

SPECIAL MESSAGES

LOVING PEOPLE WITH YOUR MIND

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

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. 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.

I want to stop right there, reading those verses only to start with, because I want to talk to you today about how your mind helps you to love people. We typically think in terms of loving people from the heart, and that's not incorrect at all. We love people from the heart. We love people with our desires. We have good feelings for them. We desire for them the best thing. We choose, we will their best. That's all a part of what it means to love others.

But there's also an aspect, and it's taught here in this passage, that our minds are very important in how we love God and love other people. This is particularly important because Jesus told us that this is what we're all about. You were created to love God and love people. And if you are following Christ, that is really a job description for you in very broad umbrella terms.

Just look at the passage where Jesus told us that. Jesus said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and (look at this) with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment." So the first thing we do is love God with all that we are. He breaks it down: heart, soul, and mind.

Sometimes we look at the soul as the mind, will, and emotions, but he gets specific and breaks this out for us, then gives us the second great commandment. "And a second is like it: You shall love

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your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” He is summarizing all of God’s Old Testament word. All of God’s moral command to us, he tells us, is fulfilled in these two great commandments.

If you are here and you are a follower of Jesus Christ, love is critical. It’s not optional. It’s not an appendage. It’s not something we tag on or add on. It’s defining for who we are. And we want to think today about loving other people. We want to use our minds today so that we can use our minds to love people. I need you to be ready to think today, to track with me, to follow, because it’s what God wants us to do.

1 Corinthians 14 is an interesting passage of scripture. We just read the first few verses, the first paragraph. Paul is addressing a situation in the Church where they are crazy about spiritual gifts – super enthusiastic about using supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. When they get together it is a gift fest. They are speaking in tongues. You are like, “What in the world is tongues?” They are speaking in prophecy and all kinds of things, and Paul comes in to bring a correction.

Today we are going to talk about why understanding, why comprehension is important as a part of our worship, our love for God, our love for other people. And as a bonus, we’re going to talk about the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy. Are you ready? Let’s do it.

Broad outline: Paul comes in and says, “You are doing it wrong. It’s not helpful. In fact, it’s destructive.” He makes two points in the whole chapter. Verses 1-25: There needs to be understanding. There needs to be comprehension. People cannot be built up, people cannot be helped, they will not effectively worship the Lord and grow; whether they are Christians or not, they need understanding. Then, in the rest of the chapter, verse 26 to the end of the chapter, verse 40, he says there needs to be order. When you gather there needs to be order.

- I. There needs to be understanding.
- II. There needs to be order.

We are looking at the first of those two.

So let’s break it down. I’m going to give you five points, Lord willing. The first is:

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1. Use your gifts to love people, verses 1-5.

It's the paragraph that we just read. He starts that section by saying, "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." The first thing we want to say here is that Paul is not against the gifts of the Spirit. His point in this chapter is not to say, "Stop using the gifts of the Spirit. Stop walking in the Spirit. These gifts are not gifts or this is not the Spirit." None of that is the point that Paul wants to make. He really commands them to do two things here: Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.

To get this, this first verse is massively important because these two things go together. In fact, he has been making this point for the whole previous two chapters. He starts out in chapter 12 teaching on spiritual gifts. He is spending a lot of time on this subject because they are all about it. He wants to instruct them on how to use the gifts in a helpful way.

In chapter 12 his point is rather simple – that there is a diversity of people and a diversity of gifts. When you come to Jesus Christ you can't do it apart from the Holy Spirit at work in your heart. You will not follow Jesus apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. But when you do follow Jesus, God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit comes to live in you. And you know what? He brings things. He brings gifts. They are powerful and it enables you, it empowers you to follow God.

That's not the only way that God gives you power, but it's one of the ways that God gives you power. He says, "Listen, you guys. Stop acting like there's just one gift. There are many gifts. Not everyone has the same gift and there's no one gift that everyone has. And, very important for the life of the church: We need everyone, every member, every person to be using their gifts to serve God and love God and love others or we won't be healthy. We'll be like a body that's just a great big eye." Yeah, that's weird.

When he is finishing this important teaching, he then gives the great chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13. We read it at weddings. I've read it at weddings. I've taught on it, but it's not really about marriage. It's about what's happening right here in the church.

Now, it's not wrong to use it at weddings, but he is saying, "Okay, listen guys, if you have gifts, no matter how powerful, how impressive, how great they are, if you don't have love, you have nothing. In fact, no matter what you have, what you do, if you don't have love, it's meaningless.

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Stop. Stop and back up and look at that statement. Paul is saying everything else is going to pass away, but love remains. “Faith, hope and love – these remain; the greatest of these is love.” When Paul gets to this verse, he says, “Pursue love.” He is saying always follow the way of love and let that define who you are. This is the point, this is how I’ve chosen to phrase it: Use your gifts to love people. Your gift is not about you. You’ll be healthier if you use it, but it’s about loving others.

So, he teaches us something about the nature of the gift of tongues. He actually gives us a clear description in this paragraph. Did you get it? He defines tongues and he defines New Testament prophecy. He tells us that tongues is a spiritual gift. It’s something the Spirit gives. He has already told us not everyone has it. He tells us that it builds up the individual, that the person is speaking mysteries. The Holy Spirit is helping this person speak mysteries and he or she is speaking to God. It’s something like a prayer language or a worship language.

Now, if that seems weird to you, yeah, it’s supernatural. It’s God in you, helping you praise God and pray and to express things that you’re not even expressing in your own vocabulary. The New Testament is serious about this. God lives in you! You walk with God as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Paul says something interesting. He says, “Listen, if you are speaking in tongues when you all gather and you are all babbling, no one is helped. You may feel great, but other people aren’t helped. So he says, “I don’t want you to do that. I want you to prophesy.” Then he gives an explanation of prophecy.

Now, when we think of a prophet, we think of an Old Testament prophet who comes out and says, “Thus sayeth the Lord: You shall not...or you shall...” It doesn’t give that picture. In fact, when you put this together with the second half of the chapter, he gives a very different picture. He says, “The Holy Spirit lives in all of you and every follower of Jesus should seek to be speaking Spirit-inspired words, words that the Holy Spirit helps you speak that are not in an unknown prayer language, but in a way that people actually understand, that they are built up. He says this will bring comfort. This will bring consolation. This will bring encouragement. This will bring edification.

He teaches us that because of the nature of these gifts, we should speak to one another under the direction, under the influence, under the power of the Holy Spirit in a way that people understand. He is now going to labor on this point, on the importance of comprehending. He’s going to unpack it.

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So, just a couple of parting observations on this point. The implications are powerful. Worship is not just a private thing. You've heard me quote Francis Chan before. He was walking out of the church building and someone said, "I didn't really like worship today." Francis Chan said, "Well that's good, because we weren't worshipping you. As a matter of fact, it's not about you." Listen, I get it. We have preferences. We want to choose a church well. All of those things are relevant, but Paul is presenting this idea that worship is about God, then we are really carefully considering other people in terms of how we worship.

Another parting observation: Being filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean that we lose control. It means that we have self-control, and that we actually choose how we use the gifts of the Spirit. You are not quenching the Spirit when you control the use of a spiritual gift. This is the delineating point. When you say, "Hey, don't use that gift here, now, in that way," you are not saying, "That's not the Holy Spirit."

We've had some really weird things happen in worship service over the years. I've had the joy of being here 31 years. It's amazing, right? I know I look old, but if you look around, there are some people that are even older. They've been here the whole time and the fact that they've stayed is rather amazing, right? I mean, I've had times where I'm preaching and someone stands up and starts screaming, screaming out in tongues and then screaming out a prophecy. I'm like, "Whoa!" On a number of occasions I've had to stop someone and say, "Listen, no, that's not what we're doing right now. I don't know you, and you haven't come to the eldership of this church and submitted your life and your message. You can't do that."

I'm not in that moment saying, "That's of the devil. That's not the Spirit of God. That's not a legitimate gift." No, I'm just saying, "Not now. Not you. Not helpful. No." Right?

If that seems harsh, I'm going to tell you, you want a pastor, you want an elder who believes and takes seriously the call of God to protect your life. I wouldn't let you come into my home when my kids are little and say, "Hey, I'd like to experiment a little bit with your kids!" "I don't think so." "Well, I've got this whole new philosophy that God gave me." "Well, go talk to God, but you are not talking to my kids!" Right? Yeah, it's the loving thing to do.

Just getting those presuppositions together, let's move on.

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2. You need to understand in order to grow.

Whoa, this is a big point. Let's look at verses 6 through 12.

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

Paul begins this section by saying, "If I come to you and I speak in tongues, it's going to be no benefit to you. I need to bring you a teaching or knowledge or prophecy or revelation. If you're not able to comprehend it, you won't be strengthened. You won't grow." Then he gives three illustrations to make the point. He says that a musical instrument can make noise well enough, but that's not the same as playing music and being part of an orchestra. A bugle that's used in battle has to make a certain signal so troops know whether to advance or retreat or to take the given action that is required, or it's meaningless. Then his third illustration is foreign languages. If someone speaks a foreign language to you, they may be speaking well enough, but it doesn't benefit you.

I want to make this point out of this particular paragraph: He says you need to understand to grow. Paul says, "When I come to be with you and help you, I want to help you grow, so I want to help you understand. Said another way, if you're not growing in knowledge, you are probably not growing. God is infinite. We're never going to completely, exhaustively know him, so it's not like we've pretty much tapped out the subject and got God figured out, right?"

There is an invitation for you and me to be constantly strengthened and built up. Jonathan Edwards, in particular, taught this very powerfully. The more I understand, the more I comprehend, the greater my worship will become, the fuller my experience of God and my love for God.

For example, when you open the Bible and you are reading it on your own and you come to something that just doesn't make sense to you, you say, "Wow, I hope that doesn't mean what I

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think it means, or what it sounds like it means.” Don’t just run over that. Don’t just skip over it. Go to it. Dig it out, because we want to understand, because growth comes as we advance in our understanding, in our knowledge, and our worship is increased. It dishonors the Lord when we think that faith is just accepting superficial explanations. It’s not!

Okay, big caution. There is a knowledge that’s not helpful. 1 Corinthians 8:1: “Now, concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up.” Paul gives us a very helpful caution here. This is earlier in the book, just to point out that this has already happened in 1 Corinthians. They were in a culture where there were temples, and in these temples they would take meat and offer it to idols. There were all kinds of sexual things and fertility rites and a lot of things that a Christian shouldn’t be a part of.

There were evidently Corinthians in the church who said, “Listen, I’ve got knowledge.” He says, “All of us possess knowledge.” He is addressing this mindset. Their knowledge went something like this: “Hey, we know that these idols aren’t real. There is only one true God, and we know that God has declared all foods to be clean. Okay? These things are true. Therefore, if we go to one of these temples and we take part in this, the gods aren’t real and the food is fine and we are okay.”

Paul says, “No, you can’t be a part of worshipping something other than God! You are all puffed up! Your knowledge is not a humble: ‘God, I love you, I need you, help me to help others.’ Your knowledge is all about me! I’m all puffed up. I’ve got this figured out. You don’t tell me what to do. I’m fine.” He warns against this. He actually tells them in the fuller teaching -- I’ll just give it to you because it’s very applicable to all of us.

He says, “Listen, if you go to the marketplace and there is meat there, you don’t have to find out if it was offered to an idol. It may have been.” In that culture, in that day it may have been. He says you’re fine to eat it, because yes, it’s true -- it’s true that these idols are not gods and that all things are clean. So you are allowed to eat that. He says it’s fine. That’s different than going to a pagan worship service. “Pagan” would be a word that Paul would use.

Then he makes this statement. This powerfully, powerfully brings home our point. He says you are free to do that, unless you have someone with you whose heart is offended by it, doesn’t understand it, or stumbles over it. Then, you love that brother or that sister more than you love the meat you are about to buy. He says it’s no contest. Then you abstain because you love them.

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He is thinking through, he is unpacking an ethic of love and how it affects and sweeps through everything we are and everything we do. It's very powerful. It's like me saying to you, "You are free to have a glass of wine. You are free. Go home for lunch and have a glass of wine, if you can do it unto the Lord and thank God for it." Some of you are saying "Amen" and some of you are saying, "I'm not sure." Right?

Now, if you say, "Well, thank you! All things are pure. This is something I enjoy. Joy is a gift from the Lord. I'm going to get drunk." Hmmmm. Wait a minute, right? No. That's clearly not honoring to the Lord and not something we should do.

Same principle applies. You are free to have a glass of wine, but suppose someone goes out to lunch with you and they are offended by it. They stumble by it. They think Christians shouldn't do that, or maybe they have alcoholism, or for whatever reason, it offends them. What choice do you make? "Well, just get over it. What's wrong with you? Let me tell you about my knowledge." No, no, no. You love them, right?

Boy, you're just getting so many sermons today: spiritual gifts, wine, love. Alright. Incidentally, wine stands for all alcoholic beverages, and no illegal drugs. Alright, we are moving on. I want to leave you with this point: Worship God with your mind. Worship the Lord with your mind. We are going somewhere with this and we are almost there.

3. Use your gifts to help others understand.

Here we are in verses 12-19. We take the last verse of the previous paragraph. "So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church." God has given you gifts? Great! Don't brag about those gifts. Don't focus on those gifts. Use them to build up other people. The principle is clear. Whatever God has given you, use it to help people, not to hurt people.

He continues in verse 13: "Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret." If it wasn't clear to you already, there is a gift of interpretation.

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 pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the

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position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 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.

There is a bit of a confusing part right there in the middle. He says, “Okay, you pray with your mind, you pray with your spirit.” This is what he is saying: If you have this gift to speak to God and the Holy Spirit is helping you, your spirit is being built up, but you are not comprehending.

He says that’s okay for you individually. You are benefitting. So, great, I do that. But I also pray with my mind. And in the Church, it’s not both. It is: Speak so that it can be understood, because people will not be edified. Just to dramatically make the point: Five words of understanding are better than a thousand intelligible words.

Now he is driving home his real point: Help other people. Incidentally, he says you can’t say, “Amen” if you don’t understand, which means when you do understand, you say: Amen! Okay.

4. Package the truth in love.

Everything we’ve said to this point is really for the final minutes of this message, so stay with me.

Package the truth in love. He tells us here in verses 20-25:

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.” (Now this is really confusing – I’m going to explain it.) 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.

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Let me see if I can explain this paragraph. In the first 19 verses Paul has been talking Christian to Christian. This is how we practice spiritual gifts so that we can help other Christians grow. Now in verses 20 through 25, he turns his attention to people who are not followers of Jesus, and they come to be a part. Paul is valuing that and he wants them to understand what's going on. This is the confusing part. He says, tongues is a sign to unbelievers, meaning it leads to unbelief, so don't do it in front of unbelievers. Prophecy is a sign for believers, meaning it leads to faith. His illustration from scripture is what makes it clear. He quotes Isaiah 28. Hopefully this will crystalize this for you.

God was talking to the children of Israel about judgment. He said, "The Assyrians are going to come in and you are going to hear a strange tongue, and it's my judgment. And when you hear it you still won't understand that I am bringing discipline and correction and judgment to you. This is how far you are away from me." It's a really stern message of judgment. The foreign language, the intelligible speech is a sign of God's judgment.

Paul makes a brilliant application. It's hard for us to follow, but his application is this. He says if you use your spirituality to act in a way where other people are like, "What in the world are you doing?" you are actually highlighting the fact that they are under God's judgment rather than his mercy. You are pushing them away from God instead of pulling them toward God.

He said you may be speaking the truth well enough, but they can't comprehend it. This is the application I want to make. Listen, friends, we don't have a problem on Sunday morning with people speaking in tongues without interpretation. The application for you and me is going to be different. We live in a world where, increasingly so, what the Bible teaches doesn't always make sense. We will either present them with judgment or we will labor in the love of Jesus Christ to help them understand. Friends, we are to use all that the Holy Spirit gives us to help us do that.

People will say, "You're saying to me Jesus is the only way? That's so exclusive. Christianity excludes." We can just hit them with judgment at that point, or we can get into their world in the love of Jesus Christ and help them understand what that means and what it looks like.

They may struggle. I say they. You may struggle. We may struggle with: How can a good God send people to hell? How can a good God allow suffering? These are questions that are worthy of more than superficial glances. We want to worship God with all of our minds and help articulate these glorious truths that are difficult, that we sometimes struggle with. It's certainly

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understandable that other people would struggle with ideas like: “If I follow Jesus it’s just so restrictive. You guys have so many points. Even today Brian is saying you can’t get drunk. Who wants to live like that? I want to live a little bit! I want to have a good time!”

Paul is saying there is a way to deliver that message that’s loving, and there’s a way that pronounces judgment. It just condemns people in their state without giving them a chance to experience the love of Jesus Christ.

I’m going to end with the fifth point.

5. You can take a shortcut.

This is actually really good news. This could even help your marriage. One of the most difficult aspects of relationship, and I would say truthfully one of the most difficult things in marriage, is that your spouse is not wanting love the way you want love. This is a lightbulb moment for many people when they see this. We communicate and receive love in different ways.

There’s a book that’s helped a lot of people: [The 5 Love Languages](#). It says there are five love languages -- words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, gift giving, and physical touch, including sexual intimacy.

I read that list and some of you said, “Oh that’s my husband, that’s my wife. Yep, I recognize that.” You’ve been married long enough. But when you get married, you tend to give love the way you want it and you don’t get the fact that, “Man, this just isn’t working.” Most couples experience this. If not, it means that you’re the 1% that actually married someone with the same love language as you. That was actually supposed to be funny.

It’s very difficult for us to humble ourselves to say, “If my spouse’s love language is acts of service, I’ve got to get up off the couch and die to self and learn to serve in that way that communicates: ‘You are precious to me.’ I should not dismiss the fact that he or she just wants physical touch and wants sexual intimacy. I should not dismiss that he or she just wants to sit on the couch and talk for hours and hours and hours and hours.” Right? No, no, no. This is what it means to love. It’s very challenging.

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In the same regard, it's very difficult when people sin against us in a way that we would never sin. We've talked about this before. Their sin is different than our sin, so they'll do things that we would never do, because they are different. But we'll do things they would never do. Then you put that together in marriage. He does things, she does things that the other person would never do, then they don't communicate love in the same way and, "Kaboom!" Right? This is why love is so sanctifying. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, take that principle and apply it to the people that God brings into your life who don't know Jesus yet.

You really have to think, "How do I get in their world and hear them and love them and practice some of what Jesus did in terms of coming into my world to love me? How do I do that in a way that they can hear and understand and comprehend? I don't want to just slam the truth over their heads. I want to labor to lovingly persuade them."

Now, you can take a shortcut. Paul says "If you all prophesy..." (I've given a very general definition of speaking Spirit-given words, Spirit-inspired words. This is not on the level of the authority of scripture.) "...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. So, falling on his face he will worship God and declare that God is really among you."

What is he saying? He is saying, "Listen, you don't know what's in their heart, but you know who does? God does. When you are full of the Spirit of God and you are trusting God and you are following God and you allow God to direct you, the other person is like, "Wow, there really is a God! God hears me! God knows me! That's speaking to me right now!" Husbands, wouldn't you love it if you spoke to your wife and she said, "Wow, that was like from God!" Happens all the time in my home! Come on!

Friends, I want to just cut to the chase. Either heaven is real and hell is real, or it's not. And if it's real (scripture teaches that it is) will we love people enough to pursue them and use everything that God gives us to love them with understanding? I believe, Riverside Church, you are a church that is poised and ready to say, "Lord, we want to grow in that. We want to increase in that. With other churches in our area, we want to reach people with the love and mercy and truth and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen?"

Lord, there is a lot of content here and we are ending on a note that tells us we need to be full of your Spirit. So we pray, Lord God, in this season as we are a few weeks away from Lent then a few

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weeks away from Easter, I am asking you, Lord, would you bring renewal to your people? Would you draw us to you that we might grow in our understanding, in our love for you and our love for other people? And Lord, would you give us the words that this generation needs to know you and love you and to experience your love? Help us, O God, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.