

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 44 Edification

Reading: 1 Corinthians 14. 1-19

1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds

of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

Address

You must not expect me this evening to speak to you on this question of the gift of tongues. Paul is discussing it here, but there is one point which comes verse after verse, and it is this: *does it edify?* It is on this ground that Paul bases all his arguments in this chapter. Does it edify? You might ask the question, What is edification? What do we mean by edification? I take it simply to mean something like this: spiritual profit, or spiritual benefit. So Paul is saying if a person has the gift of tongues, when he can interpret it, explain what it means, then it can edify the people, but if no-one translates it, no-one understands it, it is not profitable because it does not edify.

Of course, without going into the whole subject of the gift of tongues, we believe that this ceased after the days of the apostles. But this chapter brings this point, and it is vital; you have it verse after verse. I looked at it in my concordance and six times among the nineteen verses I have read, this point of edification. And beloved friends, it is not just in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. It is a theme that we have constantly through the New Testament. Now does it edify? It is made very, very clear to us that there are many things that do not edify. We are told to seek those things that do edify. And on one occasion, the Apostle Paul said, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."

So there is a pair of balances here to weigh up our lives and our behaviour and the things we do and the way we behave and the places we go. Is it for edification? Also, in making a decision, in making a choice, should I do this thing? should I spend time on it? Well, this point: does it edify? And especially at the beginning of the chapter concerning the preaching of the gospel. Now it is the great point. We are told this, that the preaching of the gospel – let us be clear, that is what prophesying means in this chapter; in Elizabethan days, the days of the early Puritans, they used to use the term *prophesying* for preaching. But Paul tells us the purpose of preaching is three things: for "edification, and exhortation, and comfort" – in that order. That is not always the order we put it in.

Edification comes first. The Lord's day morning comes and the services of the house of God during that day. It will not always be a blessing; it will not always be a clear word; it will not always be a definite deliverance; but we trust that it edifies. I would ever seek this: that the preaching might edify. That is that it might be of some spiritual help and some spiritual benefit, some spiritual

profit. So may there be that prayer tonight and in secret and when we come to the house of God, that the services of the day might be for our edification.

And then secondly, *exhortation*. The apostle once said, "Brethren, suffer the word of exhortation." He was telling them what they ought to do and what they ought not to do to the honour and glory of God.

And thirdly, for *comfort*. So often we put it first; God puts it third.

But there is so much about edification in Scripture, for instance Ephesians chapter 4. "The edifying of the body of Christ." It is not just the preaching. We are told to edify one another. In our talking with one another, in our conversation with one another we are told to edify one another. Now we do not always, do we?

So really the theme tonight with me is just this one word – *edification* – because it comes again and again in this chapter. But not only so, it comes again and again right through the New Testament, the things that edify. And when the Spirit of God is at work, it will edify, and when Christ is present and Christ is precious, it will edify. But may it be a subject of prayer and meditation, as we come to the house of God, that the Word might edify us, that we as helped by the Spirit of God might edify one another, that the things we do, in our choices and in our behaviour, that these things might be for our edification, because it is for our good and it is for the honour and glory of God.

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Monday, 1st December, 2008

