

# Prophecy in Love

## 1 Corinthians 14:1–5

**Key verse: 1** “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophecy.”

Today’s message is the seventh and final one in the spiritual gifts series. So my opening questions are: “Have you discovered your spiritual gift? Have you fanned it into flame? (2 Tim 1:6) And are you using it to build up the body of Christ?” (Eph 4:12) Whether you have done so or not, Apostle Paul wants each of us to do a crucial thing. He says, “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophecy.”

Among many spiritual gifts, it is prophecy that Paul commands us to earnestly desire, cultivate, and use—even though we already have different gifts. Why does he place such a high priority to prophecy? What is it? And how can we practice it in the New Testament era?

But even before we talk about prophecy, Paul, according to verse 1, wants us to first, pursue love; second, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts; and then prophecy! This message has three parts in that order, under the title: “Prophecy in Love.” May each of us learn to prophecy in love in our own generation.

### Part I. Pursue love (1a)

In verse 1, Paul first commands the Corinthians to pursue love. This is not optional—it is a direct command. Why such emphasis? To understand, let’s look at the context.

A most important principle in Bible interpretation is reading a passage in its context and discovering what the author is addressing. Today’s passage is part of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, written in response to serious problems in the Corinthian church.

In chapters 12–14, Paul addresses boasting and divisions caused by the misuse of spiritual gifts. These problems intensified especially when the church gathered together (14:23–24). Some with more visible gifts dominated the gathering, motivated by their own honor, power, control, and superiority. Others remained silent spectators, feeling inferior and useless (12:15, 21). Their gatherings turned into spiritual talent shows, and some even gave up meeting together.

In response, in chapters 12–13 Paul gives them three foundational teachings to address their divisions and boasting. First, he says in 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” He emphasizes their identity: unity in diversity. Second, he says in 12:7, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Each person, no matter how seemingly insignificant, has the Spirit of God to build up others. Both of these are profound spiritual truths—but Paul knows that intellectual knowledge alone does not change behavior.

Therefore, in 12:31 he says, “But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.” So in chapter 13, he explains love, the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Many pastors use 1 Corinthians 13 for weddings, but Paul wrote it to correct spiritual pride and division. Chapter 13, the love chapter, is the bridge connecting chapters 12 and 14.

Now, let’s hear what Paul says to the Corinthians and to us in chapter 14. Look at verse 1. “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” Notice the progressive connection of the commands. Love first, desire next, prophesy last.

Why does love come first? In chapter 13 Paul gives three reasons. The first reason is found in verses 1–3. Can we read them together? “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Apostle Paul says that without love, speaking in tongues, having prophetic powers, knowing all mysteries, and even giving up one’s life gain nothing. In 13:8 he says, “Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.” And in verse 13:13 he concludes, “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” In this way Paul points out that every desire and every use of spiritual gifts must spring from love.

The supremacy of love is seen throughout Scripture. Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 22:37–40). The Apostle John says, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 Jn 4:8).

If love is so supreme, what does it look like? Paul says in Romans 5:8, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus on the cross is the clearest display of God’s selfless and sacrificial love. Paul describes this love beautifully in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7: “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” How amazing!

What does your love look like? Does it resemble God’s love? If not, listen to Paul: “Pursue love.” Love does not naturally grow in our hearts. We must pursue it intentionally, like a hunter pursuing prey, like an athlete running with all his strength toward the finish line. As we examine our love, we may feel discouraged, but remember two things.

First, God has placed us in the best places to pursue love: our families and our church. In context, we are united in the body of Christ. The church is a gathering of sinners—as P. Mark likes to say, a spiritual hospital. And yet, God loves the church. When we gather, let us pursue love first and foremost, not with entitlement, search for equality, fairness, financial gain, even

personal happiness. If we pursue anything else before love, our church will become like the Corinthian church.

Second, remember that love is the first fruit of the Spirit, not a fruit of your own effort. No matter how hard we try with our own will power, we will fail to love. But only when we are filled with the Spirit and obey Him, does He empower us to love. May God bless each of us to pursue love by remembering God's supreme love in Christ and by loving the church through the Spirit's help.

## Part II. Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts (1b)

As we pursue love, what does Paul command next? Again, verse 1: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." Paul commands us to earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

We should not say, "I don't have any gift from the Holy Spirit!" When we received God's love through Christ's death and resurrection, we received forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). As the Spirit dwells in us, He wants to give spiritual gifts. However, like love, spiritual gifts do not simply appear. Paul commands us to earnestly desire them. The Greek verb sounds like boiling water—not gently simmering, but violently bubbling. It means to burn with zeal.

Paul is commanding us to be boiling hot, not lukewarm, in our desire for spiritual gifts.

How can we have such burning zeal? Only when our love burns hot for what God loves: the church, the body of Christ. Just as God's love burned for the sinful world, so our love must burn for each member of His body. If we cannot love a particular person, we must remember how God sees them—precious, beloved, worth Christ's blood. If we ignore or despise or hate those whom God loves, we do not love God.

But love alone is not enough. Love must be paired with spiritual gifts. Just as a heart needs hands and feet to act, love becomes effective only when connected to the gifts of the Spirit. When our tongues are grounded in love, they can be tools of encouragement and comfort—not of tearing down.

We are easily tempted to desire many things. Desire is powerful and can be dangerous when aimed at anything other than what God loves. Scripture warns that desire of the sinful nature leads to death (Rom 8:5–7; James 1:14–15). But when we desire what God loves, what Jesus died for and what the Holy Spirit desires—our hearts will be filled with life. God loves the church. Therefore, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts to build up the church.

## Part III. Prophecy (1c)

As verse 1 says, Paul tells us to desire all the spiritual gifts, yet he adds, "...especially that you may prophesy." Why does prophecy, the noun form of prophesy, receive this focus? Again, we must read the context: "when you come together" (14:26).

In verses 2–5 Paul explains the benefits of prophecy during gatherings, especially compared to tongues. Let's read them together. "For 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. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up." In short, Paul says that tongues speak to God, while prophecy speaks to people for their upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. Tongues build up the speaker; prophecy builds up the church.

What is the criterion for the greater gift when the church gathers? Simply this: does it build up the church? According to Paul, prophecy is greater because it builds up the church in three ways: upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation.

Let's look at these three ways:

First, prophecy upbuilds the church. To upbuild is to build people into a dwelling place for God. God's house is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone, and we as living stones (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pt. 2:4–5).

Second, prophecy encourages others. Nothing encourages like truth spoken in love. To the unbelieving, encouragement means proclaiming the gospel: that we stand under judgment, yet God gave His Son so that whoever believes has eternal life. To believers, encouragement includes rebuking of worldliness, guidance into truth. We can also inspire and motivate believers to obey God's will and carry out God's plan with all we have received.

Third, prophecy brings consolation to others. This is personal, close comfort. Comfort food can help, but nothing is better than the comfort from the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2Co 1:3-4). As God comforts us, we comfort others. We also proclaim the eternal comfort God promises in Revelation 21:4—that He will wipe away every tear.

Some may ask for a precise definition of prophecy. While AI could provide a technical definition, 3 things are clear in the New Testament context: first, prophecy is not primarily predicting the future. Second, prophecy, when done in love and by the Spirit, brings upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. Third, Paul himself models prophecy throughout this letter.

Here I want to clarify two things. Unless prophecy is in line with Biblical truth, it is not prophecy. Unless prophecy is applicable in our present context, it is not prophecy.

Therefore, to prophesy is to proclaim, in love, the present application of biblical truth to upbuild, encourage, and console others in the church.

It is important to know what prophecy is and is not. But even more important is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the word of God. When we are filled with the Spirit we can prophesy. God promised in Acts 2:17, "...and in the last days It shall be, God declares that I will pour out my

Spirit on all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” And we must remember we have the Bible. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” By the Spirit and the Word, you and I are equipped to build up the church. Do you believe this?

God called me as a prophet to the nations through Jeremiah 1:1 in 1996. For years, I did not understand how to live out that calling. But God placed me as a pastor in Chicago UBF. Sometimes I wish I could preach without my limitations in English or culture. Yet through this series, I learned again that the church is the body of Christ, and my love for the church grew. I believe God has given me the spiritual gift of prophecy. Paul commands me to prophesy in love—to upbuild, encourage, and console the church. I want to fan this gift into flame.

I thank and praise God for the privilege of building up His church. Please continue praying for me to carry out God’s call by the Spirit’s power.

As we close this spiritual gifts series, let us remember Paul’s command. Let’s read our key verse together: “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” May the Holy Spirit empower us to prophesy in love. May God enable us to prophesy in love proclaiming the present application of biblical truth to upbuild, encourage, and console one another in the body of Christ, his church.

*Message by Pastor David Won*