

QUI, PRÍDIE QUAM PATERÉTUR, ACCÉPIT PANEM IN SANCTAS AC VENERÁBILES MANUS SUAS, ET ELEVÁTIS ÓCULIS IN CÆLUM AD TE DEUM PATREM SUUM OMNIPOTÉNTEM, TIBI GRÁTIAS AGENS BENEDÍXIT, FREGIT, DEDÍTQUE DISCÍPULIS SUIS, DICENS: ACCÍPITE ET MANDUCÁTE EX HOC OMNES: HOC EST ENIM CORPUS MEUM, QUOD PRO VOBIS TRADÉTUR.

If you lived prior to the Reformation, say between 1300 and 1500, this is what you would have heard when you attended church. Latin was the language of the church, and masses and sermons were conducted in Latin. The vast majority of people during this time were illiterate and unable to understand Latin. In fact, many priests only memorized the mass without ever learning Latin so that even they had no idea what they were saying. To the people the ritualistic services became misunderstood things of superstition. When the priest consecrated the bread with the statement "Hoc est corpus" it morphed into the magical term we know today, "**hocus pocus!**" When I took Latin in high school my mom taught me this little rhyme: Latin's a dead language, as dead as it can be; first it killed the Romans, and now it's killing me. Actually, I loved Latin, but in the case of the people of the dark ages it could be said that Latin was quite literally killing them from a spiritual perspective because they had no way to hear the Gospel!

Providentially, God raised up the movement we call the Reformation when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the castle church door in Wittenburg, Germany on October 31, 1517. Two very important results out of the many that came from the Reformation were that literacy increased and, most importantly, the Bible became available in the language of the people. During this time preaching became preeminent. Luther preached two to three times on Sundays and another two to three times during the week averaging 200 sermons per year. John Calvin was also a voracious preacher, preaching two different sermons on Sundays and every day of alternate weeks, averaging 170 sermons per year. These two examples of extraordinary preaching indicate what was believed about the power of the proclaimed truth of God, and so does this quote from John Calvin. The people could now hear and understand the Gospel, lives were being transformed and a religious awakening occurred, and it was all soli Deo gloria, for the glory of God alone.

1 Corinthians 14:20-25 "The Power of Preaching"

Turn, click, or swipe; however you get there; to 1 Corinthians 14:20-25. Follow along **as I read**.

[20] Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. [21] In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." [22] Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. [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 minds? [24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. {1 Corinthians 14:20-25 ESV}

Before we get started looking at this passage I want to set the cultural background and put the passage in its wider context. The religious culture of Corinth was steeped in the mystery religions. These were very emotional and experiential in nature, consisting of ecstatic speech and frenzied worship practices with no emphasis placed on the mind and rational thought. That is what was going on all around the church

in Corinth and we could suppose, since Paul addresses it, to a certain point within the church.

The Bible is quite clear that God’s ultimate purpose is to glorify himself. We see this in passages like **Isaiah 42:8** which reads *[8] I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other*. If I were to seek to glorify myself you would rightly say that I am an egomaniac, but God is the only being worthy of being glorified and worshipped so it is completely right for him to seek His own glory. Our primary purpose is to glorify God, but we cannot glorify what we do not know. The Bible is God’s revelation to us of who He is, and the proclamation of God’s Word, or preaching, is one of the primary means He uses to instruct us and mature us so that we are able to glorify Him. When you view this passage from a broad perspective you see that Paul is calling for the Corinthians to become mature in their thinking and then act in accordance with that maturity by ending their fascination with the sensational and focusing on the truth of God. The result is that God will be glorified and worshipped. Paul is not just making this an exercise in theology though. It has love as the driving force behind it. It flows immediately out of chapter 13, the great love chapter, and even the first command in chapter 14 is “Pursue love.” As we examine this passage we need to keep all this in mind. So, let’s get started.

Be maturing in your faith.

The first thing we come across is that Paul wants the Corinthians to **be maturing in their faith**. In verse 20 Paul kind of chastises the people. I like the way Phillips Paraphrase puts it. *"My brothers, don't be like excitable children but use your intelligence! By all means be innocent as babes as far as evil is concerned, but where your minds are concerned be full-grown men!"* What Paul was dealing with was people being childish, thoughtless, and self-promoting in their desire for tongues. They were looking for an emotional, sensational experience and had no interest in using their mind or maturing in their faith. It was all about appearances. This was all based off their experiences from the evil religious culture of Corinth which they were carrying over into the church, but Paul is telling them to be like infants towards this evil. If you think of what an infant is like as far as its experience of evil, it has none. Despite the inherited sin nature there is complete innocence when it comes to the experience of evil. Paul had just spent the last few verses, 14-19, emphasizing the importance of using the mind in worship. Now he is telling them to regard their previous experiences with the mystery religions as if they had never happened and instead take their thought to the level of completion and maturity. So, what does that look like?

First, Mature thinking is transformative and contrary to evil.

Romans 12:2 tells us that we are transformed by the renewal of our minds, and Colossians 3:9-10 indicates that the practice of evil is in opposition to that transformation! It may seem obvious that sin and maturing faith are mutually exclusive, but in practice it is not uncommon for us to have little sins that we like to hold onto. That doesn't mean we don't fight those sins; they are just the respectable ones that we don't really consider the weight of. They seem harmless, at least that's what we tell ourselves, but maturing in our faith cannot occur when unrepentant sin is present. To become mature in our thinking we need to be like infants in regard to evil and focus on the truths of God's Word so that our minds will be renewed and our lives transformed.

Second, Mature thinking emphasizes love.

As we do grow in maturity our lives should be more and more characterized by love. We are, after all, being transformed to become like Jesus who was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Look at the progression we see in 2 Peter 1:5-7. *[5] For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with*

godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. {2 Peter 1:5-7 ESV} Our childlike faith grows and develops to reach the mature level of Christlike love. Love is characteristic of mature thinking and drives our desires and relationships within the church and without which leads to the next **point**.

Mature thinking desires to build up and encourage others.

The Corinthians were thinking only of themselves with a sinful desire to appear spiritually superior. What they ended up doing was basically replicating what was going on in the religious culture of Corinth. Their lack of love was not only keeping them from maturing in their own faith but it was also hindering others from maturing. Mature thinking that is transformative and characterized by love will result in our following Jesus's example of sacrificial service as we seek to encourage others and help them grow in the faith. Mature thinking is others-focused.

Clear, credible communication.

Now, if we are going to play a role in building up others and witnessing then we need to have **clear, credible communication**.

Continuing to verse 21, Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12. *[11] For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to*

this people, [12] to whom he has said, "This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose"; yet they would not hear. {Isaiah 28:11-12}

We also see similar references in Deuteronomy 28:49 and Jeremiah 5:15. What Paul is demonstrating with this quote is that God has used unintelligible languages as a form of judgment on those in rebellion against Him. They would not listen to the messages He sent through the prophets in their own language so now he is sending foreigners speaking an unknown language to judge them. In those passages tongues are a means to confirm unbelievers in their rebellion against God. Because of this Paul states in verse 22 that tongues are not a sign for believers but for unbelievers. Since church is primarily a gathering of believers (Which is not to say unbelievers are not welcome!), Paul is saying tongues have no place in it except within the boundaries he gives later in verses 27-28. Now, I don't want to leave you with the idea that tongues were only ever intended as a form of judgment. Think of what occurred in Acts 2:4-13. As the apostles began to speak in tongues, people from all over the known world could understand the Gospel in their own language, but the Jews who had rejected Jesus did not understand them and mocked them for being drunk! One group hears the Gospel in their own language and believes. To another group the language is unintelligible and leaves them in their unbelief.

Language used in the church should be understandable.

So, if tongues are a sign for unbelievers, **then the language used in the church should be understandable.** This is not the same thing as saying it should be simple, but language which is not understandable has no ability to bring growth. Beyond that, and just as important, if unbelievers are present then a lack of understanding only serves to leave them in their lost state. Even if we are speaking in a known language our vocabulary may be beyond the scope of the hearers' experience. Communication which does not involve a receiver receiving the intended message is not communication.

Preaching is primarily intended for the benefit of believers.

On the other hand, Paul says that prophecy is a sign for believers. In other words, **preaching is primarily intended for the benefit of believers.** That is because the Word preached is able to increase our knowledge and understanding of God and to convict us of sin, all resulting in our spiritual growth. The spoken word of God has the same ability as the written word of God which, according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, includes teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness so that we will be mature and equipped to do good works. These are benefits only to those who have

already believed in Jesus. Obviously, and we will see this more later, preaching is able to bring someone to belief at which point those benefits of the word of God mentioned in the 2 Timothy passage carry over to them.

Unclear language plus worldly behavior negates our witness.

So far, we have mainly seen an argument for prophecy over tongues for the benefit of believers because that is what builds up the church. When the church is built up it becomes a visible image of the power of the Gospel, but what happens when an unbeliever comes into the church? That is what we hope happens, right? Well, in verse 23 Paul puts the cap on his argument against the Corinthians focus on tongues by introducing a hypothetical situation of unlearned people or unbelievers walking into a church scene of utter chaos! Everyone is shouting out at the same time in languages that nobody can understand. Of course, they are going to think that everyone is out of their minds! In the Greek, this does not just mean crazy or acting strange; it means out of control and delusional! Think of this picture we have of the Corinthian church from Paul's letter so far. Half of them are drunk from the wine of the Lord's Supper; some are bragging about sexual immorality that even these unbelievers

are repulsed by; and most all of them are shouting out gibberish trying to “one-up” each other spiritually! These new folks are looking around thinking, “This place is no different from the temple of Diana!” The credibility and witness of the church has been completely destroyed!

The power of preaching.

But now we turn to a church where prophecy, or preaching, is primary, and we see **the power of preaching**. As we continue on to verse 24, this is where we get the “BUT,” and Paul turns the discussion to the main point he is driving at. He does it by changing the scenario into one that stands in direct contrast to the previous. Instead of chaos and confusion there is order and understanding. Let’s read it again.

[24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. (1 Corinthians 14:24-25)

First, I want to expand on the definition of prophecy. The gift of prophecy is the Spirit-given ability to speak the truth of God with clarity. It is important to note that prophecy does not equal preaching, but preaching, when done from the Bible, is a form of prophecy. And

one must not be gifted with the gift of prophecy to prophesy. Speaking the truth of God is something we all can and should do; some people are just uniquely, spiritually gifted at it.

When we read the statement "if all prophesy" we need to understand that this is a very different idea from everyone speaking in tongues at the same time. Here we have a scenario where the truth of God is being proclaimed in an understandable and orderly way. Don't gloss over the fact that Paul uses the singular to reference the unbeliever this time. I think he is emphasizing the personal nature that the Word of God works in an individual's life to convict and bring salvation.

Preaching is used by God to bring salvation.

The scenario into which the unbeliever enters now is completely different from the chaotic, pagan-like environment before, and we see the process of and effects of salvation occurring. It is important for us to remember that even though the primary purpose of preaching is towards believers, **God uses His word to bring salvation to the lost**. In fact, Romans 10:14 specifically says that unless someone hears God's Word they are not able to believe. The ability of God to use His Word to bring salvation is not restricted to Gospel passages or evangelistic crusades. We

see a great example of this in the conversion of Augustine in 386 A.D. I won't go into the whole story of his path to conversion. If you want that you can read *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Anyway, he eventually came to a situation that prompted him to pick up a Bible and read Romans 13:13-14 which was where it happened to be open to. *[13] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.* This passage is undeniably intended as instruction on living the Christian life, but it was what finally turned Augustine's heart and led to his conversion.

Preaching has the power to bring conviction.

So, let's examine this scenario and see what it tells us about the power of preaching. First, **preaching has the power to bring conviction**. It is important to see in this passage what is meant by "convicted by all" and "called to account by all." The conviction that occurs is not coming from all the people in the church. That is not our job! Instead, it is from all that is said, the proclamation of the truth of God used by the Holy Spirit to bring conviction. (John 16:8) Of course, every one of us who are believers and have

sat through a sermon we thought was directed just to us knows that the convicting power of preaching is not limited to unbelievers. The Word of God is able to go deep and bring conviction and accountability for our thoughts and actions, even those deepest secrets we think nobody else knows about.

Hebrews 4:12 speaks of the ability of God’s word to expose the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. I really don’t want to treat this point too lightly. We all have sin the Spirit can use preaching to convict us of. We might say to ourselves, “I’m basically a good person,” but we have a weak definition of good. According to Jesus statement to the rich young man in Mark 10:18 no one is good except God alone. None of us measure up to God’s righteous requirement, and the Holy Spirit uses God’s Word to convict us of that. Anytime the truth of God’s Word is laid alongside the reality of sin it will result in conviction and lead to either repentance, which is turning away from sin and to Jesus, or hardening against the truth. We must take care not to harden ourselves against the truth to protect our pet sins. If you are not a believer and you are experiencing conviction for sin it is a dangerous thing to reject that truth.

Preaching has the power to produce repentance.

Second, we see that preaching has the power to produce repentance. There is an implied action that occurs in the middle of verse 25. We see a movement from conviction of sin to worship of God. This is not natural! The natural response to being confronted with our sin is to push back against God. According to Romans 8:7 we are unable to submit to God. We also see this in 1 Corinthians 2:14. It is the Holy Spirit who makes our hearts receptive to the truth of God. When conviction leads to worship then one of two things has happened. Either an unbeliever has come to belief and received salvation, as we see happening in our passage, or true sorrow leading to repentance has occurred in a believer. This is actually what we see has happened in the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. Conviction will not lead to worship if there is a rejection or repudiation of that conviction. We cannot hold onto our sin and worship God.

Preaching has the power to cause worship.

Finally, and sequentially, we see that preaching has the power to cause worship. Once we have seen our sin in the light of God's truth the result should be worshipping God who has forgiven us

and made us His children. The ultimate end of preaching is to glorify God and bring us to worship Him. The Bible is God’s revelation of Himself to us, and when it is preached faithfully we see God. It is important to note the posture of the former unbeliever in verse 25; he falls on his face to worship God. This is the posture we see throughout the Bible when people realize they are in the presence of God. We see it in Joshua 5:14, Ezekiel 1:28, with Peter in Luke 5:8, and throughout Revelation. I am not saying that falling face down is the normal and expected thing for us to do in worship, but it should be the posture of our hearts for true worship. Worship elevates God and diminishes us. It is not about us and how it makes us feel; **not one bit**. I’m not saying you should not experience any affections when you worship. In fact, I would argue that if you never experience affections you either don’t understand the enormity of the sin you have been forgiven or you don’t understand the holiness of God and the extreme measures he took to bring reconciliation between you and him. Worship does not begin with emotion. It begins with understanding, with thought. This is what Paul was getting at back in verse 20. Preaching presents the truth of God, and as we

contemplate that truth the Holy Spirit works in us to convict of sin, bring repentance, and cause us to worship.

Application

So, let's look at some application from this.

Place your faith in Jesus.

First, place your faith in Jesus. If you are not a believer and are experiencing the conviction we have talked about today, please do not ignore it. It does not take a great intellect or super-spiritual understanding to realize the truth of the Gospel; Jesus died for sinners. Admit to God that you are a sinner and deserve His just punishment. Believe that Jesus died to take the punishment for your sin and was raised from the dead to give you eternal life. Then, in response to that love of God shown to you, commit your life to following Him.

Don't toy with sin.

Second, and this is a bit of a touchy subject, don't toy with sin. As believers we need to be maturing in our faith, but if we are toying with unrepentant sin in our lives that's not happening, and we are harming not only ourselves but also our brother or sister in Christ because we cannot be what God has called us to be in the life of the church. And if we have sin keeping the church from being

what it should be then it will not be that visible representation of the Gospel that it was created to be.

Keep your witness clear and credible.

Kind of flowing right from that last application, we need to keep our witness clear and credible. We should make sure the language we use to communicate God's truth does not end up keeping it hidden because of a lack of understanding. On top of that, the actions we take as individuals and as a church must not cause us to appear like the world or unnecessarily drive unbelievers away. I say unnecessarily because the message of the cross is offensive to some, but we cannot back off from it.

Prioritize preaching.

Finally, prioritize preaching. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5:20 says not to despise prophecy. Regular time spent sitting under the preaching of God's Word is absolutely necessary for our spiritual growth and ability to worship. If this is not a habit, a commitment that you have, make it one today. And while podcasts of sermons from some extraordinary preachers are good, they are no substitute for gathering with other believers to hear God's Word together. If you are a young adult nearing the time when you will head off into the world then prioritize finding a church where the

preacher faithfully proclaims the truth of God’s Word. Alongside that, it is also important to realize that God’s truth can be proclaimed in our music with the same power to convict, bring repentance, and lead us to worship so it is just as essential to make sure the songs being sung are based in sound, biblical truth.

I’m going to make one last rather concrete application on this point that I can make since I am not the main preacher of our church. If preaching is important then knowing how to best listen to preaching is important. I highly recommend this little 30 page book titled “Listen Up: A practical guide to listening to sermons” by Christopher Ash. It is available at thegoodbook.com for just \$3, and I believe you will find it to be a valuable resource.

To sum up, we’ve talked about preaching and the power it carries in the life of the church to bring us to worship God and to build us up into a picture that displays the Gospel to the world. Salvation is all about glorifying God. In Ephesians 1 Paul repeats various riffs on the statement “to the praise of His glory” over and over. So, don’t let it stop here. Take the truth of God you hear in these walls out there so that God will be glorified because He alone is worthy.