

Title: But...Does it Edify?

Text: 1 Cor. 14.1-19

Theme: The screen of edification

Series: 1 Corinthians #82

Prop Stmt. All activities in the life of the church must pass the edification test.

My undergraduate education was spent in a university that took very seriously its mission to culture and refine its students. As a result, every year we were required to attend two Shakespearean plays and two operas. Shakespeare was fine, but opera? I couldn't even understand what they were saying? Fact is, there was so much vibrato, that if I did understand Italian, I still couldn't appreciate it. So, I admired the costumes, the scenery, the musical skill, the orchestration, but was for the most part clueless until someone died or until the fat lady sang. And whenever someone did die, it took an enormously long song for that to even happen. But, I was supposed to enjoy it because it was supposedly good for me. I think I have a little too much NASCAR in me.

Many of you grew up in a religious setting where you were bored out of your mind and almost completely disengaged from what was taking place in the church service, but you were there because it was "good for you" whether you understood anything or not. Some churches used to have their services in Latin, and some choirs still sing songs every once in a while in Latin. Why? Is it impressive? Is it a mark of sophistication? Is it something the director had to do for a requiem? Does the mystery of another language add to an air of spirituality? For some people, all that matters is the experience, the feeling, the atmosphere, the candles, the ceremony, or the tingly sensation when they sing a song that just sounds and feels spiritual. But, unless there is understanding, there is no edification! So, here is where the church looks as if it is bi-polar. On the one hand there is the intellectual aspect, where we have to formalize, articulate, explain and logically delineate the truth. For some, that is all they want. Give me the facts, let me fill in the blanks on my notes, and I will add more pages to my folder of outlines. But, when the church has emphasized the intellect part to the exclusion of everything else, then the pendulum can swing the other way as people react to that with a desire to "feel their faith." "We don't want theology, we want passion for God!" But, passion without theology becomes passion for passion instead of passion for God. Passion for passion is idolatry. Intellectual awareness without passionate belief and affectionate obedience is also idolatry because it is a worship of the truths, instead of the worship of the God who revealed these truths. We do not have to choose whether we are going to be a church that emphasizes theology or emphasizes passion. If we have the right theology and if we have the right view of theology, we will emphasize both. That is what chapter 14 is about. Edification (being built up in the Christian faith) means to grow in your love and passion for God. In order to be edified, you have to have intelligible understanding.

This chapter is organized by an introduction (vs.1-5) and then divided by 3 uses of "brothers" (v.6, 20 and 26). Today we will review the introduction (pt.1), then look at the first main section (pts. 2 and 3). When we initially looked at the first five verses of this chapter, we discovered a very important truth.

1. **Edification is far more important than Experience.** (1-5)

The point in these verses (1-5) is this: Prophecy is more important than tongues because edification is far more important than experience.

If you will recall, these first five verses have 2 commands, 2 reasons and 1 purpose.
SLIDE

Command #1 Follow the way of love! – v.1

We cannot disconnect our study of spiritual gifts from our God-given calling to love each other in a manner that is described in the previous chapter. But, the goal of this text is to do more than help us study and discuss these truths with a measure of decorum and manners; we are called to use our gifts in the church in a manner that is consistent with our calling to love. That is why Paul then gives the next command.

Command #2 Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. v.1

While the gift of tongues has some limited value, the gift of prophecy is so much more helpful to the church. And since, we are to live with a view of how can I help edify the church, then the gift of prophecy is to be desired way beyond the gift of tongues.

The two commands are followed by two reasons. Both of the reasons come with a note of explanation that follows.

Reason 1: “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.” v.2
Note of Explanation: “Indeed no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit”

Please, please, let the text and its context inform you of the big picture. Yes, Paul says that the person who speaks in a tongue is speaking to God, but he is not saying that as something to admire, elevate and demand for everyone to do. He is acknowledging that yes, the person is speaking to God, but that has no value for anyone else, and if what I do is good only for me, but does not benefit others, then I fail the test of love (chapter 13) and the test of edification (chapter 14).

The Second Reason why we should value the gift of prophecy is because:

[But] “everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” v.3

Prophecy is able to do things that tongues cannot. Granted, “he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.” What is better; doing something that benefits only you, or doing something that will benefit the entire church?

Then, as if he is anticipating the response of those who have the gift of tongues, who think it is the greatest thing ever and are getting a little upset over what Paul is saying,

Paul then says in affect, “I’m not down on the gift of tongues.” What he is down on is the fact that this gift has been so abused, and blown up into being something that it was never intended to be and as a result it was causing serious problems within the church. So, while Paul acknowledges that there is some value to the gift of tongues, he reminds all of us of the bigger picture with this note of explanation.

“I would like every one of you to speak in tongues but I would rather have you prophesy.”

In other words; I know that tongues are a gift from God and I am not saying that they are bad, since they are from God. In that vein, I wish that all of you had the gift, [and perhaps all of the other gifts too] but, even if all of you had this gift (implication – not all speak in tongues), it wouldn’t be of much benefit to the church. It has limited value.

Paul is not saying that speaking in tongues is the mark of an ideal church (where everyone has the gift of tongues) any more than he meant that everyone should be celibate (7.7) He concludes this point by giving a little summary statement; “He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues (unless he interprets) so that the church may be edified.”

You and your husband are having problems in your marriage. He is spiritually passive, emotionally disconnected, and provides no leadership at all. You are bitter. His failure to lead has forced you to make decisions that you shouldn’t have to. You do not respect him, and he is looking for respect in other ways. You come to church and a well-meaning person says, you need to experience God. You need to feel the power and presence of God in your life. So, in the service, you feel God (at least you think you do) and you go home and there is Mr. Potato head slouching on the couch, wondering when you are going to make him some lunch. That experience is not much help at this point. You need edification. You need to be built up in the faith and learn how the cross (the gospel) is the foundation for dealing with bitterness, and how to graciously, yet specifically confront problems.

2. **Edification demands Understanding.** (6-12)

In the church, we have to engage in ministry that is involved in building each other up. Therefore, edification is the screen that filters out meaningless activities in the church. The question that this text demands that we ask is, does it edify? And...THERE IS NO EDIFICATION without UNDERSTANDING.

In verses 1-5 we noted there were two commands, two reasons and one purpose. In verses 6-12 there are four questions and two applications. SLIDE The questions are found in verse 6, verse 7, verse 8, and verse 9. Now, each question is implying something, but in order to make it very clear so that we don’t miss the point there are two specific statements of application. The first point of application is also the fourth question.

Have you ever been listening to me make a point and you are thinking, “Bob, I get it, move on.” And I am saying, “Let me give you an example of what I am talking about” and you are thinking, “I don’t need an example, I got it!” When that happens, there are two possible things going on: 1) I have completely misread my audience (which is entirely possible) or 2) There are others here, who I know have not gotten it, so I keep hammering more nails into the same board.

Verses 6-12 do not give us a great deal of new insight. In these verses Paul is just giving more explanation and illustrations. I will take us through these verses, but his explanation does not need explanation and his illustrations do not need to be illustrated. But, it is obvious that if Paul is going to go into this much detail on this point, it is not because he misread his audience, but because there were a whole bunch in Corinth who really did not get the point yet. This tongues thing was a serious problem.

Question 1 (v.6) – What good will I be if I come and only speak in tongues? The answer that is implied is – I won’t be of any good to you. Now, if I bring some revelation, knowledge, prophecy or word of instruction, well that is different. Ministry like that can be understood, which in turn can be helpful.

Question 2 (v.7) – Here is illustrating his point from playing a musical instrument. “How will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?” The answer is, no one will. Without distinction in the notes, it is only noise and has no value or meaning. That is the affect that tongues has on others.

Question 3 (v.8) – Here is another musical illustration, but this time it is from war. What happens in battle if the trumpet sound is unclear and the troops do not know if they are supposed to advance or retreat? Is Paul simply grabbing an illustration or is he intensifying his language here to show that we dare not be unclear in church? People have to know the truth and they have to understand the truth. We are in a war that demands intelligible instruction.

Question 4 and Application 1 (v.9) Notice the words “So it is with you” (which are repeated in v.12). He puts it in the form of a question, but the point is very clear. If you do not use words that people understand, they will not know what you are saying. He goes on in verses 10-11 to say that all languages have meaning, but that language is wasted on the person who does not understand it.

Application 2 (12) “Excel in gifts that build up the church.” Put your attention on what is going to be the most beneficial.

3. So, what are we supposed to do with tongues? (13-19)

The opening of v.13 (“For this reason”) makes it clear that the actions that are now being called for are connected with the truth that he has just explained. Edification is far more important than experience and edification demands understanding. Tongues does not edify the church, so...what are we supposed to do with the gift of tongues? Throw it

away? Tell people that they can't do it, or if they do, then they must be demon-possessed? No.

A. **Pray for Interpretation.** (13-17)

The text does not rule out the gift of tongues. I do think that Paul is establishing a principle that should govern both the private and the public use of tongues. The principle is this: If you want to speak in tongues, get an interpreter. This is a point that Paul returns to later in the chapter when he gives specific instructions for how this affects the times when the believers gather together for church. If there is no interpreter, then you don't let the tongues take place. In v.14 he continues the points he has made earlier. If I am praying in a language that I do not understand, then my spirit may be praying, I may be feeling really good about this experience, but my mind, my understanding of the faith, direction for my life or wisdom for decisions are receiving no benefit at all. So, what should I do? I should pray for interpretation! The same thing is true if I am singing in tongues (v.15). I may be having a neat worship experience right here all by myself, but that really isn't the goal. I need to understand what I am singing. Otherwise (v.16), how can the person who is next to you in the prayer time or the prayer gathering be able to say "Amen" to what you are praying if he has no idea what you are saying? You, may be giving thanks, but the other person is not edified.

Then, like a wise pastor who really desires for his people to learn maturity, he says in affect....

B. **Don't make a big deal about it.** (18-19)

Paul says, I speak in tongues more than all of you, and I am not very impressed with it. In fact, you will probably never hear me speak in tongues, because it would not be of any benefit to you. It is not that big of a deal because it has such limited value. There is no doubt that Paul is seeking to play down and limit the role of tongues in the corporate life of the church. Individual and private use, is not really an issue, but uninterpreted tongues in the church harm the church instead of helping. That is why, he emphasizes gifts that build up the church.

Conclusion:

Theologically:

1. Paul is not freaked out by the gift of tongues, so neither should you.
2. Paul is worked up by the abuse of the gift of tongues, we should guard that.
3. Love and edification are the unchanging filters of words and actions for believers.

Practically:

1. Watch your words!
2. Does it edify?