

## "Bodybuilding 401" 1 Corinthians 14:13-25

### Introduction

- In May of this past year The Associated Press reported the bizarre and morose story of [Shannon Molloy](#) who was critically injured just about a year ago when a car crash slammed her into the dashboard of her car. Somehow her skull separated from her spine but her skin, spinal cord and other internal organs remained intact. The rare condition is known in clinical terms as internal decapitation and it left Shannon with no control over her head.<sup>1</sup>
- Sadly enough, there is a similar experience among Christians. On the outside Christians with this condition look just like any other follower of Christ—everything remains intact. But internally something is terribly wrong. The life of the spirit has been severed from the life of the mind. The Lordship of Christ which extends over everything, over all of life, has not been extended to the realm of the mind. There are Christian feelings, yes. Christian emotions, yes. Even Christian experiences. But very few Christian thoughts. It is an internal decapitation of a different sort but no less debilitating.
- Christians who have been decapitated internally, and if that image grosses you out, good. Because what I'm describing is not natural. It should not be like this. The Christian who has had her mind severed from her spirit, generally speaking, behaves no differently than the world without Christ. From the perspective of the Bible changes in behavior always follow a change in thinking. Romans 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* Not conforming, not being squeezed into the world's mold, happens when there is a renewing, a changing of the mind. Right behavior always follows on the heels of right thinking. In the words of [Henry Blamires](#), "The Christian mind is the prerequisite of Christian thinking. And Christian thinking is the prerequisite of Christian action."<sup>2</sup> And it necessarily follows that if your life doesn't look all that much like Jesus' life it's because you're not thinking like Jesus. You really want to really grow in your Christian walk? Ask God to change the way you think. 1 Corinthians 2:16. Cultivate the mind of Christ.

### Transition

As we dig into 1 Corinthians 14:13-25 this morning what I want you to see from this passage that...

### Proposition

- **It is absolutely imperative that we learn to love God in the ways we think**
- This extended section on tongues and prophecy that we're in right now really boils down to this one issue. An improper balance of experience and truth. The Corinthian church elevated experience and at the expense of truth and consequently they were not loving God in their thinking. There was this severing of the Christian mind from the Christian spirit. Internal decapitation.

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<sup>1</sup> "Woman survives 'internal decapitation'", May 17, 2007, *The Associated Press*. © All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1963), p. 43.

- You may or may not be aware of it, but right now we are in the middle of a seismic shift in the Christian landscape, especially in the context of corporate worship, that is not unlike what Paul wrote about in his letter to the Corinthians; an elevation of experience and feeling and emotion over truth.
- But experience or feeling alone, they're never enough to lead someone to godliness. [Annie Dillard](#) says living is like standing under a waterfall. “The hard water pelts your skull, bangs in bits on your shoulders and arms. The strong water dashes down beside you and you feel it along your calves and thighs rising roughly back up, up to the rolling surface, full of bubbles that slide up your skin and break on you at full speed.”<sup>3</sup> But that “sheer experience” of “standing thoughtless under the waterfall,” it isn’t enough.<sup>4</sup>
- In the context of corporate worship, because that’s what I want to hone in on now. Remember, the turtles in the road? Most of the turtles the Corinthians hit had to do with body life—dysfunctionality when they gathered corporately. Think about what we do starting at 10:15 each Sunday. When we gather to sing and pray, and preach and teach, if the mind is not engaged, if we aren’t thinking Christian thoughts while we do what we do then it’s no different than standing mindless under the waterfall. It feels good but there’s nothing uniquely Christian about it. **We’ve got to we learn to love God in the ways we think.** In this section, verses 13-25, there are...

### Organizational Sentence

- **Two signs that during corporate worship we are loving God in the ways we think**

### Transition

Sign one? From [verses 13-19](#), **the cookies have been put on the bottom shelf.** Sign two? From [verses 20-25](#), the **gospel message has penetrated the deep tissue of the conscience.** All right, let me see if I can explain. Look at [verses 13-19](#). *For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. 16 If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

### Main Points

- In the context of corporate worship, when Christians use their minds, things don’t get more complex and academic and harder to understand. Just the opposite. If the Christian is using his mind, if we are loving God in the ways we think, the words and messages about God and the Christian life that are communicated during corporate worship should get simpler and easier and more intelligible—for everyone. Or to put it another way, **the cookies have been put on the bottom shelf** so that everyone can reach them. That’s the **first sign** we’re loving God in the ways we think.

<sup>3</sup> Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> James Sire, *The Discipleship of the Mind*, chapter 1.

- From Paul’s perspective, the main problem with tongues speaking during corporate worship was that it kept the cookies on the top shelf—only a select few could reach the jar. Unless the words in tongues were made intelligible by interpretation, [verse 13](#), they were pointless, unedifying words. They may have been beneficial to the person speaking them but, in the end, only a few were edified and able to eat them.
- The Christian, or *one who finds himself among you*, [verse 16](#), who happened in on a corporate worship setting where everybody was speaking tongues, that Christian would be unable to agree with, to “Amen” with what was said, because of the unintelligibility of the words. Can’t reach the jar. Witnessing tongues is an alienating cookie-less experience. There is nothing edifying about watching others much while you’re left out. Paul says *You*, meaning the tongues speaker, *may be giving thanks well enough, but the other is not edified*. So instead of keeping the cookie on the top shelf Paul says in [verse 19](#), he’d rather have five intelligible words in corporate worship, share the cookies, than ten thousand unintelligible, unattainable words in tongues. Or as [David Garland](#) rephrases Paul’s words, “mindless, incomprehensible jabber instructs no one.”<sup>5</sup>
- In our house most days there is some kind of Star Wars play going on. If you’ve seen the newer movies, *The Phantom Menace* in particular, you’re familiar with a character by the name of Jar Jar Binks. He’s cute and he’s lovable. But he’s impossible to understand. He’s kind of like tongues speaking without interpretation. Deep down, you know he’s good and he plays an important part in the story but you’d just rather him shut up and leave so that you can get on with the plot. It’s fruitless to try and understand him.
- That’s kind of what Paul’s getting at here in this passage. In [verse 14](#), Paul describes a situation in which he prays with his innermost spiritual being. *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays*. But something else also happens. He says *my mind is unfruitful*. What Paul is not saying is that speaking in tongues is a mindless exercise beyond the control of the individual. That’s not what he’s saying. What he is saying is that speaking in tongues doesn’t benefit his mind. *My mind is unfruitful*. It’s a Jar Jar Binks fruitless kind of experience. It benefits the spirit, yes, but not the mind. And as I’ve already described, [verse 17](#), “neither does it benefit the minds of others.”<sup>6</sup> It keeps the cookies on the top shelf.
- Tongues aside, I think Paul is right here giving us a very important goal for Christian corporate worship. The goals for corporate worship...this...are instruction, encouragement, edification, strengthening, if you remember 1 Corinthians 14:3. If you’re a Christian we want you to be strengthened and built up by this. We want you to leave stronger than when you came. The goal is to make things intelligible, [verses 6-12](#). But also one of the main goals of this is to make things fruitful for the mind, [verses 13-19](#). The cookies are placed on the bottom shelf so that everybody has access to what’s being said. Things have to be stated and communicated in ways that people can process and chew on and think with their minds. It is spirit and mind working together. Not the spirit internally decapitated from the mind or vice versa. In other words, it’s not enough to come to corporate worship and have your spirit alone edified. That’s an incomplete picture of what needs to happen during corporate worship. Experience alone isn’t enough. The mind has to be edified too.

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<sup>5</sup> Garland, p. 643.

<sup>6</sup> Fee, p. 699.

- I think what Paul is driving at in this section is an attack on all irresponsible speaking or action in worship that doesn't concern itself with those Christians on the fringes, those who might be prone to alienation by the way things are said or done.<sup>7</sup> I realize I'm probably speaking more to myself than anyone right now. The technical language. The esoteric Christian jargon. It's gotta go. Forgive me for being irresponsible at times. People, wherever they are in their journey with Christ, have to be able to join in and take a cookie from the cookie jar, they have to be able to respond with the affirmation, *Amen*, to what's being said, otherwise genuine, authentic worship is not happening.
- If you in any way have a speaking role in what we do here your goal, like mine, is to strive for crisp, clear, accessible thoughts and language so that everyone, kids, adults, mature in Christ to immature in Christ, finds something to eat. It is hard work to take the meat of the gospel and serve it in a way that people don't choke on the food.
- And if you come to worship and you have no speaking role you have a responsibility too. Don't come for an experience alone. Don't come simply for a feeling or to get a feeling. Come to chew with your mind. Stand under the waterfall and feel—yes. But think great god-glorifying thoughts about the waterfall. Strive to mature in your thoughts about God and your circumstances. “Our God” as [Craig Blomberg](#) says, “is a thinking, speaking God; and if we will know him, we must learn to think his thoughts after him.”<sup>8</sup>

### Transition

The Corinthians weren't doing this. They hadn't matured in their thinking about how the corporate worship service should look. In fact, Paul says in [verse 20](#) that they were immature in their understanding of corporate worship. *Brothers, stop thinking like children. In your thinking be adults.*

- What was it about their corporate worship that was childish? It was their preference for speaking in tongues, the unintelligible cookies on the top shelf, that not only alienated believers but befuddled non-Christians too. It was their preference for experience over and against the proclamation of truth that was childish. Paul reminds them, it's truth not experience that brings people into the kingdom. Experience alone will never convert anyone. By the way, too many Christians nowadays, settle, like children, for things that glitter and shine. They would rather feel than think. Both are necessary for maturity.
- Unlike [verses 13-19](#) which address the Christian, [verses 20-25](#) address corporate worship from the perspective of the non-Christian. The flow of Paul's argument goes something like this: [verse 20](#), redirect your thinking about the function of tongues. [Verse 21](#), tongues do not lead people to obedience (see OT text from Isaiah 28). So then, application, [verse 22](#), tongues is not for believers but for unbelievers and prophecy is not for unbelievers but believers. [Verses 23-25](#) then describe the effect of tongues and prophecy on unbelievers in particular.<sup>9</sup>
- Whereas the goal of worship for the Christian is fruitful minds, everybody benefitting from what is being said, the cookies placed on the bottom shelf. The goal of corporate worship for those who don't know Christ, is the presentation of the gospel message so that it penetrates

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<sup>7</sup> Garland, p. 654.

<sup>8</sup> Blomberg, p. 274.

<sup>9</sup> Fee, p. 677.

the deep tissue of the conscience. Like a massage, working it, working it so that in the mind of the unbeliever, the light goes on. During corporate worship, we know **we are loving God in the ways we think if the gospel message is presented in such a way as to penetrate the deep tissue of the conscience of the non-Christian.** That is hard, hard work. Frankly, we don't work at it hard enough.

- The problem with the corporate worship of the Corinthians was that it wasn't doing that. **Verse 23.** *So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?* Not a good thing. That's why Paul says in **verse 22** that speaking in tongues is a sign for the unbeliever. As **verse 21** points out, which we looked at last week, unintelligibility was a sign of God's judgment—God feels farther away because of the experience of seeing others speak in tongues. **Gordon Fee** says, "Because tongues are unintelligible, unbelievers receive no revelation from God; they cannot thereby be brought to faith. Thus by their response of seeing the work of the Spirit as madness, they are destined for divine judgment—just as in the OT passage Paul has quoted."<sup>10</sup>
- What Paul prefers is that great care and effort be expended so that the non-Christian who wanders in to observe Christians worshipping might, as he says in **verses 24 and 25** *be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will fall down and worship God.* But that happens through the presentation of truth and not through experience alone. It's the truth of the gospel message, Christ crucified for sins according to the Scriptures, Christ buried according to the Scriptures, Christ raised to life according to the Scriptures, it's that message creatively and clearly presented that makes worship successful. Paul says point blank that failing to work for a clear and compelling presentation of the gospel during corporate worship so that the full weight of that message is brought down on the conscience of the non-Christian, that's a sign of spiritual immaturity. The goal is as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:11 *to try to persuade men by speaking to their conscience.* The purpose of worship is not to astonish but to bring people to a sense of wonder. It should expose non-Christians to the reality and truth and presence of God so that they confess, "I ought not to live as I do; I've got to change."<sup>11</sup>
- A couple of quick points of application. All of Paul's discussion here presumes that non-Christians are present during Christian worship. *So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in.* What are you doing to involve your non-Christian friends and family in this? What's keeping you from extending an invitation? The only way they'll think what Christians do is mad is if there's a Corinthian-like tongues-fest going on. That's probably not going to happen so invite them. Let them see. Let them observe. Let them question.
- The other thing has to do with **verse 20.** Part of what it means to mature in Christ is thinking godly thoughts about all of life. **It is absolutely imperative that we learn to love God in the ways we think.** "Dysfunctional behavior often stems from warped thinking."<sup>12</sup> Some of you have not had a new thought about God in a while and it shows in the way you're living. The spiritual synapses of the mind have short-circuited. What are you doing, what will you do to cultivate the mind of Christ? Again, I'm not talking about being an academic. I'm talking about thinking God-sized, God-oriented thoughts about all of life.

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<sup>10</sup> Fee, p. 682.

<sup>11</sup> Garland, p. 653-4.

<sup>12</sup> Blomberg, p. 274.

## **Conclusion**

- As we close this morning I want the worship team to come back up on stage and I want us to sing together the words of the hymn *May the Mind of Christ My Savior*. “May the mind of Christ, my Savior live in me from day to day, By His love and power controlling all I do and say.” Make this your prayer, your goal this week.