

PREFACE

Read 1 Corinthians 14:14-19.

Let's now take a deeper look at v14.

v14

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

Though there are different opinions on what Paul means by “my spirit”—even between the standard commentators I am using for this study—it seems clear that Paul’s use of “my spirit” refers to that part of every believer in direct contact with God’s Holy Spirit, that part of us that best understands and holds the deeper mysteries of our relationship with God through Christ. Here is a mechanical analogy: Like God, the local power station is the source of all electric power; the source sends its power out to each individual household (like the Holy Spirit) where it connects directly with the junction box for the house, where it then branches out power to every corner of the house. The junction box in the house is the “spirit” directly connected to the “Holy Spirit” coming from “God,” but at the same time sending out its tendrils to every part of the house that is “our being.”

One might then conclude that our own spirit is that part of us most attuned to the things of the Holy Spirit. *Our* spirit understands *Him*, just as He understands the Father.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-11.

The personal spirit can indeed feed the personal mind; this is what occurs when, while reading familiar Scripture, the Holy Spirit says to our spirit, “Wait a minute, there is special meaning in this passage just for you; you need to consider this in a new way.” Our spirit takes that message and sends it to our mind, and suddenly the light bulb goes off in our brain: “Hey, I’ve never seen that before!” The result? We know and understand God’s word to a greater degree—i.e., edification.

There are other times, however, when the Holy Spirit and our personal spirit seem to be carrying on a conversation all their own. We can still be edified, since we are still physically and spiritually connected to the process, but for the most part it is occurring without engaging the rational, logical mind. It is a “spirit-thing.”

For example, as we pray and worship in our prayer closet we rise higher and higher into the sphere of the throne of God. At times this can become a very strong, moving experience and, on rare occasions might even include audible communication between God's Spirit and our own, in the language of God's throne room. Our rational mind is not part of this process, so what is the point? How are we thus edified? I have pondered that question this week, and I believe vv14-15 open a window for our understanding.

R. Collins: The spirit is the faculty by which one is in communion with the deity. The mind is an organ of thought that allows for ordinary communication among human beings.

Let me preface by posing three pertinent questions:

- Am I, or can I be, edified by conversation with a brother or sister in Christ?
- Can my life benefit by being in their presence?
- If that be so, how much more will I benefit and be edified from being in the presence of and communing with very God?

We can demystify true and authentic speaking in tongues, as Paul describes, by just thinking of it as a particularly intense form of worship or prayer—an intensified form of communion with God. That communion is so rarefied that it takes place in an other-worldly language—I contend, the language of heaven. That is, *God's* language, not ours. This is a Spirit-gift He has granted to some individuals—a minority in the first century, and an even smaller minority today.

Now, though the mind during that process may be “unfruitful,” that does not mean that *you*—the one whose spirit is connected to the Holy Spirit, who is connected to very God—will not come away from such an exchange edified. Your mind may not be able to put it into words, but you will *know* that you have been edified—you have been changed for the better—because you have just been with God.

The late Samuel Wakefield, D.D., writer of *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (1862), wrote,

But to present our prayers acceptably to the Father, through the Son, we must offer them under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Though we are not authorized to look for those immediate and sensible inspirations which the prophets, and apostles, and many of the primitive Christians possessed, yet we may expect, from the unction of “the Holy One,” that earnestness, and fervor, and penitence, and trust which are necessary to acceptable devotion. The Holy Spirit is the great agent in the world of grace, and without his influence there can be no spiritual worship.

What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

This verse begins with the apostle using a familiar idiom that he will use several times in his letter to the Romans, which means, “What then is the upshot of what has just been said?” (Fee), “Similar to ‘What, then, shall we say?’” (Garland)

None of what has been said renders the “mind” or “understanding” unimportant. What is called for in the mature believer is a proper *balance* of praying—and now he adds “singing”—both “with the spirit” and “with the mind.”

I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also;

Individuals are different; congregations are different; denominations are different. Each of these has certain personalities, characteristics, talents and Spirit-gifts, belief systems, and priorities. Paul is not saying that every individual, every congregation, every denomination is to “pray with the spirit” (implied, with tongues) fifty percent of the time and “pray with the mind” fifty percent of the time. He is saying there is a time to pray with one’s spirit, and a time to pray with one’s mind; there is a time to edify oneself, and there is a time to edify the body of Christ.

Imagine a time of corporate prayer—say, during a Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer meeting, something very familiar to me when I was growing up in a Baptist church. And imagine that as each person so moved stands and offers a public prayer, one person stands and prays speaking in tongues, then sits back down. The members of the congregation look at each other, wondering, “What was that all about?” What has just occurred? The one who just spoke in tongues has, in an inappropriate way, edified himself, while not one other individual was edified at all. The design and intent of the Wednesday night prayer meeting and Bible study is to build up the church—and to do so with clarity and understanding. Even if that person who spoke in tongues was, in his spirit, praying for his neighbor’s ailing child, what good did it do anyone to do it in what seemed to be a Barbarian tongue?

Yet that same person, kneeling before God in his private prayer closet, could rightly and appropriately have uttered the very same words in the same language and it would have been utterly appropriate. In that setting, the language would *not* have been Barbarian, or foreign.

I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

The word translated “I will sing” (*psallo*) means to make music, in the form of praise to God, either with instruments or voice or both. That is, to praise and worship in song by most any means.

It is important to note something K. H. Bartels writes in the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Colin Brown):

The contrast here is not between *to pneumati*, with or in the spirit (either the speaker's or...the Holy Spirit) and *to noi*, with or in the mind, but between being in the Spirit unintelligibly and therefore unedifyingly (in tongues) and being in the Spirit intelligibly.

The Bible as a whole clearly portrays our God as a God of order—yet, He is spirit-kind. Both of these—praying and singing—should also be interpreted in light of something Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well in the gospel of John.

Read John 4:21-24.

The S/spirit, in all His/its manifestations, colors, and works, is essential, vital to the correct and effective worship of our God, whether in the assembly of saints or in the private prayer closet. As Jesus pointed out, however, the spirit is companion to “truth”—which, when traced back to its root in the Greek, means something of which we are not ignorant, something not hidden. That is *knowledge, understanding*.

It is the proper balance of the two, both privately and “in the church” (v19), that feeds and builds up the church in love. This is what was in such short supply in Corinth.

Here, too, is the lesson for us today. Most churches today suffer from the same imbalance: either there is an unbridled, undisciplined effusion of spiritualism, or a rigid, unfeeling intellectualism that throws a cold shoulder to anything remotely of the Spirit. This combined with the tragedy of traditionalism—i.e., continuing to repeat the past for no better reason than “that’s the way we’ve always done it”—results in a local body of believers lacking in growth, in maturity, and quite often in love.

It requires diligence, hard work, strong leadership, and, not least, a deep knowledge of God’s word to strike the proper balance between the two. Woven throughout this chapter (and others) is the motive that helps sustain the balance: love, and the desire that *all* in the body be edified.