

Order in the House of God: Worship that Honors Christ

1 Corinthians 14:20–40

BIG IDEA: *God calls His church to orderly worship that reflects His character—marked by clarity, peace, and love—so that His people are strengthened, His truth is understood, and Christ is exalted. Individuals desiring to share their gifts must submit to the greater purpose of portraying Christ.*

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND: Paul is still addressing the Corinthians' misuse of spiritual gifts in public worship. Corinth was a status-conscious, competitive city, and that mindset had crept into the church. Tongues, in particular, were being flaunted as a badge of spirituality, creating confusion in worship services. Clearly, this matter was of great concern to Paul, as he wrote 84 verses spanning chapters 12–14 to form a complete unit of thought. In Ch. 12: Many gifts, one body—the Spirit distributes as He wills. In Ch. 13: Love is the “more excellent way”—without it, gifts are worthless. In Ch. 14: Love applied—gifts must be used to build up the body. As we look at **vv. 20–40** today, Paul “lands the plane” (so to speak). Spiritual gifts must be practiced with maturity, intelligibility, mutual submission, and order, so that outsiders are drawn to Christ and the church is built up. Paul's message is not just about tongues and prophecy—it's about the character of our worship and our lives. God wants His church to be marked by clarity, peace, humility, and love, so that Christ is honored and His people are truly helped.

1. Grow Up in Your Thinking (vv. 20–25)

A. Childish vs. Mature (v.20)

- Paul contrasts being “infants in evil” (innocent regarding sin) with being “mature in thinking.” The Corinthians were acting childish—chasing spectacle rather than substance. Maturity means valuing what builds others up, not what makes you look spiritual.

B. The Purpose of Tongues (vv. 21–22)

- Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12—tongues were a **sign of judgment** for unbelieving Israel, not a mark of spirituality.
- Tongues impress outsiders but often leave them confused. Prophecy (clear proclamation of God's truth) convicts and converts.

C. Outsiders and Order (vv. 23–25)

- If outsiders walk in and hear everyone babbling in tongues without understanding/interpretation, they'll think you're insane.
- But if they hear prophecy—*clear truth applied*—they may become convicted by the Holy Spirit, fall on their face, and worship God.

2. Public worship should be marked by clarity and order (vv. 26–33)

A. Each One Contributes (v. 26)

- “Each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” The test: *Does it build up the church? Worship isn't a stage for performers; it's a gathering for mutual strengthening.*

B. Guardrails for Tongues (vv. 27–28)

- Two or at most three, one at a time, and only if there is an interpreter. Or else, keep silent. Tongues w/o interpretation = disobedience / disorder.

3. Guardrails for Prophecy (vv. 29–33a)

- A. Two or three prophets speak; others weigh what is said. If a revelation comes to another prophet, then the first prophet yields.

- “The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”—no one is carried away in ecstatic frenzy; the Spirit does not override self-control.
- Principle at work (v.23): “*God is not a God of confusion but of peace.*”

4. Submission to God's Word (vv. 33b–38)

A. Women and Order (vv. 33b–35)

- The principle is order and submission to authority in public worship
- Paul is not forbidding all speech (see, for example, v. 11:5, women pray/prophesy with head covered); he is restricting disruptive behaviors and non-authoritative teachings that undermine order.
- The authority of God's Word, not personal expression, governs worship. Worship is not about asserting our voice but submitting to God's voice.

B. Authority of Apostolic Word (vv. 36–38)

- Some in Corinth thought they were above correction.
- Paul reminds them: his teaching is the command of the Lord. To reject apostolic instruction is to show yourself “not recognized.”
- The authority of Scripture rules the church. Spiritual maturity is measured by submission to God's Word, not by ecstatic experiences.

5. There Should Always Be Decency and Order in Worship (vv. 39–40)

A. Desire Spiritual Gifts, but Use them in an Orderly Way (v. 39)

- The balance: don't despise any gift, but don't elevate the spectacular above what builds up.

B. The Final Principle (v. 40)

- “*All things should be done decently and in order.*” Worship should reflect the God we worship—He is a God of peace, not chaos.

WAYS TO PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- **Pursue Spiritual Maturity, Not Spectacle (vv. 20–25);** Don't chase what looks flashy in the Christian life. Instead, aim to grow in maturity, understanding, and obedience. Instead of being drawn to churches, preachers, or experiences that feel “exciting,” ask: *Is this helping me know Christ better and live more faithfully?*
- **Value Orderly and Clear Hymns, Teaching, and Preaching (vv. 26–33);** God is not honored by confusion.
- **Use Your Gifts to Strengthen Others (vv. 26);** whatever role or ability you bring to the church—*hospitality, teaching, prayer, music, service*—use it with the conscious aim of benefiting others. Instead of asking, “*What do I want to get out of church today?*” ask, “*Who can I encourage or serve today?*”
- **Practice Self-Control in Worship (vv. 27–32);** Even Spirit-given gifts are to be exercised under the discipline of love and order. If you feel prompted to share, wait for the right time rather than interrupting or drawing attention to yourself.
- **Honor God's Design for Roles in the Church (vv. 33–36);** He assigns different roles in the gathered church. Humbly receive the place He has given you, rather than grasping for another. If you're not leading, don't hijack the discussion.
- **Submit All Things to God's Word (vv. 37–38);** Test every practice and every teaching against Scripture, not against feelings or cultural trends.
- **Do All Things in Order and with Love (vv. 39–40);** Reflect God's character of peaceful, clear, purposeful. Show up prepared to worship, with a heart that seeks to serve others—not to be entertained or to cause distraction.