

1 Corinthians 14

Sermon Title: God's comin' to church too

My first time at a Pentecostal church – I was raised in a traditional Baptist church. We had pews, hymn books, and a very predictable worship service. I grew up during the alarm clock watch era. Service started at 11, and if it hit 12...watches would start going off. Time to leave. I go to college and that's where I went to a Pentecostal church. It's college, I want to try new things. So I go in...with a friend. And it, was, incredible. Flags on the wall of 37 different nationalities present in that room. We were singing to the lion of Judah and roaring. People were dancing in the aisles & everybody that had hands were in the band. It was awesome. I gave it my best white guy clapping attempt. And when the preacher spoke...everybody got in on it. One time the preacher was reading scripture "God said to Moses go up on the mountain." Lady in front of me said "You better go on up there Moses!" I'm like...she's not just talking to the preacher, she's now talking to Moses. It was great. By end of the first sermon I heard there I even squeaked out an "mmhmmm" under my breath. Something was really good about this.

And I wanted others to experience it. Next week I brought friends, and it was turnt. It went from energetic, to frenzied chaos. People falling out in the floors speaking in what I would later learn were something called "tongues." A guy stands up who has the title "Prophet." He tells a couple God is sending them to china. Wow. Starts telling us about the future...it was crazy. I was confused and scared...I wasn't ready for china. The

rest of the service was chaotic. I'm still not sure what happened but upon investigating we realized that wasn't the place for us.

I realized two things that day – There was something I was really drawn to about a church where people came ready to meet with God together. I never wanted to go back to the empty religious routines of my past. I wanted God and these people seemed like they did too...at the same time... I had no idea what to make of people prophesying and speaking in tongues. And I think most of us are in that boat...we want to be a part of a church where people expect God to show up! We want a real authentic encounter with God! But, we are often confused, skeptical, and maybe a little nervous about what an actual church gathering would look like when God shows up!

It's like jumping off a diving board for the first time. You stand on the edge scared about the distance between you and the water. But the only way to really enjoy a dive is to run and...jump! For some of us today's passage will put us in that position.

So as we work through this, I want us to have our sights set not on information, though we need it, but beyond that to becoming a church where we anticipate God moving in and through us.

Our chapter is 40 verses long today. To help us work through it, I'm going to read a selection of verses from it that summarize Paul's big idea. And then we'll talk about it.

[1] Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. [2] 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. [3] On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. [4] The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. [5] 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.

[9] 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. [10] There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, [11] 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.

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

[20] Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. [21] 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." [22] Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign

not for unbelievers but for believers. [23] 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? [24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] 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.

[39] So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. [40] But all things should be done decently and in order. (ESV)

We are going to have some fun today in church! Let me just give a heads up out front:

1. I know this is the kind of topic that can be like fresh meat to hungry wolves for some people. Maybe you love theological quandaries and wish I'd talk about this kind of controversial stuff more often. Others of you are really turned off by this because you'd rather just hear agreeable teaching that doesn't ruffle feathers or make you uncomfortable. Especially if you are not a Christian you are like oh man, here come the snakes!
2. This is why we teach the bible the way we do here at Mercy. It isn't a salad bar you can pick and choose from. It is all God's word and so that means we teach all of it. Which means sometimes we come to passages like this that have been controversial in church history.
3. I want to admit to you that I don't know everything there is to know about spiritual gifts. I believe my understanding is a lot fuller after this week but I still

have a long way to go and maybe some of you will teach me on this as we reflect on it together.

Ok so let's treat this kind of like I used to eat oreo cookies growing up. I used to twist it off, eat the first half that didn't have the good stuff, then peel the icing off the other side & eat the other cookie, THEN eat the middle last. Nobody else? Well, that's the way we are about to eat this passage. Because the first and last verses set the guard rails for how we understand this complex stuff. First verse is the Motivation, Last is the Caution. Kind of like The gas pedal & the brakes.

[1] Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

If you were here last week we talked about 1 Cor 13, the love of God for you. When Paul says "pursue love" he's not pulling that out of thin air he's saying you cannot use your spiritual gifts, even talk about spiritual gifts UNLESS it is the product of a pursuit of love. And he just spent a chapter explaining that love.

It is perfect, patient and kind...but it also never ends. And that is because the love he is talking about is the Love of God for you. Jesus described that love as the love of the father for a son who betrayed & defamed his father and ran away to another land and partied hard but ultimately his running left him broke, empty, & all alone. Maybe that's you today. And there at rock bottom he remembered his father. And he KNEW he was unworthy to ever be called his son again. He'd done too much. But he thought he'd at least go back and try

to be a servant. And messed up, still a long way off...Jesus says the father ran to him embraced him & gave him the family ring & said prepare a feast for my son that was dead is alive again. Maybe that's you today. You've run from God. You thought your way would bring you pleasure & happiness and now you see it didn't deliver. Those were fake loves. And maybe you are here this morning because you don't know where else to go. Listen to me: God is offering you the love you so desperately need. Will you come to him? Stop running today. And fall into the loving arms of the father. He will catch you & begin to heal you.

That love...Paul says run hard after it in your own life. Which means keep spending time getting to know the God who loves you fiercely. AND then, pursue & chase that love in your interactions with other believers. With that motivation, your spiritual gift will then help communicate God's love to other believers. Which is it's purpose.

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

We said two weeks ago that **a spiritual gift is a supernatural ability given to every Christian to build up others in Christ.**

The purpose of a gift is to help others know God's LOVE. So as we talk about tongues & prophecy...the only reason you speak in tongues or prophecy...is out of a deep desire for others to know God's love for them. That's why he says pursue love and THEN earnestly desire the gifts. So you can express God's love. Ok, that's oreo side one. That's the heart of this passage. Other side:

Verse 40: [40] But all things should be done decently and in order.

There are three threads Paul is untangling in this chapter that together have turned their worship gatherings into a mess. When they gather, nobody knows what's happening. Christians are frustrated & non-Christians are like 'back away slowly cause this is crazy.' And Paul says that chaos doesn't represent God. Which is what a service is supposed to do. To tell something about who God is. In fact verse 33 Paul says [33] God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

They thought everyone speaking in tongues was a sign of holiness. Of being close to God. And Paul says no, it was hysteria and wasn't helping anyone. God isn't a confusing God so church shouldn't be. One of our staff members told us he went with a buddy of his in high school to a pentecostal church and the pastor gets people stand up & all of the sudden his buddy deon gets punched in the back of the head by the old lady behind them. Scott laughs and within seconds he gets punched too! He's so scared & confused he just petrifies and stays that way til service is over...3 hours later.

So here's what Paul is saying: God desires a church worship gathering to have both Power AND Order. What ends up happening often with a church is it forgets about one or the other. Caught up in the Spirit some churches forget God

doesn't create confusion and nor should a gathering of his people. But, there are also plenty of churches so scared of the Holy Spirit disrupting ORDER that they exhibit NO evidence of the power of God in their services. We call them the frozen chosen. But that doesn't seem fitting with the Spirit of God showing up for church. God moves. He doesn't stay still.

So what do we make of tongues and prophecy? There are basically 4 approaches to these more supernatural gifts¹:

1. **Cessationist**: Gifts like tongues & prophecy are no longer in use today. They were used in the first century, the early years of the church. But once God's word was established, there were no need for these signs. They'd point to chapter 13 and say the perfect has come so no need for sign-posts. The problem of course is that the "perfect" refers to the coming of Jesus...and our passage today says not to forbid speaking in tongues.
2. **Pentecostal** – Other end of the spectrum. They believe you need to have a second baptism, a baptism by the holy spirit. And all Christians will be able to use all these gifts when they get that 2nd baptism. The problem is that the 2nd baptism does not find footing in scripture and Paul says in chapter 12 we will all have different gifts.
3. **Charismatic** – closer to pentecostal than the other guys, but would pull the reins in on them. They believe all gifts are in use today but God doesn't give all gifts to all people.

¹ These come from the introduction of Wayne Grudem's book "Are miraculous gifts for today?" I am combining two camps he separates (3rd wave and Charismatics).

But, the preaching of the gospel should ordinarily be accompanied by signs & wonders.

4. There is a 4th group that is pretty large but hard to define. This group is not convinced of the cessationist position, yet are not comfortable of much of the practice within the charismatic movement. This group focuses more on bible study, evangelism, & doctrine but are genuinely appreciative of the influence the charismatic movement has had on the global church especially in things like worship. I fall into this undefined group and I imagine many of you do. The guy I read who articulated this position called it “**Open but Cautious.**” We do not want to put God in a box! And we are willing to step into unfamiliar territory of the gifts working, but will do so remembering Paul’s words here. That God is a God of peace & desires order.

So with those two sides of the discussion laid out...lets get after the middle.²

Let’s start with tongues. Cause what in the world is that about So when we look at this passage tongues are talked about in a couple of ways. The word for tongues here can best be defined as a language. The word “glossolalia” was used pretty regularly in their day. Tongues sounds weird to us but its really just a language that is foreign & unknown to the speaker. Now

² The structure for this second half of the sermon: tongues, prophecy, then word to church members is one I am borrowing from J.D. Greear in a sermon he preached on this passage titled “Prophecy & Tongues.”

remember...the main purpose of all gifts is to point people to Jesus right? This gift arrived in a pretty awesome way. If you go to Genesis 10 there is the story of the tower of babel. Where God confused all their languages as a punishment for their sin. Well Acts 2 the apostles are all in one room speaking but the amazing thing is they are speaking and the people listening who are from all over the world are hearing these Hebrews speak in their native language. The sign here is that the curse of babel is being reversed. And one day everyone from every people group is going to gather around the throne and praise Jesus in one language. And until then, the church steps in with this gift and points people to the love of Christ!

1 Cor 14:22, “Tongues are a sign; not for believers but for unbelievers.” 1 Cor 14:21, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12, “to *this people* (the Jews) I will speak with other tongues...” God is announcing to the Jews that the Gospel is not just for them, but for the whole world.³ Tongues are in play so that people groups who’ve never heard the gospel can receive it

The other description is that it is a language spoken to God: [2] 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. Verses 14-17 talk about different ways this could play out 1 Cor 14:14–17: “Prayer,” (14:14) “singing,” (14:15) “blessing/ praising God.” (14:16); “giving thanks,” (14:16–17).

³ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology*.228–30.

So, What is this uttering of mysteries to God? I confess this one is tough for me. Here's what I can see from scripture. First, even when the angels speak...they speak in an intelligible language. There seems to be little to no indication in scripture of some unintelligible language that only God understands. So to speak out in incoherent syllables doesn't seem to match anything in scripture. Even Romans 8.26 – Spirit intercedes on our behalf with groanings too deep for words...I'm like yep. No words.

The point of this gift, as all gifts, is to help others see Jesus! And in that light Paul encourages us to seek it. And I have prayed on three occasions for it where I was in a foreign context and thought...God, I want to share Christ with this person, make my words familiar to their ears. God in his sovereignty has never granted it but that's ok. Again open but cautious means...I gotta be open.

So if you say well I want to speak in tongues because it will make me feel closer to God...that's just not what they are for! They are for helping OTHERS grow closer to God. If you feel that way, I'm praying you take steps to grow out of that. Emotional and spiritual experiences do not dictate your closeness to God. Your belief in the gospel does! You've got to begin to settle your heart on what Christ has done for you!

Functionally what does this look like at Mercy? Well, we are going to be open but cautious. Personally, I've never seen it done well in a worship service. And Paul saw people elevating

this gift in Corinth to an unhealthy level that was causing all kinds of pride problems. "Look at me I can speak in tongues."

Paul spends all this time telling them to be careful & basically avoid it throughout the chapter and then says...but don't forbid it. Almost to say leave room for an Acts 2 God like moment to happen, but don't spend time worrying about it. Paul says he would rather speak 5 words of prophecy than 10,000 words in a tongue. Let's model that kind of priority.

So I tell you what, spend your time filling yourself with the word of God. Let's let our experiences with God be guided by the word of God. We won't forbid it, but in an attempt to pattern ourselves after Paul's open but cautious tone here: If you feel like you have a tongue or a prophecy for the entire body, don't just blurt it out because that will incite the confusion Paul is rebuking here. Instead, let one of our elders know and we'll use the discernment God has entrusted to us to weigh it out.

Let's turn our attention to what Paul says he wants us to focus on instead of tongues:

Prophecy

This concept is not easy to define but it is in effect speaking what God wants into a situation. Often this is based on scripture. God says this, so go and do it. It gets a little confused because there is the role of Prophet in the OT and then there is this gift of prophecy. And they are different.

A prophet like in the old testament spoke on behalf of God. So they said “thus saith the Lord” and that was as good as if God said it. Same with NT office of Apostle. That role of prophet/apostle ended when we received the word of God...the bible.

One big objection cessationists have to prophecy is that if you say “God says” then you are adding to the bible and you can’t add to the bible. Agreed! But NT prophecy in the church didn’t carry that authority.

There was a moment in Acts 21 where some of the disciples made a prophecy to Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He went anyway. Was he disobeying God!? No, he weighed the prophecy and made a decision.

1 Cor 14:29–38, Paul tells them to ‘weigh’ prophecies (see also 1 Thess 5:19–21), something he would never have had them do with Scripture. 1 Cor. 14:36, no ‘word of God’ has come from you. Even though they had many prophets. 1 Cor 14:37–38, he tells them just to ‘obey’ Scripture. He sees a difference between their prophecy and the word of God.

How does this gift play out today? This gift often goes hand in hand with the supernatural gift of knowledge. Where someone knows something they should have no evidential way of knowing. Supernaturally revealed knowledge. (ex: God reveals to me you have had a miscarriage even though we’ve never met & I shouldn’t know that.)

Prophecy is speaking God’s truth into that specific situation. Looks a lot like encouragement / exhortation but usually has a

specificity to it. So, not authoritative as God’s word, but still important as a means of drawing one another closer to Christ.

BTW – this is not fortune telling. There is no sense of “this is definitely what is going to happen” in the majority of our biblical examples. So if someone comes to you with that, its probably not from the Lord.

So what does this mean for us?

What the spiritual gift of prophecy does is point us to how God wants us to see and live in our situation. It will never contradict scripture and MOST of the time will simply illuminate it and apply it to our specific situation. So what do you do?

If you receive a prophecy from someone, weigh it out. Which means consider the evidence in your life (for example if someone comes to me and says you are going to be a multi-platinum recording artist. – well Maybe...but evidence suggests otherwise).

Well if you are the one who you think God has given you a “word” for someone...please please do not say “GOD TOLD ME TO TELL YOU.” That is putting your word on equal footing as scripture which it is not.

Take the miscarriage example. I don’t know for certain God has revealed this to me. I could be wrong. People with this gift are still fallen sinners and never know for certain. You know even the apostles when they were deciding to send out a couple of guys to join Paul & Barnabas on a trip to Antioch. And here’s what the apostles said about it: “Acts 15:25

[25] it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul... [28]...It seemed Good to the Holy Spirit

“seemed!” That’s the best accuracy the apostles have! So if I come to you thinking God has revealed that you’ve had a miscarriage I want to be open to that, but cautious. And my purpose is encouraging you in the Lord not just revealing knowledge So I may say “I don’t want to freak you out, but I sensed something that **may** be from the Lord and God may want me to tell you. 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us that when we lose someone we love who is “in the Lord” then we can grieve as those who have hope. Because Jesus died and rose again one day we will be reunited with those who have fallen asleep and we will all worship Jesus together for eternity. And 1 Thess 4 says encourage one another with those words. And I **think** God wanted me to tell you that if you are grieving the loss of a child, you can be confident your child is with Christ and one day you will be reunited. Again it “seemed” like I should tell you that. But of course you weigh that out.

Use humility and say “I think, or it seems like God put this on my heart to tell you. I’m not sure but I feel like I need to tell you. You weigh it out.” Much less pressure that way. And remember, that word should be said in such a way that it points them back to Jesus! Soak that word in God’s words! Remember the purpose of your gift!

I want to encourage us to be open to this. Regardless of where you are in your faith. I mean look at what Paul said this could have the power of:

[24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] 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.

That’s pretty powerful! This is what God wants to do to some of you. He is showing you that YES, he is in fact God. He is real and he really does know the secrets of your heart. That thing that you think no one else knows about? God sees it. He knows it. Are you going to be so stubborn as to wait on God to speak through another person to tell you to turn back to God? Today you can stop running.

This makes me think of the woman at the well. Jesus looks at her and says go get your husband so he can hear about what I’m telling you. She says I do not have a husband. And then Jesus says you are right...you have had 5 husbands and the guy you are living with now is not your husband. This is what Jesus does...he KNOWS what you hide from everyone else. And HE STILL LOVES YOU! Today you can confess those things. You can turn from hidden sin. You can open up about hidden pain. The lamb of God died for your sin and he promises a day when there will be no more pain. Today maybe you finally see that God is really among us. God came to church today too! You know a few months ago a member came to me and said “I think I have a word for Mercy right now.” I was encouraged and said ok let me hear it. After thinking & praying on it we decided it was a good word for Mercy and he got up here the next week and spoke it. That’s one way prophecy works.

Ok, Let me close out with a word to Mercy Church

To our more non-charismatic brothers and sisters: I believe you have a great deal to learn from your more charismatic friends. After all, when they come to church they expect to meet with God. You may come in expecting some information and instruction and hopefully to feel a little better about the week in front of you. But they believe God is coming to church!

Spiritual gifts, all of them, are mechanisms by which we unlock the power of God in our midst. God wants to work through each of us in a supernatural way to lift our hearts and eyes off of the temporary and onto the eternal. And I want to be a part of a church that desires to operate in the power of God! And I think you do too! Which means we have to embrace that God is a God of order AND a God of Power.

Single Moms that come in here struggling to make ends meet they carry an unbelievable load on their shoulders: they don't need a word from Spence, they need God to show up. Married couples who stroll in here today on the brink of divorce (I've watched it happen multiple times already in our young life as a church)...They don't need tips for living or some good uplifting music...Their souls are crying out, about to explode, for GOD TO REVIVE THEIR MARRIAGE WHEN THEY DON'T SEE HOW ELSE IT COULD HAPPEN! People ravaged by cancer, young couples who have lost children to miscarriage, others that can't get pregnant...They need a word from God! WHERE ELSE ARE THEY GOING TO GET IT!?!? T.V.? Work? They've got one shot where God says they can encounter his power: THE CHURCH!!

Aside: Every week a prayer team is down here at the end of the service. Why? To call on the power of God for you. Fellow members of the mercy family who've joined the prayer team to exercise that gift of faith so they can believe God on your behalf.

A Word to our more charismatic brothers and sisters:

You must decide that your experience with God is not based on the gifts of God, but on the word of God. Paul's whole warning in this passage was to make sure gifts, especially tongues, didn't become a distraction to the real heart of the church which is the preaching of the word of God. So focus on meeting God there. Know that you have everything you need for godliness right there in his word. If he gives these kinds of gifts, fine we are open to it. But if not, no big deal because we are not dependent on it. In the book of Acts signs and wonders seemed to *follow* the apostles preaching the word. So we will preach the word and point people to Christ. And if the signs and wonders follow we will be ready.

Pursue love brothers and sisters. Let's be a church ready for God to move among us. Expecting him to show up.