

ORDER AND DISORDER IN THE CHURCH – PART 2

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Introduction:

How should believers act in church? What should our church services look like? When we gather together in a worship service, what should we expect to experience? Last message I shared with you an experience we had many years ago, when we found ourselves in a church where the service turned into complete chaos with everyone speaking in tongues or praying aloud or shouting simultaneously.

It seems as though that was kind of what church was like in Corinth. As Paul addressed the believers there, he seems to be concerned that they were caught up with valuing the gifts of the Spirit based on the amount of attention that was garnered by their particular gift. Thus, everyone wanted to speak in tongues because they felt it indicated a higher level of spirituality.

As a result, their corporate worship often became chaotic and unruly, filled with noise and confusion. I do not want to repreach the previous message, so let me just give a couple of points by way of review.

First, the gifts related to signs and wonders – tongues, healing, miracles – appear to have ceased at the close of the apostolic age. They were related to the revelation of apostolic truth, as a means of authenticating the message of the apostles. That is not to say that miracles, healings and such do not happen today. They certain can, when God so chooses, but the gifts are no longer necessary. In the same way, the gift of prophecy, at least as it relates to revelation of truth, ended with the apostolic age. Once the apostles had disseminated the truth that God had revealed to them and the Word of God was complete there was no need for the gift of prophecy as there would be no new revelation. We have the Bible as God's complete and final revelation of truth to guide us in every area of faith and daily living.

The other thing that I would say by way of review is really the bottom line in everything we looked at last time. As you read the first 25

verses of the chapter, Paul's message as he deals with all of the issues of tongues, interpretation and prophecy, really comes down to this: without a clear message there can be no understanding. And without understanding there can be no growth or edification. The bottom line is the importance of clarity and understanding.

So, the question we asked as we wrapped up last time was this: what do outsiders—newcomers, or unbelievers—see, hear or feel when they come into our service? Do they feel welcome? Do they understand the message? Can they understand what is going on? Is there clarity or do they leave wondering what it was all about?

With those questions in mind let us go on to look at the remainder of this chapter. In these verses Paul lays out some instructions to help make church more manageable and more welcoming for those who may not understand everything that takes place in church.

There are three main sections in this passage that we are looking at. They all seem to address issues or concerns that were affecting the church in Corinth. They are somewhat distinct and yet they are interrelated. The first section deals with...

Structure and order in a service vv. 26-33

There was clearly a lack of order in the public services in the church in Corinth. Paul addresses this confusion and disorder with a number of instructions and a couple of important principles. Let's look into the text...

v. 26 – it is clear that Paul's expectation is that in a normal service there would be a number of different people contributing in different ways – music, teaching, revelation from God, the possibility of even tongues and interpretation of those languages. Keep in mind, as I mentioned last time, this was still in the apostolic age, before the revelation of God's Word was complete. The elements of a service might differ somewhat today, but the idea is the same – different people bring different parts to the service.

vv. 27-28 – as we have already stated, the gift of tongues—speaking in foreign or unknown languages—was a significant focus in the Corinthian

church. Paul had some important things to say about this.

"*If any speak in a tongue...*" Paul's contention seems to be that there was no need or expectation that such a thing should happen, but *if* it did, here are some things that are important to observe. We already noted last time that the original purpose for speaking in tongues, besides the evangelistic benefit on the day of Pentecost, was to authenticate the message and ministry of the apostles, and as such, it would appear that the gift of tongues ceased at the end of the apostolic age. But, if there are tongues, what are some of Paul's rules?

Three things: it is to be limited – no more than two or three; it is to be organized – one at a time; it is to be interpreted – if there is no interpreter, then the person should be quiet.

vv. 29-32 – Paul goes on to address the issue of prophecy. Again, as we mentioned last time, revelation of prophetic truth from the Lord was important in the church of the first century, since they did not have God's complete revelation available as we do today. But again, Paul has some important instructions for them, and us, to keep in mind.

It should be limited – two or three speakers; no one is allowed to monopolize the teaching time – if someone else has a word to share, the first speaker should give time for him; it should be orderly – one by one; every word of prophecy or revelation is to be evaluated – weigh what is said; even the spirit or attitude of the prophet is to be subject to others who will consider the value or worth of the prophetic word.

The Place of a Woman in a Service vv. 34-35

Here is where I am treading into deep water... I do not want to spend a lot of time on these verses, but I do want to address a few things. I need to begin with a couple of preliminary comments.

First, I would say that many people who are much smarter than I am have studied these verses and have not agreed on what they really mean. So, I do not expect that I will have a definitive answer to the understanding of the passage.

Second, it seems like the final phrase of v. 33 fits better on the beginning of this paragraph in v. 34. That is the way it is written in the ESV and the NIV. Now, the text itself expresses four basic thoughts...

1. Women should keep silent in the church
2. Women should be in submission
3. Women should learn from their husbands at home
4. It is shameful for a woman to speak in church

So, how do we understand this? There are a few thoughts that come to mind. First, it seems that Paul is addressing a specific issue in the Corinthian church. "*As in all the churches...*" It seems to have been the custom in the early church that the women did not speak publicly in the services. Yet in Corinth there seem to be some women who were speaking out and causing a disturbance.

There may be a cultural element in that women in the first century were not well educated in areas of reading and understanding the Law and the Scriptures. Perhaps the services were being disrupted by women demanding further explanations regarding some of the teaching. That may well be the reason for Paul's command in v. 35. But we always need to be careful about assigning a cultural meaning to Scriptural commands, because that can be used to write off anything we don't like or agree with.

While that may be a valid argument, I believe that there is something far deeper in the understanding of these verses, and it goes right back to creation. When God created man, we are told that, "...*in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.*" It is important to note that mankind was created to reflect the image, the nature, the character of God. And it took both male and female to reflect that image. The man and the woman were created to complement or complete each other.

And tied into that complementarianism is the truth that they would reflect God's nature through the headship of the man and the submission of the woman. This appears to be an issue in the Corinthian church. This is not the first time Paul has addressed the issue of women usurping the authority of men in this church – see chapter 11.

So, I think the bottom line in this is that for a woman to speak in a teaching role in the church where she would be in authority over men was a violation of the roles God had designed. This would include the

evaluating of the prophetic word, as Paul had just been talking about in the previous verses. We cannot just lift these verses out of their context as though they stand on their own. For women to take that role on themselves, is to usurp the authority that God had given to the men.

Let me just add here that this position of authority is not a position of power but rather it puts a tremendous responsibility on the men in a congregation. They are to be the spiritual leaders in the congregation just as husbands are to be the spiritual leaders in the home.

Paul's Summary vv. 36-40

In the final verses of this chapter, we have Paul's summary. This is more than just a summary of this particular subject. It really gives us a conclusion to the whole subject of spiritual gifts as they were being used and abused in the Corinthian church. All the way through chapters 12, 13 and 14 Paul has been challenging the attitude that certain spiritual gifts were more to be desired than others because they indicated a higher level of spirituality.

Look at vv. 36-38 – *read them*. What is Paul saying? You think you are so smart, so gifted. Does prophetic truth actually come from you? Are you the source of all revelation? Are you the only ones who have the truth? If you are as smart as you think you are, then you will realize that the things I have said are coming from the Lord.

This was really a final warning from Paul about their abuse of spiritual gifts and their belief that they had some kind of special knowledge or special access to God's truth and revelation. Their abuses were causing discord and confusion within the church and even chaos in their worship services. He concludes by saying – *read vv. 39-40*.

Conclusion

So, what is the lesson for us? There are three key statements in these verses, that I have kind of passed over, but I want to come back to them, because I believe that they are what we need to take from this:

- v. 26 – Let all things be done for building up
- v. 33 – God is not a God of confusion but of peace
- v. 40 – All things should be done decently and in order.

Those commands need to be the ruling directives in our worship services. There are those who would say we must allow the Spirit to direct our times together. Don't plan too much, just let the Spirit lead. I would suggest that is when we will get into the kind of confusion and chaos that seemed to plague the Corinthian church.

Yes, there must be room for the Holy Spirit to intervene, to even interrupt our plans but in it all, there must be order and decency. The purpose must always be to build up the members of the congregation. As we said last time, there must be clarity and understanding. When there is disorder and confusion, there cannot be understanding and growth.

Let us strive together to build up one another as we worship together.