

1 CORINTHIANS (PART 25) ▪ CHAPTER 14
LSD IN THE COMMUNION CUP?
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What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? ¹⁷ For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. ¹⁸ I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; ¹⁹ yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Cor. 14:15-19)

INTRODUCTION

Why don't we put LSD in the communion cup? This question isn't as crazy as it may first seem. The question concerns the nature of our faith and the purpose of our assemblies. What are we aiming at here? There is a strong current in our day which emphasizes the manufacturing of feelings, emotions, and ecstatic experiences. In these assemblies the leadership aims at creating a certain form of religious high and the believer expects to walk away having had experienced it. "Once you've experienced it..." as the song goes. In some situations the believers act like the higher life could be achieved by means of a lobotomy and a hit of acid. At the other end of the spectrum are those who act like correctly filing theological notions in their cerebral cortex is the epitome of faithfulness. Their body simply serves to give their brain mobility. So, is the swollen belly or the swollen head our only options? What is the purpose of our assemblies?

THE GOAL: EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

Many of the Corinthian believers were coming out of a religious background which centered on the experiential, as many of the false religions of the world do (12:2). That's why it would seem that the gift of tongues was made into such a prominent feature of the Corinthian's gatherings. Paul addresses this abuse in chapters 12-14. He shows them that they've got the wrong focus: it's not personal experiences, but edifying others that counts in the body. The standard by which Paul urges us to judge activities in the congregation is by their ability to edify (a Greek metaphor "to build a house, erect a building" (14:12 cf. Mt. 16:18; 26:61).

What edifies us? As Paul argues, if you can't understand what is being said, the experience is worthless as far as the edification of the church is concerned. In chapter fourteen verses 1-25 Paul carries on a running contrast between prophecy and tongues, arguing for the absolute need for intelligibility in the activities of the gathered church. He argues from an analogy concerning sounds (vv. 7-9); the phenomenon of foreign languages (vv. 10-11); the need for interpretation of tongues (vv. 13-14); the argument that "spiritual" is not enough, our understanding must be involved (vv. 15-17). Paul's emphatic conclusion is "I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (v. 19). In verses 26-40 Paul argues for the absolute need for

order in the activities of the gathered church. Paul's thesis is that edification depends upon people comprehending and receiving God's word. This demands understanding and order in worship.

THE BIG PICTURE

The issue at Corinth is just a small slice of a bigger issue that runs through the history of God's people. These two approaches to God – one via “religious experiences,” and the other via God's word declared – have a long history of conflict. The conflict stretches back before Baal, through the Corinthian church situation, past the Latin services at the time of the Reformation, and forward to the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements of our day. The issue has not gone away, and it is a frequent assumption in our culture that “religion” (including the Christian faith) is about generating certain experiences. This is, of course, not at all to deny that there are real experiences. The living God demands our whole person including our emotions. He addresses our deepest emotions (look through the Psalms!). What Paul and the Scriptures deny is that our emotions and experiences are reliable indicators of anything except how we're feeling or what we're experiencing at the moment. They also deny that we are to live from spiritual high to spiritual high. But God's word is to define our response to everything, including our experiences. “But I feel so close to God when...” no more justifies any action or response for the Christian than it does for the person taking LSD. The purpose of understanding what God has said is so that we can respond properly with our whole person to what He has said. We grow in understanding so that we can trust, obey, and be encouraged. God's word is to be the shaping influence in our lives.

CONCLUSION

The most basic application of Paul's admonition to our situation concerns the need to simply learn the discipline of showing up for worship week by week. What difference would it make if everything was done in the church according to Paul's instruction – and yet you're not here? Would that edify you? Could you edify others? Without an assembly none of this is possible. Closely related to this first matter is the order with which our meetings are conducted. When we show up late doesn't that affect our ability to edify one another? And if we're carrying on our own conversations during the assembly – why not have whoever's speaking at that moment break into a foreign tongue? And what about those who regularly get up and leave for portions of the meeting? Isn't that the same as if whoever was speaking started speaking Swahili?

One of the things that Paul specifically mentions in this admonition is to “sing with understanding” (v. 15). There are a few related issues in our situation. We must remember that we're not only singing to God, we are also “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,…” (Col. 3:16). We must work at understanding what we're singing. Closely related is the corporate “Amen” (v. 16). We must understand as far as we are able what we are saying “Amen” to. And when we do, let it be hearty, for Jesus is the Amen (Rev. 3:14).

We need to see ourselves as workers participating in God's grand construction project (3:9; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20). The apostle's and prophets are the foundation. Jesus is the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20). God's people are the bricks (3:9). Love is the cement (8:1; 13). God's word is the hammer (Jer. 23:29). Let all things be done to contribute to this construction project.