

OUR TEXT

1 Corinthians 14:20-40 *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me,” says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.*

Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophecy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep deep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the work of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

FREEDOM AND ORDER

- ✓ **Pursuing freedom for freedom’s sake is chaos.** If “anything goes,” anarchy reigns.
- ✓ **Pursuing order for order’s sake is tyranny.** If everything is restricted, free expression is strangled.
- ✓ **But pursuing order for freedom’s sake is freeing.** This allows for growth and strengthening.

No one would suggest we do away with traffic lights or pedestrian crossings or other such traffic laws for the sake of freedom of expression. Chaos would ensue, eventually turning to anarchy as each would want his own personal freedom of expression. No intelligent thinker believes that true freedom is allowing everyone to do whatever they want.

Nor would one suggest we become a police state, regulating by computer the speed and direction of every vehicle, the crossing of every pedestrian and the flow of every walkway. This would be tyranny, robbing each individual of personal freedom.

So let’s apply this thinking to the church worship service.

The goal of the church service should be a “liturgy” or order of service that allows room for the individual worshiper to express himself freely, while under the order of truth taught to convict, correct and uplift.

CORRECTLY INTERPRETING OUR PASSAGE

If we view 1 Corinthians 14 as a template for what our church service should become, we will find ourselves frustrated and confused and misled.

But, if we view this chapter as a snapshot of what the early church service was like with God through Paul teaching the path to a more mature and beneficial experience, we will find our understanding enlightened.

It appears that this early church service of the Corinthians was a gathering of believers – probably in a small to moderate number (perhaps something like the size of Oaks Bible) – with no lead pastor or elder. Verse 26 seems to indicate that one would come with a song to sing, another with a teaching from God, another with a revelation to be made and another with a word in another language which may or may not have been interpreted. Those more mature in their faith and with the gift of prophecy (forth-telling the word of the Lord) would “judge” or assess the merit of each song, teaching, revelation or word given. Some women would try to correct the men in their assessment, in a society where women hardly were allowed to speak at all, resulting in more confusion. It appears there was little “liturgy” or order of service, and that often more confusion reigned than clarification. This resulted in divisions, cliques and putting down of another’s right to speak at all.

I see that Paul makes 2 significant points of what change was needed:

1. “Let all things be done for edification.” (verse 26b)
2. “All things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.” (verse 40)

These two considerations will guide our discussion today.

ARE WE BETTER OFF?

Have we evolved into a better and more mature worship experience in our 21st century? Some would say we should try to go back to the home groups of Acts and try to emulate the free flow of the Corinthian church early services. But I would counter that Paul is here teaching that their service needed to mature to (1) more edification and (2) more order.

Thus, most churches now have a “professional” pastor to teach and lead (edify) and a somewhat predictable order of service to bring “order.” In most services there are elements of freedom to the worshipper within the boundaries of the liturgy. There is the freedom in singing, sharing, praying and hearing the teaching given, all the while assessing its truth against the truth of the Scripture. I see this as a healthy and beneficial evolution. I love that we have our “Body Life” segment of the service where young or old, male or female, new to the church or charter member, can express a praise, prayer request or encouragement to the body. To me, this is freedom within order.

We must never let the liturgy strangle or “quench the Spirit” with its order. Nor should we allow our freedom in worship to become disorderly or confusing to the hearer. But as we have already stated, we must pursue order in our services for the sake of freedom of expression and experience in worship. We would hope that each worshipper would leave having felt that he/she has met the Lord in some way and has had a unique and freeing experience with God, despite the orderliness of the service.

VERSE BY VERSE

v. 20 Paul wants movement from childishness to maturity (in regards to church worship)

v. 21 Paul references a time when the Assyrians took over the Jews and spoke to them in a foreign tongue, causing confusion and not listening to God (from Isaiah 28:11 and following).

v. 22 Paul uses this Old Testament example to make an important point about the purpose of tongues versus prophecy – especially within the church service, which is the context of the passage.

- a. Speaking in tongues (Gk: glossolalia = speaking in a foreign language unknown to the listener) is to be used as a SIGN (verification of God’s presence) to UNBELIEVERS (as it was to the foreigners at the Acts 2 Pentecost). Therefore its primary value is not in the church service.
- b. Prophecy (speaking forth God’s message of truth) is to be used as a SIGN to BELIEVERS to verify God’s presence in the message as God’s truth is told. Therefore, it is of primary value in the church service.

- v. 23 Tongues in a church service will confuse and potentially dissuade a nonbeliever.
- v. 24 Prophecy in a church service has the potential to convict an unbeliever or immature believer.
- v. 25 God's Word rightly prophesied can cause one to believe that it is God talking directly to his heart, and causing him to sense God's presence with consequence of repentance.

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

- v. 26 When there is the chaos of each wanting their own turn at sharing their spiritual thought, be sure that each sharing is for the purpose of building up the church (and not just building up the sharer).

SUMMARY of v. 20-26: **Let all be done for the building up of the church.**

- v. 27-28 If one wants to speak in a tongue in a church service, here are the rules of order:
 - a. No more than 2 or 3
 - b. There must be an interpreter so all can understand what is being said
 - c. If no interpreter, the tongue must be to himself in quiet
- v. 29-33 If one wants to speak a word of prophecy in a church service, here are the rules of order:
 - a. 2 or 3 will speak, then there will be an assessment of squaring with God's word by others
 - b. As an assessment is being made, the original speaker must remain silent
 - c. Then others can prophesy in turn following this procedure, that all may learn and be encouraged
 - d. Prophecy must always be tested by the assessment of other prophets
 - e. Bottom line – God wants peace in the church for all, not confusion
- v. 34-36 Rules regarding women making assessment of a prophecy:
 - a. Women are not permitted to make verbal assessment of prophecy in a church setting
 - b. Women are to be subject to the male elders in the matter of purity of a prophecy
 - c. Women may have a discussion about a prophecy with their husband at home
 - d. They are to remember that God did not choose a woman to first bring forth the Word of God, and that they are the recipients of the Word from a man

(Note: God is not saying women should not speak in church. He has already encouraged "all" to speak with prophecy or tongues as God leads. If this has any bearing on present day, it would be that women are to be subject to the elder(s) of the church in the matters of spiritual purity of the Word.)

- v. 37-38 Rules for all regarding Paul's teachings on this subject:
 - a. You are to regard these instructions as directly from the Lord Jesus, by my apostolic authority
 - b. If you do not so regard these instructions as of the Lord, you are not to be recognized in the church as one worthy of speaking
- v. 39 Pursue to prophesy a Word of the Lord; don't forbid the speaking in other languages (with an interpreter present)

SUMMARY of v. 27-40: **All things (in the church) must be done properly and in an orderly manner.**

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Our God is a God who loves to build people up in the church. Therefore we must be about encouraging one another to grow into the image of Jesus. God wants YOU to grow from where you are today to a closer likeness of Jesus tomorrow and each day. This is done through actively involving oneself in the key disciplines of the believer:

WORSHIP - personal and corporate

FELLOWSHIP - spending time with other maturing believers

DISCIPLESHIP - reading and studying of God's Holy Word

MINISTRY (within the church) - getting involved in the life of your church

EVANGELISM (outside the church) - sharing your faith with your world

Our God is a God of order, for the sake of freedom. God took the formless void and darkness of this planet and gave it abundant life and light. He separated the light from the dark. He separated the days from the nights. He ordered the sun, moon and stars in their movements. He separated the land from the sea and the earth from the heavens with an expanse of space. And this all to give His creation of mankind a freedom in which to flourish, roam and grow.

And in the church, God again wants to bring order out of chaos. May our "rules" be (1) God's rules and (2) rules that make sense and (3) rules that free each believer to flourish as growing disciples of Christ. May you feel that freedom here at Oaks Bible Church.