

More Gifts for the Church

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[0 : 00] Good morning. I'm surprised to see so many people today. I honestly expected it to be very empty with the storm, but I'm glad to see so many people. Welcome to Watermark Church.

My name is Eric. I'm one of the guys on staff here at the church, and I'm so grateful to be here with you today. If you've been here for the past few weeks, you'll know that we've been going through the book of 1 Corinthians, and we've been looking in chapter 12 at spiritual gifts, and why God gives gifts to the church and what he expects us to do with those gifts.

And then the past couple weeks, we've been looking at 1 Corinthians chapter 13, talking about love and seeing that actually the passage about love also connects to spiritual gifts and how we are supposed to use them within the context of the church.

Today we're moving on to chapter 14, and what we're going to see is that, again, with gifts, God gives gifts to us so that we can build up the church and encourage one another.

That one of the big things God wants us to do when we come together as a church is to encourage one another and build one another up, and that he gives us gifts to help us as we do that.

[1 : 16] And the first thing that we need to see is that God wants us to love one another by building one another up. If you were paying attention during the scripture reading, you'll notice that this passage is specifically about two spiritual gifts.

You have tongues, and you have prophecy. And it seems that in the church in Corinth, there was a spiritual popularity contest going on, and everyone wanted to speak in tongues because that's what all the cool kids did.

And if you spoke in tongues, you were seen as a better, more mature Christian. If you didn't speak in tongues, and you had one of those other second-rate gifts, then you yourself were a second-rate Christian.

And Paul is saying that is not the case. He's actually saying tongues is a great gift, but it's not one that should be used in the context of the gathered church.

Because when we use spiritual gifts, we have to be aware of our context. And in the context of the church, God wants us to build one another up, and tongues, although they build ourselves up, don't build up one another.

[2 : 28] Prophecy, however, builds up others. You can think about it this way. Imagine we went on a Habitat for Humanity building trip. And we're heading to the trip, and you have your bag packed, and you have a little hammer and nails in there.

And I am super excited because I have brought an amazing and powerful tool with me, a jackhammer. And we get to the building site, and you have your little puny hammer and nails, but I am walking around showing off my jackhammer.

And it is big, and it is powerful. I find somewhere to set it up, and I go to work. And a crowd gathers around because I'm big, and I'm making lots of noise, and they want to see what's going on.

And everyone is paying attention to me because I have this big and powerful and amazing tool. But there's a problem. We're at a Habitat for Humanity building site.

Our goal is to build a house. The foundations are already laid. There's no need to dig up the ground. In the context that we're in, even though my tool may be more powerful, may be more expensive, may be cooler, may get more attention, your hammer and nails are a way better tool for this context than my jackhammer.

[3 : 51] There are contexts where the jackhammer will be a better tool, but in this context of a Habitat for Humanity building trip, the hammer and nails are the tools that you need because they are the tools that will help you build the house.

And Paul is saying in the same way, when we come together as a church, God wants us to build up one another. And tongues is a great gift. It's a powerful gift.

It's a gift that gets attention on us, but it's not a gift that builds up the church. And God wants us to be people who when we come together, build one another up and encourage one another.

And so in the context of the church, prophecy, he's saying, is the better gift because prophecy builds up more than tongues.

And, you know, the past few weeks, we've been talking, like I said, a lot about the issue of gifts in the church. And if it feels repetitive, that's because Paul was a little bit repetitive on this topic.

[4 : 58] And Paul, I think, was repetitive on this topic because he saw it as vitally important in the life of the church. He said, God gives us gifts because he expects us to use them properly.

And if we don't understand how we're supposed to use them, then we're not going to use them in the proper way. And we're not going to accomplish the proper tasks with them that God wants us to accomplish.

So let's take a minute and think about where we are personally in terms of spiritual gifts. Do you know whether you have any spiritual gifts?

Do you know what they are? If you don't, I would encourage you to get involved in some ministries and try out different things and see what comes up. If you have a bulletin today, we have this little insert.

You can check it out. It has a list of all the different ministries in Watermark and all the different ministry needs that we have and spiritual gifts that go along with them. And so my encouragement to you is if you know what spiritual gifts you have and you would say, I'm not really using them to build up the church right now, check out the list.

[6 : 06] Find out where you can get plugged in and find a way that you can get involved in helping to build up the church. And if you would say, I have no clue what spiritual gifts I have, check out the list.

Find something that seems interesting to you. Try it out and see whether you discover that you have some spiritual gifts that you never actually knew you had beforehand. And ultimately, as Paul has already said in chapter 12 of Corinthians, the spiritual gifts that we have don't make us better or worse Christians.

God's the one who gives out spiritual gifts. The thing that makes us more or less mature is how we use the gifts once we have them. Are we using them to draw attention to ourselves? Are we using them to build up the body?

Are we using them to make ourselves look greater? Are we using them to make God look greater? And that's the point that Paul is trying to get at here.

Prophecy is a great gift in the church. Prophecy, delivering messages from God to the church to challenge people and equip people and lead them towards God is a great gift for the church because it builds everyone up.

[7 : 18] where tongues, speaking to God in unknown languages that even we ourselves can't understand, it's great, it's powerful, it's amazing to have this direct communication with God, but if I'm up here speaking in tongues, none of you have any clue what's going on.

And so in the context of the church, a gift that comes in clear language is essential because clear communication is essential for building up the church.

And that's the second thing I want us to see today is that clear communication is essential to building one another up in the context of the gathered church. And, you know, if I wanted to come up and encourage you, say I wanted to encourage Christina, and I walked up to her and I said, would she be encouraged?

Probably not. She would say, what the heck is going on, Eric? And I would say, well, that was me saying, hi, Christina, I hope you're having a great day. God loves you in my language.

But if she can't understand it, it makes no difference to her and doesn't build her up. And so that's sort of what Paul is getting here is that in these two gifts that relate to communication, tongues don't build others up because even if you're saying amazing, great spiritual truths in tongues, they can't be understood by the rest of the church.

[8 : 50] He talks about instruments, a flute or a harp, and says, you know, if I just get up on an instrument and I start banging around and playing it with no rhythm or rhyme or anything, no one's going to have any clue what I'm playing.

If we're in an army and the army needs to be assembled and the bugler comes out and starts playing the bugle to gather us together but doesn't play anything distinct, no one's going to know that we're supposed to get ready for battle.

Everyone's going to think he's practicing or trying to figure out how it works. In the same way, when we communicate with each other within the context of the church, we need to communicate in a way that can be understood by one another so that the ideas that we're trying to communicate can be properly communicated and understood.

And he's not saying tongues are bad. He actually says tongues are a good thing. He says he himself speaks in tongues. He says he wishes that everyone in the church could speak in tongues. He says tongues build us up and he's not saying this in a bad way like a prideful building yourself up but it's more of a devotional building up, the way that you would be built up spiritually when you read your Bible or when you pray.

[10:10] He says tongues are a great thing but it's all about the context. Tongues are an amazing gift for growing closer to God in your personal devotions, he's telling them.

But when you're gathered together as a church, that's not the right context because in the context of the church, clear communication is essential.

Just like the jackhammer on the Habitat for Humanity site. It's a great and powerful tool but when it's used in the wrong context, it's not going to accomplish the job that needs to be done.

He also talks about interpreters of tongues. He says if you have the gift of tongues, you should pray that you could interpret. And he says if you have an interpreter, then it's okay to speak in tongues in church because this message is no longer direct between you and God but actually between you and God and the rest of the congregation through the interpreter.

He doesn't want them to get the wrong idea and swing the pendulum too far and say tongues are evil, we need to stay away. He wants to help them see this is a good gift but it's a powerful tool that needs to be used carefully and in the right way.

[11:34] And he believes so strongly in this power of clear communication that he says he would rather speak one simple sentence in clear plain language than 10,000 words in a tongue.

I'm kind of a nerd and so I wondered if someone says 10,000 words, how long will it take them to do that? So I googled average speaking pace and discovered that to speak, that the average person speaks about 150 words per minute which means that if you're speaking 10,000 words, that's speaking for a little bit over an hour.

It's like a long sermon basically. And Paul says, I would rather get up here and speak five words that everyone can understand than 10,000 words, a one hour long sermon in tongues.

Picture this scenario with me. I know it's far-fetched. It would never happen. But if the Apostle Paul was alive today and Tobin calls him up and says, hey, Paul, we want you to come to Watermark. We want you to be our guest speaker for a Sunday. Because you're the Apostle Paul, we're going to change the schedule for the service a little bit. We're going to have you preach for an hour.

[12:50] It's a long sermon for us. And we know that you have this great gift of tongues and we want to see and experience it. So if you could come up here and preach for an hour in tongues, we would love that, Paul.

And Paul says, I'll come preach. Okay. And he gets here and we start service. The band plays a couple songs. Maybe we take communion. And we have the scripture reading and Paul gets up front and he steps up and he says, Watermark, Jesus died for you.

Drops the mic because he's from the first century and doesn't know what to do with it and walks off the stage. And the band sort of looks at each other and is like, are we supposed to go back up for the closing song right now?

I guess so. And so they come back up and sort of hesitantly play through the last song and then Jeremy looks over at Tobin and he's like, are we done? I think. And Tobin comes up and does an awkward closing benediction because everyone's really confused.

And as soon as the service ends, Tobin makes a beeline for Paul and he's like, Paul, what happened? We had talked about this. You were supposed to preach for an hour and you took like 10 seconds and you were supposed to preach in tongues and I didn't hear any of that.

[14:10] What's going on? And Paul says to Tobin, look, the five words that I said have more meaning and application for your life than anything that anyone here would have gotten out of it if I had stood up there for an hour and spoken in tongues.

Because clear communication is essential in the life of the church. There was a German theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

He lived around the time of World War II. He wrote a lot about community. He has a book called Life Together. If you want to read about community, it's an excellent book to look up. And he has a quote in that book about this topic.

He says, God has willed that we should seek and find his living word in the witness of a brother or sister in the mouth of man. That God wants us to communicate his truth to one another.

Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's words to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth.

[15:26] There are times where each of us become discouraged and disheartened and we need someone else to come up and speak God's truth to us because when we hear it from someone else we can understand it and believe it in a way that we can't just telling it to ourselves.

He continues and he says, the Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother. His own heart is uncertain. His brother's is sure.

Let me read that again. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother. His own heart is uncertain. His brother's is sure. This has been true in my life many, many times where I'm having trouble obeying God.

I'm having trouble trusting that God's promises are true and I know these truths from the Bible. I know how God promises me that I'll have fullness of joy in him and that he'll give me strength to fight against temptation and I repeat them to myself over and over and over and I still feel trapped. I still feel helpless and then I pick up the phone and call or message Alfie or Jeremy or Chris or Edmund and I just say, hey guys, this is going on and they say the exact same thing to me that I've been saying to myself the whole time but for some reason when I hear it from them it makes a difference that it never made when I heard it from myself.

[16:53] When they say, hey look, God is with you in this. God's going to give you the strength to overcome this temptation. That has a power to it that no amount of self-will can conjure up within myself.

The Christ in the word of my brother is stronger than the Christ in my own heart in those moments and that's why God has given us this community of the church. That's why God has us come together.

That's why Paul encourages us to build one another up when we come together. The last line of Bonhoeffer's quote, he says, this is the goal of all Christian community.

They meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. That when we come together it's not just supposed to be me or Tobin or Chris or Alfie or Graham standing up here on stage and speaking to you.

But that actually each and every one of us is supposed to come together and share God's words with one another and share this message of salvation among ourselves. That the church is an incredibly powerful tool created by God to transform the lives of his people.

[18:02] To bring us into community with one another so that as we come together we are pointing each other back towards him. And Paul in this passage in 1 Corinthians 14 is saying that is absolutely true.

And that's why it is so essential that when we come together as a church we communicate with each other in language that is clear and understandable to one another.

So that when we share this message of salvation with one another it can be comprehended and applied by the others in the church and it can make a difference in our day-to-day lives.

the core reason that the church exists is to worship God and to meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.

And so I want us to take a minute to think about this issue of clear communication. You know do we feel like we are doing a good job of communicating clearly this message of salvation with one another?

[19:09] On a couple levels. One are we actually opening our mouths to talk to one another and share this message? Or are we just assuming they already know it so they don't need us to repeat it so no worries.

And if we do open our mouths to share this message of salvation with one another are we sharing it in a way that is comprehensible to them?

Like I know I've been around the church for a long time and I know this isn't quite exactly the same issue as speaking in tongues but it does have to do with being understandable.

I know that when you've been in the church for a long time there are lots of big church words that you learn and it's very easy to have these church words just become the content of our conversations about God or in the church and so we have these big words like atonement and justification and sanctification and propitiation that most people in the church don't know and nobody outside the church knows and yet people who have been in the church a long time like to throw these big words into conversations and it leaves other people behind a lot of the time because if you're talking to a new Christian they have no clue or a non-Christian they have no clue what's going on when you use these words and I know personally I've done this before and that's probably why I'm aware of it so I'm not just saying you guys do this but it's actually something I've done too but are we able to communicate the gospel in a way that someone who's never heard of Christ before can understand are we that clear in our communication because sometimes when I use big words it's because

I don't actually understand the concept but I want to sound like I do or sometimes it's because I just want the other person to think wow he's so smart he knows all these big words it's super embarrassing when they ask me to define them and I'm like I think it means this but we need to be clear in our communication we need to actually open our mouths to speak to one another and when we do that we need to do it in such a way that we can understand one another so are you opening your mouth to share this message of salvation with those around you in the church and outside of it and if you are doing it in such a way that they can understand it simply the third thing that we need to see from this passage is that true love within the body of the church is a light to outsiders true love within the body of the church is a light to outsiders in verse 22

[22 : 01] Paul says tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers it makes it sound like tongues are supposed to be something that makes non-Christians see how great God is and that leads them to faith but in the context of this passage what's actually going on is he's quoted an Old Testament passage in the verse before this 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 and that's from Isaiah and basically what happened is God communicated very clearly with his people and said you need to turn and follow me or judgment is coming and they said that's too simple of a message we're not interested in listening to it because it's too childish and so he said okay I'm going to send in foreign armies to attack you and invade you and they're going to say the same thing in their language and you won't be able to understand it even though it's super complex and so the foreign armies come in and they take over Israel and it's actually a sign of judgment not of salvation and so

Paul is paralleling that an amazing way for judgment so when he says tongues are a sign for unbelievers that actually parallels what he says later in the passage if the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues and any outsider or unbeliever enters will they not say that you're out of your minds if all of us right at this moment started speaking in tongues and someone who had never heard of Jesus before walked and they saw what was going on in here they would be like this is a crazy place I need to leave before I become crazy like the rest of them and even though they had seen God working powerfully in and among us they wouldn't know that that's what they were seeing they would think that they were seeing insanity and society has special places for insane people that are places that salt and light to non

Christians we are supposed to get together and interact with one another in such a way that it makes the gospel beautiful to non-Christians and when we get together if all we're doing is speaking in tongues with no interpretation and a non-Christian walks in I'm out of here and even though they've seen God's powerful work it's a sign that points towards judgment not towards there's something else interesting in what Paul's saying here though and that's the fact that he expects non-Christians to be present when the church is gathered together it's something that at least on staff we try to be aware of here at Watermark that every time we get together on a Sunday morning there are non-Christians in our presence like right now at this moment there are multiple non-Christians in this room is pretty obvious to you but

I'm guessing for a lot of people in this room it's something that we don't really think about that much and Paul is saying that if you are a Christian when you come together as the church that our interaction with one another within the church is something that will point the non Christians among us either towards Christ or away from Christ but God wants it to be something that points them towards Christ there have been many times where I've been in churches or community groups and heard someone say something and just cringe because I was so thankful that I don't have a non Christian friend here right now and I hope that everyone here is Christians because if I was a non Christian and I heard that I would not be feeling very good about coming back don't get me wrong the gospel itself the message of the gospel that we are messed up people who need rescuing and salvation from

God in itself is offensive but also Christians a lot of times have a tendency to be offensive ourselves and add on top of that I'm not saying we should water down the message of the gospel but I'm saying that when we get together we should present it and we love you and we care about you and we want you to become a part of our family and we understand what it's like to not be a Christian and so you know the church when we get together like I said point people towards God or away from God and Paul says the reason that prophecy is so powerful within the church is because if a non Christian comes in and they hear the church speaking in tongues they're out of here this crazy people but if they hear us prophesying to one another then they hear us sharing the message of salvation with one another they hear us calling out sin in each other's lives they hear us reminding one another of the fact that

[27 : 39] God forgives our sins and the fact that we have messed up again and again and again that we have a God who loves us and it shows them something beautiful and different about the church and it shows them something that we have that hopefully they want and it points them towards Christ you know the real tension that Paul is talking about in this passage on the surface it looks like prophecy versus tongues but in reality it's something deeper than that it's love for one another and building one another up versus building ourselves up and he's saying the world is all about building yourself up if we get together and all we're focused on is building ourselves up and any non-Christian walks in here they're going to see nothing different about us nothing unique about us nothing that sets us apart and nothing that points them towards

God but if we get together and we love one another and we invest in building one another up and a non-Christian walks in here they're going to see something different and something beautiful something that they want something that makes them have to say God is here among these people and something that makes Christianity and the idea of a relationship with God beautiful so that they'll actually listen when they hear the gospel and so the way that we interact with one another generally within the church not just in terms of spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy but just general life is vitally important like if we come to church and we say I'm not really interested in singing along with the rest of the church and I don't really want to have to talk to people after church so I'm going to show up at 1115 right as the sermon starts

I'm going to sit through the sermon and then I'm going to leave during the closing prayer so that I can be built up but I don't actually have to talk to anyone else or invest in anyone else and someone from our office at work sees that are they going to see a heart that says I love the people in my church and I want to invest in them and build them up or are they going to see like oh he's going to listen to a talk I do that with TED talks online all the time if we come to the church and we say I'm going to take advantage of the different ministries that are offered here I'm going to send my kids off to the kids ministry I'm going to sit in here I'm going to enjoy the music I'm going to enjoy the preaching and I am not going to get involved at all I'm not going to serve I'm not going to give I'm just going to come and enjoy it and take what I can to be refreshed and refilled and we have non-Christian co-workers who see us doing that is that going to point them towards

God's love and show us them something different about God's people or is that just going to make them say yeah I would do that too if I thought the talks were interesting and the music was good get rid of my kids for an hour yes please but on the other hand if we're a church that comes together where everyone gets involved everyone says I see a need I want to serve and help with that need everyone says I see areas where people need my help and I'm going to offer it that's different that's weird a good weird though and your non-Christian friends and co-workers are going to say why why would you offer to to show up super early on a Sunday morning to set up sound equipment if you don't have to why would you spend an hour on Sunday morning watching little four-year-olds or

even worse teenagers there's something different and something beautiful about that when we get together and we build one another up as a church something that the world around us can't quite wrap their minds around but something that's good for a generous people who you know sees needs within the church and gives financially towards that you know why would you give your money if you're not getting your name written on a building come on this is Hong Kong there's something different about that something special about that and as the world sees us even interacting with one another and hanging out after church drinking coffee and talking to people from totally different walks of life totally different backgrounds than us there's something different and something special about that that makes the gospel beautiful to a watching world and Paul wants us to be the type of church that is different and special and beautiful to a watching world because he wants everyone to have an opportunity to hear the gospel he wants everyone to see the beauty of Christ and knows that the way that we interact with each other within the church helps people to see that or points them away from even taking a glance and so if you're a Christian here today I have a couple questions for you first how are you showing God's love to others within the church or in your community by serving and giving again we have this handout in the bulletin if you are looking for ways to serve look no further find an opportunity in here that interests you contact whoever is in charge of that area and we would love to get you hooked up in serving within the church if you're a

[34 : 08] Christian here today how is your interaction with others within this church body showing something different and beautiful and supernaturally loving to the world or just showing them another person just like themselves like hypothetically if we could videotape you from the time that you walked up the escalators or down the hall today came in here sat down saying listen to the sermon get up believe to the time that you walk away and we played that for your co-workers to watch or for your children to watch would they say there's something special about the way that this person loves the people around them in the church there's something different about the way they interact with people in the way that I would interact with people something weird but something that's kind of beautiful or would it just be like oh they're listening to a talk I watch TED talks all the time no big deal how does the way that you interact with the others within this church body show a love for the gospel or a love for yourself and if we took the rest of the week too how does the way that you live your life on a day-to-day basis show that the gospel is beautiful or show that you are just living for yourself because Paul says we need to be about the business of building one another up and loving one another and making the gospel beautiful for watching outsiders and if you're a non-christian here today this message has stuff to say to you too you've been here you've seen God's people interacting you've heard the songs and the sermons if you've been here and you've seen these things are you at a point where you can say God truly is among these people my hope and my prayer is that you can and obviously we are also messed up people like if if the church always perfectly showed God's love when we came together this passage that we've been talking about today wouldn't exist so so we make mistakes we mess up and we're not going to always get it perfectly but my hope and prayer is that if you are here today and you're not a Christian you'd see something different about our community you'd see something different about the way that we interact with one another and love one another and that you would be able to honestly say God is present in this place and if you can't say that then keep watching because hopefully you will see it but what Paul is saying is that if you have seen God's people and you have heard God's truth and you have a responsibility to respond properly to that that God has us here today not just to be entertained and have fun and have a good time but that he has us here today because he has a message for you of an amazing salvation of the fact that he created us and he loves us but we have rebelled against him and although we deserve judgment that he has offered us salvation he's offered us a chance for forgiveness and life and that hopefully the the picture that you can see within this body of something different is just a glimpse of the way that he'll transform your life if you trust in him for that forgiveness and so if you're not a

Christian here today my challenge to you is trust believe and if you have more questions find us afterward and ask because we would love to talk with you about it so tongues prophecy really it's all about what we've been talking about the past couple weeks love are we loving one another or is our interaction just pointing the world around us and ourselves back towards ourselves let's pray father we thank you for your love we thank you for the gospel and for the way that you transform lives we thank you that you give gifts to the church to build us up and we thank you that you have given us

the power to live different lives change lives that that are able to show your love and your power to the world around us and to each other we pray that we'd be a people who bring the message of salvation to one another we'd be a people who are willing to step in when those around us are weak and be strong with them and for them that we'd be a community that's known for being different in a way that's a little bit weird but also beautiful and good and that through us the watching world would see your gospel and believe it and be transformed in jesus name amen