

Singing and Praying With Understanding

Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding their worship assemblies, "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15, NKJV). What point was he making?

The Context

This entire chapter is about the use of miraculous gifts in assemblies. The Corinthians' assemblies were evidently a mass of confusion: numerous brethren were speaking in tongues, yet sometimes there was no interpreter; multiple brethren were speaking out at the same time, either prophesying or speaking in tongues, thereby making it practically impossible to understand what anyone was saying. Paul feared that visitors would think they were mad! (v. 23).

Paul reminded them that all things must be done for edification (v. 26). That requires orderliness (v. 40), and toward that end the Apostle laid down explicit rules governing who could exercise what gift and when (vv. 27-36). Edification also requires clear communication. In the first half of the chapter, Paul emphasized that as an inherent advantage of the gift of prophecy over the gift of speaking in tongues. Everyone could understand the prophet and thus benefit from his message, but no one could learn from someone speaking in tongues unless someone was present who could interpret the language being spoken. Five words understood were far better than ten thousand spoken in a tongue (v. 19).

The Point

Many translations render v. 15 as praying and singing with the spirit and the *mind* (NASB, ESV, NIV, etc.). The point would then be worshiping in spirit (or as directed by the Spirit) and comprehending what one is saying. The problem is, that does not fit the next verse or the overall context very well. I prefer the NKJV rendering, spirit and *understanding*. Paul's word can refer, not just to my understanding what I am doing, but also to doing it in such a way that others understand it; and that is exactly his point! If others do not understand what I say when I am praying, how can they add their "Amen"? (v. 16). How are they edified? (v. 17). Singing, too, is to teach and admonish (Colossians 3:16).

The Application

We do not have miraculous gifts today. They belonged to the foundational days of the gospel (1 Corinthians 13). Nevertheless, the principles in this chapter are quite relevant to our worship.

Singing with the understanding obviously requires that we understand the words we are singing. More to the point here, however, it is singing so that others can understand them.

Music has evolved significantly over the last twenty centuries. Almost all of our hymns are in four-part harmony; still, we are singing the same words at the same time. Some hymns have an echoing effect, where one voice holds a word while other voices sing additional words. It is still all very discernable. But a few newer hymns are rounds, where each part is singing different words at the same time. They can be fun to sing musically, but I wonder: in terms of a listener's ability to discern what is being said, is that significantly different than four prophets or four tongue-speakers talking at the same time? Granted, the modern listener can read all the words in the hymnal or on the projected song slide. But if you are like me, you are concentrating on getting your part right and somewhat blocking out the others' words. How does that add to edification?

As to prayer, the application is obvious. Brethren who lead in prayer must use plain enough language that we can grasp what they are saying. Note the simple, straightforward wording in Jesus' sample prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Also, leaders must speak loudly and clearly enough to be heard. Microphones help, but they can only do so much. It is just as difficult to understand a prayer leader who mumbles English as one who speaks boldly in a language we do not know!

"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble . . . let all things be done for edification" (v. 26).

- by Frank Himmel

How Will We Be Remembered?

Like it or not, we are all leaving a legacy. Every day, by what we say and how we act, we are

shaping how others will remember us.

Two men from my past illustrate this clearly.

The first was harsh and critical. He often caused trouble among brethren and seemed to find fault more easily than he offered help. His influence was negative, and over time, it simply faded. I honestly haven't thought of him in years.

The second man was very different. He was kind, helpful, and encouraging. He looked for the good in others and tried to build them up. Though he's been gone a long time, I still think about him. His influence has lasted.

The Bible reminds us, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1). Ecclesiastes 7:1 reminds us, "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." What people remember about us matters.

So, how will it be with you and me? When we are gone, how will we be remembered? Will we be remembered for criticism and conflict, or for kindness and encouragement?

Let's determine to live in a way that strengthens others and honors God. If we do, our positive influence will not soon be forgotten. Think!

- by Greg Gwin