

Session 7 – 1Corinthians 14

THE USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN WORSHIP

Paul's great desire is that the believers who attend the worship gathering should be **edified** – a key word in this chapter: see **v.3** (translated *strengthening* in NIV), **v.4** (x2), **v.5**, **v.12** (translated *build up*), **v.17**, **v.26** (*built up*). To seek to edify others is an example of a loving use of spiritual gifts – the importance of love having been stated in **v.1**.

1. v.1-25 The importance of intelligibility in the gathering for worship

Paul seems to be addressing a situation in Corinth where the gift of tongues was highly prized, but prophecy and other gifts were less valued.

- The gift of **tongues** enables the speaker, inspired by the Spirit, to address God from the heart using words unintelligible to others.
- The gift of **prophecy** enables the speaker, again inspired by the Spirit, to deliver a message from God – a message for that particular church at that particular time.

a) The effect of prophecy (v.1-5)

- Whatever is done in the church must be for building up the body (cf. **12:7**). Anything spoken must be **intelligible**; therefore, in public worship, prophecy is of more value than tongues.
- Tongues may build up the speaker (**v.4**), but prophecy has the effect of **encouraging**, **strengthening** and **comforting** all (**v.3**). Paul wants EVERYONE to speak in tongues (**v.5**), but in church only if it is interpreted; then understanding and upbuilding occur.

Definition of prophecy: "There is a continuing gift of inspired insight available to the church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which gift, whilst not possessing the authority or nature of Scripture, must be given opportunity for its exercise within the church if she is to know God fully as her living head." (W Grudem)

b) Analogies that argue for the importance of intelligibility (v.6-12)

- The gifts in **v.6** can all be **understood**. This is illustrated in **v.7,8 & 11**: unless one understands the music, the significance of the call to battle or the words of a foreign language, each is *useless*.
- The aim is to **excel in gifts that build up the church (v.12)**.

***'The point of everything in corporate worship is not personal experience in the Spirit, but building up the church itself.'* (Fee)**

c) Application to those in the church (v.13-19)

- Consider the effect unintelligibility has on corporate worship. Those with the gift of tongues must pray for interpretation in the corporate gathering.
- There is a need to pray with the spirit and with the mind also; this is also true of singing (**15**). Praising God with the mind (= intelligibility) will benefit others (**16-17**).

***'Clearly Paul is not looking for unintelligible prayers (prayers in a ritual, emotional jargon?) or hymns chosen on the basis of attractive tunes without regard to the theology they express. The MIND is to be active in both.'* (Morris)**

- In **v.18-19**, Paul summarises what he has been saying by referring to himself. He has the gift of speaking in tongues, and he values it hugely (for his private prayer and worship). But in church, it is important for him to speak intelligible words.

d) Application to those outside the church (v.20-25)

If unbelievers attend the Christian gathering (perhaps because of personal searching, or curiosity), again the use of the gift of prophecy is to be preferred over tongues.

- Words in an unintelligible language will not help the newcomer. At best, they will fail to understand; at worst they will think that the speakers are out of their minds (**v.23**).
- But intelligible words of prophecy can have a profound effect: they can lead the unbelievers to recognise the presence of God

among his people, and can lead to conviction of sin, repentance and conversion (v.24-25).

Thus, prophecy is to be preferred because it leads both to the edification of believers and to the conversion of unbelievers.

2. v.26-40 The importance of order in the gathering for worship

a) *Guidelines for orderly worship (v.26-33a)*

As Paul reminded his readers in Ch.12, diversity is a characteristic of the church, and so there will be a variety of people with a variety of gifts who will make a contribution to the gathering. This must be done in an orderly way so that the church is edified.

- *Tongues (v.27-28)* Speaking in tongues, if it is interpreted, can be part of worship. But only a few should do it and they must do it one at a time.
- *Prophecy (v.29-32)* Again this is to be done in an orderly manner. Paul introduces the important guideline that these prophecies should be weighed/evaluated/assessed. (Questions to be asked will be perhaps: *Is what has been said in keeping with scripture and the teaching of Jesus? Is it loving and edifying? Does it glorify God?*)

In v.33, Paul gives a theological reason for what he has just said: everything that is done should be in keeping with the character of God, so disorder would be inappropriate – *peace* should be present.

b) *Orderly behaviour (v.33b-35)*

This is a very difficult passage, because Paul seems to be contradicting what he said in Ch.11. There he talked about women praying and prophesying; here he says that they should remain silent.

It appears that there was something unseemly about women's behaviour in the worship gathering at Corinth, as they made spoken contributions in a way that mis-used their new-found freedom. Paul makes this rule in order to preserve seemliness and order.

c) Conclusion (v.36-40)

Those who are truly Spirit-led will acknowledge Paul's views as being from the Lord (**v.37**). If they don't, God will ignore them (**v.38**).

Then (**v.39-40**), Paul summarises what he has been saying in this chapter.

- Encourage the use of spiritual gifts in the Christian gathering, especially prophecy.
- Make sure that the gathering is conducted in an orderly way.

For homegroups

1. Read Rom 14:19, 15:2, 1Cor 8:1, 2Cor 10:8, 12:19, 13:10, Eph 4:12,16,29, 1Thes 5:11. What do these verses say about the ways in which Christians are edified/built up?
2. What gifts used well would be particularly good for edifying the church (**v.12**)?
3. Is Paul in this chapter addressing ad hoc problems in the Corinthians church, or is he also outlining his blueprint for the mature Christian congregation?
4. Does Paul expect all believers to prophesy?
5. What do **v.16,17** say about our thanksgiving?
6. Read **v.23-25**. In what ways, if any, should we be attentive to the needs of any not-yet-Christians present at our church services?
7. Can you envisage a service in our churches which is more like the gathering described in **v.26**?
8. What does this chapter say about prophecy? (See especially **v.1-5 & 26-32.**)
9. If our worship is orderly, does that mean that it will be boring and predictable?
10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using liturgy in our church services?
11. How would you define Christian maturity from this passage?