

1 Corinthians 14:20-40

“Order In The Church”

Today we come to the conclusion of this section that we've been looking *into* and learning *from* since we entered into Ch 11 regarding proper order in the church. The Corinthian church was a church that seemed to be out of control on so many different levels. and So Paul has been addressing them and dealing *with* them so that they might get grounded and oriented as to the way that the corporate gathering of the body of Christ is to function.

So he's spoken to them about God's ordained order of authority, he's spoken of how the Lord's supper is to be observed reverently, and with a sensitivity to the needs of others, rather than taking that opportunity to indulge ourselves. (You recall there were people getting drunk and pigging out at their love feast while others had virtually nothing and then they'd end the evening by seeking to observe the Lord's supper while previously defying everything it stood for.) He's spoken of the error in comparing ourselves amongst ourselves, seeing certain gifts of the Spirit as super spiritual and others as virtually nonessential. The fact is that God has a plan for my life, a purpose for your life and He will gift you, and gift me accordingly in order to fulfill His will in me, and in you. and Even as every member of my body is needed for me to function as I was intended, so to in the body of Christ; there is no “nonessential” member. We all need each other, are benefited and blessed by one another as we simply submit *to* the work rather than kick *against* the work that God wants to do in us.

and Of course the key ingredient in *any* work going on in and/or through our lives is what? The Agape love of God flowing into and out through us, apart from love it doesn't matter how spiritual I may seem, how magnanimous the work may be it will count for nothing regarding eternity if I have not love. Therefore the primary pursuit of the Christian life isn't the various gifts of God, but rather the *love* of God, we're to *desire* spiritual gifts, they're good, pray *for* them, yearn to *get* them. But we're to *pursue*, that is we're to make it our chief aim, and see to it that our main goal is to obtain and acquire God's love, apart from love I'm nothing.

Today we continue on in the context of the comparison between tongues and prophecy. You remember that Corinthian's were all about tongues; to them that was the “be all, end all” gift of the Spirit. and Paul has been seeking to set that perspective in its proper place, and he tells them that tongues are a great gift (no doubt) but prophecy is greater. Because he who speaks in a tongue speaks to God, edifies himself, he who prophesies speaks to man and edifies the body. and If you weren't here last week I'd encourage you to pick up that tape or Cd because we just don't have the time to review all the details that explain what's happening with respect to tongues and prophecy, how it is that they apply to the body. But as Paul continues on here he adds to the equation the non-believer. and Again he's not on an “anti-tongues” campaign; he said he spoke in tongues more than any of them ever dreamed of. But that when it comes to the corporate gathering of the body of Christ, what is essential is edification which comes through *understanding*. 5 Words spoken with understanding will do you infinitesimally greater than 10,000 words spoken that you don't understand. Now Paul goes on to say, not only is prophecy greater when it comes to *edifying* the saved, but it's greater when it comes to *evangelizing* the lost.

Vs20

So he's saying, "You guys really need to be getting this, you need to understand the priority and the point of it."

Now there are certain things that it's ok, even encouraged that you be immature in, however *understanding* is not one of them. That is, the way you think, how you perceive things, it's critical that you and I be mature in our mindset. You see there's a big different in being "childlike" which Jesus tells us to be, and being "childish" which is how the Corinthians have been acting toward each other. **When it comes to looking to the Lord, trusting in the Lord to take care of you, meet your needs, guide your way, hey, you and I should trust Him with the simplicity of a child. Think of your kids (or kids in general) they don't worry about if the bills are going to be paid. They don't sweat where they're going to sleep tonight, or where groceries are coming from. Oh you may worry now and then, but to them the fridge is like a magic food box, food just keeps coming and coming, every time they open it there's something to grab. They just trust provision is there for them, when it comes to our relationship with the Lord, we should trust Him the same. Remember He said, "...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."** Matt 6:31-33 **You see if I being sin tainted, and basically self-seeking have it in my heart to provide for my kids, how much more does my heavenly Father have it in His heart to take care of His kids?**

Paul says here that child like tendencies can be good in the right arena, but understanding isn't one of them. In malice (that is in evil, or cruelty, or wickedness) it's good, even encouraged to be immature in those areas. Don't be wise concerning wickedness; don't grow by experience to realize the inner workings of evil or wickedness, steer clear of those things. It's best just to be clueless regarding wickedness and malice. But in understanding we're to be mature, or perfect, that is well rounded and complete. To the Romans Paul put it like this, "...I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil." Rom 16:19 and Obviously wisdom in what is good, maturity in our mindset comes from studying, taking it, meditating and contemplating on the Word of God. The Psalmist said, "*I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation.*" Ps 119:99 **I think that herein lies a huge key in allowing that transition being made from my head to my heart. When I read God's Word it's automatically placed in my head, but it seems that as I meditate on God's Word, really think through it and chew on it that the transition is made from my head into my heart. Don't be children, childish when it comes to understanding, have a mature mindset formed and fashioned through the study of God's Word.**

Vs21-22

Now I have to humble myself before you here and confess that right after Paul makes this statement about how critical it is to be mature when it comes to understanding he turns around and makes this statement that for me serves to be one of the most problematic and difficult to understand passages in all of the NT. and Not just because he says that tongues are a sign to the unbeliever, if it stopped there we could easily track, but lets keep moving for a moment and then we'll come back to the issue.

Vs23-25

Were you able to dissect the difficulty here? In Vs 21-22 he says that tongues are a sign to unbelievers and prophecy for believers. Then in Vs 23-25 he seems to say just the opposite when he says the non-believer being privy to hearing you speak in tongues will think you're insane, but if he hears prophecy he'll fall to his knees in his own heart and confess that God is truly among you. and We go, "Riddle me this, which is it?" and I'm going to tell you that I prayed over this and probed the scriptures concerning it, listened to other studies and read various commentaries and for all that I'm still not certain regarding the exact intent Paul is implying here.

A respected translator J.B. Phillips thought that perhaps there was a copyist error in Vs 22 and that the reason it seems backwards is because the copyist made a mistake when recording the passage. and When you hand write such an extensive text I suppose that's possible but I'm not certain I'm with him on that.

Because the context allows for it's rendering to say exactly what it does. You see there in Vs 21 Paul is quoting from Isaiah 28 (Vs 11-12) whereby Isaiah was pronouncing judgment upon unbelieving Israel. He was exhorting the priest to teach the people line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little there a little and the people wouldn't receive it. They were all partying and getting drunk (including the priests). God was seeking to communicate to them in their own language through the prophets but they wouldn't listen. and So God told them that since they wouldn't hear Him in Hebrew (basically) that His judgment would be rendered through a people whose language they didn't understand, He was raising up there Assyrians (a people with stammering lips and another tongue) to invade them and take them into captivity. It would be a sign to them in their unbelief, but here's the deal, it wasn't a *good* sign, it was a sign of judgment.

and So there are those who take this to mean that tongues is meant to be a sign to unbelieving Israel that God is at work through another nation, that His judgment has fallen temporarily upon them reminiscent of the days that the Assyrians took them captive (meaning that God is working through another people to accomplish His purpose). Again I'm not sure that that's what Paul is getting at here.

There are those who think that tongues are a sign of judgment to the unbelievers who hear in that it testifies to them that they don't understand the things of the Spirit. You know the bible says, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*" 1 Cor 1:18 So that when someone who is a nonbeliever here's someone speak in tongues and they say, "You are out of your mind" it testifies against them that they're in a position that falls under God's judgment apart from repentance. You know it's that whole, "...*the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" 1 Cor 2:14 So there are those who take that position with this Vs.

Still others in following the flow of what Paul has been saying with respect to it's better to speak with understanding in the body than with tongues and then quoting this Vs is seeking to warn the Corinthians that it's not healthy when they don't want to hear the Word of God in a language that they understand and instead place emphasis on a language *they don't* understand because it's not healthy for their growth and development into maturity.

It wasn't good when the Jews had to hear the tongues of another people, it meant that they wouldn't hear what God was saying to them straight, so He had to resort to other means.

and Here's the deal, I'm not prepared to place my stake on the ground of any particular position just yet except to say that *whatever* sign he's referencing here (with regards to tongues and unbelievers) it's clear that it's not a *good* sign. *When a non-believer witnesses a strange tongue it's not generally a good thing that comes of it. Even in the natural, if you've ever been in another country, or surrounded by people that speak a language that you don't understand, it's quite humbling, disorienting to a degree, quite confusing, you're like a fish out of water. How much more when you add the spiritual dynamic?*

You say, "Well what about Acts Ch 2 when all the disciples spoke in tongues and yet 3,000 got saved?" Well let's consider that for a moment, it's true that about 120 people spoke in tongues with no interpreter that day. and It's true that about 3,000 people got saved.

However is it true that they got saved through what was being spoken in tongues? No, people were saved when Peter ceased speaking in tongues, spoke to them words of edification, exhortation and comfort as he presented to them the gospel in the common language of the day. When people just heard them speaking in tongues they thought they were drunk, out of their minds. But prophecy didn't confuse them, it cleared the matter up for them. So prophecy isn't only good for the believer, it can radically impact the unbeliever as well.

Vs23

I think we can all bear witness to that reality, tongues not properly regulated can be confusing and confounding even for the believer, how much more the non-believer?

Vs24-25

What's the bottom line? Tongues have the tendency (when publicly exercised) to be confusing and confounding, prophecy has the tendency to be convicting and convincing. So that be it the believer, or the unbeliever, in edifying or evangelizing prophecy is more advantageous in the corporate setting than is tongues. We've mentioned this recently but it's not an altogether uncommon thing to be ministering in a corporate setting like this and perhaps have an unbelieving friend sitting beside you and suddenly illustrations or topics come up that begin to describe a situation or circumstance in their life. and They think you've set them up, you told me they were coming and what I should say to them, all I'm doing is seeking to minister to the body of Christ, but God is making Himself real to them in a convicting convincing way. So Paul is saying that a surefire way to be confusing is to exercise tongues, but a surefire way to be convincing/convicting is to have the gift of prophecy at work in our midst.

Vs26

Now there are a couple of things that we should note here. 1st of all in the day Paul was writing this it would be very uncommon for believers to gather in an assembly like we are today. Occasionally they may rent a hall, but by and large it was in home groups that they met. and It would be difficult to fit more than say 10/max 15 people in a given home. So the church in Corinth would meet in homes throughout the city. Not that that's better or worse, but out of necessity that's what they did.

So it was generally a more intimate gathering, a little less formal so to speak. But being less formal had a tendency to lead to disorganized chaos, everyone had something to say, or something to add to the service. Now that's not what Paul had a problem with, it wasn't the protocol, it was the approach, it was random chaos. Can I say that I think the protocol is something that in the church today has been largely lost. and What I mean by that is this. None of them came with the simple mindset of passively receiving, but everyone of them had purposed in their heart to contribute to the gathering in some way. Now again in a little bit larger gathering even like this it's just not conducive to good stewardship with our time to have everyone share something, we'd be here all day. **But in a home group, or smaller group gatherings interaction in this way is encouraged.** The problem was that there was no real order to the meeting, that's what Paul is getting at. He says, "The gifts are flowing that's good, an edifying environment is not, that's bad." I shouldn't seek to contribute in a way that exalts me, or makes me out to be super spiritual, but rather in a way that encourages and builds up the others present, I don't need the spotlight or to take center stage to bless the body of Christ.

But I like the mentality of having the frame of heart and mind to come to the gathering in order to contribute in some way. Everyone may not be able to stand up and share, but everyone can minister to someone in some way. What a wonderful thing if our church family made a practice of showing up 15 min early for church, and staying for 20-30 after church. and Your entire objective was to bless someone, in some way. **Someone comes in looking down, and a whole handful of you are wrestling over who gets to go pray for them. "I saw them 1st, no I saw them 1st!"** Or simply engaging in godly conversation, giving God praise for His goodness, interacting with the body in a manner that's edifying, what a glorious thing. So often we want to be the last in, and the 1st out, we get what we can out of it and split. How much better to add what we can to it rather than just get what we can out of it? After service just speaking to someone about the way God was ministering to you, finding out what He's been speaking to them, you'll find it to be some of the most powerful times of our gathering. Doing what we do for edification.

Now Paul brings in orderly regulation with respect to tongues *and* prophecy.

Vs27-30

In other words as great as the gifts are, they're not to be the central focus of our time spent together. Our time should revolve primarily around the *word* of God, and the *worship* of God. That's why he says only 2 in a given meeting, at the most 3, and with regard to tongues if there's no interpreter keep silent, simply speak between yourself and God silently. It's not a matter of if tongues are appropriate in church, they are. It's a matter of if it's appropriate to speak out in the midst of a service, it's not. and When the service is given to that occasion, it's to be regulated and if someone speaks out and there's no interpreter present, than that gift isn't to be operated anymore publicly in that setting specifically. If you feel led after that to speak in tongues just do so silently to yourself and to God. and So it's underscored again, even it being a sign to man, the message isn't to man it's prayer, praise, or appreciation to God.

Regarding prophecy again only 2, at the most 3 in a service and don't interrupt each other (and that goes for tongues as well, each in turn) if God lays something on your heart, just hold silent until the opportunity to speak with out interrupting someone else presents itself. and It's never appropriate to interrupt a teaching like this because it's inconsistent for God to interrupt Himself in speaking to His people.

Vs 31

So this the goal of the gifts and of the time spent seeking the Lord together, that all may learn and be encouraged. It's not to see various gifts in operation, it's to learn, and be encouraged by the Lord. The gifts are simply to serve as one means to that end, the goal of our gatherings is to learn and be encouraged.

Vs32

Again he's regulating order. The Holy Spirit doesn't force you to do something beyond your control. Often times because of the way people have seen the abuse of the gifts they're fearful of giving themselves entirely to the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives for fear of doing some weird or obnoxious thing all out of control. Paul is telling us that that's not the way the Holy Spirit works. So if you ever see that happening rest assured that person isn't being led of the Holy Spirit to act out in that way. **They may be emotionally overwhelmed, but the Holy Spirit unlike a demonic spirit will not force you beyond your will, or cause you to act out in an absurd, obnoxious or weird way. The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet, or another way understand that you can control yourself when exercising the gifts of the Spirit.**

If someone else is speaking sit silent until they're finished, then you can speak out if the environment is appropriate for that.

Vs33

Now that doesn't mean that God will always operate in a way that we're comfortable with, in our own little box. But it does mean that there won't be an atmosphere of weirdness or confusion when God is moving, God doesn't author confusion, or instability, but rather peace. Jesus isn't the Prince of pandemonium, He's the Prince of Peace.

Vs34-35

Now it's critical that we keep the overall context of the letter with this. We know Paul isn't saying that women can't have an active role in the church body. In Ch 11 he spoke of women praying, of women prophesying, we know that the scriptures make allowance for women to fulfill virtually every role with in the church except for the role of the elder, or the Pastor/teacher of the body. **We realize that the woman is not to have authority over the man in that way as it pertains to the body of Christ. In the secular arena the sky is the limit, in the church and in the home God has ordained the man to lead and be accountable for those things.**

So when he's speaking about women keeping silent, it seems to me that the reference is back to Vs 29 with regard to judging prophecies. He's saying when it comes to making decisions with regard to God speaking to the church corporately, judging the word of prophecy, leave that to the leadership of the church. **If one of the gals has a problem with the way something went down, let them inquire of that at home with their husband, not all out loud in the general forum. and Again the overall overtone is that of keeping the environment orderly, not disruptive or distracting.**

Even as in Ch 11 we spoke of the proper covering for women under their husbands so to here, he's saying, "Don't try to take over, let your husband be your spiritual leader, if he's uncertain he can ask the leadership and get back with you but don't try to circumvent the God ordained structure as it pertains to godly order.

Vs36-38

Paul is simply doing some preventative maintenance here, he envisions the would be prophet there standing up and saying something to the effect of, "Thus says the Lord, the word of Paul is the word of man," and seeking to usurp and undermine his authority and God's desire for proper order. and So he says, "Hey if there's anyone among you who thinks he's a prophet, or is spiritual, ask him and he'll tell you that what I'm saying isn't from man it's from God." Kind of pigeonholing them into agreeing with him, but he says, "If anyone is ignorant, then ignorant is what he is." Or another way to understand this, "If they won't acknowledge this, than they're not to be acknowledged." If someone claims to be spiritual yet they don't acknowledge or adhere to God's revealed word, than they're not to be acknowledged or adhered to.

Vs39-40

So realize the greater overall benefit of prophecy, desire earnestly to prophesy, but if carefully regulated don't forbid the gift of tongues. It can all be done, but it needs to be decently and in order. and Therein lies the balance, our Baptist friends have the "Decent and in order" down great. Our Pentecostal friends are good with the, "Let all things be done." But we need the balance of both, we don't want to have the solid stable order of a corpse, yet we don't want to be with out structure, or have spiritual epilepsy just writhing about out of control. We want the biblical balance, godly order in the church, so we study God's Word that we might be mature in our understanding, learning and being encouraged that all things might be done for edification, the building up of one another.

Prayer Points:

God give us the balance, we want to be alive with Your Spirit freely coursing through us, having Your way in us, yet we realize that You desire order, structure and balance. So help us to strike that balance that You might be magnified and Your body might be edified in this place. That as we gather we might learn and be encouraged by Your Word, the moving of Your Spirit, and Lord help us to grow in our understanding, that we might Have Your mindset through the meditation and contemplation of Your Word. and God we praise You that You're the author *not* of confusion, but of peace.

God wants to give you His peace today, the peace that comes only from His forgiveness, you can know peace *with* God and have the peace *of* God ruling in your heart. But only by faith in Jesus Christ, why not open your heart to Jesus today? He became sin for us upon the cross, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He'll give you His forgiveness, His righteousness, His peace, all you have to do is give Him...your heart.