

International Bible Lessons Commentary

1 Corinthians 14:12-26

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, July 27, 2014

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 27, 2014**, is from **1 Corinthians 14:12-26**. Note: *some churches will only study 1 Corinthians 14:13-26*. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

1 Corinthians 14:12-26

(1 Corinthians 14:12) So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

Our Creator has given people many natural gifts and many good desires; for example, a mind and a desire to learn. Christians may desire spiritual gifts from Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and some may pray for and seek specific spiritual gifts. Some may desire spiritual gifts for the power they give or for the excitement some gifts seem to offer. Some may want spiritual gifts to make them feel good or meaningful or equal to others who have them. Paul wrote that our motive for seeking spiritual gifts needs to be “for building up the church” (not just numerically, as Paul will indicate in his letter).

(1 Corinthians 14:13) Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret.

After Paul wrote that God gives Christians different spiritual gifts, he wrote that if a person had the gift of speaking in tongues that he should also pray for God to give him the gift of interpreting what he prayed in tongues. He should pray for this additional gift and give God the reason that he wants this additional gift “for building up the church.” Otherwise, no one (including the person speaking in tongues) will know what was said or meant except God alone. No one may know the source of the tongues either because they may be uttered by demons who can talk through people (see Mark 5).

(1 Corinthians 14:14) For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive.

Paul revealed in his letter that if someone prays in a tongue his mind (or his reason and understanding) is unproductive (perhaps bypassed or not involved in the speaking). The spirit of the person moves their mouths rather than their minds moving their mouths. If they prayed with their minds, they would speak words and sentences that could be understood by them and those who speak the same language. Paul did not write that in praying in a tongue that the Holy Spirit always spoke or prayed through someone, which the Holy Spirit can do. Demons can also bypass a person's mind and speak through someone, as in some of the cases when Jesus and Paul cast out demons that spoke words of understanding (see Mark 5 and Acts 16). Paul wrote that the person's spirit (a part of their psychological being as a person?) can pray using their tongue separate from the involvement of their reason and thinking processes. Those who speak in tongues should pray for the power to interpret so they and others can know if they are speaking words consistent with the teachings of the Bible or words that a demon has placed in their mouths. Words given by demons will not build up anyone, least of all the church.

(1 Corinthians 14:15) What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also.

God had given Paul the gift of speaking in tongues. Others had received that gift and other gifts too. Some of those in the Corinthian church may have been tempted to pray only with their spirit in tongues without also engaging their minds and without any understanding of what they were actually praying to God. Therefore, Paul wanted those who prayed and praised God only with their spirit to pray and praise God with their mind as well, which would build up the church and also give meaning and purpose to them in their praying.

(1 Corinthians 14:16) Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying?

An outsider might be someone who is not a Christian or a Christian without the gift of tongues and without the gift of interpreting tongues. The Holy Spirit gives His gifts as He wills and He gives a variety of gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12). When any person cannot know or understand what another is saying, and especially when praying, they should not say, "Amen;" which means, "May it be so," because they may be saying "May it be so" about something that would do harm or destroy someone or the church or be contrary to the Bible rather than build up someone or the church. Paul never wrote that everyone should have the gift of speaking in tongues or the gift of interpreting tongues.

(1 Corinthians 14:17) For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up.

With tongues that no one can interpret, a person might thank God for something wonderful that God has done or he might praise God for Who He is, and God would appreciate their thanks and praises. But, Christians can also thank God and praise God in ways that will also build up someone or build up the church. Christians can pray for God to help everyone understand and give thanks to God for what God has done and for Who He is. A person and the church are best built up by engaging our minds as well as our spirits according to the Scriptures.

(1 Corinthians 14:18) I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you;

Paul had reason to thank God because his gift of speaking in tongues was a gift from God. He did not write this because he was arrogant or felt superior to others. He sincerely wanted to thank God. Some people are not better than other people or more favored by God than others because of the gifts God has given them. God gives gifts to benefit many people and for purposes that God alone may know until He reveals them.

(1 Corinthians 14:19) nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Paul wanted Christians to use their gifts properly. It would do little good in a church worship service for Christians to pray and praise God in words that no one could interpret or understand but God alone. True prayer and praise in tongues could be made by believers at home. Paul emphasized that in church a few understandable words of instruction given with a mind actively committed to God for building up people in the church would be better than thousands of words that no one could understand.

(1 Corinthians 14:20) Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.

Paul continued to encourage and teach believers how to mature as Christians. They had divided into groups and argued among themselves. Perhaps some felt superior to others because they spoke in tongues and others did not. Perhaps some thought that true Christians spoke in tongues or tongue speaking was the sign that someone was saved. Paul wanted them to grow up and be adults, but that did not include learning more about evil and evil practices that might tempt them or desensitize them to evil behavior.

(1 Corinthians 14:21) In the law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me,” says the Lord.

Paul consistently referred people back to the law of God and the prophets (see Isaiah 28:11-12). God placed the rebellious people of Judah in Babylon where they would hear a foreign language they could not understand; still, some remained rebellious and would not listen to God. By analogy, Paul used Isaiah to teach that in a similar way some people would speak God's message in a foreign tongue and their listeners would remain rebellious against God. In general, Paul wrote that God will use foreign people and foreign languages to speak to people and lead many to faith in Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 14:22) Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers.

Paul wrote that the gift of speaking in tongues or in a foreign language was a sign for unbelievers that Christianity was from God, a gift of God, that the good news of Jesus Christ was a gift from God for all people and not just for the Jews. Earlier, Paul may have taught the Corinthians about the Day of Pentecost and how the disciples in Jerusalem spoke in foreign languages as a sign from God for unbelievers that Jesus had been raised from the dead and had sent the Holy Spirit to fill them. Prophecy or teaching the truth might not mean anything to unbelievers, it may seem foolishness to some, but it should mean something to believers and build them up.

(1 Corinthians 14:23) If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

In Paul's day, if the whole church spoke in tongues and unbelievers could not understand a word they said, they would think the whole church was crazy. On the day of Pentecost, many people could actually understand the different languages that the disciples spoke as the Holy Spirit gave them the gift of speaking foreign languages. Even on the day of Pentecost, however, some thought that the disciples were drunk (Acts 2:15).

(1 Corinthians 14:24) But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all.

Preaching and teaching is the result of thinking with the mind, so an outsider or unbeliever may be able to understand the teaching in their own language, especially with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Who can reprove the unbeliever through the truth. In Corinth, Greek and Latin would have been the only languages that needed to be spoken in daily life, and if everyone in the church was speaking the truth about God in Greek or Latin then the unbeliever might be called to account for his disobedience to God and encouraged to repent and come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

(1 Corinthians 14:25) After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you."

Paul did not mean "reading people's thoughts or minds," which can be a trick to trap people. Rather, unbelievers would hear about particular sins that concerned them personally, and they would hear the call to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and their conscience would speak to them. The truth would convict them of sin and show them their need of a Savior. The Holy Spirit would further convince them of the truth they had heard, and they would come to faith, believe the gospel, and worship the true God.

(1 Corinthians 14:26) What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

Paul did not condemn all speaking in tongues in the church. He did suggest that the home may be the best place for praying and praising God by speaking in tongues. He did suggest a proper order of worship, and the order of worship in this verse would not lead an unbeliever to think that the whole church was out of their minds, especially when the tongue would be followed by an interpretation (which followed a hymn and a lesson from the mind at the first part of the service of worship). Whatever believers do in Christian worship, "Let all things be done for building up" the church spiritually and in other ways so believers can give reasons why they believe and live holy to the Lord.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why does Paul say Christians should be eager for spiritual gifts? What are we to strive to do with our gifts?
2. What did Paul say about how he would pray and praise God?
3. What can happen when someone does not understand what we say? What should we do when someone does not understand us?
4. What did Paul prefer to do in the church?
5. When Christians gather to worship God, what should they do according to Paul?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
— © Copyright 2014 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.