

1 CORINTHIANS 14:20-25

WHEN OUTSIDERS COME TO CHURCH

“Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, ‘By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.’ Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”¹

All of mankind can be divided into two groups—saints and ain’ts. Either an individual is saved, or an individual is lost. When the Apostle Paul instructs Christians, “Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:32], he established the divisions for all mankind before God. While the Jewish people are truly God’s chosen people, it remains that the nation rejected their Messiah when He was presented.

In his letter to Roman Christians, however, Paul makes it clear that God has not rejected His ancient people forever. Of Israel, he writes, “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen” [ROMANS 9:1-5].

Then, soon after writing these words, Paul cautioned Gentile believers to watch out lest they should begin to feel superior to their Jewish forebears. “Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

‘The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’;
‘and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.’

As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” [ROMANS 11:25-32]. Therefore, it should be obvious that the world is divided into categorised designating them as either saved or lost, saints or ain’ts.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

It will be beneficial for us to compare our own meetings with those of the New Testament churches, focusing particularly on the purpose of our meetings. In the account of the meetings of the early churches, we find a passage that tells us something of their purpose in meeting. I am reading from the NET Bible, so it may differ somewhat from your own translation. Therefore, I ask you to listen, making any notes to assist your understanding in your own Bible. Later, review your notes, comparing them to what is written in your own translation.

Luke writes, “Those who [acknowledged the truth of]² [Peter’s] message were baptised, and that day about three thousand people were [won over]³” [ACTS 2:41]. The first thing to note is that only those who acknowledged the truth of Peter’s message were baptised. Thus, we see that baptism is for those who are believers; it is not administered to make believers. Moreover, it is apparent that those who were baptised were counted as believers—they would henceforth be expected to live as examples of God’s grace. Perhaps others believed, but the divine enumerator did not count them because it would not be possible to make any statement concerning them.

Of those who received baptism, I continue reading in the NET Bible as Doctor Luke writes, “They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. All who believed were together and held everything in common, and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved” [ACTS 2:42-47].¹

Thus, the divine account informs us that they met together on an ongoing basis, and also that whenever they met it was for the purpose of receiving doctrinal and practical instruction from the apostles, for fellowship, for worship, and to unite in prayer. Applying this information to our contemporary situation, we can say that the purposes of our meetings should have as a priority instruction from the Word of God. An untaught congregation is susceptible to every sort of evil. Though many modern congregations undoubtedly consider themselves well versed in the Word, they are actually ignorant of the will of God. Certainly, we want to enjoy fellowship, but the concept is distorted to mean something other than what it originally conveyed. Fellowship, in the New Testament, was the sharing of life—it was the investment of spiritual gifts into one another to build up the Body of Christ. Worship was integral to the services of the apostolic churches; but the worship of those early churches was seeking and experiencing the presence of the Risen Saviour, rather than generating artificial ecstasy through singing and dancing. Finally, if we will emulate the earliest churches, we will invest significant time in prayer.

Congregational worship will lead to the salvation of souls. We seek to glorify God, and He is glorified in the salvation of lost souls. This is evident from a statement the Apostle makes when writing his second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. According to the revelation the Apostle provides, the Master is coming again “to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:9-12].

² Marginal reading

³ Marginal reading

Unquestionably, the services of the church of the Living God are to be evangelistic. Every Christian is expected to be an evangelist—a living testimony of God’s grace, telling of the mercies of Christ that he or she has experienced and testifying to the grace of God. Especially is this true when outsiders come to church. By this, I do not mean that we are to preach solely about how one is to be redeemed; but I do mean that we should exalt God and always point all people to consider Him. Neither do I infer that each of us should collar every guest who enters into our services; but I do mean that we are responsible to pray for the salvation of souls and to seek an atmosphere that ensures the Spirit of God works without hindrance in our meetings. Above all else, I mean that when we come together, God’s glory should be our primary concern.

SURRENDERED TO THE FLESH — “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, ‘By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.’ Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”

Contemporary worship seems frequently to lead to an error that characterised the Church of God at Corinth. Worshippers focus on their feelings rather than on building one another. Worshippers imagine that the purpose of their activity is to make themselves feel good rather than to meet the True and Living God. Christians in Corinth, and many contemporary believers, are more focused on what they can get out of worship than they are on what they can give in worship! They seek to be served rather than seeking to serve others. Thus, just as was true in Corinth, so it is that modern Christianity is often guilty of spiritual infantilism.

We are taught that the gifted men given to the churches to instruct the people have as a goal the advancement of believers toward maturity. Listen to the Apostle’s words concerning this matter in the encyclical we have received as the Book of Ephesians. [The ascended Saviour] “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [EPHESIANS 4:11-16].

Let those words soak in for a moment. God intends for you to grow up, to move toward unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to move steadily toward mature manhood, to make perceptible progress toward becoming Christ like in your character and conduct. This movement toward spiritual maturity presupposes that you will leave behind childish attitudes and childish conduct and that you will not move beyond being susceptible to attraction to every passing fad. Above all else, God’s goal is that each of us who name the Name of Christ will permit His Spirit to work through us to build up the Body of Christ in love. If you are not growing, you are at best rebellious; at worst, you remain dead in your trespasses and sins.

The author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians sought to move readers toward maturity. However, he expressed his frustration with them because they were not growing. Take note of his frustration when he has writes, “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” [HEBREWS 5:12-14].

He expected that these Christians would be teaching others of the Master at every opportunity. Instead, they were content to continue in spiritual infancy. He wanted to speak to them of Christ’s priesthood and the practical impact of that divine service. He longed to delve deeper into soteriology—the doctrine of salvation, exploring the cost and discovering the privileges that accrue from the salvation we enjoy. However, he considered it impossible to speak to them of these great truths. The author writes as though he anticipates each Christian will be a teacher! It is a reasonable expectation!

It is anticipated that those who have been in the Faith for any period should be teachers! If you have faith in the Risen Son of God, you surely know that all about you are individuals who need to be taught of Him, and you are God’s appointed messenger to these people. Each Christian is to be a teacher, telling others of Christ the Lord. This is the truth communicated by the Apostle Peter’s words, “In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” [1 PETER 3:15]. I have said before, and I will say again, you are not evangelical if you are not evangelistic. If the essence of your faith can be defined by what you feel or what you experience, it is defective. Christianity that fails to result in witness to the Son of God is deficient at best.

The Corinthian congregation had within it a number of members who were convinced that exciting gifts that brought them notoriety were preferable to other less flashy gifts. It is apparent from reading the Apostle’s words that many of them sought to speak in other languages. However, Paul has earlier said that such activity may make the individual feel quite good about herself or himself, but the mind produces no fruit from the effort [see 1 CORINTHIANS 14:14]. Moreover, speaking in a foreign language makes fellow believers who do not understand the language feel as though they were outsiders. This is the meaning of his words, “If you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:16].

Unpack the instruction! Paul is clearly saying that acting without regard for fellow believers is infantile. Paul intimates that when you seek a personal high, without thinking of the impact of your self-seeking act on fellow church members, is extreme childishness. Such actions are self-centred; they exhibit a love of display and attention seeking which the Apostle deplores! Many modern Christians, like the Corinthians, would rather be made to feel than to think. They readily fall under the spell of virtuosi, showing a lack of maturity in the things of the Spirit. What should be evident is that when the focus is on yourself, you cannot worship acceptably.

Bad as focusing on the “self” is when considering the impact of such actions on believers, Paul will continue by pointing out that it is perhaps worse in its impact on outsiders. Uninterpreted and uncontrolled speech in other languages makes other believers feel like they do not belong, but it confuses unbelievers who may be present. Outsiders conclude that the believers are just another pagan cult meeting where all present are overwhelmed with ecstatic, frenzied experiences and are therefore “out of [their] minds” [verse 23]. Thus, evangelism will be hindered because they will leave without hearing the message of God’s redemptive love.

Speaking in tongues is highly desirable in some segments of contemporary Christendom. Undoubtedly, practitioners of tongue talking feel good about speaking in tongues. I have heard from dear friends that they feel close to God, or they feel spiritual, or they feel powerful. However, it seems highly significant that no record in Holy Writ is provided of a single word spoken in tongues. Neither is there any record of an interpretation of tongues in the Bible. Tongues are never mentioned in relation to their specific content. It is fair to conclude that the messages delivered in tongues were not new revelations, or they would have been included for our edification! Neither did the messages that were delivered in tongues provide new insight. What seems abundantly evident is that the messages delivered through tongues were expressions of old truths given in the native language of people present. Though tongues could edify when interpreted, the purpose of the gift was to validate the truth of God's appointed spokesman.

There are but a few instances provided in the Book of Acts that describe people speaking "in tongues." Let me point out also that in each instance when people spoke in tongues, there were people present that understood them because they were speaking their native language. There is neither example nor encouragement to imagine such a thing as a "prayer language," as some believe tongues to be. Speaking in tongues was for the purpose of communicating God's mighty works so that some nearby could hear and understand.

Of course, each of us has undoubtedly read the account of the Day of Pentecost telling how the Spirit of God descended and filled the believers who awaited the fulfilment of Jesus' promise. Let's review what Doctor Luke has written concerning that day. "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

"Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.' And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" [ACTS 2:1-12]?

A key sentence for understanding what was occurring is **verse six**: "each one was hearing them speak in his own language." Moreover, they specifically heard these uneducated Jews telling in the multiple languages represented by those present in Jerusalem that day, "the mighty works of God" [verse eleven]. There is no hint of what the disciples felt, but the impact of what they were saying is the focus of Doctor Luke's account. This incident was a sign of God's power and judgement, warning the people to pay attention to what was shortly to be said.

There is another account of people speaking in tongues. Luke describes how Cornelius and those gathered with him were filled with the Spirit. These Gentiles had gathered to hear the message of life from Peter. Peter, of course, had been sent by the Holy Spirit to point them to life. Here is the account as found in Acts. "No sooner were these words out of Peter's mouth than the Holy Spirit came on the listeners. The believing Jews who had come with Peter couldn't believe it, couldn't believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on 'outsider' non-Jews, but there it was—they heard them speaking in tongues, heard them praising God.

“Then Peter said, ‘Do I hear any objections to baptizing these friends with water? They’ve received the Holy Spirit exactly as we did’”ⁱⁱ [ACTS 9:44-47].

How did those listening know they were “praising God” if they did not understand what was being said? Of course, Cornelius and his cohorts would have normally spoken Latin. Though Peter and the other Jewish believers with him routinely communicated in Aramaic, it should be obvious that they were conversant in Koine Greek. Moreover, it is likely they understood at least some Latin, if for no other reason than that they were citizens of an occupied country—they would have heard Latin on a daily basis. When Cornelius and those assembled with him spoke in “tongues,” they apparently spoke in a language, or in languages, understood by those who heard them.

Whenever we speak about tongues, there is another matter than must not be overlooked. Paul does indeed say that tongues serve as a sign for unbelievers [verse 22]. Specifically, the strange tongues and foreign languages are a sign of judgement coming on those who do not believe. Paul quotes Isaiah [see ISAIAH 28:11, 12] to substantiate this point. Although tongues were a sign, it is significant to note that no more than three people may exercise the gift in any service! “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:27].

The important point to take home is that the Corinthians were censured because they focused on what made them feel good about themselves. Thus, they were ignorant of the impact of their actions both on their fellow saints and on outsiders who shared the services. Translate that into the contemporary scene, and it serves as a caution against designing our services to please ourselves. For should we do so, we will exclude fellow believers who are hungry for the presence of the Lord and we will fail to confront outsiders with the powerful message of life.

If we build our services as a showcase for music, we will deprive fellow worshippers of the opportunity to be equipped for service. Worse yet, we will fail to point outsiders to life in the Beloved Son. They will conclude that we are entertainers competing with other entertainers that amuse for a short while but never change anything in our broken lives. If we design our services as a means of displaying our theological sophistication, we will fail to include simple believers because we will fail to communicate. Worse still, we will fail to confront outsiders because we will have presented ourselves as mere philosophers with an alternate opinion.

LED BY THE SPIRIT — “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, ‘By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.’ Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”

Paul has pointed out a serious flaw in worship that seeks to please the worshippers. In the particular case of the Corinthians, it was because many of the Corinthians were endeavouring to speak in tongues. Because so many were speaking in tongues, the practise proved unprofitable for the congregation and it alienated believers who heard it [verses 16, 17]. Moreover, outsiders who were present in the services were confused and concluded that the church was just another cult promoting frenetic, even hysterical, experiences.

Paul contrasted this deplorable situation with the desirable situation that results as the entire church participates in prophesying. He portrays a hypothetical service in which the congregation supports and participates in testifying and preaching. In this instance, the message is communicated in clear, intelligible words. Unbelievers coming into the service will hear the divine message of life. They will learn of their own offence against Holy God, but they will also hear how God has provided salvation. Thus, they will receive hope that as they look to Christ they will receive the forgiveness of sin. It is not necessary that each member of the church actually speak if each member is in agreement, giving hearty assent to what is being communicated and taught through the declaration of God's working among the congregants.

As the congregation participates in the prophetic ministry, outsiders will be convicted of sin. Convicted of sin, each will be called to account (brought under judgement) by what is being communicated, which is also agreed to by all. Thus, the secrets of the heart are disclosed and the outsider can neither deny his condition before God nor plead ignorance of God's mercy and grace. Because this is taking place, the outsiders will fall on their faces and worship God, declaring that God is really among the worshippers [see verses 24, 25].

Because Paul says tongues are a sign for unbelievers [verse 22], Christians have sometimes erroneously concluded that speaking in tongues will result in the salvation of lost people. However, it is the proclamation of God's purpose and power that convicts sinners and points them to life. Let me demonstrate the correct statement by reading that verse from a somewhat literal translation. "Tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers."ⁱⁱⁱ Prophecy is not "a sign" for believers; rather, prophecy *is* for believers. Testifying, preaching the message of life, proclamation of the mind of God—this is effective in bringing people to life in the Son of God. Focusing on what the individual wants is not effective in turning the lost to life.

Again, let's translate this into the contemporary situation for our congregation. Central to worship is the presentation of the apostles' doctrine. If the proclamation of the Word is absent, it is unlikely that worshippers will meet the Risen Christ. To be certain, observing the ordinance as given by the Master and prayers are essential parts of worship. Undoubtedly we need to be united as a people, enjoying sharing our lives and investing our gifts in one another as we endeavour to build one another in the Faith. However, without the declaration of the Word—without the preaching of the Word—it is impossible to see how a congregation can hope to meet the Living Christ. This is implied in Paul's pointed declaration earlier in this letter to Corinthian Christians, "Since in the wisdom of God the world by its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching"^{iv} [1 CORINTHIANS 1:21].

I am covering familiar ground when I say that if we conduct our services properly, we can anticipate an impact on outsiders who enter into the services. Hearing the proclamation of the Word, outsiders will be convicted. Declaring the mind of God confronts sinful man with his failure to achieve righteousness through his own efforts. Through proclamation of the Word of God, outsiders will be called to account—they can no longer hide behind a façade that attempts to camouflage their condition before God. While it is assuredly true that "the spiritual person judges all things" [1 CORINTHIANS 2:15], the skilful application of the Word judges outsiders. As the congregation testifies and participates in proclaiming the Word, the spiritual condition of the outsider is revealed to himself or herself. After all, "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" [HEBREWS 4:12]. The Word of God exposes secrets buried like splinters in the hidden recesses of the soul.

The secrets that are exposed are not simply revealed; but because they are exposed, they can be healed! Although the process of exposure is painful, as result of congregational participation in the proclamation of the Word, outsiders will be brought to repentance and will worship God in Spirit and in truth. Ultimately, these outsiders will acknowledge the presence of God in the midst of the congregation. Proclaiming the Word is the only means of reaching outsiders because it lays open their soul and prepares them for repentance. While contemporary practises such as music, drama or dialogue, may be an adjunct to attracting outsider, separated from proclamation of the Word these efforts inevitably fail to reach the soul of the lost.

I must draw attention to the fact that the outsider will worship God. In Paul's letters to Corinthian Christians, this is the sole use of the word "worship," and the word is used in this instance to describe the reaction of an outsider who is stunned to discover that God is actually present among the members of the congregation. In the context of the church to which Paul wrote, there would have been no altar, no accoutrements, no grand temple, no statuary, no gaudy vestments. The worshippers would have been meeting in houses, and their worship would have consisted of talk and persuasion, as they considered questions of belief and behaviour—matters of scant concern to ancient peoples. The discussions would have included consideration of lifestyle changes to reflect righteousness and expectations of drastic transformations that were shortly to be revealed. Thus, the outsider would have been stunned that in such an environment God was actually present. Pagan religion was designed to keep changes from happening; and these Christians were anticipating change as evidenced by what God was even then doing!

APPLICATIONS FOR OUR CONGREGATION — From this passage, I note three principles that are essential for healthy worship:

- Need for the Spirit's control;
- Social responsibility in worship;
- Corporate worship is a special ministry.

Let's think about these principles in turn. First, I mentioned the *Need for the Spirit's control*. I make this statement with some trepidation, knowing that there are individuals who imagine that if they are out of the control, the Spirit must be in control. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Paul's statement in verse 20 emphasises a neglected truth.

The word translated "thinking" is the Greek word *phrèn*. The word is used only in this verse in our New Testament. Thus, it appears to have been deliberately chosen to advance a truth. The word spoke of thinking, but the emphasis is on understanding. In other words, Paul is stressing the need for understanding in worship. The ability to think and to understand in Christian worship cannot be overestimated! This is evident from other passages in which Paul emphasised the ability to think.

Consider these words penned to Roman Christians. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" [ROMANS 12:2]. Learn to think so that you can discern the will of God, understanding what is good and acceptable and perfect.

To the Corinthians, the Apostle will later write, "We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ"^v [2 CORINTHIANS 10:4, 5]. Thus, we are encouraged to use the mind, to seek worship that entails understanding and thoughtful approach to God.

This understanding of godly worship fits with Paul's later assertion to the Corinthians that "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" [1 CORINTHIANS 14:33]. We cannot underestimate the value of thoughtful participation in worship—prayer is to be thoughtful and deliberate; study of the Word is to be conducted with understanding; Christian education is to consist of conversation with wise and mature believers, both past and present. The church in assembly is a place for intelligible communication of the mind of God through proclaiming the Word of God. As Craig Blomberg has perceptively stated, "Our God is a thinking, speaking God; and if we will know Him, we must learn to think His thoughts after Him."⁴

I mentioned the need for *Social responsibility in worship*. By this, I mean that we are responsible to see worship as opportunity to meet God, but also to introduce outsiders to life in the Beloved Son. Christian worship must relate to outsiders, but the need to relate to outsiders must not supersede the necessity of confronting the human heart with our responsibility to know God. It seems obvious that unbelievers were regularly present at the services of the Corinthian congregation. This suggests in turn that non-Christians will share in our services. Most often, this will be because Christian friends have invited them to join them in the service.

We cannot temper the offence of the Cross to outsiders, nor should we attempt to do so. However, it raises the issue that each participant in the conduct of worship must consider how best to conduct their ministry and how best to present the message in order to make the Faith attractive rather than repulsive to outsiders. Each member of the congregation should come to the service praying for God's power to be demonstrated in the salvation of souls and anticipating the power of God displayed in the salvation of souls. We should expect people to come to faith in Christ because of our services. It is true that the number coming to faith and the frequency depends on the Spirit of God as He convicts the lost and opens their hearts to faith. Nevertheless, we are each responsible to prepare to meet God, bringing the lost to share with us in worshipping the Risen Saviour.

Finally, I said that *Corporate worship is a special ministry*. Individual worship is important; each Christian should have time daily to meet God and to hear His voice through reading the Word and through quiet meditation. However, when we meet in assembly, the Body of Christ is powerfully revealed to any who witness our unity. While the Spirit of God lives in the believer, He is present in power when the Body is met in unity of worship. The primary function of the Body is not entertainment or competition with the world for a hearing—it is to reveal Christ among us. Therefore, corporate worship is a special ministry.

Let me say clearly that if you do not come to the worship service with a clear expectation of meeting God, it is likely that you are not prepared to worship. If you participate in the worship and fail to meet the Living God, you cannot say that you have truly worshipped. Ultimately, the congregation owes outsiders something better than giving them what they want. We have no business offering to outsiders what makes us feel good about our own efforts. Through proclamation of the Word, we offer the way to life. Through testimony of God's grace, we present the hope of the Living God with man.

I have spoken to Christians, but if you are an outsider, one who has yet to meet the Living Saviour, there is no better time and no more appropriate place than this present time and in this place. The message we proclaim is that the Son of God died because of your sin and raised to declare you right with the Father. For this reason, the Spirit of God now calls you to believe in Jesus the Risen, Living Son of God. Receive from Him the forgiveness of sin and the life that He alone can give. Do it today. Do it now. Amen.

⁴ Craig Blomberg, **The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1994) 274

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- ⁱ **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)
ⁱⁱ **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)
ⁱⁱⁱ **The NET Bible First Edition**
^{iv} **The NET Bible First Edition**
^v **The NET Bible First Edition**