

## **“Orderly Worship”**

24 October 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call to Worship**

**Hymn of Preparation:** How Great Thou Art

### **Prayers of Adoration & Confession**

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

**Praise:** Show Us Christ

### **Sermon:**

The mute function on Zoom calls allows the host to mute everyone. Why is it there, because it is recognised that speaking over people does not lead to a constructive meeting or to the imparting of knowledge or ideas? How many times have we found ourselves speaking when someone else is also speaking?

The church in Corinth was in danger because of the divisions, worldliness and innate selfishness that had become rampant in the leadership and in church practice. The apostle Paul has heard of this, is deeply concerned and has been patiently working through the issues with them in his letter which we call 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. In Ch 12-14 he has been addressing the sheer chaos that was the reality of their worship services. The tongue speakers were dominating, and others were being drowned out.

The spiritual speaking gifts of tongues (God language) and prophecy (speaking God's words) given by God to the Church through its members by the Holy Spirit are being abused in what can only be described at best as extreme childishness or at worst as self-serving self-indulgence.

The apostle's attitude is one of patient love, I think many of us would have written the Corinthian church off, however he is not soft, and his tone is definite and firm. (v20) *Brothers and sisters stop thinking like children* regarding the spiritual speaking gifts.

This is very important because how you act in worship has consequences for those who attend your church meetings. In v20-25 he highlights that a dominance of tongues (unintelligible words) will cause those who do not believe to say you are mad for they understand nothing (v23) but prophecy which is understandable will convince them of sin. The gospel, the direct speaking of God to them will cause them to say, *“God is really among you”* (v25) Therefore we must be careful how we use these spiritual gifts of speaking and try and excel at the ones which edify and draw people to God. (v12, 19)

In chapters 12-14 Paul has outlined the significance of spiritual gifts for the church, all have a gift given by God, each is important and have their place and should be valued and used. (Joan Barry organising the placing of flowers in the church each Sunday for 37 years) The purpose of the gifts is to edify, that is strengthen, encourage and comfort like a good personal trainer in the spiritual realm. The Corinthians failure to use their spiritual gifts properly was really a failure to love, so he took some time to outline what love was in the magnificent words of Ch 13. He then argued that to edify and build up the speaking gifts must be intelligible and so he argues convincingly that tongues spoken in church must be

interpreted and prophesy is to be preferred and is better, at least 2000x better. (v19) Claire Smith summarised this well as “**love requires intelligibility**”.

Today we will see that as Paul concludes his argument with his main point being that “**love requires order**” because order reflects the character of God (v33) “*God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*” All of this would be straightforward apart from the instructions that Paul gives to women in church to remain silent which just screams at us as culturally shocking pushing buttons of gender justice and equal opportunity. Let’s take a closer look at v26-40.

### **I. They come prepared to use their gifts. (v26)**

The situation in v26, is most likely a house church setting, a small number of believers coming together with the purpose of strengthening, (edifying) the church by using the wide variety of spiritual gifts available. (16:19) It is of great benefit and encouragement to us when different people read the scriptures, lead us in prayer, lead the service, play an instrument or sing or share testimony. I know they prepare and think and pray much before they use their gift at the front, and it edifies the church. Paul urges us all to be prepared to use our gifts, come prepared to build each other up. Being in church is about sharing, giving and being other-person focused.

The apostle Paul in another letter to another church said this, “*we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us*” 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Ch 2:8

We would love to see people stay around longer, eat together, speak to each other about what God has been saying in the service, pray, walk, visit a park. What practical thing could each of us do to use our gifts in church, and to share our lives with each other? Will you ask God to help you commit yourself to that?

### **II. A time to speak and a time to be silent. (v28, 30, 34,35)**

Paul calls the church in Corinth to stop thinking like children (v20) Children love to talk and keeping them quiet is hard and being children, they sometimes think if they speak quietly no one can hear them. Maturity and wisdom teach us that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak! (Ecclesiastes 3:7) The apostle outlines practical advice for the use of the gifts and order in the church.

- A. Tongues:** Paul expects in their worship services that many if not all will want to use the gift of tongues, but only 2-3 people should do so in any service and then the others should not speak. It is not to say the others could have contributed but for the sake of the church they should be quiet. That would be difficult for many of us! Likewise, if no-one interprets the first message given in tongues then no-one else should speak because that is not edifying to the church. Again, being told to be silent would be difficult. That doesn’t mean you whisper or simply talk to yourself, no you are to be quiet, make no sound.
- B. Prophets:** similarly, only 2-3 prophets should speak and then the others should realise that is enough, both in terms of length of service and what people can take in. What appears to have been happening is that many prophesies were being given at the same time and in a selfish spirit one would not give way to the other or would dominate. Some may have argued that under the spirit they couldn’t help

themselves, and had to speak, Paul dismisses that because he says the tongue speaker should stop and in v32 he says the prophet's spirit is under their control. They can control whether they speak or do not speak.

Paul instructs them to give way to another, to take time to weigh carefully what is being said and don't have more than 2 or 3 speakers. There is a recognition that what is said needs to be weighed carefully. That means evaluated, is it true, is it theologically correct, is it helpful, how can it be applied. This was to be done by "the others" v29 most likely the other prophets, and eventually by the whole church (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1ff) Not everything said was correct and false teaching and demonic deceit needed to be guarded against.

Being orderly reflects the character of God, to have order in our services and to edify the church is pleasing to God. One of my weekly tasks is to arrange the order of service. We have elders who are ordained leaders who give order and direction, and we have the systematic exposition of the word of God as Gods word to us each week, which we should weigh and evaluate. Our 3D groups are in keeping with the wider church contributing to the hearing and discussing the word of God. This is good and even an ordered service requires more than a single gift and when many share and participate it is good. Participation with order pleases God.

- C. Women:** What Paul says to the women in the church in Corinth (remain silent) is culturally shocking to us, some might label his comments as gender discrimination, and it appears to set up an inequality between men and women in the church. I think we can detect in this passage that Paul is not unaware of the difficulty and how his instruction would have been received by the women and church in Corinth. He came to them (2:3) in weakness, fear and trembling. However, he is very clear that this is not his command but the Lord Jesus (v37b-38) When I speak to this I do so without any intention to offend or hurt but to encourage the church to follow Jesus commands. So let us carefully look at what is said!

***What does Paul say?*** Women are not permitted to speak, they are to be in submission, the instruction is for every church, and to speak would be disgraceful (shameful)

***What issues do we have?*** It is culturally shocking, it appears to contradict Ch 11 where women are permitted to speak in church (v5) when he says the Law says, we ask what Law because he isn't explicit here and lastly, we wonder if this is for all women or just wives because of the use of the word husband in v35. The word for woman and wives (gune) in Greek is the same word and the word for man (aner) is the same for husband.

***How do we respond?***

- Remove the passage and just ignore it, either by saying that it was not in the original text or simply by pretending.
- Relativise it. The best way to think of this is what we could call the Downtown Abbey effect. The way servants were treated then is unacceptable to us today, it is culturally inappropriate, and we do not treat people like that or insist upon it, living downstairs, eating after the family, speaking only when

spoken to and so we say it cannot be applied today. This is actually very common by those who wish to still accept scriptures authority.

- Only for wives and not women in general. I don't think that argument holds for various reasons and practically it would create a two-tier hierarchy in women which is not helpful between single and married.
- Others that the word used for speaking means "*chattering*" and this was simply a **local issue** of excited wives chattering in the church at what was being said. That strikes me as being very condescending, patronising to women generally and these wives especially.

However, if we reject each of these for good reasons, we are still left with an instruction from Paul that women in church should be silent in the context of the prophesy being weighed, that they are not to speak or contribute to that process of the weighing of the prophesy.

### ***Paul's reasons for this instruction.***

1. God is a God of order (v33) The issue is primarily one of order, not of ability, or of equality.
2. It is the universal practice of the churches (v33b, 36) It is not local, or even specific as some have argued.
3. The Law says so. (v34) In 12:21 Pauls uses the same phrase. Technically the Law refers to the first 5 books of the bible, but the quote in 12:21 is from the prophet Isaiah, so Paul is using it as a reference to scripture in general. So, the bible says so. Where? It is likely he is referring to his argument in Ch 11 from the doctrine of creation, before the fall when God placed men and women in a particular order of roles though created equally. One is created first and to lead and other is to help. The argument is based upon the biblical principle of headship, which God ordained in the doctrine of creation pre fall. It is therefore a universal biblical principle of order established by God.
4. It is disgraceful (shameful) to not follow this order. Why? Because the order is established by God, it dishonours him, if we do not follow and honour his given gender roles within marriage and the church. (Note, no such role is envisaged in business, education, government for example)
5. It is a command of the Lord Jesus (v37) It comes with apostolic authority.
6. It is a way that is fitting and orderly (v40)

### **III. How does it apply?**

This instruction and others in scripture affirm the biblical principle of headship within the church and marriage. It is important that within the church and marriage we accept this principle and work out what it means in love and in respect of the order that God has ordained.

It does not deny that women can speak and pray in church and in marriage again worked out in work this principle or headship and submission.

This worked out in the authoritative position of male leadership in preaching and leadership and should be exercised graciously

Lastly brothers and sisters be eager to speak Gods words to one another but heed the apostles' instructions and respect the God given order ordained for the edification of the

church. That will mean that all of us (men and women) will at times will be silent and at times speak to the glory of God.

When we exercise our gift, do we do so out of the love for God and for others, submissive or leading responsibility, when we should be?

### **Prayers for Others**

### **Announcements**

**Closing Hymn:** Holy Spirit, Living Breath Of God

### **Benediction**

### **Discussion Questions:**

How do you come to corporate worship? How might you come prepared to share your God-given gifts to build up and encourage the church?

What does it mean to weigh what is spoken carefully? What would it look like for you individually or us collectively to do that?

*'There is a time for everything . . . a time to be silent and a time to speak'* (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

What controls does Paul argue for to maintain order?

Consider when you have spoken in a Christian gathering. What was motivating you? Do you think you should speak more, less, or differently in future?