

Excel in Building Up the Church

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[0:00] So we'll start 1 Corinthians 12, we'll start in verse 27, and we'll read through chapter 13, verse 13, verse 13.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing.

[1:22] And if I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful.

It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child.

[2:21] I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.

Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide.

These three, but the greatest of these is love. God is teaching us through Paul about spiritual gifts. This all began back in chapter 12 when Paul said in verse 1, Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

And so now what has he done but very detailed and very extensively he has been informing us. Chapter 14 will wrap up this section of the letter.

[3:20] And as will hopefully, Lord willing, cover this chapter in two sermons. Tonight we're going to look at verses 1 to 25. Now this is a pretty lengthy section of scripture.

But there are really three main topics that Paul covers. Three topics that each relate to spiritual gifts. So I've organized this sermon around these three topics.

Love, the local church, and the lost. So let's begin by looking at the relationship between spiritual gifts and love. And it's just the first half of verse 1.

Chapter 14. Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. So Paul is giving us here a balanced perspective.

The Corinthians, they had swung that pendulum in one direction way too far. They were elevating spiritual gifts to these unhealthy levels. To the neglect of love.

[4:24] So what did Paul do in chapter 13? Oh, he spent time correcting that swing. He showed the place of love as supreme. He showed the properties of love that we just read of.

He showed the permanence of love as well. So he was helping the Corinthians. He was helping us to not confuse giftedness with godliness.

They were thinking that giftedness alone, that was good. And Paul is saying, no, you're forgetting the great value and the importance of godliness. I appreciate how Joel Beeky says it.

Beware of thinking that rich gifts make up for poor holiness. Because they don't. So Paul took a lot of time in chapter 13 helping us to see this.

So much time that we might have done something that we shouldn't. We might have then swung the pendulum in the opposite direction. And gone from elevating the gifts to now disregarding the gifts.

[5:27] Don't we see that often even in the church today? Christians not giving any thought to spiritual gifts. Christians not concerned with exercising spiritual gifts that God has given to them.

Well, if we've fallen into that temptation from one extreme to another, here is Paul's balanced perspective at the very beginning of chapter 14. Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. It's not one or the other. It's both. Godliness and giftedness. We should be characterized by godliness as we exercise our gifts.

And not just exercise them, in fact. But what does Paul say? We should be desired. We should be desired. We should be desired. We should be desired. Before we exercise any gifts given by God, we should be desiring the gifts.

Corporately, as a body, and individually as well. We should want them. We should want them that they might be used to God's glory. Here are gifts. Charles Spurgeon says, Gifts which we dare to ask of God.

[6:37] Gifts which we may expect the Spirit of God to bestow upon us. Gifts which can be used in the church of Christ and which we desire to possess in order that we may use them to the glory of God.

We should earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. And at the same time, pursue love. Now, do you hear the active nature of both of these verbs?

Pursue and desire earnestly or eagerly desire? There's this real intensity that we're hearing from Paul. Pursue love. Not just try to act in a loving way if at all possible, but pursue it.

And as you pursue that love, eagerly, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. Not just acknowledge that God gives them good as that is, but desire them wholeheartedly with a real zeal.

Now, again, let's remember the Corinthians. They were desiring the spiritual gifts, but without love. Love is selfless.

[7:43] And yet the Corinthians were being selfish in their attitude toward one another, and therefore toward the gifts. Seeking then to exercise their gifts for their own good and not for the good of the body.

So Paul is helping the Corinthians to remember the relationship between the gifts and love here in these opening commands of chapter 14. We, too, need to remember that relationship.

We, too, need to heed these commands. We, too, need to remember to pursue love and to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. So how do you think about your own spiritual gifts and the way that you exercise them?

The manner in which you exercise them? Are you passive in how you think about them? Well, God's word is instructing us here to think very differently about spiritual gifts, to have an active mentality.

We should desire even specific ones. Look at how Paul finishes the second half of verse 1. Especially that you may prophesy. Or look down at verse 13.

[8:54] We haven't come to this quite yet, but listen to what Paul says there. Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. Meaning he should pray that God would give him the gift of interpretation of tongues.

So we should be praying. We should be asking that the Lord would gift us to serve the body. Now we find these gifts in Romans chapter 12.

We saw them in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. And in 1 Peter 4. We should ask, Lord, would you give me these gifts?

Now this is interesting. Maybe something that you haven't thought of before. That God doesn't necessarily just give gifts at conversion. Here we see that gifts can be given throughout the Christian life.

Now Paul doesn't teach it so much as he assumes it. As he's working through the explanation of spiritual gifts. He assumes that the Corinthians, that these Christians, could be given more gifts.

[9:59] Now that makes sense. If we think about gifts themselves, what are they given for? For the common good. That's what Paul said back in chapter 12, verse 7.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. And when he talks about the common good, he means the common good of the local church.

So let's think about the local church. The body changes over time. Now, God may bring believers to a particular local church in his sovereignty to bless that church with their gifts.

Well, can he not also give believers already in that local church additional gifts to bless that church? Perhaps several families have moved away and several of those members were teaching in Sunday school.

God may bring new members into that church with the gift of teaching. Or he may even give members from within that church that gift as well. So what should we do?

[11:01] We should earnestly desire spiritual gifts. We should pray for spiritual gifts. It is good to desire them. It is good to express those desires to God in prayer.

We should pray for them in greater number. Now, to be clear, this is not for our own gain. Not for our own glory. Again, that's how the Corinthians were operating.

And it's certainly a temptation that we can succumb to. Wanting gifts that we might be seen and praised by others. So we aren't to ask for more gifts so that we can be exalted.

No, just the opposite. We ask for more gifts that God might be exalted in his body. This is why Paul says, pursue love and eagerly desire the spiritual gifts.

If we are pursuing love, then we will rightly desire and ask for spiritual gifts. Because as we just saw in chapter 13, love is selfless.

[12:08] Love gives of itself for the good of others. So yes, we should pray for gifts in greater number, even as we are growing all the more in love.

In fact, because we are growing in love. As we love our brothers and our sisters more, we will desire that they be built up.

That the body be built up all the more. And spiritual gifts are a means God uses to bless his people. To bless his church. So you see, love and spiritual gifts, they go hand in hand.

Paul is showing us that they are not to be pitted against each other. As though it's either love or spiritual gifts. We see the goodness of both. So we should pray as we grow in love for gifts in greater measure.

And also, we should pray for them, I'm sorry, in greater number. And also we should pray for them in greater measure. Joel Beakey makes this argument. He says, The possession of a gift by every member of the body logically implies that each person receives at least one gift immediately upon conversion.

[13:18] However, that does not rule out the possibility that further gifts might be added. Or present gifts might be strengthened or weakened over the course of the Christian life.

And then Beakey gives us Paul's words that he wrote to Timothy in his first letter. As an example of this strengthening of the gifts. Paul tells Timothy in chapter 4, verse 14, not to neglect the gift that he has.

The gift that God has given to him. And the context there in that letter to Timothy is clear. The gift that he's speaking of is the gift of teaching. Don't neglect that gift, Timothy.

Don't let it fall into disuse. He's reminding Timothy of the responsibility to exercise it. So rather than neglecting it, as Paul says in his second letter to Timothy, fan the flame of the gift that you've been given.

Stir it up. You've been given a spiritual gift. Now use it with all diligence. So we should pray accordingly as well. Lord, strengthen in me the gifts that you've given to me.

[14:30] Make me to be all the more effective in how I use these gifts. Help me that I might use them to stay in practice. To stay sharp.

Now in some ways, can't our tendency oftentimes be just the opposite? Instead of praying, Lord, might you give additional gifts to bless the body? Or instead of praying for the strengthening of the gifts that we've been given, we can do something more like this.

We can look at an area of ministry perhaps in the church and maybe resign ourselves and say, well, I can't serve in that way. I'm not able to serve there because I'm not gifted in that way.

Or I'm weak in that area. God hasn't given me the gift. Or I need that gift to be strengthened before using it in that way. So I'm not going to. I can't do that.

Now let me say there's certainly a place for recognizing our limitations. There's certainly a place for not diving into something ill-prepared. It may be that others are more suited by God for some area of ministry.

[15:38] But there is also a temptation towards passivity in all of that. A passivity that we do not see in 1 Corinthians 14. Instead of quickly resigning ourselves to not doing something, have we considered instead praying about it and asking God to equip us with the gifts needed in that area of ministry?

Have you earnestly desired the spiritual gifts? So if we see a need in the body, an area where the body could be helped in some way, and we have the capacity to meet the need, we have the bandwidth available to us, but perhaps we recognize, I'm not gifted in that way.

Ask God. We should ask God to equip us with the spiritual gifts necessary to strengthen that area that is weak. We shouldn't just throw up our hands and say, well, that's too bad.

That's not me. We should say, God, gift me. That I might be useful in that area. Would you give me that gift? That I might use it to your glory.

So we don't throw up our hands and back away. No, we should get down on our knees. And we should pray. When it comes to desiring spiritual gifts, we should be less like Moses at the burning bush.

[17:04] When he tried to come up with all kinds of excuses to give to God for why he couldn't fulfill the role that God had for him. We should be less like Moses in that moment, and we should be more like Isaiah when he found himself in the throne room of God in that glorious vision.

We should say like Isaiah, here I am. Send me. Equip me. Gift me. So that I might serve you in the body. If I'm not desiring spiritual gifts, perhaps I need to also ask, am I desiring to serve?

I should long to be useful to my king. So with humble love in our hearts, we should be asking the Lord to give us more gifts, to strengthen the gifts that we have, that we might more effectively serve him in his church.

And all the while, we are pursuing love. We never stop doing that. We aren't chasing after love until we exercise our gifts. No, we keep pursuing love as we exercise our gifts.

One commentator said, keep on pursuing love, but still keep cultivating your spiritual gifts. Because we do have this clear command. In chapter 14, verse 1, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.

[18:29] So we should live in obedience to that command. While also, though, not forgetting what Paul said back in chapter 12, verse 11.

God apportions to each as he wills. So we need to hold this wonderful balance here. We should earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, while also, we should be resting in the knowledge that God perfectly apportions them as he wills.

So we joyfully submit to the sovereignty of God over the gifts that he gives, and at the very same time, we earnestly desire the gifts that he gives.

Is this not just another way of saying? Philippians 2.12, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So church, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, for it is God who apportions them to us as he wills. So don't grow complacent in desiring and using your gifts, but do stay content in the sovereignty of God.

[19:44] So that's the first general topic of our passage. And just the first half of the first verse, and I promise we will pick up the pace as we go. We've seen the relationship between love and spiritual gifts.

Now we move to the second, which is the relationship between the local church and spiritual gifts, and more specifically, two spiritual gifts, the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues.

Now this is the majority of our passage this evening. It's verses like 1b through 19. So we're going to break it up into some sections and read some verses at a time. So let's go back to verse 1, and we'll read through verse 5.

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 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.

[20:48] 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. So here's the basic point that Paul is making in these verses.

Prophecy is better than tongues. Now, before unpacking that point in this passage, we need to answer the question first. What are these two gifts that he speaks of?

Well, prophecy would have been the gift of receiving words from God and then communicating those words to the body, speaking revelations from God.

So in Paul's day, prophecy would have been distinct from preaching. To preach is to take the revelation that God has already given, the words from God that we have, this special revelation and to explain it and to help us to apply it to our lives, to exhort and to proclaim what God has already said, to bring understanding and clarity, to encourage and challenge, to comfort and rebuke.

[22:11] But the revelation itself stays the same. It's unchanged. You should always hear us say as we preach, turn to this place in your Bibles.

Because that's what we preach. We preach this special revelation. It's to proclaim what's already been revealed, that we all, by the kindness of God, have access to ourselves.

So as one of your pastors, I'm not bringing you any new revelation. And the moment that I claim to do that is the moment you should be heading for the door. We have God's full and final written revelation of himself right here in his word until Christ returns.

No more words to be given for anybody to speak. No more words to be written down either. So prophecy in Paul's day was not simply preaching.

It was special revelation from God given to very particular people for very particular circumstances in that specific day.

[23:16] So we saw the example last time of the prophet Agabus who came to Paul and he spoke on behalf of Paul. I mean, on behalf of God to Paul. Words that were very directly related to Paul's life.

Remember, he took Paul's belt and he bound his own hands and his own feet and he said, thus says the Holy Spirit. This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

So Agabus didn't pull out his Bible and find a passage and use the words from that passage. No, Agabus simply said very clearly himself, thus says the Holy Spirit.

Now, if I say thus says the Holy Spirit, I better have just either given you a chapter and verse or I should then give you a chapter and verse. But not so in the early days of the church.

So the gift of prophecy was this direct revelation and I would argue infallible revelation given to some in the church. That's prophecy. And now even more briefly, tongues.

[24:23] The spiritual gift of tongues was the ability to speak in a foreign, albeit human, language. So someone who had this gift could speak truth from God in a language that you do not naturally know, but others do.

So tongues, human languages, spoken by a believer who doesn't naturally know the language.

They could be spoken privately for the edification of oneself, but also publicly for the edification of the church.

Granted, there was someone there with the gift of interpretation to tell the church what words were being said. Now, having said all of that, as we saw last time we were in 1 Corinthians, both of those gifts, the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues have ceased in our day.

And we saw two good biblical reasoned explanations for why these and the other sign gifts have ceased. Now, without rehashing all of that, here's just those two basic arguments.

Number one, because the offices of apostle and prophet have ceased to continue. And number two, because throughout redemptive history, signs and wonders have accompanied new revelation.

[25:45] But where new revelation ceases, so too do the signs and wonders. We see that throughout the Old Testament. That's the pattern. And so it makes sense. The pattern continued into the new.

So both of these gifts that Paul is talking about here, prophecy, tongues, these gifts have ceased.

So that being said, the next natural question is, why are we walking through this passage?

Paul is giving very specific, detailed instruction about life in the church. Some of the most specific, detailed instruction about life in the church, about gatherings in the church, and then how these two specific gifts operate in those gatherings.

But if these gifts have ceased, why are we spending this time on something that seemingly doesn't hold real relevance to us today? Why not just skip ahead to chapter 15?

Because in the basic point that Paul is making, the theological principle behind this chapter absolutely holds true for us today.

[26:54] And we need to see that together. And it's this. We should do what builds up the body of Christ. We should concern ourselves in gathered worship with what edifies the body.

We should be pursuing what is most valuable and helpful and clear and fruitful and orderly in our gathered worship. We see that one of these gifts in Paul's day did this far better than the other in Paul's day.

Prophecy most naturally lended itself to the edification of the church. Tongues did not. Tongues could be edifying to the church, but only when there was interpretation of those tongues.

Tongues. So think of it very simply like this. Prophecy edified with a one-step process. A word was declared. Tongues edified with a two-step process.

A word was declared, but then it had to be interpreted. So in other words, tongues plus interpretation basically equaled prophecy. So Paul's point is simple.

[28:05] Prophecy is better than tongues because prophecy more directly, more expediently edifies and strengthens the church. Now that's not to say that tongues are bad.

That Paul would say that tongues were useless or that they should be discarded as a spiritual gift.

Look at verse 5. Paul says very plainly, I want you all to speak in tongues.

That's pretty positive. Then he says about himself in verse 18, I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

Which we could talk about the tone of that. That seems hard to understand. Like what's he saying about how that sounds arrogant, but we're not going to go there because this is God's inspired word. But he says in verse 18, I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

So Paul definitely isn't bashing tongues. And we see the usefulness of tongues in the book of Acts. Multiple places, especially Acts chapter 2. As the Spirit of God caused the believers gathered together to speak in tongues.

[29:13] And there was a captive audience before them who heard what they said. Jews that were gathered from all over the world coming to Jerusalem. They spoke languages from all over the world.

And yet they heard and they understood what the believers were saying in tongues. These Jews were amazed and they were astounded and they questioned, how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. Peter then preached to these Jews and 3,000 of them were saved.

So what a gift speaking in tongues was. What a useful, profitable gift it was. But in the context of our passage, in 1 Corinthians 14, in the gathered body of believers, there in Corinth, tongues simply wasn't as needed or useful.

Think about it. They all spoke the same language. Paul is addressing not the unique situation of Pentecost, but the ordinary weekly gathering of the Corinthian Christians.

[30:28] Prophecy was of far more use than tongues, and yet tongues were of far more intrigue to the Corinthians than prophecy. You see, Paul's not just being pragmatic.

Paul is also addressing their hearts. As one commentator said, the Corinthians were intoxicated with this gift, the gift of tongues. It's not hard for us to imagine this.

The charismatic movement today is often just as intoxicated with that gift. All kinds of false doctrine has arisen that elevates tongues.

It elevates tongues to some kind of super gift, as though those who speak in tongues are somehow more spiritually elite. So, of course, if you can't, well, you're going to feel inferior.

You're going to feel like a lesser Christian. I don't have this close personal relationship with God like these other Christians who can speak in tongues.

[31:32] Do you see how this way of viewing the gift and defining the gift actually produces the exact opposite effect that spiritual gifts are supposed to have? The gifts are supposed to build up the body of Christ.

But instead of being built up, well, those who can't speak in tongues will be torn down. They'll be discouraged. Wow, they can speak in tongues. I can't.

But I should if I'm a Christian. So why can't I? You see how this kind of thinking is just naturally self-focused. You see the detrimental effects of elevating one gift over all the others.

It happens today and it happened in Paul's day among the Corinthians as well. Shifting the focus of tongues from serving the body to just really serving oneself.

Matthew Henry rightly says this about all spiritual gifts. They are bestowed that men may with them profit the church and promote Christianity. They are not given for show but for service.

[32:39] Not for pomp and ostentation but for edification. not to magnify those that have them but to edify others.

So it's clear the Corinthians had lost this perspective on the spiritual gifts as they had become intoxicated with the praise that came from speaking in tongues when no one even knew what they were saying.

So Paul's doing some needed course correction. Prophecy is better in the gathered church. in the local church setting in the worship service where the primary demographic are Christians who speak the same language.

And how is that demographic best built up? Which spiritual gift of the two will better more efficiently fulfill that purpose of edification? Well clearly the body can't be built up if tongues are spoken with no interpretation given.

It's just nonsense to the hearers. We've all been in situations I'm sure where we've been unable to communicate with someone because we each spoke a different language.

[33:49] When I was in elementary school we had a foreign exchange student from Japan who came to live with us and this was before many of the modern technologies that we have. I mean cell phones were around but most of us especially younger people didn't have them.

We didn't have apps that could translate for you so this high school foreign exchange student and elementary school me would try to communicate and just like even English speakers a high schooler and an elementary schooler maybe communication is tough but it was especially difficult because he didn't speak much English and I spoke no Japanese.

The only Japanese spoken in our household was my dad could count from one to ten because he had once visited Japan so that only goes so far in communication. There's a real language barrier and there's a reason that it's called a barrier because speaking different languages is indeed a barrier to communication.

It's a barrier to understanding. So it is with tongues that are not interpreted in the congregation.

There's a barrier to understanding for the body of believers and so in the gathered church that's the primary audience for the exercise of this spiritual gift.

The primary audience that Paul is speaking of is not God. That's what Paul is saying in verse 2. The primary audience is not yourself. That's what Paul is saying in verse 4. When you're gathered for worship the primary audience is the body.

[35:17] The point of speaking in tongues in the local church in the corporate setting is to communicate to the body that the body might be built up. I mean remember that's the general purpose of all spiritual gifts the building up of the body.

Chapter 12 verse 7 speaks of the manifestations of the spirit for the common good. Chapter 14 down in verse 12 to build up the body.

So the body can't be built up unless the body understands. So Paul says in verse 5 the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues that are uninterpreted.

And his reason is clear because the one who prophesies communicates in a way that can be understood. And we do each other no good if we can't be understood.

Well now going to verse 6 Paul gives an explanation of this by way of illustration. And he says there beginning in verse 6 Now brothers if I come to you speaking in tongues how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?

[36:27] If even lifeless instruments such as the flute or the harp do not give distinct notes how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound who will get ready for battle?

So with yourselves if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. 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 I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So instruments they are useful only in so far as they play distinct notes which together form beautiful songs.

Even more crucially consider that bugle or the horn that's used in battle. It has a very important purpose. It communicates to the soldiers whether to advance or perhaps to retreat.

And the sound that's associated with the advance is different from the sound that's associated with retreat. Soldiers need to know which one is it? Do we move forward and attack or do we turn back and retreat?

[37:41] So if the bugle doesn't play the distinct sound that communicates advance or retreat, what good is the bugle? In fact, it's really doing more harm than good.

It's creating confusion among the soldiers. So it is with the tongue, the gift of tongues. Unintelligible words. They are not profitable.

You're just speaking into the air, Paul says. We're just wasting our breath. And then Paul says this applies to whatever we're doing in corporate worship. And we see that Paul speaks to different elements of the service beginning in verse 14.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind.

I will sing praise with my spirit, but 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?

[38:47] 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, I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

So whether in prayer or in praise to be of benefit to others, the mind, the intellect must be involved. So Paul says that he's willing to set aside his ability to speak in tongues in the congregation because he can do it.

He just said that in verse 18. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in worship services Paul argues there's no place for praying or praising in tongues without interpretation because that is without the mind.

There must always be an avenue to understanding. So Paul is helping us to see let's kill two birds with one stone and let's simply desire the one gift of prophecy because it is through prophecy that truth was readily communicated and as truth was communicated believers were built up.

Simply put intelligible speech is profitable for believers and surprise surprise profitable speech is also beneficial to unbelievers.

[40:21] We see that in our third topic in this passage the relationship between spiritual gifts and the lost beginning in verse 20 brothers do not be children in your thinking be infants in evil but in your thinking 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 a sign not for believers but for unbelievers while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers if therefore the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues and outsiders or unbelievers!

enter will they not say that you are out of your minds but if all prophesy 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 that God is really among you so in the midst of this very long discourse here Paul gives to us another command don't be children in your thinking but rather be mature a child like mindset is undeveloped it needs to progress it needs to be developed and so Paul is saying that he doesn't want to see sinful heart attitudes developed and he wants the Corinthians remain very undeveloped in evil very childlike in that way be infants in evil don't be indulging sin but in our thinking we should grow we should progress we should mature so

Paul is helping us he's helping the Corinthians along in our thinking he's helping us to mature in how we view spiritual gifts and their intended uses even in relationship to the lost now Paul here sounds perhaps a little contradictory on the surface because in verse 22 he says that tongues are a sign for unbelievers which we might think that he means tongues are beneficial or helpful or useful for unbelievers we might think he's saying tongues are a sign for their benefit especially considering the second half of verse 22 while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers which we saw prophecy builds up it's to the benefit of the church so is he saying that tongues are to the benefit of unbelievers well that would be confusing because in verse 23 he says the opposite of that he says that if an unbeliever came among the church gathered for worship and the whole church was speaking in tongues that unbeliever would think you all are out of your mind in other words that unbeliever wouldn't benefit at all from the tongues being spoken just like a believer who's an outsider or we could just simply say a visitor wouldn't benefit either so what would an unbeliever benefit from an unbeliever would benefit from prophecy wouldn't he and that's what verse 24 tells us if all prophesied and they would testify to

God's presence among the body so we see the confusion here I think most of us would say verses 23 to 25 that makes sense because those verses are basically teaching the same truth about what profits both an unbeliever and a believer very basic level intelligible words profit human beings in general and of course when the spirit of God takes those intelligible words and applies them to our hearts we have the miracle of salvation and that unbeliever becomes a true worshiper of God so verses 23 to 25 those make sense what do we make of verse 22 how is it then that Paul can say tongues are a sign for unbelievers well that quote from the Old Testament in verse 21 helps us the quote is the evidence for Paul's conclusion in verse 22 we see it there with that little word thus or your translation might say then in other words in light of what this

Old Testament verse says Paul concludes that tongues are a sign for unbelievers so what is this Old Testament quote well it's taken from Isaiah chapter 28 and those are words that God spoke to his people people of Israel before they were taken into exile by foreign nations they had not listened to God when he spoke to them with their own language through their own prophets so now God will speak through others through conquering nations who speak a foreign language who speak a foreign tongue and they will speak not just with their words but with their actions they will come in judgment bringing God's judgment upon his people so we see that Old Testament quote from Isaiah 28 is not speaking of some kind of blessing but rather of a curse hearing the words of a foreign tongue was a sign of judgment for

[45:45] Israel and the same was true in Corinth in Paul's day unbelievers who heard a foreign tongue would conclude what that these people are crazy these people are out of their minds and what would they do they leave the service and presumably not come back why would you go back to something that's pointless and strange and you can't understand so yes tongues are a sign for unbelievers but not a good sign it's a sign of

their rejection of the gospel this message that is going out into all the world tongues functions as a sign of judgment when they can't understand what those tongues are saying the unbeliever who hears would simply be confirmed in their unbelief yep just like I thought those Christians are crazy I won't be going back no sense in listening to them so how much better how much more effective

Paul argues is prophesying that unbeliever hears those words that unbeliever understands those words with his mind and by the power of God in his heart and so how good those words are for him to hear prophesied and that brings us to today the gift of tongues the gift of prophecy have ceased! But the purpose of these gifts has not tongues interpreted prophecies told in first century Corinth they communicated God's truth that sinners might be saved that the saints might be sanctified that's still what we should want today even if these gifts have ceased The proclamation of God's truth has not!

We have God's truth we have God's word it is living and active it is sharper than any two-edged sword it brings conviction it reveals the secrets of the sinner's heart it brings repentance and faith so we faithfully gather around the word and we rejoice that the spirit of God is still taking his word and working it into the hearts of sinners and of saints indeed how many of us have stories of God drawing us to himself like this very example that we have in 1st Corinthians where you're sitting in the pew you're hearing the word of God preached not as someone who was prophesying to you but as a pastor was preaching to you and you were convicted you were called to account the secrets of your heart were disclosed you said to yourself who told this preacher that I would be here today that preacher had no special revelation about you unless maybe somebody told him that you were coming to the service that day but no special revelation about you but God still did a transforming work by his word to save your soul that you might turn from your sins and trust in Christ the only savior and maybe you didn't literally fall on your face maybe you did but either way you humbled yourself before God you became a true worshiper of him and you've continued by God's grace to worship him and to grow and to be built up in the body by the very same means that God used to save you by the word proclaimed in a language that you could understand the gifts of prophecy and tongues may have ceased but praise

God he is still at work through his word so then let's strive together using the gifts that God has given to us to excel in building up the body until we are fully mature on that day when Christ is revealed from heaven yet again let's pray together heavenly father we thank you for your word we thank you for every word of your word we thank you that you've given us first Corinthians 14 that we might learn and profit from all that you have to say to us through Paul and so father we do pray that you would help us by your spirit that we would strive to excel in building up the body of Christ we pray that you would make our services to be a place where your word is clearly proclaimed where truth goes forth where there isn't muddled confusion where there's joyful worshippers!

[50:22] of you present we pray even as the lost are often among us that you would save sinners as they hear that truth clearly proclaimed Christ crucified that he died upon the cross for our sins that he rose again and he reigns now and intercedes for us even as we come before you in prayer so father help us to that end we pray that we would do things orderly that we would do things that would glorify you even as we exercise our spiritual gifts so help us that we would be mature in our thinking help us that we would pursue love and help us that we would earnestly desire the spiritual gifts we pray all of these things in Christ's name amen