

The guidelines for worship in this chapter give us the impression that the worship service in Corinth was very disorderly. One person would have the attention of some of the people as he shared a revelation, someone else is singing in tongues, and another group is listening to a prophecy. Everyone wanted to participate and demonstrate their gift. It is as if people were competing to be heard. Perhaps we have gone to the other extreme of too few participating. As we go through this chapter, we should listen for the applications to our worship services, while keeping in mind the overall theme of order so that we might grow in Christlikeness.

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. 1

Corinthians 14:26-40 As we learned last week, every part of a worship service should be to build up the body, and each of us has a role in seeing that happens. Disorder, distraction, condemnation, and the likes have no place in our worship gatherings. It is an essential part of our Christian life to gather to worship and hear from God in His Word (Hebrews 10:25ⁱ). There can be humor and catching up on one another's lives, but we must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to be sure we are not distracting from the main purpose we are gathered.

Regarding "if anyone has a song," I have been in gatherings where people called out the number of the song to be sung. We do something similar on Wednesday night. The musicians had to know the whole book or play by sight. Smaller groups sing songs they are familiar with as different people lead out with what is on their heart. We do that in our prayer time on Sunday afternoon. Sometimes that ends up being a solo which is okay too. We are sharing what God has put on our hearts.

Someone has a verse to share or a testimony, or some new thing they have seen in the Word, and that is welcome as well. But as Paul has said in the previous verses, if there is an utterance in an unknown language, the person should be sure there is someone to interpret (14:28ⁱⁱ).

Our 10:30 Sunday morning service is more structured because we have many guests and are a much larger gathering than the New Testament house churches. The order keeps things from becoming chaotic and prepares us to hear from God's Word. But our smaller gatherings like those of the early church have this freedom of everyone participating. In whatever manner each gathering operates, the main thing is that all is done is done to build one another up in Christ. We want the Word of God to renew our minds and to teach us the difference between the flesh and the Spirit (Romans 12:2ⁱⁱⁱ). We need to hear where we are in error and receive the gift of conviction so that we allow God to change our behavior. We refer to this as the process of sanctification, which means to make us more like Jesus (Ephesians 4:11-16^{iv}). In Ephesians 4:13 Paul described this process of being built up to continue *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* That is the end goal of worshiping together, unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, Christlikeness! When we realize this is God's method, how can we ignore the importance of being involved in a local church body?

²⁷ If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep

silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 1 Corinthians 14:27,28 Here are Paul's strict guidelines to bring the Corinthian church back to some semblance of order. If there is someone who has the gift of interpretation, two or three at most can share something in tongues, one at a time. If there is no interpreter, you can pray with your spirit (verse 15^v) silently to God. This was the only gift Paul was limiting, and that is because it was a gift that was not meant for building up the body. It is usually an expression of praise or gratitude. Without limiting that function to two or three, the whole time together might end up in this kind of praise without the necessary teaching and preaching that would build up the body. The little time we spend together during the week should be to help one another grow in the knowledge of the Word which prepares us for the situations we will face during the week. It is God's means of maturing us (1 Peter 2:2^{vi}).

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 1 Corinthians 14:29 The message for that worship service can come from two or three people who believe God has given them something to share. But it is not "thus saith the Lord" as in the case with the office of a prophet in the Old Testament (Luke 16:16^{vii}). Instead, we look into the Word and for the confirmation of the Spirit to see if it is from God. Every individual can weigh what is said, as the Bereans did (Acts 17:11^{viii}). At the same time, the elders can correct or confirm a prophecy. But since we all have the Holy Spirit, we should all weigh the words that are spoken.

³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 1 Corinthians 14:30 Take turns, which is respecting the other's gift. Sometimes when someone is sharing, a Scripture comes to mind that brings clarity to the topic, or a thought from the Holy Spirit that illuminates the subject. The one who is sharing should stop and let the person add what has been revealed to him or her. In other words, welcome the interruption. This is when someone has a revelation, not just an opinion. This would tend to be chaotic in our larger churches of today, but it should be the style of our smaller gatherings. It is the way we operate the Bible studies. We try to let the person who is speaking finish their thought before we speak so we do not speak over one another or have multiple conversations going at the same time, but if someone has something to add, we should welcome it.

³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ^{33a} For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. 1 Corinthians 14:31-33a The freedom for all to participate by sharing something from the Lord was very different from most of our worship services today. Was it that the Spirit was so actively building the early church? Paul did not see this as a problem if it was orderly. Worship was not a spectator event. Those who wished to speak can wait their turn because the spirit is subject to the soul. The Holy Spirit is not like some ecstatic outside power that takes over our mouths. The Holy Spirit prompts us, and we can use our mind and will to know when it is proper to share what He is leading us to say. Our will and desire to honor one another tells our spirit to wait for the proper time so that it will be the most beneficial and peaceful.

^{33b} As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 This is controversial in our secular culture and even in the Greek world of that day. Why does

Paul cite the Law when they have been freed from the Law (Romans 8:2^{ix})? The Law still gives us guidelines and fundamentals that never change, such as the character of God. It also tells us of the nature of man and woman, both good and bad. It was before the laws were given to Moses that God created man and woman, and woman led man into the fall (Genesis 3:6^x). It was the responsibility of man to speak up, and he failed to do so. You can see this is Paul's reasoning in 11:1-16^{xi}. God meant for man to lead by serving while also being interdependent with his wife (Ephesians 5:21^{xii}).

One speculation about the issue behind Paul's instruction is that men and women sat separately, and women would call over to their husband with a question. In verse 35 Paul is saying they should wait till they get home to ask questions of their husbands. This interpretation goes well with the next saying that God is not a God of confusion but of peace and with the whole context of worship being orderly. In Hebrew culture the men studied the Scriptures, and the women were home working and caring for the children. The Greek culture was a bit different, but the fact that women needed to ask their husbands to explain what they learned indicates that there was a similarity.

Others interpret this to declare that women should never address the congregation. However, a few verses earlier Paul said "all" can prophesy (Joel 2:28^{xiii}; Acts 2:17^{xiv}). That includes women. Others say we should connect it with the issue of tongues and is saying women should not speak in tongues in church. Still other commentators argue that it was a merely a cultural issue of the time or related to the immodesty of women in Corinth. These are honest points of view to consider. But I believe the wording points toward asking questions across the room during the worship time.

It is easy to read this chapter with foregone conclusions paying no attention to the details of what is written and Paul's reasoning. When addressing women's role in the church, Paul refers to created order and the design of God, both in this passage and in others. When Paul uses Scripture to back his statement, he is giving the authority behind his statement to express a God given truth (1 Timothy 2:12-14^{xv}).

I believe that in saying women should be silent in the church, Paul is also referring to teaching or preaching to the entire congregation, which are more authoritative gifts. In another passage, Paul asks the older women to teach the younger women (Titus 2:4^{xvi}). He instructs that men be appointed as elders (1 Timothy 3:2^{xvii}). Paul has already laid out the roles of authority in chapter eleven (11:3^{xviii}).

Why would it be shameful for a woman to speak in church? Because woman is subject to man (Genesis 3:16^{xix}). It reminds us of the fall, when Eve took the authority from Adam and led him into a choice that caused every pain and suffering since, including the death of the Messiah for the sins of mankind. When a woman takes the authority in a church over man, we should be reminded of the fall. She is saying I will be like Eve and step out of the order of creation.

Taking the whole passage into account it seems that the situation was that women commenting or questioning their husband across the room was interrupting the worship service. However, Paul's point about being in submission also tells us that some women were trying be authoritative. It was a trend at the time in the secular world of Corinth.

This does not mean that women are any less valuable than men. It does mean that God has given us different roles. In our present culture women are increasingly taking the lead. Paul is telling us that will not end well. Look at all the women running for higher offices. It is not that women cannot do a better job than man in many cases. That is not

the reasoning. It is that it is not God's design. He designed us with complementary roles in mind. We need one another to be complete.

Of course, when there is not godly man to take the lead, a woman must fill in the gap until one comes along who is willing. Deborah in the Old Testament is an example of that (Judges 4:4^{xx},8^{xxi}). Women can have all kinds of roles in the church including to speak an inspired word (prophecy), lead music, share testimonies, pray, teach the children and women's groups, but the role of elder is assigned to men. Men must step up and learn God's Word, submit themselves to God and learn to be led by the Holy Spirit. Then they can lead by being the servant of all (Matthew 23:11,12^{xxii}).

In this discussion of male leadership, we forget that what we are talking about is not just deciding spiritual matters and directing, but even more importantly and time consuming is to be serving the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3^{xxiii}). That is really all shepherds do. They direct the flock to safe pastures, care for wounds, guard them against poisonous weeds, care for the young. It is all serving to see that the flock is safe and healthy. If there is no man who has so dedicated himself, a woman must fill the role. When that is the case, it is a shame to the men of that community and their lack of dedication to God and His Word. Rise up men of God and be who God has called you to be in your home and in the church, by serving in love. **It is a shame for women to refuse to submit to godly leadership and order, and it is a shame for men to not submit to God and be the servant leader God has called them to be.**

It sounds like they had the same issues in Corinth that the church is dealing with today, outspoken women who insisted that it was old fashioned for leadership to be a male role. Paul said in 33b that all the churches agreed with this practice, only Corinth insisted it change. They were acting as if they were the authorities, when it was Paul who brought them the Word. He is the apostle appointed by God to share the direction of the Holy Spirit.

I realize most churches have abandoned this concept along with many other Scriptural instructions. We are a Bible church. We are of the 20% of Americans who still believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. One pastor asked me what I had against women pastors. I replied, "The Word of God!" He did not have a response. Those who argue this Biblical truth imply that we are denigrating women. Not in the least! We just recognize that male and female are given different but equally important roles according to the design of God. I heard one godly woman say, "My husband is the head, but I am the neck that turns the head." Well, as long that is in united agreement as to which way the head should turn, that is fine. We men need the women's input, but then we must pray, and do as we believe the Lord is leading us regarding decisions that have eternal consequences. (Consider 1 Corinthians 7:33,34^{xxiv}.)

In the previous chapter we saw that love does not insist on its own way (13:5^{xxv}). That is a good rule for husband and wife to live by, as long as the woman is the helpmeet as she was designed to be, and the man leads in love and service as the Holy Spirit directs him (Genesis 2:18^{xxvi}; Ephesians 5:33^{xxvii}). I realize this is rare, but it is God's plan for a happy and healthy marriage. It should be the normal Christian marriage.

³⁶ Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 14:36,37 These verses ask questions few churches today are willing to answer. He has said that God's

design is for the wife to be in submission to her husband. Then he asks regarding all these guidelines he has brought up, if those who disagree are the apostle from whom the Word of God came. Opinions must have been just as strong then as they are now. That question and the following declaration should clearly put an end to this current argument that Paul's instruction regarding women was merely a cultural issue and that of whole congregations praying in tongues at the same time.

³⁸ *If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.* 1 Corinthians 14:38 This is as strong as Paul could state it. He is saying that those who do not accept what he has outlined in this chapter should not be listened to. And to think I once thought the early church was so full of the Spirit that they did not have these personal conflicts. Ha!

³⁹ *So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.* ⁴⁰ *But all things should be done decently and in order.* 1 Corinthians 14:39,40 The closing verses review two of the main points. I have emphasized a woman's role in worship because it is such an issue in the church today. But Paul's emphasis is that we earnestly desire to prophesy as it builds up the body. At the same time, don't forbid people to speak in tongues, which is of course in a decent and orderly fashion. We have both extremes in the church today. In some churches everyone is speaking in tongues at once and other churches forbidding tongues even with an interpretation.

Verse 40 is Paul's summary statement. Decency and order should be the description of the way the church functions even when there is freedom in the Spirit and many participants. When a service is indecent and disorderly, the Spirit will be quenched, and the body will not be built up.

As we have seen in previous messages, the gifts of the Spirit have not ceased. We are to desire the gifts that build up one another. God's goal is that we mature into Christlikeness, and the exercise of all the gifts as we gather to worship is one of the main ways in which we are spiritually matured.

The point of this chapter has been to bring order to the worship service so that the body might be encouraged and strengthened. We need to hear from God when we gather. We need to share our hearts of praise and worship for all God's goodness. We need to be edified before we go out and face the world for the rest of the week. Because that is the case, I would encourage everyone who can to attend at least one small group meeting a week for the same reasons even if you have to do so on zoom. Paul is stressing the need to respect and serve one another in love so that we all might grow in Christlikeness. We all have a part to play for the glory of God.

Questions:

- 1 What problem is Paul addressing?
- 2 How does it apply to us today?
- 3 Why is worshiping together so important?
- 4 What was the guideline for tongues? For prophecy?
- 5 What Law is Paul citing in verse 24?
- 6 In what other Scriptures does Paul make this point?
- 7 What is a shame for women? For a man?
- 8 What are the two points Paul emphasized?
- 9 What is Paul's summary statement?
- 10 What is your part in building one another up?

ⁱ **Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

ⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 14:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{iv} **Ephesians 4:11-16 (ESV)**

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

^v **1 Corinthians 14:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.

^{vi} **1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

^{vii} **Luke 16:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

^{viii} **Acts 17:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

^{ix} **Romans 8:2 (ESV)**

² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

^x **Genesis 3:6** when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he

^{xi} **1 Corinthians 11:8-11 (ESV)**

⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;

^{xii} **Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

^{xiii} **Joel 2:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

^{xiv} **Acts 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ ““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, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

^{xv} **1 Timothy 2:12-14 (ESV)**

¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve;

¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

^{xvi} **Titus 2:4 (ESV)**

⁴ and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,

^{xvii} **1 Timothy 3:2 (ESV)**

² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

^{xviii} But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ^{xviii}

^{xix} **Genesis 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

^{xx} **Judges 4:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

^{xxi} **Judges 4:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."

^{xxii} **Matthew 23:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

^{xxiii} **1 Peter 5:1-3 (ESV)**

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

^{xxiv} **1 Corinthians 7:33,34** ³³ But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

^{xxv} **1 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

^{xxvi} **Genesis 2:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

^{xxvii} **Ephesians 5:33 (ESV)**

³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.