

Orderly Worship

Scripture Text: 1 Corinthians 14:26–40

What is the value of having order in things? Why not just let every person do what he or she wants? Order in most, if not all, things helps accomplish the goal of a thing. Consider a courtroom. What if there was no order to the way the court was run? What if everyone spoke whenever or whatever he or she wanted? How quickly would the courtroom fall into disorder or anarchy? Order is a part of life. God created order into the natural world. God also designed institutions with a certain order. The very first family was designed with order. There was order in the Old Testament Jewish Law and traditions. There was order in the Jewish worship practices. There was order in the assignment of priests and the Old Testament sacrificial system. One might assume from this that order is designed in just about all things.

Order seems to be the main point in the passage today. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that there should be order when the church gathers for worship. That may not seem all that controversial or surprising, but not all churches demonstrate the same attention to orderly worship and that was true with the Corinthian church of the New Testament. Paul wrote the letter of First Corinthians to the church in Corinth, a city that had a reputation for immorality, religious diversity, and corruption. The church Paul planted there struggled under these influences and began to divide over various issues. Up to this point in the letter Paul addressed issues such as who the church is and what it should be doing, about following Jesus and not various leaders in the church, about working out problems within the congregation, about observing the Lord's Supper properly and about glorifying God in all that it does.

In chapters twelve through fourteen, Paul addressed the use of spiritual gifts, specifically the use (and misuse) of speaking in tongues and prophesy. Right in the middle of writing about spiritual gifts Paul discussed the issue of love. This was meant to show that in whatever the church does, including the use of the various gifts God has given to its members, it should be done with love. The spiritual gifts are not meant to be self-serving, or to place a badge of honor on ourselves to show how important or gifted we are. Church is not about us, but is about Jesus and making more disciples of Christ. In chapter fourteen Paul mentioned two things I would like to elaborate:

- We should do all things to build up the Church
- We should worship appropriately and orderly

Building Up the Church

Paul called the church several things in this letter. Earlier, we read that he called the church the Temple of God (because God's Spirit dwells in the church) and God's field (where God is growing disciples of Christ). Paul also called the church God's building, because God is building (or constructing) the members into the Body of Christ. In chapter fourteen, Paul

referred to the church's responsibility in this process, the process of building up the church. He referred to the members of the church building up each other:

1 Corinthians 14:26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. *Let all things be done for building up.*

The word used in this passage and throughout chapter fourteen literally means “building a house.” That is what the church members are doing when they use their spiritual gifts properly – they are building up the church. Church members are each working with the Chief Carpenter, Jesus Christ, to build up, to encourage, and to help the church to be the church. This means that whatever God has given each member of the church ought to be used for the common good of the church. Your gifts are not meant to show off a talent, or to make much of you, but to primarily glorify God by serving and edifying the church. They are also meant to equip the church for ministry. This is the reason why God has given various people to the church to serve the church – to equip the whole church for ministry.

Ephesians 4:11–12 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints *for the work of ministry*, for building up the body of Christ.

What we do in church ought to be done to fulfill the mission of the church, to make more disciples of Jesus Christ, and to help the body of believers grow into a stronger and healthier community. Are you using your gifts to glorify God and to help His church? Are you using your gifts primarily for yourself, for your benefit? Does what you do help make more disciples of Jesus Christ? Does it honor Jesus Christ? Those are some questions to ask.

Appropriate and Orderly Worship

My wife and I were recently watching an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*, a science fiction television series that we have watched numerous times. In this series, a group of people are lost in a distant portion of the galaxy and are trying to make it back to Earth. I think we may be on our fourth or fifth “voyage” with the characters in the show. In this particular episode, one of the characters, who is called Seven of Nine, decided to do some procedure without getting the appropriate authorization. This caused all sorts of problems for the engineering team on the starship. The main engineer found Seven of Nine and said her actions had disrupted operations all morning, and told her, “Procedures exist for a reason. To maintain order.” I believe that is true for most things. Imagine if you did not have rules or procedures at your work – the business may fail. What if the rules and procedures of your family were not followed – there might be chaos. The same is true for the church.

Apparently the Corinthian church had not maintained order when they gathered together for worship. It seemed that some in the Corinthian church had misused the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesy. Misuse of gifts, and might I say talents and responsibilities, affects the church. When members of the church do not function in an orderly fashion, they hinder

the church and hurt the mission of the church. Consider Paul's statement regarding the misuse of speaking in tongues:

1 Corinthians 14:23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are *out of your minds*?

Not only were the problems in the Corinthian church hindering proper growth and edification for the church body, there was also a risk of unbelievers who may visit and see confusion and disorder. In this case, disorderly worship impacted the church's witness to an unbeliever. Therefore, Paul called for order when the church met together for worship. He mentioned in verses 27-28 that those who speak in tongues should do so *one at a time*. Likewise, those who prophesy in the church should do so *one at a time*. Those who do speak in tongues should also do it with an interpreter present in order to not cause confusion. Both speaking in tongues and prophesying should be done in a way that would strengthen and encourage the whole church and not create confusion.

Paul did not forbid speaking in tongues and prophecy but encouraged their use. At the end of chapter twelve he said the church should "earnestly desire" these spiritual gifts. The church should just use these gifts appropriately and orderly. It does not have to be just these spiritual gifts. While Paul was certainly addressing the spiritual gifts, probably because the Corinthian church had a problem using them properly, all things done by the church are in view here. Verses 39 and 40 could be a summary of chapter fourteen:

1 Corinthians 14:39-40 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done *decently and in order*.

Whatever we do, as the church of God, ought to be done in such a way that does not create confusion. Most churches today do not have the same issues as the Corinthian church, where everyone was talking or prophesying at once and creating confusion. However, there might be other ways in which this passage is applicable. When we gather together for worship, are we each doing our own thing? Is one person worshipping in their own way, while others are doing something else? Are we all focused on whatever is going on at the time so that we can worship God *together* as the church? Are we distracted by things that might not be Christ honoring? These are things that we ought to ask. Are we causing disorder during corporate worship or are we united in what the church is doing?

Silence is Golden

Some people say, "Silence is golden, duct tape if silver." I am not sure if those are words to live by, but they may be applicable. The first part of this saying is actually from the poet Thomas Carlyle who translated a phrase from a German work that said, "Speech is silver; silence is golden." It is probably more common to just say, "Silence is golden." I am certain many parents have said those words to their children, with varying degrees of success. Well, Paul was concerned about silence in the church, for he mentioned it several times in our passage. Sometimes Christians will focus on a particular passage or concept in the

Bible. I am guilty of this. In First Corinthians chapter fourteen, the verses that seem to get the most attention are the following:

1 Corinthians 14:33–34 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches.

There seems to be an incredible number of opinions and interpretations regarding this passage. In preparing this sermon I read many different and contradictory statements about it. This passage seems to be quiet clear on the surface, but raises questions in relation to other passages in the Bible. One thing to note about Paul's statement regarding the women in the Corinthian church is that it is not the only place where he wrote about people being silent. In verse 28, he referred to those speaking in tongues as being silent. In verse 30 he said a prophet should also be silent. Another thing to note is that Paul doesn't seem to be addressing an issue for *only* the Corinthian church. While Paul may have been addressing a particular issue, it was an issue for *all the churches*. Paul included the words "as in all the churches of the saints" and "the women should be silent *in the churches*."

While we are not entirely certain what the issue Paul was addressing, it seems to be in regards to speaking in tongues and prophecy. Also, whatever the women were doing was causing a disruption when the church met together for worship. We have to read Paul's statement regarding women within the context of spiritual gifts and orderly worship. Paul does not seem to say that women should *always* be silent for he *assumed* just three chapters earlier in chapter eleven that women did prophesy:

1 Corinthians 11:5 but every wife *who prays or prophesies* with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.

This passage assumes that women (at least the married ones!) prayed and prophesied. Also, in the book of Acts, we see the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy during Pentecost where God's Spirit was poured out on both men and women and they shall prophesy. Luke wrote the following:

Acts 2:17–18 And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and *your sons and your daughters* shall prophesy...even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

And there are other references in Scripture to women speaking and prophesying. The point is that we cannot interpret this passage in First Corinthians chapter fourteen as a command for complete silence for women. Paul's solution to the problem in Corinth was to say that the women ought to "ask their husbands at home." This suggests the women in Corinth, or at least some of them, were questioning the prophesies during the worship service and this may have been usurping the male leadership in the church. While, I am not absolutely certain what Paul means in this passage, whatever the women in Corinth were doing, it was not orderly and did not build up the church.

Conclusion

In closing, Paul's exhortation to the church in Corinth, and to us, is that everything we do when we gather for worship ought to be done to encourage one another, to edify one another, and to help one another be disciples of Christ. If we are not doing that, then we are not fulfilling our purpose in being here. We are blessed with numerous and wonderful resources. Each of us who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior has been given spiritual gifts and talents. Are we using our resources and our gifts to build up God's church? When the local community sees the church will they be confused about the purpose and mission of it? Will they see a group of people called by God on mission for God to glorify Him in all that we do? Will the church commit to doing everything we do for the sake of the gospel? That is my prayer. Amen!