

Pastor Craig Schill
May 22, 2011
Sermon Series: 1 Corinthians

Building Up the Church!
1Cor 14:1-40

I always enjoy having my parents here with us at Lake Cities. And many of you know my Dad is an architect. I asked Dad while in India last February, “Dad, how many buildings have you designed?” And he couldn’t answer – too many to count! Hundreds in his career. Office buildings, homes, churches, camps, prisons, hospitals, seminaries, and on and on. When I was a student at the University of Arizona, a new Science building was being constructed on campus, a beautiful high-tech masterpiece – designed by my father.

In the three different homes we’ve lived in, between my Dad and my father-in-law Steve and I, we have over the years built a food pantry, remodeled a bathroom and living room, created a laundry room, build a storage shed, a deck and most recently a luxury dog-house!

How many of you kids enjoy building things with legos? Or Lincoln logs? are inspired to build things because we are made in the image of a God who creates!

And the most important thing we can build and create is the church. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians, Romans and 1 Corinthians that the church is like a building – Jesus is the architect and we are construction workers, stone by stone, building up his holy temple. And as we return to 1 Corinthians this week, we find the “building up” the church the major theme. Please turn with me now to 1 Corinthians 14.

As you find your way to the passage, you might remember that we are in the last section of the book where Paul is responding to the Corinthian's question. He has dealt with questions on marriage, food sacrificed to idols, and now he is addressing questions regarding the public worship service (chapters 11-14). And within that section, starting back in chapter 12, Paul has been talking about the importance of spiritual gifts. He finishes that topic in chapter 14.

So, with that, let's begin with an exposition of the text; then step back a little bit and explore the relevance of the text to today, and finally we will see some clear applications for us here at LCCC.

Exposition of Text

Starting with some structure. The passage today breaks into two sections. In verses 1-25 Paul contrasts two gifts - prophecy and speaking in tongues. Next, in verses 26-40 Paul applies his teaching by restructuring their Sunday morning services.

Beginning in verse one, Paul transitions from chapter 13, and the supremacy of love: 1Cor. 14:1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. 1Cor. 14:2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. 1Cor. 14:3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

As I said, the contrast is between the gift of prophecy and speaking in tongues. In terms of definitions, all we need to know at this point is that the person speaking in tongues is not understood by others while the person prophesying is understood.

And because prophecy is understood – the church members are edified, exhorted and consoled. The first word (edification) is the controlling word of the chapter and is the most common translation from the Greek. But other translations of the same word are: “helping others grow” (NLT), “strengthening,” (NIV) “upbuilding” (ESV), or “building up” (NAB). The Greek word, *oikodomei* is a compound word, from *oikos* (house) and *demo* (build). The word literally means building a house - the process of building and constructing. It is a blue-collar word borrowed from the everyday construction site. Paul uses it figuratively, saying, “Just as you would design and build a house or building - now use your spiritual gifts to build the church. Make it stronger and larger, use high quality materials. Strengthen and support the church.” That is what edification means. Let’s track together that word through this chapter. It is the key!

Back to tongues and prophesy, verse four: **1Cor. 14:4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies (builds up / strengthens) himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.** The standard by which spiritual gifts are measured is whether they edify the church; the use of tongues builds up an individual’s faith but prophesy edifies the whole church, therefore it is preferred. **1Cor. 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets WHY? so that the church may receive edifying.** Paul repeats again the goal is building-up the church, therefore prophesy is preferred.

Now remember, the context – chapters 11-14 is about the public worship services. We are not talking about private devotions, or small group meetings, but Sunday morning when everyone is gathered. And in that context – prophesy serves the church better than tongues, because it can be understood by the people.

This is a good time to ask, “What problem is Paul trying to solve?” The problem was that in Corinth speaking in tongues was dominating public worship. Can you imagine a worship service where 50% or 75% was unintelligible to you? Where week after week, month after month you could not understand what was being said? The closest analogy I can give you is if you have ever been to a worship service conducted in another language, totally unfamiliar to you. For a little while it is novel and you can catch the spirit of worship; but over time, if your mind is not engaged it will wander. And so the people in Corinth were beginning to regress and decay spiritually, because there was no clear teaching of the Word of God.

In verses 6-12 Paul continues his argument for prophesy over tongues. He says “think about music” verse seven. If they can’t discern a clear melody how can people know what song is being played? Second, (verse 8) think about the trumpet in battle, a specific series of notes have the power to call the troops to battle. Third, of all (9) known languages all have meaning within the words, if they didn’t there would be no understanding. Prophesy is superior to tongues in public worship.

Now there is one way tongues will work, and that is if there is an interpreter, v.13, **Let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.** Here is a picture of me in India with an interpreter. My audience here spoke no English, and so without the interpreter I had no hope of edifying my audience, but with an interpreter we could communicate and build up the church.

BUT, if there is no interpreter – tongues do no good. Paul is very strong on this (14-19) Verse 14: **For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful...** Verse 16: **Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the**

ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? Verse 17: For you are giving thanks well enough, but **the other person is not edified.** Conclusion in verse 18-19: 1Cor. 14:18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; 1Cor. 14:19 however, in the church **I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.**

Now, let's be clear, Paul is not down on tongues – he thanks God that he has the gift and desires other to have it -- but in public worship it is full of problems – even with an interpreter, verses 23-24: 1Cor. 14:23 Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? 1Cor. 14:24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; Remember Paul's continual principle we have seen over and over – *Just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should do something.* Just because you have an interpreter doesn't mean you should speak in tongues, if it is going to cause other believers to stumble in their faith! Instead let love control your actions, and before you exercise your freedom - put other's needs ahead of your own.

By the way... there is a debate on whether speaking in tongues means speaking in a known language unknown to you, or an angelic non-human language. It could include both, but the later is favored here because (1) tongues are perceived as a strange thing to outsiders which favors a supernatural language – because though it might surprise you if I starting speaking French or Chinese by God's power, it would not likely cause you to believe I was crazy. (2) Also because known languages were uses by contrast (along with musical instruments) in verse nine that could imply tongues are something besides a known language.

But what is Paul's point in verses 1-25. Simply, that if the goal is building up the church – prophecy is preferable to tongues, because prophesy is understandable, and therefore God's powerful Word is able to do its work. Tongues, in public worship, without an interpreter do more harm than good, and with an interpreter still possibly pose problems. Tongues, is designed, therefore, for a private setting, according to Paul.

Application of Paul's Teaching (26-40)

Now, in verses 22-40, Paul changes to his second point – giving specific application to the Corinthians. First, verse 26: *“When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”* Seven times now in this chapter Paul tells us – please, please, please *everything should be done to edify / build up the church* – that is your responsibility and the standard by which everything is measured!

Now, Paul the worship planner gets specific: in verse 27, Paul **limits the number of people** speaking in tongues to two or three, and requires (no surprise) **and interpreter**, or else, verse 28, speaking in tongues is **forbidden in public, but encouraged in private**. Verse 29, **the number of prophets is limited** also to two or three while the rest of the congregation judges what was said, according to Scripture. Verse 30-31 – prophecy is given by one speaker at a time – **so that all may learn and be exhorted in their faith**.

And the reason behind all this, Verse 33, **for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints**. Paul argues for order and structure and clarity in the worship service, so that, the Word of God can be heard without distraction.

In verses 34-35; Paul commands women to keep silent in church and to inquire at home if they have questions. We don't have time to explore all the aspects of this, but remember that Paul has already told men to be quiet twice in certain situations, and now he tells women also not to disturb the proclamation of the word. Paul is an equal opportunity shusher. His goal is the same – that God's Word be heard. And the summary is in verses 39-40: [1Cor. 14:39](#) Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. [1Cor. 14:40](#) But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

Relevance of Text

That was a long passage, and we have spent a good deal of time working through it. Now we come to the question of relevance. What relevance, if any, does this passage have on Lake Cities Community Church in Rowlett, Texas in 2011?

Let me set up the discussion this way. Here at Lake Cities Community Church, based on my knowledge of you and your backgrounds, I believe the following is fairly accurate: About 1/3 of you come from Pentecostal or Charismatic backgrounds. Of that group, many of you have spoken in tongues and some continue to speak in tongues in your devotional life. Tongues play a large role in Pentecostal theology and so we certainly have members of our church who would see this passage as being very relevant today.

Another 1/3 of our congregation come from a very different cessationist background, meaning you have been taught the sign gifts, or perhaps even all the gifts, were only for the early church and are no long relevant today. Though I am not a cessationist today, this is generally my background. If you are in this group you may see 1

Cor 14 as an interesting history lesson, but not applicable because you believe both prophesy and tongues are no longer viable gifts.

And then, the last 1/3 of our congregation really doesn't have an opinion, perhaps this whole discussion is new to you, or you have never taken the time to study it.

With these three groups, all in our small church, you can see that this is a sensitive and controversial passage for a pastor to unpack. Therefore, I will now close in prayer.

No – just kidding! My strategy in debatable passage is two-fold. First to stress that it is OK for us to disagree on the relevance of this passage, as long as we don't let our disagreement divide us. Second, move from what is clear to what is unclear, which is what I will attempt to do now, as I present 6 lessons of application I believe we should take from this text.

1) I agree with Paul when he says: **“Do not forbid speaking in tongues (v39)”**.

And we do not forbid speaking in tongues at LCCC. I believe God can and does give sign gifts to the church for the edification of the body. I saw this directly while in India over and over. And while I have not personally experienced any sign-gifts, I believe they exist and are given by the Spirit to those He wishes. Paul is clear, and I agree with him - do not forbid speaking in tongues. To me if a church establishes a position paper or doctrinal statement that forbids tongues, that seems to be directly at odds with this passage.

2) **Tongues are really not meant for public worship, but for private devotions.**

Though Paul does not forbid speaking in tongues in public he discourages such practice, even with an interpreter – as it can cause offense and confusion. This seems like a very

sensible position and is why we here at Lake Cities do not promote speaking in tongues in public worship. We do not have a time for tongues, because in Scripture the public use of tongues is discouraged, and I agree with Paul that it can become a barrier to unbelievers.

3) **Tongues without an interpreter are forbidden from public worship.** That is a clear teaching. If a person gets up in any worship service and begins speaking in tongues in such a way as to address the whole church without an interpreter, they are in violation of Scripture.

4) Remember let's not get too caught up in tongues and prophecy, because **the issue really** isn't about either one! This issue is how best to edify the church. To only talk about tongues and prophecy (when neither are hot topics in our church) is to miss the point of the passage. Our conversations are about worship, and children's ministry and reaching the community for Christ. And in all our internal debates, we must keep in mind what we have learned today – that the KEY issue is whether or not what we do edifies the church.

5) **All things are to be done in a proper, orderly manner.** The point here – for all of us ministry leaders – is that we are held accountable when by being disorderly and sloppy with our work – we can keep people from being able to understand or access God's Word. There should be order and clear reasons for doing things, and structure within church ministry. The Corinthians lacked this.

6) The final lesson is the question I believe St. Paul would ask you and I this morning. **How are you using the passions, desires, skills and abilities God's has given you to build up the local church?** Have you put your gifts to work in the church? If not this church, another church? If you are gifted at teaching – are you teaching in the church? If you are gifted as a leader or in administration – have you put those talents to work

building up the church of Jesus Christ? If not, why not? Are you waiting to be asked? Maybe it is time to volunteer? Have you volunteered but didn't get a phone call back from the busy pastor? Ask again. Many of you are using your gifts in the church - but some of us need to be reminded.

By the way, we should have the new ministry team assignments out in early June, but if you have not been contacted about that, please let me know. We want to help you to plug into ministry at Lake Cities!

To say it another way - the church is not to be like a government work crew you pass on the highway, where one guy is working, and the others are standing around watching. Each one of us, kids listen to me - that includes you as well - we are all called to contribute meaningfully to the health, life, vitality and future of the church. There is no greater call than that. Let me close with the following story written by Lillian Daniel in Leadership Journal.

"At my daughter's elementary school musical, the printed program noted: "This musical was originally written for 15 actors, but it has been adapted to accommodate our cast of 206." There were no auditions and no one was cut. No performer left without something special to do. They danced, they sang, they delivered lines, and somehow 206 children graced the stage that night."

The church's calling is like the volunteer geniuses that took an elementary school musical with 15 parts and creatively made room for 206. We take the task of ministry and divide it into parts so that everyone has a job, because we believe God has gifted each person to contribute something unique. Is it efficient? No. Not if all you all care about is getting the job done. But the church cares less about getting the job done and more about

the people doing it. God has given each of us talents and gifts we are called to use in the church. All of us. The church remains the home of the no-cut audition. Together we build up the body of Christ.