Tongues

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Preacher: Rev J.M.Macpherson

[0:00] Let us turn again to the chapter which we read in the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 14, reading at verse 23.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?
But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all, and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest.
And so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you, or among you, of a truth. It's obvious that in these chapters, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, that Paul deals with the question of church order in the church in Corinth, but there is a great deal that is unclear. Indeed, a great deal of his teaching that gives rise to different viewpoints, and to a certain amount of controversy. And this, of course, is true in a particular way with regard to this whole question of speaking in tongues.
[1:31] Now, it's not my intention this evening to deal with this topic. It is hardly relevant with regard to the reason for our meeting together as we prepare for gathering together at the Lord's table in his will to monitor.

What I would like to do is, taking these verses as a basis, to consider some of the Apostle Paul's teaching with regard to our church gatherings, our meeting together as a church for worship, and that, of course, includes our meeting together for the Lord's Supper.
Indeed, at communion season such as these, we have a whole series of services. We may have five or six or seven services we gather together in the church.
And it is good that, in the light of the Word of God, we examine our gathering together. We consider what is the reason for it, and whether we are receiving the type of blessing that the Apostle Paul indicates in these and other verses.
And I'd like to suggest four vital aspects of our church gatherings, of our meetings for worship, that the Apostle Paul brings before us here.
[3:02] And it would be good that we, as individuals and as a congregation, set our own worship, individual and congregational, under the light of the Word of God, as it is brought to us here.

The first of these principles that the Apostle Paul brings to us here is this very simple one that we are all in agreement with, but it is good that we remind ourselves of it.
It is simply this, that Christians met together as a church. That in these apostolic days, as down to our days, Christians gathered week by week in order to worship God in the house of God.
Now we know full well that Christianity is not church-going, that it is possible to attend the Lord's house week by week, that it is possible to be at all the services of a communion season, and yet in our Christian experience to be sadly lacking.
Christianity is not church-going. But nonetheless, it is significant that here, at the very outset of the Christian church, in the New Dispensation, that Christians are found gathering together in regular fashion to worship God.
[4:29] Some of you may be familiar with the debate that some years ago, I don't know if it's still continuing in evangelical circles, the debate that went on where a contrast was set up between what was called the gathered and the scattered church.

And there were those in evangelical circles who said that our church gatherings, our meetings for worship, were not so important after all. But the important thing is the scattered church.
Believers here and there, at their places of work, in their homes, in their neighborhoods, there bearing their witness for Jesus Christ. And the little informal meetings in the homes and so on, that these were the heart of the church and of Christian witness.

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Now we would never deny that there is a great deal of truth in that, that we must be Christians wherever we are, and that we should seek in every place to worship God.
But the Word of God makes very clear that there is a gathered church, and that there is a place for Christians, particularly on the Sabbath day, to gather as a church and to worship God.
[5:49] And it is disturbing if one finds, as one has found in evangelical circles, that the regular, stated, weekly worship of the church of God is the mean.

The Apostle Paul tells us that they met as a church. And this, I think, must have been very significant in those days when the Apostle Paul wrote.
You remember how many of the Christians in those days were of a very low and humble social status. Many were slaves. It's reckoned that in the church in Rome, a very large proportion of the Christians would be slaves.
No five-day week for them. Not even a six-day week. And yet, in spite of the difficulties that were involved, they knew that it was their Christian privilege, as it was their Christian duty, week by week, to gather, to make the effort to come to the house of God, that they might worship Him.
Now, there may well be exceptions. There may be Christians in solitary places who cannot gather with their fellow believers. But, of course, as you and I well know, and as tonight we thank God for, that tomorrow we can gather, as a congregation, as a people of God, on the Lord's day, and in the Lord's house, it would certainly not be our desire to forsake the gathering of ourselves together as the manner of some means.
[7:29] But I don't need to dwell further on this point. We accept it. But it is good that we recognize it once again as so central to the teaching of the Word of God.

Then the second principle that the Apostle Paul sets before us here I'd suggest is this, that Christians found excitement in their worship.
I wouldn't say that excitement is necessarily the best word, but it's the best one I can think of at the moment, that Christians found excitement when they gathered together to worship God.
That, of course, was part of the problem in Corinth, that the believers were meeting together and they were so excited, some of them, about the great gifts that they had and about the reality of the worship that they had, that there was disorder.
There was confusion in their worship. But certainly, while it's true that there was confusion and the Apostle Paul seeks to put order into the confusion, it is true that they looked forward to their church services.
[8:38] The whole church comes together, says the Apostle Paul, and in their enthusiasm, they're speaking with tongues. In their enthusiasm, various ones are taking part. They want to hear the Word of God.

They want to worship God. There are things to be criticized, but there is this desire to meet with God and to meet in the house of God. There was no dragging of the feet for these early Christians. There was no feeling that they would be bored when they went to the house of God. There was no desire that the service would not be too long or that perhaps it might be uninteresting or dry.
The Christians, as you read through this chapter, it's quite obvious, they went with enthusiasm and with expectation to the house of God. In the book of Acts, we're told that the early Christians, when they met together, they met with gladness and singleness of heart.
And you remember how the Apostle Paul, at the end of his brief visit to Troas, he was due to leave the next day, and yet the Christians urged him to have yet one more meeting.
[9:50] And there was that late night meeting that went on and on, that prolonged itself. The deep desire of the believers that they might meet in worship, that they might gather together around the Word of God.

the expectation that, yet again, there would be something from God, there would be blessing for their souls, there would be that that would excite them, and that would fill their hearts and minds.
And of course, we must pause, and ask ourselves, if that is true of us. As this congregation meets tomorrow, and particularly around the Lord's table, as you and I examine our own hearts, is there this eagerness?
Is there this excitement, to use that word? What is there to be more excited about than the fact of our great redemption in Christ, and the reality of the Holy Spirit who indwells the Lord's people, and the fact that tomorrow, yet again, the bread and the wine will be there that will point us to the greatest thing that ever happened in the history of this universe, the death and the resurrection of

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the Son of God?
Ought we not to come with gladness and singleness of heart, but do we? Will you? That surely is something that, in our free church services, is borne in on us again and again as we sing these psalms.
[11:20] It's a constant note in the psalms that the psalmist, whether it were David or another of the psalmist, you find it in psalms by different authors, that there is this great expectancy, there is this great joy as they come together into the house of God.

Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house and the place where thine honour dwelleth, says David in Psalm 26. Or again, in those verses we sang, one thing I have desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.
And you'll notice that the psalmists, as in this chapter, are not speaking simply of the daily experience of the believer as he lives in communion with God.
We should know something of this blessing of daily fellowship with him. But they are speaking particularly of the gathering together of God's people to worship him, particularly on his day, the service that God in his mercy will grant to us tomorrow.
Or again, how often we sing, I joyed when to the house of God. Go up, they said to me, Jerusalem within thy gates, our feet shall standing be.
[12:44] Or that 84th psalm that we sang, the psalmist said that he would prefer to be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of sin.

How pleasant, he said, are the tabernacles of thy grace to me. Then, let us examine our own hearts and our own attitudes.
We are coming here to worship God. We will gather tomorrow to worship God. We will come into this very building. We will come some around the table of the Lord.
With what attitude do we come? Do we expect this kind of blessing that Paul speaks of, that the psalmist sang of? And it should be true of every aspect of our worship.
You remember how the psalmist in Psalm 42 when he's out in his exile and he's not able to worship as he normally does.
[13:51] He thinks back the times when he could meet with God's people. And there he is thinking, of course, particularly of meeting with God, but he's thinking of the aspect of fellowship.

With them, God's people, with them, into God's house I went, with voice of joy and praise, yea, with the multitude that kept the solemn holy days.
To be able to gather with God's people, that should be a source of blessing to us. Not something formal, not something simply that we repeat week by week, but something that with gladness of heart we look forward to.
Oh, how wonderful to meet with God's people in God's house, on God's day, and tomorrow at God's table. or even, even what we might term the less important aspects of our fellowship.
Think of the very offerings, the collections that we give. And it's significant how you can read through in the Old Testament and in the New and find the sense of thrill and excitement that the Christians and God's people had as they gave.
[14:59] You remember how in the days of Moses, the people had to be restrained from giving. They gave with such gladness and enthusiasm. We're told again in Chronicles in the days of David how the people, they rejoiced because they offered willingly.

And again in the days of Joash, there's a reference to the joy and the enthusiasm with which God's people gathered together to worship him, to give to him, and to receive from him.
but above all, the excitement and the joy is in this that God's people meet with God. The last verse of our text tells us that this man who wandered in he goes out and says that God is among you of a truth, the Lord in the midst.
So there then is the second principle. The first is that the Christians met together as a church. The second is that the Christians found excitement and joy in their worship.
And then there's a third principle that we can draw from these verses and it is that unbelievers came to their services. unbelievers came to these worship services of the Christian church in Corinth.
[16:25] Now of course we know that unbelievers normally come to our services when they're invited. Remember how Moses said to Hobad, come with us and we will do you good.

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And you and I who are Christian people should continually be seeking to say that to the world around us, to our neighbors, to our workmates. Come with us and we will do you good.
Not we of ourselves but the God whom we serve. But in this case it doesn't seem to be so much that the man concerned that speaks of a particular unbeliever here that he was invited.
Rather he seems to have come in of his own accord. Let's read again at verse 23. If therefore the whole church become together into one place and all speak with tongues and there come in those that are unlearned or unbelievers will they not say that ye are mad?
But if all prophesy and there come in one that believeth not or one unlearned he is convinced of all.
Here were the Christian people gathering for their worship service as in the mercy of God we shall do tomorrow.
[17:40] And they're crowding in through the place of worship. And here is this man speaks of one unbeliever and he's walking along. There's no indication here that he's invited maybe someone at the door did invite him but it may be that this man is walking along and perhaps he's in trouble or in need.

Perhaps somebody near and dear to him is very ill. Perhaps he's had a believement. Perhaps he's unemployed. He doesn't know how things are going to go with him.
Whatever it be he sees these people going in and he doubtless says to himself well maybe there's something there. Maybe there's an answer to my need in that place.
And we might notice in passing what an important part every Christian person plays by the mere fact of coming to the house of God.
When the world outside sees that there are more and more attending a place of worship they're bound to take notice. How important this is for our young people. How important that Christian young people should not neglect the services of the house of God but come as often as they can because as they come then other young people will see well it's not a strange thing to go to church.
[19:05] You and I know full well that in the world in which we live the society of which we form a part today the vast majority of the young people would think the church is outmoded.

But to go to a place of worship is completely irrelevant. Ah but if there are young people who are going then they will see and as in this case they will be encouraged to come to the house of God.
And so this man he goes into the place of worship and it's obvious that the apostle Paul considers that it is desperately important what impression he forms there in that place of worship.
Now you and I might be tempted to say that's not the important thing. We go to the house of God to worship God. We don't go to make an impression on the outsider and that of course is profoundly true.
We go to worship God and to meet with God. But at the same time we cannot forget this man or these men and women because the apostle Paul obviously considered that it was of vital importance what they would think, how they would react when they saw Christian worship.
[20:24] Whether it be the preaching of the word, whether it be the administration of the sacraments, whatever it be. He says if this unbeliever, if they come in unlearned or unbelievers and they see the way you're carrying on in Corinth, will they not say that you're mad?

And the apostle Paul says we can't have that. We can't have Christian worship considered in that light. It's important that you so worship God that this man, instead of saying that you're all mad, he will be convinced of all, he will be judged of all, and he will fall down on his face and worship God.
You find exactly the same attitude expressed in verse 16, where Paul, again speaking of the type of service, uncontrolled, that they had there in Corinth, he says, elsewhere, when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest.
You must so gather what you do, what you preach, when you administer the sacraments, when you sing praise to God, it must be done in such a way and with such a spirit, that even these outsiders will be conscious of the fact that God is there and that they will hear the word of God.
Now, of course, the impression that was given in Corinth was that of uncontrolled frenzy, and this is obviously one of the reasons why the apostle Paul writes at such length on this subject.
[22:00] He tells them, as we read in the last verse, that they should do all things decently and in order. But I wonder, as you and I worship God, as we gather, whether it be at our normal week by week services with the preaching of the word, or whether it be at a communion service where we have the preaching of the word, and also visibly this word set forth in the sacrament.

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I wonder what these outsiders would think there. What would be the impression that they would have of our services of worship? Well, it wouldn't be of uncontrolled frenzy, we know that.
I wonder if it would be of deadness and dryness. I wonder if it would be of just carrying out the custom.
I wonder if it would be as we meet together tomorrow at the Lord's table. Well, that's what these people always do. That's their custom. That's the kind of thing they do.
I wonder if, as you and I gather at the Lord's table in the spirit of expectancy and of prayer, that those who are not yet in Christ, that they would be compelled to say that although they do not understand fully, that nonetheless they can see that there is reality.
[23:24] They can see that those people, that they are doing something that means so much to them, and that is deeply penetrating into their very being, and that although he doesn't know God, he has made conscious that the Lord is there in the midst.

Unbelievers came to their services, and they come to ours. It may be that at a communion Sabbath, they are less than usual, at least in some of our congregations, perhaps here, that they will be there.
And although this is a preparation for the Lord's people, yet let us remember and let us be in prayer, that as you and I show forth the Lord's death, that men and women such as the one Paul speaks of here would be enabled to sense the reality of God.
Then there's a final principle that I suggest that the Apostle Paul brings to us here, and it is this, not only that unbelievers came to their services, but that unbelievers were converted to God.
But in these Christian worship services in the early church, even there in Corinth where there were so many problems, unbelievers were being converted by the work of the Holy Spirit and brought to God actually in their worship services.
[24:58] That's what happened here. you see it in verse 24, if all prophesy and there come in one that believeth not, here's this unbeliever, he's not yet a Christian, but by what he sees, by what he hears, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all, and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest.

And what's the result? Falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is among you of a truth. There is something in that service of Christian worship that compels him himself to worship God.
Now what is it? Well, no doubt there are various elements. There is no doubt the whole sense of the presence and the power and the holiness of God that he is aware of in this Christian gathering.
but there is one particular thing that is stressed to us and it is this, it is what the Apostle Paul calls prophesying. And obviously from the context we recognize that this is the communication and the explanation and exposition of the word of God.
It's certainly true that in apostolic times, before the word of God was fully written, that there were those given the special gift of prophesying until the word of God should be complete as we have it now in all its fullness.
[26:28] And so, whether it be in that context or in ours, it's obvious that the Apostle is speaking particularly of the preaching and teaching of the word of God.

And let us remember that this word of God is not only preached as we preach it here, but that it is shown forth in the Lord's Supper in a practical and visible way.
There the gospel is likewise being preached. And so the Apostle tells us that this man, as he comes into a Christian service, he hears the word of God preached.
Well, it may be that before he came in, he never thought of these things. It may be that he never thought of sin or of salvation. But here he is, hearing the word of God, and we are told that he is convinced of all.
Now this word convinced is exactly the same word that our Lord uses when he speaks of the Holy Spirit. He tells us in John 16 that the Holy Spirit, when he comes, will reprove or convict or convince, it's the same word, that he will reprove of the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.
[27:46] So there's a reference to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. As the word is preached, the Holy Spirit is applying it, and things are happening in men's hearts. We're also told that he is judged of all.

And the word judged has the idea of examined. In fact, it's the very same word that is used when Festus, speaking of the prisoner, Paul, and before Agrippa, he says, now, after examination had, I

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want to be able to give a report to Caesar.
And it's the same word, judgment, examination, a complete examination of the man, of what he thinks, of what he believes. And surely the reference here is to the fact that as this man hears the word of God preached, that he is turned, as it were, inside out.
his motives are laid bare. His thoughts are likewise laid bare. In fact, that's what the apostle tells us. Thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest.
Now, that doesn't mean, of course, that this man begins to have, as it were, an open confession session in the congregation, that he starts manifesting publicly the secrets of his heart.
[29:07] I don't think that's what the apostle means at all, but rather that the secrets of his heart are made manifest to himself. He had never realized this before, that he was a sinner.

He had never realized the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He had probably never thought of judgment to come, but here this is being made plain to him.
He is being, the secrets of his heart, his own sin and his own need, they are being made manifest to him. And all this, my dear friends, happens in a normal service of the Christian church, what you and I are praying for, or should be praying for week by week, and particularly as we meet tomorrow, and remember that same death.
Let it be your prayer as it is mine, that as we receive blessing, we trust by God's grace that we will at his table, that there will also be blessing for those who will not be at the table, but whom the Holy Spirit will be convicting and judging.
And this surely is what we should expect at all our worship services, but do we? Is it not all too easy to get into the habit of seeing so few conversions?
[30:27] There has come a call, it hasn't been put in the monthly record yet, but ministers have received information about a day of fasting and humiliation in the month of January.

And one of the points that is made in the explanation of this is that if we are honest, we must recognize that there are very few conversions in our midst.
and it's all too easy to expect it. We've seen so few, and particularly at our church services. But the Apostle Paul tells us that this should be normal, that this should be what we expect, that the unbeliever should come in, and such is the power of the word of God and the sense of the holiness of God in the service of God's house.
There is conviction recognition, and that there is a recognition of the reality of God and a worshipping of him. I'm sure many of you are familiar with that classic of our highland religious life in the past century, Religious Life in Ross by the Reverend John Noble of Laird.
Mr. Noble in that book tells the case of a certain man in the parish of Roskine in Allness. And it's so much to the point, I feel, with regard to what we're talking about here, that I'd like to read the quotation.
[31:56] It's a rather lengthy quotation, but I feel that it's one that we would do well to heed. Mr. Noble tells us as follows. A farmer, William Monroe, had newly married.

His wife was a godly person, but he, while leading a decent life and walking circumspectly, had not at that time been brought to think seriously of his soul's salvation.
He attended church with perfect regularity, but his religion had no hold of his heart. Not long after his marriage, to his astonishment, he found his weekday practices clearly presented to him from the pulpit on the Sabbath.
He was surprised at this, and could not conceive how it was that the minister came to know of his daily ongoings. In frequently thinking over this curious and, to him, annoying circumstance, he came to the conclusion that someone must have been informing the preacher, for otherwise, how would it be possible for him to describe so truly the things he was doing?
But here also a difficulty was encountered as to the personality of the informant. Who might it be? The conclusion he arrived at, after revolving the subject in his mind for a long time, was that it could be none other than his own wife, whom he dearly loved.
[33:27] She it must be who was the minister's informant, for there were some things stated by the minister which none but his wife knew of. The exposure of his conduct, as he took it, which was so repugnant to his mind and feelings, continued to be made every Sabbath publicly from the pulpit, till, as he believed, every eye in the church stared at him.

It was a trying ordeal. He could stand it no longer. He charged his wife with acting as informant and pointed out how unbecoming it was on her part to be telling the minister all his faults and that she

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must stop it at once.
Otherwise, much as he regarded her, they must separate. She, of course, pointedly denied all complicity in the matter, but to no useful purpose.
He was fully persuaded it could be none else, for some things which the minister had been stating, as he thought, could be known to none but to her. He was very displeased with his wife and considered it ill-breeding on the part of the minister to make public use of such information.
As time went on, he began to hear the workings of his corrupt heart, delineated from the pulpit in language equally as unmistakable as that which formerly described his overt actions.
[34:53] This staggered him immensely. He was well aware that his wife knew nothing about these things, and in fact that no one knew of them save the omniscient God and himself.

And yet, here they were, laid before him by the preacher. He was dumbfounded and filled with consternation. He began to regard the whole circumstances in quite a different light from that in which he formerly viewed them.
The minister's informant could not be any other than God, the searcher of hearts. Wife and minister vanish, and he finds himself confronted by God, alone, before whose eyes all things are naked and open.
His attention is arrested, his conscience is roused, his whole being quivers. He no longer accuses his wife or his minister, but himself.
Guilty and self-condemned, he falls down at the feet of sovereign mercy, waiting to be dealt with, as it may seem good to the Lord. The penitent sinner finds mercy.
[36:05] And isn't that what the Apostle Paul is talking about? A man who, as he hears the word preached, as he is in the house of God, is made aware that God himself is in the midst.

And we also need to notice, as you and I pray for this in our congregations, we need to notice that this man, he says that God is among you.
This is the acid test, of course. Can it be said of our meetings? Will it be said of our meeting tomorrow? But notice something further.
The man, we're told, is convinced of all, or by all. He is judged by all. And this takes it out of the sphere merely of the preacher, but into the sphere of every Christian person in the congregation worshipping God.
He is convinced, we're told, by all. What he sees in every believer. The attitude. The spirit, no doubt, of prayer and of expectancy.
[37:22] This is used of God, too, to convince them. And what I'd like us to ask ourselves is tomorrow, as we gather to hear God's word preached, and as we gather to meet with them at his table.

Would it be true that we are in such communion with God? That we are expecting such great things from God? That the man in this condition would be compelled to say that he is convinced by all.
By you. By me. As Christian people. In intimate fellowship and communion with God. What a wonderful thing it would be.
Now mightily, I believe, we would sense and know the spirit of God moving in our congregations. If by grace, we might thus come expectantly to the house of God.
God. And you know, I think that this man, as we close this evening, and as we think of this man, and of course the fact that you and I, as we prepare to gather and to sit at God's table of our responsibility, it's good to think that this man went out of the church.
[38:42] He went out saying, God is among you, of a truth. He was constrained to fall down and worship God. He sensed that God was there.

But I can't help feeling that that man, when he went outside the church, he maybe changed rather a little, or a little, his words.
In there, in the church, as he was being convicted through what he saw and heard, he said, God is among you, of a truth. But don't you think that once he was outside, he would say, God is among us, of a truth.
But he was now in the family of God. Let it then be our prayer, that as we prepare this evening to meet with God at his table, and as we prepare week by week to worship God, that we will so meet with him in a spirit of expectancy and of holiness and of prayerfulness, that there will be many who will be saying, God, who is among them, is now among us.

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Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, thou knowest that what must most characterize us in the light of such a passage of thy word is a sense of shame.
[40:16] That we who worship week by week, and some of us who have done so for many, many years, us find it so easy to come with a cold, dry heart.

We find it so easy to come unprepared. And we ask that in thy mercy, as thou hast given to this congregation another opportunity to worship thee during a communion season, that thou would enable each one to use these days and opportunities of preparation, that we might come to the house of God, truly believing that thou art, and that thou art there to bless us and to do us good. We pray for the services of thy house tomorrow, that thou will be very present amongst us, and that we would all, without exception, be constrained to say, God is among us of a truth. We pray for those who, in thy good providence, will communicate at thy table tomorrow. May it be a time of true feeding upon Christ for all. We pray that if there should be any, even here with us this evening, who in their hearts find a true love for the Lord Jesus, but as yet have never publicly made that know, that thou would so lift up Christ in all his love and mercy and grace before their believing eyes, that they would know they can do no other than to obey the gracious command and invitation of their Savior, this do in remembrance of me. Continue with us as we sing our parting psalm of praise, and thou shalt have the glory forever in Christ. Amen.

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