

**Preaching Christ....  
...by the power of the Holy Spirit  
...and the authority of the Word of God**

**Date:** 5 September 2021  
**Services:** Across the diocese  
**Series:** **God's church** - 1 Corinthians  
**Title:** **Unpacking speaking in tongues**  
**Passage:** 1 Corinthians 14:1-25  
**Outline:**

1. **Recap: gifts and love**
2. **Case study: tongues and prophecy**

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Why do things go **wrong** in the life of a church?

Often because people are **self-indulgent** and insist on their **way**...

Sometimes because people think they are more **important** than others and so push others **around**

sometimes because people see themselves as **superior** to others – they have more **money**, better **qualifications**, they are more **capable**... claim to have a **deeper understanding**... and so on and so on.

Or because there are **factions**... groups supporting **one leader** over **another**... and causing havoc behind people's back about that **'other'** leader or other **group** – through **rumour mongering** or **gossip** or outright **slander**...

...the result of course is a **disaster**...

Churches can be **awful** places at times... //

Because – **because** they are made up of **human beings**....

And **all** this – and **more** – we've seen in **Corinth** as we've worked our way through **1 Corinthians**.

So we've seen arguments around **leadership**

We've seen an attitude of **superiority** – elevating one style of leadership over another – and elevating some of God's gifts of the **Spirit** over **others**...

We've seen an attempt to attract and win people through **clever rhetoric** which pays little attention to the central message of Jesus' death on the cross which to **some** in the church was frankly a **foolish embarrassment!**

We've seen an arrogance in terms of **sin** – a man sleeping with his **step-mother** and the congregation **congratulating** themselves for being so **'modern'** and **up to date**

We've seen a **selfishness** in regard to doing what may very well be **permissible** for the believer – but something that actually causes some to **stumble** – like eating food which had been sacrificed to **idols**

We've seen selfishness with regard to the **Lord's Supper** where people were **gorging** themselves on a feast while others went **hungry**...

So God wants to set them **right** about the nature of life in the body of Christ...

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And as we come to the first part of 1 Cor 14 today, I want to ensure we see the chapter firmly in its context so that we understand the passage all the more helpfully:

**1. Recap: gifts and love**

**2. Case study: tongues and prophecy**

First then:

**1. RECAP: GIFTS AND LOVE**

Let me ask you – if God has given you a gift of the Spirit... who is it **for**?

Not **you**!

We saw in ch 12, that gifts were given *for the common good*.

Yes **you** – **YOU** have been given things which you **love doing** and are **good at doing** – but those things are not for **YOU** – for your own **fulfilment**, for **aggrandizement**; for **self-promotion**; for **recognition**; for elevation **above others**...

No the gifts God has given you, have been given you to **bless the body of Christ** – to **build up the body** – to **strengthen** the body – to **help** the body of Christ **function** as it **should**.

That means that no **particular gift** makes any one person **better** than others, or more **important** than others...

...remember from ch 12 - the **eye** – the **hand** – the **toe** – are all **equal** – are all **needed** – all **valuable** – none **indispensable**.

...**each** one, part of the **body of Christ**...

But that it not how the Corinthians **saw things**...

They were clambering over each other to get to the top of a ladder they had **invented** about who was more **important** based on the **gifts** they **had**. ///

And there was something **missing**... **desperately, tragically missing**...

**Love /**

**Love! //**

And so it is that at the end of Chapter 12, a whole chapter on gifts of the spirit and life in the body of Christ, we read:

*And yet I will show you the most **excellent way**.*

The **most excellent way** – as we saw last week – is the way of **love** and to use your gifts in love in the service of others!

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You might have the most **spectacular gifts** of the Spirit in your **church** – but if you’re exercising them **without love** – **forget it... waste of time.**

Whether I speak in **tongues**, speak a word of **prophecy** or **knowledge**, have a great **faith** or have the gift of **generosity** – if I am using those gifts for **MY benefit** – for the **kudos** or **admiration** or **recognition** I receive – then I gain **nothing**.

**Because that’s not love!**

**Love** which is **patient** and **kind** and does not **envy** or **boast** and is not **proud**...

And that **type** of love – the love God has so clearly shown to **US** in **Jesus Christ**... will not seek to use God-given gifts in **any** other way than God **intended** – namely – the **common good** and **his glory!**

So let’s be clear – when in 12:31, God says “*Now eagerly desire the **greater gifts*** and then here in ch 14:1 - *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially **prophecy*** he doesn’t mean gifts which make **YOU** look **great**... but that they are to **desire** gifts that are **best** for building up the **body**... for **encouraging** and **strengthening** the **church!**

And then he gives as it were, a case study.

## **2. CASE STUDY: TONGUES AND PROPHECY**

If the overarching principle in seeking gifts and using gifts is to **build up** and **encourage** the people of **God**... let’s **zoom** in on **two** gifts and see how the **principle works** in **practice!**

It’s really important to try to understand what Paul means by ‘**prophecy**’ and ‘**tongues**’ as there is a lot of confusion around **both**.

‘**tongues**’, *there are two different gifts mentioned in the New Testament.*

The first is that which we see in **Acts 2**, where the disciples were enabled by God to speak a **language** they had never previously **known**.

The purpose of **that** gift was proclaiming the good news of Jesus... to those who had travelled to Jerusalem for Pentecost and would then take the news of Jesus **back** with them to their **home towns**

But the gift of **tongues** mentioned here in **1 Corinthians** seems quite **different**... it is a **supernatural** gift of a type of **ecstatic speech - unrecognisable to others**, unless they have the gift of **interpretation**... // It would **appear** to be a type of **private love language** orientated to **God**.

**Prophecy** on the other hand, is not a private speaking **with** God, but a public speaking **for** God – for God’s **people**.

When we hear the word ‘prophecy’, you might think of a supernatural **foretelling** of the **future**. But that’s not usually how prophecy is spoken about in the **New Testament**.

The gift of prophecy is more a **supernatural** insight into **God’s Word**, and applying it in the **current context**: **encouraging, consoling, rebuking, challenging**. A bit like what we do in **preaching today!** //

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in the **OLD Testament**, prophets spoke as the *Word of the Lord* - **take it or leave it**, In the **NEW Testament**, prophecy was much more **common**, and was, as Paul goes on to instruct: *to be weighed up, and sifted through before it was accepted*.

The Corinthians are **fixated** with tongues, but Paul wants them to pursue **prophecy**.

Why? Verse 4 ...

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*Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies **themselves**, but the one who prophesies edifies **the church**.*

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Edifying the church will always be the **priority!!**

At the risk of being **repetitive** -

*gifts are* not for **self-indulgence**: because it's what I **enjoy**;

*gifts are* not for **self-expression**: because it's important to **who I am**;

*gifts are* not for **self-promotion**: because I am **important**.

**Gifts are from God for the building up of God's Church!**

This is obviously a **huge issue** in the Corinthian church – because God goes on to spend a lot of time on it.

I went through and put what he was saying about **tongues** on the one hand and **prophecy** on the other in a **table...** and I want to briefly show you the highlights so we can see very clearly what God is saying.

## Unpacking the gift of tongues

### TONGUES

Speaks to God  
no one understands  
builds up themselves  
great if everyone did

### PROPHECY

Speaks to people  
...strengthen, encourage, comfort  
builds up the church  
but RATHER people prophecy

AIM: to build up the church



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## Unpacking the gift of tongues

### TONGUES

Tongues on its own - useless  
instrument - random notes  
no one knows what is said  
speaking into the air  
it is like we are foreigners

### PROPHECY

unless with revelation, prophecy or  
word of instruction

Go for gifts which build up the church



## Unpacking the gift of tongues

### TONGUES

pray for interpretation  
people cannot say 'amen'  
I speak in tongues more than  
all of you

### PROPHECY

But would rather speak five intelligible  
words to instruct others...  
...than 10,000 words in a tongue



## Unpacking the gift of tongues

### TONGUES

Unbelievers – in a church  
where everyone is speaking  
in tongues –  
..."you're out of your mind"

### PROPHECY

Unbelievers – in a church where  
everyone is prophesying  
...convicted of sin  
..."God is really among you"



The difference between the two gifts is made incredibly clear... and while there is nothing wrong with speaking in tongues, they will do nothing to build up the church like prophecy will...

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Three things I want to say a I close:

Is it **your aim** - your **heart's desire** – to use **whatever gifts** the Lord has given you for the '**common good**'... that is, for the **building up of his church** – the **encouragement** and **strengthening** and **comfort** of your **brothers and sisters** in **Christ** who are the **body of Christ**? //

....or is there a **chance**... that you are seeking to use your **gifts** not in the service of **others**, but the **service of yourself**? //

That's very searching isn't it... it may be hard for you to confront...

And it may mean coming to God in humility and recognising – Oh Lord – I've been making it all about **me**... I'm so **sorry** //

**Second**... there can be NO view here which some church groups claim, whereby **unless** you speak in tongues you're not the **real deal**... you **cannot** come to that conclusion... the Bible says – **look** – if you **have** that gift – it's between you and **God** – no one needs to **know** – and it has **no** place in the assembly without **interpretation**... // It can hardly then be **essential** or a **test** of whether or not someone is a **Christian** or has the **Holy Spirit**! And it is so **damaging** and **hurtful** to claim anything **like that!!** //

And the **third** thing I want to leave with you... is **this**....

Let's think about the life our churches... and the nature of our church services...

**None** of our churches are in danger of being dominated by people speaking in **tongues**.

But it's a **great** question to ask – what **DO** unbelievers **find** when they come to a service at **your** church?

Maybe I'm being a little **controversial** here... but I wonder if they would conclude

**'these people are out of their mind'**

OR

**'God is really among you'??** //

Now don't get me wrong – I **do** think the church service is mainly for the **believer**... so that they might **praise** God and hear his **word**...

...but **sometimes** – like those who speak in **tongues** – we can sometimes so **inward focused**... so **indulgent** about how we do things... that we can consider **nothing** about the **impact** for **unbelievers** when they **come**... //

Wouldn't it be **great** if what they **experienced** and **observed** among was so **real** – so **powerful** – so **engaging** and **compelling**... so **intelligible**... that people were convicted of their sin and concluded '**God is really among you!**'

I sometimes think that what we **do** and **say and sing** is so **alien to the unbeliever**, that we **might as well be speaking in tongues**...

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My brothers and sisters – over these past weeks – what a vision for the church we've seen...!

People – **you** and **me** – **gifted** in **different** ways – but all working **together** in **love**... //

Friends, **eagerly** desire gifts of the **Spirit** – especially those which build up Christ's **body**

...so that our churches may **strong, faithful, alive**...

Where the **love** of God is **palpable**!

Where we are all growing **stronger** in our **love** for God...

...more **devoted** to **Jesus**...

More **clear** about God's word

..more **passionate** about the **good news**... //

...to **what** great end? //

...so that when those who do not yet believe come among us... their **hearts** are laid open by the **power** of the **Word of God** and they **exclaim** "God is **really among you**!"