Seek The Good Of Others

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Devotional Scripture: Gal 6:1-10

OUTLINE

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OVERRIDE AND APPROACH TO LESSON

Key Verse: 1 Cor 14:26

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews how God wants us to Seek the Good of Others. The study’s aim is to discover how to help others and put our own interests in the background to build up the body of Jesus Christ. The study’s application is to determine that in every contact with others, we seek their good and keep our own interests out of the way. (From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary).

Key Verse: 1 Cor 14:26

26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Chapter 13 is one of the most sublime digressions in any letter in any language. But it was nonetheless a deviation from the central theme of gifts and their use by the church which Paul began in chapter 12 and then concluded in chapter 14. Paul had intimaded in chapter 12 that the Corinthians were perverting the purpose of gifts from a unifying influence on the church to one fostering fragmentation and discord (esp. 12:21-25). A contributing factor to their factious spirit was the Corinthian pursuit of individual freedom and personal enhancement at the expense of other members of the body whose needs may have been trampled or ignored along the way. Manifestations of this self-centeredness affected each of the problem issues taken up since chapter 8.

The focal problem in the matter of the use and abuse of gifts seemed to be the Corinthian fascination with tongues, a gift which apparently lent itself most readily to perversion from something intended “for the common good” (12:7) to something employed for personal enhancement (14:4). Paul’s corrective was not to stifle the use of gifts (14:39; cf. 1 Thes. 5:19-20) but to urge that their use be regulated by love. The gifts of the Spirit should be controlled by the fruit of the Spirit, chief among which was love (Gal. 5:22). This would lead to exercising the gifts so they would benefit the church body as a whole (14:5) and also honor God (14:25, 33, 40). By way of illustration and correction, Paul compared and contrasted the Corinthians’ preoccupation with tongues with their apparent disinterest in prophecy.

The Corinthian infatuation with tongues was for Paul another manifestation of their immaturity and worldliness (cf. 3:1-3). This he hoped would change, especially in regard to an enhanced appraisal of prophecy and a recognition of the importance of this gift for the assembled church. His final words, contrasting prophecy and tongues (14:21-25), were intended to conclude the exhortation begun in verse 1. This summary argument in verses 21-25 began with the citation of a portion of Isaiah’s prophecy against Israel (Isa. 28:11-12). Because Israel refused to listen to God’s message proclaimed by His prophets, Isaiah predicted that another message would come. This one would be delivered in a foreign tongue unintelligible to the Israelites, yet unambiguous (cf. 2 Kings 17:23). The foreign tongue symbolized God’s rejection (cf. Deut. 28:49; Isa. 33:19), His disciplinary response to Israel’s stiff-necked rebellion against Him (cf. 2 Kings 17:14; Acts 7:51). Foreigners instead of Israel became the temporary servants of God (cf. Isa. 5:26; Hab. 1:6; Matt. 21:43; Rom. 10:19-21), and their foreign tongue was a punitive sign to Israel of what had taken place. That seems to be the significance which Paul attached to tongues.

As such, the primary arena for its exercise was not the company of believers but... unbelievers (cf. Matt. 13:10-15, on parables). Uninterpreted tongues had their place but not in the church where prophecy benefited believers (1 Cor. 14:3). Tongues were of benefit in an assembly of believers only if they were interpreted. But this seems not to have been the Corinthians’ practice. Instead they apparently poured forth their gift of tongues in unrestrained fashion. As a result believers with some other gifts were nonplussed by the behavior of the tongues-speakers (v. 16). Furthermore, newcomers (idiōtai, those who attended but were not believers) and other unbelievers (apistoi) who were aware of but as yet unconvinced by the gospel message (unlike those of vv. 21-22 who had forthrightly rejected it) would find their behavior positively ridiculous. Will they not say that you are out of your mind? This, Paul suggested, would certainly not advance the cause of Christ in Corinth. But prophecy was desirable because it would not only benefit believers (v. 3) but would also expose unbelievers not to a scene of chaos but to one of conviction (cf. John 16:8) and judgment (1 Cor. 2:15)—which would lead to personal disclosure (the secrets of his heart will be laid bare) and the worship of God. As he had done throughout the letter, Paul addressed the Christian community in Corinth as brothers, a general term including both sexes (e.g., 1:10; cf. 1 Peter 5:9). When the
church met, anyone was free to participate by contributing a hymn, or a word of instruction (cf. 1 Cor. 14:6; probably a lesson based on the OT), a revelation from one gifted in prophecy (cf. vv. 6, 29-32), or a word from one gifted in a tongue followed by an interpretation of what was said. The controlling principle in this free participation was the rule of love. All that was said and done was to have as its goal the need of strengthening (pros oikodomēn, "edifying") others (cf. vv. 4-5).

Commentary from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Paul will end this chapter with the imperatives "do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:39b, 40). Some planning is necessary to make that happen, and Paul proceeds to outline the thinking that should go into that planning in the verse before us. Before we examine Paul's thoughts in detail, a couple of cautions are in order. First, the phrasing each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, etc., should not be taken to mean that each and every one of the Corinthians is to come to a worship service with all of the things listed. Rather, the idea is more like "some have this, some have that" (compare 1 Corinthians 12:8-10). Second, we should not interpret the verse before us as "the" God-ordained pattern for worship services, but as a hypothetical way of how good planning can work. A hymn is literally "a psalm" someone might cite or sing from the Old Testament; it could also refer to a Christian hymn that is known to the congregation. To present a word of instruction indicates a teaching time. This may involve using Scripture, repeating a teaching received from Paul, etc. Paul also desires that speaking time be allowed for someone having a revelation. Opinions differ as to whether being enabled to speak revelations is the same as being enabled to prophesy. The fact that 1 Corinthians 14:6 mentions the possibility of Paul bringing both "revelation" and "prophecy" leads some to conclude that those are distinct concepts. Others think, however, that the concepts are synonymous or nearly so. Someone can also speak in a tongue, which must be followed by an interpretation (see v. 27); if there is no one available to interpret, then tongues speaking should not occur (v. 28). The important principle that applies with all the above is that everything must be done so that the church may be built up. Built up is related to edified, we see the connection with 1 Corinthians 3:9, where Paul refers to his readers as "God's building." That building, the church, is constructed by God himself (see Ephesians 2:19-22), but it is also built up by leaders of the church.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In 1906, William J. Seymour opened the Apostolic Faith Mission church in a modest, two-story building south of the Los Angeles city hall. Seymour was preaching a new type of message, and the church was quickly flooded with people. Seymour proposed that becoming a Christian was a three-step process: (1) salvation by faith, (2) cleansing sanctification of the believer by the Holy Spirit, and (3) filling of the believer by the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way. The most prominent of the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit was said to be the ability to speak in tongues—ecstatic languages of prayer and worship. Seymour and others declared that this was a restoration of the gifts of the first-century church as depicted in the book of Acts. What Seymour launched came to be known as the Azusa Street Revival, which lasted until about 1915. Many churches came into being as a result, and these came to be known as Pentecostal churches. Later, a similar movement of people known as charismatics began to develop within many denominations. Charismatics often encountered hostility in churches that did not accept the practice of speaking in tongues. Despite opposition, the charismatic movement has grown. It is estimated that 500 million Christians today are charismatic or Pentecostal—25 percent of all Christians worldwide. The practice of speaking in tongues was controversial in Paul's day. It is still controversial today because many believe that the miraculous spiritual gifts, including the ability to speak in tongues, ceased with the completion of the New Testament; this is known as cessationism.

Paul wrote letters to the churches in Rome, Corinth, the region of Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. Yet in all of his letters, Paul addressed the issue of speaking in tongues only with the church in Corinth, and only in 1 Corinthians. (The other New Testament texts that address this subject are Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6.) Paul's lengthy discussion of tongues in 1 Corinthians indicates that this was a point of controversy within the Corinthian church. Scholars within Pentecostal churches generally divide the phenomenon into two categories. One category is glossolalia, defined as a worship language that does not communicate by itself, but needs interpretation. Sometimes this is called a prayer language (based on 1 Corinthians 14:14), a worship language (based on 14:15), or the language of angels (based on 13:1). The other general category is xenoglossia, the miraculous ability to speak in an existing foreign
language that the speaker has not studied. The purpose is usually for evangelism, as in Acts 2. One thing to keep in mind as we study this lesson is that not everyone in the Corinthian church spoke in tongues. We can see this fact in a series of seven rhetorical questions that Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 12:29, 30. The sixth of these is "Do all speak in tongues?" The expected answer to this and to the other six questions is no. Paul has already said several things about speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 by the time we get to the opening phrase for this reason of today's text: it is speaking to God (v. 2a), is a spiritual mystery (v. 2b), and is primarily for self-edification (v. 4). Paul also expressed a personal desire that all the Corinthians speak in tongues (v. 5), but he further taught that prophesying was to be preferred over speaking in tongues "unless someone interprets" (v. 5).

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Help Others By Promoting Understanding (1 Cor 14:13-22)**

13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.
14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.
15 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.
16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?
17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.
18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;
19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.
20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.
21 In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord.
22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

**Understanding through prayer (13-15)**

*Prayer that "strives" with others (Rom 15:30)*

30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

*Prayer that comes from a righteous heart (James 5:15-16)*

15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

*Prayer that others would believe and understand God's message (John 17:20)*

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

*Prayer that is intercessory for everyone (1 Tim 2:1)*

2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone

*Prayer for those captivated by sin (1 John 5:16)*

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.
Prayer for the poor (Prov 21:13)
  13 If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.

Prayer that is in the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:18)
  18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Prayer that asks for an open door for those who proclaim the gospel (Col 4:3)
  3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Prayer that others may be helped (2 Cor 1:11)
  11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Prayer that God’s Word will be spoken fearlessly (Eph 6:19)
  19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,

Prayer for steadfast faith (Col 4:12)
  12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Prayer or the deliverance from the wicked (2 Thess 3:1-3)
  3 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

Understanding through worship (16-17)

Worship with joy, gladness and thanksgiving (Ps 100:2-4)
  2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Worship with thanksgiving, reverence and awe (Heb 12:28)
  28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

Worship during calamities (Job 1:18-20)
  18 While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" 20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship.

Worship rejoicing in God (Phil 4:4)
  4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Worship God in the splendor of His holiness (Ps 29:2)
  2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.
Worship to bring glory to God's name (Ps 86:9-10)

9 All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. 10 For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

Worship our God and Maker (Ps 95:6-7)

6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice,

Worship God only (Matt 4:10)

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24)

24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Understanding through teaching (18-22)

Teaching to make disciples (John 8:31-32)

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Teaching freedom from being a slave of sin (Rom 6:17-18)

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Teaching to unify in Jesus (Eph 4:11-16)

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Teaching so that disciples can be found perfect in Jesus (Col 1:28)

28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Teaching God's Word to learn how to revere God (Deut 17:19)

19 It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.

Teaching God's Word to determine the truth (Acts 17:11)

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Teaching God's Word so that it can be handled correctly (2 Tim 2:15)

15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Teaching that Jesus is Lord (2 Cor 4:5)

5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
Teaching that results in Christ being known (Phil 1:15-18)

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

Teaching to rebuke, correct and train in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16-17)

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Help Others Through Orderly Worship (1 Cor 14:23-26)

23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. 26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Worship in unity (23-24)

Unity though God composing the members of the body (1 Cor 12:24-28)

24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Unity in Christ (Phil 2:1-4)

2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Unity though baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-13)

12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Unity into one faith (Eph 4:4-6)

4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Unity that lets the world know about love (John 17:23)

23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
Unity through the Church (Eph 4:10-13)

10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Unity through love (Col 3:14)

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Unity through being one in Christ (Gal 3:26-28)

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Unity through living in harmony with one another (1 Peter 3:8)

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Worship in spirit and truth (25)

Worship in spirit and truth because God is a Spirit (John 4:24)

24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Worship in spirit and truth through a broken spirit and contrite heart (Ps 51:17)

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Worship in spirit and truth by being humble, holy and revived (Isa 57:15)

15 For this is what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Worship in spirit and truth by not worshiping in vain (Matt 15:8-9)

8 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

Worship in spirit and truth being in the presence of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:17)

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Worship in spirit and truth by doing it with our whole heart (Rom 1:9)

9 God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you

Worship with goal of edification (26)

Edify through seeking peace at every opportunity (Rom 14:19)

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Edify by seeking the good of others (1 Cor 10:23-24)

23 "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is constructive. 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.
Edify because it is one of the Church’s duties (Eph 4:10-13)

10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Edify by controlling our speech (Eph 4:29)

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Edify by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20)

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts From Bob Deffinbaugh

I want to conclude by focusing on three principles, which are the foundation for Paul’s teaching in the first half of the chapter.

Principle One: Your mind matters. John R. W. Stott has written an excellent booklet entitled Your Mind Matters. In it he decries the mindless Christianity of our time. He cites three forms of this error. First is Catholicism, which has meaningless ritual. Second is radical Christianity, which stresses ecumenicalism and social action without regard to doctrinal essentials. Third, he says, is the charismatic movement, which has divorced Christianity from rationality.

Paul tells us that edification is hardly possible, other than in a very minimal way, without the active participation of the mind. That is why tongues must be interpreted in order to edify. That is also why all must judge when a prophet speaks (14:29-31). Many Christians seem to think that spirituality has little to do with the mind. And yet Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2 that it is the renewing of our minds that is key to Christian growth and worship. In the next verse in Romans 12 Paul used the Greek word for “think” four times. Our minds are essential to godly living.

Charismatic Christians have seriously erred when they have selectively focused on the statement of Paul, “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Paul is not setting knowledge against love; he is showing the danger of knowledge without love. Elsewhere Paul indicates the danger of love without knowledge (Philippians 1:9-11). So often I hear it said, “We worship Jesus, not the Bible.” Well and good, but which Jesus do you worship? The Jews of Jesus’ day believed they worshipped the true God, but in chapter 8 of the Gospel of John our Lord informed them otherwise (cf. verses 19, 42). Repeatedly the Lord told His opponents that they were ignorant of the Scriptures (cf. Matthew 22:29). One test of a follower of God is his obedience to the Word of God (John 8:32ff.). It is only by carefully studying the Scriptures that we can know God and serve Him as we should. Jesus said in His high priestly prayer, “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

A common characteristic of the cults is their emphasis on emptying the mind. Many forms of cultic meditation have the “worshipper” focus upon some simple object, emptying the mind of all else. Frequently simple, supposedly meaningless words are repeated. Worship that disengages the mind is exceptionally dangerous.

No long ago I heard a prominent Christian leader sharing about his devotional life. He said that he would go into a dark room, empty his mind, and then open himself to God’s speaking to him. What came to his mind he took to be divine communication. Now I realize that I have oversimplified what he meant, but that is dangerous. If we wish to know what God has said to us, let us study His Word. God can speak to us audibly, but He has most often chosen not to do so. Let us not sit in dark rooms, but let us open our Bibles and use our minds to worship Him.

In this regard, unbelief can be seen to be senseless. The atheist, the agnostic, and the religious pagan would have us believe that Christianity is foolish and that they are wise. But this is not true. The psalmist wrote, “The fool has said in
his heart, “There is no god”’ (Psalm 14:1). It is the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom (cf. Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, etc.). Men and women do not reject Christ because the evidence is insufficient. People do not go to an eternal hell because faith is irrational. Ultimately, Christianity is not an intellectual problem, but a moral one. Men will not believe because they choose not to; it is not for lack of knowledge. God has said that you are a sinner, worthy of eternal death. He has sent His Son to die in your place, to forgive your sins and to give you eternal life. Will you trust in Him? That is the choice God requires of you for salvation.

**Principle Two:** Spiritual gifts must be measured and governed by the principle of edification. The Corinthians had overestimated the importance of the gift of tongues because they had measured its significance in terms of its spectacularity. While it may be true that tongues are more spectacular than other gifts, the way they were practiced only edified the speaker, not the congregation. Gifts were primarily given “for the common good” (12:7). Without interpretation, those in the congregation were, at best, spectators, not participants in the worship of the speaker (14:16-17). In such situations the tongues speaker might become proud and his speaking profitless.

While the principle of edification was applied specifically to the gift of tongues, it also applies to the exercise of all other gifts. In 14:29-33 it will be applied to the gift of prophecy. Whenever the only person who gains is the one exercising his gift, the principle of edification is likely to have been violated. I know of instances where it appeared that a man participated publicly in worship only for the self-gratification of being heard. That violates the principle of edification. I know of times where a person has spoken and no one understood what he meant. That violates the principle, too. Everything that is done in the meeting of the church must be regulated by this principle. While a person may be personally edified, others may not be. Let us always be guided by the principle of edification.

**Principle Three:** Tongues may be an evidence of carnality, not spirituality. Paul has already warned us of the danger of attempting to assess one’s spirituality by the gift he possesses. The gifts we possess have been sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11), and we are stewards of them (1 Peter 4:10). We cannot take pride in them for they are a manifestation of divine grace (Romans 12:6; Ephesians 4:7). Those who would desire to measure the maturity and spirituality of a church by the presence of the gift of tongues should be warned by Paul’s words in verses 20-25, for it was immature thinking that led to this conclusion. Historically, tongues signified carnality and judgment. In point of fact, Paul has indicated that this was also the case in Corinth. Not only were the saints there carnal (3:3), but they were being judged for their unspiritual conduct (5:1ff., 11:27ff.).

May God enable us to desire the best gifts and to exercise them for the edification of the church, to His glory.

*Adapted from URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/spiritual-gifts-part-4-measure-gift-1-cor-141-25*

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Paul’s sage advice “Everything must be done so that the church may be built up” (v. 26) can be used in many situations. It challenges us to evaluate our church activities by a simple question: Does it build up the church or tear it down? Consider how this test applies to your own church and how you relate to it on a personal level. What issues are important to you? music styles? preaching methods? Sunday school options? Do you want changes to suit your own preferences? When does voicing your preferences cross the line from building up the church to tearing it down? These are hard questions! We move toward the right answers when we realize that the abiding value of 1 Corinthians 14 is not so much doctrinal instruction about the gift of speaking in tongues but about how we understand the priority of edification in the church.

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. Words that are not understood are wasted words (1 Cor. 14:13-14)
2. Experience excites the feelings, but understanding challenges the mind and behavior (vss. 15-17)
3. When seeking to be understood, choose quality of words over quantity (vss. 18-19)
4. Tongues may minister to some, but the preaching of the Word ministers to all (vss. 20-22)
5. Our worship should bring conviction and comfort, not confusion and chaos (vss. 23-25)
6. Seeking the good of others is the rule of all Christian worship and practice (vs. 26)