

Making Sundays Great Again

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[0 : 00] For this reason, the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding. I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

Otherwise, when you are praising God in the spirit, how can someone else who is now put in the position of an inquirer say amen to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you, but in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue.

Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil, be infants, but in your thinking, be adults.

[1 : 01] In the law it is written, With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers.

Prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers, but for believers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare.

So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, God is really among you. What then shall we say, brothers and sisters, when you come together, each of you has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation?

Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. Amen. Right now, over the month of November, I want us as a church to be reminding ourselves of the things that are really important to us so that we can look ahead to the future.

[2 : 23] I think you two used to have a song about being stuck in a moment and I can't get out of it. I think sometimes for some people in this pandemic season, it'd be really easy just to get stuck where we are and to be focused on the problems that we're facing in the day to day and to stop looking ahead.

But as Christians, we are a forward looking people and we have a lot to look forward to. Some really important things are happening for us at a very kind of concrete level.

We are going to get the old school house handed back to us before the end of this year. So we're going to be able to use it again, even for small Sunday gatherings.

We do anticipate that we'll get to meet together as a church sometime in the next few weeks. So things are going to change and develop. There are new opportunities ahead of us.

There are new people connecting to Cornerstone, even through the Internet. OK, so I'm taking this chance to kind of prepare myself and prepare you for the future, for what's ahead and to think about what are the things that we really want to hold tightly to as we move forward.

[3 : 42] And last week we spoke about mission, that we've got a love for our city. That means that we want to plant churches so that the message of the Lord will spread rapidly through our city.

So that's what we spoke about last week, that we have a commitment to being a church planting church. We're thinking about maybe starting some new congregations in Gilmerton or amongst Latinos next year.

This week, I want us to think about this part of our DNA as a congregation, which is just this idea that we really want to make Sundays a highlight of our time together as a church.

And that's what that passage was about that Simon read to us. When you come together, that's what Paul is focused on there.

We want everybody who comes to church, whether online or in person, when they come on a Sunday, to feel enriched, blessed, helped, strengthened by that experience.

[4 : 49] Now, imagine you're sitting in a cafe. You've got your laptop. You're with a friend called Saul of Tarsus.

They call him Paul now. And he's got his laptop out as well. And Saul or Paul is the author of this letter to the Corinthians. So you're sitting there with Paul in a cafe.

You're catching up and having a chat. And then Paul says, sorry, I've got a Zoom call to make. And he jumps onto his laptop and he starts talking to some people on the other end of the Zoom call. And you're kind of lugging in. You can only sort of hear part of the conversation, really, of what Paul's saying. And you can hear Paul saying things like this. You realize that the non-Christians who come to your church think you're bonkers.

They think you're start raving mad. Have you noticed that non-Christians come to your church and they never come back? So you're thinking, wow, that's kind of strong, isn't it?

[5 : 54] Paul, who's he talking to? What's he talking about? And then as you're listening to the conversation, you think, oh, this is a guy's down in Corinth that Paul's speaking to.

And then Paul goes on. He goes, you know, you guys, you're so childish. All your tongue speaking is totally self-indulgent. Your services are weird and they don't do anything for anyone except a few self-indulgent exhibitionists.

Well, you're kind of sitting back in your seat by this time thinking, oh, Paul's not pulling his punches. These are the things that Paul's talking about in the passage that Simon read that we're looking at this morning.

It's a chapter about what we do when we gather as a church. And verse 26 says this. It says, everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

So everything we do when we come together as a church is done, not just for our own enjoyment, but for the building up of others. And especially about as we speak in church services, that we speak clearly in helpful ways that strengthen everybody who's tuning in.

[7 : 13] 1 Corinthians chapter 14, the idea of speech is mentioned 24 times in this chapter. It's the dominant theme. How do we communicate when we come together as the church?

And above all, I think we want to say that how do we communicate clearly in a way that helps those who are new to church or those who are not Christian believers?

How does what we say help them? So if we are trying to hold on to anything from the service through the week, Thursday morning, you jump up.

What was church about? What was the message? Well, the Thursday thought is this. We are on a mission to make the gospel clear to everyone.

We're on a mission to make the gospel clear to everyone. So we want to say this. The church has a message for everyone. There's no doubt that the church is a people on mission.

[8 : 24] Every true church, including the first century church of Corinth down there in Greece, or the 21st century church of Cornerstone here in Edinburgh today, we are all part of the people of God.

We are all followers of Jesus. And from the earliest part of the Bible, we see that God said that he would bring people together to love him, to worship him, to be his community in this world.

So in the book of Genesis, at the start of the Bible, we see that sin, anger, violence, evil, wickedness, selfishness are wreaking havoc in the world.

And into that situation of a ruined human race, God comes and says, I'm going to create a new people who will live before my presence and be a blessing to the world.

So God comes with a promise about a new people who will be a blessing to the world. That's what the church is. It's a fulfillment of God's promise.

[9 : 37] He brings together a new community of people who will live in his presence and share in his mission to bless this world.

So the church is a people on mission. A mission to be light to the world, to bring God's good news to those who don't know it.

And when we gather on a Sunday morning, those gatherings, those coming together as Christians are part of our mission to the world.

But when we come together as a church, that's not just a private act for those who are believers. It's a public act for everybody who wants to show up.

So when we come together as a church community and worship, whatever we do when we gather, whether we sing or speak or teach or share, as is described in verse 26, we do all of those things in a way that will bless everyone who's there.

[10:46] And we're paying particular, careful, special attention to those who are present, who don't believe, who are new, or who are unsure.

Because what we want is for them to be convicted about Jesus and come to faith themselves.

Verse 24 says, if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while they're prophesying, they're convicted of sin.

That's what we want, isn't it? For people to come in to be convicted of sin. The secrets of their heart are laid bare, says verse 25, so that they will fall down and worship God, saying, God is really among you.

So there's this huge priority, this huge pressure that Paul lays on those of us who are Christians to make sure that our church services are a blessing to those who don't believe and don't know Jesus. That's something that Paul insists on, and it's something that we insist on at Cornerstone. I don't know if you've been in town recently. I've been in town a couple of times this week, but haven't been in town much at all before that.

[12:02] And if you go along Prince's Street, it's really quiet. It's quite unusual. But there's a place in Prince's Street. I think it's called the New Club. It's near Hanover Street.

And the New Club, as far as I can work out, is a private members club for Edinburgh. That means that if you're not a member, you don't get in. So I couldn't just wander into the New Club.

You probably couldn't either. You only get in if you know someone. And when you go in, of course, there's maybe a dress code. You have to have a shirt and tie and a jacket if you're going to go to dinner.

You're probably expected to speak the right way. And maybe you have no idea what people are talking about sometimes. There's club rules and club meetings and in-jokes and the history of the New Club.

And in that environment, in that setting, you probably get the feeling really quickly, I don't belong here. I'm not one of these people.

[13:01] Well, that's not what church is like. Church is not a club for the few, for the insider, for the elite or for good people.

Anyone can come to church. And when they do, they should all be able to follow and understand clearly what's happening, what we're talking about. Because when God created a people, he gave us a home with himself.

And what we're doing when we gather is we're gathering as a people to offer that same home to anyone else who wants it. Who wants to have a sense of belonging and community and to come to know the living God themselves.

So we are not a private club for insiders. And we've always got to be careful when we come together that we don't speak or act in a way that excludes others or gives them a real sense that they don't belong.

And as we think about how we communicate on a Sunday, which is what this chapter is about, then we have to communicate so clearly to those who don't know Jesus.

[14:15] So there's the second main point I want to make, which is that we will speak clearly in order to build everyone up. That's what this whole passage is about. Building people up, strengthening them.

And verse 13, if you've still got the chapter open in front of you in your Bible or in your phone or you maybe printed it out.

So verse 13, where Simon started reading, says, For this reason, the one who speaks in the tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. What's the reason that he's referring back to in the previous verses?

Well, the reason that he's referring to is mentioned in verse 12, the previous verse. Try to excel in gifts that build up the church, says verse 12.

So God gives Christians different gifts. And there's a lot of controversy in the Corinthian church about some of these gifts and a lot of competition for people to have the most kind of spectacular or

showy gift.

[15:16] And there was a real kind of peacocking, showing off, exhibitionism in that church, a very competitive culture that they came out of in Corinth, a city that was commercially very powerful and drew competitive, ambitious people.

And that filtered into the life of the church. And so they're using their gifts to show off. And they're not really thinking about other people when they do that. So in the previous chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul said, listen, there's something much more important than your gifts.

It's love. Love must govern the way that you use your gifts. So here in chapter 14, he's saying, right, as we let love guide what we do with our gifts, that means we're going to want to prioritize those gifts that communicate most clearly.

That's what he's looking back to here. Try to excel in gifts that build up the church. Use your gifts to build up those around you so that they will have their faith strengthened.

So there were some people in this church who spoke in tongues. And this was a sort of unintelligible spiritual language that they used publicly in order to impress others.

[16:39] But the problem with it was that nobody had a clue what they were on about. It was not helpful to anybody other than themselves. So Paul is adamant that when we gather for worship, we want everyone to be built up or, as it's sometimes said, to be edified.

And that word edification or built up occurs seven times in this chapter. So here we are walking along Prince's Street this week.

If I'd been with someone, I might have turned around and said, what a magnificent edifice Edinburgh Castle is. So an edifice is a building, a construction.

So when Christians talk about edification, that something is edifying, they're saying something that strengthens and encourages others.

When we edify others, we want to build them up through words and acts of love and encouragement. And as I've said, it's talked about a lot in this chapter. It's another really dominant theme that when we speak, we're speaking in ways that will build other people up.

[17:59] So that's a kind of quality assurance scheme that Paul's imposing on the church. As they think about what they do when they come together as believers, how do they decide what to do?

Well, there's various things involved, but very clearly, one thing that's involved is this. Does what you're doing strengthen others? Does it edify them?

Does it build them up? If it doesn't, then don't do it. So love needs to guide the way that we look at our times of worship.

We're thinking about others. We want to show love to them. And so as we look at the way we worship together, love will guide the way we go about it. And that's where tongues became a problem in the church in Corinth.

Because tongues were a really good gift for the private worship of God. But Paul's saying they don't build other people up the way that prophecy does. Even if you interpret your tongues, they're still not as helpful as prophecy.

[19:03] So tongues speaking isn't really an expression of love for others. The loving thing to do is to use gifts in a way that will bless and build everyone.

Now, what's Paul talking about here? If you're new to church, if you're not somebody who's read the Bible a lot or been around Christians very often, you might have no idea what I'm talking about or what Paul's talking about.

In 1 Corinthians 14, when he talks about tongue speaking and prophecy. Well, as far as we can work out, tongue speaking was a euphoric experience where the user had a pattern of unintelligible sounds that they used to express deep spiritual longing.

So it was a very worshipful thing, a kind of spiritual ecstasy that they used to engage with God.

And one of the things that Paul says here is that, you know, that these tongues bypass the mind. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, he says in verse 14.

[20:09] Verse 14 says, if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So it's a sort of non-cognitive, non-reflective process.

So it's not edifying for others. So that's not what Paul wants them to be focused on in church. He talks more about prophecy. Now, we might think about prophecy as like, oh, a prophet is somebody who predicts the future.

But is Neil McMullen about to start predicting the future? Is that what's going to be helpful for me? Well, I don't think that's exactly what Paul's getting at here. Prophecy is about an inspired message from God that's intelligible to everybody who hears it, that enables them to reflect personally on God's truth, to think about their lives and their relationship with God.

That's the impact that Paul expects to see here in verses 24 and 25, that as prophecy is done in the church, as his truth is taught, that people will be convinced and convicted and begin to worship God.

They'll begin to get real insight to their own lives, to the secrets of their heart, to the things that are wrong with them. So prophecy is about talking to others in a public way, in a way that addresses the mind and shapes the heart.

[21 : 41] So that's what love will guide us to do, to speak truth clearly in a way that convinces others, convicts them, speaks their mind, shapes their heart.

It will edify. It will build them up. It will strengthen. And if we love people, and especially if we love those who are not yet believers, or those who are new to church, we don't want them to think that we're mad or that we're bad, that we don't care about them.

So there's a total emphasis in these verses on new people or new believers. I think the verse in the Bible that we're reading called them inquirers.

I think the Greek word is idiotes, which doesn't quite mean what we would mean by idiot, but it just means a neophyte, somebody who is new, who's not initiated into certain ideas.

And I think in other translations, it's translated as outsider. So those neophytes, those new people are mentioned three times. And then we've got the unbelieving, those who don't believe the gospel, also mentioned several times.

[22 : 54] So there are two groups of people here, people who are new to church, maybe new believers, and people who are not yet believers. And they're called out for special care and attention.

And here's where Paul really starts to poke the Corinthians and say, listen, if you're speaking in ways that they don't understand, you're being childish and self-indulgent.

Verse 20, brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil, be infants in your thinking, be adults. So the mature, loving thing to do is to show people, yeah, we care about you.

And so we're going to speak to you in ways that you can understand. Because if we don't, then as verse 23 says, unbelievers will come in and they will think we are bonkers.

We're mad and we're bad, and they're not going to come back. So Paul's been really sarcastic here. Why? Because he feels really strongly about this issue.

[24 : 07] This matters hugely to him. And if Paul cares so strongly about it, if the Bible cares so strongly about it, then we who are part of Corners, we should care a lot that our services connect well with those who are not yet Christians or who are new to church.

And that should really drive what we do, what we say, how we say it. Something to really think about and pray about. We should be so passionate for this.

You see, when it comes to tongue speaking, they might love it for themselves. But to unbelievers, it's a sign of judgment, of rejection, and they're going to think we're crazy. There's a quote here from Isaiah chapter 28 in verse 21.

Now, Israel in the Old Testament was rejecting God, and so through the power of Isaiah, God is saying to them, well, I am going to speak to you in a tongue you don't understand then.

As a sign of judgment, you've rejected me, and now my judgment, my rejection comes against you. So what Paul is saying here is this, that tongues will be a sign to unbelievers, a sign of our rejection of them, that we don't really care about them.

[25 : 32] Signs, tongues will be a sign that promotes unbelief. Prophecy will be a sign that helps belief. That's what Paul is saying here.

So it's really important then just to say, let's communicate clearly. That's part of our mission, to make God known. And let's communicate most clearly for those who are not yet believers or who are new to church.

And so it's really important for us, I think, too, to understand then that God still speaks today. God is still speaking to us today. God's alive and at work in our world.

So I think one thing we can take from this then is that if God is still speaking today, we can expect unbelievers and new people to be present in every church service.

There will always be people, because God is a God who speaks in a living way today, there will always be people who come to church who are curious but unconvinced.

[26 : 37] And our lives will be attractive to them and our services will be attractive to them because the gospel is a message of power and life. So that's one thing.

We're expecting unbelievers to be present when we gather for worship. The second thing is, if God is still speaking, then we need to be intelligible and clear in what we say, what we sing, how we praise God.

Paul's very clear in verse 16. If people don't understand, then they cannot participate. Otherwise, when you're praising God in your spirit, how can someone else who's now in the position of an inquirer say amen to your thanksgiving since they do not know what you're saying?

You're giving thanks well enough. Nobody else is edified. Okay? So they can't participate. They can't agree. They can't amen what you're saying because they don't actually know what you're saying.

So Paul goes on to say this. In the church, I would speak, rather speak, five intelligible words, just five, to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue they don't understand.

[27 : 49] So we have to put a huge emphasis on intelligibility in worship, on being clear in what we say. That's an extra challenge for us at Coralstone.

Because we have so many people who come along who don't have English as their first language. So God is still speaking.

That means we expect unbelievers and the unconvinced to be in our services. It means that we will make every effort to be intelligible and clear in what we're saying. It means that we come longing for people to be built up.

Everyone. We want others to be strengthened and built up as we gather. And we especially want those who are not Christians to be convinced and convicted.

Verse 24 again. They're convicted of their sin. They're brought under judgment by all. The secrets of their heart are laid bare. As different people speak and what they say, whether it's somebody reading the Bible or somebody talking about what God's up to in their lives, or somebody preaching from Scripture, people hear God beginning to expose what's going on in their hearts.

[29 : 03] The reality of their spiritual need becomes clearer and clearer. And they begin to worship God.

They fall down. There's a sense of God's presence and they fall down exclaiming, God is really among you. So we have that particular longing, hope, anticipation and prayer when we gather that non-Christians will be convinced and convicted that God is speaking to them.

Exposing the secrets of their hearts so that they too will become worshippers of God with us. So those are three things I really want to emphasize. And we expect all kinds of people to show up at church.

We need to be intelligible and clear of what we say. And we believe the message of the Lord will convict and lead people to worship. If you're not a Christian this morning, then God has really important things to say to you.

I'm sorry if I'm not making that clear. If you can begin to hear God's message for you, then it will cut through like a laser to the very heart of who you are.

[30 : 15] Your struggles, your fears, your anxieties, the things that crush you in life, the things that wound you, the sorrows that you carry, the hard things that have happened to you, the hard things that you've done to others.

You'll begin to see them in a new light. And you'll begin to see that there's hope for you. Not because of your capacity to work out your own solution to all of this, but because of what God has already done through his son, Jesus Christ, and his death and resurrection to give you a new start. No matter who you are, what you've done or what you've been through in life, God offers you a new beginning today. New life, forgiveness, and freedom from all the things that you feel trapped in or shamed by.

God wants you to know him. God invites you to know him now. God invites you to know that he is real and present. God invites you to become a worshiper, to say to him, God, I love you more than anything else.

I believe in you. And I want to follow you. So that's something that you can say today. For the first time, perhaps. God is worthy of our worship.

[31 : 36] He really is. There's a quote here from John Calvin, French theologian of long ago. He says this, for who even of slight intelligence does not understand that as nurses commonly do with infants, God is want to in measure to lisp in speaking to us.

Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as to accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this, he must descend far beneath his loftiness. God reaches down in his word to speak to us in a way that we can understand. And so that's an amazing gift. What a loving God he is to accommodate himself to us in this way.

And so as we speak, we also want to make sure that others will understand too. To accommodate ourselves so that we speak clearly for them.

What an amazing gift that God is willing to be known by us. That he's done everything that needs to happen for us to know him. He does it out of love.

[32 : 48] He's spoken so clearly through his son, Jesus. And now he invites us to speak back to him. I'm going to pray. I'm going to sing a song. I'm going to give you a moment of quiet reflection.

We're going to sing another song and then we'll end. Lord Jesus, thank you so much that you have spoken through your son, Jesus, to each of us today. We pray that this service would speak to all who are listening.

And it would speak of a God who wants to be known, who longs to be known by all who would come to him. And may we come to you, God, today. May we fall down in your presence and say, the Lord is really here.

And may we worship you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.