

## **SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:**

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

### **III. MAINTAINING PROPER DIET & EXERCISE**

#### **D.) ROLES & EQUIPMENT (Offices & Gifts)**

## **“ORDER IN THE GYM I: EQUIPMENT**

### **(1 Cor. 14:1-33a)**

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#### **INTRODUCTION:**

Pop Quiz: *If the apostle Paul had been born in contemporary America, which state would you assume he was from?* Personally, I am convinced it would have to be New Jersey! I say this not just because it's my home state, but because two of Paul's favorite forms of communication are striking rhetoric and dripping sarcasm. Keep this mind as we examine our Scripture this morning.

Further, let us review the context. The Corinthian Christians have proven themselves to be a church with tremendous passion and a great number of impressive abilities. Because of this, the culture they live in which still holds much sway in their lives, and their lack of accountability they have begun to think of themselves as super-spiritual Christians. They have come to believe that their own personal intuition and emotional leadings are superior than even those of the apostles. As a result, they have not only fallen into theological and practical error, but have become a community with constantly changing expressions and beliefs of what it means to worship and be a peculiar people set apart by and for Christ. This people, therefore, began to lose sight of Christ's supreme Lordship and instead are ruled by their own wisdom, intuition and emotions. As a result, they have many divisions and quarrels and are completely unlike any other Christian Church of the First Century.

Having reminded these Christians about what it means to be the Body of Christ, empowered by the gifts of His Spirit in order to live out His divine love, Scripture now further delves into HOW Christ's Church may best express this and the dangers that need to be avoided.

#### **PRAYER**

### **I.) LOVE IN SPEECH (vv. 1-5)**

#### **A.) Divine Love Is Most Expressed Through Prophecy (v. 1)**

- Speech, in general, is described as the superior gift because it is how – according to Scripture – followers of Christ most and best express and share divine love.
- The embodiment of divine love, as we saw in the last Chapter, is Christ Himself – His example and His teachings. To share about Him and His Word is the most loving expression human beings can make!
- However, not all speech or forms of communication are equal in this regard. Only speech which is prophecy – a forth-telling of God's Word direct from Him, clearly understood.
- Corinth, however, was a tremendous melting pot of peoples from countless places and language groups. Therefore, those who could not only speak eloquently but do so in a variety of languages were often held in highest esteem. The Corinthian Christians, in their pride-tainted zeal took this even a step further by combining this idea with the pagan concept of a unique and mysterious way to communicate with the supernatural and divine. So much so, that they apparently claimed to discover and speak a special heavenly language that is so mysterious and

special that even they didn't know what they were saying!

## **B.) The Problem With 'Tongues' (vv. 2,4a)**

- Before proceeding any further, it is important to recognize that throughout this chapter Paul refers to two different understandings of “language” or “tongues.” Whenever he uses the term in the singular, he is referring to the peculiar non-human language the Corinthians have taken pride in. When he uses the term in the plural, he is referring to human languages.
- Paul begins this discussion by comparing the Corinthian's non-human 'tongue' to prophesy, while making very clear that the two are not compatible. It is an either-or proposition. One may choose to speak in this 'tongue' or prophecy, but can NOT prophecy in this tongue. **Why?**

### **The Corinthian “Tongue” is:**

#### **1.) Mysterious and Impersonal (v. 2)**

- Nobody (whether speaker or listener) understand any it's sounds. In fact, no human is even capable of understanding these gibberish sounds.
- Paul's references to it being something that could only be “*spoken to God*” and expressing “*mysteries in the spirit*” are **sarcastic jabs** and NOT any kind of acknowledgment of a 'heavenly language.' His point is that it is such unclear, inhuman nonsense that no human on earth could understand it and therefore the only person that even the speaker could possibly be attempting to talk to is an all-knowing God. Paul does not ever say, however, that these sounds ever actually do reach God or are ordained by Him.
- It is also impersonal – random sounds randomly thrown out into the wind. A mystery whose very origins are known only to the speaker's own spirit.

#### **2.) Promotes the Self (v. 4a)**

- The effect (if not motivation) of this indecipherable speech is only to promote the individual speaker as possessing a proclaimed spiritual ability and communion with God that others do not have and cannot even comprehend.

**Compare these characteristics with what we learned last week about divine (agape) love and you will see that this speech is contrary to Godly love. Now, compare instead:**

## **C.) The Blessing Of Prophecy (vv. 3,4b)**

#### **1.) Clear and Personal (v. 3)**

- Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit always and only speaks words in human languages that can be understood by those present and which reveal and never conceal God's mind and purpose.
- In this manner, they further also result in blessing the hearer with:

**a.) edification:** spiritually building others up

**b.) encouragement:** boosting the listener's strength and courage to further seek and submit to Christ – His salvation and will.

c.) **consolation**: comforting in the midst of the world's afflictions and persecution.

## 2.) Builds the Church (4b-5)

- One who speaks in the Corinthian 'tongue' only builds up himself, whereas prophecy builds up ALL in the church for they all are given God's clear Words in an understandable manner.
- In verse 5, Paul abruptly switches to the concept of speaking in different known human languages to further make this point. It's great, he says, to have the ability to speak in different human languages. But, it can only be prophecy and result in 'building up' when the language spoken is understood by all who are listening.
- Illustration: I could preach this message this morning in Koine Greek, modern German or even Hebrew. I could even stand here and give a very clear gospel presentation in one of those languages. But it would not build up or constitute prophesy because few if any of those present would understand any of it.

## II.) THE REQUIREMENT FOR EFFECTIVENESS: **INTELLIGIBILITY** (vv. 6-12)

### A.) The Question of **Benefit** (v. 6)

- The first test of any of our words or acts as Christians should be: **“Is this for my benefit or others’?”**
- *“What is the benefit of exercising this gift in this way at this time?”*

### B.) The Question of **Meaning** (vv. 7-10)

- The second test is: **“Does this express to others a clear and applicable meaning?”**
- Lots of things make all kinds of noise, but even the most enchanting or loud sounds have no benefit unless they communicate a meaning that is easily understood by those listening.

### C.) The Question of **Community** (vv. 11-12)

- The third test is: **“Will this bring me closer together in commonality and community with my audience OR simply further our unbridgeable differences?”**
- If we are truly zealous to serve and honor Christ in the power of His Spirit (as opposed to the pleasure or promotion of our own), then we will seek to excel in that which most builds up the church and not just draw attention or praise to ourselves.

## III.) APPLICATION FOR THE **CHURCH** (vv. 13-33)

### A.) **Understanding** (vv. 13-19)

- Once again, Paul is in no way here calling this gibberish an actual 'spirit language.' Rather, he is sarcastically making the point that since it is clearly not any human language it can only come from one's own spirit. As such, it can never be fruitful because it will never be understood. Thus, it cannot be of the Holy Spirit but of the human spirit. Otherwise, the speaker and listeners alike *would* understand and be built up.

- Paul completes this argument by referring back to his own ability to speak in many different human languages. Even so, he says, it would be more beneficial for more to speak five plain words understood by all than 10,000 words of great eloquence in other languages that might impress his listeners but also leave them confused and no more built up themselves.

## **B.) Purpose (vv. 20-22)**

### **1.) Maturity (vv. 20-21)**

- Illustration: This past Monday, after picking up my sister-in-law, niece and nephew from Trinidad we met up with *my* sister and her kids at the Queens Zoo. My sister's baby, Zoe, spent the day entertaining us all with some pretty amazing and never-before-heard babbles and sounds. [*imitate*] It was adorable and impressive, but I still have no idea what she was really trying to communicate.
- Senseless babbling may be cute in babies who are not yet capable of defined speech, but it is wasteful, inexcusable and selfish in those who are capable of more!

### **2.) Languages (v. 22a)**

- All three previous examples in Scripture of a demonstration of the true spiritual gift of languages (and recorded in Acts) were performed as a sign to unbelievers that in Christ they too may be reconciled to God and adopted into His family!
- It was a rare gift for the benefit of unbelievers during a unique time of transition in God's relationship to humankind.

### **3.) Prophecy (v. 22b)**

- Prophecy, however, is primarily for believers. In the local assembly we are speaking God's Word to His people, not proving His New Covenant to unbelievers at it's conception.

## **C.) Witness (vv. 23-25)**

- Still, prophecy can be a tremendous blessing not only to the primary believing audience but to any other comers.
- It is an effective tool of discipleship and evangelism. The Corinthian 'tongue', by contrast, accomplishes neither. It merely confuses the faithful, divides the congregation, and scares away the unbelievers.

## **D.) Peaceful Order That Produces Edification (vv. 26-33)**

### **1.) Edifying**

- All forms of worship and communication need to have a purpose and effect of building up others spiritually.

### **2.) Limited Number of Speakers**

- No more than 3 in a given service/event. Otherwise, it creates confusion and diminishing returns.

### 3.) **One At A Time**

- Never more than one voice at a time.
- NO competing voices.

### 4.) **So ALL Understand**

### 5.) **Under Proper Control**

- Self-control at all times and in all circumstances. Any giving of control to emotion or circumstance is unloving, unproductive and unbiblical.

## **CONCLUSION: What Does This Have To Do With PBC in 2009?**

Our church does not and never has taught or practiced the 'Corinthian tongue.' Nor, to my knowledge, has this ever been a significant question or issue. So what are we to walk away with from this text?

As always, we need to walk away by applying it's principles to all appropriate areas of our own lives and community. [Spiros Zodhiates warns: *“Who is the troublemaker in the local assembly? He who believes that the interest of God and others should center on himself. A self-centered person who seeks to appropriate all God's blessings for his benefit, even if those benefits are spiritual, causes division and trouble in the local congregation”* (Speaking In Tongues and Public Worship, pg. 11)]

In all that we consider – in voice or action - and in all of our activities we need to carefully consider:

**“Is this for my benefit or others'?”**

**“Does this express to others a clear and applicable meaning that builds up and glorifies Christ?”**

**“Will this bring me closer together in commonality and community with my audience or simply further our unbridgeable differences?”**