



Sermon Transcript February 12, 2017

Empowered to Serve Build the Body 1 Corinthians 14:1-40

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 12, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text:
1 Corinthians 14:1-40

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.

⁶ Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? ⁸ And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? 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. ¹² So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

¹³ Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say, "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 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.

²⁶ What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, lesson, revelation, a

tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷ If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸ If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 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.

Introduction

My goal this morning is to tie up two loose ends. First of all, I want to bring to conclusion our journey through 1 Corinthians 12-14. And so we will be spending most of our time this morning in 1 Corinthians 14. But in addition to that, I also want to make some concluding observations about spiritual gifts as we bring this series to a close. There is a “string of thought” that binds these two loose ends together for us this morning. It is a thought that comes from our text this morning, 1 Corinthians 14:12. Here Paul says, “*strive to excel in building up the church.*”

I can't think of a better statement to summarize the purpose for this sermon series on spiritual gifts. Just look at the energy captured in this statement. When Paul uses the words “*strive to excel*” he is calling us to work hard at it and to be good at it. Work hard at building up the church. If you want to excel in something, be good at building up the church. I trust that is a shared passion each of us have in a growing measure. We want to take the gifts the Spirit of God has graciously given to us and we each want to do our part and to “*strive to excel in building up the church.*”

This statement, “*strive to excel in building up the church*” also summarizes the climax of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 12-14. We have already seen that in these three chapters, Paul is bringing a corrective to their thinking on the matter of spiritual gifts. They had taken one spiritual gift, speaking in tongues, and they had elevated it to the gift

of status when they gathered as a community to worship. They considered this gift the definitive sign that one was truly spiritual. And so through these three chapters, Paul is redefining for them what it really means to be a “Spirit-filled church.”

Here is what we have seen as we have made our way through 1 Corinthians 12-14. A Spirit-filled church is a church that exalts Jesus as Lord. It is a church that embraces the full diversity of the spiritual gifts given to the church, not elevating one gift over the other. It is a church that embraces the unity of the body of Christ, recognizing that everyone is important and everyone has something to contribute. And then, last week, right in the middle of Paul’s thought on this topic, we have that great chapter on the supremacy of love. And so, Gordon Fee says that as far as Paul is concerned, the definitive sign that we are people of the Spirit is “always to walk in love.”¹ And so Paul brings this interlude to a close by saying, “*So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*”

We noticed last week that 1 Corinthians 13 is an entire chapter dropped right in the middle of a thought. This thought began at the end of 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul says, “*But earnestly desire the higher gifts.*” He then breaks his train of thought, and goes into chapter 13, where he talks about the virtue of love. Then in chapter 14, he picks up where he left off at the end of chapter 12 and he says, “*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.*” This is what he is referring to at the end of chapter 12 when he talks about *the higher gifts*. This is the big question of the text, “What are the *higher gifts*?” As we will see in a moment, quite simply they are the gifts that lead to “*building up the church.*” This therefore becomes the final sign of what it means to be a “Spirit-filled church.” It is a church that “*strives to excel at building up the church.*” With that in mind, let’s look at 1 Corinthians 14.

When You Gather to Worship

There are a couple observations we need to make to help us understand the point Paul is making here in 1 Corinthians 14. First of all, Paul is specifically talking about what takes place when they gather to worship. He wants to make sure that when they gather to worship, that the service is “*done decently and in order.*” That is exactly how this passage ends in verse 40, “*But all things should be done decently and in order.*” There are two reasons for this. First of all, he wants to make sure that when an unbeliever, possibly a seeker, comes into their worship gathering it will lead them to conclude, “*God is really among you.*” In other words, he says in verse 25 that the goal should be that this seeker becomes a worshiper of God, “*and so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare*

that God is really among you. Secondly, and perhaps of highest importance, Paul wants the activity in their worship gathering to be done in such a way that it builds up the body of Christ, that it builds up the believers assembled there to worship God. He says in verse 26, “When you come together, each one has a hymn, lesson, revelation, tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”

Now when we think of a worship gathering, what comes to mind is our setting this morning. Here we are gathered for a weekly worship service. We are gathered here in a church building, in a sanctuary. We have bulletins that list for you our “order of service.” If anything can be said of us, we do things “decently and in order.” We have to. We only have twenty minutes between the first and second service. And so some accuse us of being too orderly and too programmed as we plan things down to the minute. But that is not the worship setting in Corinth. Most likely they were meeting in homes. Their services were far more interactive than ours would be. Much of Paul’s instructions in this chapter has to do with when you can speak and not speak and to make sure only one person is speaking at a time. Listen to his instruction in verses 29-31, *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.”*

It is in this worship setting that the Corinthians elevated the gift of speaking in tongues. To them, it was a sign that the Spirit of God was present in their gathering. How do you know it was a good Sunday? How do you know it was good service today? How do you know the Spirit was present in power among us? Well for them, speaking in tongues was what they used to measure such things. But Paul says, actually, when you come together in a worship gathering and everyone is speaking in a strange tongue, it is counterproductive unless you have someone there to interpret what is being said. How so? Well if you can’t understand what is being said, it doesn’t benefit the body of Christ. And furthermore, if someone from the outside comes in and observes all of this, they will conclude that you are out of your minds.

In order to make his point, for the better part of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul pits these two spiritual gifts against each other: speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy. What is the difference between these two gifts? One is understood and one is not. One builds up the body and one builds up only the one who is speaking. You can get the gist of Paul’s argument by what he says in 1 Corinthians 14:4-6, *“The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the*

one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? “ And so he concludes in verse 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.”* Why? Because his aim is to build up the body and if there is no one to interpret whatever tongue is uttered, Paul says in verse 11 that he is like a foreigner to me. It is like watching a foreign film without the subtitles. If you don’t understand what is being said, you can’t follow the story. So he says in verse 12, *“So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.”* For the sake of the body, it is better to speak a word that is understood than a word that no one understands. This is why Paul refers to the gift of prophecy as “the higher gift.” It is “the greater gift” because it builds up the body. It is a word that can be understood.

Let me say something about the gift of speaking in tongues. Paul is not saying that the gift of speaking in tongues is not a legitimate spiritual gift. Paul confesses to speaking in tongues and you get the sense that he does so regularly. He says in verse 18, *“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.”* He said in verse 5 that he wished all of them had this gift. The implication here is that not everyone does. He says in verse 4 that when this gift is exercised it edifies the person and builds up the person who has this gift. I get the sense from verse 14 that the gift of tongues is a prayer language. When this gift is exercised in a time of prayer, your spirit is engaged but not your mind. That is because you don’t understand what you are saying. And yet, the one who is speaking in tongues, Paul says in verse 2, is speaking to God. And so Paul is instructing those who have this gift to not bring it into the worship setting unless someone is there to interpret it. He says in verses 27-28, *“If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.”* Why? If no one understands what you are saying, he says in verse 16, how can anyone add their “Amen” to it? In other words, it doesn’t build up the body.

I know people in our church who have this gift. I know people in our church who have asked for this gift and it has not been given to them. Paul asks the rhetorical question at the end of 1 Corinthians 12, *“Do all speak in tongues?”* The answer is “no.” It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is given as the Spirit deems. It is no more or less of a manifestation of the Spirit than the other spiritual gifts. In Corinth it was over emphasized. In our setting, perhaps undervalued. There is nothing wrong with asking for it. Ask for it. In either case, this chapter provides helpful instruction in exercising this gift.

Now the other gift highlighted in this chapter is the gift of “prophesying.” It too is referred to in verse 12 as a “manifestation of the Spirit.” Some clarity is given as to what Paul means by the “gift of prophecy” when you come to his instructions on exercising this gift in verses 29-32. Here it is defined as “*a revelation.*” But it is not a “revelation” on par with Scripture. Because when “a prophet” offers what has been revealed to them, the community is to weigh it and discern what is of God in what is shared. It goes along with what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21. Here Paul says, “*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.*” You wouldn’t do that with Scripture. Scripture comes with an air of authority. We don’t read a passage and test it to see if it is from God. Rather, we test ourselves to see if we are aligned with Scripture. But this gift of prophecy is different. It is a “revelation” or a word that God puts on our hearts for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. The word we like to use in our circle is, “the prompting of the Spirit.” Has the Spirit of God ever laid a person on your heart or a word that brought comfort and encouragement to someone else? That is the nature of this gift.

Two weeks ago I shared with you how I experienced God’s healing power. I had that chest cold that has been going around and I couldn’t exert any energy without coughing. It got so bad on Saturday night, that at 11:00 I called Pastor Mike and told him that I needed him to preach for me. I was up until 2:00 in the morning because I could not stop coughing. I went to bed 2:00 and at 4:00 in the morning I woke up and felt strangely different. The need to cough was gone and I was a bit sweaty, even though I had not been running a fever. I said to the Lord, “if you healed me and want me to preach, wake me up at 5:00. Sure enough, at 5:00, I was wide awake. At 6:00 I called Mike and said I think I can preach. I preached all three sermons without coughing. At 2:00 that afternoon it came back and I was home sick for the next two days. But I got a divine reprieve for when I needed it.

The radio personality, Paul Harvey, used to say, “and now for the rest of the story.” Would you like to hear the rest of the story? I received an email that afternoon from someone in the church. She told me how she and her husband pray in the car on their way to church each Sunday. Uncharacteristically, she felt prompted that morning to pray for healing for those who were coming to church and for those who were leading the service. After offering this prayer, she was going to go back to praying what they normally pray as they drive to church. But the Spirit of God impressed upon her to keep praying for this and she said “it became the only focus of my prayer this morning.” Can you imagine how I felt when I heard her say that? Can you imagine how this confirmed in her heart that she was indeed hearing from the Holy Spirit when I shared that Sunday

what was happening in my life? Listen to what she said as a result of this experience. She said, “What a confirmation for me of the underlying purposes of the Holy Spirit’s leading that I am not always aware of. I was unaware of your illness, but I have no doubt the Holy Spirit directed my prayer today. The Holy Spirit is truly at work at WEFC.” That is exactly what Paul says happens when this gift is exercised. As the body of Christ is built up, others declare that “*God is really among you.*”

Let me say a few things here about this gift. When this gift is exercised, it does not come with an air of authority. Be careful of the person who throws their spiritual weight around by saying, “God told me . . .” Rather, this gift is offered in humility and is weighed and discerned in community. We even saw in 1 Corinthians 13:9 that “*we know in part and we prophesy in part.*” Right now, we see as through a mirror dimly. And yet at the same time, the Spirit of God places people and words of encouragement on our hearts and as we offer these words to one another, we demonstrate that God is near. When a word is offered that speaks directly to your situation, it speaks to the nearness of God. I would also say that this gift does not take the place of preaching and teaching. Paul tells Timothy that when the body of Christ assembles that they are to “*Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and to teaching.*” He also adds in 2 Timothy 4:2, “*Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*” This too is intelligible and leads to the building up of the body of Christ. And that is the point Paul is making in our passage this morning. When you come together to worship, do everything decently and in order and *strive to excel* at the gifts that are intelligible. These are the higher gifts because they build up the body of Christ.

So can we take this one loose end and tie it together. What is a “Spirit-filled church” according to 1 Corinthians 12-14? That is the question at hand. Paul starts this conversation in 1 Corinthians 12:1 by literally saying, “*Now concerning matters of the Spirit.*” Bringing a corrective to their thinking that the sign of the Spirit is wrapped up in speaking in tongues, Paul provides this insight. A Spirit-filled church is a church that exalts Jesus Christ as Lord. It is a church that embraces the full diversity of spiritual gifts given to the church. It is a church that maintains unity, recognizing that everyone in the body of Christ is important. Every gift is needed. You are needed. In fact, the quintessential demonstration that the Spirit of God is present among us is found in our love for one another. And so, as we wrap up these three chapters, Paul says that the application of all this is that a Spirit-filled church is a church filled with people who “*strive to excel at building up the church.*” And so we do things decently and in order and we minister encouragement to each other through words that are understood.

Empowered to Serve

Now let's tie this other loose end together as we bring to a close this series on spiritual gifts. In our passage this morning, two spiritual gifts were highlighted: the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy. Obviously, when we talk about spiritual gifts, there are many more gifts than these two gifts. But it is the same principle that applies when we are talking in general about spiritual gifts. Through the exercising of our gifts, we want to “*strive to excel at building up the church.*”

In the class Mike and Dan are teaching on spiritual gifts, they have broken spiritual gifts down into three categories. These categories are helpful because they demonstrate the many ways you can “*strive to excel at building up the church.*”

The first category is “Motivational Gifts.” These are gifts that seem to be rather natural talents that we have. Consequently, we have a natural motivation to use these gifts in serving the Lord and building up the church. A few weeks ago, I quoted what J. Oswald Sanders said about this, “The coming of spiritual gifts in the life of the Christian does not eliminate natural gifts but enhances and stimulates them. New birth in Christ does not change natural qualities but brings them in line with holy purpose; when they are placed under the control of the Holy Spirit, they are raised to new effectiveness.”² And so you can take things like music, art, working with your hands, hospitality, extending mercy, organization, and so on—you can use these gifts to build up the church.

There is a group of ladies who get together and sew prayer blankets to bless those who are suffering. That is a natural ability that is used for spiritual good. Taking a meal to someone, tending the flowerbeds at the church, providing artistic expertise on our webpage, giving to someone in need, being part of the worship team, running the soundboard, helping with Hands Opened Wide or Parents Night Out; are all examples of motivational gifts that are used for the building up of the church. It is as simple as taking the way God has made you and wired you and using it to bless others. That is just as much a spiritual gift as anything we talked about in 1 Corinthians 14. Because in it you “*strive to excel at building up the church.*”

The next category of gifts are “Ministry Gifts.” These gifts establish and equip the church to be the church. Here you have gifts like teaching, counseling, shepherding, leading, evangelism and preaching, to name a few. These are gifts that can be developed and need to be developed. These gifts ground the church in truth and guide the church in reaching out to the community and around the world.

Our Stephen Ministers exercise ministry gifts as they support those who are going through difficult times. Our Sunday School teachers use these gifts as they invest in our children. There are many significant leaders of the church who look back to a Sunday School teacher who made a difference in their lives. Ministering to our middle school and high school students and facilitating a community group are ministry gifts that help deepen and solidify the body of Christ in the faith.

Finally, there are “Manifestation Gifts.” These are the spiritual gifts we saw in our passage this morning. In fact, in our circle, these are the gifts we need to embrace if we are going to embrace the full diversity of spiritual gifts given to the church. These gifts are unique in the way they demonstrate the power and the presence of God among us. It is here where the gifts of intercessory prayer, and healing, and discernment, faith, prophecy and tongues are exercised. If we have swung the pendulum in any direction in our circle, we have diminished the notion of the supernatural. Perhaps in reaction to various abuses of the supernatural, we have over compensated and reduced our faith down to the natural or the cerebral. When in reality, like Paul says in Romans 15:18-19, our ministry has to be characterized as one of word and deed and “*by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.*”

Don’t make this more mysterious than what it has to be. When you go to pray for someone, before you pray, ask God to lay a word on your heart that will encourage and comfort that person. When someone is sick, offer to pray over them by putting your hand on them and asking for God’s healing power to be demonstrated in their life. If God puts someone on your heart this week, ask God what it is that he wants you to do and do it. Actually, go ahead and ask God to put someone on your heart. When he does, reach out and encourage that person.

Conclusion

So as we tie up this loose end, whether it be Motivational Gifts, Ministry Gifts or Manifestation Gifts, let us *strive to excel at building up the body*. This is the end to why we spent time considering spiritual gifts. As we embrace the fact that we are stewards of what God has given us to be used in the kingdom of God, we must take the gifts God has given us and be faithful.

God is love. The church is the presence of God in this world. We demonstrate the love of God by using the gifts the Spirit of God has given us and as build up the body of Christ. Look for meaningful and joyful opportunities to serve. May we *strive to excel at*

building up the church for the glory of God.

¹Gordon Fee *The First Epistle to the Corinthians Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 698

²J. Oswald Sanders *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007) 81

Motivational Gifts

Artistic Creativity
Craftsmanship
Giving
Hospitality
Knowledge
Mercy
Music
Organization
Voluntary poverty
Wisdom

Ministry Gifts

Apostle
Counseling
Evangelism
Helps
Leadership
Missionary
Service
Shepherding
Singleness
Teaching

Manifestation Gifts

Deliverance
Discernment
Faith
Healing
Interpretation
Miracles
Prayer
Prophecy
Suffering
Tongues

Sermon Title: Build The Body
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-40
Sermon Date: February 12, 2017

COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. If you had a time machine that would work only once, what point in the future or in the past would you visit? Why?
2. Get in groups of three and share which one of these emotions describes best how you are currently feeling: Sad, Angry, Scared, Happy, Excited or Tender. Share why you are feeling this emotion and spend time praying for each other.
3. Share one thing from Sunday's sermon that resonated with you.

Diving Into The Word

4. Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25. What positive and negative observations do you make about the gift of tongues? What observations do you make about the gift of prophecy?
5. Why in the worship setting is the gift of prophecy greater than the gift of tongues? Read 1 Timothy 4:13-14 and 2 Timothy 4:2-4. How has God used these "intelligible gifts" during the worship service to build up your faith?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 14:29-32 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21. What do you learn about the gift of prophecy from these passages? How have you experienced "the prompting of the Spirit" in your life? How can you be attentive to this work of the Spirit in you?
7. Read 1 Corinthians 14:12 and look at the lists of spiritual gifts on page 11 of the sermon transcript. How does this list inspire you and help you "*strive to excel in building up the church?*"

Taking It Home

8. Share what you have learned about spiritual gifts through this sermon series.
9. Ask God to place a person on your heart that you can encourage and ask God to show you how to encourage that person. Then do it!