

Today's Quick Word 1 Corinthians 14:12

By Bruce Christian

1 CORINTHIANS 14:12 *So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.*

It is ironic that the part of the Bible where most of the teaching concerning tongues-speaking is concentrated tries to DISCOURAGE its use! 1 Corinthians 12 talks about all the different gifts and how they are to be shared for the mutual benefit of all, emphasising that the least 'spectacular' gifts are the most important. The Greek of the last verse of 1 Corinthians 12 (31) has two possible interpretations, each of which is grammatically correct and valid:

1. "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way." (which is the one followed by most English translations); and
2. "You are eagerly desiring the 'greater' gifts, but now I will show you the most excellent way."

I am not a Greek scholar, but in the light of the opening verse of Chapter 13: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging

cymbal.," I find it hard to understand why the SECOND option is NOT the preferred one! To me, it makes much better sense of the very point Paul is trying to get across to a body of believers who were getting a name for themselves for their competitive, 'I'm-more-spiritual-than-you' attitude (cf Chapter 3).

Chapter 13 talks about the very BEST gift of all, the one without which all other gifts are NOTHING: humble, selfless, forgiving love ... and the VALUE of this gift is inversely proportional to the 'visibility' of its bearer. This is why in Chapter 14 Paul works hard to convince the Corinthians to specialise in gifts that build others up rather than those, like tongues-speaking, that enhance one's own appearance of spirituality.

It is sad that at different points in church history Paul's whole point in this letter has been misunderstood and lost! We need, not only to be clear presenters of God's truth to a lost world, but to be simple and self-effacing in the way we encourage one another from God's Word. The practice of tongues-speaking rarely contributes to this end.

Today's Quick Word 2 Samuel 2:1-2

By Bruce Christian

2 SAMUEL 2:1-2 *In the course of time, David enquired of the LORD. "Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?" he asked. The LORD said, "Go up." David asked, "Where shall I go?" "To Hebron," the LORD answered. So David went up there*

Here is an important insight into what identified King David as 'a man after God's own heart'. (cf Acts 13:22). Saul and Jonathan had both just been killed in a battle with the Philistines, and David had already been anointed by Samuel as the King-elect, so, regardless of the complex political machinations and bloodied infighting that would mark the path to the throne, David could confidently assume that his ultimate coronation was a foregone conclusion.

But here we are given a helpful glimpse of the mind-set that would characterise every aspect of the son of Jesse's behaviour throughout his future reign. He took nothing for granted, but always 'enquired of the LORD', and then acted in unquestioning obedience to what was revealed to him. This was typical of his God-focussed thought-life and behaviour: "God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer." (Psalm 66:19).

Could the same be said of OUR prayer life? I was challenged by today's verses because I know how easily I can just apply my own

'wisdom' and 'logic' to circumstances which might arise, and thus pursue a course of action which seems 'right', without first 'enquiring of the Lord'. Do we begin every day by committing our ways to the Lord in prayer, asking him to guide our steps and 'make our paths straight'? Does the wisdom of David's son, Solomon, characterise our pattern for living: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)? Are we guided by the wisdom of the Apostle James: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil." (James 4:13-16)?

The Lord may not answer our requests for guidance as directly as he did for David, but as we read his Word each day we can trust him to make his ways clear. All that he desires of us is a heart that seeks him earnestly in prayer, and that is willing to submit humbly to his will in simple trust.

Today's Quick Word Ezekiel 13:20-21

By Bruce Christian

EZEKIEL 13:20-21 *Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that you ensnare like birds. I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power. Then you will know that I am the LORD."*

The three main ways the LORD God reveals himself to Mankind as the only true God are: through his Creation (Psalm 19:1-6); through his inspired, infallible Word, the Bible (Psalm 19:7-13); and through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3).

But he also reveals himself through changed lives. The many powerful false prophets in Ezekiel's day were very effective in leading God's people astray, blinding them to the truth and binding them to empty, unsatisfying philosophies and world-views leading to godless, immoral behaviour. This made the task of faithful prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc, especially difficult because God-centred truth was much less

palatable than man-centred lies.

It is no different for us today: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18a), and no effort to make it 'relevant' or 'acceptable' to modern man will ever make it effective in its true purpose. For starters, modern man does not want to be told he is a sinner who needs a Saviour! Nor does he want to be told he is not in charge of his own life and destiny. No, the message of 'the Cross' will never 'cut the mustard' with self-sufficient, ego-centric modern man.

But what DOES make him sit up and take notice are lives that are radically CHANGED by the POWER of the Gospel (cf Romans 1:16). That is how the LORD encouraged Ezekiel to press on with his difficult task, as he announced to his deceiving adversaries: "I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power. THEN you will KNOW that I AM the LORD."

Do we see the value of OUR testimony in the Lord's hands?