

1 Corinthians 14:1-19

“Be Profitable”

Keeping with the context we’ve been studying this portion of scripture that deals with spiritual gifts, and the way that we’re to interact with one another as a corporate gathering when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit. **That God has a place and a purpose for each one of us as members of His body, and even as my body can’t function completely as it was created to apart from every member fulfilling its purpose, blue to in the body of Christ. Every member is essential, each of you is important.** So we need not envy one another, compare ourselves amongst ourselves, or be discontented with the portion of the body that God has called us to. We’re to walk in love, serving one another, laying our lives down for each other, looking to build up and edify one another; which brings us to our text today.

You recall from last week that we discovered that in reality the gifts of the Spirit (though good) aren’t of any value to anyone apart from the agape love of God flowing in and out through them. The gifts we likened unto containers, and it’s not containers in and of themselves that mean a whole lot to us by themselves. It’s what we place *inside* those containers that give them their worth, their value, even so it’s the love of God poured out in our hearts, working in and through the gifts of the Spirit that give those gifts their worth, their value. **and So we took the time to note and to study with respect to our lives both personally and practically love’s preeminence, love’s performance, and love’s permanence. Love is essential, it puts forth unrelenting effort, and it is eternal in nature. What then should be my priority, my precedence, my primary pursuit as a believer (gifts?) Look at Vs 1 of Ch 14.**

Vs1

with all this emphasis placed upon the essential aspect of God’s love in our lives it’s no wonder that Paul should cause this portion of scripture to culminate in the *command*: “Pursue love.” and Again I draw your attention to the fact that things like punctuation marks and Ch breaks don’t occur in the Greek manuscript. and So notice the natural flow when you read it like this, “and Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love, *pursue* love.” (Then he carries on, “*and Desire spiritual gifts,*”) but he wants to make sure that you and I are readily aware of the order of priority. You see this word “Pursue” is in the present tense, the active voice, and the imperative mood which means that it’s a command that we’re to be actively obeying on a continual unending basis. My chief aim as a believer isn’t to pursue the gifts of God, but rather the *love* of God. Why? Because as we learned last week apart from the love of God compelling me, constraining me, stirring me in what I say, or how I behave, motivating my actions, none of it is of any eternal value to me whatsoever. If I want my life to count for eternity it is essential that I be filled and overflowing with the love of God. *Pursue love, that word pursue speaks of running hard to catch up with someone, it speaks of following after, endeavoring to obtain, even attaching oneself to another person, and running a race swiftly in order to reach the goal. Paul says, “Make the love of God your passion, your personal pursuit, it’s good to desire spiritual gifts, you should, but the gifts aren’t the goal, God’s love, is.”*

Now that brings up a question. What does it mean to walk in God's love, to actively and practically lead my life in the love of God; not in a manner of legalism, but of wisdom? Do you want to know how God interprets active love practically portrayed in our lives? 1 Word, "Obedience."

Jesus said, "*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.*" John 15:9-10 We saw loves performance in Ch 13 Vs 4-7, but everyone of those things is fulfilled as we simply walk in obedience to the Word of God. It's sort of an issue of semantics, because to abide in the love of God and to walk in obedience to God is really one and the same thing. Remember Paul said, "*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." Rom 13:8-10 You want to walk in obedience, walk in love, you want to walk in love, be obedient to God's Word. Pursue, (follow after, seek out, endeavor to acquire) love.

"and Desire spiritual gifts, but *especially* that you may prophesy." and Again the order here is important, God's love has to come 1st, because apart from love the gifts are pointless. So let love be your priority, then you and I are prepared to operate in the gifts practically. and When it comes to corporate interaction in the body of Christ he says, "The gift you should especially desire to have in operation is the gift of prophecy."

Now what is "prophecy." Some say prophecy is in reality inspired preaching, or perhaps I should say preaching that inspires because they don't mean directly inspired in that way. Now in Vs 3 Paul will tell us exactly what prophecy is, but can I tell you that what Paul is *not* speaking about is preaching. There's a word available in the Greek for "preaching" and Paul used it in multiple places as did Jesus, it's not something unique or uncommon. But Paul didn't use that word here, he used the word that means what it says, "To prophesy." and One way that the strong's exhaustive concordance explains this word is like this, "To speak forth under divine inspirations." "To break forth under sudden impulse to teach, refute, reprove, admonish, comfort others." So we're not speaking here of preaching and teaching in regards to what we receive every Sunday and every Wednesday when I've spent hours studying and preparing to put together a message. Certainly God leads in that as well, but what we're speaking of here is a spontaneous unction by the Spirit of God by which He gives revelation, reproof, illumination and or comfort to others. Now it can happen in the midst of a message like this, but it's not something that can be pre-meditated. It's something that the Spirit of God comes upon you for in that moment in order to minister to a specific need at that time. So this is something that obviously is of benefit, it profits the entire body, the assembly being built up under the operation of the gift of prophecy. That's why he says that prophecy is of greater value to the body than is tongues. You see the Corinthians were all about tongues. He says, "Tongues are great, but prophecy is greater." Now that might upset our Pentecostal friends, but that's simply what God's Word (not my opinion) declares, notice.

Vs2-4

You see one gift is meant primarily for personal use, the other is to be exercised in public. Tongues may edify me personally (if I'm exercising that gift) but prophecy will edify the entire body collectively. Now follow me here. Love teaches us to be what? Other's oriented right? Now if tongues primarily benefits myself, but prophecy will benefit others, than as it pertains to the gifts which of the 2 should be my primary desire? Prophecy, why? Because I'm looking to build up and edify the body corporately, not simply myself personally, notice Vs 2 (read).

Do me a favor; underline that 1st phrase, "He who speaks in a tongue *does not* speak to men but to God."

and It's going to seem like I'm picking on our Pentecostal friends again, that's not my intent. My intent is to simply speak the truth from the Word of God in love and let the chips fall where they may. Because it's all too common, especially in the Pentecostal circles to have someone stand up, speak in tongues and then a message is given, "My little children, hearken unto Me." and They'll go on to speak on behalf of God as though what's been said in tongues was a message from God to man. Yet the bible says very plainly, quite clearly that when someone is speaking in tongues they're *not* speaking to men but to God. The idea of messages in tongues is simply unscriptural. Now does that mean the gift of tongues has been faked? Not necessarily, what it does mean is that the interpretation was wrong. Now it could be 2 different gifts being exercised. For instance God begins to stir someone, placing a word of prophecy on their heart, they're nervous or too embarrassed to share it. Someone begins to speak in tongues and then they're emboldened to share what's on their heart. Or they receive what God's placed on their heart as the interpretation to the tongues when in reality it's meant to bring edification to the body as a word of prophecy and there was simply no interpreter present with respect to the utterance in tongues.

Because we're going to see in a little while that tongues is either *praying to*, giving *praise to*, or offering *thanks* to God. It's always addressed *from* man *to* God, never the other way around. How much sense does it make for God to address you in a language you don't even understand? Now if you and I realize that it does me no good to speak English to a Russian apart from an interpreter, how much more does God realize and understand that? "Well what about what happened in Acts Ch 2?" What about it? No one was speaking a thing to man, we read that when the Holy Spirit fell they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. and Because it was a feast time there were all kinds of Jews and proselytes from all over the world there, various languages and all. and Out of the dozens of dialects and various languages it mentions around 16 that heard them in their native tongue. But they weren't preaching to them the gospel in tongues. It says very clearly what they were hearing. We read in Vs 11 of Acts Ch 2, "...we hear them speaking in our own tongues *the wonderful works of God.*" Acts 2:11 Or to understand that another way they were magnifying and praising God, not addressing the people with a word *from* God. When it came time to address the crowd Peter ceased speaking in tongues and shared with them the gospel in the common language of the day be it Aramaic (or more than likely Greek). But the point remains the same, when it came time to address the people he ceased speaking in tongues, because when someone is speaking in tongues they're not speaking to you, or to me, they're speaking to God.

Now if God gave say Spanish to you as a prayer language (though you didn't have a clue how to speak Spanish naturally) but you began to speak out in tongues (in the appropriate setting) and someone present understood Spanish, that would be the equivalent of what took place in Acts Ch 2. Now there's obviously a *supernatural* companion gift to tongues in the "interpretation" of tongues, but that wasn't what was happening in Acts 2, those people were hearing the disciples speak in their native dialect and they knew that they were Galileans. It would be like someone that you *knew* was from Germany having never spoken English suddenly speaking perfect English, that's why they were confused, "What's this?" and Peter stood up and shared with them what was going on and gave them the gospel in the common language. You see if I don't get this part down I'm open to all kinds of abuse and misuse of the gift of tongues. Because when I feel like speaking in tongues I'm going to think God has a message for the people so I'm going to just blurt out something and people aren't going to have a clue what I'm saying.

So tongues (if not understood biblically) can bring confusion, however prophecy brings clarity.

Vs3

So this is by biblical definition what the gift of prophecy accomplishes in the body of Christ. #1 Edification, it's an architectural word, a construction term meaning to *build up*, which would be the opposite of *tearing down*. If the way you're divulging information is destroying someone, tearing them down, you're not edifying them. If you're edifying them you're promoting their growth in the Lord, be it in their practical holiness, their commitment to Christ, giving them insight and wisdom, you're helping them, not hindering them, building them up. #2 Exhortation, or encouragement, this is that attribute that the Holy Spirit so often uses to stir us to action. "You have the right *information*, now make of it practical *application*." Exhortation encourages you to move forward in your walk and relationship with the Lord, and it can have both positive and negative aspects. "Repent from *this*, or cease doing *that*, (to the negative) and start growing *here*, allow the Lord to begin moving in your life *there*." Or perhaps you've grown stagnate in your relationship with the Lord, or I've grown lazy in my service the Lord, the word of exhortation will stir me in such a way as to place me back on that proper path, cause me to prioritize my life in a proper way, get back on board with the Lord being my 1st love. and #3 Comfort or *consolation*, "Hey, trust in the Lord He's still in control." So this attribute doesn't only console them but it will also add strength to them, help them to hold out and carry on. When one or more of these things take place in your life because a brother or sister has been sharing *with* you or ministering *to* you, they've been moving in the gift of prophecy.

Vs4-5

Now I don't want you to misunderstand Paul here, he's wasn't "anti" gift of tongues. He says, "Hey I wish you all spoke with tongues. But even more that you prophesied." Why? Because one only edifies self, the other benefits the entire body. Now he says, "If there's an interpreter present, then the whole body can be edified just the same, but apart from that the gift of tongues is of no value to a corporate gathering."

A minute ago I asked the question, “Why would God need to speak to me in a language I don’t understand?” The answer is He wouldn’t. Why would I need to speak to *God* in a language I don’t understand. Couple reasons that might benefit you. #1 It’s an exercise of faith, when something bypasses my intellectual ability to comprehend at that point I’m moving on faith. **and It’s never unhealthy to move (not in presumption) in faith. 2^{ndly} you may come to a point whereby you don’t know how to say what you need to say, words fail you, you can’t express your heart because it’s so overwhelmed in joy, or sorrow.** At that point it’s good to know you can express your heart to the Lord in a way that goes beyond your personal ability to communicate and trust the Holy Spirit to communicate the fullness of your heart to the Lord. Be it in praise, petition, thanksgiving or whatever.

Now, how can me having understanding via an interpreter to someone else’s prayer language edify me? The same way that when I read through the Psalms and though the words spoken are directed to God, my heart is right there as well, and the psalmist has a hold on the position of *my* heart and *my* heart is in agreement with his. I agree with those things, my heart begins to lift those same things up to the Lord, in humility/praise/prayer before the Lord.

Vs6

This is such a huge key (and I’ll develop it a little farther in a minute) but the idea here is that *understanding* is *key* in *edifying* or building up the body. In other words if I’m rattling off in some language you don’t understand how does that benefit you?

But if I speak words of revelation, insight, exhortation, or explanation of the word of God, now we’re getting somewhere, we’re building forward momentum in our walk and relationship with the Lord.

But I love the apostle’s heart here, you might just lift this one little phrase right out of the middle of this Vs and consider it as coming from yourself in relationship to the body of Christ. “What shall I profit you?” That’s the heart of the apostle, the heart of God, not looking to get something out of it for himself, but to add something to it for you, for me. You see, “What profit am I to the body of Christ? What do I profit you?” Think about that, earlier in this letter Paul wrote, “*I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*” 1 Cor 10:33 You see, what’s the position of your heart in being here? “What profit is in it for *me*?” Or is it, “What shall *I* profit *you*?” Is my heart self centered, or other’s centered?

Now he illustrates what he means by the need to understand before I can benefit from what’s being said or shared.

Vs7-8

Now there are a couple of different instruments that I know how to play, but wind instruments aren’t one of them. If I break out on the flute or the trumpet it’ll be like unto a hideous train wreck for you. It won’t make sense, it won’t soothe or comfort you in anyway. That’s like unto a message received with out understanding. If you’re in the army and when the horn blows you don’t know if it’s chow time or charge time, it’s going to make for radical confusion in the ranks. It’s just noise being blown into the air, but it doesn’t mean a thing to me personally.

Vs9

You see there it is, before there can be any *edifying* there must 1st be *understanding*. If you can't comprehend the concepts I'm placing before you I'm just putting sounds in the air. Now I might be having a real good time, but doesn't do you any good at all. My 2 yr old son likes to bang on drums and strum my guitar, he thoroughly enjoys it, to me it's just noise in the air. So unless I utter by the tongue words *easy* to understand, how will it be known what is spoken. You guys this is the key I was talking about. There's a common problem that Pastors can fall into at the pulpit and that's wanting everyone to know how smart they are. Now I'm not saying that a Pastor should ever belittle the intelligence of the congregation and it's good to have our intellect stimulated from time to time. There's nothing wrong with being challenged. But so often Pastors want to show off the fruits of seminary and time spent in study and so they issue these big theological words, and give out all these esoteric insights and concepts so that by the time they're finished speaking everyone is saying, "Wow that guy is really smart, what in the world did he just say?" If there was *ever* a theological giant in this world (outside of Christ) it was Paul the apostle. Yet what was his objective/his policy when it came to sharing revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or doctrine (teaching from the scriptures)? *To utter by the tongue words easy to understand. It doesn't help anyone to complicate matters, we're to feed the sheep, not place the nutrients out of reach lest we just be speaking into the air. So when you're sharing God's word with someone remember that, speak in words easy to understand or you'll just be speaking into the air.*

Vs10-11

"I'm not saying the gift isn't legit, or that it's with out significance. I'm simply saying that if I don't understand it, it's of no value to me."

Vs12

Underline that, I should *only* and *always* exercise gifts God has given me in the corporate assembly in ways that build up, encourage and benefit the body. Let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel, not yourself, or myself.

Vs13

Why? That the church might be edified; and remember that an interpretation is different than a translation. Translation is a word for word rendering, and interpretation is concerned with general concepts and ideas being communicated. So the interpretation of just a few syllables can be quite colorful in meaning, because it's the concept being communicated, not a word for word rendering.

and Remember that Paul is addressing the proper environment in the corporate setting. If you were to ask Paul which gift would be better to have in my personal private devotional life he'd no doubt say *tongues over prophecy*. Because if you're alone who are you prophesying to? But if you're praying in tongues and you're alone it will still serve to edify you even if you don't understand it personally. But in the assembly prophecy is of greater benefit.

Vs14-17

and What's our focus to be ? "The other;" but you see he tells us very clearly what's going on when you're speaking in tongues. He says (in Vs 15), "I will pray," so it's a language of prayer, directed to God. "I will sing," it's a language of *praise* directed to God. and Vs 17, "You indeed *give thanks well*."

It's language that expresses appreciation, thanksgiving, magnifying and glorifying the Lord for the great and marvelous works He's done. But it's always *from* man *to* God, ***never, never, never,*** the other way around.

Vs18

I read somewhere that 10,000 was the largest number in Greek. So Paul is making quite a statement here. He re-underscores the fact that he's not knocking tongues as a gift, says that he exercises the gift of tongues more than any of them ever dreamed of doing. But when it comes to addressing the collective gathering of the saints he says, give me just 5 words any day of the week that I can speak to them that they'll understand, than 10,000 words in a tongue. Why? That I may teach others, that I might instruct them, inform them, enlighten them in their walk and relationship with Christ. 5 Words that you'll understand will do you more good than 10,000 that you don't. It's Paul aim *not* to impress you with how spiritual he is, but to be profitable for you that you might grow in your love relationship with the Lord. Let's make that our aim as a family together, what shall I profit you? That we might be profitable one to another in this fellowship, and as a family to the glory of God.

Of course the greatest profit that can come to you is to know Jesus Christ in a personal way. Maybe you've never received Christ into your heart, asked Him to forgive your sin and fill you with His Spirit. Today can be the day, Jesus came here to profit you, it cost Him dearly, but it can profit you greatly. He took upon Himself the sin of the world, becoming sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Crucified for our transgression, raised again for our justification so that whoever would call upon the name of the Lord would be saved. Let me encourage you to open your heart and invite Jesus in today.

Prayer Points:

God cause our lives to be of value, of benefit, a blessing to the body of Christ. That we might be those who build up, encourage and strengthen one another, rather than tear down, discourage and deplete each other. and May we walk *in*, and pursue *after* love, walking in obedience to Your Word from the heart, may we hunger more and more to know Your word, to know Your ways, to know You.