

January 30, 2022

How the Tongue Question Helps Us Pursue Greater Corporate Worship

1 Corinthians 14:1-19

The zeitgeist of our age

In 1998 Pearl Jam released a song entitled *Wishlist*. The song contains a list of wishes:

I wish I was a neutron bomb for once I could go off
I wish I was a sacrifice but somehow still lived on
I wish I was a sentimental ornament you hung on
 The Christmas tree *I wish* I was the star that went on top
I wish I was the evidence *I wish* I was the grounds
 For fifty million hands upraised and open toward the sky

Whether Eddie Vedder intended it or not, this wishlist epitomizes the zeitgeist of our age: the desire to be the best, to be the center, to be served by all. *I wish* I was the reason millions of people raised their hands. *I wish* was the star on top the Christmas tree. *I wish* I was the moon that shines at night.

Celebrity Church

Sadly this was how Corinthians were practicing their spiritual gifts, especially the gift of tongues. Tongues in particular, as Calvin points out, “had more of [a] show connected with it.”¹ When someone exercised this gift, it amazed those who heard them. The tongue speakers consequently were greatly admired, and therefore tongues abounded. If you wanted to be a celebrity in the Corinth, you spoke in tongues. It was even esteemed more than prophecy. And therein lay the problem: the Corinthians were concerned more with personal experience in the worship setting than they were for the good of the whole.

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 435

How love exercises the gifts

Beloved we are not exempt from this error. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul's words because this is temptation in every assembly: using the gifts to benefit me, using the gifts to serve me, using the gifts to bring attention to me. Whatever gift it may be. This is the grossest abuse of the gifts because the Holy Spirit gave these gifts not primarily for any one's private benefit, but for the benefit of the whole Church. If during corporate worship, you and I seek private experience over public edification then we are not practicing love in the Church. These verses are *the application* of Paul's love chapter. That's why he inserted chapter 13. This is how you practice love in the corporate gathering, by consciously surrendering your private preferences, your private experience, to the greater good of public edification. That's how love practices the spiritual gifts.

The Big Idea...

The rule of love in corporate worship is that private experience must always surrender to public edification

- ☆ Our Doctrine
- ☆ Our Duty
- ☆ Our Delight

I. Our Doctrine²

The interpretations are Legion

First off I must say this particular passage is, in my opinion, the most difficult passage in this letter. Even among Reformed commentators, the interpretations are Legion. John Calvin, Hermann Witsius, Charles Hodge³, Abraham Kuyper, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, D.A. Carson, all differ on particular details, causing some of them to land on very different conclusions. So beloved I can only teach according to the light given me. I am not the final standard. “Test everything, hold fast to what is good.”⁴

Our charismatic brethren

Now I love our charismatic brothers and sisters. I spent 11 years in charismatic churches. One thing that is especially admirable about many charismatics is that they very readily apply the Lordship of Jesus Christ to the nations. They believe that Jesus is King over all and that all peoples should submit to His reign. Many of us in the Reformed camp could learn from their example.

² A brief analysis of the text can be seen in how our translators broke up the paragraphs. In the first paragraph, **v.1-5**, we see **Paul’s assertion**, namely that in the context of corporate worship, *prophecy is to be preferred over tongues*. Look at **v.1** “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” In the second paragraph, **v.6-12**, we see **Paul’s argument**, namely that *tongues do not build anyone up if they cannot understand them*. Look at **v.6** “Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?” In the third paragraph, **v.13-19**, we see **Paul’s application**, namely that *tongues should only be used with interpretation so that all can be built up*.” Look at **v.13** “Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.”

³ I think I land most closely to where Hodge lands. He says here “There are many things also in this chapter which it is not easy to understand on any theory of the nature of the gift. Under these circumstances it is necessary to hold fast what is clear, and to make the certain our guide in explaining what is obscure. It is clear 1. The word *tongues* in this connection, as already proved, means languages. 2. That the speaker with tongues was in a state of calm self-control. He could speak or be silent, 14:28. 3. That what he said was intelligible to himself, and could be interpreted to others. 4. That the unintelligibility of what was said, arose not from the sounds uttered being inarticulate, but from the ignorance of the hearer. The interpretation of particular passages must therefore, be controlled by these facts.” Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 278

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:21

The first problem

But on this issue of tongues, I don't believe their views can't be supported Biblically. Let me name just two.⁵ **First**, they believe that tongues is a gift available to every single Christian. But look at **12:30**, halfway through the verse "Do all speak with tongues?" It's a rhetorical question. The answer is obviously no, just like the answer to the question "Are all apostles?" is obviously no. The problem is that it sets people up for failure and disappointment. I was prayed over for like 45 minutes to receive the gift of tongues, I finally felt so embarrassed that nothing was happening so I started faking it. If the assumption is that everyone can receive this gift, you either have to fake it, or assume that something is wrong with you, that you have some secret sin that you haven't confessed yet.

The second problem

The **second** problem is that they believe that there are two types of tongues. The *first type* of tongues is what we see at Pentecost in Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit fell on certain men enabling them to speak in foreign languages that were previously unknown to them. The Parthians heard them speaking in Parthian, the Egyptians heard them speaking in Egyptian (**Acts 2:8**). Nearly everyone agrees with this view of tongues.⁶ But the *second type* they hold to is a prayer language that is not a known human language and they point to this passage as evidence. That's what I want to address here. Is the gift of tongues *two-fold*? Does the Bible teach that tongues is the gift of being able to miraculously speak a foreign language not previously learned; and that tongues is *also* a special prayer language that transcends all human language? Does Scripture teach tongues to be two distinct gifts?

⁵ Others believe that tongues is a necessary sign of baptism of the Holy Spirit - which means for some that you aren't saved if you don't speak in tongues, while others simply believe means that you haven't yet received everything the Holy Spirit has for you.

⁶ There is a minority report that seems to say the miracle was not in the speaking but in the hearing.

Answering the question lexically

The word for tongues γλῶσσα *glōssa* (G1100) is found 50 times in the NT. One of the principles of interpretation is that we interpret Scripture with Scripture. How does Scripture interpret γλῶσσα?⁷ Specifically in the book of Acts where this gift is seen in history?

- In **Acts 2:4** and **2:11** γλῶσσα was the supernatural gift of speaking in a foreign language. v.4 “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other *tongues* (γλῶσσα) as the Spirit gave them utterance.” What were these other tongues? Those foreigners among them proclaimed in v.11 “...we hear them telling in our own *tongues* (γλῶσσα) the mighty works of God.”
- In **Acts 10:46** Peter and other believers heard Cornelius and others in his household whom the Holy Spirit fell upon praising God as they spoke in tongues. Apparently they were speaking in was a language known to Peter and his company. We read “For they were hearing them speaking in *tongues* (γλῶσσα) and extolling God.”⁸

Nowhere in Acts⁹ or elsewhere in NT could I find γλῶσσα *glōssa* ever being used as a special prayer language that transcends all other human language.

Does 1 Corinthians 14 teach a secret prayer language?

But our charismatic brethren will point to 1 Corinthians 14 as evidence to the contrary. So let's carefully consider that claim. First look at v.2. Paul just

⁷ In **Mark 7:35** Jesus heals a deaf man who has a speech impediment. “And his ears were opened, his *tongue* (γλῶσσα) was released, and he spoke plainly.” γλῶσσα was used to signify he could speak normally in his own language. In **Luke 1:64**, we see Zechariah's tongue (γλῶσσα) being restored to signify he could speak after being made mute by the angel. We read “And immediately his mouth was opened and his *tongue* (γλῶσσα) loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.”

⁸ I don't believe these were two separate things, in other words, one thing they were doing was speaking in tongues (which Peter and his company could not understand) and the other thing they were doing was extolling God (in a language that Peter and his company could understand). For Peter & Co. deduced what was happening here was a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32—namely that these Gentiles were being grafted into true Israel (see study note in Reformation Study Bible). For them to make such a conclusion, it seems entirely improbable that they understood nothing of what these new tongue speakers were saying.

⁹ The other places in Acts, i.e. 2:3; 2:26; 19:6, don't help answer the question.

said in v.1 “...earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. Then in v.2 Paul gives his reason “For [*because*] one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God¹⁰; *for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.*” Here we see that when someone is given the gift of tongues, they are in fact speaking or praising or praying to God. That cannot be disputed. But is it a foreign language or a heavenly language outside the realm of human language? Look at the second part of the verse. Paul says “...*for no one understands him...*” Stop. There are two ways to understand this: 1) no one *living* understands him or 2) no one *that was present* could understand him.

No one could understand?

Now if it's the *first*—*that no one living understand him*—then there *must be* two types of tongues.¹¹ But the problem with this view as we have already seen is that γλῶσσαι is not used like that anywhere else in the NT. In fact, at Pentecost those present understood perfectly what was being said. Acts 2:8 “... how is it that we hear, *each of us in his own native language?*” We must remember the context here! Paul is correcting the Corinthians for their *abuse* of tongues. They were speaking in tongues in the corporate worship setting when some were present who didn't understand what they were saying. So Paul doesn't mean ‘*no one living understands*’ but rather ‘*no one present could understand.*’¹² Or in this case, *some who were present could not understand.* Clearly some could understand, because v.5 mentions those who could interpret.

What are these mysteries?

But our charismatic brethren will say ‘...but the end of v.2 says that “...*he utters mysteries in the Spirit.*”’ What are these mysteries? They cannot be

¹⁰ The first part of that verse agrees with all the tongue speaking in the book of Acts. Those supernaturally empowered to speak in tongues, spoke directly to God not to men, praising His name, declaring His wonderful works (cf. Acts 10:46)

¹¹ A type of tongues that can be understood and interpreted by at least some, and a type of tongues that cannot be understood by any.

¹² Hodge, pg. 279

unintelligible or incomprehensible things.¹³ These mysteries must have meaning and content. Why? Because these mysteries could be interpreted (v.5, v.13). If tongues do not possess rational subject matter, then they cannot be interpreted.¹⁴ So then what are these mysteries? Well Paul has already used this word *μυστήριον* (*mystērion*) earlier in 2:7 and 4:1 as a synonym for the gospel. The gospel is the mystery of all mysteries. That God would redeem sinful man by sending His Son into the world. **Ephesians 1:9** He made “...known to us the mystery of his will...which he set forth in Christ.” That is what the tongue speaker was praying to God about. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit—*notice that Spirit is capitalized*—to praise God for what He accomplished in Christ. But the problem was there was at least some who could not understand him *because he was speaking in a foreign tongue*. The mysteries spoken were not the problem, *that these mysteries were spoken in a foreign language so that some could not understand was the problem*.

The most difficult verse

But the most difficult verse is v.14. The context is that in v.13 Paul tells those who speak in tongues to pray for the power of interpretation. Why? v.14 “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays *but my mind is unfruitful*.” What does he mean by saying that “...my spirit prays *but my mind is unfruitful*?” This verse seems to support the view of a prayer language of which no one not even the speaker himself understands. But again I believe this contradicts the passage as a whole. v.4 specifically says that “The one who speaks in a tongue *builds up himself...*” How can a person build up themselves (v.4), if their mind is unfruitful

¹³ Hodge says here: “To make the word mean, things not understood by the hearer, is contrary to the usage of the word. A secret disclosed, is not longer a secret; and a mystery revealed ceases to be a mystery, for a mystery is something hidden. Besides, Paul would then say, ‘No man understands him, yet he speaks what is not understood.’ The meaning obviously is, that although not understood, yet what he utters contains divine truth. The difficulty was in the language used, not in the absence of meaning...” *Ibid*, pg. 280

¹⁴ “The tight connection Paul presupposes between the content of the tongues and the intelligible result of the gift of interpretation demands that we conclude the tongues in Corinth, as Paul understood them, bore cognitive content.” D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Academic, 1987), pg. 87

(v.14)?¹⁵ It seems to me that if the one speaking in tongues could be built up by something that his mind doesn't understand, then it follows that the rest of the church could be built up by something they don't understand. BUT that is the very thing Paul is arguing against in this whole passage. Edification for the church depends upon their understanding what is being said. A fruitless mind does not edify.¹⁶

My mind is unfruitful *for others*

Therefore when Paul says that *his mind is unfruitful* he means that it is unfruitful *for others*. "...It does not produce fruit in [his] hearers."¹⁷ Or as Charles Hodge says "it does not benefit others."¹⁸ So look at how Paul resolves this in v.15 "What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, *but I will pray with my mind also*; I will sing praise with my spirit, *but I will sing with my mind also*." To paraphrase 'I will continue to speak in tongues in the Spirit, and even sing in

¹⁵ "...it is not credible...that any spoke under the influence of the Spirit in a language that was to themselves unknown. For the gift of tongues was conferred--not for the mere purpose of uttering a sound, but, on the contrary, with the view of making a communication. For how ridiculous a thing it would be, that the tongue of a Roman should be framed by the Spirit of God to pronounce Greek words, which were altogether unknown to the speaker, as parrots, magpies, and crows, are taught to mimic human voices!" Calvin, pg.445

¹⁶ Furthermore it seems to contradict Paul's analogy in v.11 "...if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me." If a person prays in a tongue without have some understanding of what he is saying he is a foreigner to himself" (Calvin, pg. 446). Likewise it seems to contradict v.16 "...if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?" If a person prays in a tongue without understanding, he cannot say Amen to his own prayers. Now if someone says here: "But if the person speaking tongues can understand in his mind what he is saying, then certainly he can be his own interpreter." But this doesn't necessarily follow. I've been in enough conversations with my in-laws and others whose English was a second language, and I've seen them start a sentence and are not able to finish it because they don't know the English word for the Spanish equivalent. So they often are unable to translate their own thoughts.

¹⁷ "...it may mean that under such circumstances...it does not produce fruit in the hearers—the presupposition being that the edification of the hearers requires intelligibility of utterance." Carson, pg.104

¹⁸ "The words therefore, must be understood to mean, 'my understanding produces no fruit,' i.e. it does not benefit others." Hodge, pg. 288

tongues in the Spirit, however I will pray and sing so that others will be able to understand, so that they will benefit and bear fruit.’¹⁹

The goal of the whole text: public edification

Beloved that is Paul’s greatest concern. If during corporate worship, worshippers can not understand what is being said, or prayed, or sang they can not be built up. 5 times in our passage he makes it clear that public edification—the building up of every saint—is the most vital thing.²⁰ He does this first of all by asserting that prophecy is to be preferred over tongues. Look at v.3 “On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their *upbuilding* and encouragement and consolation.” *Prophecy* in this place does not mean the foretelling of future events. It does mean that elsewhere.²¹ But here *prophecy* is, as one author puts it “so to speak the Word of God faithfully, in such a way as to turn everyone to Jesus.”²² That’s what prophecy is. **Revelation 19:10** says “...the testimony of Jesus *is* the spirit of prophecy.” Faithful preaching is

¹⁹ Witsius says here “...mind seems here to be chiefly used in a transitive sense, to mean that what we give another to understand. Such is the meaning of Proverbs 5:1 “My son, be attentive to *my wisdom*; incline your ear to *my understanding*”, that is, to those things which I shall give thee to understand. To *pray with the mind*, is to pray in such a manner that the prayers which you deliberately conceive, may be conceived and understood by others. Paul, accordingly, proposes himself as an example of the proper manner of conducting prayers. *If I pray in a tongue* unknown to the assembly in whose presence I pray, but which I have learned by Divine inspiration, *my spirit prayeth*, I am acting under the influence of that gift, which impels and arouses me to unusual and remarkable proceedings; but *my understanding is unfruitful*, [that is] I do not enable another to understand...” Calvin pg. 443-444, fn. 3

²⁰ The other four places are:

- end of v.4 “...the one who prophesies *builds up the church*.”
- end of v.5 “...so that the church may be *built up*.”
- v.12 “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in *building up the church*.”
- v.17 “For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being *built up*.”
- [Note: there are also phrases that are synonymous to building up others: 1) “how will I benefit you” - v.6; 2) “how can anyone...say ‘Amen’” - v.16; 3) “in order to instruct others” - v.19.]

²¹ Jesus prophesied like this Matthew 24 + many other places; Agabus prophesied like this in Acts 11:28; 21:10-11. But foretelling future events doesn’t edify as universally as preaching the Word and Gospel.

²² Douglas Wilson, *Partakers of Grace: A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Moscow, ID.,: Canon Press, 2018), pg. 214

prophecy.²³ It's preaching—not foretelling future events—that accomplishes the goal of v.3 “...*upbuilding* and encouragement and consolation.”²⁴

Doctrine: The rule of love in corporate worship is public edification

And so we arrive at our doctrine: *The rule of love in corporate worship is that private experience must always surrender to public edification.*²⁵ Consider the six proofs Paul makes of this in our passage.²⁶

Proof #1: Public edification should be *desired* over private experience

Why does Paul tell us to earnestly desire prophecy over tongues in v.1-4? Because, v.4 “The one who speaks in a tongue *builds up himself*, but the one who prophesies *builds up the church*.” Pursuing love (v.1) in during corporate worship *means* we must desire that which builds up all, instead of that which just builds up the individual.

Proof #2: Public edification is *greater* than private experience

In the context of corporate worship, Paul calls prophecy a greater gift than tongues. Halfway through v.5 “The one who prophesies is *greater* than the

²³ That was the most common view of the Reformers and Puritans. William Perkins called his book on preaching *The Art of Prophecy*.

²⁴ Calvin says here: “By this term he means, (in my opinion,) not those who were endowed with the gift of prophesying, but those who were endowed with a peculiar gift, not merely for interpreting Scripture, but also for applying it wisely for present use. My reason for thinking so is this, that he prefers prophecy to all other gifts, on the ground of its yielding more edification—a commendation that would not be applicable to the predicting of future events. Farther, when he describes the office of Prophet, or at least treats of what he ought principally to do, he says that he must devote himself to consolation, exhortation, and doctrine. Now these are things that are distinct from prophesyings.” Calvin, pg. 415

²⁵ Edification or upbuilding (v.3) is οἰκοδομή *oikodomē*. It's a construction term. When a house is built, it progresses from an empty lot to a framed structure to a completed home. Corporate worship is meant to move the whole assembly from spiritual immaturity to spiritual maturity. Spiritually οἰκοδομή means to advance others from immaturity to maturity.

²⁶ WCF 26.1-2 “All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. 2. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification...

one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” If tongues comes with an interpretation, then it can edify the whole church. But short of that, faithful preaching which *edifies all* is always greater.

Proof #3: Private experiences are unintelligible or unknowable to others

Look at v.6 “Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?” What happens in corporate worship must be intelligible, it must be comprehended and understood otherwise it benefits no one.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.²⁷

It doesn't matter how good it felt for me to recite **John 1:1** in Greek. My private experience doesn't benefit anyone in this room unless you can understand me. Paul trots this out with illustrations from nature to prove his point. Look at v.7 “If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?” If John came up here and just started playing random chords, no one would know what song we were singing. v.8 “And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?” The troops would be handed a defeat if the trumpeter doesn't blow a tune that everyone understands. v.9 “So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning,²⁸ ¹¹ but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.” Monica's dad only speaks Spanish. I speak only English. We cannot sit in a room together by ourselves and have a conversation without an interpreter. If he speaks in Spanish to me, he is a foreigner to me. If I speak in English to him,

²⁷ see Carson, pg.87 for a humorous and sad story on this.

²⁸ “None is without meaning” —another clue that tongues are a distinct languages known in the world. See Hodge, pg. 284

I am a foreigner to him. If we both insisted on our own way, we would never be able to communicate. No public edification if we insisted on private experience.

Proof #4: Private experience quenches the Spirit

Paul says in v.12 “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” Essentially he’s saying, “If spiritual gifts are what you delight in most, then strive after those gifts that benefit everyone.” Paul’s logic is clear: the Holy Spirit is manifest the most when the whole Church is being built up. To focus on those gifts which only build up the individual (in the context of corporate worship) is to experience less of the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is a quenching of the Spirit to prefer private experience over public edification.

Proof #5: Insisting on private experience hinders the worship of others

Look at v.16 “Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.” To say “Amen” at the end of the prayer is to confirm the prayer, it’s to say “That’s true, I agree, I consent, yes Lord!”²⁹ To say *Amen* is to participate in worship. The tongue speaker in Corinth were preventing others from worshipping God with them. As a general principle that’s what happens when we prefer private experience to public edification: we hinder the worship of others.

Proof #6: A tiny public edification is better than a ton of private experience

Look at v.18-19 “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.” Stop. Paul is not depreciating tongues. He knows they are from the Holy Spirit. In v.5 he desired that all the Church spoke in tongues. He even told them to pray for interpretation (v.13). It is a wonderful gift. But when it came to

²⁹ The Heidelberg Catechism Q.129 asks *What does that little word “Amen” express?* A. “Amen” means: This shall truly and surely be! It is even more sure that God listens to my prayer than that I really desire what I pray for.

public worship, he says the smallest amount of prophecy is better than gobs and gobs of tongues. **v.19** “Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” Why?³⁰ Because public edification is more vital than private experience. That’s **our doctrine**: Loving each other in the setting of corporate worship means that we will gladly surrender our personal preferences in order to aim at building up the whole body.

II. Our Duty

2 duties

1. Experimental Use

Our first duty is to *examine* ourselves. How do you and I approach corporate worship? We all have an approach of some kind. We approach the dinner table hungry. We approach our pillow tired. We approach a trip with a certain sense of adventure. How do you approach corporate worship? For at least the last 60 years the seeker-friendly model has taught us to approach worship as consumers. Pastors Rick Warren and Bill Hybels perfected the art of surveying the unchurched.³¹ How do we get “unchurched Harry and Mary” into the church. So their methodology was that they would survey the unchurched by asking them how the Church might form the worship services so that they would be motivated to attend. In other words, these surveys sought to

³⁰ “Whatever the place for profound, personal experience and...emotional experience, the assembled church is for intelligibility. Our God is a thinking, speaking God; and if we will know him, we must learn to think his thoughts after him.” Carson, pg. 106

³¹ see <https://www.theberean.org/content/seeker-friendly-way-doing-church?sapurl=Lys5MjZkL2xiL2xpLyt3dm44dWs4P2JyYW5kaW5nPXRYdWUmZW1iZWQ9dHJ1ZSZyZWNIbnRSb3V0ZT1hcHAud2ViLWFwcC5saWJyYXJ5Lmxc3QmcmVjZW50Um91dGVtbHVnPSUyQnd2bjh1azg=>

find out the felt needs, and preferences of their communities.³² The results of the survey became the framework for how these churches would structure their worship services. The unchurched were the consumers, and these churches transformed itself to make sure they could get the most consumers in the door. Now as a Reformed Church, we are supposed to reject that type of approach. Corporate worship is not a product to meet the individual's felt needs so that their private experience is enhanced. We are supposed to know that. But beloved don't you realize that the genius of the seeker-friendly model is that by appealing to our felt needs, they are appealing to our default approach to worship? What can I get out of worship? That's everyone's default position: *how is worship serving me?* It's not a question of *if* you have approached worship that way, *but* are you approaching worship that way now? Is worship at this local church *doing it for me?* Which has the greater priority in your heart: private experience, private preference, or building up the saints? How do you wake up on Sunday morning? Do you think about what you have to put up with in the House of God, or do you think 'how can I love my brothers and sisters today?' Do you ponder how your gifts can be used to serve others and honor Christ in worship?³³ Or do you think about your own inconvenience of having to die to self?

2. Admonitory Use

That brings us to our second duty: rebuke. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for thinking about only themselves in corporate worship, and we must rebuke ourselves if that is our approach. **First** we must rebuke the idea *that we can*

³² "...we have capitulated to the felt needs rather than the real needs of the world. What does the world "feel" that they need? To be comfortable, to be anonymous, above all to be entertained. Decades ago the megachurch movement tapped into this, and church attendance exploded. The equation was simply: subtract anything that makes people feel uncomfortable and you will gain huge crowds." Jonathan Landry Cruse, *What Happens When We Worship*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), pg. 94

³³ See Timothy S. Lane & Paul David Tripp's *How People Change*, (Greensboro, NC.: New Growth Press, 2008), pg. 76

worship God however we choose. Loved ones, corporate worship is not a choose your own adventure book. As Jonathan Cruse puts it:

“Worship ought to kill us...The Christian life, paradoxically, begins with death. We must die to our sin so that we can live for Christ. And this is one of the works that the Holy Spirit performs in us when we, by faith, participate in worship...’God’s Word, rightly read, and heard, will shake us up. It will kill us, for God cannot bear our sin and wants to put to death our self-centeredness...Once worship kills us, we are born anew to worship God rightly.”³⁴

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 says “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. ²Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.”

Worship is dangerous for those who think they can do so however they want. Beloved, consider the judgments God has sent against this attitude. As priests, Nadab and Abihu were explicitly told what honored God and what edified the saints. But they decided to worship how they saw fit. **Leviticus 10:1-2** says they “...offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. ²And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.” Or consider how the Corinthians were practicing Lord’s Supper contrary to what God had said. Paul said in **11:30** “That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” Worship is dangerous for anyone who thinks they can approach God however they wish. If that’s you, I urge you to repent of such a thought.

Secondly, we must rebuke the idea *that what is most important in worship is our personal experience.* Loved ones making personal experience *the priority* in

³⁴ Cruse, pg. 93

worship is what the reprobate do. **2 Timothy 4:3-4** “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” Making personal experience the priority is contrary to the gospel itself. **2 Corinthians 5:15** says “...he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” If *your* preferences, *your* desires, *your* passions are what is most important in worship, then be rebuked. Corporate worship was designed by God in order to build up the whole Church, not to give everyone their own private experience.

That is **our duty**. First we must examine ourselves to see how we are approaching corporate worship. Second, we must rebuke ourselves if we think *we can worship God however we choose* or if we pursue *personal experience as the most important thing in worship*.

III. Our Delight

Babel v. Pentecost

Dear congregation, have you ever just meditated on the gift of tongues before. Why would God give such a wonderful and controversial gift? Paul thanked God for this gift. **v.18** “*I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.*” Why did Paul have such an appreciation of tongues? Why should we have such an appreciation of this gift? Listen to how one author answers that question:

“The miracle at Pentecost [*the speaking of tongues*] was a reversal of Babel, which meant that it was a *unifying* miracle. When God confused the tongues at Babel, the result was that men scattered, divided by their different languages. When God gave different languages at Pentecost, the intent was

to move men in the opposite direction, to gather them all to Christ. At Babel, the different languages *scattered*. At Pentecost, the different languages *gathered*. They all heard, in their own tongues, “the wonderful works of God” being declared (Acts 2:11).”³⁵

Tongues were meant to gather us to Christ, to unify us.

Tongues are a sign of what Christ accomplished

Tongues are meant to be a sign of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us.

Q. How did Christ gather us and unify us?

A. He refused to please Himself

“For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me” (**Romans 15:3**) Jesus Christ came into the world not to satisfy His own private pleasure. He came into the world for our sake. There is no need that He has not met for you loved ones.

There is no need He has not met

Do you have a hunger that nothing in this world can satisfy? Jesus said “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”³⁶

Is your soul in darkness? Jesus said “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”³⁷

³⁵ Wilson, pg. 219

Abraham Kuyper says here “In the day of the Lord, at the wedding-feast of the Lamb, all the redeemed will understand one another. In what way? By the restoration of the pure and original language upon the lips of the redeemed, which is born from the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind. And of that great, still-tarrying event the Pentecost miracle is the germ and the beginning; hence it bore its distinctive marks. In the midst of the Babeldom of the nations, on the day of Pentecost, the one pure and mighty human language was revealed which one day all will speak, and all the brethren and sisters from all nations and tongues will understand.” *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, Trans. Henri De Vries, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), pg. 138

³⁶ John 6:35

³⁷ John 8:12

Are you dead in your sin? Jesus said “I am the resurrection and the life.^[4] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”³⁸

Are you weak and foolish? “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Do you have a sense of guilt upon you? Jesus Christ is your complete righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Don't you see loved ones? All of our corporate worship—including our use of spiritual gifts—is supposed to tell the gospel story. The Holy Spirit gave us these gifts not for our own private experience, but so that we can meet the needs of others just as Christ Jesus met our greatest needs. “The Son of Man came into the world not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”³⁹

Don't work against the gospel

If Jesus came into the world to meet His own needs we would be damned. And if we treat worship as a place to meet our own needs we are working against the gospel. And working against the gospel is the most miserable place to be. So here's my final exhortation. It was the joy of Christ's soul to serve poor wretched rebellious sinners like you and me. He loved the Church and gave Himself up for her,⁴⁰ who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.⁴¹ Make serving others your joy. Make public edification your chief goal and joy in corporate worship. Don't return to the

³⁸ John 11:25-26

³⁹ Mark 10:45

⁴⁰ Ephesians 5:25

⁴¹ Hebrews 12:2.

ghetto of personal private experience, you will never be satisfied. That is a cloud that never rains. Earnestly desire after the spiritual gifts, especially those that build up the whole Church of God.