

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 worshipping 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

Bible Classes: Are You Learning Anything?

Often we may hear someone say, "I'm not getting anything out of my Bible class." When this happens what is the cause? There may be many causes. One could obviously be that the teacher is not prepared and that he is not doing a good job in presenting the material. However, even if this is the case, still as a Bible student, I can learn much in the class IF I do the proper kind of preparation and study for the class at home.

I believe that probably more often than not, the problem lies more in the other direction. The person who makes this statement may, in fact, be putting little or nothing into the class. They come without studying and expect the teacher to suddenly excite them about this subject and fill them with knowledge. This will not happen if we do not show enough interest at home to prepare for the class.

Also, how many parents are concerned enough about their children's soul that they make sure they are getting their lessons and bringing their books? Are we wasting time and losing our children in our indifference?

- by Steve Hardin

How Are You Using Your Time?

Have you wondered why there never seems to be enough time to get everything done? Well, we may now have the answer. According to an article in U. S. News, an average American, in his lifetime, will spend:

- 6 months at stoplights
- 8 months opening junk mail
- 1 year looking for misplaced items
- 2 years unsuccessfully trying to return phone calls
- 6 years waiting in line
- 6 years eating

Other recent studies suggest that we will spend as much as 20 years watching TV, and even more time sleeping!

Now, to put this in its proper perspective, think of this: if you attend every service of the church (Sunday Bible study, Sunday morning and evening worship, and Wednesday night Bible study) you will spend only about 1.5 years total. That's only slightly more time than you will spend looking for misplaced items, and only about twice as much time as you will spend opening junk mail!

But, some Christians will not do even this much. Over and over again we return to Hebrews 10:25 - "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves, together". God commands us to assemble. Why? There are multiple reasons, but the context of this verse clearly shows that there is a great benefit for US! Are you taking advantage of this great blessing?

Christian, how are you using your time? If you don't regularly attend all of the services, you may be spending more time opening junk mail than worshipping God. Isn't that a terrifying thought!?!

- by Greg Gwin