

# PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path"  
Psalm 119:104*

September 10, 2017

## Singing and Praying With Understanding

by Frank Himmel

Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding their worship assemblies, "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" (1 Corinthians 14:15, NKJV). What point was he making?

### The Context

This entire chapter is about the use of miraculous gifts in assemblies. The Corinthians' assemblies were evidently a mass of confusion: numerous brethren were speaking in tongues, yet sometimes there was no interpreter; multiple brethren were speaking out at the same time, either prophesying or speaking in tongues, thereby making it practically impossible to understand what anyone was saying. Paul feared that visitors would think they were mad! (v. 23).

Paul reminded them that all things must be done for edification (v. 26). That requires orderliness (v. 40), and toward that end the Apostle laid down explicit rules governing who could exercise what gift and when (vv. 27-36). Edification also requires clear communication. In the first half of the chapter, Paul emphasized that as an inherent advantage of the gift of prophecy over the gift of speaking in

tongues. Everyone could understand the prophet and thus benefit from his message, but no one could learn from someone speaking in tongues unless someone was present who could interpret the language being spoken. Five words understood were far better than ten thousand spoken in a tongue (v. 19).

### The Point

Many translations render v. 15 as praying and singing with the spirit and the *mind* (NASB, ESV, NIV, etc.). The point would then be worshiping in spirit (or as directed by the Spirit) and comprehending what one is saying. The problem is, that does not fit the next verse or the overall context very well. I prefer the NKJV rendering, spirit and *understanding*. Paul's word can refer, not just to my understanding what I am doing, but also to doing it in such a way that others understand it; and that is exactly his point! If others do not understand what I say when I am praying, how can they add their "Amen"? (v. 16). How are they edified? (v. 17). Singing, too, is to teach and admonish (Colossians 3:16).

### The Application

We do not have miraculous gifts today. They belonged to the foundational days of the gospel (1 Corinthians 13). Nevertheless, the principles in this chapter are quite relevant to our worship.

Singing with the understanding obviously requires that we understand the words we are singing. More to the point here, however, it is singing so that others can understand them. ▶





Music has evolved significantly over the last twenty centuries. Almost all of our hymns are in four-part harmony; still, we are singing the same words at the same time. Some hymns have an echoing effect, where one voice

holds a word while other voices sing additional words. It is still all very discernable. But a few newer hymns are rounds, where each part is singing different words at the same time. They can be fun to sing musically, but I wonder: in terms of a listener's ability to discern what is being said, is that significantly different than four prophets or four tongue-speakers talking at the same time? Granted, the modern listener can read all the words in the hymnal or on the projected song slide. But if you are like me, you are concentrating on getting your part right and somewhat blocking out the others' words. How does that add to edification?

As to prayer, the application is obvious. Brethren who lead in prayer must use plain enough language that we can grasp what they are saying. Note the simple, straightforward wording in Jesus' sample prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Also, leaders must speak loudly and clearly enough to be heard. Microphones help, but they can only do so much. It is just as difficult to understand a prayer leader who mumbles English as one who speaks boldly in a language we do not know!

"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble... let all things be done for edification" (v. 26). ■

## What to Do with the Truth

**Know it.** "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

**Believe it.** "If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?" (John 8:46b).

**Obey it.** "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls..." (1 Peter 1:22).

**Handle it accurately.** "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:25).

**Model it.** "But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2).

**Speak it.** "But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

**Support it.** "Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth" (3 John 8). ■



### Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday Morning	Sunday Evening	Wednesday Evening
GREETER	Josh Baucom	Adam Gibson	John Baucom
SONG LEADER	Gary Hagler	Bruce Williams	Ian Brown
OPENING PRAYER	Mike Zachry	David Gray	
LORD'S SUPPER			
BREAD	Mark Clifton	Mark Clifton	
CUP	Adam Gibson	Adam Gibson	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Rawland Daniel		
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Frank Himmel	Brian Wilson
CLOSING PRAYER	David Gray	Chris Brooks	Bruce Williams