Noise Gets Your Attention, But Music Speaks to the Soul

1 Corinthians 14:1-25 NLT

Today we will be getting back into the book of 1 Corinthians where we left off at the end of chapter 13. I’m going to start today by giving you a spoiler. I say that because I believe that Paul’s message in verses 1-25 can be summed up with a couple of thoughts. First, from his own words as written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in verses 7 and 8 he writes:

“7 Even lifeless instruments like the flute or the harp must play the notes clearly, or no one will recognize the melody. 8 And if the bugler doesn’t sound a clear call, how will the soldiers know they are being called to battle?”

1 Corinthians 14:7-8 NLT

And second, what I think the big idea is here. I will say it two ways:

First, Noise can get your attention, but music speaks to the soul.

And second, the gift of tongues can alert people to the presence of God, but preaching can edify the hearer.

Many times when people discuss the gift of tongues their emphasis is on whether or not it has ceased. Today that is not going to be my focus, just as it was not Paul’s focus. Instead he focused on the context and benefits of each of the gifts. Please follow along with me as I read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25.

“14 Let love be your highest goal!...”

(Remember we have already read that Paul believed love to be the best thing and that without it you are just a noisy gong. Along with that we have talked about how love is focused on others and requires sacrifice. But as we continue we will see that as we seek love other gifts will help us to show it to others.)

Continuing in the passage:

“…But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy. 2 For if you have the ability to speak in tongues, you will be talking only to God, since people won’t be able to understand you. You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit,[b] but it will all be mysterious. 3 But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them. 4 A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church.

5 I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.

6 Dear brothers and sisters, if I should come to you speaking in an unknown language,[d] how would that help you? But if I bring you a revelation or some special knowledge or prophecy or teaching, that will be helpful. 7 Even lifeless instruments like the flute or the harp must play the notes clearly, or no one will recognize the melody. 8 And if the bugler doesn’t sound a clear call, how will the soldiers know they are being called to battle?

9 It’s the same for you. If you speak to people in words they don’t understand, how will they know what you are saying? You might as well be talking into empty space.

10 There are many different languages in the world, and every language has meaning. 11 But if I don’t understand a language, I will be a foreigner to someone who speaks it, and the one who speaks it will be a foreigner to me. 12 And the same is true for you. Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church.

13 So anyone who speaks in tongues should pray also for the ability to interpret what has been said. 14 For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don’t understand what I am saying.

15 Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will also sing in words I understand. 16 For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don’t understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don’t understand what you are saying? 17 You will be giving thanks very well, but it won’t strengthen the people who hear you.

18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you. 19 But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language.

20 Dear brothers and sisters, don’t be childish in your understanding of these things. Be innocent as babies when it comes to evil, but be mature in understanding matters of this kind. 21 It is written in the Scriptures[f]:

“I will speak to my own people

 through strange languages

 and through the lips of foreigners.

But even then, they will not listen to me,”

 says the Lord.

22 So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers. 23 Even so, if unbelievers or people who don’t understand these things come into your church meeting and hear everyone speaking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy. 24 But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don’t understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say. 25 As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, “God is truly here among you.”

Let’s back up a little bit, to see how tongues were demonstrated during the early stages of the ministry of the Good News being spread.

“2 On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

5 At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

7 They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, 8 and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! 9 Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” 12 They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

13 But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

Notice, some were amazed and some thought that the preachers were drunk. And the deciding factor in this case was whether or not they understood what was being said. Not to mention the fact that we see that a loud noise drew them in. And what happened next is crucial to the point I am trying to get across today. Acts 2 goes on to record:

“14 Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. 15 These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. 16 No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

17 ‘In the last days,’ God says,

 ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

 Your young men will see visions,

 and your old men will dream dreams.

18 In those days I will pour out my Spirit

 even on my servants—men and women alike—

 and they will prophesy.

19 And I will cause wonders in the heavens above

 and signs on the earth below—

 blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

20 The sun will become dark,

 and the moon will turn blood red

 before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives.

21 But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord

 will be saved.’”

This is preaching, or prophesying. The speaking in tongues was a miraculous sign to draw people in and then Peter preached to help the people understand what God was doing and the days that they were living in.

Therefore, I will finish with this. When someone, even if it is you, speaks in words that can’t be understood, be amazed, but more than that, open your ears to be ready for the message that is coming.

It is cool to see amazing things, things that are beyond our comprehension, but it is instruction that is beneficial.

Would you rather listen to someone play music or have someone skillfully teach you how to play your own?

Or maybe another question to ask would be, “Would you rather do something that causes awe or help others to be awesome?”

In 1 Corinthians 14 the Apostle Paul is trying to help the Corinthians seek the things that will be most beneficial to the building up and edification of the church.

As Paul concluded:

“18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you. 19 But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language.”