

1 Corinthians 14:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

Analysis

Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding—the emphatic contrast: *alla en ekklēsia* (ἀλλὰ ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ, "but in church"), Paul prefers *pente logous dia tou noos mou* (πέντε λόγους διὰ τοῦ νοοῦ μου, "five words through my mind"). **That by my voice I might teach others also** (*hina kai allous katēchēsō*, "that I might instruct others also")—the purpose is *katēcheō* (κατηχέω, "instruct, teach," root of "catechize").

Than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue—the hyperbolic contrast (5 vs. 10,000) emphasizes the point. In corporate worship, comprehensibility so outweighs incomprehensibility that five intelligible words trump ten thousand unintelligible ones. The ratio reveals Paul's values: edification through instruction is infinitely more valuable than impressive but unintelligible speech.

Historical Context

This verse likely silenced objections: Paul, who speaks in tongues more than any Corinthian, chooses intelligible instruction in corporate worship. His authority and experience make the argument unanswerable.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul use such extreme hyperbole (5 words vs. 10,000)?
2. What's the relationship between intelligibility, teaching, and edification?
3. How should this verse shape our priorities in corporate worship?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλ᾽	ἐν	ἐκκλησίᾳ	θέλω	πέντε	λόγους	διὰ	τοῦ
Yet	in	the church	I had rather	five	words	with	G3588
G235	G1722	G1577	G2309	G4002	G3056	G1223	
νοός	μου	λαλῆσαι	ἴνα	καὶ	ἄλλους		
understanding	my	speak	that	also	others		
G3563	G3450	G2980	G2443	G2532	G243		
κατηχήσω	ἢ	μυρίους	λόγους	ἐν	γλώσσῃ		
by my voice I might teach	than	ten thousand	words	in	an unknown tongue		
G2727	G2228	G3463	G3056	G1722	G1100		

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 14:4 (Parallel theme): He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.