

Title: Three Rules for Worship

Text: 1 Corinthians 14.26-35

Theme: Worship that reflects God

Series: 1 Corinthians #84

Prop Stmt. God must be worshiped in a manner that accurately reflects Him.

This series in 1 Corinthians has been a delightful challenge. We are called by God to live as a unified body of believers in the midst of a disintegrating world and society. This unity is expressed in our relationships by our moral purity, humility, integrity, and care for the vulnerable. We are to be like Christ. We are to be dependable, trustworthy, and predictably honest. We are called to be light in the midst of darkness, truth in the midst of lies, life in the midst of death, and fresh air in the midst of the stench of decay. We do not make decisions based on what does everyone else do, or what is the industry standard, or what can I get away with. We make live based on, what will please God? What will spread the fame of Jesus? What kind of a marriage, what kind of a work ethic, what kind of a family, what kind of a conversation will adorn the gospel? Even the way we approach and function within the church is done recognizing that we are stewards of His church. We are His people, the flock of His pasture.

As your shepherd, I must protect you from false teaching and feed you with the good stuff of the Word. The diet of 1 Corinthians is good stuff, and has been used by the Lord to help me look more carefully at our weaknesses as a church and the elders have been so good to help work on a game plan to address these. I am blessed to speak from this pulpit, because you come with your Bible, and you should. You want to learn it, because you long to live it. You are gentle people. You are careful to listen, study, and apply.

Chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians cover some hot potato topics. You do not bat an eye, nor debate with rancor and malice. Thank-you. Our text is bringing us around the final corner of this chapter. We are almost done with this section. And in chapter 14.26-35, we have three rules for worship. This morning, we will only get through the first two. Then the third one, which is a very controversial subject, is one I will tackle next Sunday. Finally, on the 15<sup>th</sup> (July), I will wrap up the chapter and the section with some clear points of application for our own setting.

Read Text: 1 Corinthians 14.26-35

“What then shall we say, brothers?” Let’s try to wrap this up by laying out some rules that will help straighten out the mess that has been taking place.

1. **Everything must edify the church.** (26)

*“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.”*

The scene that Paul paints here sounds like after the meal is over (the gathering often started with a meal) it was “show time.” Corinthian Idol? Keep in mind a couple of things: 1) The church was smaller and met in a home. 2) The smaller the group, the less formality or structure is needed; and, the larger the group, the more structure is needed. 3) The church did not have a completed Bible to study. This letter is one of the earliest books of the NT to be written. Without an accepted Bible, yet (beyond the OT), the substance of what was being declared was naturally going to be a bit more subjective and conversational. That is important to recognize, because some of what is described here is just that a description of what was taking place, not a prescription for what has to take place in a church service. The NT was not completed yet and would not be completed for another 30 years or so. I would expect that in the churches there would be more of an emphasis upon revelations at this point. Verse 26 is not saying that these are the things that have to take place in a worship service (prescriptive). Although, teaching/preaching, singing and prayer (which is not mentioned) are part of the ingredients in the church gathering. Paul is describing part of what is already happening and is simply pointing out the obvious problems if “everyone” decides that they have to say something or do something. The gifts that are mentioned in this verse again, are not the ingredients that have to take place in a service; these are just the gifts that he has been dealing with in this chapter. The problem is self-evident; church becomes a stage to be heard, to be seen instead of a body of believers whose primary task is to help strengthen each other.

Should the church function with an open mic?

Illus – Denise – great Elvis impersonation

2. **Everything must be orderly.** (27-33a)

Chaos and bedlam is not a sign of spirituality. But, let me caution you. Neither is dead formalism a sign of spirituality either. Worship is not a spectator sport. True worship demands active participation, but that active participation is not merely going through the routine, it is engaging with God at the heart level.

a. **Tongues** (27-28)

i. **Rule** (27)

V. 27 and v.28 both begin as “if clauses.” If tongues are going to be part of the gathering time in the Corinthian church, it had to be of such a nature that it was going to benefit the church. That is clear from v.26. Now in v.27, we see that the way Paul writes, that tongues is not a necessary part of the service. (if clause) It is not essential to the growth and benefit of the body. However, if someone wants to speak in tongues, Paul says – “hold the phone” a few rules must be in place:

- 1) Two and absolutely no more than three can speak
- 2) They must speak one at a time
- 3) Someone must interpret

That is the rule. The rule limits how many can speak; the manner in which they must speak and the only condition that permits them to speak. This is entirely consistent with the purpose of spiritual gifts.

ii. Condition

He then goes on in v.28 to explain that if there is no interpreter present, then the person, who wants to speak in tongues, must be quiet. Why? If there is no interpretation, there is no understanding on the part of anyone. If no understanding, there is no benefit and edification to the rest of the body and everything must be done for the strengthening of the church. The controlling principle for the exercise of spiritual gifts has to apply to the gift of tongues as well. That principle is: order, self-control and concern for others.

What if you were part of a church that had serious problem with spouse swapping, but gave \$1 million per year to missions? A million dollars annually to missions does not make up for a fundamental failure to grasp some of the very basic implications of living out the gospel in ones own life and church. So, let's say you point this out and the people say, "What?! Don't you think we ought to give money to missions?" And you say, "That isn't the point. Money to missions is fine, but living in such mockery of the picture of God in marriage is not, and if you use your giving as an artificial standard of spirituality, or worse yet, if you think that by your giving, you can buy off God so that He will wink at your sin, then you would be better off to keep your money and start obeying God."

Some of the believers in Corinth were so proud of the fact that they spoke in tongues, that they used the occasion of tongues as an opportunity to violate some very foundational matters for the church. Speaking in tongues is not the ultimate sign of spirituality. If you speak in tongues and there is disorder, a lack of self-control, and a smug sense of spiritual superiority over those pathetic people who don't, then you don't understand the ministry of the Spirit.

Paul is so concerned about orderliness, and being sensitive to all of the people in the church, that he de-emphasizes the gift of tongues in exchange for emphasizing the need for order, self-control and edification. If the exercise of a gift does not have an obvious benefit for the body, then it should not be used. That is why he insists that there be an interpreter present. That brings up an obvious question for us; how did they know if someone was present who had the gift of interpretation? The text does not say. So, whatever ideas we have, are to a point a bit speculative. But remember, the church gathering in Corinth was small enough to meet in a home, although it was more than likely a good-sized home. Therefore, if someone began to speak in a foreign language, the leader could simply ask if there was anyone present who could speak and interpret that language. If not, then the person speaking in tongues would not speak anymore. Perhaps there were people in the church, who were known to have the gift, and they needed to be present, and if they were not there, then, again, the tongues-speaker simply remained quiet.

There is no such thing as a person who is so “full of the Spirit” that they just have to speak, no matter what. Being full of the Spirit is never an occasion for being out of control when one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5.23). These guidelines regarding the operation of tongues in the church are given by the Spirit, through the apostle Paul for the orderliness of the worship service. You cannot be led by the Spirit in a manner that violates the Spirit’s Word.

**b. Prophecy (29-32)**

**i. Rule**

Prophecy (general word for teaching, preaching, communicating God’s Word in an intelligible manner) is an expected part of the service. Tongues (even in the Corinthian church was not necessary), but prophecy is.

- 1) Two or three speakers are all that people can handle.

It sounds as if there were many people who wanted to be heard every time the church gathered, and much of the service itself was a waste of time. (Remember Rule #1).

- 2) The others should weigh carefully what is said.

This implies several things. The speaker did not speak with unquestionable authority. The listeners had a responsibility to listen with discernment, and the speaker had the responsibility to subject his message to the evaluation of the audience. Elsewhere (1 Thess. 5.20-21) the audience is to listen to and test these prophecies and is to hold on to what is good. In 1 Cor. 2.12-16, believers are promised the Spirit of God who enables them to discern what is true and what is false. At the beginning of this section on spiritual gifts it is very clear that no person functions in the church as an island. All of the people are to work in harmony with each other and that there is no spiritual caste system that allows one group of gifts to out rank all the others.

**ii. Condition**

The condition that Paul gives is in v.30. The person, who receives a revelation, does not just blurt it out. He waits until the other person is done. The first speaker needs to finish and recognize that he is not supposed to monopolize the entire time, and the second person, needs to realize that he is not supposed to interrupt the guy speaking. One of the obvious problems in the church of Corinth is that you had a whole bunch of guys who wanted to speak, but who did not want to listen. We have a word for that. It is called Kindergarten. Kindergarten church, where everyone gets to talk and no one has to listen. But as David Garland noted, “A church plagued by the commotion of competing prophets vying for attention and dominated by conceited members who refuse to listen to what others have been given to say does not testify to the presence of God.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> David Garland, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT, 1 Cor. P. 662.

I think that there were a couple of things going on here. In the first place, it seems pretty obvious that there was a rather competitive atmosphere present, as people (prophets) were vying for the admiration, and fondness of the church. Jerry is teaching on spiritual disciplines on Sunday nights and as part of that has been addressing the issue of prayer. Let's say that tonight, Jerry decided to have a praying contest. Each contestant would get 5 minutes to pray, and the audience would vote on which prayer was the most sincere, emotional, articulate, vocally dynamic, made the most effective use of dramatic pauses and of course, which one made me cry. I think that the other thing that is going on, is that the prophets needed to be lowered a notch or two. You just can't get up and say anything you want and call it prophecy. Everything you say is accountable to the people. And the people have the responsibility to listen with a discerning ear and to evaluate what is being said. The point is, this is not a performance to be applauded. The instruction of God's people with God's truth is to be applied.

iii. explanation

*"The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets."* (v.32)

The urge to prophesy is subject to the person speaking. He can never use the excuse of "I just can't help myself" as a justification for disrupting the service. Paul makes allowance for prophecies, he does not make allowances for one person to use that in order to monopolize everything.

c. **Governing Principle** (33a)

*"For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."* (33a)

Do you see the point? The worship of God is to reflect the person of God. The worship service is not a time to be out of control and out of your mind. It is not a time to perform, to put on a show, for envy or selfish ambition, or competition and jealousy. Authentic worship will accurately reflect God. The chaos at Corinth was not a sign of the Spirit's presence, but a sign of the self-centered immaturity of the congregation.

Have you ever seen this violated in our day? Yes. Have some churches reacted to this abuse and attempted to put unbiblical restrictions on the atmosphere of worship? Yes. We do not have to choose one against the other. Authentic worship is going to be Word-centered, Christ-exalting, understandable, unified, edifying and concerned for the well being of all of God's people.