

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

For Discussion: When visiting a new church, what kinds of things would you expect to be able to learn about what they believe about God from their worship service? What about their other beliefs? Where would you observe these things?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

For review: In 1 Corinthians 14:1-25, Paul laid out some of the key differences between the gifts of tongues and prophecy and spoke to the importance of engaging people's minds and understanding in worship. While both tongues and prophecy are gifts of the Spirit, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to desire prophecy more because prophecy is a gift that is dedicated to the building up of the church. Paul also valued the mind because it is an important component of a holistic worship of God that involves our whole being. Additionally, it is through understanding that believers are edified by truth and are directed in joint worship with others. Paul continues his teaching with specific instructions for maintaining order during corporate worship, focusing again on the exercise of tongues and prophecy. He then proceeds to provide further directions for how women were to conduct themselves in their worship services.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-33a

What are the guidelines for the practice of tongues in corporate worship?¹ What are the guidelines for the practice of prophecy in corporate worship?²

¹There should be no more than two or three who practice the gift of tongues in a single worship service (v.27).

¹Those who speak in tongues must speak in turn (v.27).

¹There must be someone to interpret the tongues for the rest of the congregation.

-If there is no one to interpret, then everyone with that gift must refrain from practicing it in the service (v.28).

²Two or three who have the gift of prophecy can speak in a worship service (v.29).

²Those who prophesy are to take turns one by one (v.31).

-If a new revelation is given to someone else in the congregation, the first speaker must yield (v.30). As important as prophecy is, prophets must be willing to be interrupted rather than monopolize the time.

²The others must weigh the message of the prophecy (v.29, **1 John 4:1**) – Scripture remains the church's greatest authority.

²In both cases, Paul assumes that the use of the gift is under the person's control (v.28, 30, 32).

²Even the highest spiritual gifts are subject to regulations and must be practiced within specific parameters.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:33b-40

What principles had Paul previously established with respect to women and men in the church (1 Cor. 11:3-9)?¹

How does this guide our understanding of his instructions to the women in verses 33b-35 (1 Tim. 2:11-13)?²

¹There is a non-reversible relationship of headship between a husband and wife – this is akin to Christ and God (11:3).

-The basis of a wife's submission to her husband is their divinely set roles, as expressed in creation order (v.8-9, **Gen. 2:21-22**), rather than a difference in dignity or worth => priority in creation signifies priority in leadership.

¹This headship needs to be clearly demonstrated, especially where God has established boundaries for men and women.

-There should not be any blurring or exchanging of the markers of gender (e.g., hair length/head coverings in Paul's day).

¹For Paul, it was a given that women would have vocal participation in public worship (11:4-5). By his own definition, prophecy cannot be practiced silently or in solitude (14:3-4).

²Where Paul required women to be silent, it was a response to an undermining of the headship dynamic when they spoke up. Women were not to behave in any way that would signal a lack of submission to their husbands (v.34-35).

-Within the church there was also to be a submission of all women (and men) to the male leaders (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

In what way was a woman speaking up in church a sign of her lack of submission?

²Participation by women in judging prophecies (i.e., debating, discussing interpretation, questioning/scrutinizing) was not allowed (see v.29). Women were to submit to the judgments of the church leadership in this area.

-It would be inappropriate for a woman to judge a male prophet because that would blur the distinctions of authority.

-The judging of prophecy would have to be done through the application of Scripture, which makes it similar to teaching in a mixed congregation – something that was clearly forbidden (1 Tim. 2:12).

-Just as 11:2-16 addresses acceptable acts (prayer and prophecy) that were made unacceptable by the ways in which they were done, 14:33b-35 deals with a very specific situation for an act (speaking in church) that would otherwise not be prohibited.

²The other commands in the passage to be silent are not absolute (14:28, 30). These commands pertained to refraining from a specific act, under specific circumstances. Similarly, Paul does not ban women from all vocal participation in corporate worship.

What principles surrounding corporate worship did Paul give to the Corinthians (also see verses 26-33a)?

- [The way we worship communicates something about who we worship](#) (v.33a).
- Everything is to be done for the building up of the church (v.26).
- Worship must be conducted in an orderly manner (v.40).
 - Order is not just the opposite of chaos but is God's divinely ordained structure, which is a reflection of His character and values (another expression of this is the unity that should exist among the members in the body of Christ).
 - Tongues can be made as intelligible as prophecy, but confusion can still be introduced through how the gifts are practiced (v.27, 31 – the need to take turns).
- It is God who defines what worship is and what makes it acceptable – it must be done on His terms, not ours.
 - Worship is not for self-expression or asserting your "rights." For Paul, even eating was not a matter in which to assert one's rights (**1 Cor. 8:8-9, 13**).
 - The primary submission that is done in worship, for both men and women, is to God.
 - Our submission to God's order for worship and His design for creation should be communicated in the worship service.
- There needs to be a balance among the different elements of the worship service (v.27, 29) – things should be valued with respect to their relative importance (e.g., one gift vs. another, serving vs. teaching).

If everything is to be done for building up (v.26), how does remaining silent in the church accomplish this for the women?¹ How does witnessing this build others up?²

- ¹"Building up" is not an encouragement to be anything you want to be, but an encouragement to be what God wants you to be.
 - It is not stifling or repressive to help women to become what they were created for, it is the best thing to do for them.
- ¹It is good to show deference to God's order as an act of trust and obedience. Affirming and living out His commands allows Him to prove the rightness of His ways and to bless those who walk in them.
 - Boundaries are given not to limit freedom but to cause God's people to flourish => guide to the right use of God's gifts.
- ²There is encouragement in seeing others be faithful to God, even when it clashes with the world and/or carries consequences.
 - This is an example of proper submission that women can set for those who are younger (**Tit. 2:3-5**).
- ²When women relinquish responsibilities that are not theirs, this frees them up to take on the things that God does call them to and, correspondingly, helps others do likewise (i.e., encouraging the men to take their responsibilities seriously).
- ²A husband and wife are one, when a word or command is given to one of them, there is usually an accompanying implication for the other.
 - "...if it be a shame for her to speak in the church, where she should be silent, it is a shame for him to be silent when he should speak, and not be able to give an answer, when she asks him at home." – Matthew Henry

What attitude from the Corinthians did Paul confront in his teaching?¹ What was his response to them?²

- ¹Paul was confronting an attitude of pride and self-sufficiency from the Corinthians, as though they knew better than him (v.36).
 - He anticipated that some of them would call his teaching into question and reject it (v.37-38).
- ²Paul asserted his authority as an apostle – God's Word was coming to the Corinthians through him, not the other way around.
 - He was able to confidently declare that his teachings were from the Lord, so much so that he made agreement with them a measure of a true prophet and those who were genuinely spiritual/mature (v.37), as there is no contradiction between what the Spirit says to one person and another (**1 Cor. 12:3**).
- ²Those who did not approve of God's teaching showed themselves to not have God's approval (v.38).

What about God is revealed by our practices and focus in worship?¹ How can our worship services be made to be an even greater witness and declaration of who God is?²

Reflection and application

It should be clear to all what kind of God we worship (what He is like, what He values, etc.) through the way we approach Him, the things we affirm and emphasize about Him and one another, and the manner in which we gather together. The call for corporate worship to be conducted in an orderly way is not a pursuit of order for its own sake but because it is a reflection of who God is, just as is the case with the character of His followers. Some of the ways that Paul called on the Corinthians to do this was to follow the guidelines that he laid out for the practice of their spiritual gifts and to pursue being who God made them to be, living lives befitting the roles and relationships that He set for them and encouraging others to do the same. Let us seek to do likewise, holding fast to the order that God has instituted and seeking to make His presence clear and unmistakable whenever we come together for worship.