

Order in the House of God

(1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

How many of you have heard the biblical phrase, “*where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom?*” Often when we hear this verse found in 2 Corinthians 3:17, many understand it to mean that we are free to express our worship to the Lord. But in context, God’s word is speaking of the freedom we have in Christ that unveils us to behold the glory of the Lord, which moves us to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

In contrast to the world, the biblical understanding of freedom is also very different from the world’s idea of freedom. The world’s perception of freedom is the liberty to do whatever you want. But the freedom of the Spirit is the power to do what you ought to do. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there will certainly be liberty to express our worship. But there will also be the freedom to resist our fleshly impulses so that we might obey God, and bring glory to His name (1 Corinthians 7:22–23). Where the Spirit of the Lord is, not only will there be liberty, but there will also be order.

As we have learned in this series, the Corinthian church appreciated their liberty in Christ (1 Corinthians 8:9). And they earnestly desired to exercise certain spiritual gifts, like tongues. But the problem was that although they desired to experience the gifts of the Spirit, they were not under the control of the Spirit. Consequently, this led to dysfunction, disorder and division in the church. How many of you know, to know the release of the Spirit, we must also know the restraint of the Spirit.

Main idea: When God’s presence and power is manifested in His house, there is liberty to exercise our spiritual gifts in an orderly fashion to the glory of Jesus.

To unfold this theme we are going to look at 3 guidelines for orderly worship in the house of God.

1. **Speech that reflects His love**

The first guideline for orderly worship in the house of God is **speech that reflects the love of Christ**. After explaining that the goal of spiritual gifts is for people to encounter God in such a way that they will fall down and worship Him, Paul continues: *“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up”* (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Following up with his instructions on the proper use of the gifts, Paul asked, *“What then, brothers?”* Paul asked this question so that the Corinthians would weigh what their response should be to his teaching on the use of the gifts. The proper response is not for them to be discouraged from using their gifts. Notice that he follows up his question with, *“When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.”*

When gathering together as a church, we ought to all gather with the understanding that through the Holy Spirit we all have something to contribute for the common good. Often what hinders a church from fulfilling the mission of Christ is that many Christians come to church as mere consumers and not with the mindset of a contributor.

Now this modern day consumer oriented approach to church, doesn't seem to be what the Corinthians most struggled with. Rather their struggle seemed to be that they were so focused on using their gifts, that they lost sight of the purpose for the gifts. The purpose for operating in the gifts is not to look impressive to others, but to impart to others something from God for their good.

Notice that after explaining to the Corinthians that when the church came together they all had something to give, Paul concludes in verse 26: *“Let all things be done for building up.”* It's been said, the gifts of the Spirit are not for your enjoyment, but for your employment. And the goal of our employment of the gifts ought to be the building up of the body of Christ.

What should motivate us to use our gifts to build others up? Remember, in 1 Corinthians 8:1, Paul wrote that knowledge puffs up, but *“love builds up.”* For this reason, Paul began this chapter on the practice of spiritual gifts with the exhortation to pursue love. Apart from the self-giving love of Jesus, the gifts of the Spirit will be used to puff one’s self up, rather than to build others up.

It’s important to note also that the gifts of the Spirit that Paul refers to in verse 26 (i.e. *a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation*) are all related to the tongue or verbal communication. And as we learned last week, our tongues can be used for great good or great evil.

More than any virus, what the tongue is capable of spreading in the church can bring the greatest harm to the body of Christ. James wrote that the tongue is *“full of deadly poison”* when it’s set on fire by hell (James 3:8). But when its set on fire by the Holy Spirit, the tongue can bring great hope, health, and healing to the body.

During a recent discussion I had with Pastor Bob Mohler on the practice of the gifts of the Spirit, he shared a very helpful insight. He said, “The gifts of the Spirit must be controlled by the fruit of the Spirit or they will do more damage than good.” And do you know that two of the virtues of the fruit of the Spirit are love and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)?

In Galatians 5:22, the virtue of love is listed first because all the other 8 virtues listed spring from love, including self-control. Love will not insist on its own way. Love is patient and kind. Love is not rude. Love doesn’t have to be first. Love will wait its turn. Love will lead us to speak up for others, but love will also make us hold our tongue. Love will keep us from posting our opinion on social media, especially when it serves no restorative purpose.

Remember that the Corinthians were majoring on the gift of tongues. And although Paul did not forbid them to speak in tongues, which was a language unknown to the speaker, he regulated its use, especially in the church. Specifically he writes, *“If any speak in a tongue, let there*

be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret” (1 Corinthians 14:27).

Apparently not only were some Corinthians speaking in a tongue that was unknown to them and those around them with not interpreter, but several were doing so at the same time. This misuse of the gift of tongues led to chaos and confusion. And as we learned last week, their misuse of tongues was turning people away from Christ rather than leading them to Christ. Sadly, this same misuse of tongues in some churches today is having the same repelling effect towards unbelievers as it did in Corinth.

Why was this happening? As I noted before, the Corinthian believers were high on spiritual gifts, but low on spiritual maturity. Where there is spiritual maturity, which is marked by the self-giving love of Jesus, there will be a desire to use our gifts. But our motivation will be not to lift ourselves up, but to lift others up.

When love is controlling us, we don't need to be the center of attention. When love is controlling us we will be content to work behind the scenes and support others in the use of their gifts so that the church is edified. When love is controlling us we don't have to be the first to speak or even to have the last word. Sometimes love and reverence for God will compel us to be silent.

This leads to a second guideline for orderly worship in the house of the Lord.

2. Silence that Reveres His Law

In addition to **Speech that Reflects Christ's Love**, a second guideline for orderly worship is **Silence that Reveres His Law**. After explaining that we are to do all things to build up, especially in the way that we use the speaking gifts, Paul continues: *“But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. (1 Corinthians 14:28).*

Paul exhorts the Corinthians, who desired to speak in tongues, that if there's no one to interpret, to keep silent in the church. They were to keep silent because, if your words are not intelligible, they can not build up, which is the goal of all spiritual gifts, including speaking gifts in the church.

Keep in mind that the reason the Corinthians weren't holding their tongues was because they lacked self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit. They wanted to speak in tongues because they believed it was a sign that they were spiritual. But Paul is saying, if you truly want to be spiritual, some of you need to learn not how to speak in tongues, but how to hold your tongues. Similarly if we want to be spiritual, some of us need to talk less and listen more.

Now in regard to holding their tongues, Paul wasn't just speaking to those who wanted to speak in tongues, but also to those with the gift of prophesy. Paul continues: *"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged"* (1 Corinthians 14:29-31).

It's important to note here that when Paul is writing about how Christians are to conduct themselves when they are gathered together, he may have also been thinking of smaller gatherings in the homes of believers. There were times when the church gathered together in larger settings while a church leader preached the word to the people, as we see in Acts 2, where Peter spoke to a large crowd. But often in the first century, the church would meet in smaller gatherings in homes.

Last Thursday a group of us met in my home for Life Group. Most of us present had a chance to speak a word from the Lord, ask questions and pray. And in a setting like that, where multiple people will have opportunities to speak, we must be careful to conduct ourselves in an orderly manner so that, as Paul explains in verse 31, *"all may learn and all be encouraged."* When believers, especially those called to

shepherd God's people, are proclaiming the word, there ought to be great reverence for the word of God being spoken.

Concerning the reverence that God's people should have for His word, the prophet Isaiah wrote: *"Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? ² All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word"* (Isaiah 66:1-2).

O brothers and sisters, one of the great evidences that God is in our midst and at work in our hearts is great reverence for the word of God. When God's word is being spoken, those who are truly alive spiritually, as Paul explained, will reverently listen and weigh what is being said with a heart ready to obey (v.29). But among the immature Corinthian believers, there was a lack of reverence for the word. It appears that while the word was being spoken, people were chattering with each other, talking out of turn or thinking about what they wanted to say. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone, and rather than carefully listening and weighing what they were saying, you were thinking about what you wanted to say next.

When we gather together for worship, whether in a small group or with the entire church, our greatest desire should be to hear from God rather than to be heard by others. And hearing from God should not only be our first priority in public worship, but even in our private times of worship. Prayer shouldn't just consist of talking to God about what we desire. Prayer can be a two way conversation, if we begin our times of prayer with an open bible. As Daniel Henderson often says, the one who starts the conversation tends to lead the conversation. Let God start the conversation, as you open up his word, and let your prayers be a response to what He is saying to your heart.

But rather than hearing from God, some of the Corinthians were more focused on being heard. And their motivation for wanting to be heard was not to be helped or to help others, but so others would take notice of how spiritual they were. So in addition to reminding them of the

purpose of spiritual gifts, namely to build others up in an orderly fashion, Paul continues: “*and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace*” (1 Corinthians 14:32-33a).

Let me ask you, if someone is expounding the word of God in the Spirit, would the Spirit move someone else to cut the preacher off so that he can share his own word from the Lord? I was at a Pastor’s conference once, and while the host pastor was preaching from the pulpit, another Pastor in the audience began to speak out in a unintelligible language. The preacher, who was interrupted, paused. And after the man got done uttering what no one could understand, the host Pastor continued his message. And later, after the host Pastor delivered his message, he addressed the interruption that took place by quoting 1 Corinthians 14:32b: “*and the spirits of the prophets are subject to prophets.*” After quoting the verse, he said, Pastors, I believe in the gifts of the Spirit. But when they are operating as God intended they don’t disrupt what God is doing. The Holy Spirit isn’t going to interrupt Himself. God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

Now after calling those, who were being disruptive by speaking out of turn, to be silent, Paul specifically addresses women in the church, who were apparently also being disruptive, to keep silent. The verses that we are going to examine now are understandably controversial, especially if they’re taken out of context. Many today, even if these verses are explained in context, will still find them offensive. But those who have reverence for the word of God will not only carefully weigh the meaning of Paul’s admonishment, but will faithfully seek to obey it.

With that said, notice that after admonishing others in the church for speaking out of turn, Paul continues: “*As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church*” (1 Corinthians 14:33b-35).

Now we know from other passages, like 1 Corinthians 11:5, that Paul is not saying that women are not allowed to speak at all in the church. What the bible does teach is that the office of Pastor or elder, which includes the responsibility to authoritatively preach the word of God to both men and women, is a role that God ordained men to fulfill. And although women are also given speaking gifts to be exercised to build up the body of Christ, they are not called to teach the men of the church or to usurp their God ordained authority to provide leadership in the home and in the church (1 Timothy 2:11).

Keep in mind that women are not the only ones that Paul calls to practice silence and submission in the church. Paul was calling for silence and submission from all the Corinthians who were not honoring God's order of things.

Now one way that the women in the church of Corinth may have been disrupting God's order of things, was by usurping the God ordained male headship in the church. For example, if someone in the church was exercising the gift of prophecy and there was a question or disagreement about what was being said, perhaps there were some women that publicly called it out, rather than yielding to the elders of the church or their husbands to address it.

Notice that Paul says that if there was something they didn't understand or needed further clarification about, they should discuss it with their husbands at home. Why at home? It's possible that what Paul is addressing here are related to instances when a prophet, while preaching the word, was being disrupted by chatter among some women who were asking their husbands questions about the message. So Paul says, if you have a question, talk about it when you get home and not while the preacher is preaching.

When Paul says that its shameful for a woman to speak in the church, he's not saying it's shameful for them to pray, to give a testimony or to prophesy. What he's saying is that it would be shameful for them, and for anyone else for that matter, to do so in a disruptive manner or in way that dishonored the God ordained male headship in the church and home.

This leads us to a final guideline line for orderly worship in the house of God.

3. Submission that recognizes His lordship

In addition to **speech that reflects the love of Christ** and **silence that reveres His law**, orderly worship requires **submission that recognizes His Lordship**.

The instruction that Paul gives for orderly worship, which builds up the body of Christ, was not optional. In verse 34, he references the law, as the authoritative basis for submission to God's order of things, and in particular male headship in the church and in the home. Specifically, Paul is probably referring to the order of creation in Genesis 2, just like he did in 1 Corinthians 11:3-9 when he wrote about a wife honoring her headship, who was her husband.

Now the Corinthians enjoyed their freedom in Christ, which among other things, means that all believers, male and female, slave or free are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). But oneness in Christ doesn't mean sameness. God has ordained that male and female members function according to the gifts that He distributes to each and in the roles that He has ordained. The differences in giftedness and roles are not designed to distinguish a person's superiority over another. We are all equal in Christ. The distinct roles and gifts that are assigned by God to the body of Christ are not about individual worth but about function.

When we all function according to our giftedness and in submission to God's order of things, we will not only build one another up in love, but we will reflect the beauty of the functional and loving unity that exists between the three persons of the godhead.

But in the name of freedom, the Corinthians were going against God's order and consequently their freedom in Christ was leading to dysfunction and disorder. Freedom without order leads to disorder. So

Paul concludes: *“Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?”* (1 Corinthians 14:36).

The Corinthians were so caught up with experiencing the gifts of the Spirit, that they were disregarding the authoritative teaching of the word of God given to the church through the apostles. As Paul’s admonishment suggests, the Corinthians were functioning as if the word of God was special to them. In other words, they were doing church as if they had unique instruction from God that exempted them from what God made clear through the apostles for all churches.

Do you know there are many professing Christians today that claim to be operating in the gifts of the Spirit, but their lifestyles are in direct rebellion to God’s revealed will? Notice that Paul continues, *“If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸ If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized”* (1 Corinthians 14:37-38).

What Paul is saying here is that Christians, who are truly speaking for God and who are spiritual, are not those who appear to be operating in the gifts of the Spirit, but those who are submitted to the Lordship of Christ. Beware of anyone who claims to be speaking for God whose teaching not only contradicts the written word of God, but who are also not living their lives in submission to the word of God.

As Paul concludes, *if anyone does not recognize* God’s authoritative word, which also means that they don’t know the Lord, God certainly does not *“recognize”* them as one He has sent. (v. 38)

When we truly know Christ, His love will be evident in our lives. And His love is displayed, when in submission to His word, we seek to serve others in love as Christ served us. Paul concludes: *“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order”* (1 Corinthians 14:39-40).

Although the Corinthians were out of alignment with God in how they practiced the gifts of the Spirit, Paul didn't forbid them from desiring the gifts of the Spirit. If we are going to function with unction—in the energy of the Spirit, we must earnestly desire the gifts. We have freedom in Christ, but freedom without order leads to disorder.

So we are free to pursue the gifts of the Spirit so that we might build up the body of Christ. But as Paul concludes, *all things should be done decently and in order*. And we will do all things decently and in order when our greatest pursuit is not the gifts of the Spirit, but love.

Conclusion

Remember, we grow in the love of Christ, who laid down His life for the sheep, not by first seeking the gifts of the Spirit, but by first seeking His face. Seeking God's face means to cultivate intimacy with God that leads to the accomplishment of His purposes.

When you seek His face and take on His heart, you won't be so preoccupied with knowing your gift. You will be more preoccupied with meeting needs in submission to Christ. And in the process of meeting needs you will discover your gifts and exercise them for the good of others and for the greater fame of Christ our Savior.