

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Corporate Worship and the Gifts

Today we conclude our last discussion involving the spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy. We will look at how they are to be conducted in the worship service. I think this is very important because these biblical guidelines tend to be ignored in a lot of charismatic services. But in saying that here is our struggle: In our church; we don't deal with people speaking in tongues inappropriately or prophesying in church. In fact, you might just look at this next section and go "So what?" Why are we even discussing this issue anyway? How will this help benefit me in my Christian walk? Those are good questions and here is my reply. In order to know God in a deep way you have to know what He values, even if it doesn't seem very important to you. For example, my wife loves receiving cards on special occasions. Now I don't think cards are that big of deal, especially if there is no money inside. That's because my love language is gifts. Now I can ignore Machele's desire for cards because they don't seem very important to me; but that won't do anything to improve our relationship, it will only hinder it. It is the same with God. Ignoring what He cares about will not do anything to better your relationship with Him. When it comes to a worship service, God does care about how they are conducted. Ultimately, He wants to be glorified and He wants us to be edified and this happens when there is order. Let's read verses 26-28. The first issue Paul deals with is having order for those that speak in tongues.

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. Notice here God likes the congregation participating together in the worship service. The more people that get involved the more the worship service is built up. We received a taste of this in our Ash Wednesday service last week. We had multiple people coming up front and reading Scripture. We had a time where people confessed some sin in their life. We had great worship and we read a corporate confession together as a body. In the end the body was built up because the church likes hearing from other people and them getting involved. Whenever we get together it should be for the edification of the body. I think most churches, including us, tend to perform our services in cruise control. We have some worship, we pray for the kids, we have a sermon, and we take communion. I'm convinced we have to leave room for the Holy Spirit to operate. How that plays itself out, I am not quite sure. But it is in the forefront of my mind. Okay, now Paul deals specifically with tongues in a corporate setting. **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.**

I don't think you can be any clearer when it comes to this section. In general:

- a. Two or three people at the most should speak in tongues
- b. It should be done one at a time. In other words, the speakers should take turns
- c. If there is no one to interpret one should keep silent.

One of the things I've noticed in charismatic services is that keeping silent is confused with whispering in tongues so others hear you. They will whisper things like *Tse tat tat tse tse* so that whoever is next to them can hear it. That is not what Paul means. He means to be silent. Pray to God without making audible noise. My wife tells me when I whisper to her in a service, I do it too loud. I don't know how many times she has told me I can't whisper very well. It is the same with folks who whisper in tongues. They can't whisper very good! I've had people pray for me and they have done the whisper thing and it just irritates me and makes me uncomfortable. Without an interpreter talk to God in your spirit. Paul doesn't say whisper, he says keep silent.

Another thing that tends to happen when someone attempts to interpret a tongue is that they confuse interpretation with their gift to prophesy. For example, many times when an interpreter is actually present they tend to interpret tongues like it is a message from God to the congregation. You will hear interpretations like "The Lord wants you all to return to Him." or "He wants you to have more faith." The problem with these interpretations is that the nature of tongues

revolves around what the speaker is saying to God, not what God is saying to the church. Today, most people speaking in tongues are praying to God in a heavenly language. The Holy Spirit is interceding on behalf of the speaker as he talks to God. Usually it consists of intercession or thanksgiving. For example, Paul says in verses 16 and 17. "If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. I think there are people in charismatic churches who confuse the interpretation of tongues with their gift of prophesying, or proclaiming something God has put on their heart for the church. They are two different things so we have to be discerning.

Okay let's see what the Bible says about prophecy.

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 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. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

Here are the guidelines for prophecy. You'll notice some similarities to speaking in tongues.

- a. No more than two or three at a time
- b. Prophesying should be done one at a time
- c. There are prophets or elders who have to evaluate what is being said. In other words, is it from God?
- d. You have to yield if one has a fresh revelation
- e. Ultimately, the speaker is in control

The point that is interesting to me is that Paul says the spirits are subject to the prophets. This is important because there are times when you will hear Charismatics claim that they could not control speaking in tongues or prophesying; it was guided by the Spirit. Paul disproves this point by saying the Spirit is subject to the speaker. That is one reason why if someone is prophesying and another person gets a fresh revelation from God; the first speaker has the ability to stop. The fact that people are to take turns indicates the individual; not the Spirit is in control. God is not a God of confusion but a God of peace.

I remember when this truth was blatantly abused. After a meeting the guest speaker said if anyone wanted to learn how to speak in tongues to show up after the service. Curious, I joined the party. He had everyone line up in a giant huddle and when he gave the word he had them speak in tongues. Now some did; others just kept silent. As folks were speaking in tongues, he began to show the people how they had control of the Spirit. He told them to speak louder. Then he said, I want you to speak even louder. You had people speaking in tongues at the top of their voices. Then he told them to stop. Many people stopped on a dime. Then he had them speak slower in tongues, and then faster. I left that meeting and I thought this doesn't glorify God. It makes a mockery out of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 29, we are told that if someone prophesies we are to weigh what is said. The verb that is used here is the same one that is used when Paul talks about a person distinguishing between spirits. In other words the person that weighs what the prophet says is exercising the gift of discernment. Again this is important because you can't just believe what someone prophesies. The reality is that some people prophesy things that are not of God. In the end, the integrity of the service is at stake. There must be people to guard and shepherd the flock. At Northside, we are not going to allow people to just proclaim that something is from God. Instead we are going to have them meet with the elders to discern if what they say is truly from God. If we all agree and it is within the parameters of the Bible, then we will let them share. We, the elders, take our job seriously and we are responsible to make sure that our folks are not being led astray. Okay, we are going to move on to the next controversial section. It involves women in the church who are being contentious.

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.

To be perfectly honest this seems to be an odd insertion here. Throughout chapters 12-14 Paul has been addressing spiritual gifts, mainly tongues and prophecy, so a discussion on contentious women is the last thing you'd expect. Furthermore, we were already told in chapter 11 that godly women did speak in the church by prayer and prophesying. As a result, it seems odd that Paul forbids women from speaking in the church.

I actually read some commentators who stated that this was not something Paul stated because of the insertion here and because of the content. One prominent scholar, Gordon Fee, suggested that a copyist inserted this in a marginal note and it was inserted into the text by a future copyist. This has happened before. For example, the King James Version translates 1 John 5: 7 in this way. *"For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."* Unfortunately, no other translation thinks of this passage as referring to the trinity. Instead they translate this verse in this way: *"For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."* What happened was that a copyist inserted the father, the Word, and the Spirit in his marginal notes and the Catholic Church insisted that Erasmus, who was translating Latin into the Greek, include the marginal notes from the copyist into the text. Erasmus did not want to do that because it was not written this way in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts. However, he made an unwise wager. He said the only way he would include it is if he found it in another earlier translation. It just so happened that someone produced a manuscript from the eleventh century with that Trinitarian formula. Erasmus had to eat his words and include it in his *textus receptus*. The *Textus Receptus* is the manuscript that the King James goes by. However, since the time of Erasmus we have found manuscripts such as the Codex Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus which date early fourth century. There is no mention of the Trinitarian formula in those texts. The NIV, the NASB, the ESV all use the earlier and more reliable manuscripts.

The problem with some suggesting this passage involving women to be silent was not in the original manuscript is that it does occur in those fourth century manuscripts. In fact, every manuscript we have includes this section. So even though its insertion seems odd to me, I have to believe this was part of Paul's writings. I cannot go against the early manuscript evidence. So the question now is what does it mean?

Well one thing is obvious, it does not mean that godly women cannot speak in the church assembly because Paul indicated to us in chapter eleven that they do pray and prophesy. Contextually, it appears that Paul is referring to women who attempt to "weigh" in or discern if a prophecy comes from God. In doing so, this would undermine the authority of the male leaders who were assigned that task. Consequently these women were to wait until they got home before they spoke or asked questions regarding a prophecy. This seems to harmonize what Paul says in 1st Timothy 2:12 where Paul forbids a woman to teach and have authority over the man in the church. When a woman spoke up and attempted to distinguish between the spirit of God and of Satan they were entering the teaching area that was reserved for the male leaders in Corinth. Paul concludes in verse 36.

36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? Whether Paul is still addressing these contentious women or not is unclear. He may be or this may refer to those that were contentious in the church when it came to prophecy and tongues. 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. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 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.

So here is the conclusion. Tongues and prophecy are allowed in a corporate church setting as long as they follow the order mandated here by Paul. Thus, speaking in tongues should be done no more than two or three at a time; one must wait for the other to finish, and if there is no interpreter they must remain silent in their prayer to God. Likewise, prophets were to number two or three at the most. They had to wait their turn, and should another have a fresh

revelation; they were to stop and allow that one to take precedence. Finally, those weighing what the prophets said were to be the male leaders of the church. In the end, that is what Paul meant by proper order.

I think this is a good time to personalize this passage, less you think it is irrelevant to us at Northside today. The question I want you to ponder is why do you come to a corporate church setting like this? Now, depending on the person their may be different answers.

a. I come to church out of habit

Some may come out of habit. Sunday morning at 10:30 has been a part of your life for many years. It is almost like you are on cruise control. The question I have is this: Are you coming here to worship God or are you just showing up because it is the right thing to do? It is not uncommon to come to church for years and never really worship God.

b. I come to church out of guilt

Some of you come out of guilt. You have been taught growing up that you should come to church and if you don't; you aren't being very spiritual. You want to sleep in on the rainy Sunday mornings. You want to watch the football games. But you feel guilty. Here the deal, Feeling guilty is not a legitimate reason for coming to church. I have talked to people who feel guilty towards me because they haven't come. I always tell them don't come to church because you feel guilty; come to church because you want to worship God and glorify Him.

c. I come to church because of my friends

In his book, *"The Body"* Chuck Colson said that the number one criteria for people coming to church is because of the social element. They want to be around and hang out with people that they like. In many cases, they are just waiting for the service to get over so they can go to lunch. They are not too interested in worshipping and experiencing God; they are more interested in experiencing fellowship. For many, there is no desire to draw closer to God spiritually.

d. I come to church because I want to meet Jesus

Finally, there are some people whose hearts are right and they want to worship and experience God in a personal way. They want to enter into worship and they want to hear what the Bible says about certain issues. They love the Lord and look at a corporate setting as an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord. That is the right attitude.

Okay here is the **objection**: But sometimes the church is so boring. Sometimes the pastor goes on and on and he seems to always be saying the same thing. We play the same songs; we read from the same book; and we perform the same rituals. Church for me, seems monotonous and in cruise control.

That is a legitimate complaint in my opinion because many times church seems too canned and monotonous. But according to this passage, church services are not just for the worship leader or the pastors. Church services should also involve your participation. Paul's whole point about the gifts of the body is that they build up the church. Some of you have gifts that you are not using to add to the quality of our services. Some of you may have musical abilities. Others may be skilled in drawing or painting or some form of art. Others of you may have something on your heart that you want to share but do not. We become a fully functioning body when there you choose to become a part of these services. My desire is to make sure that I provide opportunities for you to be contributors. In the end, our services will take on more life if we are all involved in the building up of the body.