

**Desire The Greater Gifts
(1 Corinthians 14:1-25 February 21, 2021)**

Desire The Greater Gifts

— 1 Corinthians 14:1-25 —



This week I realised that it has been too long since I used a Star Trek illustration – so it's about time.

If you have ever watched the series – you know they use a universal translator so every species can communicate clearly.

But in a number of episodes the translators break or don't work – the result is chaos.

Communication without understanding is a recipe for chaos.

Now let's ramp that up. Instead of just dealing with human interactions – I come in peace – what if we are dealing with the most precious and important truth ever communicated – the gospel? Now communication takes on a whole new level of consequence.

Could you imagine Jesus coming and saying – My word is truth – My word is life – what is my word – and then speaking gibberish or speaking the words of life in a language no one understood?

You can't imagine it.

And yet it is this very type of misuse Paul addresses in chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians.

It is clear that some in the church of Corinth thought certain spiritual gifts were evidence of greater spirituality.

In particular tongues.

Having these gifts supposedly showed you were great.

Unfortunately, the result was worship services that were an unedifying mess.

The word was dishonoured and debased.

In a sense these three chapters answer one question.

What demonstrates greatness – the gifts
of the Spirit or the fruit of the Spirit?



What demonstrates greatness – the gifts of the Spirit or the fruit of the Spirit?

What shows true greatness in the kingdom – having a gift like tongues, miracles or healing? – OR – demonstrating fruit like love, kindness and gentleness?

Paul is absolutely clear – no contest – the fruit of the Spirit is the true sign of greatness.

True greatness is seen in character not giftedness.

Paul makes this clear in these three chapters.

Spiritual gifts should exalt Christ and edify His church 12

Love is greater than any spiritual gift 13

So, pursue love and desire the gifts that exalt Christ and edify His church 14



Chapter 12 Spiritual gifts should exalt Christ and edify His church

Chapter 13 Love is greater than any spiritual gift

Chapter 14 So, pursue love and desire the gifts that exalt Christ and edify His church

In chapter 14 – we will see that the gifts that the Corinthians should have desired are those that edify. In Corinth that was prophecy and teaching.

It is important to remember – the church in Corinth in the mid 50s AD worshipped in a time before the canon of the New Testament was finished – a time when prophecy was a major way of bringing truth to the people of God.

Churches like Corinth had no collected New Testament, but they did have prophets who were able to convey the necessary truth and parts of the complete revelation.

They got a revelation here, an epistle there, at times a whole gospel came – but no early church had the totality of New Testament revelation.

The gift of tongues was also present. It was not primarily designed as a teaching, church edifying gift – but could function that way.

The main reason God gave tongues was *not* to teach or edify the church. It was primarily designed to convict Israel of the truth that Gentiles were to be a part of the church.

However, because it had been wrongly labelled as an evidence of spirituality – those with the true gift – and possibly some with a counterfeit form of the gift – were seeking to make tongues a focus of the church's worship.

Look at me – I speak in tongues – it shows I am important.

Instead of seeking what edifies – what builds up – the church was distracted by the misuse of this gift.

Edification – building up the church – is Paul's concern.

Notice this emphasis in chapter 14.

v. 4 – tongues does not **build up** the church – prophecy does.

v. 5 – prophecy is greater because it is what **builds up** the church.

v. 12 – desire the gifts that **build up** the church.

v. 17 – tongues does not **build up** the church.

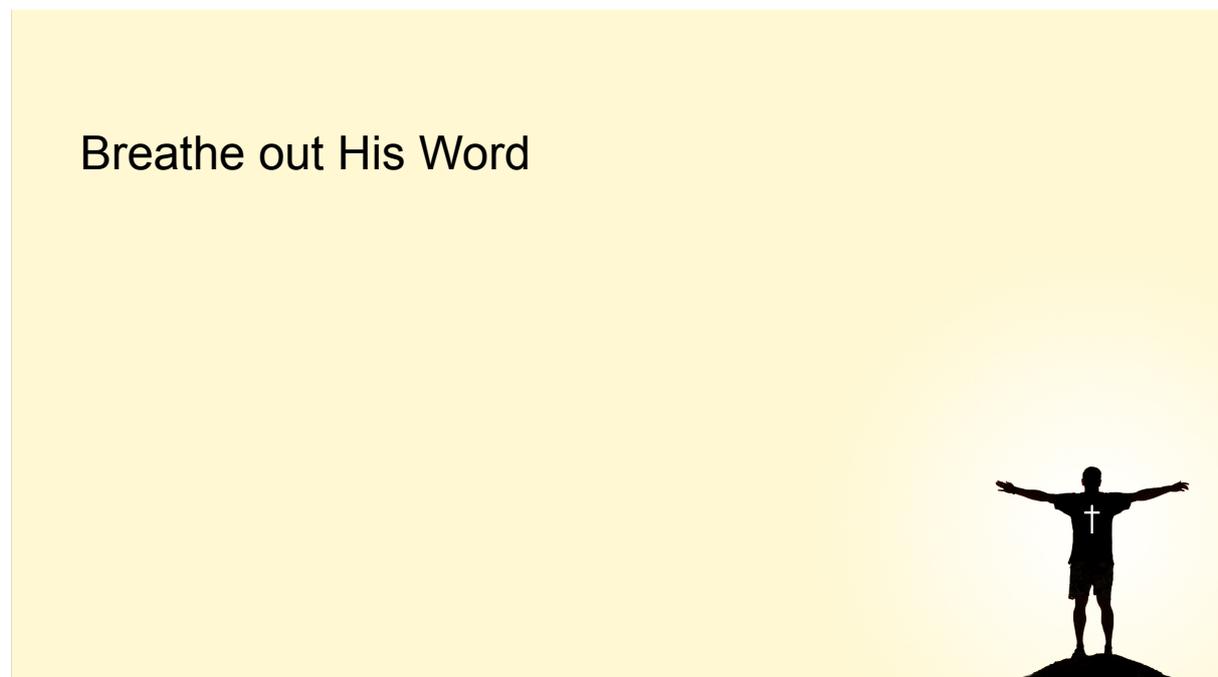
v. 26 – everything you do in a worship service is to be for **building up** the church.

How was the church primarily to be built up?

By the communication of the truth of God in a way that was understandable.

One of the great unalterable truths is that the church of God has always been built upon Christ and His word.

God had a plan. That plan began with:



Breathe out His Word

2 Timothy 3:16:

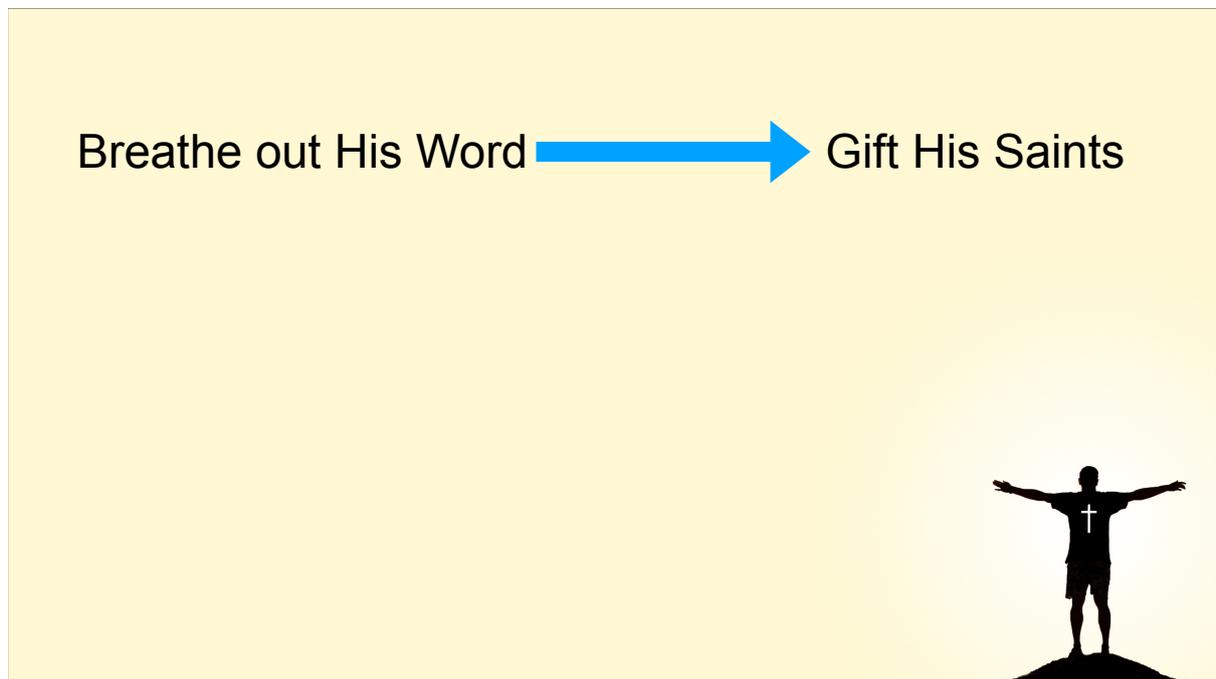
All Scripture is inspired – breathed out – by God.

2 Peter 1:20–21:

No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

God breathed out His message – His word – through oral prophecy and written Scripture.

Then God would:



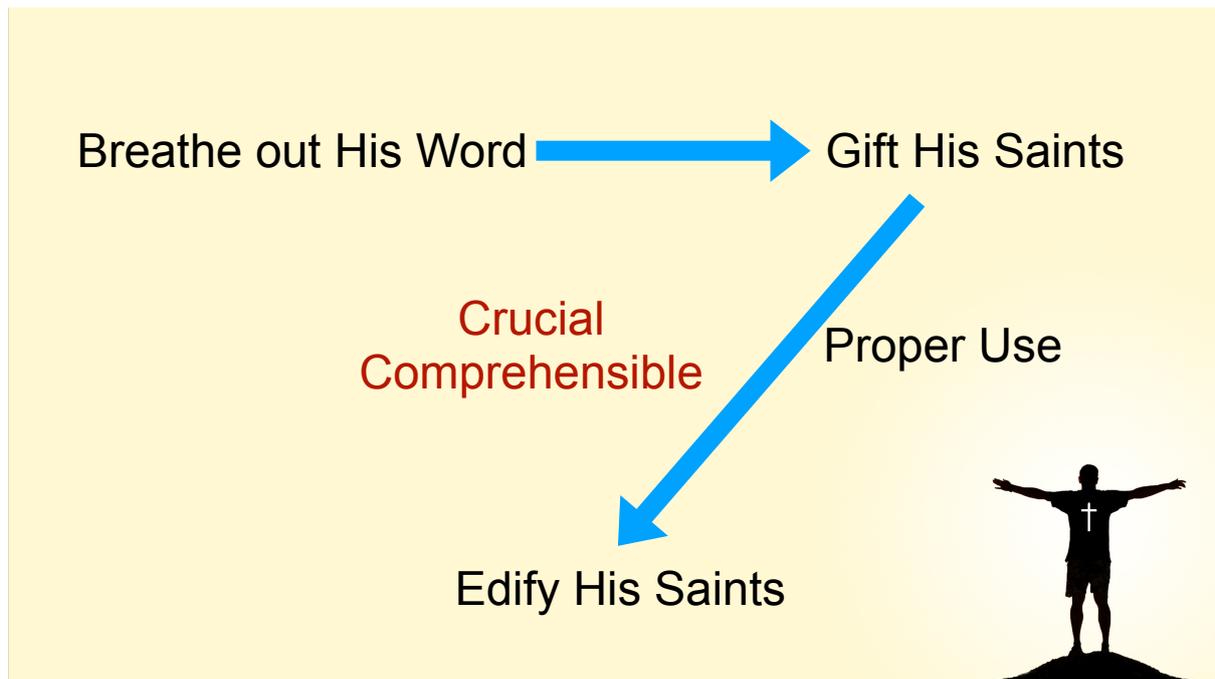
Gift His Saints

1 Corinthians 12:28:

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.

God gifted some of His people to take His revelation – His word – and make it understandable for the people of God.

In this way they would:



Edify His Saints

Ephesians 4:11–12:

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, **to build up (to edify)** the body of Christ.

2 Timothy 3:16–17:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be **complete, equipped** for every good work.

The God-breathed word in the hands of a gifted saint – when used properly – when the word is treated as crucial to our spiritual life – when it is made comprehensible – conveying an accurate sense of God’s message – this leads to the saints being built up.

This is the way it has always been.

Moses received the Law and then taught it faithfully to the people.

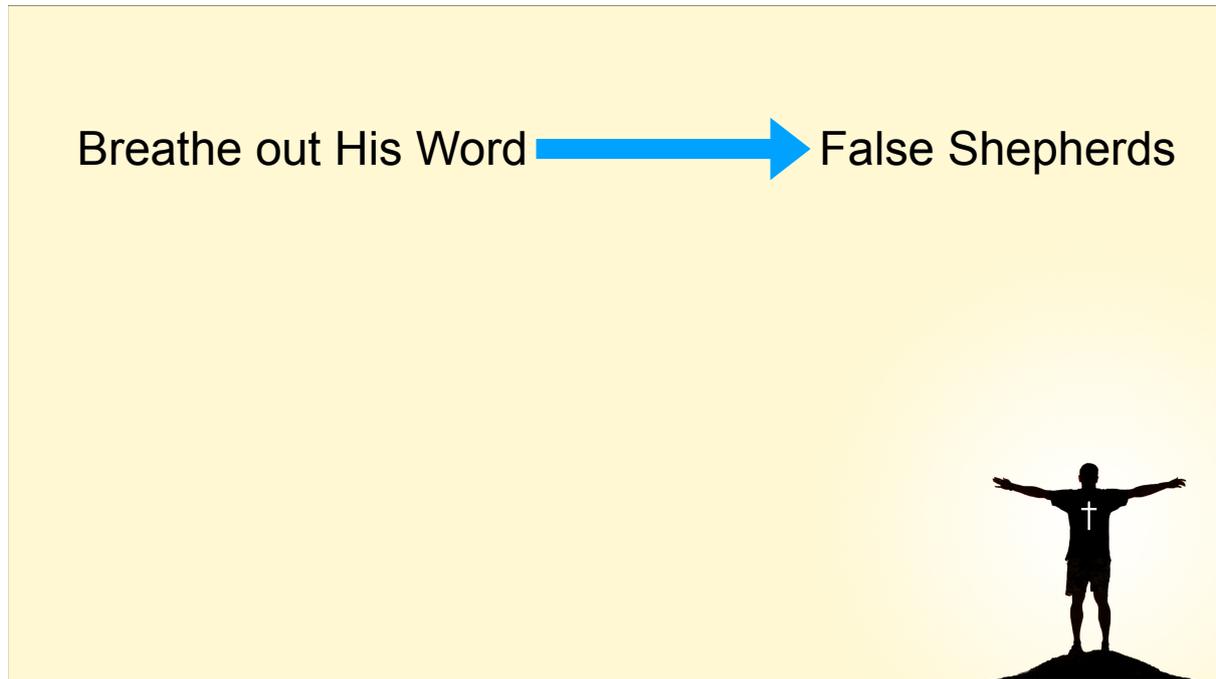
The Kings and Levites were tasked with reading and teaching the Law to the people of God.

Apostles and Prophets spoke and taught the revelation of God.

Teachers were to take the Scriptures and made them understandable to their flock.

But, there are three dangers in this process that Scripture speaks of.

First:

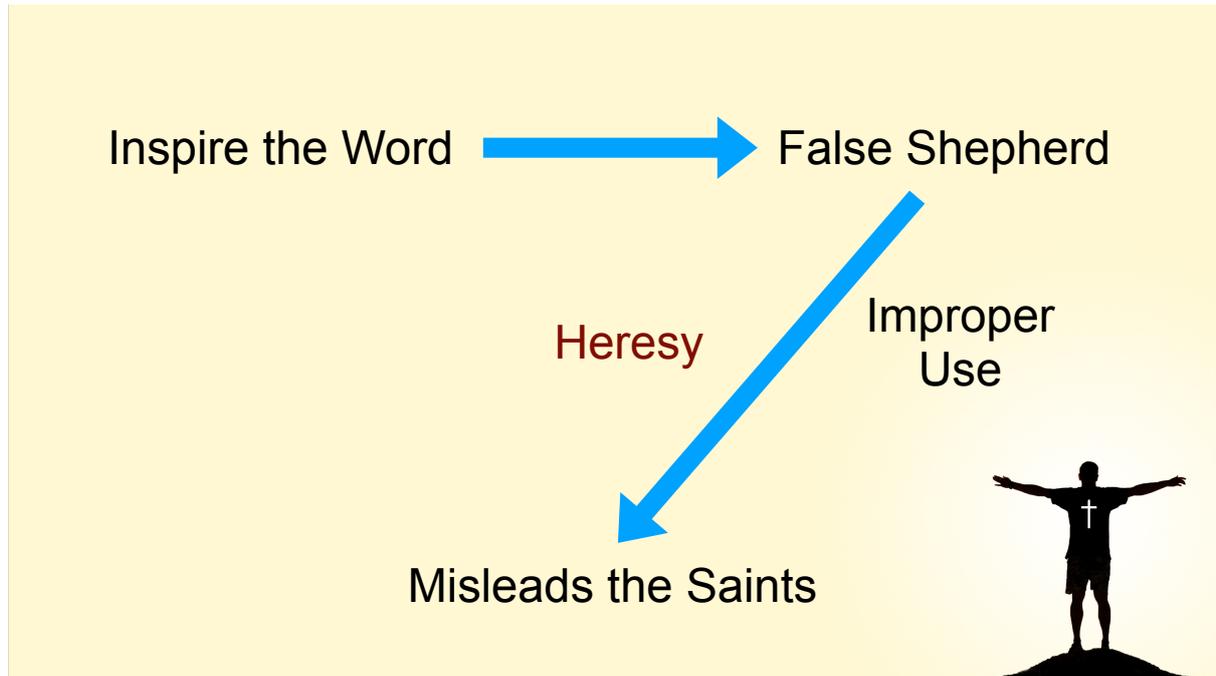


False Shepherds. The **Deceiving Dans** who turn up and say – I am a man of God – I'm here with the message of God for you – but it is not from God.

Scripture warns us to beware the false shepherds.

Acts 20:29–30:

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them.



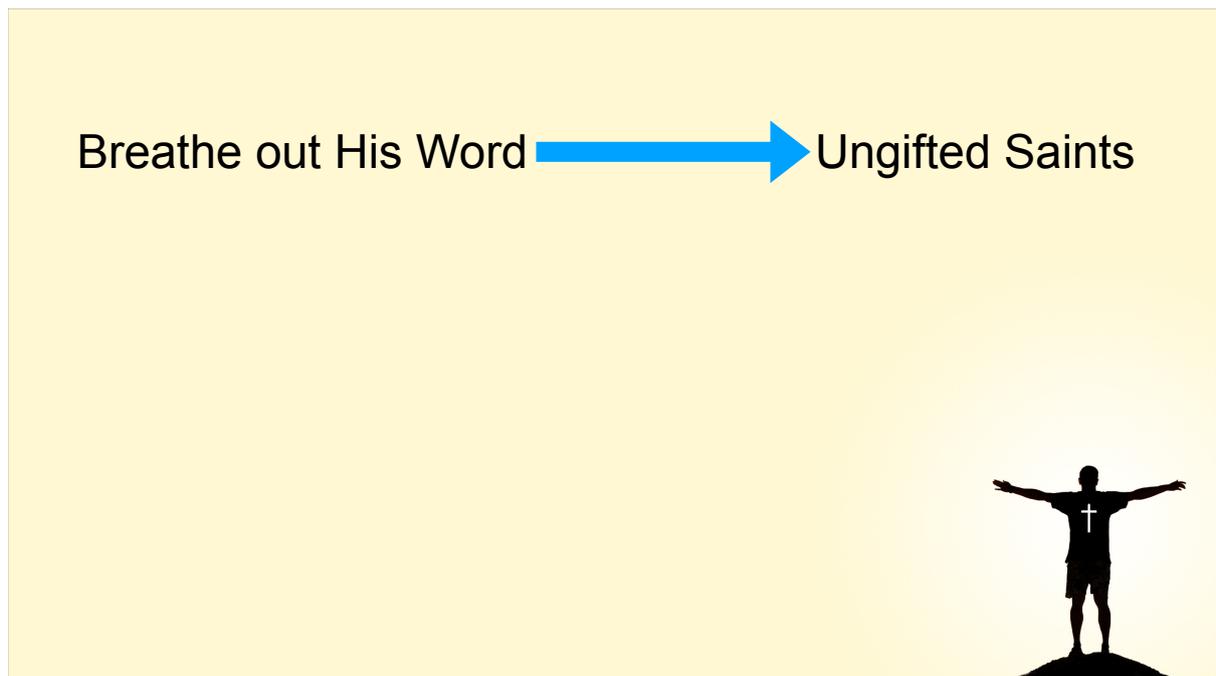
These false shepherds misuse the word and mislead the saints. The result is heresy.

2 Peter 3:16:

The untaught and unstable will twist [the Scriptures] to their own destruction.

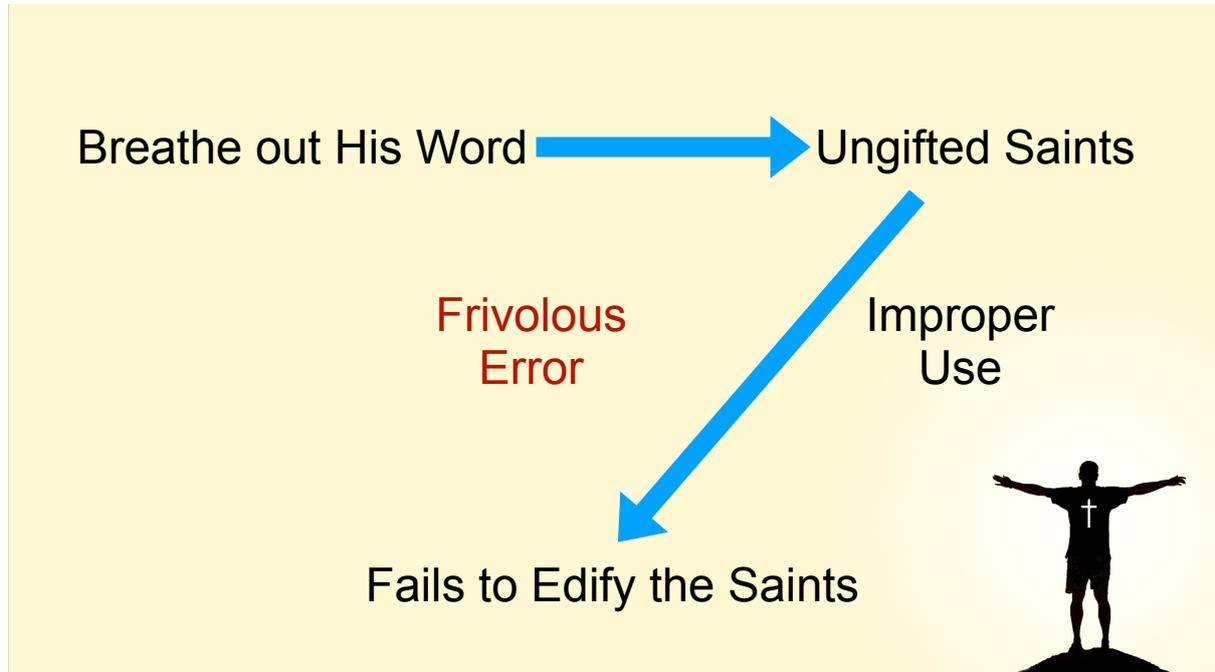
This happened in Corinth. We have already seen that there *were* false prophets. In chapter 12 we saw that some actually said they had a message from God – and the message was that Jesus is cursed.

But there is a **second** danger.



People who are saints – but are not gifted to handle the word. Often well-meaning saints – but who should not be in a public speaking ministry.

The **Ungifted** Uriahs.



They treat the word frivolously or teach error.

Recently, right here in Brisbane during a time of worship the congregation was told – Hallelujah means – jump up and turn around – so he told them now we are going to do the Hallelujah to the tune of the hokey pokey.

“We do the hallelujah and we turn around”.

Rubbish. Hallelujah means – Praise the Lord.

This stuff is nonsense. If that is what you come up with you should not be up front leading the flock.

The flock is not edified – not built up.

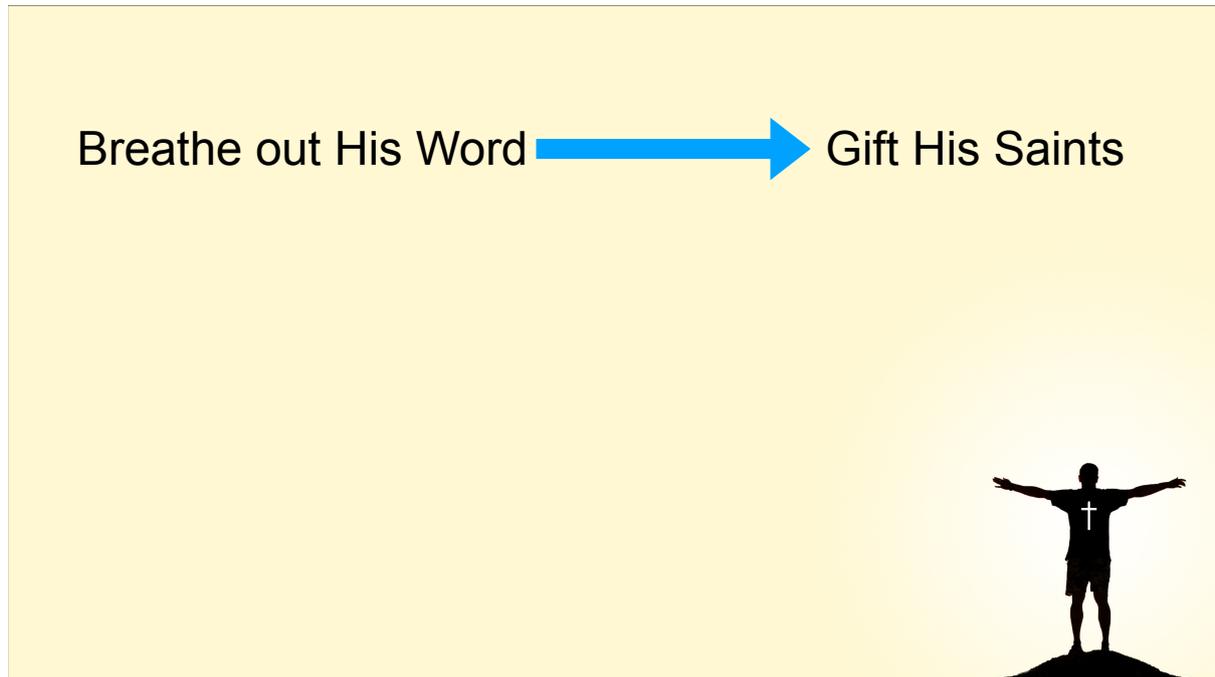
Too many people who should not be up front end up filling the message with jokes and anecdotes and nonsense and error – so the people leave the time of worship starving for the greatness of God or confused about the truth.

Clearly this sort of stuff was happening in Corinth.

It seems some true saints thought they had speaking gifts – but the result was chaos.

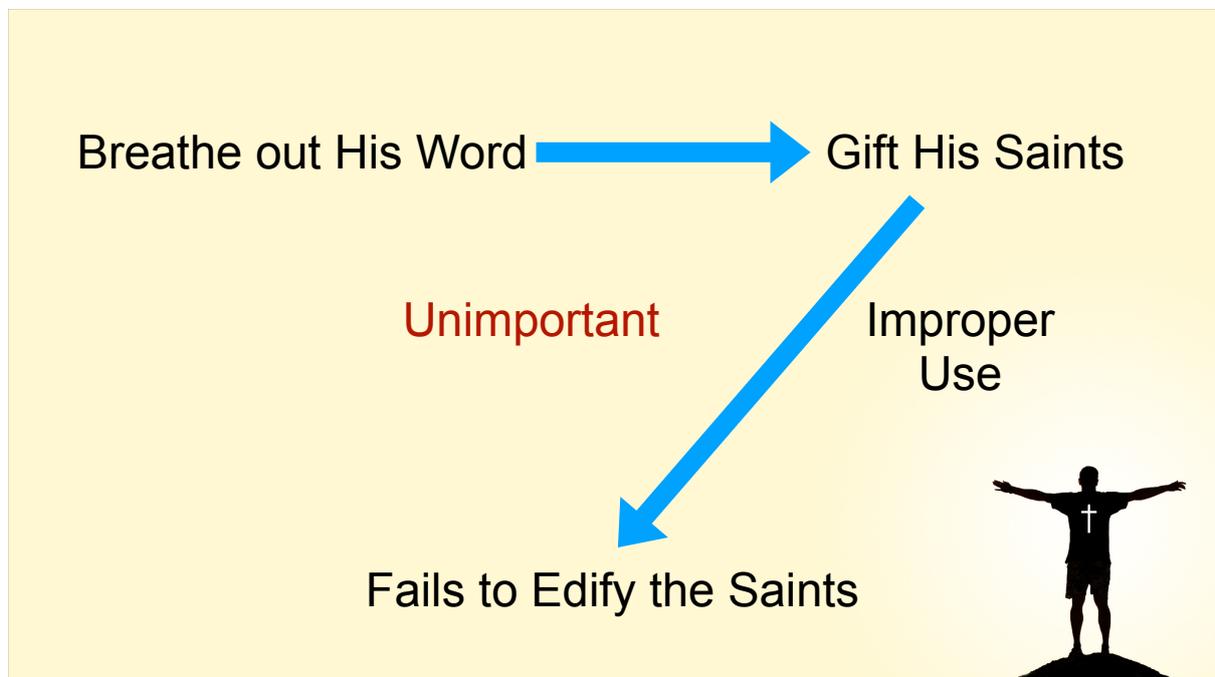
It is why we don't open the pulpit or up front leading to anyone. Only gifted saints should handle the word.

There is a **final** danger.



The **Misusing Michaels**.

A genuinely gifted saint who takes the true God-breathed word but misuses their gift.



It becomes about them more than Christ.

Unfortunately, there are so many ways men and women have misused God's word in this way.

One way they can do this is by failing to treat the word with the respect it demands.

The word is treated as **unimportant**.

Basically, the word becomes a side act. It is sidelined in favour of the individual.

It is look at me – rather than look to the word.

My stories – my music – my performance is the focus.

In Corinth, the look at me flashiness of tongues was prioritised over the substance of prophecy.

When you read verse 26 – it seems that a large part of the church simply wanted their turn in the spotlight:

What then, brothers and sisters? Whenever you come together, each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

It was about the individual. And it was out of control.

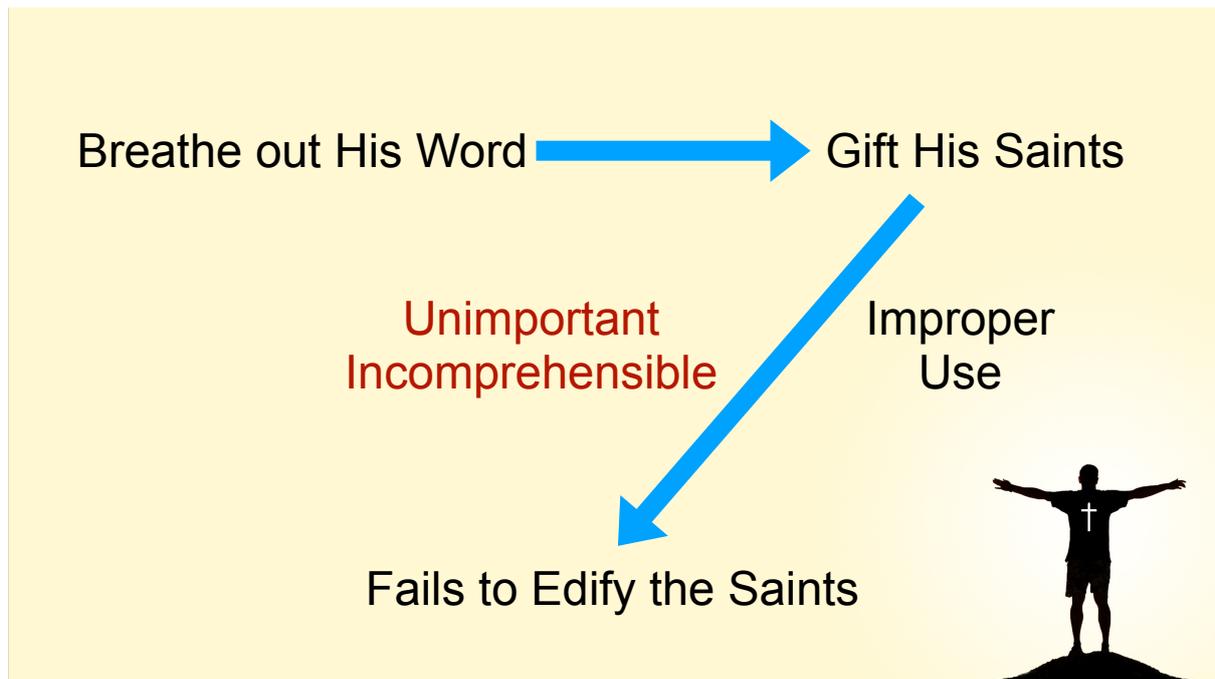
Everyone speaking together – in languages of every kind.

The result was – if an unbeliever walked in and heard this cacophony – they would say – you lot are insane!

Unbelievers are not being convicted. Israel is not being challenged The church is most certainly **not** edified.

And Paul will have none of it.

But there is another related way gifted saints can **misuse** the word.



They can fail to make it comprehensible.

The people just can't understand it.

Exercising the gift not comprehension of the message was what mattered.

There are many ways to do this.

I will put my hand up and say I have been guilty of this. Giving a sermon that sounds like a commentary – boring you to sleep – confusing you with Greek and theology and big words.

Totally accurate – but near incomprehensible.

It does not edify.

One other way is to read or preach the word in a language the flock does not understand.

If Carlos Morales read the word in Spanish and preached in Spanish – most of us would have no clue what he said.

It could be one of the great sermons and we wouldn't get any of it.

This was a huge issue in Corinth. Uninterpreted tongues that no one understood. 1 Corinthians 14:11:

Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker will be a foreigner to me.

It might as well have all been in Swahili.

In these chapters – Paul warns about the **Deceiving Dans**, the **Ungifted Uriahs** and the **Misusing Michaels**.

Corinth had allowed things to degenerate to the point they pretty much had every abuse of the word you could imagine.

When you read chapter 14 – that place was a madhouse. Not much if any building up.

Imagine people with the real gift of prophecy, some with the real gift of tongues, then add in false prophets and the false gift of tongues – and now imagine them all deciding I need to be heard so they speak their words – all at the same time.

True words, false words, foreign words, gibberish words – all just tossed out there – fighting to be heard over everyone else – with the implication that somehow this shows the church I am someone truly spiritual.

I would say this is madness.

Unbelievers would say it is madness.

Paul calls it madness.

We should call it madness.

This terrible scenario lies at the heart of chapter 14.

Here is the point of this morning's message:

Incomplete communication of God's word without understanding is a recipe for chaos.

Accurate communication of God's word with understanding is a basis for edification.



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Accurate communication of God's word with understanding is a basis for edification.

Paul is very clear – the church should seek the word gifts – the spiritual gifts associated with communicating the truth of God – that have three characteristics:

First – The church should seek word gifts that:

The church should seek word gifts that:

Edifies the body not the individual 1-5



Edifies the body not the individual 1-5

Gifts are given to glorify Christ and build His body.

Gifts are not given to glorify and build up an individual.

Clearly uninterpreted tongues was being used to say – look at me – I am awesome.

Paul says no – this has to stop.

In terms of edifying the church – prophecy is a greater gift than tongues.

Prophecy edifies the whole body – uninterpreted tongues edifies the individual.

1 Corinthians 14:1:

Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.

Remember the context here.

I gave you a paraphrase of chapter 12 verse 31:

If your desire is for the church to have the gifts that build it up – that is good.
But there is an even better way – love.

Chapter 13 deals with this better way – love.

Now in chapter 14 Paul says – OK – Pursue love and if you do have to desire spiritual gifts for the church – please – desire to have the ones that edify the church – and in Corinth – the main gift would be prophecy.

Remember Paul is not saying – you as an individual desire this gift – you can't ask for a gift – you get whatever gift God chooses to give you – we saw that in chapter 12.

He means as a church – desire to have the word gifts exercised among you that will that edify the whole body.

And what edifies is prophecy **not** uninterpreted tongues.

Verse 2:

For the person who speaks in a tongue is not speaking to people but to God, since no one understands him; he speaks mysteries in the Spirit.

If people can't understand the message – if the language is foreign to them – if there is no interpreter – then the only one who understands what is said is God – no one in that church is edified – the words remain a mystery to them.

Even if someone had the genuine gift of tongues – and used it to convey a message from God – if the message comes in Vietnamese – no one in that church would understand it but God – the message is wasted.

Verse 3:

On the other hand, the person who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation.

Prophecy was given in the language of the people – they understood this message. It is designed to communicate truth – and it edifies – it builds them up.

The people can understand and are changed by the power of the word.

This is what the word does – it strengthens – it encourages – it consoles.

The word takes a young believer and matures and strengthens them.

When someone is struggling – there are passages to help them.

If someone is devastated – terminal illness, a dying loved one – there are passages that console.

There is something in the word for every phase of life.

But if you can't understand it – if it comes to you in Ancient Arabian – you might as well be hearing the myth of the Arabian Nights – it won't edify.

Verse 4:

The person who speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

Here is the real issue. Uninterpreted tongues does **not** build up the church.

Don't mistake Paul's intent here.

He is not saying – look tongues was designed to edify the person – so in the privacy of your home – have it at – glossolate away – and be edified.

The context here is **public worship** – *when you come together*.

Don't then think he is saying what is good is to have both. In your worship service you should have these uninterpreted tongues that builds up the individual and prophesy that builds up the church.

No he is clear, if you are speaking in tongues in the church – with no interpreter – don't think for one moment that anyone there is being built up.

The only one being built up is you – and Paul is **not** saying that is a good thing.

His implication is that uninterpreted tongues is terrible. Word gifts are designed to edify the church not the individual.

Verse 5:

I wish all of you spoke in tongues, but even more that you prophesied. The person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may be built up.

Does Paul really wish every single Christian in Corinth spoke in tongues?

Perhaps – but I think this is more likely hyperbole.

This gift has caused enough damage.

In chapter 12 – Paul was clear – a healthy church is made of many parts with different gifts not just one gift – tongues.

Paul even says – not all speak in tongues.

It is more likely Paul is using hyperbole to say – look don't get me wrong – I am not anti-tongue – I speak in tongues.

But since you are declaring tongues makes you special – hey – I wish you could all speak in tongues – so no one could say – look how special I am – because you would all be speaking in tongues.

But having all speak in tongues would not build up the church – so he says – what I really wish is that you prophesied.

Prophecy is what builds up. Uninterpreted tongues does not build up.

Again – Paul is not anti-tongue so he adds – while this was not the purpose for the gift – if there is interpretation of the genuine gift – then there is edification – the church understands the message and the body is built up.

It is not just Corinth who has a problem with upfront ministries calling attention to the individual rather than God.

By their very nature the word gifts – the upfront speaking gifts are noticeable and prominent.

It is one reason one prominent qualification of those who use these gifts is to be humility.

It is so easy to make the gift all about the individual – to edify them and not the church.

I have sat in churches where a very gifted speaker told stories with pathos and skill. Captivating, entertaining – but spiritually lacking in nourishment.

Or sermons that were so well-delivered and entertaining – that is what you remember.

Look, I have preached sermons where I worked hard on the message – but I know it lacked humility and prayer and a reliance on God.

It was preached in human effort.

People would have left thinking – Craig did a good job on that message – **not** how awesome is Christ.

It is a trap that is so easy to fall into – and one that *must* be avoided.

If any gift seems to make more of the individual than of Christ – that is a huge warning sign.

The **second** characteristic – **The church should seek word gifts that:**

The church should seek word gifts that:

Edifies the body not the individual 1-5

Communicates God's understanding clearly 6-19



Communicates God's understanding clearly 6-19

Good leaders have always known this.

Consider Ezra, Nehemiah and the other leaders who guided the people of Israel out of the Babylonian captivity. They faced many challenges – one major challenge that may not readily spring to mind was how to feed the people on the word.

You see, the nation of Israel went into captivity a nation of Hebrew speakers. But while they were in captivity – the generation born there grew up speaking the language of Babylon – Aramaic.

So they arrived back in the land – determined to rebuild the nation on the Scriptures – but the Scriptures were written in Hebrew yet the people spoke Aramaic.

Imagine me reading the New Testament in Greek and preaching it in Greek. Or imagine Daniel Park reading it and preaching in Korean – a couple of Amens and a whole bunch of puzzled faces.

Not a lot of encouragement and edification.

Here was Ezra's solution. Nehemiah 8:5–8:

Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, ... [the] Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

Ezra read it and Levites who knew both Hebrew and Aramaic translated it and explained it. They took the truths of the word and made it understandable.

The uninterpreted tongues in Corinth were not understandable. So Paul urged them to seek prophecy.

Prophecy is intelligible – uninterpreted tongues is unintelligible

Verse 6:

So now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you with a revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?

Even an Apostle speaking in uninterpreted tongues is useless.

Paul might be Apostle to the Gentiles – but he was only useful if he came speaking a revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching – something in a language they could understand.

He then gives three analogies to reinforce his point.

1. Musical instruments.

Verse 7:

Even lifeless instruments that produce sounds—whether flute or harp—if they don't make a distinction in the notes, how will what is played on the flute or harp be recognized?

Music is a very powerful tool. Find ten talented musicians – have them play Bach or Mozart – and you are edified.

In skilled hands this music conveys emotion and can edify – it can soothe, encourage and strengthen.

However, I assure you I am somebody you *don't* want playing a musical instrument – your ears would protest.

But you know what even I can make a noise on an instrument.

Give ten musically challenged individuals like me – ten instruments – we will make a noise – a cacophony – and no one will be edified.

Bach intended his music to convey certain emotions.

In my hands the only emotion you would have is frustration.

God intended His word to convey meaning – tongues without interpretation conveys no meaning.

2. A Bugle

Verses 8 and 9:

In fact, if the bugle makes an unclear sound, who will prepare for battle? In the same way, unless you use your tongue for intelligible speech, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into the air.

When a King wants to send his army into battle – the bugle sounds – one long clear note – and the army moves.

A muffled, unclear sound – just leaves confusion.

Was that the signal – are we to charge?

The message failed.

In the same way uninterpreted tongues just speaks words into the air – the message is lost.

You are just speaking into the air – sounds are coming out of your mouth with no meaning and no way of encouraging, warning or teaching the flock.

The call to action or encouragement or comfort fails.

3. Barbarians

Verses 10-11:

There are doubtless many different kinds of languages in the world, none is without meaning. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker will be a foreigner to me.

The word translated foreigner is literally barbarian.

There are links here back to Babel.

The different languages put up barriers and invoke animosity. Brothers become barbarians – separated.

Each language has meaning – but if you don't speak that language – the meaning is lost.

I am a barbarian to you and you are a barbarian to me.

We are not united in praise and worship.

Put these illustrations together and we see that uninterpreted tongues is like a cacophony of sounds – twenty monkeys hammering away and blowing on musical instruments.

Meaningless. Confusing, Frustrating.

It fails to do what it was designed to do.

Verse 12:

So also you—since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to excel in building up the church.

Since they were zealous for gifts – they should be zealous for the ones that edify – the ones that convey the meaning of God – prophecy or teaching.

Meaning is so crucial.

Probably the greatest catalyst for the Reformation was having the Bible available in the language of the people.

Up until that time all that was available was an older Latin translation. It was read in the church and none of the people understood it at all.

But when the Bible began to circulate in the vernacular – the language of the people – it was a revelation. The truth of God was available to the people of God.

The errors of the Catholic Church were obvious to all – it is why they fought so ferociously to stop the spread of Bibles and preachers.

We believe that there are a number of tremendous translations of the Bible in English – accurate and understandable.

This principle is also why we have supported Bible translators for years. We are passionate to see the word of God in the language of the people – so it can be unleashed to do its work.

The task of the man of God is to make the truths of the word live in the language of the hearers.

Take these precious, wonderful teachings – grapple with them, understand them – and then convey them in a way that touches the hearts of the flock.

Paul then directly addresses those with the genuine gift of tongues.

If you have got it – and you plan on using it in the church – don't – **unless** there is interpretation.

Verse 13:

Therefore the person who speaks in a tongue should pray that he can interpret.

It is hard to know if Paul means – pray for an additional associated gift – the gift of interpretation – or if this gift comes with tongues – but they hadn't been exercising the gift – so pray to activate the gift.

Regardless – Paul says – you need to interpret the language.

Paul makes it clear – this is his pattern.

Verse 14:

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

God works through Paul and his spirit – the inward part of him – to pray in tongues – but if it is without interpretation – even Paul has no clue what it means – his understanding is unfruitful.

Paul is not content with that.

Verse 15:

What then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with my understanding.
I will sing praise with the spirit, and I will also sing praise with my understanding.

If he is to use this gift publicly – he will pray for interpretation so as his spirit prays and sings praise – his mind understands and joins in and his mind joins in praying and singing praise – and the implication is both Paul and those in the congregation will benefit by understanding this message from God.

Verse 16:

Otherwise, if you praise with the spirit, how will the outsider say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?

Outsider is probably not the best translation. It is a word that means unskilled. Many versions translate it as ‘ungifted’ – they don’t have the gift of interpretation.

I think the NIV 1984 version gets it right. It translates this word – *those who do not understand*.

Paul is saying – how will those in the church who don’t have the gift – who don’t understand what you are saying – how will they say Amen – I agree – with your prayer?

Amen means – I agree – I add my prayer to yours.

But to agree – you have to understand – otherwise it is just going through the motions.

Verse 17:

For you may very well be giving thanks, but the other person is not being built up.

You might be giving a very appropriate prayer of thanks in Russian – but those in the church are not edified – not built up – because they have no idea what you are saying.

Verse 18:

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

It's hard to know if Paul is saying he actually spends more time speaking in tongues than them because many of these Corinthians were hard core tongue speakers.

It seems his intent is to make it clear that he is not anti-tongue. He speaks in tongues – frequently.

But verse 19:

In the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order to teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Five understandable words can convey a lot.

Grace through faith in Christ.

Praise Him who saves us.

There is so much truth in these words.

But, ten thousand incomprehensible words conveys *nothing*.

An hour of amazing, detailed teaching that no one understands is useless.

In fact as Paul is about to say it is less than useless – it makes others say you are insane.

Look it has been suggested to me on more than one occasion that I should make verse 19 my life's motto.

Keep my sermons short and clear – not long and dense.

A few clear words not many hard to follow words.

Perhaps that is not bad advice.

The point is that anyone who speaks in a worship service had better make sure that what they say is based on the word of God – and it is clear, intelligible and those there actually understand.

Jesus was a master of brevity and clarity.

His Lord's Prayer is so filled with truth – I could literally spend a year preaching on it – but it is only a few lines long.

His parables are models of effective communication.

Something we must strive for.

The **third** characteristic – **The church should seek word gifts that:**

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Communicates God's understanding clearly 6-19

Declares the gospel to all 20-25



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When you boil it down – the main reason God chose to communicate with us is to reveal His plan of salvation – the gospel. His truths about Christ, the cross and redemption.

You have probably seen the advertisement where the German coastguard is manning the radio when a mayday comes in. He receives a message from a ship “Mayday, mayday, we are sinking.”

The operator replies – “Hello zis is the German Coastguard.”

“We are sinking. We are sinking.”

To which the operator relies – “Vot are you sinking about?”

An inability to communicate can cost not just lives – but eternal lives.

In untranslated tongues, praises and truths about Christ – the gospel – this precious, life-saving message is lost.

Verse 20:

Brothers and sisters, don't be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking.

Parents, see if this sounds familiar.

A mark of childishness is – it is all about them – they have to be the centre of attention – and they don't care how they behave.

If a couple of adults are talking – and the child in the room is ignored – what happens? A tantrum, an interruption, a look at me the most important person here disturbance.

And children have very little regard for right and wrong – it's all about them.

This was Corinth. Look at me. Notice my gift – **la la bar bar ra ra**.

And dealing with sin – that was not on their radar. They tolerated gross immorality, division and selfishness.

Paul says – time to grow up.

It is the gospel and Christ that should be central.

Move yourself to the side, live as Christians – and in the way you think and talk be adult – speak of Christ.

Verses 21-22:

It is written in the law, **I will speak to this people by people of other tongues and by the lips of foreigners, and even then, they will not listen to me**, says the Lord. Speaking in tongues, then, is intended as a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers.

Tongues was not primarily designed as a look at me gift – an I'm so spiritual gift. In fact it wasn't even designed to be a primary method of communicating God's truth.

It was given first and foremost as a sign to unbelievers – specifically in this context – unbelieving Israel.

We looked at this a few weeks back but let me remind you.

Sin led to judgment at the Tower of Babel – the confusion of languages and the animosity between nations.

This was Genesis 11. The very next chapter – Genesis 12 – God begins His plan to undo this division.

He chooses one man – Abraham – who will become a great nation – and crucially through His seed – **all** nations will be blessed.

The one nation Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations. Unfortunately, Israel disobeyed. They rebelled and instead of being a light to the nations – they became just like the nations.

So God sent a prophetic sign to them. What was it?

Tongues.

In Deuteronomy 28:49, Jeremiah 5:15 and Isaiah 28:11 the very passage Paul quotes here in 1 Corinthians 14 – God says – unintelligible tongues – hearing foreign languages that they could not understand – would be the sign that while Israel had failed and lost track of the plan – God had not. Gentiles will be part of the nation.

The true Israel would succeed where they failed.

In the fulness of time Jesus comes into the world, lives and dies and rises from the dead.

The book of Acts opens with Jesus telling His disciples – go to the ends of the world.

Then in Acts 2 – the day of Pentecost – tongues arrives.

What did it signal? Acts 2 verse 21:

Then **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Prophesying in tongues was a sign that the church was to be built from **every** nation. It is not just faithful Jews – but everyone from every nation – who calls on the name of the Lord – who will be saved.

Unfortunately, the disciples did not rush out to the nations.

In fact they still questioned whether Gentiles should be allowed into the church.

God uses persecution to send them to the nations – and in Samaria – and in Gentile communities – tongues was the sign to Israel that Gentiles were to be a part of the people of God.

So, in the early church:

Tongues was primarily a prophecy through a human language as a sign to unbelieving Israel of God's plan to undo the curse and create one nation from all peoples.

We believe once the church was established – with Jews and Gentiles as one – the purpose for tongues passed and the gift passed.

But in Corinth – the gift was present.

Throughout this whole book of 1 Corinthians, Paul has made it clear – the gospel unites. It takes men and women, slaves and free, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile and unites them as one.

1 Corinthians 12:12–13:

For just as the body is one and has many parts, ... — so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—**whether Jews or Greeks**, whether slaves or free.

But this church is so divided.

They divided over leaders, over theology, over rich and poor.

Their misunderstanding widened their divisions. The Lord's Table – a symbol of their unity – they celebrated it with every division on full display.

Now – here is this gift – tongues – that is designed to declare the unity of every type of people – in one body – and in Corinth it actually became a cause of division.

I am more spiritual than you because I have the angelic gift and you don't.

Paul will have none of it.

It does not edify the church or glorify Christ. It is meant to convey our unity in Christ.

Verse 23:

If, therefore, the whole church assembles together and all are speaking in tongues and people who are outsiders or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

Remember – outsiders is better translated – *those who do not understand* – Christians without the gift of interpretation.

Unbelievers. In the context it is primarily unbelieving Jews who can't accept that Gentiles should be part of the kingdom.

They come in and see all of these people speaking in unknown languages and probably some of the false gift with its babble thrown in as well.

They will think they have entered the twilight zone.

And they will think the church is crazy.

Listen – even when we communicate clearly – some Christians and many unbelievers think we are crazy.

Jesus rising from the dead. Heaven and hell. Right and wrong. Sexual fidelity.

But add in the lunacy that happens in some churches – slaying in the Spirit, uncontrolled tongues, partial healings, uncontrolled prophetic words – their suspicions are confirmed – Christians **are** insane.

Verses 24-25:

But if all are prophesying and some unbeliever or outsider comes in, he is convicted by all and is called to account by all. The secrets of his heart will be revealed, and as a result he will fall facedown and worship God, proclaiming, “God is really among you.”

God designed His word to penetrate our souls.

Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

But you have to understand it for the word to do its work.

Prophecy is in the language of the people.

An unbeliever – or someone without the gift of interpretation – they can understand prophecy.

They are convicted.

They are called to account.

The word pierces their hearts – convicts them and they will fall down and exclaim – “God is really among you.”

That is the choice. Uncontrolled uninterpreted tongues – you are insane – or prophecy – you are the people of God.

That is what we want. We want them to hear the gospel and be convicted.

If a wavering believer, a Jew, a non-Christian walks in here – I pray they will hear enough of the message to be convicted about their sin – the glory of Christ and the way of salvation.

Incomplete communication of God’s word without understanding is a recipe for chaos.

Accurate communication of God’s word with understanding is a basis for edification.

As a church we should desire the greater gifts. In this age after the New Testament was completed – that is primarily teaching.

Taking the word and making it live.

It is why we are such a word focussed church – not performance or jokes or flash.

It is why we spend your resources training interns in the word.

Look, I can tell you – we still have so far to go in making our sermons and communications clear.

But that is our goal – in our music, our prayers, our preaching, our communion and baptisms – that the message of Christ is clear, the way of salvation evident and God is seen as central in all we do.

Tongues should not be a divisive issue. It was designed primarily to point to the truth that in Christ there is a solution for the mess sin has caused. His death paid our penalty. His resurrection promises new life. We are one in Christ.

May we long for that day when we are one – when every tongue and nation will be united in praise of the One who died to save us.

Desire The Greater Gifts **(1 Corinthians 14:1-25 February 21, 2021)**

Main Point:

Incomplete communication of God's word without understanding is a recipe for chaos.

Accurate communication of God's word with understanding is a basis for edification.

General Questions:

1. What is God's basic plan for getting His message – the Word to us – in a way that we can comprehend it?
2. What are the ways this plan can be corrupted? (Consider about the **Deceiving Dans**, the **Ungifted Uriahs** and the **Misusing Michaels**.)

How do you guard against these misuses?

3. What misuses of the word and God's speaking gifts were occurring in Corinth? What is Paul's solution to correct them?
4. Why is it important for gifts to edify the body not the individual?
5. Why is uninterpreted tongues such an issue?
6. Why is prophecy greater than uninterpreted tongues?
7. What are the gifts that edify the body with God's word that are present in the church today? What does – desiring the greater gifts – look like in our church?
8. How can we make sure up front gifts are Christ focussed not focussed on the individual?

Application Questions:

1. What should be the qualifications of those we allow in the pulpit?
2. What should be the qualifications of those we allow in public teaching roles eg. Worship Leading?
3. Why do you think tongues became such an issue in churches today?
4. Are there suggestions you have for us to make the communication of the word clearer in our public ministry?

5. Are their suggestions to make sure that Christ and the gospel are more clearly articulated in our services?
6. Any comments on our balance in communicating the word – clarity, comprehensiveness, understandability, etc?