

Title: Excuse me, have you seen the forest?
Text: 1 Corinthians 14.1-5
Theme: The way of love and gifts of the spirit
Series: 1 Corinthians #77
Prop Stmt

It is Mother's Day and I bought the line that on Mother's Day we should take the mothers in the family out to eat. That can be a recipe for disaster. First of all, the guys have to organize the event in order to get actual credit and points for doing it right. Then, you have to find out who all is going and where you will go. Not that all guys wait until the last minute for these sorts of things but, the "we'll ask mom after church where she would like to go" brainstorm usually results in the "stand in line for 2 hours and 47 minutes at the restaurant". One year I had a brilliant solution. We'll go out in the evening after the rush is completely over. I still did not get points that year. The waitress was completely spent and about everything on the menu that we asked about was no longer available. There are now two days in the year that I do not go out – Mother's Day and Valentines Day. It is not because I don't like the mothers in my family, it is because I do. If I just blew up your brilliant plan of asking mom after church where she would like to go, my sincere apologies and prayers, you will need them.

If you can agree on what the actual goal is, then you can make decisions accordingly and it goes a long way to helping you accomplish it.

The church at Corinth, like any church can do, had lost sight of what was the most important goal. The means of accomplishing the goal became more important than the actual goal. If you lose sight of what the goal is, then the means, which is supposed to help you achieve the goal, can, overtime, become an actual hindrance to the goal. This text before us sets forth a huge goal that we must understand and embrace. You have heard the saying, "let your conscience be your guide?" We have something better. We are going to let the grammar of the text be our guide. This message has two parts. 1) What and 2) So What. Here is the "what" part.

1. **Let the Grammar be the Guide.**

Since the Spirit of God directed Paul to write this letter, our study of the text will help us discover what is the big idea and the most important truths we must grasp. When you are looking at a text, start with the verbs. In the Watergate investigation the reporters were told to follow the money. Here we follow the verbs and in this case the chapter begins with two verbal commands "follow", followed by the verbal command "eagerly desire."

A. Two Commands

a. **Follow the way of love**

The command to "follow" means keep pursuing like a hunter pursues his prey. We never move away from the cross and we never move away from love. These are truths that we

tie on our fingers and live with their constant reminder even when, and especially when we are dealing with the matter of spiritual gifts. Pursue love but, as you are doing that, be eager for spiritual gifts.

b. Desire the gifts (especially prophecy)

Definition: *a God-given ability bestowed upon a believer in order to minister to the church*. This second command, like the first command is a plural verb. The point is, that in the congregation there should a community-wide appreciation, eagerness and valuing of the gifts. Let's appreciate the gifts, but in particular, we need to understand that the gift of prophecy should be seen as being especially helpful. Again, Paul is writing in part to address the unhealthy emphasis that the believers were giving to the gift of tongues. Listen carefully. In this text, Paul is not attacking the gift of tongues. He is attacking the fact that the Corinthian church was putting way too much emphasis upon it. But in putting these two verbs/commands together he is also showing that speaking gifts (prophecy) do not have to be occasions for pride.

B. Two Reasons (2-5a)

1) Tongues are of limited value (2)

“For” – v.2 reason #1

It is communication with God, but does not help the church (2)

It edifies self (4)

It is a spiritual gift but limited in its edifying affect (5)

(12..31; 14.1; 14.39) Remember from the beginning of this letter and of course throughout the Apostle Paul's writings that the church is built and strengthened by the clear, understandable preaching, teaching, and careful explanation of the message of the cross. When someone is talking in a manner that no one else can understand, while it may be of some help to the person in some way, it is of no benefit to anyone else.

Paul recognizes that the gift of tongues was a gift from the Spirit and (according to v.5) he is pleased that they have this gift at Corinth. The verb (thelo) is a difficult one to translate and I don't think the NIV captures it as well as it could. Paul is not wishing that every member speaks in tongues (12.29-30), but Paul is pleased with the presence of the gift in the church, he is not threatened by the fact that they have it, and is glad that they have a sense of freedom in its use. He is not down on the gift of tongues per se, he is cautioning them not to oversell its place, because it is frankly not that beneficial.

2) Prophecies has value for all (3)

“But” – v.3 in contrast to the limited value of tongues, the gift of prophecy is different. Prophecy has benefit to the entire body, not just one person. And, the benefits of the gift of prophecy are significant such as; strengthening the believers, encouraging the

believers, and comforting the believers. Brothers and sisters, ministry like that is huge! No wonder Paul was telling them to desire this gift. The word for encouraging is the same word that is used as a title for the Holy Spirit (paraclete) and it refers to a person who comes alongside of another and assists that person in need. Comfort is a related need, and this word has the idea of whispering in the ear that which will calm a person fears. The gift tongues has its place, but it does not benefit the church like prophesy does. This gift is very useful to edifying (building up) the church, which is why in contrast to a gift that has limited personal value, prophecy is greater because it helps the entire church, not just one person.

C. One Purpose (5b)

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts (especially prophecy)...**so that** the church may be edified.

Do you see how the grammar shows us what the big idea is? There are two commands given based on two reasons for one big purpose. Follow love and eagerly desire gifts so that the church may be edified. Everything that you do is to be done so that the church will benefit from your life and ministry. This concept is absolutely enormous. This is the big, very big, yea, verily and amen, the Super Big Idea: **Does it edify the church?** This is the major theme of this section.

1) Major Theme

a. Established theme of section

12.7; 14.5; 14.12; 14.17; 14.26;

This paradigm, this lens, this filter, this view is clearly one of the big ideas that Paul wants the believers at Corinth to grasp.

b. Established theme of book

Think of the impact that this concept would have on the issues that were affecting this church.

- The problem of divisions
- The problem of immorality
- The problem of taking each other to court
- The problem of poor marriages
- The problem of questionable practices
- The problem of disrupting God's pattern of authority
- The problem of discriminating against the poor
- The problem of desecrating the Lord's Table
- The problem of abusing spiritual gifts

2) What does it mean?

a. What does church mean?

I am using the word “church” as the Bible does, not as our society does. When Paul speaks about the text, he is speaking about the people who have come to faith in Christ and who are part of that local congregation. We recognize that in a general sense when a person comes to faith in Christ that he is part of the family of God. But church, almost always means the local, visible and assembled congregation of believers in a specific place at a specific time. Those people who were part of the family of God and part of that local assembly of believers at Corinth were the church at Corinth.

The question that Paul wanted those believers to ask was, “Is what I am doing helpful to building up my brothers and sisters in Christ?” Does this edify or benefit them?

b. What does edify mean?

Edify, is related to our word edifice. It is a construction term that means to build. To edify a person is to build them up. When you do that in Christ, you are helping that person along the way of becoming more like Christ. The means: **Spiritual Gifts are gifts given by the Spirit to each believer in order to help every member of each local congregation become more and more like Christ by serving each other.**

That was the “what” here is the “so what.”

2. **Your life in the church is God’s means to glorify His Son.**

Ephesians 3.20-21

- A. The Father receives glory and honor from the exaltation of His Son.
- B. The Son will ultimately honored in His Kingdom.
- C. God designed the church as the means to bring Him glory by spreading the fame of His Son and to prepare us for the Kingdom of Christ.
- D. God designed you to be part of the church.

That means that God made you for the purpose of being part of the means that spreads the glory and fame of His Son all over the world and to prepare us for the Kingdom of Christ. That is your mission. That is your mandate. That is your reason for being.

- E. The church is your identity in this world.

This is where you belong. This is where you are needed. This is what you were designed for.

- F. You exist to spread the fame of Christ by using your gifts in order to strengthen the church (body of Christ) so that this body can more effectively carry out her mission.

Do you see how this turns our thinking right side up? We have had this whole thing backward, upside down and catawampus. We have thought that we go to church in order to help make our lives a little better and patch up a few cracks and holes. In that way of thinking the church is the means to our own end, when in reality, our lives are the means, to the glorious and eternally triumphant and significant ends of the church, which in reality is spreading all over the world the fame and honor of Jesus Christ.

You do not have to choose between your family and the church. That is a false either/or. If I really love my family, I will help build a strong church for their spiritual health. If I really love the church, I will help my family be a spiritual asset to it.

There is an old expression that goes, “you can’t see the forest for the trees.” I do not want you to argue over the meaning and place of the gift of tongues and miss the main point of this text, and frankly, miss the entire purpose of your life. I am seeking to build into each of you the understanding of how absolutely essential it is for you to grasp your place in this world by having the eyes of your heart opened to seeing your place in the church and the church’s pre-eminent place in God’s plan. But, if you live for the purpose of glorifying God by spreading the fame of Jesus through the spreading and strengthening of his church, that means that you will be pouring yourself into people, who will from time to time let you down. In other words, I am asking you to calibrate your life based on this text and do something that does not have a temporal guarantee of perfection but has an eternal guarantee of success. Now, hang on to that thought for a second.

When you look back through the Scriptures, you see how often, a well was the location for some very important romantic encounters. Abraham’s servant found Rebekah at the well at Nahor and she became the bride and love of Isaac. Jacob met Rachel at a well and Moses met Zipporah at a well in Midian. So, perhaps you understand a bit more of the drama in John 4, when Jesus was at Jacob’s well and was seeking..., his bride. The angels (I am speculating a bit here) had to be in suspense as they waited to discover what princess, what noble woman, what pure, precious and richly ornamented virgin would be chosen to represent His bride. Only to discover to their eternal shock that Christ was talking with this woman. This racially mixed, socially outcast, morally defiled, broken, and embittered woman was his bride. She, in many ways represents us. He did not love her because of her sin, but in spite of it. He did not love her for what she was, but for what she was going to become.

We do not love the church because of all that she is right now. We love her because of what she will be. But you cannot love her now unless you are marinating your soul in the love of Christ, because you and I cannot love the church like we should on our own.