

"Use Our Gifts to Build His Church"

1 Corinthians 14:13-25

As we've mentioned numerous times through this series on 1 Corinthians, the believers there were divided over many issues. Why was their division? The answer is found back in 11:19 when Paul was dealing with the problems at the communion table:

¹⁷ In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval

Isn't that how we use our differences and preferences too? As a measure of whether we are right and others are wrong? That we are more mature than others. Not that many years ago – and it still lingers a little bit – a lot of churches went through what was called 'worship wars', where opposing views expressed that God was most glorified with particular songs or styles of music. God is not worshipped at all when we're arguing about which style or songs have God's approval. It reflects our immature understanding of the great-ness of God when we have this kind of thinking.

And this kind of thinking still exists today when believers divide over various issues, including the one Paul is dealing with in 1 Cor. 14. Some in the Corinthian church felt that speaking in tongues was a sign of God's approval or that you have the Holy Spirit or not. And some still feel that way today. That can't be true. As we mentioned last week, salvation according to Eph. 1:13-14 is proof you have the Holy Spirit. And here in 12:30 Paul clearly said

²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

The answer is no, no one has all the gifts, therefore not everyone has the gift of tongues. When we are unwilling to accept what Scripture clearly says it reveals our spiritual immaturity. We'll see these things in vv.13-25.

Paul's main point in Ch. 14 is that believers should desire and value the gift of prophesying over the gift of tongues for the simple reason that one is intelligible and the other is not (unless there is an interpreter). In vv.13-40 he's going to especially talk about this in the context of when the church comes together to worship and be instructed.

The gift of prophecy is not receiving new revelation from God since the apostles and prophets have disappeared after the church's foundation was laid. However, God now extends the prophetic gift of taking the Word of God and speaking truth into people's lives to build them up, comfort them in difficult times and confront sin when necessary. All the things Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:16-17 that Scripture is equipped to do. Paul stated this was more important than uninterpreted tongues the church is built up when God's message is understood. We stopped at v.12 which said,

Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

Let's continue where we left off now.

¹³ For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. ¹⁶ If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

It would appear that Paul would use his gift of speaking in tongues as part of his private devotions with God but he also says, that's not enough if I don't understand what I am saying. So here's an excellent reminder from one who actually spoke in tongues:

We Need Private Encouragement but More **Importantly, Corporate Edification** **(14:13-19)**

In his challenge to the Corinthians to stop being enamored by or abusing the gift of tongues, Paul reminds us of the need always to want to grow in the Lord. So, he gives a little bit of his own personal testimony

That we all need personal time with the Lord (vv.13-15)

He talks about praying, singing and praising God in his spirit. He's enjoying these things 'in his spirit'. It's uplifting. But, if it's not feeding his mind it's just that - a feel-good experience. So our personal times with the Lord need to be Spirit-led but Word-fed. Sometimes we listen to Christian music just for the music. That's fine but are the words biblical and feeding us also? Praying is wonderful but is it all request, request, request or is there acknowledge of God's attributes in praise and are we praying biblically as well, praying for people to be saved and believers to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. So if one uses tongues as their personal prayer language but they don't know what they are saying, the benefits are not long term. It's a good experience but that's not enough Paul says.

That can't replace corporate gatherings (vv.16-17)

¹⁶ If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

No one benefits from our personal spiritual experiences other than ourselves, Paul said. Especially in the case of uninterpreted tongues usage. You might be thanking God in a gathering using tongues but without an interpreter no one can say Amen! On the other hand, some believers avoid gathering with others because 'they don't understand. They're not like me. I'm more spiritual. I'll just stay home and do my own thing.' Which is arrogant and disobedient. This whole letter is about everyone's giftedness and everyone's need to spiritually benefit from each other's gifts and ministries.

We live in a digital age. We can fool ourselves into thinking that worshipping online only is all we need. We have the technology for when people can't be here. One of you told me you listen to your phone when you have to work. We've had snowstorms when people couldn't make it or when you're sick, it's great to have. But don't be lulled into thinking that's all you need. You don't fellowship with people online. I'm guessing many people probably don't sing along with the songs and might

even be checking emails or doing something else while we're praying. Paul is always commending the need for believers to gather together, in person for spiritual maturing. We need personal time with the Lord but we need corporate time with God's people to grow even more. Because Paul points out,

Corporate edification has greater value than personal experiences (vv.18-19)

¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Instruction – even limited instruction – far outweighs spiritual experiences. Notice the maturity of Paul here. He was so gifted he was gifted in speaking other languages more than anyone else, but he said I would rather hear five biblical words that feed my soul. I will benefit far more from that.

Now he's getting a little personal here. Maturity or their lack of it. Wanting spiritual experiences or claiming your experience gives you God's approval over others than being edified through His Word is actually a sign of spiritual immaturity.

²⁰ Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. 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. ²² Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.

Paul comes back to his main point in Ch. 12, what spiritual gifts are to be used for:

Spiritual Gifts are Necessary for Making Disciples
(14:20-25)

All the gifts are for the building of the body, Paul said earlier. Making the gifts about yourself shows a lack of spiritual maturity. So

How we use our gifts reflects our maturity (v.20)

'Stop thinking like children' indicates some were. Please stop this now Paul said. Think like adults – in their spiritual growth – by being like infants when it comes to evil behaviour or thinking. "Evil" seems like a strong word but the bible constantly uses evil in contrast to righteous or good. If we're not living rightly or making wise godly choices then we're doing the opposite. There is no in between. We're obeying God or we're not. We're living righteously or we're not. To be selfish is to be evil because selfishness is sin.

To use our gifts to elevate ourselves or to show that we have God's approval while others do not, Paul says is childish. We need to grow up in our faith and act more selfless. And he is still speaking about the misuse of the gift of tongues, especially tongues without an interpretation. That's the key to remember here. He is contrasting uninterpreted tongues (that which can't be understood) with prophesying (communicating the Word of God in your own language). To make his point he quotes Is. 28:11-12.

In Is. 28, God is confronting the northern kingdom of Israel (the 10 tribes who established Samaria as their capital) and confronts their rejection of Him by their selfish behaviour. So God tells them they will be taken away by a people of foreign lips [the Assyrians whose language they did not

understand] because they were relying on a treaty with them rather than trusting the words of God (who will protect them) spoken by the prophets.

Paul now applies this point to the Corinthians' situation. Just as an unknown language was a sign of Israel's unbelief in God, so uninterpreted tongues [which are real languages we don't speak or understand] reveal unbelievers failure to understand the truths of God. Paul's point?

Unbelievers won't understand a confusing message (vv.21-22a, 23)

So how are tongues a sign for unbelievers? The Corinthians were enamoured with tongues and were claiming that having this gift was a 'sign' that you had God's approval somehow. In other words, tongues purpose was for the believer. Paul says no. But isn't he saying unbelievers can't know what's being said? Remember what Paul is contrasting: he's contrasting intelligible speech about God prophesying with unintelligible speech about God (uninterpreted tongues). He keeps repeating, if you're going to us tongues you need an interpreter.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on the first disciples and they spoke in tongues, which are clearly stated as languages that the audience understood because it was their native tongue. They understood what was being said and many of them heard the gospel, repented of their sin and gave their hearts to Jesus. So tongues was used to reach unbelievers when they understood what was said. Paul's main argument here is to believers who were thinking tongues was a way to show they had God's approval, which is not the point of tongues. Every spiritual gift is for the common good and to make new disciples and build up current ones. No gift exists for a believer to be a sign that they are approved of God and others are not. That's selfish and immature as Paul says.

We know this is his point because he contrasts uninterpreted tongues with the clear language of prophesying; which is declaring God's truth to speak into your life.

A clear message results in spiritual growth (vv.22b, 24-25)

... prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. 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? 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, ²⁵ and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

Paul's focus in Ch. 14 is on how the gathered community should worship together. There was a lot of confusion and disorder as we'll see next week. He indicates in v.23 that people would just randomly speak in tongues, at the same time. But no one was interpreting. If this was a genuine use of tongues there needs to be an interpreter (v.28). Otherwise an unbeliever will hear this and conclude this is nuts! Not surprisingly, this was not an uncommon experience in pagan cult practices where part of their 'worship' to their gods was to have ecstatic utterances as a sign that you were speaking to the 'god'.

Yet when an unbeliever hears the Word of God being spoken in their own language, they can understand, repent and be saved. The Spirit might convict them and they will understand that God is really among us.

God is really among us who believe that Jesus Christ alone paid for our sins on the cross. When we repent of our sins and give our life to Jesus, His Spirit comes to dwell in every believer. He

affirms with our own spirits/conscience that He is real and the Word is God's truth. We don't have to seek His approval; we already have it because we are His children. Our approval isn't found in whatever gift we have. God loves us all equally and fully. He wants us to grow in our love for Him and our faith in Him. We are right with God and the righteous will live by faith (Rom. 1:17). And faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.

That's how we're saved and that's how we grow, reading and studying personally and listening and studying corporately together, fellowshiping and building one another up in our faith.

Don't use your gifts as a way to draw attention to yourself but to minister to others. Don't use your gifts to impress others but to build others up. Let's use our gifts to the glory of God so that when people who don't know Jesus come in here they will exclaim "*God is really among you!*"

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at oliviet@rideau.net