

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

**Title:** How to Run a Good Church Service

**Truth:** Church worship must be done in an orderly fashion to please God.

**Date/Location:** Sunday February 21, 2021 at FBC

## Introduction

Where does our church bulletin order of service come from? Is it in the Bible? Not exactly! But the idea is found in this passage of Scripture. Order in worship does not have to be completely scripted, nor is the order specified exactly in the Bible. But there must be a plan and ordered arrangement so that the service truly pleases the Lord. What was happening in Corinth was not orderly. It was confused and chaotic. There was simply too many things happening in the service—some right and some even wrong—for it to serve the purpose for which God designed the church.

### I. Order in the Church, v. 26-33

- A. Situation: Everyone had something to say. Many were trying to speak, and evidently it was chaotic because they were speaking at the same time! There were psalms, doctrines, tongues, new revelations, and interpretations of a tongue or perhaps of a prior revelation.
- B. Guiding principle: everything for edification. This statement is a rebuke. What they were doing was *not* edifying and it needed to change immediately.

We grant that the worship service is meant to worship God, but that is not *all* it is intended to accomplish. It is intended to produce edification in the believers, and hopefully faith in those visiting (14:24-25).

Remember, **edification** is the building up and strengthening of believers. It partners with the term **profit** from verse 6 which refers to assistance, aid, or benefit with a special focus on spiritual growth.

Obviously the context of “all things” is the church...at work your purpose is to do your job and at home your job is to keep the home and at school your job is to learn, not specifically edification...but we should think about just how wide we can cast the edification principle at work and home and school also.

- C. Through Paul, God reveals limitations on the use of spiritual gifts. Paul starts by putting fences around the gift of tongues (v. 27):

1. The number of tongues-speakers is limited to two or at most three. The fact that Paul is limiting it to two or three speakers each implies that before the limitation, they may have been six or 12 people speaking in the church, and many at the same time. One problem: the congregation cannot process multiple people speaking at one time. The church would be overwhelmed to try to keep in mind everything that was going on in the service. There must be a cohesiveness to the service, which is done using by fewer speakers instead of more. More causes confusion.
  2. Those ministering in the church must speak one at a time. Verse 27 says “each in turn” and verse 31 says “one by one.” The people were to minister one at a time, not several at the same time. No edification could possibly occur with multiple simultaneous speakers.
  3. Someone must interpret if a tongue is spoken.
  4. If there is no interpreter, then it is not appropriate to speak in tongues (v. 28). There is no exception to this rule. Instead, the person must keep silent in the church (not speak to the church body). Note this phrase “keep silent in the church” and keep it in mind for an upcoming verse. The word means to say nothing, to keep still, to close the mouth. As a concession, Paul says that he may speak to himself and to God. If someone were to ask me if they should do this, I would have to explain that tongues are not given today and show them how they are misunderstanding.
- D. The same sort of limitations apply to the gift of prophecy (v. 29). Two or three are permitted to speak. The rest of the church is to listen carefully. In this case, in place of interpretation of the tongue, Paul says, “let the others judge.” No translation is needed because it is in the same language. *Judge* here means to discern, distinguish between right and wrong, to ascertain if what is said is right and true and agreeable to the rest of Scripture.

For us, that simply means comparing what is said with the content of Scripture. In that earlier era, it was a bit harder in the sense that the Bible was incomplete, so there were some genuinely new concepts that were brought to the church’s attention. Most of those were from the mouths of the apostles, however, which helped verify that what was said was true. Then again, there were “false apostles” going around, and pre-existing false doctrines being pushed by society. The need for the mental “heavy lifting” is always present. Paying attention is the first rule of such spiritual weightlifting. Thinking is the second rule.

- E. There seems to be a situation where a new bit of revelation might come to the attention of one of the church members. If so, then the others are to keep silent so that all can learn and be encouraged.

Note that by the time Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus, he gives no instruction about the prophetic and tongue gifts. It appears that as the NT was nearing completion, these gifts died off during Paul's lifetime. 1 Timothy 3:15 indicates Paul is teaching Timothy how to "conduct yourself in the house of God..." yet there is no instruction on new prophetic revelation or tongues. This is interesting. Paul was dealing with a very specific, time-limited problem in Corinth here. We do, however, pick up timeless principles from it. One of those is given next in v. 32.

- F. Self-control, v. 32. the prophets control themselves. They are not going wild with prophetic utterances or gibberish tongues. Their own spirits are subject to themselves. That is, they are in good control of their faculties and are sober-minded. (I don't mean as opposed to drunk; rather, they are settled, calm, orderly, truthful, etc.) Otherwise, they give evidence that they are not from God, because God is the author of peace, not confusion. If there is a hub-bub going on, you know it is not from the Lord.

It is same in church today—as in all of life—self-control is a critical virtue.

- G. These principles apply to ALL the churches. If it is a Christian church, these principles apply to them, at all times, in all nations, among all Christians in all cultures.

## **II. Role of Women in the Church, v. 34-35**

- A. These verses are particularly unpopular today. Read them carefully and take them plainly. They mean what they say. And, in coordination with the above, these principles are always applicable in all churches. They do not pass out of vogue like last year's style in clothing, nor do they change because academia has decided that feminism is the moral order of the day.
- B. Women are commanded to keep silent in the churches. Notice the plural "churches." Notice also the parallel to the command for those who are tongues-speakers who were to keep silent if there were no interpreter around to translate what he was saying. It is the same verb and both are in an imperative mood, present active. I take it then that it means the same thing. It does not mean "really be quiet" in verse 28 and then "optionally be quiet in verse 34!

C. What verse 34 **does not** mean: total silence from the time a woman enters the church doors until the time she leaves. That seems obvious. Paul is talking about the worship service of the church—several people talking in tongues or giving prophecies, others listening and discerning what is being said, interpreting of a message given by another person, etc. Silence does not apply during the pre-service greeting time or post-service fellowship or between-service chatter.

D. What this **does** mean:

1. Verse 34 means that a woman is not to teach or address the assembly with a tongue or prophecy or a Bible teaching. Correlate this with 1 Tim. 2:12-14. **She is not to lead.** Leading in service is the heart of the matter. That is reserved for the men of the church. In fact, it is shameful (disgraceful) for a woman to speak out in the church service.

In other words, this means that all churches that have women pastors or women teaching men or leading the worship or administration of the church are in a shameful situation. Notice again it is God's word saying this, (note v. 37 especially). It is not *me* saying it. I do not have an interest in how it is supposed to be done one way or the other—I just want to follow God's Word. If God said men could *not* lead services, then I would have to obey that. But He said this.

Certainly the men ought to be ashamed of themselves as they sit around and let the women lead. What are they doing?

2. Verse 34 means that a woman is to take upon herself a submissive attitude. This principle correlates with the writings of Moses (See Genesis 3:16 and notice the general tenor of the entire Law, which shows very few examples of women leading and no instruction toward that end.) A woman should feel serious hesitancy to speak out unless requested to do so, as when we ask for prayer requests or prayer.

**Remember** 1 Corinthians 11:13 where Paul spoke of a woman praying with her head covered. We see therefore that prayer in a corporate context was permissible for women, under the rubrics discussed above. In *our* prayer meetings, similarly, there is a difference between a woman praying and a woman getting up and teaching. The first happens regularly; the second never does. This is not to say that women cannot be good teachers; but God assigns them a different role: in teaching younger women and children, and in the home.

3. Verse 35 means that a woman should not raise up her voice to ask a question during the church service. The idea of a question is that of an inquiry meant to truly learn something, not to prove a point or correct the teacher. Second, questions are to be directed toward one's husband. Notice that it does not say "wait until the service is over and ask the pastor." It says to ask your husband!

What if you do not have a husband? Go to your Christian father or brother. If not, then some arrangement must be made for your questions. Perhaps the pastor has asked deacons and their wives to take up that role. Or perhaps, the church is small enough that the pastor can field such questions directly outside of the worship service. This becomes awkward for the pastor at times because he cannot play a substitutionary role for anyone's husband or father or brother. Nor does he wish to contradict a husband or be put in the middle of a situation where there is a conflict between spouses. It is better for husbands and wives to work out those things between themselves unless counsel is required.

Bottom line: **Non-leadership** and **submission** are the main principles for women in the church.

- E. Remember, we are learning what God says in the Bible. We are not learning what the women of society say on the talk shows or in college classrooms. They can say all they want, but that does not guide or direct the conduct of the church. Talk shows and university professors do not guide the life of the church—only the Bible does that!
- F. If there is an un-submissive attitude because "I don't get to pray or ask my question" or "Who does that pastor think he is by teaching this woman-hating stuff?" That is an indication that the person is out of line with the Lord.
- G. Practical application.
  1. What about a woman singing in the church, as does my wife? She has sometimes felt uncomfortable because of this passage of Scripture. As I understand things, she is not violating the "non-leadership" and "submission" principles given in this passage. She is ministering in a submissive way, in an orderly fashion, using a God-given gift, with grace, encouraging fellow believers through the vehicle of music and lyric. I understand that some may object that singing is like teaching (Col. 3:16) and thus some churches may not permit this. But it seems to me that everyone is clear that she is not a co-pastor; she is not teaching from God's word in the pulpit; she is not leading worship or

acting in any kind of leadership role. She is serving by singing or playing the piano, as are the other talented ladies in the church.

2. To the matter of asking of questions...it is sometimes awkward when questions come to me during greeting time at the door (from anyone) because of lack of time for an inadequate answer, or distractions, or lack of privacy, or whatever. Sometimes too, I have fielded questions that are meant to be corrections or criticisms to a message. Such are *definitely* inappropriate—they are not really questions and are not in line with the principles of this passage. This does not say I am not open to correction, but far better to have the husband answer your question or for him to offer it to me later. And I am not entirely closing the door on questions at the door! Just know the limitations of the setting do not allow for always the most complete answers.

After studying this issue—which I have not done before at this depth—I am thinking about it more deeply. Whether at the door, or during the week by email, or during a Q&A session in the church, I wonder what a wife asking a question of the pastor does to the husband who understands *this* passage of Scripture. Suppose he knows that she is supposed to come to him first. Does it honor him for her to go to the pastor first? Has he given his blessing for her to ask the question? Does it undercut the husband's authority? Does it make him look uninformed, immature, and weak in the eyes of the church? I think these are very important questions that must be considered by both husbands and wives. I confess that I have been insensitive to those kinds of issues for years. I have had a zeal to take any and all questions and try to answer them. If that is unmixed with concern for how these other matters appear, then it is not a virtue but a flaw. Instead of answering all the questions, I should have directed you to the proper place to ask the question first. The fact that I *could* answer does not mean that I *should* answer, at least right away.

Said another way, this passage is not about “putting down women.” It is about honoring husbands and elevating them to their proper leadership role. A woman with a husband who leads her spiritually is blessed by God. If you cannot see that, then stop and think about it a while before getting upset and spouting off (James 1:19)!

So, for the next Bible Q&A session on a Sunday night, let us think about these matters. Check with your husband first before asking something. Maybe I should respond when a married woman asks, “What did your husband say to you in answer to that question?” If his

answer was good, then fine. If it could be helpfully fleshed out, so be it. At least the head of the home has been honored.

I do not feel that I can categorically deny any female to ask a question, because there are some who do not have a husband or father to field their questions. Some women do not have believing family, or surviving family in the case of a divorcee or widow. Or, a husband may have given an OK for the wife to ask the question. One of the purposes of a Q&A session is to “cover” those situations.

If your husband is unable to answer your questions, then he can go to the pastor and work through it. Ultimately, he needs to be able to answer your questions. Husbands have a serious responsibility to study up and know the Word. He is the head of house!

### **III. Attitude in the Church, v. 36-38**

- A. In verse 36, Paul is saying that Corinth is not the center of the universe. They are not the origin of the word of God, nor the only recipients. They were not special. Rather, they should conduct themselves like all the other churches.
- B. Individuals in the church who were leaders in the assembly should be acknowledging that what Paul was writing were the commandments of the Lord. In fact, anyone who thinks they are a spiritual person should willingly acknowledge that what Paul was saying are the commandments of Christ. What Paul wrote was what God had him write. Anyone who at that time or presently ignores Paul or puts him down is doing himself a great disservice.

Paul’s writing is just as authoritative as the red letters of Jesus in the gospels, or the words of God in the Law, or the writings of the prophets and psalms. It is God’s word, not man’s word. Let us apply this for a second. A feminist who becomes a Christian has an uphill battle against all that she—or he—has been taught from the world. Make no mistake, she has been taught feminism and it comports with the sinner’s inflated view of herself. A man can also be a feminist and have the same battle. God has ordained things a bit differently than the world wishes them to be, and people who are saved out of the world realize that over the course of time. What authority makes feminism right, anyway?

- C. Anyone who thinks otherwise was ignorant, and Paul was ready to leave them behind. They could continue in that ignorance, but that was not going to hold back Paul and should not distract the church from following the truth.

#### IV. Summary Remarks about Spiritual Gifts and Orderliness, v. 39-40

A. **Summary:** They were to earnestly desire the best type of gift for edification, which was prophecy. They were to permit tongues—for that time.

This verse cannot be used today by continuationists as a club against cessationists to demand the right to speak gibberish in the church.

A **cessationist** is one who believes the miraculous gifts such as healings, tongues, and prophecy have *ceased*.

A **continuationist** believes that the miraculous gifts *continue* in the present day.

Reasons why: 1 Cor. 13:8 in how it describes the completed revelation; the purpose of tongues as a sign to unbelievers; the definition of tongues as real languages, not gibberish; the proper use of tongues in the church is most often not how Charismatics or Pentecostals use them.

B. **Final principle:** Everything must be done decently and in order in the church.

*Decently* means it is appropriate for public consumption. It is becoming of the kind of thing the church is—the dwelling place of God by the Holy Spirit.

*In order* means that it follows proper procedure and protocol. It is in a state of well-regulated conduct (Col. 2:5). The service is a proper sequence of events.

If something does not meet these standards, then it is not to be done in the church. We must not run fundraisers, hawk products in the church, do silly games, or have randomly ordered, “seat of the pants” services or sermons, etc. The church is a place of holiness, not of crude levity; a place of worship, not a social club; a place of learning, not a place of entertainment.

The church is the body of Christ, nothing less. It is worthy of our absolute best—decency, orderliness, use of our special abilities for the Lord, self-control, worship, honor, and submission.

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