'better.' It doesn't mean that somehow those prayers are more special or more likely to be answered, it's just a gift that God chooses to give to some people, at some times, for His own purposes. That's the whole point of 1 Corinthians 12 – the Holy Spirit gives gifts as He sees fit, to whomever He sees fit. Our job is just to be open to receiving them and to earnestly desire the best gifts (1 Cor 12:31). So compare this form of speaking in tongues, with...

[3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.](#)

So, to be clear, the form of tongues we're speaking of here is directed to God, and not toward men. But prophecy is directed toward to men. And there are two forms of prophecy, just like there are two forms of tongues. The first is the form most people think of – the foretelling of events, telling people now about things that are going to come. But that's not all that prophecy is. In fact, the majority of prophecy falls into the second category, which is what we described here – edifying, exhorting, and comforting men.

Sometimes that happens through God revealing what He will do in the future – and that might comfort, or it might exhort or inspire people – but sometimes it's reminding people of what God has done or is doing. We can prophesy by just reminding people of God's view on a certain issue – we're exhorting them to understand God's position and to embrace it.

4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. 5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

Now, that should be interesting to some of you who come from a more hyper-Pentecostal background, or have been to certain churches. You know they put a lot of emphasis on speaking in tongues. If you have had that experience, then you're "in" as a Christian, but if you haven't, 'well, you might not even be saved, or you might be harboring some secret sin, or you might need to get your thinking straight and stop embracing and accepting all that negativity, because you're quenching the Spirit.' No. That's not true. Paul says he wishes that everyone could speak in tongues, but he understands they don't. And they won't. And that's not because there's something wrong with them, it's simply because God doesn't give everyone that gift. And anyway, he says, there's something more important – the ability to prophesy.

And did you notice WHY one is more significant than the other? Because prophecy edifies more people! Remember, it's all about others, and not about me! We've said several times that if we could reduce the entire book of 1 Corinthians to one word, it would be: others. Stop thinking so much about yourself, even in church, and start to look out for others.

6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?

If I speak in tongues it isn't going to benefit you unless it's interpreted and the content has to do with things that reveal or give knowledge, or prophecy or teach. But that's not the usual content of this kind of tongues – he's talking here of speaking in a heavenly language that is addressed directly to God and so he's going to show that you speaking in tongues to God, doesn't really help anyone else because they don't understand what is going on or what you're saying.

7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? 8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? 9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them *is* without significance. 11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me. 12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel.

You see, once again, this is not the kind of tongues we find back in Acts Chapter 2 on Pentecost where men heard other men speaking their own languages. This is a language that no one present understands. There were no interpreters at Pentecost, but this event

requires interpretation or else it's just like a child blowing into a flute or a pipe or banging on a drum. It makes a lot of noise, and it might be fun for the child, but it doesn't make much sense to anyone else.

I had to have some work done on Mady's guitar last week and so I took it down to Guitar Center. She was working so I took all three kids in by myself. You want to talk about a sanctifying experience! Try taking three kids under the age of nine into a store full of stuff that is just screaming out to them – "Come touch me!!!"

So, we gave Mady's guitar to the guy at the bench and went to look around while he was working. Karisa wanted to check out the guitars – she's pointing to ones that cost hundreds and even thousands of dollars saying, "I want to play that one daddy!"

I finally give her a ukulele, since they're small, and she sits on the stool and strums away singing "Bless the Lord O' My Soul." Not bad.

But meanwhile, the boys want to check out the drums, because they're boys, and apparently all you have to do is ask the guy at the counter and he'll give you a set of drum sticks to try out all the drums. Now picture this, two boys – brothers, in Guitar Center, surrounded by at least a dozen different drum kits and they each have a pair of sticks. When I come walking in, they're already arguing because, "He keeps playing and I can't hear myself!" But 'playing' is a loose term because my boys have no idea how to play the drums; they're just interested in making as much noise as possible. I look at the guy behind the counter and think...that guy must feel like he has the worst job in the world at times.

Whacking away on the drums may be fun for a little boy, but it's not beautiful, and the only person who can appreciate it is the one doing it. It doesn't mean anything to anyone else, there's no rhythm, no pattern, nothing to appreciate. That's kind of the point the Bible is making here about speaking in tongues when there's no one to interpret.

13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

When this form of speaking in tongues really occurs, not even the person being used by God knows exactly what is going on.

15 What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

Paul says, "Look, if God gives me this experience – awesome, great, I'll receive it. But I'll also pray and sing with full awareness, understanding, and insight into what I am doing."

16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? 17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; 19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

So, if you're feeling a bit sketchy about this whole speaking in tongues thing, you have to know, and see right here in Scripture, that Paul did it. In fact, he did more than everyone else he says. So, it's not a bad thing. When God wants to do it, we need to be open to receive it. But we also need to make sure we don't make too big of a deal about it, because it's no where near as good as helping others by speaking with our understanding.

20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

21 In the law it is written:

*"With men of other tongues and other lips
I will speak to this people;
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,"*

says the Lord.

22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

We're right back at this issue: it's not all about you. People in Corinth really wanted to speak in tongues, and that's still true today, but as Paul is pointing out – what if someone new comes walking in, or someone – like perhaps some of you today – who don't know Jesus comes walking in and everyone is praying in some strange language no one has ever heard? It would be a little odd wouldn't it? Like my boys in the drum department, people would be banging away and having a blast, but no one else understands what they're doing.

I'm a pastor, I believe speaking in tongues is possible, that it could happen today, but if I walked into a church I had never been to and everyone was doing this, I'd stick real close to the door if I even stayed at all.

But what if you walk in and they're talking about God and who He is, and they're reading from the Bible, and they're singing songs that talk about the holiness of God and the nature of God and the promises of God?

That's what happened to me – I walked into a church 17 years ago and practically fell on my face as they sang about and spoke about a God who I knew was real and whom I had

been hiding from because I didn't want to do things His way, I wanted to make all my own decisions.

When people walk in here, we want them to have the same experience – we want people to know they might be uncomfortable with God at the moment because they need to work on their relationship with Him, but there's nothing odd about what's happening here in this building. If anything, I want them, I want you, to feel like this is a safe and comfortable place to learn more and connect. And if there is anything that is keeping that from happening, I want to know about it. Catch me after the service, or contact me – my email is in the bulletin, and let me know anything that's bothering you or how we could be more welcoming.

We hope our services are done 'decently and in order' that there is rhyme and reason to the things that happen and that they all glorify God. Sometimes that means we have to reign in our individuality a bit, but that's only for the sake of corporate worship. There are other times and places to express your individual relationship with God – by singing loudly, dancing, shouting, or praying in tongues. But when we come together on Sunday mornings – we want the focus to be on God, not on us.

So, Paul gives some practical instructions on how to make that possible back in Corinth.

26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

And so, we have some pretty straight forward instruction for how the gifts ought to be employed in the way they were doing church there in Corinth.

We don't usually offer a time for this kind of speaking in tongues in our Sunday morning services, most churches don't. But instead, what I've seen done, and what I'd love to do perhaps in the near future is have an evening service that is more focused on an extended time of worship and prayer where all the gifts would be encouraged, but, of course, with a Biblical focus on glorifying God and encouraging others, not showing off or drawing attention to oneself. Hopefully we can do something like that soon.

But we have one more issue to cover before we close and it's a doozy, so remember the context here – everything Paul has been saying for several chapters has been focused on encouraging people to put others first, and not to just demand their own rights or chase

their own desires, not to insist on their own ways. Well, here's another way that was playing out:

34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

I'm sure you can imagine how many arguments have been started by this passage and how the feminists and others just love to tear it up, and also, how chauvinistic men have used it to abuse women over the years. But both the feminist and the chauvinist are wrong in their interpretation, because they're typically ignoring the context as they make their argument.

Paul has no problem with women. He's already said it's good for them to pray and prophesy back in chapter 11. And, listen to what he writes elsewhere:

Romans 16:1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who labored much for us.

And he keeps going on praising men and women for their work in the Church. Paul is no chauvinist. He's no woman hater. There's nothing in the Bible intended to oppress women or keep them down. In fact, the Bible teaches that man wasn't good enough on his own, so God created woman.

But what the Bible teaches is that both men and women have roles – distinct roles, that are both from God and honor God. It's not better to be a man, or better to be a woman. It's best to be a man with a woman, or a woman with a man. For the overwhelming majority of the population, that is God's plan – one man, joined to one woman, 'til death do they part. Put together they discover the fullness of God's resources and blessings during their time on earth.

So, what is going on here, what is Paul saying? Well, remember the context – the church services in Corinth were a ruckus – people were talking over each other, people bursting out in tongues, people were dividing up into cliques about who was their favorite pastor, they even had people getting drunk at the communion services. It was a mess. And on top of that, the services were segregated by gender with the men sitting on one side and the women sitting on the other. It was a cultural thing – remember all this is happening in ancient Greece which was actually under Roman control at the time, and the culture

outside the church treated women with less respect than men. The church was actually the place where women were esteemed.

So, as a reflection of their culture, when they gathered together, the men sat on one side and the women sat on the other, but apparently when they had a question about something that was going on, the wife would shout across the room, “Honey, what’s going on?” Again, it was just a mess – it was more of crowd than a congregation, and if you walked in off the street there was nothing that would make you want to stay. So, Paul says, let’s keep everything nice and quiet and orderly during the service so that the focus is on God. That way those who are already saved, and those who need to be saved, can give all their attention to Him.

And now he wraps things up by calling them all back into line with the rest of the church throughout the world:

36 Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. 39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

That’s the final word – and it’s one of the guiding principles of our ministry here at Calvary Chapel. In everything we do, we hope to conduct ourselves decently and in order. We’re open to all the gifts, we love and esteem women, but more than anything, we love God and we want the focus of our meetings to be entirely on Him, uncluttered and unobscured by any of our own preferences or desires.

So, how has all of this impacted you today? I hope it’s helped you to see God a little better and understand His word and His church a little more. If not, if you have any questions, or any encouragement, I’d love to hear –let’s talk after the service or feel free to email me.