

**Title:** This is Church - Part#2  
**Subtitle:** Examining the atmosphere of the Sunday meeting  
**Big Idea:** Church is Seeker Sensitive, but also God centered  
**Text:** 1 Corinthians 14:20-25

**Introduction:**

*In his book, **Holy Discontent**, Bill Hybels tells the story of driving home from church one as a junior high kid. His dad informs the family that his business associate, Bob, was starting to show some interest in God and that he was planning to invite him to church. Evidently, Bob's wife had recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer, and the news had thrown their entire family into a tailspin. According to Hybel's dad, Bob was living pretty far from God and the recent events of his wife's medical report finally opened him up to spiritual things.*

*Upon hearing of his Dad's intention to bring Bob to church, the young Hybels begged his dad to reconsider. **"Dad, whatever you do, don't invite him to our church! If there's any spark of spiritual interest in him, we'll extinguish it in sixty minutes flat! We'll chase him further away from God than he was even before his wife got the bad news. His only hope is to stay away from the church! You just CAN'T let him come!***

I believe, if we are honest, many of us had similar moments in our own lives. We are so excited that a family member, a co-worker or a neighbor is interested in spiritual matters, that they are asking about Jesus, that they have picked up a Bible, but we are hesitant, cautious, even scared to bring them to church. Let me give you a few reasons I believe why?

**1. Something weird might happen.**

We are afraid that they might experience or see something so strange or bizarre. If so, they will run for the hills. Let me give you one axiom: Just because something is weird does not make it God. Corollary: Just because something it is NOT

weird does not make it God. Normal is typically a definition of what we prefer. The point is we must use discernment and the Scriptures as our guide.

**2. We may embarrass them.**

In college in Longview Texas at Mobberly Baptist church, to greet the visitors, they would ask all the members to stand and have the visitors remain sitting. Then they would sing this song, “We are family that loves, loves, loves one another...”

**3. Nobody will notice them or too many people will notice them.**

There are two philosophies when it comes to church and both are valid. Some people who come long to be acknowledged, but not embarrassed. Others want to come in quietly, sit in the back and simply observe. Both are asking, if this a safe place for me and my family? The reality is that you don’t know which response to give. My strategy is to error on the side of a simply welcoming them and then ask one question. How they respond tells me if they want more space or if they want further dialogue.

**4. We are afraid of what the pastor may say from the pulpit.**

Will the pastor talk about homosexuality, bash culture or get on some incidental pet topic that has no relevancy or worse yet, just offends my guest. VCC family, I will do best to work with the team of pastors and volunteers to ensure that any person’s visit here is positive, thought provoking, touching, personally changing and inspiring. Just because the gospel always confronts, doesn’t mean it has to offend.

This being said I have observed a problematic trait in Christ’s church. I can’t prove this, but I believe many Christ-followers go to church simply **because they know they should**. They understand the church culture and all the spiritual gymnastics associated with it. However, deep down inside, they are ashamed or afraid to be seen next a to a coworker, friend or family member in a church setting. I believe this lack of “pride” factor has created a huge problem for Christ’s church.

**In the business world, a company does not have a moment until people start wearing the t-shirts.** Think about it: Disney, Apple, Google, Sean John, Tiger Woods, Starbucks. All sell a culture as much as a product.

This morning as we continue in our second installment of “This is church!” I want us to examine the atmosphere of the Sunday setting. In our time together, I

want us to look AT TWO GUESTS THE SCRIPTURES SAYS SHOULD BE WITH US IN THE SUNDAY GATHERING. I want us to examine God's word and get a sense of not only of WHO should be there, but WHAT EXPERIENCE should be happening. In order to address these questions, I want you turn to Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Turn with me in your Bibles which I know you brought today to 1 Corinthians 14:20-24.

We are in our second installment of the series entitled, "This is Church". Last week we looked at the enduring nature of the church. This week we will look at the very familiar Sunday morning experience. I want us to examine this familiar setting for many of us look at the Scriptures together to discern what atmosphere should be here when we gather on Sunday morning?

**Text:**

1Cor. 14:20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

1Cor. 14:21 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.

1Cor. 14:22 Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.

1Cor. 14:23 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?

1Cor. 14:24 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,

So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

**An excursus on spiritual gifts:**

I know what you are thinking...what is he going to get of THIS passage? Most people have never heard of these words, let alone hear a sermon on this text. In all my years at church, I have never heard a sermon on this text. First, let me give a few thoughts about "spiritual gifts" from this text. Then we will address the atmosphere

of the Sunday setting. We are NOT going to take the time to day to explain everything about “tongues” and “prophecy”. We’ll save that for another time. Let me simply provide a few principles I believe the Scriptures teach on spiritual gifts.

### **1. Spiritual gifts STILL exist today.**

I doubt anyone here questions the legitimacy of the spiritual gifts of **teaching, administration, leadership, mercy or helps**. Thus, most people feel some of the spiritual gifts exist today, but give little explanation to which ones have ceased and on what criteria. Others have suggested that once the New Testament was compiled, the spiritual gifts of revelatory nature were no longer needed. Ironically, while Acts was being written, many churches who flowed in these revelatory gifts had in possession some of the Epistles and perhaps some of the Gospels. **What is certain is that no text in Scripture ever says that the Bible was given to replace confirming acts of power of the gospel message.** Bottom line: **if the church in the first century needed spiritual gifts for its growth and extension, why would it not need them for the twenty-first century?**

### **2. Just because someone discovers their own spiritual gift(s) does not mean they are good at them yet.**

Spiritual gifts are not sign of maturity. Often times in the Bible, spiritual gifts fall on people who have very little experience in the faith. They are graces bestowed by God for the calling God has upon them. Like anything else in life, they need cultivation through community to mature.

### **3. Spiritual gifts ARE meant to be part of the corporate experience.**

1Cor. 14:18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

1Cor. 14:19 **BUT IN THE CHURCH** I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

### **4. Spiritual gifts are not toys for selfish indulgence, but tools to fulfill the Great Commission.**

The Great Commission is to be accomplished by the Person of the Holy Spirit and through the means of the Holy Spirit.

We can talk more about this later. For now, let’s look at the problem in the Corinthian church.

#### **Problem in the Corinthian church:**

The Corinthian church is a mess. They have problems with promiscuity (even incest), syncretism (blending of faith), partying during communion, lawsuits among

believers, questions about the validity of the resurrection and here, in this text, people who feel that their spiritual gifts give them a license to be selfish in the corporate gatherings. I think I counted 11 different issues that Paul addresses in this letter alone. If I was the founder of this church, I would be tempted to shut it down. A good reboot every now and then is not a bad thing. Paul though sees it differently. Rather than close shop, he regulates and guides the spiritual practices of the church.

1Cor. 14:20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

1Cor. 14:21 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.

1Cor. 14:22 Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.

Tongues are a sign for unbelievers; prophesy a sign for believers. The question before is **WHAT KIND OF “SIGN” ARE TONGUES AND PROPHECY?** “Signs” in both OT and NT can take either a positive or negative connotation. To answer this question we must look at Paul’s quote of Isaiah Paul uses in verse 21.

Is. 28:7 And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions.

Is. 28:8 All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth.

Is. 28:9 “Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast?

Is. 28:10 For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there.”

Is. 28:11 Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people,

Is. 28:12 to whom he said, “This is the resting place, let the weary rest”; and, “This is the place of repose” – but they would not listen.

Is. 28:13 So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there – so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured.

Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11 to show how the corporate church is acting immature. In Isaiah 28, the priesthood and prophets has compromised itself even to the point of intoxication. Isaiah sees the babbling of drunken priest as a picture of what God is

going to do to judge Israel for her unfaithfulness to the covenant. Just as the priest are babbling along in their intoxication, people of a foreign language, or alien tongue (i.e. the Assyrians), will enter Israel and judge her for turning away from God and going down their own selfish path. Thus, in Isaiah, tongues are seen as a negative sign.

Paul compares this setting in Isaiah to what he sees occurring in the Corinthian church. He casts the Corinthians in the role of speaking strange tongues that inadvertently confuses the outsider, not bringing them to obedience, but rather keeping them in judgment. The Corinthians believed the endowment of spiritual gifts gave them the license to be selfish. Rather, than try to reach the world, the Corinthians indulged in a spiritual joy ride.

Summary: Paul uses “tongues” as a “judgment” sign against seekers. Rather than encountering God, these folks walk away scratching their head saying, “What was THAT all about?” Their hearts are not more changed than when they arrived. Church did nothing for them.

It should be noted that Paul never shuts down the use of spiritual gifts. I would have, perhaps even the church given all the other misconduct that was occurring in the church. Rather than close shop, Paul regulates it and then proposes a preferred atmosphere that should occur in Christ’s church when we gather.

**Besides God’s people WHO else should be in church**

1. Visitor
2. God

I bet you are impressed with this observation. Seminary really sharpened his pencil.

## Church is to be SEEKER SENSITIVE (Visitor) -

### 1. God expects visitors (guests, seekers, onlookers) in His house each Sunday.

1Cor. 14:23 So if the whole church comes together...and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in...

1Cor. 14:24 But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in...

This point alone should challenge many of us. When was the last time you and I brought someone to God's house? When was the last time you and I invited them a church event? When was the last time you and I even thought of inviting something? Every study I have ever read has told me that that primary reason someone has not come church, "Nobody has invited them." Perhaps that empty seat in your car is a sign that God wants to fill it. I told the staff this week, the Christmas program is NOT an **END** to itself to entertain Christians, but a **MEANS** to introduce guests to Christ and His church. If you are passionate about your faith, if you are proud of your church family, if you want your friend, co-worker and family member to not be just entertained, but challenged and built up with the Gospel and God's Spirit, **then bring them to church.**

### 2. God expects us to help visitors understand what is going on.

1Cor. 14:23 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?

1Cor. 14:24 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,

So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

There is nothing worse than entering into a setting where you want to engage, but no one around you takes the time to explain what is going on. *I feel this way when I am around car junkies. I don't know anything about cars. Never was around them. No one ever showed me how to maintain them other than wash them. When I step into their circles and they quotes models, engines, parts and manufactures, I*

*just smile and try to feign my ignorance. I don't want them to think I am less of a person if I don't know the difference between a classic corvette and a Ford Festiva. I do think those new Tesla's are quite cool!*

In the same way, some in church are so interested in their own needs, they don't even try to help those who have no idea what is going on. This point alone should cause all of us to evaluate our actions when we come to church. I understand there are times you need to connect, to pray, to worship freely and you need to know that is what you should do in God's house. That being said, **it is unloving to focus entirely on our needs and not notice, not help understand, not take time for our guests to connect. Our need for connection, does not give us license to stop loving.** Perhaps that is why 1 Corinthians 13, which is not a wedding text, but a passage on how we are to live and love in God's house.

### **3. God people come to church to give as well as receive.**

Church is a wonderful place to see people we love, hear beautiful music, worship God, hear motivating messages and receive personal prayer. But if we don't watch out, church can be a consumer mindset. Yes, church is about receiving, but it also about giving.

1Cor. 14:20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

Children has a habit of thinking their needs are the only needs. You never have to teach a toddler how to use the word, "mine". My mom used to use the picture: Roger - world. Adults, especially parents, understand that concept of sacrificing sleep, finances, comfort for someone else. Paul compares Corinthian worship to that of a selfish child. They came to church solely for their own personal needs and pleasures. We must be "adult" and at time give up something so others can connect.

## Church is also GOD-CENTERED (Visitation)

### 1. In OT and NT, God is always the focus of the Sunday gathering

The fourth commandment says, “Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy” (Ex. 20, Dt. 5). Each week, God sends out the invitation (and we are the couriers of that summons) for all people (no matter of race or religion) to gather in His house. This was one reason the Court of Gentiles existed in the Jewish Temple. Our God loves it when His children gather and they bring guests. **However, whether OT or NT, God is always the center of this gathering. He is the object our worship, our giving, our prayers and it is His word we focus.**

**We don't stop everything we are called to do Biblically simply because visitors are here. Rather, we keep God the focus and we need to help our guest understand and if they choose, to connect with us in worshipping God.**

### 2. Christ' church has to be a safe place.

1Cor. 14:24 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**,

What happens in this room is not entertaining, it is enlightening. We do gather to watch a show. We understand God is doing a real work here. We are not here to fulfill a religious hurdle. We gather because God wants people to repent, to confess, to prayer for grace for He so freely gives. We gather not to put on a spiritual façade pretending we have our act together. We gather to be real, to cry at times, to feel the pangs of this world and seek God's healing touch for our lives and our families. **None of this will ever happen, if this room is not a safe place.** In the text, the seeker feels safe enough to allow God's work of grace to surface in their life. This obviously will look different for different people.

What is amazing to me is the fact that this newcomer, this visitor, this guest, somehow feels so safe in God's house and with His people that he or she presses forward to grab God in spite of who is looking and what is happening around them. Valley Christian Center, if Christ's church is anything, it is and must be a safe place for people, whether members or guests, to feel safe to either connect to God through their personality in worship or confess to a friend, I am struggling and am need of help. **You cannot have church if people are not free to connect and safe to confess.** Call it a meeting or a gathering. Call it the Elks club or Rotary. Don't call it church.

If the seeker, or any saint for that matter, feels intimidated, an object of focus, embarrassed or ashamed, they will not respond and grace will not prevail. **It takes both an encouraging atmosphere as well as a courageous soul** who can frankly say, "I don't care who is here, what people will say, I need grace and I am going to find it." May God grant us such persistence on the pursuers, but may He also convict us of score-carding anything in this room.

My dear friends, let's keep our eyes on Jesus, examine our own souls and forget about watching what is going on. Sure there may be times when God's Spirit prompts us to pray with one another. There may also be times, when people simply need space to bare their hearts and allow God to minister to them by His Spirit. Let's make this place safe for people to connect.

### **Christ's church must foster an encountering presence of God**

Rather than being shunned by selfish worshippers, look at the preferred atmosphere Paul suggest seekers are to encounter when then enter through Christ's church. I believe this is the most important verse of this chapter.

**1Cor. 14:24** So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

This is what God longs to do. To meet with people personally and transforming ways. To overcome them in a way that their knees buckle with homage to Christ the King. Sadly, though this atmosphere can be squashed.

Because of the selfish indulgence of the Corinthians worship, it can be safely presumed that God’s presence in their midst was inhibited. Certainly, God’s grace for salvation was impaired. True seekers walk into church seeking something but leave unchanged because of inward attitude and activity of God’s people. From this event we can draw this conclusion: **GOD’S PRESENCE BE FOSTERED AND GOD’S PRESENCE CAN BE GRIEVED.** Let us clear up once and for all the difference HIS “**OMNIPRESENCE**” “Where can I go from Your Spirit?” (Ps. 139:7) and HIS “**MANIFEST PRESENCE**” that is a distinct visitation of our God in the seeking hearts of His people.

Being fully divine, God is always present. However, the *effects* of His presence can never be presumed. That is to say, the manifest presence of the Spirit can be graciously given as well as withdrawn. To say it another way, the omnipresence of the Spirit is not synonymous with the effects or influences of the Spirit. Some differentiate between “the omnipresence of the Spirit” and “the manifest presence of the Spirit.” I would tell my Presbyterian friends in seminary, **OUR GOD LOVES TO BE PURSUED, NEVER PRESUMED.**

It must be noted at this point that as a Person, the Spirit of God manifests Himself according to His own sovereign purpose and pleasure. He does not perform on demand, nor is He a spiritual butler poised to jump in at anyone’s beck and call. He cannot be controlled or manipulated or domesticated to perform on demand. He is the Lord.

The primary function of the people of God in the corporate setting is to refrain from any activity or attitude that might block the effects of the Holy Spirit in their midst. “Do not grieve (λυπεῖτε) the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 4:30). The verb here means “to cause pain or grief...to distress”. Similarly, Paul writes “Do not quench (σβέννυτε) the Spirit” (1 Thes. 5:19). Quench here literally means “to put out a fire” or “to extinguish by drowning with water.” Stop suppressing the Spirit.

The people of God must refrain from any attitude or action that stifles the activity of the Holy Spirit. No doubt, the work of the preacher is greatly affected, for good or evil by the condition of the congregation. As a Person, we must not grieve Him. As a fire, we must not quench Him. He is a sensitive yet powerful Spirit who facilitates the power and presence of God in the preaching.

#### **Things that grieve God in the Corporate Setting:**

I hope you can see from this text that having a genuine church service where people encounter God in a personal and powerful way hinges not only on the worship leader and the preacher. It also depends on you. Let me give you a few things we can all do to welcome a visitation of our God:

- 1. Welcome His Presence Inviting God to come - Welcome Him**
- 2. Meet with Him**
- 3. Offer unblemished worship**
- 4. Look for those in need**
- 5. Coming only to get and not to give**
- 6. Obey the Spirit’s promptings**

Just as God’s people need not only a solid conviction of *inspiration* with regards to the Scriptures, they also require a proper view of *expectation* with regard to the Sunday setting. They must come with an eagerness to hear the word of God, a readiness to submit, and a desire to experience the presence of God, a willingness to help everyone in the house to engage and participate.

## Conclusion:

My dear friends, God's presence can be fostered and it can be grieved. Welcome His presence and His activity in the midst of the corporate setting. When this happens, preaching actually becomes easy. Spurgeon says:

I have a great success in soul winning ... but I have never taken any credit for it, for I feel that I preach under great advantages; the people come with an intense desire to hear, and with an expectation of getting a blessing ... When a congregation expects nothing, it generally finds nothing even in the best of preachers; but when they are prepared to make much of what they hear, they usually get what they come for ... Our work is, no doubt, greatly affected, for good or evil, by the condition of the congregation...<sup>1</sup>

Rather than charismatic chaos, we see a wonderful picture of a congregation that connects to God while still be sensitive to those around who may need some assistance to help them engage. In doing so, an encountering presence of God manifests in such a glorious way, that seekers and saints alike feel safe to address their "stuff" in a dignified and compassionate manner. This is church!!!

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *All-RoundMinistry* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), p. 355.