

1 Corinthians 14:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

Analysis

Even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp—Paul uses an analogy from musical instruments (apsycha phōnēn didonta, "lifeless things giving sound"). **Except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?** The Greek diastolos (διαστολή, "distinction, difference") refers to discrete, recognizable tones.

The rhetorical question drives home the point: even inanimate instruments require intelligible patterns to communicate. Random notes aren't music; they're noise. Similarly, uninterpreted tongues lack the diastolos necessary for meaningful communication. Paul's analogy appeals to common sense: communication requires distinction, pattern, intelligibility.

Historical Context

Greek culture prized music and rhetoric. Paul's audience would immediately grasp the absurdity of a flute producing indistinct sounds—it defeats the instrument's purpose. So does unintelligible speech in worship.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this musical analogy illuminate the nature of edifying communication?
2. What other analogies might help modern readers understand Paul's point?
3. In what ways might our worship lack 'distinction in sounds'—clarity of message?

Interlinear Text

ὅμως	τὰ	ἄψυχα	φωνήν	δῶ	εἴτε	αὐλὸς	εἴτε
And even	G3588	things without life	sound	giving	or	pipe	or
G3676		G895	G5456	G1325	G1535	G836	G1535
κιθάρα	ἐὰν	διαστολὴν	τοῖς	φθόγγοις	μὴ	δῶ	πῶς
harp	G1437	a distinction	G3588	in the sounds	G3361	giving	how
G2788		G1293		G5353		G1325	G4459
γνωσθήσεται	τὸ	αὐλούμενον	ἢ	τὸ	κιθαριζόμενον		
shall it be known	G3588	what is piped	or	G3588	harped		
G1097		G832	G2228		G2789		