

The Imperfect Church – 26
The Orderly Church
1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Introduction

From the very beginning God has been a chaos-destroying, ordering God. At creation, God hovered above the empty and formless Earth. In the midst of that chaos and emptiness, God creates order as he brings creation to life. Out of all the chaos of the world, God chose one man to use to birth a nation (Abraham), through whom he would send a Savior and fulfill his ultimate plan. God delivered Israel from the chaotic nature of their slavery in Egypt and brought them into the peace of their own land. Romans 5 says that Jesus came at “just the right time” to save us from our sins, meaning God wove together the intricate, chaotic tapestry of human history to bring about salvation for all humanity. Romans 8 says that all things happen for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Meaning that God takes the chaos of our own lives, all the hurt and pain, all the disappointment, all the sin, and weaves it all together for his glory and for our good. God always brings order and peace from chaos.

This truth about God has profound implications on our own lives, and even for our worship gatherings as God’s people. As we continue our journey through 1 Corinthians seeing how God has designed the church to function, we now come to Paul’s final argument regarding the use and abuse of spiritual gifts in the church. In chapter 12 we learned that God has given to each believer at least one spiritual gift, for the sole purpose of serving/helping the body of believers. Those gifts are not for our own growth or glory, but to deploy in service to others. This was reemphasized in chapter 13 showing us that our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is the driving force behind our service to others.

Chapter 14 zeroes in on two spiritual gifts that were being particularly misused and abused in Corinth...the two primary speaking gifts of tongues and prophecy. Tongues is an evangelistic gift that supernaturally enables someone to speak a human language that is unknown to the speaker but known to the hearer. If you have the gift of tongues, you are absolutely called to the mission field to share the Gospel with those who speak that language. Prophecy is best understood as teaching and preaching today. It simply translates as “to speak in front of.” So if you take the truth of the Bible to a person or a group of people, you are a prophet in the NT sense.

These two gifts tend to give the people who have them some power, some authority, some notoriety. Tongues is a pretty showy gift that gives the impression of deep spirituality. Prophecy is speaking on God's behalf to others, so a platform of some kind typically comes with that gift. This was especially true in Corinth. These gifts played to their arrogance and sense of spiritual superiority. And since these gifts got you noticed in the church, they were coveted and were being (ab)used by many of them. This reality created a worship experience that was characterized by utter chaos. You had countless people speaking in tongues at the same time, with no interpreter present to share that truth from God with the rest of the church. So all of it was being done for self-glorification, not to strengthen the church. Everybody it seems had a "word from God" to share with the congregation. Everyone is talking, most of it is incomprehensible, and no one is benefiting much from any of it. It is into that context that Paul will now emphasize the character of God as an order-producing, chaos-destroying God.

TS – in so doing, the Bible lays out here a series of rules to govern our worship gatherings in the Church. Let me give you the rules and then we will read the text together and break it down for the next few minutes.

1. EVERYONE SERVES (V. 26A)
2. EVERYTHING STRENGTHENS (V. 26B)
3. NOT EVERYONE SPEAKS (V. 27-32)
4. EVERYTHING SPEAKS (V. 33-35,40)
5. EVERYONE SUBMITS (V. 36-38)

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 - ²⁶ Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.

²⁷ No more than two or three should speak in tongues. They must speak one at a time, and someone must interpret what they say. ²⁸ But if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately.

²⁹ Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. ³⁰ But if someone is prophesying and another person receives a revelation from the Lord, the one who is speaking must stop. ³¹ In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged. ³² Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can take turns. ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people.

³⁴ Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says. ³⁵ If they

have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings.

³⁶ Or do you think God's word originated with you Corinthians? Are you the only ones to whom it was given? ³⁷ If you claim to be a prophet or think you are spiritual, you should recognize that what I am saying is a command from the Lord himself. ³⁸ But if you do not recognize this, you yourself will not be recognized.

³⁹ So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.

1. EVERYONE SERVES (V. 26A)

This is Paul's major point as he begins. Each Christian will take whatever gift they have and they will put it into service for the church. Again, this is already the foundation he established in chapter 12. An un-serving Christian is an oxymoron. This is how God designed the church to function...a group of people who are complementary gifted coming together to form one cohesive group, to minister to one another and serve the world around them. He will speak of this same issue to the church in Ephesus, from the vantage point of church leadership:

Ephesians 4:11-16 - ¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

If we want this church to continue to be a healthy church...a unified church...and established and mature church...one of the primary ways that happens is each of us serving to build up the church.

1 Peter 4:10-11 - ¹⁰ God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. ¹¹ Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you.

Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

Apparently serving others is the way to live a God-glorifying life. Anyone can come up with countless excuses as to why they can't or won't serve...too busy, work is too hectic, kid's sports schedule, weather was nice and the lake was calling my name, it was raining, my nose was running...but if you aren't serving you are missing a large component of what it means to be the church. If you aren't serving, this body of believers becomes handicapped as some parts of it aren't functioning like they're supposed to.

2. EVERYTHING STRENGTHENS (V. 26B)

While we can appreciate the call to serve, he helpfully clarifies now why it is that we serve. There is only one purpose in our serving, end of v. 26 – “But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.” Here is that word “strengthen” again, the word used to build a house. He has used it several times in the letter so far. 8:1 – love strengthens. 10:23 – I am allowed to do everything, but not everything is beneficial. He will use it four times in chapter 14. He deeply cares about this.

Here is why this is important, especially coming out of the Corinthian context...your gifts are not for your own selfish gain. You are not to serve (or give, or attend) church to gain power, to get your way, to make demands because you've done so and so. That is a self-glorifying way of using gifts. You are not to serve to gain attention, to get a good reputation, so others will think and say good things about you. Narcissism makes life about yourself. Christianity makes life about the Lord and about others.

You are not to serve to earn some good favor with God, trying to make up for all the sins you've committed. We don't view our faith like the scales of justice. We know the bad side is weighed down pretty heavily with what we've said, done, and thought. So now we feel the need to do good things to tip the scales back in our favor, or at least balance things out. Though there are some “Christian” groups that teach such things that is not how this works. Our faith is based on Jesus' sacrifice, not ours. His perfect righteousness, not ours. His serving of our needs, not our serving of others.

Our serving of others is not so we can feel better about ourselves and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done. Our service to others is designed to come alongside them to help them, to build them up, to strengthen them.

3. NOT EVERYONE SPEAKS (V. 27-32)

This is where we really begin to see the chaos that characterized the Corinthian worship gatherings. They were this atmosphere of confusion as everybody tried to outdo everybody else. Everyone with the gift of tongues, and likely many who did not have the gift but easily faked it to join in, were all going at the same time. No one is interpreting. So this is like a chaotic meeting of the United Nations as all these foreign languages were being spoken, and all trying to be louder than the others. A room full of people babbling incoherently helps no one.

On top of that those with the gift of prophecy were getting revelations from the Lord and trying to each speak them to the church. The problem was that everyone was seeming to get a "word" from God. So competing with the tongue speakers were all the prophets trying to get their moment at the microphone. Person after person were lining up claiming God was speaking to them and through them. Many were legit, but many were likely faked as well. That's part of the problem with holding to these goofy charismatic views and practices...you can't discern what is real and what is fake. Paul's counsel...be silent. Not everyone speaks at church and to the church.

v. 27-32 - ²⁷ No more than two or three should speak in tongues. They must speak one at a time, and someone must interpret what they say. ²⁸ But if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately.

²⁹ Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. ³⁰ But if someone is prophesying and another person receives a revelation from the Lord, the one who is speaking must stop. ³¹ In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged. ³² Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can take turns.

This rule severely limits the scope of who can speak. Even for those who have the gifts themselves...the presence of the gift does not automatically equal free-reign practicing of it. For the tongue speakers...never more than 2 or 3, only one at a time, and always with an interpreter. If that is not followed, the biblical rule is to sit down and shut up. That rule alone should discount about 95% of charismatic practices.

For those who teach and preach, the prophets...only a few. Remember, this historical context is before the church held formal positions for paid preachers. By the end of the first century, that practice was fully in place, as Paul instructed for preaching Elders to be paid positions in the church.

So they had to rely completely on those in the church who were hearing from God and could relay that message to the rest of them. But if 20 people are all sharing different messages from God, it is chaos. They are all over the place. No one could follow what the Lord was saying and thus could not benefit from it. Notice what he says next in v. 29 – “let the others evaluate what is said.” Now, this is not a biblical command to critique the preacher! While there are always some in the church who believe their spiritual gift is criticism, that is never biblically warranted. Remember, this is before the church had the Bible. They didn’t have the foundational, authoritative Word of God. They relied on those who could hear from God and communicate it. Once again, here is the problem with that...how do you know it’s for real? Is the message really from God? Does this person really have this gift? Anyone can say God told them something. So it was up to the church to listen intently and discern together if something was indeed from God.

Regardless of who you listen to as a spiritual authority in preaching and teaching, in classrooms, bible studies, groups, on RightNow Media...you are to evaluate what is said. Evaluate everything by the foundational, authoritative truth of the Bible. If something preached, taught, or said does not line up with the Bible, discard it. If something does line up with the Bible, but you happen to not like it, doesn’t matter. Embrace it as God’s word to you. We’ll talk about that in a minute.

One more part to notice here in v. 32 that I think helps clarify a lot of the mess happening in charismatic environments...those with these miraculous gifts are in control of their spirit. The word he uses for control means that their spirit is “in submission” to them. Therefore, this whole idea that when the Holy Spirit takes over in these charismatic practices, these people are under his control like some demonic force or in slavery, is never true! I had a friend in college who always said, “The Holy Spirit is a gentleman.” So all these crazy, outlandish things that are done in charismatic churches and then blamed on the Holy Spirit are simply false manifestations of the Spirit. Remember from Galatians 5...one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control.

4. EVERYTHING SPEAKS (V. 33-35,40)

v. 33 – ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God’s holy people.

Have you ever wondered why God cares so much about what we do in Church? So much so that he gives us rules to govern even our worship gatherings? This is why. Everything we do is to reflect him. Our worship practices, as with our lives, communicate what we think God is like.

David Garland writes, "Christian worship is to reflect the character of God. The Holy Spirit is not like a Ping-Pong ball careening from one person to another and creating mass confusion. The disorder in Corinth is not attributable to the workings of the Holy Spirit but to narcissistic exhibitionism, disdain for others with "lesser" gifts, and disregard for the common good."¹

The reason chaotic worship is a problem is because God is not chaotic. God brings order and peace out of chaos. He doesn't get his people together and create chaos. Our worship is to mirror him, to represent him well. Our actions, not just our words, communicate to everyone around us exactly what we believe God is like. Just as God says in 1 Peter to be holy as he is holy, here is says to worship orderly as he is orderly.

And he gives a very specific illustration of something that was happening in Corinth that created chaos in worship and defied God's instructions here. Women in Corinth were causing problems. Let's talk about this...when it comes to Bible interpretation I am always hesitant to label something as a "cultural issue." The idea goes like this...I don't like what that says, and since we are so enlightened now as 21st century Americans, that command was likely specifically for that particular culture and does not apply today. Here is why I am hesitant to do that...it is Pandora's box. Once you open that door, can you ever close it? Can't you just throw everything in that category and then make the Bible perfectly match your personal values?

But there are some places that are so glaringly obvious to be cultural issues that we have to figure out what was happening to cause such comments in the Bible. For example, the Bible says for Christians to greet each other with a holy kiss. Now we aren't going to implement that with our First Impressions team who greet you at the door. Welcome to Broadway, smooch! That was their culture, not ours, and happens in many cultures today, but we aren't one of them. V. 34-35 are an example of a glaringly obvious cultural issue. And here is how we know that...it directly contradicts what Paul has already said in chapter 11 about women who are publicly praying and prophesying in the church. How can he condone it in one chapter and then condemn it three chapters later?

Here is what is going on...we have already spoken multiple times about the fact that the Corinthians are bringing their pagan, cultic practices that they were part of their entire life, into the church. From sexual

¹ David E. Garland, [1 Corinthians](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 664.

immorality, to power struggles, to disunity, to eating meat in pagan temples, the Church in Corinth was having troubles separating from the world. That is what is happening here. I have mentioned a couple times before the prevalence of the cult of Cybele and Dionysius. These two prominent cults in Corinth were dominated by female worshipers. Their worship was characterized by ecstatic utterances (gibberish brought on by possession by their pagan deity), and by chaotic self-promoting dancing and loud incoherent speaking. These women have brought these practices into the church. They are likely the primary culprits behind the chaos Paul is condemning here.

So these verses are not chauvinistic or patriarchal. This is simply solving a real issue at Corinth. And just like Paul instructs tongue speakers and prophets to be silent, he does the same with these women. Not because they are women, but because they are a distraction in worship. And the reason he tells them to ask their husbands any questions when they get home is very simple...it is not because their husbands are smarter or more spiritual. Their husbands were the only ones listening because the women were too caught up in that chaotic mess to get anything out of church. God is a God of order and peace...we must reflect that when we gather together.

5. EVERYONE SUBMITS (V. 36-38)

v. 36 – *Or do you think God’s word originated with you Corinthians? Are you the only ones to whom it was given?*

This is a powerful statement that levels the playing field and puts all of us in our proper place. We are not in charge. We don’t get to do whatever we want in any area of life, even in church. God’s word is authoritative, not our opinions. We didn’t write the Bible. God didn’t consult us when he was issuing commands to the world.

All of this comes down to submission, to the Lord and to his word. This is what the church is. This is what the church does. The Bible is our authority...not ourselves, not politics, not science...the Bible. We start there, we stay there, we end there. If you want to destroy chaos and enjoy peace, this is how that gets done. Everyone submits to the same authority. Not mine, not yours, but Gods.

Let me show you how this works...at count of 3, everyone say their full name at same time. Utter chaos. Everyone is out for themselves. Only hear the loudest. Now at count of 3, everyone say “Jesus” at the same time. Only when we submit together will we find health, peace, order, unity.