

**Text: I Corinthians 14**

**Title: “The Helper ... Through the Church”**

**VIDEO BUMPER** – I have to say that sometimes I get really discouraged when I think about the darkness that engulfs our nation. I feel hopeless when I think about what it will take to stop the slide. Then I remember how Jesus sent His followers out into a dark world 2000 years ago with nothing but the Holy Spirit and the Gospel and the world was forever changed. That Spirit is at work in us. He’s the Helper who works in us and through us to accomplish the mission of Jesus until Christ returns.

Let’s open our Bibles to I Corinthians 14. We talked last week about how the Holy Spirit helps us through certain capabilities called spiritual gifts that He gives to every believer. These capabilities are empowered by the Holy Spirit to spur one another on to all Jesus calls us to be as His followers. And while all of the gifts are necessary, there is one gift that is indispensable in every church ... the gift of prophecy. That word may conjure up some weird ideas for you. So we’re just going to jump off into the deep end. **Read I Corinthians 14:1.**

For context, the Apostle Paul spends three chapters of his letter to the Corinthian church talking about spiritual gifts. In chapter 12 he outlines the importance of the gifts in the church. In chapter 13 he talks about how they should be used in love. And in here in chapter 14 he circles back to explain the overwhelming value of one of the gifts ... the gift of prophecy.

So what is the gift of prophecy? It’s listed among the other gifts back in chapter 12. It is also referred to as an individual believer called a “prophet.” Sometimes when you hear about prophecy you think in terms of predicting the future. And you see that function in the Bible. But here in I Corinthians, and many other places in the NT, it is not about *predicting the future*, but about *proclaiming a message* from God. When a person prophesies they are giving a message from God that builds up believers. They may speak words of insight or direction into our lives. They may remind us of Scripture promises we are to claim or exhort us to obey a scriptural command. Now...

**Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.**

So the word of Christ should be a vital part of our gatherings. We're not just here to drink coffee and chat about who's going to win the Super Bowl. Our conversations should ultimately focus on Christ and His Word. And to lead us in this the Spirit gifts certain believers with this capability. Think of it in terms of what I am doing today ... preaching a message from God based upon the truth of Scripture. Or it can be exercised through a teacher in a Bible study class, or through another believer in a small group or prayer meeting, or even in a one-on-one conversation.

Now obviously, we have to always keep prophecy under the Scriptures which are the final and ultimate authority in our lives as believers. Spirit-inspired prophecy will always be consistent with and based upon the revealed truth of Scripture.

Now this long chapter is taken up with explaining the great value of the gift of prophecy. And Paul does this by comparing it to another gift that was enormously popular to the Corinthians ... the gift of tongues. **Read I Corinthians 14:2.**

Let me take a moment and explain the gift of tongues. It appears that this gift takes two forms in the Bible. In Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit fell upon the church at Pentecost it says those believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (languages) as the Holy Spirit enabled them. People from all over the world were in Jerusalem that day and when these Spirit-filled believers began to declare the Gospel people heard them in their own language.

But in Corinth, it appears that the gift of tongues had a different expression. It is commonly called "ecstatic exclamation." That means that a person makes sounds that are like a language but no one understands. Sometimes it's called a "heavenly language." It is a worshipping gift and v.2 says it is spoken to God, not to men. No one would know what a person was saying unless there was an interpretation, which is also a spiritual gift.

The Corinthians loved this gift and it was a problem. It was a sensational and mysterious gift. Someone speaking in a "heavenly language" sets themselves apart from others. "I know a language you don't know. I have a connection with God that you don't have." The gift was very gratifying because they were worshipping God with it but it wasn't edifying to anyone else.

Now certain churches teach that after you're saved there's a second blessing called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. And the evidence that you have received the baptism in the Spirit is that you will speak in tongues. But if you carefully study

the NT you find that is not the case. Speaking in tongues is a legitimate gift for some believers but not everyone possesses this or any other spiritual gift. This gift is not mentioned in any other letter to any church in the NT, leading us to believe that this gift, and perhaps other gifts, do not operate in every church. But it was in an issue in Corinth.

Our worship and spirituality should move beyond what is just gratifying to us. We should desire what edifies the whole church. That's why the gift of prophecy is so valuable to the church. It says in v.3 that "everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort." Notice the three ways prophecy benefits other believers. It is for...

### **1. STRENGTHENING**

This means to build up someone else ... to increase their potential as a follower of Jesus. Jude uses this same word in...

#### **Jude 20a - Build yourselves up in your most holy faith...**

So when we speak messages from the Lord to others we build them up and strengthen them in the Lord so they are able to grow in their faith in and knowledge of the Lord. Next, prophecy is...

### **2. ENCOURAGING**

Everyone needs encouragement. People with the gift of prophecy may remind us of a promise of Scripture that applies to our situation or an exhortation to remain strong in the Lord.

#### **Hebrews 10:25 - Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

So our conversations at church should be filled with this kind of scriptural encouragement. And some are particularly gifted at doing that. But there's another way prophecy benefits believers:

### **3. COMFORTING**

We get beat up verbally through the week. What a joy it is to be around others who speak to us words of consolation and hope.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I read something recently on social media about a family who attends our church. They've been through an incredibly difficult season. The wife wrote that 3 ½ years ago they attended a worship service here and I happen to be preaching on Romans 12:12 that says “be joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer.” The wife wrote: “I had probably read (that verse) a hundred times but honestly it's like this was the first time I had seen or heard it! I was struggling this day in particular and was questioning why God wasn't answering our prayers the way we wanted. Why God wasn't giving us hope or patience through our journey ... It was like God was saying, ‘this ... is what I want for you (and your family) on this journey I have you on.’ This verse became our family verse that day and we have clung to its promises over the last 3 1/2 years and will continue. We don't get it right all the time (especially the patience in affliction) but this verse hangs in our kitchen as a daily reminder of what God commands of His followers.”

I had no idea that God was using that message from the Lord that day so pointedly in this family's experience. But that's the way the Holy Spirit edifies the church through prophecy.

**1 Corinthians 14:4 - He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies (builds up) the church.**

This is what God wants us all to think about when we gather with God's people. I am here not just to get something out of it; I am here to put something into it.

Now if you have this gift, or think you may have it, here are few things to remember. First, be careful about claiming, “God told me to tell you,” or “the Holy Spirit told me to tell you.” That can communicate a sense of superiority like “I hear stuff from God that others don't hear.” Second, make sure the message is tied to Scripture. Your words have no power, but the Word of God does. And when you remind someone of a promise or a command in Scripture God will use it. Third, make sure it is for building up and not tearing others down. Sometimes people with this gift think it's divine permission to give everyone a piece of their mind.

And if you're on the receiving end of a message from the Lord through prophecy here are some things to keep in mind: First, the Bible says for us to test prophecies to see if they are in keeping with the revealed truth in Scripture. If someone says

they have a message for you from God, but it contradicts Scripture, don't receive it. Second, at the same time the Bible says for us not to despise prophecies. Take it seriously, even if it may challenge you. Third, pray about how the Word applies to your situation. Prophecies are not infallible. For example, girls, if a guy comes up to you and says, "God has told me that I'm supposed to marry you," you need to pray about that. And if God hasn't put that same affection in your heart for him, then he's not speaking from the Lord. So we come down to...

**1 Corinthians 14:12b - Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.**

So, spiritual gifts like prophecy have a powerful effect upon believers. But we also know that when we are faithful to speak Gospel truths to each other it has a powerful effect upon non-believers as well. Now let's go a little deeper into the chapter.

**1 Corinthians 14:23 - So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?**

Notice that non-believers may be present in the gatherings of the church. They've been invited by someone in the church or they just show up because they're seeking. Are any non-believers here because you are building a relationship with them and have invited to come to church with you? And it's not wrong or inappropriate for us to think about how our gatherings are perceived by non-believers. In the Corinthian case, if a non-believer comes to church and hears someone babbling away in tongues they're going to think, "You people are crazy. I don't understand any of this." I don't think it honors God or the Gospel if church is like a foreign land to non-believers. Our church words can be like a foreign language to non-believers. Our church dress might even be like a foreign dress to them. And if we're not careful our "churchiness" can come across that way. Now make no mistake, the message of the Gospel will be definitely be offensive to the non-believing mind, but that doesn't mean we are to be offensive. Our worship experiences should move people to faith and not to contempt.

**Read I Corinthians 14:24-25.** Notice how prophecy benefits non-believers when the Word of Christ dwells among us richly through our conversations and through gifted individuals who prophesy. First, it brings...

**1. CONVICTION**

**1 Corinthians 14:24b - he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all,**

As the truth of Scripture is explained and as a Gospel witness is given the non-believer is convicted of their guilt before God and that they are under God's judgment for their sin. And by all that is going on, he or she realizes they are accountable to God for their sin. Jesus said this very thing about the Helper:

**John 16:8 - When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:**

The Holy Spirit uses people in this. There's another benefit to non-believers...

## **2. DISCOVERY**

It says in v.25 that "the secrets of his heart will be laid bare." Suddenly they see themselves the way God sees them as the light shines into the dark corners of their heart. Their sin becomes personal. It's not just that they've made some mistakes; they have broken God's law and will have to account for that. And there's another thing that happens to them:

## **3. CONFESSION**

It says in v.25 that "he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" Now he knows God is real and that He is near. Presumably this guy comes to Christ. Is that where you are? Are you broken over your sin and your separation from God? Has the Holy Spirit done spiritual open-heart surgery on you and shown you your need for Christ? It feels like God is right here. Call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved.

Church, let's let the Word of Christ and the Gospel dwell richly among us. Listen to the messages from God that come through preaching and teaching and admonishing in our church. Weigh it and put it into practice. Be doers of the word and not just hearers. Make church attendance a weekly pattern in your life so that you can be exposed to this kind of ministry that strengthens, encourages and consoles you. And come thinking not, "what can I get out of this," but "what can I put into this." And we will all go away rejoicing, "God is really among us!"