

What Should We Do in Church?

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[0 : 0 0] All right, it'd be great if you could have your Bibles open at chapter 14, 1 Corinthians 14, that Nate just read for us. And as I said, there's also an outline which you might find helpful.

There was a lady in a church who had a particular spiritual gift. And so she went to her minister and asked this question. She said, I have the gift of liturgical dance and I was wondering if I could dance in church next Sunday.

She was serious. What would you say to her? Is this something that we should encourage our members here at 6pm church to do? How would you decide?

Well, as we come to chapter 14 today, Paul comes to the real issue the Corinthians had when it came to spiritual gifts. And the issue was that the Corinthians were more interested in speaking in tongues than prophesying.

And as Paul addresses this issue, he actually gives us some principles which help us determine what we should do and what we should not do in church, including liturgical dance.

[1 : 0 9] But before we get into the chapter, it might be helpful to try and get an idea of what tongues and prophecy are, which is point one on your outline. And I say get an idea because the Bible doesn't give us a complete definition.

So what does it say? Well, firstly, speaking in a tongue refers to speaking in a different language by the Spirit. So chapter 14, verse 2. Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God.

Indeed, no one understands them. They utter mysteries by the Spirit, it says. And now the word mysteries just means something that is unknown to others. It's a secret that is hidden.

Even to the speaker, verse 13 would seem to suggest. Because in verse 13, even the speaker has to pray for an interpretation. And it indicates that it's a completely unknown language to those around.

Now, some people think, therefore, that it must be referring to the language of angels that we heard about last week. So you've got your Bibles there, chapter 13, verse 1. Paul says, If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

[2 : 1 7] Now, as we saw last week, Paul is obviously using exaggeration here to make a point that if you have the most impressive gift ever, but have not love, then you're nothing. But speaking in the tongues may include the language of angels.

May. But if you look at chapter 14, verse 2, again, there is a little footnote next to the word tongue. Do you see there in your Bibles? The letter D next to the word tongue. And if you look down the bottom of your Bible, it says, Or in other languages.

You see, speaking in tongues could just mean speaking in other languages, like the disciples did on the day of Pentecost, which we heard from our first reading. And the word for interpret, which comes up later in our passage, just means translate, as you'd normally translate a different language of the world.

So let me demonstrate to you now, speaking in tongues. Ni hao. I just spoke in tongues. And we have an interpreter here. So I'm not breaking the Bible.

Where's Gillian? Yeah, that's exactly right. That's what it means. Hello. I know what you're saying. Yeah. Now, of course, 14.2 says they do this by the Spirit, doesn't it?

[3 : 29] That is, by the Holy Spirit. And what Paul means here, I think, is that the Holy Spirit either converts us so that we use our existing ability to speak in other languages for worship, or the Spirit miraculously enables us to speak other languages, as he did for the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

But it's never in an uncontrollable manner. Because in verse 27 and 28 of chapter 14, if there is no interpreter, then the person who's speaking in tongues is to remain silent, it says, which assumes they can remain silent.

It assumes they can restrain themselves. In other words, it is controllable. Which means those people you see in other churches on YouTube or wherever it is, who are rolling around on the ground and are speaking in an uncontrollable manner, are not speaking in tongues.

It's not what tongues speaking is. But the best definition we can get is that speaking in tongues is speaking a different language by the Spirit in a controllable manner.

So beware of people who say, this is what speaking in tongues is. It's definitely this. Because the Bible doesn't get any clearer than the definition I gave you. It may be, but it may not be.

[4 : 44] What about prophecy then? Well, again, the closest we can get to a prophecy is applying God's truth, God's word, to specific situations in order to build the body.

And that's the common element between the Old Testament and the New Testament prophecy. They speak a specific word of God into a specific situation. And because it's a specific situation, then prophecy is often a little more spontaneous.

So have a look at chapter 14, verse 29 with me. Chapter 14, verse 29 says, Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

See what's happening here? Prophecy is a little more spontaneous. Revelation comes to them, and so the other person should stop. And I think this is where prophecy differs from teaching, by the way.

Teaching is the careful thought through communication of God's truth, regardless of the situation. It's telling people what God says. So tonight, I'm telling you from God's word about tongues, prophecy, and what we should and should not do in church, regardless of whether you have issues with these things or not.

[5 : 55] Whereas prophecy applies God's word in a particular situation at the time. Good preaching should really do both. And both need to be weighed against God's word and done in an orderly fashion, but teaching carries with it more authority, because it is the careful thought through instruction of God's word.

But it is telling people, this is what God says in his word. It carries more authority, which is why teachers, James 3, verse 1, will be judged more strictly, because it carries more authority.

Whereas prophecy is more spontaneous applying of God's word in a specific situation. So, for example, you come to church, and here is someone who has just got engaged or something, and you stand up and say, look, I think we should rejoice with them, because the Bible tells us to rejoice with one another and to mourn with one another, so everyone come back to my place for supper tonight or something like that.

You just have a thought, a revelation, and you apply God's word to that specific situation. Or you might come to church, and there is someone who is struggling with something, and so you hear about it over supper, and you say to them, oh, look, can I encourage you?

I was reading this in the Bible, and I want to encourage you to keep persevering, because what I was reading reminds us that it will be worth it. That's prophecy. Now, you might want to ask more questions about that later when we have our question time, but that's a rough idea of what tongues and prophecy are.

[7 : 16] But for Paul, prophecy is greater than tongues in church. So point to verse 1, he says, Now follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy, he says.

You see, Paul says, pursue love. We heard about love last week, which is the underlying principle for all Paul says here, because love seeks the good of the other person. It is other person-centered rather than self-centered.

And this means that while they are to eagerly desire spiritual gifts, or literally be zealous for gifts of the Spirit, which the Corinthians clearly were, they are also to be zealous for prophecy.

Why? Because prophecy builds others up, and so it's actually more loving. It's a greater gift. So verse 2, For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, to others, but to God.

Indeed, no one understands them. They mutter mysteries by the Spirit. But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort, he says.

[8 : 16] Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church, others. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.

The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets it, so that the church may be edified. Do you see here why prophecy is greater?

Because it strengthens, encourages, and edifies, or builds up others, not just the speaker. And because it builds up other people, because it's other person-centered, then it is more loving.

In fact, chapter 12, verse 7 said, that's why the gifts were given in the first place, for the common good, not the private good. And unless tongues are translated, then they only build up that one person, it's only for their own good.

But prophecy, by its very nature, is for the common good. It builds others up. It's more loving. It's what makes it a greater gift, chapter 12, verse 31. And so, says Paul, go for prophecy, you Corinthians.

[9 : 13] It's greater. Now, at this point, we have the key principle of the whole chapter, I think, which helps us to know what we should do and should not do in church. And that principle is to do whatever builds the body of Christ.

Now, to be clear, we're not speaking about bodybuilding. We're not talking about this next slide. There we go. And we're not talking about that kind of bodybuilding. Are we talking about this kind of bodybuilding?

Or if you're at the camp, next slide. Okay? That bodybuilding, or this one here around us, this is what we're talking about. Okay? And this is the idea. Thanks, Alex. The idea throughout the whole chapter.

Okay? In fact, the word itself is repeated several times throughout the chapter. It is sometimes translated as edify, but it just means build. Verse 4, verse 5, verse 12, 17, 26.

It's repeated throughout. So, just have a look at verse 26, just to be clear. Verse 26, What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word, or instruction, or revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

[10 : 15] Key principle, everything must be done so that church may be built up. Okay? That's the key thing. It's pretty clear, isn't it? We are to do whatever builds the body of Christ. That's what we're to do in church.

But notice verse 26 there, it just says builds up. The word in the original Greek just means build. So, it means to build up in maturity and build out in number. We're to do things that help people become Christians and grow as Christians.

That's what it's talking about. And prophecy by its very nature does this, but tongues does not. Why not? Because tongues are not intelligible to others. No one knows what you are saying.

And if others don't know what you are saying, then how can they possibly build up? See verse 6 to 12, he says, Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?

Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?

[11 : 22] So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? It will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly, there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.

If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

It's pretty clear, isn't it, what Paul is saying. If you speak in tongues, you cannot build others up because they don't understand what you are saying. It is not intelligible to them. And so in order to build others up, there needs to be clarity.

People need to understand. Like a piece of music, he says, if there is no distinction in the notes, no clarity in the notes, people will not understand the tune. It will be meaningless to them.

Or in wartime, if the trumpet call is not clear, then people won't understand that battle is upon them. And so says Paul in verse 9, unless you speak intelligible words, then you're not going to encourage anyone.

[12 : 23] You'll just be speaking to the air or you'll be like a foreigner who no one will understand. Michelle was in Sweden. Her brother married a Swede and Michelle was over there visiting one time and she was having breakfast at the hotel and there was a jug of something in front of her and a Swede kind of walked past, pointed at the jug and mumbled something in Swedish.

And she assumed that he was just talking about that's the milk for the cereal. She poured it on and as she did, lumps plopped out onto the cereal. It was off yogurt. Okay, that's what we were saying. Don't drink that.

Unintelligible. If it's unintelligible, it's not going to encourage others. It's not going to build others up. It's going to be meaningless. And so here we have another principle for what we do in church. What we do in church must be intelligible if it is to build others up.

It must be understandable for others so that they can be encouraged. And so when it comes to tongues, says Paul, then pray that you can interpret it so that people will understand. Verse 13, he says, For this reason, the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? Well, I will pray with my spirit, but I'll also pray with my mind.

[13 : 42] I will sing with my spirit, but I'll also sing with my mind, he says. I deliberately use the word mind there because that's what it is. And these verses are a little tricky, but Paul is saying that when you speak in a tongue, your spirit is encouraged.

You have this encouraging experience, if you like, but your mind is unfruitful. I mean, verse 13, as I said before, suggests that not even the speaker of tongues understands what they're saying themselves.

That's why they have to pray for the ability to interpret it. And so tongues is just a spiritual experience, which only the speaker feels, but doesn't really understand. The far better option, says Paul, is to pray with both spirit and mind, so that both you and others will understand.

And we Christians who put a priority on the Bible, above singing or kind of other experiences which evoke emotion in church and that sort of thing, often we're ridiculed and hassled by other Christians for being too academic, too cerebral, you know, too much of the mind.

And we need to let go and experience God a bit more. But apart from the fact that we meet God primarily in his word, it also goes against what Paul is saying here. He wants us to use our minds as well.

[14 : 59] And not just so we'll understand what's going on, but especially so that others will understand what's going on and be encouraged. See verse 16? Verse 16.

I can't find it. There it is. Otherwise, when you are praising God in the spirit, how can someone else who is now put in the position of an inquirer or a visitor say amen to your thanksgiving since they do not know what you are saying?

You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you, but in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue, he says.

Pretty clear, isn't it? In order to build the church, it must be intelligible to others and this includes not just Christians but non-Christians as well. See verse 20?

Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children in regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the law it is written with other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.

[16 : 10] Tongues then are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is not for believers but for unbelievers. And so this is the situation of the non-Christian. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you're out of your mind?

But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying they are convinced of sin and are brought under judgment by all as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare so they will fall down and worship God exclaiming God is really among you.

See what Paul's saying here? He tells them to grow up which would have been a slap in the face to these Corinthians who thought they were spiritually mature but notice they had to be mature in their thinking. This is their problem.

They didn't want to use their minds. They just wanted to have that spiritual experience which tongues provided but Paul wants them to grow up to use their minds and to consider others including non-Christians who might visit.

I mean if a non-Christian came here tonight and heard all of us speaking in different languages which they didn't understand then not only will they not be encouraged to follow Jesus but they'll walk away thinking we're mad and I mean most people think Christians are a little mad in any case and this is certainly not going to help is it?

[17 : 28] I once went to a church of a friend of mine at school and I was standing next to my friend who invited me when they all kind of put up their hands and started speaking in a language which sounded gibberish to me.

It wasn't any language that I'd heard of in the world and there was no one translating. They were just all speaking at the same time in an unintelligible manner and so not only did I have no idea what was going on what they were saying I was actually downright scared.

I thought who are these people? What is going on? And I couldn't wait to get out of there to be honest. Now if I as a Christian thought this imagine how a non-Christian would feel.

So says Paul pursue the gift of prophecy not just for the believers but also for the unbelievers so that if they come in and hear us speaking God's word to each other whether it be encouraging another person who is struggling or making encouragement comment during question time in the light of the sermon or sharing an experience of God's love for you or saying the confession you know asking for forgiveness together then they might hear and understand that they too need forgiveness but they might hear and understand too God's love for them in Jesus so that they might in the words of verse 25 fall down and worship God exclaiming God is really among you.

If you're a visitor here tonight then I hope what we are doing here is intelligible to you that you can at least follow what we're saying and what we're on about and so just so we're clear we are on about Jesus who died for us to pay for our sins so that we can be right with God and we meet together to learn more from God through his word the Bible and tonight in particular we're learning what we should and should not do in church.

[19 : 15] I hope that's clear for you but if I told you all that in a different language or we kept speaking different languages in a supernatural way all at once then nothing would be clear.

Well prophecy is better than tongues I think it's pretty clear. Of course it doesn't mean you can never speak in tongues in church but if you do it must be done in an orderly way which brings us out of point three prophecy and tongues in practice.

Verse 26 What then shall we say brothers and sisters when you come together each of you has a hymn a word or instruction a revelation a tongue or interpretation everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

That's our key principle remember and that means it not only needs to be intelligible but it also must be done in an orderly way. So verse 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue two or at the most three should speak but one at a time and someone must interpret if there is no interpreter the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

You see the principle of order here? He says only one person should speak at a time and notice only two or at the most three should speak so not everyone who can speak in tongues will speak in tongues.

[20 : 28] You see just because you have a gift that does not mean you have to use it rather the thing we always need to ask ourselves is will this build the body of Christ? Will it be loving to others or indulgent to me?

And for tongues this means there must be someone to interpret so that people can understand and be built up. If there is no translator then the speaker must remain silent which is very different to my experience in my friend's church.

No, there needs to be order so there can be intelligibility so there can be encouragement. It's the same with prophecy have a look at verse 29 to 32. Verse 29 two or three prophets should speak and the others should weigh carefully what is said and if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down the first speaker should stop for you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets he says. As with tongues one person is to speak at a time each in turn it says but when it comes to how many there seems to be some flexibility here.

In verse 29 he says two or three but then in verse 31 he says you can all speak in turn but with tongues there is no flexibility two or at the most three should speak.

[21 : 45] But again the emphasis here is on order. So if one person is prophesying and another one has a revelation something comes to mind as I said before then the first is to stop so that the next person can go.

It's a bit like what might happen in Bible study you know when one person is sharing something a thought about God's word you've got God's word open you're studying it and you're trying to understand it someone's talking about something and another person says oh I've got an idea one person the first person stops the other person comes in so that the whole group may be edified built up it's all very ordered you see why?

Well verse 33 it says for God is not a God of disorder but of peace as in all the congregations of the Lords people God is a God of order and peace he says see not only do we need order so that we can understand but we also need order because it reflects God's very character I'm a father of three kids and sometimes they're quite noisy and at some dinner times they all talk at once I don't know if you've ever had that experience at your own dinner table everyone's going left right and centre and sometimes I've got no idea what's going on stop quiet you first how was your day you next I was not quite that bad but there needs to be order so that we can understand what's going on and there needs to be order because that's the character of God God is the God of order the Father Son and Spirit the Father always sends the Son the Son never sends the Spirit or tells the Father what to do there is order within the Godhead and God is on about order you're going to have to look at

Genesis 1 and 2 to see how the order in creation is written about there and so what we do in church needs to be ordered as well and that's why when we have a question time which we'll have in a moment or perhaps we should call it question and prophecy time we'll have one person speaking at a time rather than everyone calling out randomly and talking over the top of each other it will be done in an orderly fashion why?

as I said so that everyone can be built up and encouraged and follow what's going on now this brings us to verse 34 which I was thinking we should just skip over actually I'd like to because it seems rather harsh doesn't it especially if you read it on its own I mean listen to this verse 34 women should remain silent in the churches they are not allowed to speak but must be in submission as the law says well maybe we should just pray and I should stop it does seem harsh doesn't it especially when you read them out of context which is actually a good reason not to skip over them and look at them in context and see what God is saying firstly it does not mean that women cannot speak at all in church because in chapter 11 and I think chapter 11 is in the context of church Paul assumes that women can pray and prophesy in church so Marty doing a good job leading service you're still right to go second it's not just women who would remain silent at certain points in verse 28 if there is no interpreter the tongue speaker is to remain silent at that point verse 30 if someone gets a good thought or revelation the first person prophesying should remain silent at that point so Paul is not picking on women here he's saying for the sake of order there are certain points at which people must remain silent third the point at which women are to remain silent is at the point of asking something of the prophet verse 35 in order to learn something from them it says whether it was to help them weigh up what was said or simply to learn more and it's at this point they are to remain silent and ask their own husbands at home that's the point fourth the reason they are to remain silent at this point is because it shows proper respect for their husband's headship and that's what it means to be in submission as the law says you see the law refers to the

[25 : 32] Old Testament just as it did back in verse 21 and the Old Testament passage Paul seems to have in mind is Genesis 2 which we looked at a few weeks ago last year actually there we saw men and women are of equal worth but in order to enrich life God gave them different roles where the husband is the head of the family and we must realise just because they had different roles doesn't mean they have different worth that's what the world says that's not what God says God the father and God the son have different roles the father was not crucified on the cross the son was they had different roles but none of us here would say they are of different worth would we so also the husband and the wife and so women have to remain silent at the point of questioning the prophet and instead ask their husbands so that they might reflect the created order in other words the idea of order in the family household is to be reflected in God's household the church the context you see is all about order that's what's clear now what is not clear to us at least is exactly what this looks like and the precise situation is unclear it would have been clear to the

Corinthians but it's not clear to us because there are a number of options we've got here it could have been that the women were questioning the prophet to simply learn more rather than asking their own husbands which means when we have question time technically married women shouldn't ask questions but should talk to their husbands about it when they get home if that's the situation at least that encourages biblical discussion within the marriage which is a good thing but it might not have been that situation instead it might have been the women asking questions in order to evaluate the prophets and pass authoritative judgment on them if so they were exercising headship over them which breaks the created order this means that married women could ask questions to learn but not in order to evaluate but it might also have been that the women were questioning their own husbands who were prophesying and at that point they were breaking the created order and embarrassing their husband or in the words of verse 35 being disgraceful it says instead they should ask them at home now we don't know which precise situation it was so it's actually really hard to apply this too precisely all we can say with confidence is that we need to do things in a way that reflects God's character which includes order order in the family household which is to then to be reflected in

God's household the church and so I take it when we do have question time there needs to be order and respect in the way that we ask questions of me and of each other over supper for those married women amongst us that includes respecting your husband's headship this means not trying to exercise headship over your husband or another man who's not even your husband so if my wife Michelle was here tonight and we had a question time she couldn't then say to me oh thanks Andrew for that mess of a sermon what do you mean by point three are you really sure you think that do you want to have a rethink of that because I think you're wrong she shouldn't be doing that okay you see there are ways to ask questions and whether some women at Corinth were doing it in a way that sought to have authority over their own husbands or another person or something else we're not clear on but we do need to make sure that what we do in church respects the order of the family household and is reflected in God's household now I suspect this would have been hard to hear for the Corinthians as it is for us though for the

Corinthians it would have also been hard to hear about pursuing prophecy over tongues but Paul reminds them and us that there is also an order between God and us God is God and we are his loved and obedient children or at least we're to be that so verse 36 he says did the word of God originate with you or are you the only people it has reached if anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the spirit let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command but if anyone ignores this they will themselves be ignored you see we must work hard at living out scripture even if society disagrees in fact the true prophet Paul says the truly spiritual person will recognize this as a command and seek to obey it remember chapter 12 the spiritual person is not the person who has lots of gifts no the spiritual person who confesses Jesus as their Lord and means it who lives it out in obedience and so they are the ones who will live in obedience to

God's word here so what does all this leave us point for well firstly it means that if we do have people here who can speak in tongues then we need to make sure that it's all done in a way that encourages and builds up the church and in a way therefore that is interpreted as well so if for example I know Jillian can speak Mandarin if she wants to break out in a prayer or pray at the end of the service in Mandarin that would be fine as long as we have someone else or she'd have to interpret it herself so there's nothing wrong with tongues per se but it must be done in a way that is intelligible and builds up the church second it means that we should actually seek to prophesy more than tongues that is we should pray for help and practice speaking God's word to one another in various situations that come up to encourage one another and build the body of Christ you know when you talk to someone over church or something and they're sharing with you a tough situation and you're going oh that's really bad go the next step apply God's word to them pray for them remind them of God's sovereignty and love in Christ pursue prophecy that's what he's saying here and to do that though we actually need to know

[31 : 11] God's word so we can apply it in specific situations don't we and so that means working hard at understanding the Bible so that's the first thing prophecy sorry tongues when we speak in tongues it needs to be interpreted secondly we should seek to prophesy so practice doing it as Paul says in Colossians 3 we're to teach and admonish one another or Ephesians 4 we're to speak the truth in love to one another and build each other up and thirdly everything we do in church should be ordered and intelligible so that we encourage others so when it comes to songs for example we need to choose songs that are clear and speak God's word because that's what builds some songs don't say anything of substance and so can hardly build the body other songs like some lovely old hymns are great but sometimes have words which quite frankly to me are unintelligible it's such old language that I have no idea what it's saying in fact I asked someone at 10am church one time I said oh we're singing this hymn can you tell me what this verse means as an older person they had no idea so I cut the verse okay it needs to be intelligible so that people can build up and so when it came to this person who asked if they could dance do some liturgical dancing in their church the questions we ask is can it be done in an orderly way will it be intelligible to others and will it build the body of

Christ in fact the minister asked just that last question he said is this going to help build up other people if the answer was yes then let's dance but she said no it's actually more of a personal thing between me and God and then he said well look thanks for the offer but I'm going to decline and I want to suggest to you that you actually have the gift of welcoming and it wasn't a brush off because welcomers are a visitor's first experience of church it's a vital ministry and so he gently encouraged her to pursue the ministry of welcoming which would build the church see this is God's view of what we should and should not do in church and it ought to be our view of what we do here and not do here at 6pm so let's pray that it would be let's pray Heavenly Father we do thank you for this passage of scripture