

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

ORDER IN WORSHIP: STRUCTURE

10



WEEK 10

Order in Worship: Structure

This passage concludes the discussion on proper behavior and order in the church's gatherings. The principle is one of balance. Paul writes, "each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation" (verse 26b). The principle here is apparently that of participation. Everybody has something to bring. Reading 1 Corinthians 14, a form of worship where one person "performs" while the congregation only "observes" cannot be justified.

However, there is a balancing principle of order. The speaking must be "one at a time" (verse 27b) and made understandable by all. What drives this balance? Paul commands that "...Everything must be done so that the church may be built up" (verse 26c). The goal is for the church to be built up in Christ and strengthened in faith, hope, and love. If the gifts of every member are not activated, the church misses out. If it is chaotic and difficult for an individual to be heard, the church misses out. Therefore, the goal of those organizing worship services should be to create ordered space for members to serve and encourage the body.

Verses 34-38 are some of the most difficult verses in all of Paul's writings. In isolation, this passage seems to be an absolute command for women not to speak in the church gathering. This is quite problematic because, earlier in his letter, Paul gives instructions on how women should pray and prophesy in the assembly. Apparently, it is not all speech but a particular kind of speech, or at a particular time. Two options stand out. The word "woman" can also be translated "wife." Paul encourages the "women" to wait until they are home to discuss with their husbands. The situation he is addressing may be one of a marital disagreement breaking out in the church after a husband speaks. He could be saying, "This is shameful and awkward for a husband and wife to have a public fight."

- 01 1 Corinthians 14:26-31
- 02 1 Corinthians 14:32-40
- 03 Ephesians 5:15-20
- 04 James 3:13-18
- 05 Ephesians 4:11-13
- 06 Philippians 1:27
- 07 1 Timothy 3:14-15

Another option is that he is specifically addressing the work brought up in verses 29-33 of weighing the words spoken and ordering them. Someone is doing this work of assessing what is said and giving people permission to speak in an orderly way. Presumably, this would be the work of the elders. So, Paul could be saying it is the work of the male elders to structure the service.

Whatever the conclusion, the main point of this passage is that worship gatherings should be structured in a way that maximizes the encouragement of the church through the orderly use of gifts.

GOOD ORDER IN WORSHIP

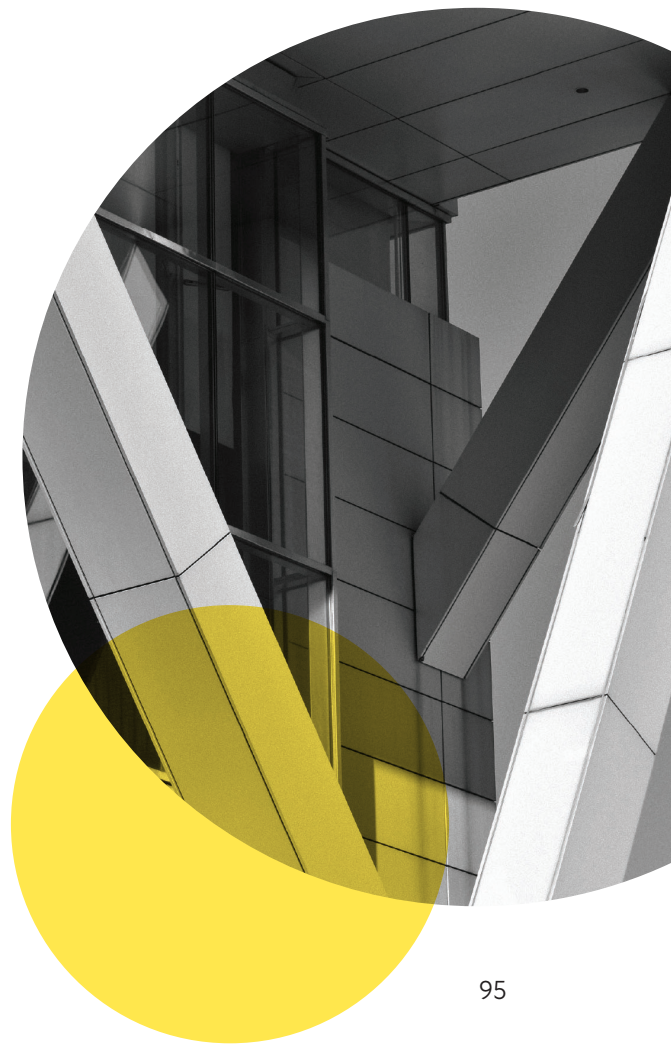
What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

²⁹ Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰ And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹ For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. ³⁸ But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

³⁹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.



WARM UP

What is one of the most memorable church (or religious) services you have ever experienced? What was so special about it?

What part(s) of worship services do you look forward to most? Are there any that you dread?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-40

Paul continues to write to the church in Corinth about orderly worship practices. Worship gatherings were undoubtedly very different in Paul's day from what we experience today. How might we be relevant or sensitive to the culture without compromising scripture?

Paul gives direction for specific practices of the day in verses 26-33, but his summary in verse 33 seems to address a central issue the church was experiencing—disorder. Their behavior in the worship gathering was to be regulated by the church's leadership to maintain order. What would it be like to attend a church with no order, structure, or leadership? What if a service included several people talking over one another (likely a problem in the Corinthian church)?

In verses 34-35, Paul makes a statement often taken to extremes by those on both ends of the spectrum. Context is key to understanding this passage. Paul is focusing on the duty of men, serving as church leaders, to evaluate the validity of prophecies shared during worship gatherings. But remember that in 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul indicates that women can prophesy in church gatherings. The idea of him saying that all women are silenced in every way would be inconsistent with other passages where women are not prohibited from speaking. It is also possible that Paul is referring to women whose husbands were present in those services. In previous verses, Paul has sequentially addressed speaking in tongues and their interpretation, followed by prophecy and its evaluation. He is not saying that women are to never have a voice in worship gatherings. However, they are not to take on the authority and responsibility of assessing the legitimacy of prophecies, which have been assigned to the male leaders of the Corinthian church. As in Chapter 11, Paul's aim is not to undermine equality of personhood but to define the distinct roles of leadership within the church. How do we best maintain order in church gatherings? How important is it to have confidence in church leadership?

Paul asks two pointed questions in verse 36. What do you think he meant by this? In verses 36-38, was he telling them to submit to God's truth in this matter? Do you think he expected opposition to his instructions?

How does Paul summarize these thoughts in verse 40 regarding his hope for the Corinthian church?

APPLICATION

Consider your calling and giftedness. How can you better contribute to the order and structure of your church so that newcomers feel welcome and not confused?

THINK

Healthy church members lead to healthy churches. What characteristics make for healthy church members? List at least 3 or 4.

PRAYER

Ask your group for prayer over any area you believe is keeping you from serving Christ with your whole heart.