

# Watch your language! 1 Corinthians 14.1-11

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*So, if you speak in a way that no-one understands, what's the point of opening your mouth? (1 Cor 14.9 – the Message)*

Paul seems to be getting increasingly exasperated with the Corinthian church as this letter progresses. He's now getting wound up about those in the Corinthian church who have a special gift, a language that no-one else understands that allows them to communicate with God privately. "What's the point of that?" he seems to be saying, "How does it help anyone else?"

However, it seems to me that there is a wider point here.

Those who have read these 'thoughts' before, will know that my initial training was as a scientist. I have a B. Sc. In Chemistry and chemists, like every other profession, have their own language, or jargon, or use words in a very particular or narrower sense than ordinary language.

Theologians too have their own language and when theologians use their special language in a more 'every Day' context it frequently lands them in trouble. For those of you who are old enough you may remember that David Jenkins (then Bishop of Durham) got himself into a spot of bother by

using the language of theologians in an everyday context, even getting blamed for a fire at York minister. For details see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/06/david-jenkins-bishop-durham-biblical-facts-fire-york-minster>

But churches also have a special language and so often we don't even realise it. Some of it is around words that just aren't part of everyday language, like communion, absolution, even salvation!

For those of us, like me, who grew up in the church we understand that language well because it's our native language, we speak 'church'. But for the majority of the population of Britain, who didn't grow up in the church, the language is, in many places, unintelligible. We speak a foreign language.

When I was a minister in London I had a colleague in the district (jargon there! special use of Methodist language – it's a bit like a diocese – more jargon!!!!). anyway, I had a colleague who was starting a new church in a new housing development and who wanted everything that the church said and did to be jargon free and intelligible to ordinary people on the estate. So, they looked (amongst other things) at the hymn book and the songs that they might sing and found that only about 10% of them were free of jargon in such a way that ordinary people would understand.

There is an increasing need for churches to have people who are gifted translators, people who can put the language of the church into plain English that people today will understand. I wonder who the people are in your church who have that ability to translate from Churchy to ordinary English. It's a real issue for evangelism today, as it was in Paul's day.

“So, if you speak in a way that no-one understands, what’s the point of opening your mouth?”

(btw – it’s not unique to church!)

Jargon alert by the way!

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