

HIGHLANDS CHURCH

Study Guide

Pursue Love, Preach Jesus

Thomas Slager
September 8, 2025

Major Points

- 1** When a good thing like tongues, hospitality, or generosity becomes the main thing in a church, it displaces Christ and becomes a bad thing
1 Corinthians 14:1
- 2** Prophecy -- the intelligible proclamation of God's word -- is superior to tongues in the gathered church because it builds up, encourages, and consoles others rather than only edifying the individual
1 Corinthians 14:3-4
- 3** Paul would rather speak five understandable words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue, because the purpose of spiritual gifts is the benefit of others, not self
1 Corinthians 14:19
- 4** When outsiders encounter the clear proclamation of Christ, the secrets of their hearts are disclosed, they fall on their faces, and they declare that God is truly among his people
1 Corinthians 14:24-25
- 5** The church's identity should be defined by Jesus himself, not by any particular gift, program, or practice -- believers should unite under Christ even when they disagree on non-essential theological topics
1 Corinthians 12:31

Key Quotes

- “When a good thing becomes the main thing, friends, that's a bad thing.”*
at 5:40
- “My salvation is not contingent upon what I believe about spiritual gifts.”*
at 2:10
- “Pursue love, hunt, or love, not to be loved, but to give love, man, what a different mindset we would have as people.”*
at 9:49
- “I'd rather speak five words with my mind to instruct others in 10,000 words in a tongue.”*
at 31:18
- “Those people are Jesus people. When they get together, what do they talk about? They preach Jesus. They're Jesus people.”*
at 35:40

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Slager says that when a good thing becomes the main thing, it becomes a bad thing. What 'good things' in your own church experience have you seen take on an outsized role that might overshadow the centrality of Christ?
.....
.....
2. Pastor Slager presents two categories for both tongues and prophecy -- public and private. How does this framework help you think about the diversity of spiritual experience among believers without drawing lines of division?
.....
.....
3. Paul says he would rather speak five intelligible words than ten thousand in a tongue. What does this tell us about God's priority for clarity and understanding when his people gather, and how should that shape the way we communicate the gospel?
.....
.....
4. Pastor Slager asks, 'When outsiders and unbelievers come to Highlands Church, what's their experience?' If an outsider walked into your church this Sunday, what would they say defines your congregation -- and is that the identity you want?
.....
.....
5. Pastor Slager calls the church to be 'Jesus people' who pursue love and unite under Christ despite theological differences on non-essentials. Where do you find it hardest to extend unity to someone who sees a secondary issue differently than you?
.....
.....

Word Studies

διώκω dioko

Greek

To pursue, press forward toward, or hunt after with intensity. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul uses this word to command believers to aggressively chase after love as a hunter pursues prey. The same word is used elsewhere for persecution (e.g., Acts 9:4), which highlights the relentless, single-minded energy Paul expects believers to pour into loving others.

Usage: 45 times in the NT

οικοδομή oikodome

Greek

Building up, edification; literally the construction of a house. Paul uses this architectural metaphor throughout 1 Corinthians 14 (vv. 3, 5, 12, 26) to describe what spiritual gifts should accomplish in the gathered church. Prophecy 'builds up' the body like a craftsman adds to a structure, while unintelligible speech contributes nothing to the edifice.

Usage: 18 times in the NT

προφητεύω propheteuo

Greek

To prophesy; to speak forth God's message. In the NT, this encompasses both foretelling future events (as OT prophets did) and forth-telling -- proclaiming and applying God's already-revealed truth for upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation (1 Cor 14:3). Paul's usage here emphasizes the latter: declaring what God has said so that others are built up.

Usage: 28 times in the NT

Cross References

Ephesians 4:11-16

Paul describes the purpose of spiritual gifts as equipping the saints for ministry so the body of Christ is built up toward maturity -- the same 'oikodome' principle that drives his argument in 1 Corinthians 14 about prophecy being superior for building up the gathered church.

Deuteronomy 28:49

Moses warned Israel that God would bring a nation 'whose language you shall not understand' as a sign of judgment -- the same Old Testament pattern Paul draws on in 1 Corinthians 14:21 when he quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 to explain tongues as a sign against unbelief.

Joel 2:28-29

God promises to pour out his Spirit on all flesh so that sons and daughters will prophesy -- the prophecy Peter cites at Pentecost in Acts 2, which Pastor Slager references when discussing the public, proclamatory use of tongues and prophecy.

Philippians 2:3-4

Paul instructs believers to do nothing from selfish ambition but to count others more significant than themselves and look to the interests of others -- the same 'others-centered' ethic Pastor Slager identifies as the heartbeat of 1 Corinthians 14's argument for prophecy over self-edifying tongues.

Colossians 3:14

Paul calls love the bond of perfection that ties all virtues together -- reinforcing the 1 Corinthians 14:1 command to pursue love as the governing priority above every spiritual gift.

Further Reading

- **Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14**
by D. A. Carson
- **The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New International Commentary on the New Testament)**
by Gordon D. Fee
- **Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God**
by J. I. Packer

Scripture References

REFERENCE	TYPE	TIME	CONTEXT
1 Corinthians 14:1-25	Read Aloud	8 : 40	<i>Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gi...</i>
1 Corinthians 12:31	Read Aloud	9 : 00	<i>But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will ...</i>
1 Corinthians 13:13	Read Aloud	9 : 20	<i>So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; b...</i>
Hebrews 12:2	Referenced	10 : 00	<i>Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our...</i>
Matthew 6:33	Referenced	10 : 15	<i>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteou...</i>
Acts 2:1-11	Referenced	11 : 40	<i>And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and ...</i>
Romans 8:26	Read Aloud	12 : 40	<i>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For ...</i>
Mark 10:43-45	Read Aloud	15 : 40	<i>But whoever would be great among you must be your ...</i>
1 Peter 4:10	Referenced	21 : 50	<i>As each has received a gift, use it to serve one a...</i>
Romans 12:2	Referenced	25 : 30	<i>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transfor...</i>
Isaiah 28:11-12	Read Aloud	30 : 30	<i>For by people of strange lips and with a foreign t...</i>
John 14:6	Referenced	36 : 20	<i>Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, a...</i>