



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 14: 20-24

"Strange Tongues"

1 Corinthians

TRANSCRIPT

Well, we're continuing our studies in 1 Corinthians 14, and we're looking at verses 20 through 25. This subject of tongues. Paul writes: "Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written," and he's quoting here, Isaiah. But it's interesting that he calls it the Law. And so obviously, the word Law, or *nomos* in Greek, *torah*, in Hebrew refers to all of the Bible. Sometimes, that's the way it's used in Scripture, so you need to understand that when Christ speaks of fulfilling the Law and the prophets. He means the whole of the Bible, not just those sections of the Bible. And here, Paul is really speaking of the prophets, but he calls it the Law. Quoting Isaiah, "It is written, 'By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me,' says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you." May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, it is a great privilege to be here among Your people and opening Your word as we have done, reading it, and then considering the meaning of

the things that Paul has written, and the application to each and every one of us. One thing we are certainly reminded of from this particular passage, but really from the whole of chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians is the value and the importance of Your word, of Your revelation, because that's what the Bible is. It is Your inerrant word. It's Your revelation to man. You reveal things about Yourself, who You are, what Your plans are for mankind, for this world. Most importantly, who Your Son is, and that He is the way to heaven itself. He's the way to You. He is the source of eternal life. And so, we value this. We should value this.

Certainly, that is one of Paul's main lessons in this text. He's correcting an error. But in doing so, he is directing us to the importance of Your revelation. May we value it. May we apply ourselves to it. So, we look to You to bless us in that way. Certainly, that's a lesson that we must learn. But we pray that You would give us an understanding of Your revelation, and we thank You that You've given us the Spirit of God, every one of us has the Holy Spirit. Every believer in Jesus Christ does. He is our teacher, ultimately. He guides us in our thinking and He illuminates our minds and gives us an understanding of how Paul's words apply to each and every one of us. Some ways differently from others. Yet, the Spirit of God will enlighten us in that regard. So may we not be people who refuse that. May we not stiffen our hearts against Him, but bless us, and build us up in the faith, and make us teachable, and make us more and more like Jesus Christ. That's what we look for in this hour, that You would sanctify us, draw us to Yourself.

You have a message for us this morning. Bless it. Bless the message You gave to those here this morning in the Sunday school classes. Cultivate that truth in their hearts and give us all encouragement. And I pray that for the ministries that take place during the week. Whenever Your word is taught, bless Your people. Bless those who teach, bless those who listen.

And bless us materially, Lord. We've been reminded by Mark that we have a great privilege to pray for our friends and for fellow believers, and for others as well, Lord, for those who have asked for our prayers, and we do, Lord. We can't go every name in this moment, but You know the needs of everyone here. Bless them. Encourage them. Bless them physically. Bless their health. Bless their financial circumstances, the situations in life in which they find themselves. Some are very difficult. Some are without work. Some are sick. Some are just simply discouraged

from the pressures of life, the difficulties that they face either in the home or at work, or wherever they may be. Students can be discouraged by the studies they are engaged in. Encourage Your people. Give us diligence. Help us to resolve by Your grace and in Your power to live a life of obedience and one that brings glory to You. That's the great object of life. That's the great purpose of it all for us, Lord. That we live not for ourselves, not for our own pleasure, not for some goal of having ease and comfort at some point in our life, but that we live to Your glory. And You put us in difficult circumstances very often in life to prove our character and give us an opportunity to reflect Your glory and our trust in You. So, bless those who are in difficulty and encourage them, and enable them to live that kind of life. And Father, may our time together this morning be to that end, and may we all be encouraged and given a desire to live a life of glory to You. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] We sometimes speak of people losing perspective. That can be a big problem. I'll illustrate. You know what perspective is. It is the method of representing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface. It gives the appearance of depth to a picture. The ancient Greeks developed it. The Romans used it. It was important in art and architecture, in building things like the Colosseum. But when Rome fell, it was lost. Throughout the Middle Ages, the pictures that they produced were flat. They lacked proportion. It wasn't until the 15th century that an Italian named Filippo Brunelleschi rediscovered the mathematical laws of perspective. And then he was able to build the great dome in Florence.

Now, that was a case of the world losing perspective. At least, Europe losing perspective, literally. But, it happens figuratively to individuals all the time. We lose perspective. We lose sight of the big picture. We get lost in the details and we fail to see what is big and what is small, what is important and what is less important. It's easy to do. That's one reason we all need someone to give us perspective from time to time, someone who will correct us, someone who will come alongside when we're a little off the mark and tell us that we are, that we're not seeing things correctly.

Paul was doing that for the Corinthians. The church had lost perspective in the ministry and in the Christian life. It had been blessed greatly with all kinds of spiritual gifts. Paul had reminded them that, reminded them that at the very outset of

this book back in chapter 1 and verse 7. He said that the Corinthians were not lacking any gift. They were greatly blessed. But they were putting most of their emphasis on one gift, then a whole host of gifts.

But it was one gift that they valued above all others, and that was the gift of tongues. Not even the greatest of the gifts. Now, I say that, but it's understandable that they would do so. At least, understandable to me. The gift of tongues was the supernatural ability to speak foreign languages. A supernatural ability for a Greek to speak Latin or some Germanic dialect. Anyone who has struggled learning a language knows how thrilling it would be to be able to simply speak a foreign language. Wouldn't it be interesting to be able to sit down over a cup of coffee and speak to some Egyptian in Arabic about the events that are unfolding in Cairo, and be able to understand the nuances of the language? That's the gift of tongues. It is certainly an impressive gift. It was a supernatural gift. So, the Corinthians were understandably impressed with it. They were using it, and using it a lot to the exclusion of the other gifts. But they were not using it really properly. They were actually misusing it. They were not letting tongues be translated. So, no one knew what was being said.

As great as this gift was, as great as this blessing was, people weren't understanding the things that were being said. People were hearing a language but no one was learning the message. As a result, there was lots of confusion and there was no edification. And that's the whole point of spiritual gifts. God gives a variety of gifts to the church, to the church as a whole, but to individual congregations, the local body of Christ. He distributes gifts liberally, and He does so for the purpose of edification, for the purpose of strengthening the church.

Paul made that point and we've referred to it numerous times. I think it's somewhat of a guideline in our thinking about this gift of tongues: what it is, and what it is not. But back in chapter 12 and verse 7 where this whole discussion really begins, he said that gifts are for the common good. God gives every Christian a spiritual gift. Every one of you has a gift. But he doesn't give anyone a spiritual gift for personal use and enrichment.

Now, that may be the effect of having a gift. And no doubt, it is. If you use your gift, and you use it properly, you're going to be blessed by it. You're going to be encouraged by it. But that's not the point; that's an effect. But the purpose of it is not

for personal enrichment or enhancement. God has given the church, and each and every one of us, spiritual gifts for the common good, for the edification of the church for the purpose of building up the body of Christ and the faith. It enables us to serve one another effectively.

Now, that's been the main lesson in this part of the book. The importance of edification, of helping people grow in the faith and become more mature as Christians. That wasn't happening in the church at Corinth. People were using the gift excessively and for the wrong reason, for personal enhancement, perhaps. They were using it for selfish reasons. They were showing off.

So, in the midst of Paul's instruction on ministry and spiritual gifts, he teaches them what he calls a "more excellent way" in chapter 13. It's the way of love. Love, he says, does not seek its own. It seeks the benefit of others. There's no place for selfishness, for self-promotion, or grandstanding in the church. The Corinthians had lost sight of that. As a result, they were doing everything from a wrong motive, and for the wrong reason, and for the wrong purpose.

So, Paul now explains two things in regard to the gift of tongues. He explains the purpose of the gift and the procedure of the gift. That is, the way it was to be used. He explains the procedure in verses 26 through 33 where he says there is to be a certain order in the use of the gift. People are to speak one at a time and each is to be interpreted. Tongues is to be interpreted. If there's no interpreter, then the gift is of no value. People are not going to understand what's being said. And so if there's no interpreter, he tells them to remain silent. Don't use the gift. There's no point in speaking if it is unintelligible. Again, the emphasis is on edification, and there will be no edification without understanding, and Paul will stress that in the verses to come.

But first, he explains the specific purpose of the gift. And interestingly, he says that it is not for believers. The gift of tongues is for unbelievers. It is a sign to them. Now, that's verses 21 through 25. That's our passage this morning. But before he does that, before he gives the purpose of this gift, he tells them what their fundamental problem is: they had lost perspective. "Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature." In other words, you're not mature. You're not behaving like an adult.

Now, that was certainly a blow to the pride of these Corinthians. They considered themselves to be wise and sophisticated. They were polyglots. Meaning,

they knew lots of languages. They spoke all kinds of languages. And here Paul tells them that they needed to stop acting like children. It was the last thing they thought they were doing. They thought they were being quite sophisticated. But he says no, you're acting like children. He blunts the blow, so to speak, by calling them brethren, but he did that not simply to be tactful, but because they were. They were all in the family of God. They were brothers and sisters in Christ. And his correction was given out of a genuine brotherly concern for them. We all need that. Even the most gifted in the church needs someone to give perspective, give correction at times. The Book of Proverbs tells us that. You know, you've read through it. And if you remember the series we had in that some time ago, there's a great deal of emphasis on being that kind of friend to those around us, being willing to correct our brothers and sisters when they need that. It's filled with those kinds of aphorisms, those kinds of wise sayings on the value of correction. Proverbs 27 verse 6. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."

Correction, obviously, is not always pleasant. It's a wound, in a sense, but it's a wound for the good. Proverbs 25 verse 15. "By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded and a soft tongue breaks the bone." The point is: persuasion to do good. Persuade people to do that. Do it in a tactful way. Do it in a proper way. The best way to persuade someone to change, it's not with a harsh word, but it's with a soft word. Paul was doing that here. He calls them what they were, but he makes a point of calling them brethren.

Still, they needed the truth even if it hurt, and perhaps that reference to them as brethren wouldn't blunt the blow altogether. But that's okay. They needed to know what he was telling them. And the truth was, while brethren, also being children. Children in the way they were thinking, children in the way they were acting. They were immature.

How do children think? What attracts their attention? Well, they like things that glitter and things that amuse. They'll almost always choose something sugary over something nutritious. I have to confess I'm a little bit like children in that regard. I was thinking about that, what am I eating here for breakfast? They'll pick something shiny over something dull. They'll be more inclined to pick a silver gum wrapper over a green wrinkled dollar bill. They're attracted to the spectacular, so to speak. They're not able to distinguish what is of real value and what isn't of real value. So,

they will choose the things that appear costly or grab their attention rather than what is really of true value.

And the Corinthians were really doing that. They showed a sense of values or lack of values by preferring the sensational to the more substantial, to the spectacular gift of tongues, to gifts like prophecy and teaching. Paul calls that foolish. He calls that childish. He indicated that, that tongues was not the most important gift by telling them to earnestly desire the greater gifts. Well, obviously, tongues is not one of the greater gifts. It may have been popular in that church and in that time, but it's not the greater gift. So he says, especially to desire prophecy. They can all understand prophecy. At least, they can understand the words that they may need to give a great deal of thought to what is being said, but they can understand the words. It's not a mystery to them. No one can understand tongues. Not without an interpreter. So, their fascination with it was not due to the benefit they received, but to the excitement that it gave.

Now, I made this point last week, but it is important to be clear about what Paul was correcting and what he was not correcting. What was and what was not the problem in Corinth? The Corinthians were not speaking ecstatically in heavenly or angelic languages. That's sometimes the way the gift of tongues is described, or assumed to be the case. That's not what was taking place. Paul was not correcting what we today would call counterfeit gifts. The Corinthians were using a genuine gift. They were speaking in human languages. The biblical gift of tongues is the supernatural ability to speak an unlearned foreign language, a human language. Acts chapter 2 and the event of the day of Pentecost defined the gift of tongues in that way. If you want to understand what tongues was, don't look at some of these modern churches today that are engaging in this kind of ecstatic behavior. Go to the Book of Acts. Go to 1 Corinthians. Go to the New Testament.

The explanation that is given is that it is a known language. That's what took place. That's what we see in Acts chapter 2 that took place on the day of Pentecost. The people who witnessed this phenomenon of these different languages being spoken described them as that. They are speaking in dialects, they said. They were speaking known languages. And the wonder of it was that these were Galileans who were doing it. These were uneducated, simple, common people who were speaking eloquently in foreign languages. People could understand their own language from

these people, and they knew that they had not been educated. They knew they had not been trained. So, they saw that this was a supernatural event.

That was what was happening in Corinth. The problem was: the tongues were unintelligible not because they were ecstatic, non-languages, but because they were not being translated or interpreted. Now, I might add that if that's the case, if Paul would say, "Don't practice this gift if you're not going to interpret it. Don't practice the gift of speaking a known language if it's not going to be interpreted." Then, by implication, it was certainly applied to what's going on in these churches where they're not even speaking a known language and no one's understanding them.

Now, in verse 21, he gives further proof of that that this is a known language in defining the kind of gift that he is speaking about and correcting. Where Paul speaks of strange tongues, he wasn't referring to gibberish or non-languages, but to the real language of the Assyrians. What Paul was doing is explaining the purpose of tongues by quoting Isaiah 28 verse 11. He refers to it as the "the Law," but he means the Bible. The Old Testament, to us. He's referring though here, he's quoting Isaiah 28 verse 11, which is a prophecy of the Assyrian invasion of Judah. It was a prophecy of judgment given in response to Israel's refusal to believe the Word of God.

The nation was in a crisis. The Assyrian army was threatening both the northern and the southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Both were ripe for judgment. They were wicked. They were idolatrous. They refused to repent. And Judah, the southern kingdom, in fact, was looking to Egypt for help rather than turning to the Lord. Isaiah warned the people not to do that. They were not to look to others. They were to look to the Lord instead, but they would not listen. They would not hear the Word of God. They in fact mocked Isaiah's words.

So, he said, in effect, since they would not listen to God's word, they would be made to listen to foreign words. And here in verse 21, Paul quotes the prophecy. "In the Law it is written, 'By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,' says the Lord." So, the Assyrians would come up to the very walls of Jerusalem before God would deliver them. Later, the Babylonians would knock down the walls and carry them off into captivity. They did not listen. But when those nations came, and the people heard foreign languages, they would be reminded of this prophecy. The strange tongues

would be a sign that judgment had come, that it had arrived. It was at the walls of the city. It was at the gates.

Well, later in verse 16, Isaiah gives the prophecy of the coming of Christ. He describes Him as a costly cornerstone that God laid in Zion, and all who believe in Him will not be disturbed. The foreign armies were coming and they were going to disturb the city and the people. But, if those who put their faith in the Messiah to come, he says they will not be disturbed. But still, many didn't believe. And that, too had been prophesied in Psalm 118 verse 22. David wrote of the stone which the builders rejected. It's the chief cornerstone. It's Christ that he's referring to. And the nation's rejection of Him, rejection of their Messiah is the ultimate rejection of God's word.

So, strange tongues, which were a sign of judgment at the Tower of Babel, and a sign of judgment at Israel's destruction, and later at Judah's captivity, is the sign of judgment for rejecting Christ. That that's what Paul indicates in verse 22. So then, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers. But prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe. That's a straightforward explanation. The gift of tongues is a sign to unbelievers, not to believers. The Corinthians were using it for themselves, and tongues were not for them. It's for unbelievers. And from the context, it is especially a sign to Jewish unbelievers, and that gift was especially appropriate in Corinth where there was a large and very active synagogue and has Jews there, and other places throughout the empire, heard Christians miraculously speaking unlearned languages that communicated a message of judgment, but also a message of hope, a message of forgiveness. They would have been greatly affected by that. It was clearly supernatural, and that supernatural aspect of it confirmed the truth of the message that was spoken. That's the purpose of tongues. It was a sign given to confirm unbelief and lead unbelievers to faith.

Now, that should correct a lot of mistaken ideas about tongues. It's not the necessary proof of a person's salvation. It's not the necessary proof that a person has received the Holy Spirit, as some teach. There is no such thing as the second blessing, where a person then receives the Holy Spirit, and then gains this new ability to live a victorious Christian life. Paul stated back in chapter 12 and verse 13 that "we were all baptized into one body and all made to drink of one Spirit." That's true of

every believer in Jesus Christ. He doesn't leave anyone out. He says we all were baptized into one body. All made to drink of one Spirit.

Paul wrote something very similar to that in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 13 where he states that having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. At the moment of faith, the person has the Holy Spirit. At the moment of faith, a person is sealed with the Spirit and can never lose the Spirit, and can never lose the salvation that he or she has received. It's faith that is necessary, not tongues. Tongues is not necessary for a greater power in the Christian life or for Christian service. Nowhere is that stated to be the purpose of the gift of tongues.

What Paul explained in chapter 12 verses 10 and 11 is that not everyone has the gift of tongues. All the gifts are given sovereignly by the Holy Spirit as He wills, not as we ask. A person may desire to have a particular gift. That doesn't mean that he or she is going to receive that gift. God determines the gift that we should have and how we are to function in the Body of Christ. Now, we're to desire the greater gift, but that means desire their use. Be looking for that and encouraging the use of the greater gifts in the service of the church, but we don't gain those personal gifts by our desire. It's according to the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit.

So, the gift of tongues, just as the gift of prophecy or the gift of helps, or the gift of faith, or the gift of teaching, was given to some, but not to all. Given individually. The gift of tongues was not intended for everyone, only for those to whom the Spirit chose to give it. If it were necessary for spiritual life, if the gift of tongues were necessary for our personal development, if we can only have power to succeed and have victory in the Christian life by having the gift of tongues, Paul would not have told people to not seek that gift. He would've told them to seek it.

He does the opposite. He told the Corinthians to seek the greater gifts, not tongues. Still, people have tried to prove the private use of tongues from this page. For example, from verses 18 and 19, where Paul said that he speaks in tongues more than all of them, but he would rather speak five words of intelligible speech than 10,000 words in a tongue. So, the argument is made that since he spoke in tongues, and he spoke in tongues a lot, he evidently didn't speak them in church, in the meeting of the church. He must've spoken them in private.

But, it seems to me that's a case of proving too much. Paul nowhere says that he used tongues in private prayer. It doesn't say that he did that here. It doesn't say

that he didn't speak it in church. I assume he spoke it where it was supposed to be used, and used it according to the rules that he laid down here. He wasn't telling the Corinthians not to use the gift in the service of the church, not saying that he didn't. His point is: I'm not going to use it if it can't be interpreted. That's what he's prohibiting here. Tongues without the use of a translator. That was the problem in Corinth: not using the gift of tongues, but speaking in tongues without an interpreter.

So, what he was saying was: if I were to speak paragraphs in eloquent Persian, but no one understood Persian, it would be pointless. No profit. None at all. So, unless there is a translator, unless there is an interpreter, someone with that gift, it's better to speak a short sentence of five words that are understood than a long eloquent message that no one understands. The point is, and again, this is the point that Paul has been making all through this portion of the book: for a ministry to be truly a ministry, for it to truly minister to us, to edify us, it must be understood. That's the reason he says prophecy is the greater gift. It gave revelation that people would understand. That's what people needed. That's what was being neglected in Corinth, and I suspect that's largely why they were not growing, why in chapter 3 he says you're still children. You need milk. I can't give you meat. That they needed what we all need, which is, very simply, the Word of God.

And in the day before the canon of the New Testament was complete, the New Testament prophet gave new New Testament revelation. So, Paul now draws a conclusion in verse 23. And remember, the problem is not the use of tongues. It is the use of tongues without an interpreter. He says, "Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?" Well, the answer that he expects is yes. And why? Well, because these people who come in, these people who are ungifted, I assume that means unbelievers, but interested, and then simply unbelievers come in. They won't understand what's being said. They won't understand what's happening. No one will. Not even the Corinthian believers. It will all be completely incoherent. The unbeliever will miss the meaning of the sign and will not be brought to conviction of his unbelief and his sin because no interpretation of the tongue is given, and the message of repentance is not understood or heard.

So, instead of being convicted or favorably impressed by what he or she witnessed there in the church, they'd leave the meeting in disgust or maybe even in

amusement, thinking they've just visited bedlam. We've been to a madhouse. So again, Paul recommends prophecy over tongues because if an unbeliever should enter the meeting and hear prophecy, here revelation, then they will be convicted. That's what the Word of God does. It convicts in unusual ways. It may not be an explicitly evangelical message. Maybe something, maybe a message on tongues, and an unbeliever hears it, and God uses that to convict them in some way. The Word of God does that. The Word of God produces conviction, an understanding of one's need of the Savior. It does that in the hearts of people; it does that supernaturally.

Verse 25. "The secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you." That's the power of the Word of God. That's really the description, this description of power that is given of the Word of God in Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 12. It is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. It divides between the soul and the spirit. It judges the thoughts and the intents of the heart. It does that like nothing else can. It is unique in that regard. I've said this before. I say it again. This book is unique. This book is supernatural. It does a supernatural work in the hearts of people when it is taught. Scripture analyzes us accurately, and that can be painful.

It was for the Roman governor Felix. Remember that interview that he had with the apostle Paul in Acts chapter 24? Paul spoke to him about sin and judgment. And Luke writes that Felix trembled. He stopped the conversation and he never returned to it. It told him more about himself than he cared to know. Maybe that was one reason that the Corinthians preferred hearing people speak languages they didn't understand to hearing things that they did understand. They could come to church and not be troubled by the things they heard. The Bible can do that. The Bible can be very troubling.

But it's not just troubling. It is encouraging. It brings conviction. It tells us what is wrong with us. It puts its finger on the heart of the problem. It shows us where we need to change. But it also gives the solution. And it gives power. The Bible is alive, and it will always have its intended effect. Whenever we teach it, we as teachers and preachers may not see an effect before our eyes. It may even be discouraged sometimes by what we see. But the assurance that we have is that the Word of God never goes out, and returns empty. That's what Isaiah wrote. Isaiah 55

verse 11. He says that God's word does not go forth and return empty without accomplishing what I desire, God said.

Tongues did that. Unbelievers witnessed people miraculously speaking unlearned languages. And when it was translated, when they heard a message, that produced conviction. It may not have always led to conversion, but it did sometimes according to God's will. It did on the day of Pentecost. 3,000 Jews were saved on that day. From all over the world. And, God can do that today with His word where tongues are not spoken. But He does do that, and He did that with that gift. Now, it had to be used in the right way and at the right time. The Corinthians weren't doing that; that was the problem. They were overusing this gift and they were misusing this gift, and they were doing all of that to the neglect of the greater gifts: prophecy, teaching.

What had happened is they'd lost perspective, and they saw things in the wrong proportion. They were too fascinated with the sensational, for the things that glittered, and not enough interested in the reasonable: that which takes some thought and some effort. Word of God is reasonable, and it is the most important thing for you and for me. It gives us real perspective on life. It analyzes us as nothing else can. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, Jeremiah said.

Who can know it? You know what the answer to that is? The answer to Jeremiah's question: who can know the heart? Who can know the mind of a man? No one. Psychiatrists can put you on a couch and analyze you and use Freudian perspective on things and never understand the nature of your heart and your condition. But the Word of God knows it. The Word of God is that which unveils things, unmask us. It gets to the heart of us. It speaks to us in private. That's what. It diagnoses us. It is reasonable. And as I say, it's the most important thing for God's people. It's what gives us perspective on life.

It's the vanishing point. The vanishing point is what determines perspective in a picture. We know it from geometry and from drawing diagrams, or simply drawing pictures and learning how to draw them with some perspective. All the straight lines in a drawing recede and converge to that single point on the horizon line. That's the vanishing point. And all the objects as a result of those lines going to that one point on the horizon line have the appearance of some depth. That's necessary in order to get right perspective in a picture, and that's what the Bible is for us. That's what it

does for us. It determines the direction of our lives, how all of the lines, the things that interest us, our activities in life: business, family, hobbies, how all of those things converge and relate to one another. It gives us perspective and it shows us what is big and what is small, what is important and what is not important. Without it, without the Bible, without that as the so-called vanishing point, we have no perspective. All of life gets out of proportion, and we live foolish lives.

So, do you want foolishness in your life or do you want wisdom in your life? Do you want to be mature? Do you want to be relevant? Do you want to have an influence for good in your family at work, at church, wherever you are? Do you want that? I'm sure you do. We all want that. Well then, we must make the Scriptures, the Word of God, what Paul is calling prophecy, but what we would broaden to all of the revelation of God, this book, we must make that it important. It must be the priority. That's where the Corinthians failed. They valued other things more than God's revelation, more than His word.

But only God's word, the Bible, corrects our thinking. It's the lamp to our feet. It alone can lead us to fall on our face and worship God. But it may be that there are some here who've never worshipped God. You don't know Him. He's revealed Himself in the Bible, and what He has revealed is that He is just, He judges sin, but He's also love. He's merciful to all who come to Him in faith and trust in Him, and He has revealed Himself in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Savior. And the promises that all who come to Him, who believe in Him, who offered Himself as a sacrifice for sinners, who paid the price for the sin of everyone who believes in Him, that they will be saved. At that moment of faith, they'll be sealed with the Holy Spirit. They'll be justified. They'll be declared righteous, and fully and completely accepted by God at that moment, and for all eternity. You know, we can never become more acceptable to God than we are at the moment of faith. We can grow as Christians, but we are fully and completely absolved of all sin at that moment and considered 100 percent righteous and perfect in His sight. The rest of our lives are spent developing and maturing and becoming increasingly like that declaration, but that's legally what we are before Him. Fully accepted. You come to faith in Jesus Christ, and you can rest in that for all eternity. May God help you to do that and help all of us to rejoice in the salvation we have, and to apply ourselves to learning more and more about Him through His word, through His revelation. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we give You thanks for Your word. May we sense the importance of it. This is a unique book. These 66 books are unique. Nothing like this in all the world. It's Your revelation. So much more to know about You than what we have here, and we'll spend all eternity learning more about You. But, enough is here, and more than we can ever comprehend in this life. So help us to apply ourselves to it, and in so doing, experiencing the transformation that comes through the study of Your word, becoming more and more like Your Son, and more and more useful to one another. Bless us in this way, we pray, and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.