

Lesson 9

Unity, Order, and Worship

1 Corinthians 14.26-40

Overview

In this section, Paul begins to wrap up his corrective teaching on the matter of exercising spiritual gifts inside the public worship service. His main emphasis is that all things be done for the purpose of building up. Equal to that, is his reminder that God is a God of order ... not chaos and that the worship service is to be conducted with that in mind. At Corinth, tongue speakers and prophets were to speak in order ... and the number of those who did speak was to be limited to only two or three ... in turn. Instead of blurting their questions and comments in the middle of the worship service, women were instructed to ask their questions at home. Those who felt they had arrived at a point to where they could improve the worship service were reminded that they were to submit to the Lord's command. Through the apostles, the Lord demonstrated how He wishes to be worshipped, which must be respected if we are to be pleasing to God.

The Bigger Picture

Order and detail. Harmony and peace. This is the way of God. It is seen through His creation. It is seen in the way the Trinity worked together to provide us with redemption. Order, harmony, and peace are also to characterize the public worship assembly. This not only makes things appealing and understandable to those in the world who visit with us, but it also results in the building up of the local church family. In our text, Paul makes it clear that we are to respect what God has designed. We do not have the liberty to change things at will.

The Text

NLT

1 Corinthians 14:26–40 (NLT)

²⁶ Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you. ²⁷ No more than two or three should speak in tongues. They must speak one at a time, and someone must interpret what they say. ²⁸ But if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately. ²⁹ Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. ³⁰ But if someone is prophesying and another person receives a revelation from the Lord, the one who is speaking must stop. ³¹ In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged. ³² Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can take turns. ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people. ³⁴ Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak.

They should be submissive, just as the law says.³⁵ If they have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings.³⁶ Or do you think God's word originated with you Corinthians? Are you the only ones to whom it was given?³⁷ If you claim to be a prophet or think you are spiritual, you should recognize that what I am saying is a command from the Lord himself.³⁸ But if you do not recognize this, you yourself will not be recognized.³⁹ So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues.⁴⁰ But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.

CSB

1 Corinthians 14:26–40 (CSB)

²⁶ What then, brothers and sisters? Whenever you come together, each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything is to be done for building up.²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, there are to be only two, or at the most three, each in turn, and let someone interpret.²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, that person is to keep silent in the church and speak to himself and God.²⁹ Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should evaluate.³⁰ But if something has been revealed to another person sitting there, the first prophet should be silent.³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that everyone may learn and everyone may be encouraged.³² And the prophets' spirits are subject to the prophets,³³ since God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,³⁴ the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but are to submit themselves, as the law also says.³⁵ If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, since it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.³⁶ Or did the word of God originate from you, or did it come to you only?³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, he should recognize that what I write to you is the Lord's command.³⁸ If anyone ignores this, he will be ignored.³⁹ So then, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.⁴⁰ But everything is to be done decently and in order.

Explore the Text

1. What is the purpose of every human action in worship? (14.26)
2. What is the picture you have regarding the state of the worship service in Corinth before Paul wrote this letter?
3. Why is it so important for there to be order in a worship service?

4. Are the things Paul wrote in this passage merely his opinion? Yes/No? Why?

5. Do you see a theme in 14.26b; 14.31b; and 14.40? If so, what is it? What should this help us remember about our own worship service today?

About the Text

After explaining the *more excellent* way, now Paul deals head on with the problem in Corinth. It appears tongue speaking inside the congregational assembly had come to resemble the common pagan practices of the day, where emotionalism and self-exhibition dominated. From the text we can gather that the worship service had devolved into chaos where every person wanted to display their gift simultaneously. Worship and the building up of others had been forgotten or discarded.

I. 14.26-28 – Procedure for Using Spiritual Gifts

- A. The type of gift didn't matter. If a person had a psalm, revelation, teaching, tongue, or interpretation, it seems they all wanted to do everything at the same time. Edification and bringing others to maturity went out the window. Everyone coveted attention.
- B. In response Paul says, *everything is to be done for building up*, 14.26b.
 - i. Everything was to be conducted in a way that would help all the other saints grow and mature. All of us should be desirous of being full or complete in the sight of God. Other Christians help us get there.
 - ii. Our primary job as Christians is for the building up of others in Christ. Every Christian has been given this responsibility. See Ephesians 4.11-12; 1 Thessalonians 5.11; Romans 15.2-3.
- C. 14.27-28 contains four expectations for tongue speaking inside the assembly:
 - i. Only 2-3 persons should speak.
 - ii. Each should speak in turn.
 - iii. An interpreter must be present.
 - iv. If no interpreter is present, tongue speakers are to remain silent.

II. 14.29-40 – More Expectations on the Worship Service

- A. 14.29-33b – Procedure for Prophecy
 - i. The supernatural aspect of the work of a prophet ceased sometime during the late first century. The procedure he outlined for them was:
 1. Only 2-3 prophets should speak.
 2. Other prophets were to judge what was being said. Some prophets also had the gift of discernment.
 3. If another person had a revelation, the first prophet was to stop and let him speak.

4. Each prophet was to speak in turn.
- ii. 14.33a – This sentence is the main thought of the entire chapter: *God is not a God of disorder, but peace.*
 1. God is the God of peace and harmony. He would never condone disharmony, confusion, competition, and self-glorification. Where He is, there is always peace.
- B. 14.33b-38 – General Expectations
 - i. 14.33b-35 – Women were not to exercise their spiritual gifts over men in the worship services of the church.
 - ii. God has restricted public teaching/preaching to men. *It is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*
 1. It appears some of the Corinthian women were being disruptive in asking questions. Paul says to ask those questions at home.
 - iii. 14.36-38 – Paul says he was not relating his opinion, but rather he had received the Lord's command.
 1. None of them had the right to argue or contend with the Lord's expectation. What the apostle taught was not optional.
 2. What he was speaking was not subject to cultural or personal bias.
- C. 14.39-40 – Summary
 - i. Prophecy was again to be eagerly desired ... because it builds up believers. As long as people had the gift of tongues, those were not to be denied.
 - ii. All of this is to be done in the context of order. God's sons and daughters should be committed to reflecting this character trait of the Father. Beauty, harmony, and order are His way.

Reaction

1. What is the proper motive for the exercising of spiritual gifts inside the worship service? (14.26b)
2. What were the expectations for tongue speaking inside the assembly?
3. Why is 14.33 so essential to understand? How can we apply it in our modern times with the way we conduct public worship?
4. Does Paul's teaching in 14.33b-35 exclude women from *all* speaking on *every* occasion when saints gather? Explain.

5. Were the things Paul taught in this chapter merely his opinion? Were his teachings part of a cultural bias against women? Explain.

6. Does *decently* and *in order* imply that we should conduct our worship without vigor and excitement? How can we respect this passage and still respond with emotion and reverence in our modern worship assemblies?

For Today's Christian

Order is a part of the creative and redemptive activity of God. *God is not a God of disorder but of peace*, 14.33. In the beginning God made order out of disorder, Genesis 1.1-5. God takes void and brings form. We also see God's order and harmony within the godhead in bringing humans redemption. The Father sent the Son. The Son came and submitted to the Father's plan. And the Spirit was sent by the Father to bring attention to the work of the Son. All worked together in perfect harmony. All worked together for the good and joy of the others. If we can grasp this type of harmony and work to recreate it in the local church, then the church will be everything God intended it to be.

Respecting God's order is essential. What is written in 14.33b-35 is certainly controversial in today's evangelical world, including the churches of Christ. First, let it be understood that Paul is dealing with the subject of order within the public worship assembly. He speaks in very certain terms and is working to correct a very specific problem *in Corinth*. The problem there was disruption in the worship service. The solution was for them to move in unity and mutual encouragement/edification. In dealing with Corinth's problem, Paul goes back to a universal expectation (*as in all the churches of the saints*, 14.33b) that *women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but are to submit themselves...*, 14.34. The principle was not just for Corinth, it was not just a matter of a patriarchal culture, but for all local churches. Note how Timothy was instructed:

A woman is to learn quietly with full submission. I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to remain quiet.

– 1 Timothy 2.11-12

One of the consequences of the fall (Genesis 3.16) was the submission of women. This is also seen going further back to creation. Again Paul writes:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed.

1 Timothy 2.13-14

God's design is simple. Men lead with the spirit of love. Women submit with a spirit of love.¹¹

We must never dismiss Biblical teaching. Some of the Corinthians came to think they knew more than Paul. They had come up with a better way to worship than what they had received. We must never dismiss apostolic teaching. Anyone who dismisses it should not be recognized as a legitimate servant of God. What the apostles taught is authoritative.

Also, regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him. He speaks about these things in all his letters. There are some things hard to understand in them. The untaught and unstable will twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures.

2 Peter 3.15-16

We should never dismiss biblical commands by relegating them to mere cultural biases like male chauvinism or Jewish culture. Paul says the things He taught were received directly from the Lord. Those who reject Paul's teaching reject Jesus' teaching. It is as simple as that.

Journal

What are some of the ways the public worship assembly builds you up? What are some of the things you can do in the public worship assembly to build others up?

¹¹ MacArthur, p. 392.