

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/8/12 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians 14:1-25

When I say “worship service,” what comes to mind? We tend to think of several things, don’t we? Our typical worship service consists of an organ prelude, some announcements, song congregational singing, someone ministering in music, a prayer, an offering, some Scripture reading, a sermon, another song, and a closing prayer. We may fluctuate some now and then, or rearrange the order, but that’s basically it.

Why do we do what we do? Why do we do it the way we do it? Some of it has biblical basis. Much of it is cultural. It’s not wrong to consider culture, either. We live in our culture. We must be sensitive to culture, but we mustn’t be locked into it.

The Bible is our guide for all of life.

How much of what we do in worship is really biblically based? We’re going to study a section that will stretch us in the next few weeks.

Current Series: 1 Corinthians

We began to study this letter a year ago, and took a brief break from it in the past month. I’d like to return to it now and finish it in the next two months.

1 Corinthians 14 is about what to include in a worship service.

Q: Who wrote it?

Q: To whom?

Q: What’s the background?

Q: What’s the subject at hand as we begin ch 14? Spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14)

What place should tongues have in the church? That’s a two facet question. First, what place should tongues have had in the first century church (since it was being abused, which warranted this instruction by Paul)? And second, what about today?

Let’s try to answer the first question in our study. Let’s seek to understand how tongues fit in the early church. Then we’ll seek to address how this text applies to us.

Outline:

I. Here are the church’s responsibilities (1).

Paul highlights three...

A. We should pursue the way of love.

Q: What is love, according to chapter 13?

Q: What does love have to do with spiritual gifts? Love is the “oil” which lubricates the spiritual gifts in the machinery of the church.

Q: What do the words “follow the way of” indicate about love?

B. We should desire spiritual gifts.

Q: What are spiritual gifts?

Q: Why are we told to *desire* spiritual gifts if we already have them (see 12:7)?

C. We should give priority attention to the gift of prophecy.

Q: What does Paul mean by prophecy here?

II. Here are the reasons (2-5).

In this section Paul contrasts two particular spiritual gifts, tongues (or “other languages”) and prophecy. Why should priority be given to the latter gift? READ verses 2-5.

Tongues	Prophecy
Speaks to God (2)	Speaks to men (3)
No one understands (2)	Strengthens, encourages, and comforts people (3)
Edifies self (4)	Edifies the church (4)
Has some value (5)	Has greater value (5)

Think about it: What God says to us is more important than what we say to Him. Do you agree? What difference will that truth make on how we view tongues?

III. Here are some illustrations of the deficiencies of tongues (6-11).

Keep in mind Paul is talking about public worship services. He wasn’t against speaking in tongues. He himself did so (18). But the focus for any gift is to help the church, not merely satisfy the user of the gift.

In the first century, the gift of tongues was needed and operative (neither which is true today, in my estimation). But even in the first century, for tongues to have value it needed to be accompanied by the gift of interpretation. One person would speak, another would interpret, and the whole church would benefit.

What if that didn’t happen? It’s like four things...

A. Listening to tongues without interpretation is like musical notes without a melody (6-7).

It takes more than blowing on a flute to make music. What’s needed? There must be particular notes, with rhythm, and appropriate volume. Otherwise, it’s mere noise. But the notes are arranged in a melody line, what we hear sends a message to our brains.

B. Listening to tongues without interpretation is like a trumpet that doesn’t give a clear sound (8).

If a bugler in the army started playing “taps” right before a major battle, it wouldn’t fit, would it? It would send the wrong message. Even worse, what if he just started blasting notes with no rhyme nor reason? That’s what happens, Paul says, when a person speaks in tongues in a worship service without interpretation.

To put it another way...

C. Listening to tongues without interpretation is like hearing noise without meaning (9).

It’s just pure static.

D. Listening to tongues without interpretation is like listening to a language you don’t understand (10-11).

Have you ever had someone speak to you in a language you didn’t understand? They often get louder (as if your ears didn’t work) and speak more slowly (as if the

problem is your intelligence). But the problem is the speech symbols just don't mean anything to you. So, too, tongues speaking...

So here was the dilemma. God gave the early church a spiritual gift of "tongues" speaking. Some in the Body had it. But others couldn't understand it apart from someone else gifted with interpretation helping out. Apparently, the gift was resulting in massive confusion and controversy in the church at Corinth.

So what needed to happen in the church?

IV. Here are some implications for church worship services (12-25).

A. Excel in spiritual gifts that build up the church (12).

Q: What does that mean?

B. If tongues are used, follow these guidelines (13-19).

1. *Pray for interpretation (13).*

2. *Engage your mind, not just your spirit (14-15).*

Note: There's a principle here that applies to the use of music in the church.

3. *Think about how it will affect the rest of the church (16-17).*

4. *Realize the limited usefulness of tongues (18-19).*

Q: What do we mean by "limited?"

C. Don't be childish (20-21).

Q: How do children tend to look at life? They look at things from the perspective of how it will affect *them*, not others. If there are three pieces of candy and four children, they just know they have a right to get one of the pieces! If they got a new toy they just know they have a right to play with it no matter how much noise it makes, and no matter how it might bother someone else.

Some could have this same perspective towards their spiritual gifts. "I don't care how it affects others! I want to use my gift!" Paul says *no*.

D. Remember the God-given intent of the gifts (22-25).

Q: What was the intent?

1. *Tongues are a sign for unbelievers (22a).*

Q: In what way were tongues a "sign" for unbelievers? Trace through Acts and you'll see tongues in Acts 2 (when the gospel reached the Jews). Then you'll see evidences of the Spirit with the Samaritans who believed in Jesus (8:17ff., though no mention of tongues per se). Finally, the Gentiles spoke in tongues (10:46; again in 19:6). The gift appears when the gospel broke ground in going to the next phase of fulfilling Acts 1:8 to show the continuity of the church.

Q: Does this need for a sign continue to today? Not in my estimation. It was a sign to the unbelievers to show that what the Gentiles received by believing in Jesus was the same as what the Samaritans received which was the same as what the Jews received. There is one church, one Holy Spirit, one gospel, one Savior.

2. *Prophecy is for believers (22b).*

Q: What does prophecy do for believers? The gift helps people grow.

3. *What we do in worship services affects those watching us (23-25).*

Q: How so? Paul gives a scenario.

Key: It's not just "me and God" in worship. I'm a part of a bigger picture.