

**Sermon Title - The Loving Goal of Gathering: Gospel-Help that Glorifies God**  
**Sermon Text - 1 Corinthians 14:1-12**

**Sermon Points:**

***Introduction: Loving Each Other and Longing for Help***

- 1. Definitions of and Dispositions towards Tongues and Prophecy (various)**
- 2. Gospel-Love Prioritizes Prophecy Over Tongues in Corporate Worship (vv.1-5)**
- 3. Gospel-Love Strives to Help Others (vv.6-12)**

***Application: Expecting Gospel-Help through the Exercising of Gospel-Love***

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**Prayer Points:**

- 1. Adore God for purchasing his blood-bought children and for promising to help us by his Spirit through one another.**
- 2. Confess where you have had selfish expectations when we gather to worship. Confess where you have been unloving or proud toward others. Confess where you've expected too little from worship gatherings.**
- 3. Thank God for sending Jesus to show us what self-giving love looks like, to purchase our ability to love like him, and to give us grace when we fail to love like him.**
- 4. Ask that God would meet us with great help by his Spirit when we gather to worship and that he would be glorified as he does.**

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***Introduction: Loving Each Other and Longing for Help***

Paul has made a few things clear in chapters 12-13 so far. In chapter 12 Paul showed us that all believers are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ when they are saved. This reminds us that every single way the Spirit works in the life of a believer or in the life of a church is purchased by the blood of Jesus.

The Spirit of God then gives and empowers each believer with certain gifts to build up the rest of the body. The gifts of the Spirit are the very Spirit of God manifesting himself through us. These gifts are given to the church not as a cool way for us to serve, but as a way for God to show himself among us and build up his church through his very presence among his people.

Because the Spirit gives a diversity of gifts for the good of the one body of Christ there is no room for self-promotion as if a certain gift is most important and there is no room for self-pity as if a certain gift is not needed. We should pray for God to give us whatever gifts we need to build each other up and live for the sake of Christ until we see him face to face.

Then in chapter 13 Paul showed that the spiritual barometer for a church is not how many people have certain gifts, but instead how deeply they love each other. Indeed, great gifts, acts of service, or experiences are nothing without love. Paul went on in verses 4-7 to remind us what true, gospel-love looks like. We love because he first loved us, and our love looks like the love of Jesus because it is the Spirit of Jesus that lives in us to bring it about.

It suffers long from others. It is eager to do good to others who are harming them. It doesn't envy what others have, it does not brag about what it has, it doesn't play the comparison game with others, it doesn't act improperly toward others, it doesn't seek its own rights or benefit in situations but seeks others benefit, it is not easily stirred up to anger, it does not keep a record of wrongs people have committed against it, it doesn't

rejoice in evil, but in the truth. Love bears every burden of others, it believes in the promises of God through the gospel, therefore it keeps hoping in God and not in circumstances, and therefore it keeps enduring, it doesn't walk away!

Then in verses 8-13 of chapter 13 Paul showed that the temporary gifts like knowledge, prophecy, and tongues (and all the others, like preaching, teaching, hospitality, and administration) will pass away. Someday, we will be with Jesus face to face and we will no longer need any gifts to help us honor or experience Jesus because we will be with him face to face forever in his presence where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. But, until then, these gifts are given to help us endure and glorify Christ as we do.

These things come together at the beginning of chapter 14. Paul's basic advice for when the Corinthians gather is that they love each other deeply by doing what's best for others and that they long for and expect God's help when they gather. (14:1)

In other words, there are two big mistakes we can make when we gather for worship: 1) we can gather for selfish reasons that put our personal preferences as a high priority and therefore complain in our hearts and to others when those aren't met, and 2) we can expect too little from worship. We can come with hearts unprepared and minds unengaged because we go through the motions instead of expecting God to meet his people in power for the sake of their help and his glory.

My prayer is that as we walk through chapter 14 we will be helped to come to worship at Sojourners with a mindset to love each other and a longing for God's help that we expect him to answer.

### **Definitions of and Dispositions towards Tongues and Prophecy (various)**

In chapter 14 Paul compares and contrasts the gift of prophecy and tongues to talk about what purpose they serve and what place they should have when the church gathers to worship. So, even though I don't think Paul's main point is to give sharp definitions or to theologically debate prophecy and tongues, but rather to help a church navigate worship with love, I still think it might serve as helpful overall if we take just a few minutes to give a definition for both of these gifts and then show Paul's overall disposition toward them in this chapter so that we know what we're talking about as we go through this chapter.

***Tongues** - Speaking divinely-given content unknown to the speaker for the sake of personal help and/or to help others when understood for God's glory.*

In every place we see tongues in the New Testament, the speaker is given divine utterance by the power of the Spirit to speak content unknown to them. We see this in Acts 2 at Pentecost and then throughout Acts as people come to believe in Christ several times, though not every time. In 1 Corinthians we see this as a gift from the Spirit.

*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. (1 Cor. 14:2)*

This is a prayer to God not understood by anyone else, and the person is speaking mysteries given to them by the Spirit. Some people have referred to this as a "personal prayer language." Tongues does seem to be given for personal prayer and worship.

And tongues is given to build up the soul of the one speaking it:

*The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself. (1 Cor. 14:4)*

Now some people will argue that Paul must be sarcastic here because God doesn't give gifts to build ourselves up but only to build others up. I'll just say two quick things about this: 1) Our gifts are always encouraging our own faith while encouraging the faith of others, and 2) We are actually commanded to build ourselves up through prayer to keep ourselves in the love of God:

*But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God. (Jude 20)*

So tongues is Spirit-given personal prayer unknown to those who hear or the person praying for personal building up. It could be other real languages, it could be angelic languages (early witness) (13:1-3). But, when someone interprets it becomes useful to build up others:

*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. (1 Cor. 14:5)*

So, if someone interprets, the church can be built up because they know what is said. This verse also transitions us from a definition to Paul's disposition towards tongues. Paul says here, he desires they all speak in tongues. Now, I think Paul really does think tongues would be good for everyone, but just like in chapter 7 when Paul said he wishes they would all be single like him, he doesn't actually expect that God will give that gift to everyone. But, does Paul say anything else about his disposition toward this gift in chapter 14?

In verse 18 Paul says, "I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you." Paul is grateful for this gift God has given him. It builds him up. It strengthens him in prayer and song (vv.14-16) and yet, Paul's disposition is NOT to use tongue EVER unless he knows there will be an interpretation in church.

*Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (v.19)*

So, tongues is *speaking divinely-given content unknown to the speaker for the sake of personal help and/or to help others when understood for God's glory*. Paul is glad he has it and would be glad if others had this gift too.

**Prophecy** - *Speaking forth a previously unknown reality or application divinely revealed to help others for God's glory.*

This definition works for every instance of prophecy we see in the Old or New Testament. What we will see in later weeks is that every prophecy shares a few common principles:

- 1) It comes from the Spirit for the help of others to the glory of God.
- 2) Either the reality or an application was previously unknown to the speaker.
- 3) It had to be tested.

I'm going to say more about how it is to be tested in later weeks, lots more, but for today I'll just say that no prophecy today can ever have the same authority as the Bible. We don't stand on prophecies, we stand on the Bible and test prophecy with the Bible.

Notice, the main differences between prophecy and tongues is that prophecy is spoken in words everyone can understand and is always aimed to help others:

*On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. (1 Cor. 14:3)*

Moses longed in Numbers 11:29 that God would send out his Spirit and make all God's people prophets. The prophet Joel predicted in Joel 2:28-29 that in the *last days* God would pour out his Spirit and one of the things that would happen would be that God's people would prophesy. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-29 in Acts 2 and says those days are now here. And then all sorts of others New Testament books give all sorts of the work of God happening by this gift.

This is simply God bringing something, a verse, information, an application of the Bible, to mind (during a sermon, personal conversation, or anywhere) that accords with the Bible and brings help to the hearer and glory to God.

I've heard some people argue that it has to "predict" and that it can't simply be a "comforting word." I think it certainly could predict something, but, right in 1 Corinthians 14:3 it says in the worship service there is immediate comfort, encouragement, edification that comes and in 14:23-25 it says immediate conviction and worship comes.

Paul's disposition is very positive towards this gift. Paul wants them to desire this gift (14:1), he says it is greater because it builds up (14:4) and wants them all to speak in tongues but even MORE to prophesy (14:5). Paul elevates this gift above tongues for the sake of corporate worship over and over again in chapter 14.

So, with those basic definitions and dispositions, let's see what Paul says in these first 12 verses about these gifts.

### **Gospel-Love Prioritizes Prophecy Over Tongues in Corporate Worship (vv.1-5)**

Paul starts out chapter 14 by commanding the Corinthians to continue to pursue love and desire the spiritual gifts, especially that they may prophesy. But, what becomes very clear very quickly is that the chapter is really focused on comparing the gift of prophecy vs. the gift of tongues and showing which is more useful in their corporate gatherings to love each other best.

Again, as we've said so often, the main point of these chapters is not Paul defining or trying to give an apologetic for spiritual gifts, but instead, Paul is cutting to the heart and trying to help a real church in real time to use these gifts in the way of love. Prophecy and tongues sometimes took place out of the local church context in the New Testament, but Paul is concerned with how these believers at Corinth used their gifts for the sake of loving each other in worship together, which would lead to the honoring of Jesus.

And I make a point about the local church now because I find that so many people talk right past each other because they miss that point. Those on the side afraid of these particular gifts point to bad examples at places that normally don't take local church membership or leadership seriously and therefore have only seen these gifts exercised in ways that don't line up with 1 Corinthians 14. And those who want to see these gifts practiced often come from backgrounds with very little exposure to or commitment to the local church and so they can't understand why the church isn't promoting the gifts the same way they were promoted at their favorite ministry.

Often times people wanting to see these gifts practiced accuse the other side of being too intellectual and not wanting to actually have a vibrant relationship with God. Often times people afraid of these gifts accuse the other side of being too emotional and not wanting to actually know truth about the God they are in relationship with.

Paul's concern is a local church that practices these realities in the way of love for the good of all there and to the glory of God. And Paul's concern is a church that knows deep truth about God, tests everything by the word of God, and has vibrant, deep relationship and communion with God by the Spirit. Paul wants gifts with leadership and care. Paul wants worship with head and heart. Paul wants all done in love for the sake of others. Let's look at what he says in verses 1-5:

*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the realm of the Spirit, 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. 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.*

Paul reminds them of love and then commends prophesy above tongues. If we were to summarize Paul's thoughts in one sentence we could say, "Tongues is a gift that will build you up as you speak mysteries to God, but unless you have an interpretation I'd prefer you prophesy so that everyone can be built up, encouraged, and consoled, because they will understand you!"

Paul will get more specific on order later in the chapter, but what is clear here (and later) is that the point of the church gathering is not just individual. Yes, the Lord is meeting each of us individually through his Spirit, but we are also meant to come to worship thinking about how we can serve each other.

Do you come to church with your own personal preferences as your main concern? You want things done a certain way? Or do you come with a heart that longs to do and practice whatever is helpful for others?

Here, Paul says he prefers prophecy because other people can understand and therefore be helped. It's that simple.

Also, lastly in this section notice that Paul expects that God will meet his people for his glory through other people. Prophecy is given by God, spoken to others, and they get real help! This could come through a song, preaching, prayer time together, conversations, or anything else.

As you're driving to church do you pray that God would use you to bless others? As you're driving to church do you pray that God would use someone else to bless you? Do you expect that when you come to church **GOD** is here among us by his Spirit to point us to Jesus Christ and help us adore, worship, and trust him more deeply? Do you expect God to show up among his people and help them worship his Son by his Spirit?

Paul did. And we should.

### **Gospel-Love Strives to Help Others (vv.6-12)**

In verses 6-11 Paul gives two analogies meant to show the same thing about why the way of love will lead them to *not use* tongues in a worship service if they don't have an interpretation. Look at verse 6 with me first:

*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?*

This is rhetorical. Paul is saying, "If I come speaking in tongues with no interpretation I will be of NO benefit to you unless I also bring something else you can understand." Then he gives two analogies. Look at verses 7-9 first:

*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.*

Paul simply says, if an instrument doesn't play distinct notes you could never know what instrument it was, nonetheless the song or it's meaning. And if a soldier plays a bugle that isn't distinct no one will get ready for battle. In other words, distinct, understandable communication is needed for someone to enjoy the music or get ready for battle. In the same way he says if you speak in tongues that no one else can understand you will just be speaking aimlessly in the air and no one will benefit. He gives one more analogy in verses 10-11:

*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.*

Here, Paul gives an analogy to languages. His point here again is simple. If you have a conversation with someone and neither of you can understand each other, you will be literally "barbarians" to each other. There

won't be any fruitful or productive conversation, but just noises made. Yes, what is said has a real meaning, but not unless it's understood. Look at verse 12:

*So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.*

Paul knows the Corinthians are “eager” to see the Spirit of God work, and overall that is a good thing. He actually told them to pursue that in 14:1. But, remember the hearts of these Corinthians. They were always trying to push themselves up while they pushed others down. They were boasters. They boasted in the teachers they loved. They boasted in their sin. They took each other to corrupt courts to get their own way. They ate food offered to idols to prove their superior knowledge even though it destroyed the conscience of their blood-bought family. They boasted in who had certain spiritual gifts and made it a competition. So, even though the pursuit of the Spirit was good, Paul realized their faulty methods and motivations.

Oh, how often we come to worship services and times together wanting to make ourselves look good, or get our way, or want our preferences to be heard as most important.

So, instead of that mindset Paul says to “strive to excel in building up the church.” In other words, desire the work of the Spirit to bless others in your blood-bought family. Don't desire to show yourself spiritual. Desire these gifts in the way of love, love looks out for others, love serves others, love longs to help others rest in Jesus. Love strives FOR others not against others.

### ***Application: Expecting Gospel-Help through the Exercising of Gospel-Love***

So, here's my application for us as we close, the application is that you give yourself to a time of prayer and Bible on Saturday nights before we gather, that you give yourself to prayer as you get up and prepare to come on Sundays, and that you give yourself to prayer as we go throughout the service.

Begin to prepare your heart on Saturday night. Open your Bible as a family or by yourself and ask God to show you the preciousness of Jesus and all the promises of the gospel. Linger there. See Jesus. Treasure Jesus. Stay until he looks beautiful to you and better than all the world promises. Ask him to help you see the gospel clearly and be set free from all selfishness and all bitterness and ask him to free you to love like he loved because he first loved you. Go to sleep asking God to help you come to worship expecting God to meet you and expecting God to use you to meet others by his Spirit.

Pray again as you come to church on Sunday. Remind yourself of the time of word and prayer the night before. Remind yourself of Jesus. Fight off bitterness and anger again with the better promises of the gospel. Ask God for help from the Spirit to listen, engage, and be eager to lay down your preferences to help others. Ask God to meet us and help us and to think beyond what we could ask or imagine.

And then pray again as we go through the service. As you're singing, be praying that you would mean the words. As you sing, be praying that God would teach you and help you through the lips of others. As you listen to the welcome, pray along with the welcomer that God would meet us through his Spirit because of Jesus. As you listen to the sermon ask God to show you blind-spots and to comfort your heart where it's needed through his word. As you come to communion confess your sins, remember the cross, and rejoice in the gospel as you take it. And as you pray and fellowship with others, ask God to help you pray and say things that will meet them right where they need help.

This is the beauty of the gospel in action. We are God's people purchased by the blood of Christ. A blood-bought family, baptized into the body of Christ by the Spirit. A blood-bought family given gifts of the Spirit. A blood-bought family seeking to go in the way of love. A blood-bought family coming to worship with a desire to love each other like we have been loved by Christ. And because of the blood of Christ, a promise that if we will come in the way of love, God himself will build us up, encourage us, and console by his Spirit and for his glory.

All of this is by the blood of Christ. All the help comes from the Spirit of Christ. But, oh what might God do with a people that come not for their own gain, but in the way of love. And what might God do with a people

eagerly expecting that God will be among them, helping them through his blood-bought people and the gifts he's given them by his Spirit. We need his help desperately and because of Jesus, God promises to keep meeting us and keep giving it, every single time we meet.