

Christians Gone Wild!
1st Corinthians, week 32
Spiritual Gifts VI: Orderly Worship (1 Corinthians 14:26–40)
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... everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.
1 Corinthians 14:40

In this, the final week of our study of spiritual gifts, we see Paul encourage everyone in church to be actively involved in corporate worship.

²⁶What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

He also acknowledges, however, the propensity for some people who are immature to act in a way that is inconsiderate of others and disruptive. Therefore, he seeks not to curb anyone's enthusiasm but to channel it toward holiness, with guidelines for tongue-speakers, prophecy-givers, and more feminist-minded women who were apparently causing a lot of trouble at Sunday services. Sadly, the immaturity of some continues in our day on these same issues, which makes Paul's guidelines as timely as ever.

Guidelines for Tongues

Last week we defined the three expressions of the spiritual gift of tongues/languages as:

1. A private prayer language. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 14:14 saying, "I pray in a tongue."
2. A missionary gift that enables someone to speak the gospel of Jesus to foreigners in their native language that the speaker does not know. Acts 2:1–13 records just such an occasion when 3,000 people were saved in a day as the gospel was preached through the early Christians.
3. A revelatory language whereby a message of God is spoken in a language unknown to the speaker that must be translated into the native language of the people in the church so that they can understand what is being said. This use of tongues, therefore, also requires the assistance of someone with the gift of interpretation (1 Corinthians 12:10).

²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

In addition, Paul imposes some guidelines on tongue-speakers, including:

- In corporate worship, two or three people at the most should speak during the meeting.
- The speakers should speak one at a time so that there is not chaos.
- Unless there is an interpreter, no tongue-speaking is supposed to occur because others are not being edified.

Guidelines for Prophecy

Last week we defined the three expressions of the spiritual gift of prophecy as:

1. In the broadest sense, prophecy is sometimes the teaching ministry of preaching the Bible as God's Word in the church. Examples include 1 Corinthians 14:4 where prophecy "edifies the church" and 14:6–7 where Paul links prophecy and teaching, saying, "prophecy or word of instruction."
2. Prophecy is sometimes a revelation about a future event that God intends to reveal to the entire church; a revelation that is authenticated by coming true as predicted. Roughly 25 percent of the Bible was prophetic in this regard in that it foretold future events. This is what Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 14:6 where he links "revelation or knowledge or prophecy." A clear example of this is in Acts 11:28–29.
3. Prophecy is sometimes a word from God to be given to an individual. An example of this is the prophet Agabus who told Paul how he would die in Acts 21:10–11.

²⁹Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³²The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

In addition, Paul imposes some guidelines on words of prophecy, including:

- In corporate worship, two or three prophets at the most should speak during the meeting.
- The speakers should speak one at a time so that there is not chaos.
- Everything that is said should be carefully tested for its veracity, and not immediately believed.
- Anyone with a prophecy must speak in agreement with the prophets who wrote the Bible because they are our highest authority.
- Nothing in a church service should resemble chaos because chaos is the result of sin and God is not sinful or chaotic.

Guidelines for Women

^{33b}As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Apparently some of the more feminist-minded women were disrupting the church service with combative questioning that was intended to undermine the doctrine and leadership of the church. Paul seeks to bring them into godly order with some guidelines.

- Women are not to speak in a disruptive and contentious way. However, he has already said that a godly woman can speak if it is in a godly way (1 Corinthians 11:2–16). Therefore, the problem is not that women were

speaking, but that the wrong women were speaking and saying what they shouldn't have.

- Husbands are responsible to ensure that their wives are not ungodly and acting in sinful and disruptive ways in the church.
- A wife with a Christian husband should expect him to be theologically informed and ready to study Scripture with her. This does not negate the kind of women's ministry encouraged in Titus 2:3–5, but does negate Christian men expecting the church to be the sole place where their family learns about Jesus.

Paul then closes with a series of stinging questions to those who would arrogantly defy Biblical counsel and godly church leadership:

- Did you write the Bible? (³⁶*Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?*)
- How can you think you are godly if you are defiant? (³⁷*If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.*)
- Why should anyone listen to you if you won't listen to God? (³⁸*If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.*)
- Why should the immature ruin it for everyone? (³⁹*Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.*)

His closing word in 14:40 is a succinct summary of the big idea that in many ways sums up the central theme of chapter 14 and, to a lesser degree, the entire message of 1 Corinthians: "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." In this verse, Paul is clearly stating that there are principles that God ordains for the worship of His people. Church leaders (e.g., elders and deacons) are then given the responsibility of ensuring that the church services run in an "orderly" way that is "fitting" for people who claim to believe the Bible.

At Mars Hill, the leaders would appreciate your prayers as we are transitioning to a church of more than 5,000 people with seven services on three campuses around the city this fall—a process which admittedly feels like herding cats at times. The Corinthian church numbered perhaps only fifty people and likely met in a house, which means we're facing some of the same troubles multiplied by one hundred.

Therefore, the practical implication of this at Mars Hill is that we cannot and will not allow anyone and everyone to stand up and speak to the multitudes who gather on Sundays because that would encourage disorder, chaos, and false teaching. Rather, if someone believes they have a word from God through a tongue or prophecy, it will be tested "offline" by the church elders, who will "weigh carefully what is said." If the elders determine that the gift of tongues or prophecy has been rightly used, then that word will be brought "online" to the church during a worship service in a way that is "fitting and orderly."

Verses for next week: 1 Corinthians 16:1–24