

Monday, March 30 ~ The Intelligibility in Worship ~

[1 Corinthians 14:1-19](#)

Paul writes about speaking in tongues in these verses. While speaking in tongues is a sacred, direct line to God, how do those who do not speak in tongues understand what is being said? How can you learn if you don't understand what is being said?

I have two students who came to my class from China this year. For the first few weeks, I am certain what they heard was similar to someone speaking in tongues - they could not understand much of anything I said and vice versa. We communicated minimally with yes/no signals and hand gestures. As the year progressed, I began to find ways to "teach" these children. We communicated through Google translate, pictures, word cards, etc. It was amazing to watch how quickly they began to understand and learn.

Now, as we are in the latter half of the year, the two students are reading, writing, and communicating beautifully, but it took time, instruction and understanding to reach this point.

I believe that our walk with Christ follows the same path. When we are new Christians, there is so much that we don't understand, so much Scripture to read and interpret, so many lessons to learn and try to implement in our lives. It can be overwhelming - just like having to learn a new language. As Christians, it is up to us to speak and teach so that all can hear and learn. Verse 9 really speaks to this point: "So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air." We should speak so that all can hear the wonderful news that we have a living, loving Savior who gave His life so that we could have an eternity with Him.

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Intelligibility in Worship

14 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. ²For anyone who speaks in a tongue^[a] does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. ³But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. ⁴Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,^[b] but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues,^[c] unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

⁶Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? ⁷Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? ⁸Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? ⁹So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. ¹⁰Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. ¹¹If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. ¹²So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

¹³For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. ¹⁶Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer,^[d] say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? ¹⁷You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.

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

Footnotes:

- a. **1 Corinthians 14:2** Or *in another language*; also in verses 4, 13, 14, 19, 26 and 27
- b. **1 Corinthians 14:5** Or *in other languages*; also in verses 6, 18, 22, 23 and 39
- c. **1 Corinthians 14:5** Or *in other languages*; also in verses 6, 18, 22, 23 and 39
- d. **1 Corinthians 14:16** The Greek word for *inquirer* is a technical term for someone not fully initiated into a religion; also in verses 23 and 24.