

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Shall we Speak as a Barbarian or Shall we Edify?

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. (1 Corinthians 14:10-17)

For Paul, the central point of his teaching to the Corinthians had nothing to do with how many languages he or they knew, but how edifying his words were to the Corinthian Church. In this point Paul sets a powerful example for us, one that we should wisely follow. In these verses Paul contrasts speaking in prayer in a language not familiar to his audience with praying in a familiar language. God knows the hearts of all men, and He knows every word of ever language spoken by men. Thus, God is never hindered when one of His hurting or worshipping children prays to Him regardless the language in which they pray. He hears and He cares. For God there is no such thing as a language barrier. However, we are not God or even like Him in this point.

If a believer hungers to edify the church, his passionate zeal for the necessary spiritual gifts to accomplish that edification is commendable. If he desires a spiritual gift for any other purpose, the zeal is not so commended by Paul.

...seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. A preacher never longed to preach a dud sermon. For most preachers, when he fails to communicate the joyful message of the gospel suitably to a congregation, the personal pain is devastating. It is not so much that his ego suffered a blow, though that may well be true. It is far more a matter that the Lord's name was not magnified and His people were not edified by the sermon.

In this setting Paul uses a word that we might not see or use every day, "Edify." What does it mean for one person to "Edify" another? The Greek word translated "Edify" in this lesson has this meaning.

(Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary) It expresses the strengthening effect of teaching, 1 Cor. 14:3, 5, 12, 26; 2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10, or other ministry, Eph. 4:12, 16, 29 (the idea conveyed is progress resulting from patient effort).

"...the strengthening effect of teaching," "progress resulting from patient effort." For edification in the sense of Scripture's use of the word to occur, there must be good sound teaching, and there must be a conscientious reception of that teaching by the hearer, followed by an equally conscientious effort to practice the teaching, to grow in the faith, in grace, and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). A believer may be subjected to unsound teaching and grow in that error to his own harm, not at all edifying. This problem abounds in our day thanks to the ease with which an errant teacher may spread his error through the internet. The believer who lacks a discerning ear and heart and who thereby is blind to the subtle nuances often personified by false teachers seldom grows in either grace or knowledge. In fact, such a believer will often manifest a remarkable deficiency in grace toward other believers who do not share his/her errant ideas. And such a believer will grow in all the bad traits cultivated by the error, all the time thinking that he/she has discovered deeper truth than any other believer.

The godly teacher of Biblical truth guides his hearers to grow stronger in both traits; grace, the kind and truly "Gracious" words and acts of Jesus toward His own, and in the refined and discerning knowledge of Biblical truth. Carefully observe the people who follow a given man's preaching. If you see a pervasive lack in either of these areas, beware the man's teaching. They may offer a convincing show of grace and knowledge for a time, but observe them over time, especially when someone challenges their ideas. If they react with excessive intensity, anger, or a "Bully" style that attempts to overpower anyone who disagrees, they manifest the destructive fruit of their false teacher, as well as their own sinful ambition. When Peter left us with this final admonition to grow in both grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit wisely coupled these two qualities together. Sound "Edifying" teaching from

the Scriptures will grow a believer in both qualities. Errant teaching will grow a façade of one that creates a lack in the other. When Jesus taught the disciples "...by their fruits ye shall know them," (Matthew 7:20 and context) He was not equipping them to discern who is and who is not a child of God, a frequent interpretation of the self-righteous teacher of error. He was teaching them to detect false teachers. Listen to Jesus. When you hear a man teaching something that appears to be different, spend time analyzing his teaching with Scripture. If you carefully discern his teaching, you will soon see where his teaching deviates from Scripture. But do not neglect to watch the man and his followers. Their attitude and conduct, their "fruits," will as readily reveal their error as their teaching words.

Did you notice that Paul uses prayer in this lesson as the basis for edification? I find myself struggling with frustration when I hear people in the church repeating memorized prayers and memorized phrases in their public prayers. Do they wholly ignore that **they are talking to the Lord**? He remembers every word they prayed the last time they spoke in prayer. Is He pleased by "...vain repetitions" in our prayers? (Matthew 6:7) Perhaps the prayer that is characterized over time by the same phrases and words is more directed to impress the people who hear than the Lord. If a man truly talks to the Lord in his prayers, he will not be content to repeat memorized phrases. **He will truly engage the Lord in "Conversation."** Perhaps if we more often truly talked to the Lord in our prayers, we'd experience more the reality of a two-way "Conversation" in the form of His obviously answering our prayers, not ignoring our faithless repetitions of words. I have often been fully as edified by a prayer as by a powerful sermon. I recall a deacon whom I knew in my youth. This man was a devoted student of Scripture and a wise man of faith. His pastor was very conscientious but often preached a fifteen minute sermon that took him an hour and a half to deliver. Were "Vain repetitions" involved? Yes indeed. By the end of the sermon the pews were fogged with dust from the dryness of the sermon. After the pastor concluded his drought of a sermon, this wise deacon would often offer a prayer that required maybe two or three minutes to speak, but he left the congregation in tears of passion and joy toward the Lord. Friends, that is what true Biblical edification means.

Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. A man may speak powerful and wise words in a foreign language, words that praise the Lord, but if the people in attendance do not understand that language, they cannot be edified.

Our people have been blessed in recent years to preach to receptive hearts and ears in both the Philippines and in Africa. Those of us who have lived most of our lives in this country and have witnessed the growing indifference to sound, Biblical preaching in our country should take warning notice. People in both of these countries have responded promptly and joyfully to the good news they heard in the gospel. In many cases, our preachers who have preached in both of these regions had to preach through an interpreter. As I ponder my own Sunday sermon, my mind is stretched to think of trying to preach that same sermon through an interpreter. I have been blessed to meet and engage a number of men from both countries, sound, godly men of faith. In extended personal conversation, I was able to understand them and to engage them in edifying dialogue. Their deep faith and their sound knowledge of Scripture left me thankful for their friendship. Often when these same men attempt to speak in public to an American congregation, their dialect is difficult for the American congregation to understand. We have acknowledged the need for a translator when one of our preachers speaks to people in those countries. Perhaps we need to equally deal with our need for a translator when one of those preachers visits us and preaches to us. That is precisely Paul's point in this teaching. Paul didn't forbid any speaking in a foreign language. He rather taught the Corinthians to require communicative words in all teaching, including using a translator when the speaker can speak only in a language not familiar to the congregation.

If "...the other is not edified," Paul forbids the effort. Let's ponder this point and consider wise applications of its principle to our churches and to our church conduct. How many speaking patterns do we hear from our pulpits, sermons spoken in English, but riddled with mannerisms or form that more hinder than promote good communication? I grew up in a time when a public address system was rare indeed, even in church buildings that housed over a hundred people, often almost full of people. It was necessary in that setting for the preacher to speak with loud volume for everyone to hear his words. Speaking in loud volume is not a mark of the Spirit's blessing. It is a speaking habit. Now "Translate" that speaking habit to a church in our day where the building is half the size of that old building, and the congregation is half the size or less of that former day. But the man in the pulpit picked up the speaking habit from a mentor who lived in that era and spoke loudly so that all the people could hear. Instead of promoting good communications, the contemporary preacher speaking in a loud voice overwhelms the hearing senses of the audience, hindering good communication of his thoughts. The same voice volume that helped then is now a hindrance. Our preachers today should regard the setting in which they speak and adjust their speaking volume to the

situation. Perhaps an older and respected mentor preacher was self-conscious before an audience, so he paced the pulpit while preaching, or he may have stuttered when speaking. His “Understudy” younger preachers may have misread his habits and “Learned” to pace the pulpit or stutter when speaking. Such things do not promote good, “Edifying” communication. Quite the opposite, they hinder truly edifying words. Often these habits become so distracting that the hearers focus more on the habit than on the words the man speaks.

Let me give you an example. I’ve known a man from my youth who has been a consistent and powerful—and sound—influence to the Lord’s people in his ministry. This dear man lived in a region that is especially antagonistic to people with respiratory allergies. As a result, he often needs to clear his throat when preaching. Even his throat-clearing is quite unique. Years ago I was visiting a church in another part of the country. My friend often visited that region and preached there. A young man who especially admired my friend with respiratory allergies was present the night I preached. The pastor asked this young man to lead the public prayer before I spoke. As he started praying, he often interrupted his words by clearing his throat, and he wholly imitated my friend in the manner in which he cleared his throat, so much so that I had to resist the urge to look up from my bowed head to see if perhaps my friend was present. Often young men who learn from an older mentor, a distinctly Biblical and required process for a younger minister to grow into his own spiritual maturity, will sadly pick up irrelevant habits from their mentor more than learn his wisdom in the faith.

When the Lord calls a man to preach the gospel, He does not—ever—call a man to imitate his mentor’s speaking habits or personality. He calls a man who is a unique believer to develop his own gift with his own personality. A man who fails to develop his own gift in this way, while learning sound doctrine and truth from his mentor, will never grow into the strong edifying gift that the Lord called him to be. We grow into a truly, Biblical edifying gift to the church only by growing ourselves under the Lord’s wise guidance. This chapter has more to teach us than simply rising above various human languages and translators. God help us to learn its lesson.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor