

Paul continues to make his case for edification rather than excitement. Prophesying was superior in results to speaking in tongues. The assembled saints would be edified instead of merely the speaker. One who rises to prophesy may not present God's mind to us faultlessly but at least we understand the language being spoken and can take in and weigh what is said. The Spirit can move our hearts by whatever is said in subjection to His leading. He cannot if we don't even understand the language being spoken. And listeners cannot sift the precious from the worthless spoken in an unknown, foreign language. Who knows what might be said in the name of the Lord. This is why the first thing Paul mentions in chapter 12 is a screening of speakers, as to whether they confess Jesus as Lord. The need for judging what is spoken by the prophets is restated in 14:29, "let the others judge." This would be impossible without interpretation of any foreign language being spoken.

He uses simple commonplace examples to illustrate his point. Even inanimate things such as musical instruments are useless if they cannot play a tune. This reminds us of his earlier statement beginning chapter 13,

*13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become [as] sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

In the military, camp order was maintained and battles were directed by use of distinctive trumpet calls. The beautiful, familiar TAPS still played ceremonially at military funerals, is a relic of that practice. It was merely the call at the end of the day to quiet down and go to sleep. In the wilderness the Children of Israel were given silver trumpets to call them to break camp, etc. We now use radios for most of that, but if there is static communications may be disrupted. When a tornado hits a town the question always arises, Were the sirens sounded? We take shelter until the all-clear sounds. If the siren doesn't give a recognizable signal many might perish. So likewise if the speaker cannot be understood the listeners miss a warning or other blessing.

*9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.*

The key is, "**easy to be understood.**" We now use a speaker system to assure all in the room may hear speakers, even those with weak voices. Others with normally strong voices, if unsure of themselves, may

mumble. The result isn't much different than if he were speaking in a foreign language. We stopped kneeling in prayer meeting because of problems hearing prayers spoken into the back of one's chair. For this reason if we do kneel we should face toward others or rise to our feet when praying aloud. Otherwise how will the others be edified and be able to intelligently participate with an "Amen!" Verse 16 speaks to that.

*16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? 17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.*

Frustration results when would-be hearers are unable to hear, or worse, unable to understand what they can clearly hear. The confusion of tongues at Babel is reenacted all over again. The tendency is toward separation rather than uniting.

*11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.*

But we can have grace in our hearts toward one another's weaknesses.

Being zealous of spiritual gifts they were to seek to excel to the edification of the assembly. We should endeavor to speak to be understood rather than to impress others. Self becomes the focus and the speaker an object of admiration and even adulation by others. Self is in action, whether speaking an unknown foreign tongue or simply **using natural abilities** to preach eloquently or to elegantly expound doctrinal truth. This is counter to the desire of the Spirit who seeks to direct and empower the gifts He has conveyed to us from the Lord. Those with natural abilities need to guard against impersonating spiritual gift or interposing self where the Spirit should be in charge. Those who think they have no speaking ability can take heart that the Spirit can and will use them if they are given a burden to speak. Be open and receptive to that burden. **Depend upon Him, not self, whether gifted or not, to prophesy!** And those present, look to the Lord the Head to move those **He will** to pray, speak, give out a hymn as He orchestrates the meeting of His assembly in that locale. After all, He is in the midst and all there are praying and prophesying, whether audibly or not. For they are the body of Christ gathered locally unto His name.

By Ron Canner, November 5, 2003.