

[United] True Speech: to build up the body

1 Corinthians 14

MPS: Jesus Christ centers all true speech in the church for the growth and maturity of the whole body.

OBJ: Every Christian can understand true speech that builds the whole body in three ways.

INTRO In our series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians, we are laboring for one thing; to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

? How do we live united?

We've discussed many aspect of unity. Today we address one that may be the most critical aspect to cultivate considerable, real growth among the church: "True Speech: to build up the body". In 1 Cor 14 Paul teaches on the distinctive gift of speech that builds the church. I want you to understand by three parts how True Speech builds up the body. Part one, I will provide a general definition to work from. Part two, I will provide four benefits of true speech. Part Three, I will conclude with one principle for applying true speech in the church. **TRANS** I begin with a working definition of true speech.

Jesus Christ centers all true speech in the church for the growth and maturity of the whole body.

READ 1 Cor 14:1-3

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. ³On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 1 Cor 14:1-3

Prophecy Defined

I. Prophecy is true speech for the body because it is truth speech.

The term chosen for today's sermon title, True Speech, refers to words spoken among the church, specifically in public worship gatherings, that shape the language, vocabulary and ongoing conversation among the congregation. Centered on the gospel truth of God's Word, this speech continually permeates and penetrates to strengthen the spiritual growth and maturity through Christ's abiding presence in the life of the congregation. **New Testament prophecy is speaking God's gospel truths to build the body of Christ.**

Prophecy is not a mysterious activity of decoding some secret, hidden message from God. **ILLUS** Some Christians dismiss prophecy because they think they've not drunk enough Ovaltine to get the necessary, secret decoder ring. And this is only matched by other Christians who think they actually are "the secret decoder ring". Prophecy never entails discovering secret messages by applying complicated algorithms to decipher hidden code from select letters on discreet pages. **New Testament prophecy plays a primary role in the Christian's life and the life of the church.**

Prophecy in the New Testament

New Testament prophecy is distinct from the role of Old Testament prophets. Old Testament prophets were God's divine mouthpiece to communicate His message to His people. They foretold what would happen in the future and what God wanted to say to His people. The words of an Old Testament prophet were "Thus saith the Lord", God's words delivered through God's instrument to His people, sacred words from the Lord himself.

New Testament prophecy serves a new purpose distinct from Old Testament prophecy. New Testament prophecy is a forth-telling of God's truth from the Bible. When New Testament prophecy is exercised, it may arise in a number of ways and from different people, but it always agrees with, points to and aims to make clearer for obedience God's Word, in order to strengthen, encourage and build up the church. **Prophecy in love builds up the whole body, and each person, with the whole counsel of God.**

Jesus Christ centers all true speech in the church for the growth and maturity of the whole body.

TRANS Paul identifies four main benefits that make prophecy a superior gift.

Four Benefits make prophecy a superior gift.

Benefit #1. Prophecy benefits the whole by clarifying God's message. READ 1 Cor 14:4-12

*⁴The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. ⁵Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. ⁶Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? ⁸And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, ¹¹but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. ¹²So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. **1 Cor 14:4-12***

Tongues serve a lesser role. Tongues are an ecstatic utterance, an unintelligible language understood only by supernatural ability. Tongues speak to God, not to men; tongues build up self, not the whole body. Tongues cannot edify the whole body, without interpretation, because they cannot be understood by anyone other than God. Tongues create confusion in public worship. Paul doesn't say tongues have no purpose, but they present an unclear message that confuses people, and do not serve the purpose of public worship. [Prophecy should be pursued over tongues for the way it serves the whole body.](#)

Prophecy is greater because it builds up the whole body. Prophecy speaks understandable words to communicate a clear message to build up people. **ILLUS** An instrument can be helpful, but people must know what the sound means. Imagine playing "Taps" before charging onto the battlefield, or "Reveille" at the graveside. Tongues without interpretation becomes a personal prayer between an individual and God, that should be done in private. Tongues with interpretation becomes prophecy that can edify and encourage the whole church body. But Paul says that even this should be limited because it still tends toward individual-centric manifestation. The greater gifts and the greater use of gifts always strives to benefit the recipient, not the one manifesting or expressing the gift. [Prophecy is greater because it builds up the church.](#)

TRANS Tongues provide Paul's primary example because they were the issue facing the Corinthian church.

Benefit #2: Prophecy provides a clear message that addresses the whole person. READ 1 Cor 14:13-19

*¹³Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. ¹⁶Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ¹⁸I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. **1 Cor 14:13-19***

Tongues requires specific guidelines for manifestation. When tongues are used, an interpretation is required. Tongues alone express the spirit, but leave the mind unfruitful. Christians worship in spirit and truth (John 4) because God engages the mind and spirit. One without the other is incomplete. **ILLUS** This applies in other ways too. Music alone, without lyrics, is insufficient for Christian worship. Lyrics that articulate a clear gospel message are necessary. Therefore, "play", "listen" or "sway" is an incomplete form of worship, but "sing" is the clear Biblical command.

When a prayer is indistinguishable it serves no good, no matter how earnest or sincere one may be. Christians worship must include unction and understanding. Fewer words with spiritual punch are always better than fevered words displayed in spiritual passion. Paul's not scolding or diminishing those who speak in tongues. He validates their importance and

instructs in their proper use in public worship. [Christian worship engages spirit and mind to provide a clear gospel proclamation so anyone who hears can glorify God.](#)

Benefit #3: Prophecy addresses the whole to accomplish God's purpose. READ 1 Cor 14:20-25

²⁰Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. ²¹In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." ²²Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? ²⁴But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. 1 Cor 14:20-25

The whole of the Christian life means maturing in Jesus. Nothing is more pathetic than a Christian who never grows up, crying "grace" for all sins, but never walking in righteousness because of it. Naivete of evil is of high value for the Christian. But Christian doctrine should be the very substance of our nurturing strength. How we have reversed these values and priorities today, where we accept naïvete of Christian doctrine as normal and celebrate intimate knowledge of worldliness and evil. The Corinthians were so amused by speaking in tongues that they become uninterested in maturing any further.¹ Doctrine provides the "why" of your faith. When you can't articulate the "why", you don't really know the "what" you're holding. [Christians that holds little value for doctrine will always be dominated by "freak-show" spirituality to command your attention and rule the entertainment of your worship.](#)

Paul cites Isaiah 28:11-12 to make his point. (.21-22) Then, he provides an illustration to explain it. (.23-25) Unbelievers who hear tongues (ecstatic utterance; unintelligible language) cannot understand. Tongues are a sign of judgment for unbelievers that they are not able to understand because they are spiritually discerned. Prophecy, though, is a sign of judgment for believers because it discerns God's will and word for His people. Even when prophecy may not be favorable TO God's people, it will always be favorable FOR them. (Rom 8) Christians may not always like what they hear God say, but prophecy makes sure they can understand what He is saying, and that unbelievers can understand it to believe as well. Prophecy makes clear God's message to believer and unbeliever to bring them to and build them up in faith.

Christianity is not a spiritual scavenger hunt where we solve clues to move to the next step. What serves as a sign to demonstrate God's power is not identical to obeying God's commands. God sometimes uses signs to demonstrate His power for special purposes. But God's primary means of revelation for mission in the world is clear, straight-forward proclamation.

Prophecy provides a clear message of God's truth through the gospel for the whole person. ILLUS Think about when the sermon hits "right between the eyes". This is not due to the excellence of the speaker, but the pervasive, convicting work of Holy Spirit. God commands the mind and compels the heart to instantaneously transform a person from death to life, hopelessness to hope-filled, confusion to clear conviction, take one more step beyond their "end", to meet every person where they are and move them to where He is leading with everlasting love, prevailing peace, sustaining strength and indescribable joy.

Prophecy provides a clear message of God's truth through the gospel for the whole church. ILLUS One sermon for one people can speak to every person. In one sermon, simultaneously, one lady professes faith in Jesus to become a Christian, one man repents of an affair and returns to love his wife, while a young adult surrenders to vocational ministry or full-time, international mission work.

Prophecy provides a clear message of God's truth through the gospel for the whole purpose of God. ILLUS When a sermon addresses one particular theme or topic, but speaks to a completely different issue in life. I hear it every time a

¹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 188. Morris cites F. L. Godet to show that this is what the Corinthians were doing.

person says, “Pastor, today when you said...God showed me to walk in His way by...”, and the two really have nothing to do with each other. As a pastor, I just smile as a warm affirmation courses through my veins.

The faithful, clear proclamation of God’s Word empowers all God’s people and purposes in any sermon. [Prophecy provides a clear communication of God’s message to all hearers that builds up the church for God’s purpose.](#)

Benefit #4: Prophecy orders public worship to build up the body. READ 1 Cor 14:26-33a

²⁶What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³²and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

1 Cor 14:26-33a

Prophecy orders worship by demonstrating that many have value in the public gathering. It also removes people from the center of public worship, and places God’s Word at the center. Not every public worship gathering is the identical, but all have the same, united purpose. In all worship gatherings, Christians need to depend upon the whole of the church and not be isolated to one, or only a few.

READ 1 Cor 14:33b-35

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

*³⁶Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? ³⁷If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. ³⁹So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰But all things should be done decently and in order. **1 Cor 14:33b-40***

I won’t take much time, but I want us to understand what it’s NOT saying, as much as what He IS saying. Paul is not telling all women to shut-up, but He probably is telling some to be quiet. Rather, he is encouraging them to maintain a spirit of humility and order at the right time. While this passage is not totally clear in all that Paul is saying, the context of the whole books tells us that there were certain ladies in the church that liked to cause problems. Instead of calling each one by name, he’s hoping to quiet their disruptiveness by encouraging them to respect the whole congregation. This is not about “who” can or cannot speak in church, as much as what they are trying to do when they speak in church. Christian worship demands a respectful and orderliness for the benefit of all to hear the gospel.

Prophecy does not forbid tongues. It simply provides a greater benefit for the whole and accomplishes the purpose of public worship better than tongues. [Prophecy speaks the truth of God’s Word to place Jesus at the center of the Church’s speech.](#)

Jesus Christ centers all true speech in the church for the growth and maturity of the whole body.

TRANS Finally, I want to conclude our message today by providing ONE guiding principle.

One Application Principle for Prophecy

Speech IN the church should be true to God’s Word through the gospel of Jesus Christ in the ongoing conversation OF the church (in all gatherings, at all times, and among the whole body), to accomplish God’s purpose FOR the Church.

Our speech in the church should strive to make Jesus the center of all conversation in the body for the growth and maturity of the whole church. Everything that gets said among the church should be aimed in love to build up the whole church.

Words that build up everyone are better than words that only build up only one.

Instead of peaking our expectations to worry about 'something getting said that I can benefit from' when I come to church, our desire should be to prepare ourselves to share "True Speech" with others, to encourage and build up the whole body. Let the prayer of every Christian for gathered worship remain, "Lord, let the words of my mouth, like the meditations of my heart, be pleasing to You and helpful and encouraging to others. Gift me in greater measure that I might serve for the benefit and blessings of all. May each person be strengthened and encouraged to grow and mature because we served one another in Jesus' name today."

Jesus Christ centers all true speech in the church for the growth and maturity of the whole body.

Q? What word do you need today to be built up in Jesus?

Q? What word did you bring today to build up another by lifting up Jesus?

Q? Is your speech "true" to Jesus today, to build up the whole body, each and every person?