

1 Corinthians 14:1-19

“Communication & Edification In The Church”

Edification, (in any Spirit led gathering) requires 2 things. #1 Understanding & #2 Order.

Unfortunately, in many corporate assemblies today, these are the 2 very elements which are tragically lacking. There's no order, which lends itself to a lack of understanding & people walk away scratching their heads wondering what just happened... “What was I just a part of?”

As a general rule, if you enter a church service, & leave more confused than you came in, something is amiss. I'm not saying that we'll never have questions or need to seek out more information. But when I go to church, I should leave effectively more equipped, not more effectively confused! Afterall, didn't Paul tell us in Eph 4, that was the purpose for God supplying pastor/teachers in the body of Christ? To *equip the saints* for the work of the ministry? We've been learning as of late that each of us has something to contribute, something to supply, causing the growth of the body for the *edifying* of itself in love.

But to get back to the initial point. Edification requires understanding & order. Here in Ch 14 of 1st Cor, Paul spends the 1st ½ of the Ch emphasizing the importance of *understanding*, the last ½ he will highlight the essential need for *order*.

Vs 1

Paul, (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) spent what's become the last 13 Vs brilliantly expounding upon the *preeminence*, the *perfection* & the *permanence* of love. He shared *w/us* & showed *to* us that the gifts of the Spirit are for a season. They won't go on forever. When we're w/Jesus in the kingdom of God, there'll be no more need for the gift of wisdom or knowledge, healings won't be necessary. We'll have a perfect understanding, we'll know the Lord, even as we're known *by* the Lord. – In our present state, it's like we're in the children's ministry of eternity. We have a grasp on some things, but we don't have a complete grasp, or total understanding. So we need the aid of the Holy Spirit in equipping us, strengthening us, enlightening & encouraging us... But when we're w/the Lord; no more confusion, no more questions, no more tears, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more need for temporary aid, for the former things will have passed away...

Love, (on the other hands) will be w/us, abide in us & flow through us *forever*. Love is eternal... Of the 3 greatest characteristics of the Christian life (faith, hope & love), the greatest of these 3 (in light of what we've learned) is love.

Therefore, it stands to reason that Paul would follow up the statement of that truth w/this present imperative (continual command) to *pursue* love.

“*Desire* spiritual gifts”, that’s fine. Be zealous for the gifts of the Spirit, they’re good, they’re needful. But *pursue*, that is, “follow after”, love. This is that same mindset that I was trying to encourage you w/toward the end of our time together last week. “Let love lead you.” Don’t feel compelled by guilt, or constrained by pressure to serve, or to sacrifice, or to give. Let love lead you to serve, allow love to lead you to sacrifice, give out of the overflow of love. Love for God, love for His kingdom, seeing His plan progress.

Because He has loved you, you love Him & want to offer your life to Him in *any way*, regardless of how He may want to use you. Be it in some major role/responsibility, or something behind the scenes, never recognized by anyone other than Him.

There’s nothing wrong w/the gifts. We *should* desire them (we need both). But remember, the gifts *find their value* in love. Pursue love, desire spiritual gifts, but *especially* that you may prophesy.

Back in Ch 12, Paul mentioned certain gifts of the Spirit, among which were prophecy & tongues. Now, he takes those 2 specifically so as to show us their role & the level of their priority in the corporate church body. – One thing we’ve already noted is that in the Corinthian church, there was an over-emphasis on tongues & an under-emphasis, almost a diminishing/belittling of prophecy. They were really enamored w/the ability to speak a language unknown to them supernaturally, but to communicate plainly seemed rather unimpressive, wasn’t given much priority.

But follow the flow. – Remember that Paul has rebuked them on more than one occasion for their self-serving tendencies. This leans the same way. How so? What we’re going to see is that tongues are *primarily* a personal gift. *Prophecy* (on the other hand) is a *public* gift. Therefore, if I’m walking in love, I will consider others before myself. Here’s the point. – Love leads me to understand that edifying the whole *body* (the collective assembly) is more important than just making sure that I’m edified *personally*... If I want *everyone* to be edified, it’s more important than that we give way to prophecy so that everyone can be encouraged in language we all understand plainly. Make sense?

What is prophecy, exactly? Here in a couple of Vs Paul will tell us the net *effect* of prophecy, but as for what it is, it’s to speak forth a word from God. It may or may not have predictive elements to it. But it’s a word from the Lord for the people. It’s not a pre-studied, thought through & prepared message (such as I’m delivering now).

Prophecy may *weave* throughout a prepared message as the Lord would lead or inspire a thought that goes beyond or outside of what's prepared, but essentially it's sharing the heart *of* God (a word *from* God) w/the congregation... That's why Paul says, the desire for spiritual gifts is great, but when you gather together publicly, prophecy is the gift you should want the most, because God's word is what we need.

Vs 2-3

Family, I can't emphasize or highlight this strongly enough. If you will underline, memorize & plant firmly in your heart just 14 words found in Vs 2, it will save you immeasurable amounts of frustration, aggravation, uncertainty & confusion. Let's look at it together, "*...he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God,*". Can I read that again? "*He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.*"

Disregard of this incredibly plain, simple & straightforward principle, has led to some of the most significant misunderstandings w/regard to the gift of tongues. It is not uncommon for people to believe that tongues is a supernatural tool that communicates "man to man" rather than "man to God".

However, the plain teaching of the bible is that the content of tongues is addressed to God. That's why we refer to it as a "prayer language" because when a person addresses God... they're *praying*. The words aren't addressed to human ears, they're addressed to God. Therefore, it's really not necessary for anyone else to understand, you're not talking to them, you're talking to God.

But let me ask you, what would be the reason for God to speak to you in a language you can't understand? There isn't one. So when God wants to address the church through a supernatural gift of the Spirit, He won't use tongues, He'll inspire prophecy, something you can understand plainly. Listen, God is not the author of confusion, (we'll see that scripture next week) but of peace.

What we discover as we study scripture is that at true interpretation of tongues won't address the congregation (My little children, draw near to Me... or however it may go). But rather the interpretation will give praise/adoration to God. There will be a declaration of the wonderful works of God, there will be blessing & thanksgiving ascribed to God.

Think back to Acts Ch 2. On the day of Pentecost when the disciples spoke in tongues there was a multi-national crowd present that day. The disciples weren't preaching to them in tongues, they were praising God.

The people began to talk amongst themselves saying, “...we hear them speaking in our own tongues (native born languages) *the wonderful works of God.*”¹ In Acts 10 when the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles we read of Peter & those w/him, “For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.”² “God You are Great, & Greatly to be praised, the whole earth is filled w/Your glory!” Think of the psalms, how David extolled, magnified, glorified & gave thanks to God... An interpretation of tongues would be along those lines.

Now; I’ve jumped ahead just a bit (what I’m speaking of now leans into Vs 5, we’ll be there in just a minute). But generally, if one speaks in tongues, no one understands them.

Again, if we misunderstand this point, the gift of tongues can be misused. Because it’ll be used in a way that draws unnecessary attention to oneself because they think they have a message from God for people... they don’t. Not w/tongues. God doesn’t give the gift of tongues directly for the sake of others (though they can be edified through an interpreter). The gift of tongues is given primarily for the edification of one’s spirit personally, not publicly (the gift is between the individual & God).

Vs 3

Do you see how Paul is presenting a contrast between these two gifts that are both exercised audibly? One is likely to sow confusion (he speaks mysteries), the other will bring clarity. One is for the individual, the other for the whole body. Tongues is directed *to God*, prophecy is a word *from God*.

So, no one understands the man speaking in tongues, but he who prophesies speaks (notice) #1 edification, #2 exhortation & #3 comfort to men (to the collective gathering).

Notice that the nature of prophecy is largely positive (again we’re not looking at the office of a prophet, such as you might find in the O.T. or the foundational stages of the church). The one who prophesies, who moves in the gift of prophecy will speak edification. It’s a construction term, it means to build up. A word of prophecy won’t tear you down, it will add strength to you, challenge growth in you. –

“Exhortation”, it means to admonish or encourage. Think of the coach in the locker room before the big game. He’s rallying the team, focusing the team, encouraging the team to leave it all on the field, to do the work to the best of their ability. That’s exhortation, it won’t discourage you, it will encourage/motivate you to get to work or do your best for the glory of God.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ac 2:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ac 10:46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Comfort”, consolation, a calming word. A word that will strengthen you to carry on & not give up or give in.

These are the qualities that characterize prophecy. So if you’re ever in a place where the word coming forth from someone is negative, more than likely it either wasn’t a word from the Lord. Or it *was* a word from the Lord, but it wasn’t directed to the body, it was directed to the person who shared it, but it was meant for him personally & he shared it as though it was for everybody... The Lord was convicting someone to repent or something & he stood up & passed the message along to everyone, God is like, “I wasn’t talking to them, I was talking to you! 😊

Of course I would never say that the Lord wouldn’t encourage corporate repentance, read Rev 2-3 & you’ll see that He definitely does! But the fingerprints of prophecy are primarily positive, not negative.

Vs 4-5

It stands to reason, if tongues & prophecy contrast in whom they address, they contrast in whom they edify... He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself... the one who prophesies edifies the church. Now, I should say that it’s not a negative thing for one to edify themselves. Personal edification will lead to greater growth in one’s own life. Which then spills over into greater things for the body, for the kingdom of God & everyone around them. But the context here is the conduct in the corporate gathering.

So as to where tongues may edify the individual, prophecy (because it’s understood by all) will build up the whole body. That’s why he says that as much as he wished everyone spoke in tongues (he’s not down on tongues, he’s up on appropriate application & administration of the gifts), he wishes even more that everyone prophesied. Why? Because that would be great for *everybody in the assembly!*

I don’t know how else to say it, the goal when we come together publicly is to build up & edify the body. That can’t happen apart from understanding & that’s why (as it pertains to the collective assembly) Paul places a premium upon prophecy.

The one exception (he says) is that if there’s an interpreter. *Then*, a tongue (language we don’t know) can edify the body because it can be interpreted so that we understand it plainly.

Again, let’s keep the context. We’re speaking of the public gathering of the body. If the shoe were on the other foot & Paul was speaking of the personal devotional life of the believer. He would no doubt say that tongues was a greater gift than prophecy. Why?

Because prophecy is directed toward the assembly. If there's no assembly, who are you prophesying to? So, the greater gift may vary depending on situation. But pertaining to the corporate assembly, prophecy is of much greater value. It's a word we can all hear & understand plainly.

Vs 6

The idea being that if you can't understand me, then from a learning perspective I'm of no value to you. The value is found in what you can understand & grow thereby. There's no profit in what I can't understand. There *is profit* (however) in revelation (these are different ways that Paul may offer valuable communication, tongues isn't one of them). He says, "If God gives me direct revelation (speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit in his apostolic office) *that* would profit you. If I speak by knowledge (be it academic or supernatural word of knowledge) *that* would profit you. If I come to you prophesying, *that* would profit you. Or if I simply expound upon, explain & apply the scripture for you (teaching), *that* would profit you... But if you can't understand me (a foreign language) that is of no value to you, you're not going to grow or be built up that way." Crazy how common sensical this is, isn't it?

Vs 7-9

He saying it's a pattern or principle that falls true in every context. The musical world, the military world... In music there needs to be a certain meter, notes in order (building chords or melody lines) if the listener is to receive any benefit. If the song is to communicate something enjoyable. If not it's random nonsensical/undiscernible noise & it gets on your nerves.

The same is true of the trumpet blast. It needs to be understood. If you were to hear this (Reveille) you would know it's time to rise & shine. If you were to hear this, (Calvary Charge). You know it's time to charge into battle. But if you heard *this* (random trumpet notes). You wouldn't know *what* to do or *what* was going on, you'd be left confused & probably frustrated. Zero profit in that blast.

Like a child banging on a piano, they're having a great time, everyone else is silently having a nervous breakdown 😊. (Vs 9, read)

If you feel so inclined to speak in an uncertain sound (speaking to God in tongues), then do so silently between you & God. There's no profit in blasting the rest of the body. You'll just be speaking sounds into the air. Not placing thoughts, principles or precepts into the minds and hearts of others...

Again, that's not to downplay the gift, but if there's no one that can interpret it's like being in a foreign country. Incredibly frustrating trying to figure out what's going on.

Vs 10-11

You see, Paul's not downplaying the language. Language is a gift from God. Each language has significance in its proper context, but if I can't understand you, it won't bless or benefit me.

Vs 12-14

The goal of the gifts being exercised in the public forum is mutual edification, benefit & blessing. Now, one might wonder. "If tongues are directed to God, how can it be edifying to others?" In much the same way a Psalm can edify. – How powerfully would it resonate in your heart if in a designated time, someone spoke forth in a tongue (an language unknown to you/me, given by God supernaturally) & the interpretation came forth, "*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works.*"³ Or perhaps, "*For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You. I have become as a wonder to many, But You are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise And with Your glory all the day.*"⁴ Our hearts would identify w/that, agree w/that & be blessed by that! But w/out interpretation, there's no meaningful communication. **Your spirit prays (what is tongues: communication w/God; prayer, praise, blessing, thanksgiving) but your understanding is unfruitful (can't comprehend it).**

Now, we would never seek to elevate a lack of understanding as something spiritual. Jesus was clear about the greatest commandment in the law, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*"⁵ Our mind is to be engaged in our worship of God, we do what we do intentionally/purposefully... The other side of the same coin also appreciates the limitations of our understanding & thanks God for a way to express ourselves or relate to Him in a way that goes beyond intellect & demands stepping forward in faith.

Vs 15-19

In his devotional life, he would bless the Lord in tongues.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 145:3–5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 71:5–8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 22:37). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

However, in the church, he insisted upon communicating in a way that appealed to the understanding that there might be growth, edification & instruction leading to sanctification.

& Look at this, a meaningful “amen” (let it be, so be it) to a word that resonates w/you is completely compliant w/scripture! 😊

But our concern (gathering as a body) shouldn't be for ourselves personally (I was blessed, too bad if you weren't) but for the entirety of the assembly. Let's not concern ourselves w/receiving a blessing, but w/being a blessing. The body will be edified & God will be glorified in our midst...

Prayer Points:

Father, we thank You for Your Word. The resounding clarity with which You have spoken to us. May our heart be to edify one another, & to glorify You. Teach us to love You w/all our heart, w/all our soul, & w/all our mind. Renew our love for You & for one another. Bless each heart w/us today.

Perhaps you're in a place where all this sounds good, but it's not real to you. It seems more surreal because you've never truly believed on the Lord & be saved from the power/penalty of your sin. God loves you, Jesus went to the cross for you. If you'll trust in Him, look to Him & believe on Him today, salvation will be yours.