

THE MAIN THING

THE PREFERRED GIFT

TEXT:1 Corinthians 14:1-12

To the Corinthians, speaking in tongues was THE gift. In the mind of the Corinthians, if you had the gift of tongues, you were really "spiritual." They felt that those who had the gift of tongues were superior to those who did not. In chapter 14, Paul contrasts the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy. He makes it clear that the gift of prophecy is the preferred gift. Tongues were the preferred gift to the Corinthians, but Paul wanted them to understand prophecy was the preferred gift. Twice, we read the two words "**but rather**" (**Vs.1,5**). He says that of all the gifts and of all they are doing, he would much more prefer they prophesy. Let me remind you what Paul meant by prophesying (**Cp.12:10**). The word means "to speak forth, to proclaim." The gift of prophecy was a matter of forth-telling rather than foretelling. Corinthian Church was doing, primarily making tongues the "big gift" in the Church. **In chapter 14**, Paul deals with this matter by declaring to them that prophecy was the preferred gift. Again, twice, Paul says that he would rather they prophesy.

I. THE LEAST VALUE TO THE CHURCH

Paul says in **verse 1**, "**Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.**"

The word "**follow**" means "to pursue, to hunt, to chase after with intensity." **If love is the greatest thing one could possess, one should pursue it with great intensity.** We are to desire spiritual gifts (**12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.**)

Beginning in **verse 2**, Paul states why prophecy is preferred. **In verses 2-4**, Paul twice describes those who "**speakech in an unknown tongue.**"

If you notice carefully, each time the word "**unknown**" is used, the word "**tongue**" is singular. The difference between the two is significant. When the words "**unknown**" and "**tongue**" (singular) are used, they refer to a false and fleshy imitation of the actual gift. "**Tongues**" (plural) indicates the real gift of tongues. **In Acts 2:3-4**, we find the Bible's first occurrence and example of tongues. descended, they appeared like fire and descended as a single body and then suddenly parted themselves in this direction and that, coming upon each man. The phrase "**and began to speak in with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance**"

But what I want you to notice carefully is the word "**tongues**" is plural, the same as in **1 Corinthians 14**. The word means "language." It specifically speaks of a language not naturally acquired.

A) THE WRONG APPROACH

Paul described the false practice as having a false aim: **(14:2). "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."**

The aim of the false is that one "speaketh not unto men, but unto God." To the Corinthians, speaking in tongues was like an act of worship. Notice **verse 14, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful."** Paul's reference

to praying in tongues suggests one of the ways the Corinthian believers looked at the gift of tongues. **To them, it was part of their worship experience. Yet when you look at Acts 2, you find this contrary to the real gift of tongues. In Acts 2, the gift of tongues is to speak to men, not God!**

The real gift of tongues was given to preach the grace of God to men, not to have a discourse with God. In the practice of the false gift, the Corinthians not only were not speaking to men but also, men could not understand them:

"for no man understandeth him." This, again, is the opposite of the actual gift in Acts 2, for we read in **Acts 2:8, "And how hear we every man in our own tongue?"** When the true gift was practiced, men understood what was being said. It was spoken to man and understood by man. Word encourages and brings comfort. The Corinthian practice of tongues brought neither edification nor comfort. It had little value. It brought no profit to those who heard. Furthermore, it had no value because it had:

A) THE WRONG APPROACH

B) THE WRONG ACHIEVEMENT

We read in **verse 4, "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church."** The second time Paul used the phrase, **"He that speaketh in an unknown tongue,"** indicated that this false practice achieved the wrong results for spiritual gifts. It failed to edify the church. The Corinthian believers treated tongues as a self-satisfying matter, which is implied by the words "edifieth himself." God's Word that builds a person up spiritually. Since they were doing nothing but speaking in an unknown utterance, there was no revelation of truth involved. Since there was no spiritual truth being communicated to the believer or by the believer, this self-edification was the achievement. **THE I.**

I. THE SMALLEST VALUE TO THE CHURCH
II. THE SIZEABLE VALUE TO THE CHURCH

In verse 5, we see Paul's second "but rather." Paul says, "I would that ye all spake with tongues."

Notice how he described what had enormous value to the church. Paul speaks of:

A) THE BEST GIFT FOR THE CHURCH

The one gift everyone in the Church of Corinth wanted was the gift of tongues, and Paul says he wishes they all had the gift. But he would rather they prophesied. The reason is that **"for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues."** Paul says that even if everyone in the Church had the real gift of tongues, it was more significant to prophecy. In other words, the best gift for the church is the gift of prophecy, the gift whereby God's Word is proclaimed. **Paul makes clear in verse 5 that even when a person had the real gift of tongues, there would be an interpretation that would bring edification to the Church.**

A) THE BEST GIFT FOR THE CHURCH

B) THE BETTER GOAL FOR THE CHURCH

Notice **verse 6: "Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, knowledge, prophesying, or doctrine?"**

If he just spoke in tongues and what was said was not interpreted, which would result in revelation, knowledge, prophesy, and doctrine, then what he said could not and would not be understood, and therefore, no one would be edified.

**I. THE SMALLEST VALUE TO THE CHURCH
 II. THE SIZEABLE VALUE TO THE CHURCH
 III. THE SIGNIFICANT VALUE TO THE CHURCH**

Then, in **verses 7-8, "And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"**

A) NOTICE THE DESCRIPTION

In verse 7, Paul mentions two kinds of instruments that the Corinthians would have been very familiar with. The "pipe" is descriptive of a type of flute and the "harp" It describes a stringed instrument.

In either case, a wind instrument or a string instrument, unless there is a distinction in sound, a melody will not emerge. If there is no melody, then no one will recognize the tune or song.

A) NOTICE THE DESCRIPTION

B) NOTICE THE DANGER

In **verse 8**, **For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"** Paul uses a trumpet in warfare. If the signalman makes an unclear sound, then no one knows what to do or how to act. The point is obvious: **VRS.9 "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.**

If what a person says cannot be understood he is only speaking in the wind. What he says is useless and profitless.

Notice **verse 10**, **"There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification."** The word **"voices"** "languages." means Many languages are spoken worldwide, and all of them have a purpose. They are not "without signification." The words **"without signification"** literally mean "unintelligible."

All languages have the purpose of being able to communicate.

If they were unintelligible, how would one be able to express himself to another or understand one another?

We read in **verse 11**, "**Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.**" Paul sums it up by saying that it has no value to anyone if we don't understand what is being said. If we are babbling, we are as **barbarians**. In the society of the first century, anyone who did not speak the Greek language was considered a **barbarian**. The word "**barbarian**" is referring to one whose language seems to make no sense.

A) NOTICE THE DESCRIPTION

B) NOTICE THE DANGER

C) NOTICE THE DIRECTION

The Better Goal for the Church **Notice verse 12**, "**Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.**" Paul was aware of how zealous the Corinthians were about spiritual gifts but admonished them to "**seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church.**" The word "**excel**" means "to be the better." Paul said, whereas you have been self-centered, the better goal is to edify others. The goal of all we do as a Church should be the edification of others. not a higher or loftier goal.