

1 Cor. 14:1-12 “Edifying Communication”

For the Children: As young people, you will probably not understand every part of every sermon. As you grow in knowledge of God’s Word, you hopefully will come to understand. But sometimes the problem is not lack of knowledge on the part of the hearers. Sometimes it is because of the speaker. Maybe he doesn’t know English very well; or he is not a clear thinker, or there is something wrong with his voice. To help people with what you say, it has to be understandable. What we say in church – when we pray, sing, confess our faith and preach God’s Word – should be understandable. Otherwise, the church is not helped. **Questions:** What was “speaking in tongues”? Why was prophecy greater than speaking in tongues? Why does love make us want to be understandable?

Introduction:

First Point: The Reason Why Prophecy Was Greater Than Tongues

- 1) Speaking to God, Not Men: Speaking in tongues involved honouring the Lord. He could understand the words. However, neither the speaker nor the hearers could – though the speaker may have realized he was praising God. He was therefore addressing God, not men (v. 2).
- 2) Speaking to God and Men: Prophecy was also for God’s honour. However, men could also understand it and be edified (v. 3). When the “tongues” were interpreted, this was also understood by men and could edify them.
- 3) Four Illustrations: The apostle gives 4 examples/illustrations of edifying vs. unedifying speech. The first example involves a scenario where Paul speaks to the Corinthians only in tongues when he visits. Then there is nothing that edifies. The second illustration is where someone makes random sounds from a musical instrument, as opposed to playing an understandable melody. The third illustration involves a bugler in the army who blows recognizable signals, versus one who does not. The fourth illustration is that of a person trying to speak to a foreigner who doesn’t know the language – each regards the other as a “barbarian.” Uninterpreted tongues was like these unclear communications – a waste of time and unedifying.
- 4) Intelligible Worship: The principle that still applies is that worship involves communicating God’s Word (to praise Him and edify each other) in a way that is intelligible and unambiguous. That applies to every aspect of worship, including the songs we sing.

Second Point: The Course of Action This Implies

- 1) Pursue Love: In 14:1, the apostle goes back to the emphasis on love, which we have seen in ch. 13. For if we are most concerned to show love to God and our brethren, we will place prophecy above uninterpreted tongues – for then God is praised in an intelligible way and men are edified.
- 2) Desire the Gifts: Love of God and brethren also means that we will desire spiritual gifts, for the good of our brethren. The apostle is not saying that gifts should be ignored, but that they should be prioritized and used out of love. Paul could wish that all spoke in tongues at that time (v. 5). But if he had a choice, he would prefer that which edifies the Body.
- 3) Interpreted Tongues: Interpreted tongues was functionally equivalent to prophecy – it, too, could edify the Body. If the Corinthians knew that there was an interpreter present, they could go ahead and allow speaking in tongues during the worship service of that time. If not, it was not to go ahead.
- 4) Abounding in Edification: If the Corinthians want to be zealous for spiritual gifts, they should make sure that they are seeking to abound/excel even more in the use of those gifts for edification (v. 12). Literally, Paul says they are to be “zealots” for gifts, so that they can edify. Though the extraordinary, Word-gifts are no longer available, this principle still applies: we should be zealous to use our gifts to build up God’s people – which is done especially by sharing God’s Word clearly and intelligibly.

Conclusion:

