

Coach's Corner

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“The Key To Maintaining The Balanced Corinthian Corral”

I know that all of you have been on pins and needles anxiously anticipating the answer to the questions raised in our first issue of the **Coach's Corner**. Remember that Billy Bible Man and Cool Calvin Outreach were shooting it out in the Corinthian corral and to the rescue came the Apostle Paul with great bullet-deflecting wisdom. His reminder was that any ministry must keep in mind both sides of the fence—the willingness to adjust our methods to communicate the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23) and, at the same time, our preservation of the unchanging gospel message which must show that the power to change people is in God's Spirit working through God's Word, not in us (1 Cor. 1:17-2:5). We closed out that discussion with these all-important queries: “But how do we know where in the corral to be?” asked Billy Bob. “Yeah!” Calvin chimed in, “And how do we work with both fences?”

Those are the age-old puzzles of Christian ministry that we want to attempt to solve in this **Coach's Corner**, not merely to appease our curiosity, but more importantly to lay a foundation for leading a church to fulfill its part in the Great Commission.

The key to where we position the EFCM in the corral is also found in 1 Corinthians, namely 14:12-25. Let me include much of that passage for you to consider carefully:

So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.... [14] For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. [15] What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. [16] Otherwise, 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? [17] For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. [18] I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. [19] Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.... [23] 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? [24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] 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 instructs the Corinthians to view clear gospel communication and application as much more important than seeking ecstatic spiritual experiences. As such, he highlights insightful principles which answer the above questions.

First, whatever methods we use should clarify biblical truth and the gospel so that believers can be built up in their faith (vv. 12, 19). Methods should not be used merely to entertain or to “wow” the listeners. Additionally, methods should not so detract from and cover up the message that it is lost in all the hype.

Second, whatever methods we use should clarify biblical truth and the gospel so that unbelievers can understand the gospel, undergo conviction, have the secrets of their heart disclosed, repent, trust Christ, and worship God (vv. 16, 23-25). The terms Paul uses for those coming from the outside are interesting: *barbaros* (i.e. barbarian or foreigner) in v. 11; *idiote* (i.e. one who is uninformed or unlearned) in vv. 23, 24; *apistos* (unbeliever) in v. 24; and most interestingly “one who occupies the place of the unlearned” (last word *idiote*) in v. 16. All of these words emphasize that the outsider is one who needs to understand and respond to the gospel. Paul’s interest, then, is to make sure that the gospel is clearly and mindfully (see v. 19) communicated so that God can work in both Christians and non-Christians.

Does this key locate precisely where in the corral to be? No, but it does narrow the options a bit. People will still disagree over the appropriateness of certain kinds of music, media, and other methods. Nevertheless, if we can remember the two sides of the Corinthian corral (preserve the gospel; adjust the methods appropriately for the audience) and the key to this corral (clarity of gospel communication), this will go a long way toward helping us find the wise and unified place to be when it comes to ministry methods.

Men, let’s pray for our congregation that we will ever stay solidly in this corral, faithfully and fruitfully fulfilling the Great Commission in Minden, Nebraska, and to the ends of the earth!

Joyfully Shepherding The Church With You,

Tom