

PREFACE

Let me begin this session by posing a couple of questions:

1. Why are we here, in this building, on a Sunday morning?
2. Why is it *necessary* for us to be here?

Answering for myself, to Question #1 I would say, in order of priority, to worship our God and Lord, to learn from His word, to fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. To Question #2 I would say, because of the corrosive effects of the fallen world in which the church dwells. [More on this later.](#)

I recently read a couple of articles, written by a political writer who is also a Christian, in which he responds to those who are critical of Christians for their position on marriage being only between one man and one woman.

In Christianity, marriage isn't just the central building block of society—producing and rearing the next generation—but the essential symbol of the Church's relationship with Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, God the Father often portrays Himself as the faithful husband of an unfaithful bride, His chosen people Israel. Although God chose Israel and remained faithful to her, she abandoned him, seeking pagan idols or putting her trust in other nations to save her from her enemies.

This metaphor becomes even more explicit in the New Testament. Jesus often compared the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14) and Revelation looks forward to “the wedding feast of the lamb” where the bride is the Christian Church and the groom is Jesus (Revelation 19-21).

When exhorting husbands to “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” Paul explicitly ties Genesis 2:24—the passage about man and woman becoming “one flesh” in marriage that Jesus cited—to the relationship between Jesus and the Church.

Marriage is about more than just social convention for Christians—it is a symbol of God's faithfulness to His people and Christ's selfless love for the Church. In marriage, men and women take part in a small echo of God's perfect love. (Tyler O'Neil, *Here's Why Those Stubborn Christians Won't Just Redefine Marriage*, at PJ Media.com)

You may be asking what all this has to do with the discussion of tongues in vv14-19 of Chapter Fourteen.

Stay with me.

Let's look at one of the passages O'Neil mentions without citing the reference.

Read Ephesians 5:25-27.

This is a beautiful picture of what the church means to Christ Jesus.

- He loves it so much that He gave His life for her (His bride).
- Echoing the gritty scene in Ezekiel 16 painting a picture of God's tender care for Israel, once she was "born," Christ set out to sanctify her—*hagiazō*, to make her holy, purify her, consecrate her; He does this by "the washing of water with the word," an ambiguous phrase interpreted differently by different scholars, but I side with C. H. Spurgeon: "I do not believe that baptism is intended here, nor even referred to. I know that the most of commentators say it is. I do not think it... Christ sanctifies and cleanses us by the washing of water, but what sort of water? By the Word. The water which washes away sin, which cleanses and purifies the soul, is the Word"—in this case, the *spoken* word (*rhema*), not the written word.
- Why? So that when He returns to take His church home, Christ the bridegroom "might present to Himself" a glorious, beautiful, holy, and blameless bride.

This is how much Christ Jesus loves His church—and, of course, every individual believer in it. His purpose is to establish it, protect it, nurture it, to bring it to maturity pure and spotless.

And that should be *our* purpose as well.

Why is it so necessary for us to meet together regularly—to *be* the church? Why is it so necessary for Christ to be continually sanctifying and cleansing His church? Because this fallen world is dedicated to tearing it down, dedicated to its destruction. The outer walls—the *edifice*—of the church are in need of constant repair from the corruption and erosion of this earthly culture and society. It is not a once-and-done, but a *constant* process. It is not sufficient for the church to be built (edified) once; the church must be constantly, repeatedly edified just to survive and, by the grace of Christ Jesus, become stronger, more mature, more ready to be His bride in the Day of His return.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26.

Let all things be done for edification.

In v12 Paul writes, “So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.” Why is the gift of prophecy superior to the gift of tongues in vv3-5?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:3-5.

After the worship of our God, the highest priority in our coming together is the strengthening, the reinforcing of the integrity of the church—that is, the individual members that comprise the body of Christ. This is the apostle’s over-arching point in this chapter—and it is in perfect alignment with the priorities of Christ Jesus for His church.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:14-19.

v16

Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?

This verse contains an extremely awkward phrase: “...the one who fills the place of the ungifted...” One wants to inquire of Paul, “Could you have possibly said this any worse?” And then one wants to address the translators, “Couldn’t you have *helped* us, rather than stand on your head to make this even more confusing?”

The earlier NIV comes to our rescue with, “how can one who finds himself among **those who do not understand** say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving” (emphasis added). That’s all. This doesn’t refer to unbelievers (why would an unbeliever be offering an “Amen” anyway?) or necessarily outsiders. It just refers to someone who does not have the gift of interpretation of tongues; as he hasn’t a clue what is being said, he cannot affirm it with his “Amen.”

As Gordon Fee succinctly puts it, “In the assembly the worship must be corporate, not individualistic.” I would append to that, in private you are free to be as individualistic as you like.

v17

For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

It isn’t that your words and behavior are necessarily unholy or insincere; they are just out-of-place. It serves only yourself.

v18

I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;

Just in case the Corinthians have drawn the wrong conclusion, Paul reminds them that he has the Spirit-gift of tongues, and uses it rather often. He is not speaking against the gift of tongues, as if it is somehow counterfeit (as he makes clear later in this chapter); he is speaking against how it is often misused.

v19

however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

The instruction and edification of his brothers and sisters in Christ is of far greater importance to the apostle. There is no significance in his use of these numbers: the number “five” is simply a round number meaning “a few,” and “ten thousand” is the largest number in Greek. And by “in the church” Paul means, as in the ESV, “in church,” which corresponds best to our contemporary vernacular. That is, in the church service of worship and instruction.

CONCLUSION

It is no accident that the apostle prefaced Chapter Fourteen with the “love” chapter (Thirteen), for it is the love one has for his or her fellow believers that will govern the careful, orderly use of Spirit-gifts in the body—and not least in the assembly for corporate worship.

The questions we should always ask ourselves in the corporate assembly:

- *Am I doing something just for me—following my heart, following my spirit, following my way of doing things—that might possibly be a distraction, an irritant, or even an obstacle to others in the assembly as they worship or seek instruction?*
- *If I am leading, is it in a way that contributes to the whole in an understandable way, or in a divisive, even self-exalting way?*

This does not mean that we always formulate our coming together for the lowest common denominator—the lowest level of understanding. For example, in preparing this lesson I learned a new word; I could not even find it in my several *unabridged* dictionaries. David Garland writes, “Tongues are **discarnational** rather than incarnational and make the word unintelligible and inaccessible” (emphasis added). Well, at first, that sentence was unintelligible to me. Should I have rejected it because the writer was using a fifty-cent word I did not understand? On the contrary, I discovered it was well worth my time to ferret out its meaning.

Most of us are familiar with the word “incarnate,” which means, essentially, “in flesh.” “Discarnate,” at its root, means “without flesh,” and, as it turns out, the word “discarnational” has special application for this passage. In a long paper entitled “The Technological Church,” Jessica Fredricks writes,

Jesus is the mediator—the one who goes between—yet he is whole, present, and real. However, most of what we have created has served not to bring us further into wholeness but to fragment us spiritually and relationally. Our technology encourages isolation and distance instead of presence, and it creates worlds of unreality instead of drawing us further into our true reality in Jesus. We have mediated ourselves so that we reflect not the incarnation of Christ but the opposite. Much of our technology is at work creating a discarnate world. “Discarnate” refers to interactions that are defined by a shattering of wholeness, a lack of physical presence, and a turning away from true reality.

Now back to what David Garland wrote: “Tongues are discarnational rather than incarnational and make the word unintelligible and inaccessible.” We should want what Jesus wants. He wants His church to be pure, spotless, mature, and whole. It is to be distinctive in this fallen world for its unity, its wholeness, and, not least, for the love its members have and demonstrate for each other.

Unintelligible “tongues” in corporate worship do not contribute to the wellness, the edification of the body, but just the opposite. They glorify the individual instead of Christ. They disrupt and divide rather than instruct and unify. Our purpose in and for the church is to be for the latter.