

1 Corinthians 14:12b-20

Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, seek to use them abundantly in a way that will build up the church.

¹³That is why a person who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. ¹⁵So what is to be done? I will pray using my spirit, and I will pray also using my understanding. I will sing using my spirit, and I will sing also using my understanding. ¹⁶Otherwise, how will an uninformed person say the “Amen” after you give thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷To be sure, you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ¹⁸I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹But in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

²⁰Brothers, do not be children in your thinking, but be like babies in regard to evil, and be mature in your thinking.

Be Mature in Your Worship

I.

Look at me! Look at what *I* can do! When young children call attention to themselves for their latest accomplishments, adults smile and offer praise. Every skill acquired is a milestone worth marking. The first smile; the first step; the first words—every one of them is precious and memorable to parents. As the child grows, so do the skills, and parents and other adults still marvel and continue to praise the achievements.

It's not so cute when adults call attention to themselves for their skills, is it? It tends to be seen as boasting. It's like boxers standing toe-to-toe calling out their opponents and bragging about how one will totally dominate the other. At least with *boxers* it's just a show being put on to generate hype to encourage pay-per-view orders.

What about the use of spiritual gifts in the church?

The Corinthian Christians were like boxers taunting one another about their superior skills. They wanted to call attention to their spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. They were just like children shouting “Look at me!”

Before our text, Paul compares what was going on to playing an instrument. “Even lifeless instruments that produce sound, such as a flute or a harp, if they do not make the notes distinct from one another, how will anyone know what is being played on the flute or harp? ⁸ If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will get ready for battle?” (1 Corinthians 14:7-8, EHV). When you attend a band or orchestra concert you want to hear a group of musicians performing in harmony. The warm-up session before the concert is, in contrast, just a jarring cacophony of sound. When the concert begins and the instruments all play at the direction of the conductor, the melodious experience you were seeking is in store.

Paul's words indicate that worship at Corinth was a jarring mess. Those who could speak in tongues babbled on and on. Those who couldn't perhaps waited for the same experience to come their way. Instead of consideration for others, every individual sought only his or her personal glory and satisfaction.

II.

“How was church today?” Perhaps you have asked that question; maybe it has been asked of you.

The underlying question might be: Who is worship for? Is it for God, or for people?

Sometimes when the question “How was church today?” is asked, what is really meant is whether or not you got what you wanted. Church is seen as some fast-food menu where you make your choices, pick them up at the window, and drive off as soon as possible.

God doesn't always serve up what we want to hear. You might hear that your actions—even in worship—have been selfish. In your everyday life you far too often focus on yourself and your earthly desires rather than on God and his kingdom of grace. Your spiritual gifts might not include tongues-speaking, but you still want your “Look at me!” moment. You long to be patted on the back for all the service *you* give to God as you serve in the congregation. Sometimes you might be called out for lovelessness among the family of believers, the way Paul described last week as “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1, EHV).

Paul says in today's lesson: “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful” (1 Corinthians 14:14, EHV). Have you ever caught yourself humming a tune without thinking about the words? Maybe you know the words so well they go through your mind without any thought accompanying it. Paul mentions several ways that worship might happen only in your emotions and not with understanding in your mind. Sometimes it might be uplifting to hear the echoes of a beautiful hymn, or to have something speak to your emotions, but Paul says it is unfruitful to your understanding.

How would you feel if you saw these things on the Holy Trinity drive-thru menu? Perhaps you feel only an appeal to your emotions in worship is necessary or valid or desirable. If worship were a fast food drive-thru menu, you might simply ignore that section or drive away without putting in an order. People don't want to hear about their flaws and faults. They love to feel the emotional high, and sometimes become offended when other emotions are spoken to, as well.

III.

There is a great German word: Gottesdienst. Since Paul teaches us that speaking in tongues with no one to explain is not a good idea, let me explain the word. Gottesdienst is the German word for worship. Gottesdienst literally means: “God's service.” In other words, God in worship serves *us*.

Is worship for God or for us? In every other religion, the worshipers gather to serve their gods. In Christian worship, the true God has gathered us together so that he can serve *us*!

People don't *want* to hear about their flaws and faults, but we *need* to hear about them. People want to feel euphoric and sometimes become offended when emotions of guilt and shame are evoked in worship. But guilt and shame and flaws and faults are also important things to note about ourselves. These are the things that have separated us from God. These are the things that show us without a doubt that we *need* a Savior.

There is a reason our Savior-God serves up emotions that include our guilt and shame in worship. It is to remind us of the great things he has done for us. Jesus came in lowliness and humility for Gottesdienst—God's service. He came to serve as our substitute. Jesus was born into a world filled with flaws and faults as the One who is flawless and without fault. All our flaws were placed on him so that we could stand flawless before the Heavenly Father. Jesus came completely devoid of any feelings of guilt or shame to take our load of guilt and shame on himself and pay the penalty of eternal death every one of those sins deserved. He bore all our guilt so that we would be guiltless on the last great day of

judgment when he returns to take us to be with himself in heaven.

Gottesdienst—God’s service—takes the lowest of our low emotions and reminds us that we don’t have to feel down in the dumps because our flaws and faults, our sin and guilt have been paid for in full. Here at worship is God’s service that brings us his Word of forgiveness, reminding us week after week that Jesus served us by dying for us.

Gottesdienst—God’s service—is a time when we see the Font and are reminded that the Holy Spirit has given us faith which makes us adopted members of God’s own family. God serves us with special spiritual food—Jesus’ own body and blood, given and poured out for us in, with, and under bread and wine for us to eat and drink so that our tumultuous emotions can be reinforced by tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord who brings us salvation.

Gottesdienst—God’s service—serves us with the boundless love of God. God serves us by setting us free to love him.

IV.

“So what is to be done? I will pray using my spirit, and I will pray also using my understanding. I will sing using my spirit, and I will sing also using my understanding. ¹⁶Otherwise, how will an uninformed person say the ‘Amen’ after you give thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷To be sure, you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up” (1 Corinthians 14:15-17, EHV). Gottesdienst—God’s service—serves us with the opportunity to serve one another, even as we worship him.

Paul is wrapping up all the discussions he has had in the last several weeks’ readings concerning spiritual gifts. He has said: “Each person is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7, EHV). Every believer has some spiritual gifts. Chief among those gifts, he reminded us, is the gift of faith. The gift of faith and every other spiritual gift you might have been given is to be used to serve the Lord and the common good of his church.

“One and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them to each one individually as he desires” (1 Corinthians 12:11, EHV). Every ability we have has been given by God. Our lives are to be lives of worship, and we are to use all that God has given us in a way that brings glory to his Name and his kingdom.

“In the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Corinthians 14:19, EHV). Perhaps putting what Paul says in monetary terms helps to understand what he is saying. \$1 in the hand is worth more than \$2,000 you are forbidden from using. Five words used to teach people about Jesus and his great love for all mankind are far more valuable in God’s service than 10,000 words that no one can understand.

“Brothers, do not be children in your thinking, but be like babies in regard to evil, and be mature in your thinking” (1 Corinthians 14:20, EHV). There is a place for childishness: be innocent when it comes to evil. Adam and Eve were infatuated with the idea of knowing both good and evil; it brought them nothing but heartache. Childishness that avoids evil and all its perils is fine. The childishness of calling attention to oneself in worship, however, is counter-productive. It doesn’t build anyone up, but only leads to false understanding or even turns someone away from God.

Be mature in your thinking. Be mature in your worship. Use what God has given to you in service to him even while in Gottesdienst—God’s service—he serves you with the understanding of forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. Amen.