

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1–25

Dr. George O. Wood

Our Scripture today, as we continue our study in Corinthians, is 1 Corinthians 14:1–25. We have just finished three weeks in 1 Corinthians 13, a great chapter on love. Someone has called 1 Corinthians 13 “The Divine Smithy.” The allusion to the smithy is to the furnace in the blacksmith shop. The Divine Smithy in 1 Corinthians 13 is the blacksmith’s shop where the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 are heated red hot to be used rightly in 1 Corinthians 14. All spiritual gifts, unless heated by love, are worthless. So in between the two chapters on gifts has come this great centerpiece chapter on love.

1 Corinthians 14 calls us to have what I’ll call today “an Edifice Complex.” An “edifier” means a house builder, a person who constructs. The church itself is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone. We are living stones placed into the building, joining together and rising up into a temple of the Lord in which the Spirit dwells. We are members of an edifice that the Spirit of God is constructing, to the glory of Christ. As members of the household of faith, we are called upon together to be builders of one another, to have an edifice complex.

The edifice complex is something which the Corinthian church greatly lacked. That is why the apostle Paul needed to spend the time he spent, and that we have spent, in this area.

As we look at these twenty-five verses today, the edifice complex basically determines our answer to two questions. The first question is: “What gifts best build up the church?” And the second question: “What gifts best reach the unbeliever?”

I. Verses 1–19 speak of the gifts which best build up the church—tongues or prophecy.

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Paul begins, in verse 1, by establishing our priorities. It's sort of a linkage verse between chapters 13 and 14, where we sum up what has gone beforehand and go forward into what is coming. "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (NIV). Three priorities. "Make love your aim." The literal language could be translated this way, "Persecute love." We normally use the word "persecute" in a negative sense. But the word employed here by Paul, in a language in which he writes, is the same word he uses for "persecute" elsewhere in the New Testament. It means "to pursue with all diligence," "to pursue love with persistence" and "to pursue love with the standing that that quest is a terminating action." It always goes on. Of course, this is what he has really put before us in the thirteenth chapter.

When love is at the fore, then the gifts can be sought. So we are encouraged and asked and commanded to earnestly desire spiritual gifts. Gifts are an expression of the Lord's words and works. They are His mouth and His arms and His feet. Such gifts must be present in the church. A church that is spiritually without gifts is a dead church, it is a church in which new persons cannot be placed, because they cannot be nurtured and cared for. So the Lord wants a spiritually gifted church. When such gifts are not motivated by love, they're worthless.

The third order is "eagerly then desire prophecy." If we're to make gifts desired eagerly, then we must especially single out those gifts which most build up the body. Paul singles out prophecy as the gift which best builds up the body.

In these three admonitions, he is correcting the emphasis at Corinth which had had these three commands in reverse order. They started out with tongues as the chief gift for building up one another, although it did not do that, as we'll see. They sought a spiritual gift, rather than spiritual *gifts* (plural), and their aim was not love, but being a spiritual person.

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

It's not important that you seek, as a goal in life, to be a spiritual person. That may shock you, but if you'll seek to be a loving person like Jesus Christ, you'll be a spiritual person. I've seen a lot of people and had a tendency, in my own life, to try to be spiritual. It's very possible you can be spiritual and not be loving. But it's impossible to be loving and not spiritual.

So Paul says, "Make love your aim and the other things will flow along with it." Priorities established.

The importance of priorities came cross to me, even more pointedly, in a story from a periodical I received. A story of a young man, very soon after graduating from college, who was installed by his father as president of the family business. It was a fairly large business which involved the manufacture of electric hand drills. Needless to say, his appointment to the office of president caused a great deal of resentment among all the vice-presidents of the company. In the first staff meeting that the new young president held, he announced that he was a firm believer in long-range planning and that he proposed to do a good deal of long-range planning. He further proposed that he wanted the very best information he could get related to the future market. The marketing vice-president said, "Relax. We have done a complete market survey plan. It's all laid out. We have all the guidance needed to give future development to our firm." The young president said, "I beg to disagree with you. You understand very little about the market. There is no market for drills. The market is for holes. The customer doesn't buy a drill because he wants a drill. He buys the drill because he wants the hole. The drill is merely a solution to the problem. Let's find out what kind of holes the customer is going to be wanting in the future, then lets build the drills that make the holes."

I thought of that in reference to this passage in Corinthians. The Corinthians are saying, "The market is for the gifts." Paul's saying, "No, the market's not for the gifts at all. The market is for

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

love.” It is the church that loves that will reach people. Not the spiritually gifted church. A loving church that, with that love, has spiritual gifts in operation. Establish priorities.

Paul says next, in verses 2–5, that the gifts must be compared for their edifice value in the congregation. “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified” (1 Corinthians 14:2–5, NIV). Paul here speaks about two differences between the gift of tongues and prophecy.

A. The first difference is whom the gifts address. Tongues address God. Tongues are the language of prayer or praise. When tongues first occur in the Day of Pentecost, we gain an idea of what tongues were when we see, in Acts 2:11, that they heard them declaring the mighty works of God. What were they doing praising the Lord in unknown tongues, as we call them, on the Day of Pentecost? They were talking about how great God is. His wonders, His sublime attributes and beauty. His greatness. They were speaking to God in other languages, praising God.

It is equivalent, as I pointed out, to the Old Testament experience many times called “the pouring out of my soul.” Hannah, in 1 Samuel 1, is praying. She is barren. She is so deep into prayer that it says that her lips were moving but she didn’t speak, and Eli, the priest, came along and thought she was drunk. She responded to Eli “I have been pouring out my soul to God” (1 Samuel 1:15).

Tongues are an address to God. Praise, prayer, petitions, thanksgiving, intercession. Not understood by the speaker and not understood by the listener.

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

The difference with prophecy is, while tongues address God, prophecy addresses people.

Prophecy, in addressing people, does three things. It builds them up, it encourages them, and it consoles them. Prophecy is not someone going off, telling what's going to happen in the future.

Prophecy is for the present. Prophecy may be present in one-on-one encounters, where the gift of the Spirit is causing us to use the Word of God as a resource to build somebody up, to encourage somebody or to console someone. The fact that we need to build up, suggests to the apostolic picture of the church that we are not perfect. If I were perfect, I wouldn't need to be built up.

Prophecy comes to build us up. To encourage us. To console us.

What are the alternatives to this gift not being in operation?

Can you imagine a church where no one spoke to one another? Where you just come, sit, and go, and no one ever speaks. What kind of building up would that be? If we just spoke to one another in a perfunctory kind of sense. Or worse than that, if we threw word bombs at one another and criticism, which is not prophecy. It's the gift of nit-picking!

Prophecy builds up. I think that perhaps this gift of prophecy is commonly present among Christians, but not often recognized because we're looking for something spooky to happen. For someone to, so to speak, freak out in the Spirit, in some foreign language tone or some high shrill, in order for it to be recognized as the word of the Lord. In fact, an encouraging word spoken by a brother or sister who has been praying for you and about you and has received a promise of Scripture to integrate into speech may very well be speaking a prophetic word to you for your up-building, encouragement, consolation. Prophecy speaks to people. That's one difference—whom the gifts address.

B. The second difference is that there is a different result from the gifts. As a result of the gift of tongues, the person who speaks in tongues is built up. The gift of tongues, on a personal use, is

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

tremendously edifying to the person who engaged in the gift, and we'll look at the reason for this a little bit later this morning. Prophecy, on the other hand, builds up the church. Therefore, in a group setting, it's very clear which is the superior gift. Prophecy, in a group setting, is clearly superior to tongues. With the one exception—if tongues are interpreted, then they edify the church as do prophecy. But where many people are speaking in tongues and there is no interpretation, it is not edifying for the church. It does not build up. It may build up the individual. It does not build up the church. Prophecy builds up the church.

Paul, nevertheless, says that tongues are desirable on the part of all. Here is perhaps where some persons go astray in the commentary of 1 Corinthians 14. On the one hand, Paul is saying, "In a public setting, only two or three in a public worship service should give the gift of tongues with interpretation." But he's saying, on the other hand, "I wish you all spoke in tongues." Which indicates Paul himself knows the difference between a private usage, which everyone is encouraged to engage in because of its edifying purposes for the individual, and a public usage, which should be severely limited, because its value in edification is strictly limited for the whole body.

Priorities established, gifts compared.

C. Verses 6–19 present another difference between the gifts: the test of intelligibility. "Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Corinthians 14:6–19, NIV).

These verses are simply an amplification of what has happened in verses 2–5. I think the reason why they are there for illustrative amplification is the fact that Paul recognizes that there are those in the Corinthian church who will have a tendency to argue with him, to still think that it is tongues which best build up the church. If an outsider comes into a church where everyone is speaking in other tongues, they’ll feel that that church is spiritual and be won to the Lord. And Paul is having to correct this. He is contradicting the attitude that “We know that the Spirit of God is at work when everyone speaks in tongues. We feel this proves we’re a spiritual church” He is saying, “No, that’s not the case at all.”

In the early days of my pastorate here, I remember a new person came up to me after a worship service and commented that they’d enjoyed being at the church, but that they had not been able to listen well to the message that day. They wondered if it was a common practice in our church

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

for someone to be speaking in tongues sort of to themselves during the entire service. I guess what had happened was that some visitor had sat down in front of a person who quietly was worshipping the Lord in tongues during the course of the whole service. I'm sure that the person who did that during the service was immensely blessed—their spirit was edified as they spoke in tongues to the Lord while sitting in the worship service—but it was the persons around them that weren't edified. This is where Paul is continually reminding the Corinthians, "Make love for other people your guiding star. Not whether or not you're being blessed."

Several years ago, I had the privilege of preaching at the baccalaureate service in Yugoslavia. There were about three hundred people. It was a tremendously exciting service. The Lord had given me a message that day to preach that burned in my heart. I think I preached with the anointing of the Spirit of God. The only person who would have been blessed in that service would have been me, had I not had an interpreter. The interpreter who preached alongside me also came under the anointing of the Spirit of God. Back and forth. We both remarked afterwards that we'd never had an interpreting experience like that. Profound and unique. It was a special grace of the Spirit of God in operation. The congregation was edified because what I said was interpreted. Only I would have been edified if it had not been interpreted.

Speaking in tongues, therefore, in a public setting, without interpretation, is selfish. Paul calls it "jumbled music" or "an uncertain battle call" or "a foreigner speaking" (1 Corinthians 14:8–11). The solution, therefore, is interpretation. If in church my spirit prays, then my mind must also pray. If my spirit sings in church, then my mind must also sing. I must give interpretation to my prayer in tongues or my song in tongues. Paul honors the private use of tongues by declaring the plenitude of the operation of tongues in his own personal life. Even though tongues abounded in Corinthian public worship in waves, Paul says, "As much as it abounds in your public setting. In

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

fact, in private, I exercise the gift of tongues more than you all” (1 Corinthians 14:18). Which is a way, of course, of understanding how this gift flourishes. In the individual Christian’s life, it is meant to abound and flourish and be scattered among every believer. In a public setting, it is meant for limited use.

I was raised in a church which emphasized this spiritual gift. I was taught to believe there was an experience called “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Shortly after I was saved, at the age of ten, I began seeking the baptism in the Spirit. But for some reason, I did not receive this experience. In my childhood, adolescent, teenage heart, as the years came and went, it began to warp my ideas about God, because I had not had this experience. I knew that Jesus loved me. I wasn’t so sure about God the Father. Because I got the idea the, really, that Jesus was for my salvation and the Father was for my damnation. Jesus had to come and rescue me from the Father’s wrath. In a theological sense, that’s true, but in another sense, that’s only a very fragmented picture of reality. Now I understand, as a more mature Christian, that the Father loves me with a love that is equal to the Son. There is no difference in the love of the two. I had the most problems with the Holy Spirit. He wouldn’t come and baptize me as I’d asked, and I thought He didn’t like me. I did everything to please the Holy Spirit, including—when I was about fourteen or fifteen years of age—remembering that when I was ten, I kept an extra nickel in change at a grocery store and I tried to search out how I could return that nickel, so I could please the Holy Spirit. It was terrible agony. People would tell me too, “You’re such a quiet, introverted, shy person—when you receive the baptism of the Spirit and speak in tongues, the Spirit is going to have a field day with you. You’re going to roll, shout, you’re going to be outside your head”; that kind of thing. I was scared to death of the prospect of that. Some Pentecostal people frighten me.

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

When I was sixteen years of age, I'd really become desperate for the work of the Spirit in my life. I was kneeling at my home church, at the altar, one evening and I just began to pray to the Lord. Suddenly, my prayer in English became a prayer in other languages. Three things went through me. I was only sixteen years of age, but I was amazed at how the Spirit gave me perception on what was happening.

The first thing that happened to me, in my mind, as I began to pray to the Lord in other tongues, was this thought—it may seem crazy to you but it was very real and it's been a very real part of my experience since that day, "I'm conscious." I expected that when I spoke in other tongues I'd be unconscious and would not be aware of what was happening. I realized I was conscious. It was a shock and a surprise.

The second thing that went through me was that the Holy Spirit didn't violate my personality. I'm just here, quietly praying, like I've always quietly prayed. On the other hand, He doesn't violate someone else's personality who is more boisterous, making them be quiet, either. The Spirit respects all personalities. If we don't grieve the Holy Spirit, He doesn't grieve us. I learned to respect Him as a person. He respects me and He respects you.

The third thing, which was the utter astonishment from my point, was that for long I thought that with gift of tongues, you had to get in a trance and the Holy Spirit would take over your speech faculties. When I found myself conscious, and realized the Holy Spirit hadn't violated my personality, I realized that what I was speaking verbally had been going on in my heart ever since I was saved. I'd been praying to the Lord like that in my heart, but simply never gave vent to it, because I was afraid it would be the flesh. Never having been taught that what was important in experiencing the Spirit in this manner of prayer were simple things—like the

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

surrender of your life to the Lord, praying to the Lord, and exercising faith for what the Spirit is already praying in you.

I am convinced that many, if not all, Christians have incipiently received the Spirit, but perhaps have not given expression to that. And have let that pouring out of the soul, which is happening on the inside, but never gained the expression the Spirit wants to accomplish, that would be mentally edifying. That is, releasing the prayer in the heart which I would call “the nonrational side of nature.”

I'd like to put a personal view before you as to why I think the Lord may have given the gift of tongues to use on a personal level. I think psychology has, to some extent, given us an understanding of this. I don't lend to any particular psychological school. I'm not a Freudian psychologist by any stretch of the imagination. But Freud said there are two parts to man—a conscious part and an unconscious part. Our rationality, the native language which we employ, speaks to God from our rational side, from our conscious side—I pray to God that which I know. But there is that in my life which I have forgotten. There is that in my life which I have repressed. There is that which I have suppressed. There is a deeper being in me that simply exists on that unconscious level. One of the things I believe the gift of tongues accomplishes, and the reason why it's so edifying on the personal level, is: The Spirit of God and the expression of that gift has access to levels of our personality that are not immediately available to us on the rational level, and the Spirit of God prays through that. I think that's why, especially in the gift of tongues, on an intercessory level, tongues can be so powerful in personal healing, because the Spirit of God is responding to the depth within us that needs to be healed and helped and prayed to for God, and we don't know how to pray ourselves in those areas. You don't have to live in this culture very long to know the kinds of abuse and terror that are happening in family

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

situations and in real human life. The Spirit of God wants access to those deep hurts in our being and wants to pray, that out of that inner-being, there might flow a river of living water and not a dam of repression and suppression which keeps us crippled emotionally. The Spirit of God wants to pray through us and liberate us.

That is why I think it is that, on the Day of Pentecost, those that exercise this gift are known for their abundant joy—because the Spirit of God accomplishes, through this gift, a deep release in the inner man. If that gift is simply mechanical, that may not do anything at all. That's simply on the surface level. But I am talking about a gift which goes deep in the heart of our personality and brings that personality to God. God, who designed our life and knew, long before psychology came along, what it is that He had made us out of. He gives us means of prayers that address God, both on the rational side and on the emotional side of life. He's aware of that and conscious of it.

On the personal side, Paul says, "Tongues edify." On the public side, prophecy edifies the church.

II. The second question that the edifice complex determines is in verses 20–25.

"Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written: 'Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,' says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. 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? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (1 Corinthians 14:20–25, NIV).

This is a difficult passage to understand, and perhaps the most difficult passage in 1 Corinthians. Although, perhaps the passage we’ll look at next week on the role of women in the church might be more difficult. On the surface, Paul appears to be saying contradictory things in this Scripture. On the one hand, he’s saying tongues are a sign for the unbeliever. But then, he turns right around and says that if an unbeliever enters a meeting where everybody’s speaking in tongues, it will turn him off. It is prophecy that will result in his salvation and not tongues. We say, how are tongues a sign for the unbeliever if they wind up turning him off? This passage so confused the New Testament translator J. B. Phillips, that he said, “Somewhere there’s been a manuscript mistake,” and he took the liberty of rearranging the words of the text. We’re not going to take that liberty, because I think there’s an understanding outside of rewriting Scripture to suit our own convenience.

The way to understand this Scripture is to know what Paul meant by the phrase “tongues are a sign to the unbeliever.” There is a clue given to us in the Scripture that he uses. He uses an Old Testament text—Isaiah 28:11–12. Let’s draw the setting for that Old Testament text, for a moment, because understanding it properly gives us a right conclusion in the New Testament era. Isaiah was a prophet to the people of God, in the eighth century before Christ. His message went unheeded by the people of the land for years. There came a point in time where the Lord said, “They will not listen to you. They will not repent. Therefore, I’m going to send them a foreign, occupying power. When that power comes, then they will realize that I have passed judgment on their sins and have, for the present, abandoned them to their own sinfulness, that they might learn through punishment that I am a God who rewards those who do right and punishes those who do

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

evil.” Isaiah says, in that context, “When the Syrian soldiers’ boots come trampling through the land and you as citizens of the land hear them speaking in their foreign tongues, you’ll know that is the voice of God speaking to you saying, ‘Hear, O Israel, you have rejected Me, I have rejected you and you are under My punishment for a time.’” Tongues, therefore, were a sign to the unbeliever in Israel that God would keep His Word and God would pass judgment if there was rebellion.

How did that function in the New Testament setting? A stranger comes into the church, hears people speaking in tongues. There is no interpretation. What does he think? What does he perceive? Many Pentecostal people made the mistake or thinking that that is somehow attractive to that person. On occasion, it might be. On the majority of occasions, it will not be. I talked to a young woman who said that for that very reason, as a teenager, she had left the church, because she felt left out. Speaking in tongues does not say, “God loves you, God cares for you. God wants to put your life back together again. God wants to bless you. God wants to make you whole.” It simply suggests to the unbeliever, “You don’t belong here. You don’t have this gift. You’re not one of them. What is this strange stuff? It’s babble, madness.” The unbeliever does not understand the gift of tongues. The unbeliever looks at the gift of tongues like people did on the Day of Pentecost, when they were speaking languages which were clearly understood by unbelievers, and they still said, “These people have drunk too much wine. They’re inebriated.” So the tongues, Paul’s saying, are a sign to the unbeliever. A sign of what? A sign that they don’t belong. A sign that God has, for a while, put them off, rejected them. Paul’s saying, is this the message you want to give to unbelievers that come into the church? Is this the message that God has rejected them? Is this the sign you want to give?

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

That's why he turns around and says, "But when you're all prophesying, you speak to one another for a building or encouragement and for conciliation." What's the result? The unbeliever comes in and what happens? The unbeliever comes in and he is convinced by all that that he is a sinner. He is judged by all and the secrets of his heart are laid bare. So he falls down and worships God.

What's the sequence? It's an amazing sequence that overlays what Jesus taught in John 16:8–11. Jesus said, "When the Spirit comes, He will convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come." Those are exactly the three things that are happening here in the 1 Corinthians passage. When the Spirit comes through the word of prophecy in the congregation, a word of prophecy may be a sermon, or other persons standing up to exhort the flock of God. But this word of prophecy, which speaks in the person's own tongue, is meant to bring an awakened sense of sin. What does Paul say here? It convinces him. The word is "convict." The literal rendering is "it pounces" or "seizes" his conscious.

What is the most grievous sin? The most grievous sin in the world is not trusting Jesus for your salvation and your eternal life. That is your most grievous sin. What, therefore, is the Spirit attempting to do to the unbeliever that is in the church gathering? To say that the most grievous sin is not having trusted in the Lord. And that word of prophecy, and Christians exhorting Christians, is meant to communicate a sense of, "Yes, I need the Christ that they're talking about." It brings an awakened sense of sin. It brings with it an affirmation of need for the righteousness of Christ. That's why the phrase "He will be judged by all" is here. This is very easy to misread. An unbeliever comes in and you read this text—"He will be judged by all"—what does this mean? Christians are sitting around in a circle, and they spot the outsider, "We're

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

going to judge you now together; come up with ten things that are wrong in your life, and one after another, we're going to judge you." That's not what is meant by "being judged by all."

It is rather a sense that all of us as Christians, together, have come in under the recognition that Jesus Christ has borne our judgment. That we all were due for judgment. Christ has borne our judgment and we have averted that judgment by confessing Him and believing in Him. That testimony of faith, that Jesus bore our sins and therefore bore our judgment in His body on the cross, is a witness that allows all who were unbelieving themselves to be judged. Not that the Christian is all of a sudden three feet up on everybody and looking down and saying, "You sinner." But rather, the unbeliever coming in and recognizes that all of us have started out on the same ground floor. All of us have been beggars in the kingdom of God. All of us have been given the riches of Jesus Christ. Therefore, conviction results. The end process is conversion. With that kind of loving witness, through a prophetic word, an unbeliever cries out in adoration to God, "God is really among you!"

This is what we seek to happen as we meet together—with believer edifying believer—that what transpires is a witness and a glory and a beauty to the person who has come here and does not know Christ. That they walk away from the service having been convicted, not having been confused. That Christ be exalted.

Today's theme is "edify." An edifier is a house-builder. I cannot help but think, in relation to that, that there is no one I know who builds a better house than the good carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth. I want you, as we close today, to picture your house. What kind of a house do you have today? How would Jesus, the carpenter, be at work in it? Your life may represent a beautiful house and garden. Everything is in order spiritually. Not that you have a smug sense of pride or hypocrisy. But as you fairly look at your life, you realize that love for the Lord is in the

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

center place. The disciplines of the Christian life are being practiced. There is nothing unattended in your life. Some of you have a Christian life that reflects a beautiful house and garden.

You may be here today and have a very good house, but need some better maintenance. This week, our lawn died. I think it died within about ten days. I was the fastest death of a lawn I've ever seen. We originally thought it was dying because it was getting too much water. We turned the water off and it kept on dying. It didn't have enough water. Then we thought it wasn't fertilized. It kept on dying anyway. Finally, after it was dead, we discovered that it was a flea that eats the lawn. So we have a house in need of better maintenance—because a little bug came along and we didn't know what it was.

It's possible to pick up a spiritual bug. To have a beautiful Christian life that, within a period of time, is destroyed through neglect in an area or, all of a sudden, falls into disrepair and just needs some better maintenance. Jesus is saying, "Let Me into your life to do the maintenance that needs to be done. Let My body in, with their gifts, to help do the maintenance."

You may have a house in need of major repairs. Perhaps you consider yourself a Christian. The kingdom of God is within you, but there are some really broken-down lines and plumbing and roofs—God knows what else. You may have a run-down house, really ramshackle. A Christian house that hasn't been lived in for quite a while. Maybe an abandoned house, a house that still stands outwardly as a Christian, but the Lord, the master carpenter, has not been there for a while.

You may feel today that your house is a ruin. There has been so much devastation that's happened in recent years that nothing is really there anymore. You really wonder, as you're here today, whether God could ever build anything on the place of what is there.

THE EDIFICE COMPLEX

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

He can and He will. Jesus is here to meet us—whatever our life's needs are. He is here to begin the building up that you need. He is here to put His body to work, in participating with Him in the building, repairing, redecorating process. He is the God who builds up. He is the Lord of love and He seeks to come to you and to me this day.

Closing Prayer

Our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come to You in these moments, very conscious of what kind of a house we have in our spiritual life. We are aware that You see the state of the house. Jesus, the good carpenter, come to us now and show us anew Your master plan. Where there are foundations that need to be laid in faith—we ask, Lord Jesus, that they would be laid. The foundation of repentance toward God and faith in Christ. Where there are major support systems that have been taken out, causing a collapse in a roof or a ceiling, it may be, Lord, that there was some discipline in our life that was a support system, or maybe even some person who was a great spiritual support, and recently we have experienced that support being pulled out. Lord, come and place the support there again. Rebuild the house. May our lives be the temple of the Lord, the habitation of Your Spirit. Lord, come into us today. Build the home You want. Be at home in us. Help our outer rooms to radiate with a joy of Your company. Help the kitchen to reflect the joy of Your presence and the light of Your face, rather than the tedium and the anger and the hurt of the past. Help the study and the den to reflect Your mind. Help the bedroom to reflect Your grace and the quiet intimacy of Your presence. May every room in the house of our life be decorated with Your presence and graced with Your Spirit. We ask, through Jesus. Amen.