

XXVIII. Order in the Church!

February 18/20, 2014

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Aim: To worship God in an orderly manner, to sit obediently under the ministry of the Word, and to edify and encourage one another in the Lord.

The Corinthians didn't like words like 'control' and 'orderliness.' As far as they were concerned, these were Spirit-quenching words. When they came together for worship, their purpose was to lose control and to forsake order. They wanted to become oblivious to reality and be carried away. If they could come away from a worship service saying they didn't know for a while who they were, where they were, or what they were doing, they felt they had really worshiped and that God had really been honored.

Many current Christians have bought this view hook, line, and sinker. Any sign of orderliness or planning makes them suspicious. As far as they are concerned, the Holy Spirit couldn't possibly be involved if any advance planning had taken place. In their book, orderliness equals deadness; the more enthusiasm and 'shooting from the hip' there is in a service, the more the Spirit of God is at work.

In these verses, Paul attacks the two notions inherent in the Corinthians' view of worship: the more unorganized worship is, the better it is: and unorganized worship is the supreme expression of spirituality. He attacks the first by calling for orderliness in the worship of God (14:26-35), and he attacks the latter by calling for obedience to the Word of God (14:36-40).

A. Orderliness in the Worship of God (1 Corinthians 14:26-35)

Paul now gives some firm directions to bring order out of the chaos in the church meetings in Corinth.

1. Order in Worship (14:26)

a) *The Program (14:26a)*

²⁶*What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.*

In the context of the letter, we have noted Paul's strongly recurring emphasis on each member of Christ's body having their part to play. Verse 26 now takes the application of that principle into the organization of the congregational meetings. This is a unique description of what a congregational meeting may have been like in the Early church. But keep in mind the corrective nature of the context. Rather than writing a prescription for all Christian meetings everywhere, at all times, Paul is placing a firm hand on the tiller of a boat that he fears is heading for the rocks, out of control.

He first describes their normal procedure. The way seems to have been open for many to make their contribution to the meeting, but problems have arisen over the length of the meetings due to self-indulgence. The clear implication is that selfish gift-centeredness was turning the meetings into something of a free-for-all, or 'confusion (see v. 33). Rather like the situation with the Lord's Supper in chapter 11, it appears as if some were dominating whilst others were becoming discouraged and despairing.

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‘When you come together’ implies a routine of worship then shaping itself into a definite pattern. Although a ‘psalm’ (*psalmos*) may have been an Old Testament psalm, might it not have been a song not from the Psalter? A ‘teaching’ might have been the application of a truth, and a ‘revelation’ a message through a prophet.

‘A psalm’ referred to reading, or perhaps singing, one of the Old Testament psalms. ‘A teaching’ probably indicates a favorite doctrine or pet subject that was presented and expounded. Other members had what they claimed was a new ‘revelation’ from God. Others spoke in a ‘tongue,’ while still others gave ‘an interpretation.’ All of those things were good and legitimate parts of worship. The problem was that they were all done at the same time. No one was left to listen, except for the few bewildered visitors, who no doubt thought the whole group was crazy (v. 23). No one could benefit from such bedlam.

Paul gives us a window into the meeting together of this apostolic congregation. We are struck by absence of reference to a church leader or presbyter. Evidently Paul looked to a free-flowing movement of the Spirit. Although there does not appear to have been a liturgical order, as in the synagogues but also in the churches within the next century, there were recurring elements like those mentioned here. Now, however, Paul is seeking to impose some order on what appears to have been a church that was getting out of hand.

b) The Purpose (14:26b)

Let all things be done for building up.

Once again, the maturity-principle of working for the good of others – the priority of love – is the remedy stressed by Paul. The aim is not to take part, but to build one another up – the word, literally is ‘edification.’ It is for edification that the church gathers together, and edification is what we ought to take away from all our meetings.

In light of such confusion and disorder, Paul gives a clear command: ‘Let all things be done for edification.’ *Oikodomē* (‘edification’) literally means ‘housebuilding,’ the construction of a house. Figuratively, it refers to growing, improving, or maturing. The spiritual lives of Christians need to be built up and improved, expanded to fullness and completeness. The primary responsibility of Christians to each other is to build each other up. Edification is a major responsibility of church leaders (Eph. 4:11-12), but it is also the responsibility of all other Christians. Every believer is called to be an edifier (cp. 1 Th. 5:11; Rom. 15:2-3). Christians are built up by only one thing, the Word of God. That is the tool with which all spiritual building is done.

2. Ordering Worship (14:27-35)

Three aspects of the Corinthians’ worship appear to have been much abused and in need of regulation.

a) Regulating Tongues (14:27-28)

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.*

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(1) The Rules

The first was their exercise of the gift of tongues. Paul lays down four guidelines: 1) the number of people speaking in tongues in any given service was to be limited to two, or at the most three; 2) these two or three had to take turns – that is, they were not to exercise the gift simultaneously; 3) each time someone spoke in a tongue, there had to be an interpretation so all the believers could be edified (14:5); and 4) if no one with the gift of interpretation was present, those with the gift of tongues were not to exercise it.

Immediately after restating the principle, Paul applies it to the tongues-speakers, who were clearly the chief ‘offenders.’ The rules are perfectly clear. Repeating the earlier teaching of the chapter, Paul emphasizes the most important rule: ‘let someone interpret.’ If this does not happen, then tongues must be ruled out of the public meeting altogether.

They are to speak sequentially rather than concurrently, and each utterance must be given an immediate interpretation. Alternatively, if one or two or three speak, a block interpretation must follow them. Either way, there is to be no hold-up; it is vital that all understand as quickly as possible what has been said. Thus far in chapter 14 Paul has insisted that glossolalia, if not understood by all, is fruitless. Now he instructs a tongues-speaker to be silent if neither he nor anyone else can interpret, it being assumed that the speaker is able to articulate or remain silent at will.

First, in any one service no more than three persons, and preferably no more than two were permitted to speak in tongues. Second, those two or three persons should not speak simultaneously as they were accustomed to doing, but ‘each in turn.’ Orderliness, understandability, and courtesy all demand such a procedure. Several persons speaking in the same language at the same time would be confusing enough, but doing so in different languages would be bedlam.

Third, everything spoken in a tongue must be interpreted, and apparently, by only one interpreter. In the Greek construction, one is in the emphatic position, indicating that a single person is involved. The interpreters in Corinth were as self-serving as those who spoke in tongues, and each tried to outdo the other. Verse 26 implies that everyone, whatever they were doing, tried to should everyone else down. Paul tells them that, whereas two or three were allowed to speak in turn, only one was to interpret.

Fourth, although speaking in languages and translating those languages were distinct gifts, they were not to be used apart from one another. An interpreter *could not* exercise his gift unless there was speaking, and a speaker *should not* exercise his gift unless there were interpretation. Paul’s instruction presupposed that the congregation knew which believers had the gift of interpretation. If one of those persons was not present, there was to be no speaking in tongues. The rule was clear and simple: no interpreter, no speaking out loud.

(2) The Response

These guidelines take the wind out of a lot of sails today. Those who advocate speaking in tongues as a gift for our day insist it is something that is essentially uncontrollable. They maintain they are caught up by the Spirit and are irresistibly driven into ecstatic speech. Paul, however, makes it clear that those in Corinth with the gift of tongues had the ability to control it. When someone else was speaking, they could wait until he finished, and when no interpreter was present, they could refrain from speaking in tongues altogether.

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Verse 28 pre-empts an objection a tongues-speaker might make to Paul's regulative principles. The speaker can 'keep silent in church.' He is not under an irresistible influence of the Spirit, over which he has no control, as a pagan medium might be. He can choose not to speak and he should do so, if it has not been established that there is an interpreter present; otherwise the church will be damaged rather than edified.

Contrary to the pagan ecstasies that many of the Corinthian Christians were mimicking, the Holy Spirit does not work through persons who are out of self-control or 'slain in the spirit.' He ministers all of His gifts through the conscious, aware minds of the saints.

The answer to the current tongues controversy lies right here. Christians will never agree on whether the tongues were foreign languages or ecstatic utterances, and they will never agree on whether the gift has ceased. Even though we may be unable to agree on these points, we surely have to agree on Paul's guidelines. They are so clear as to be beyond dispute. Ironically, when we insist on following these guidelines, the interest in speaking in tongues dies immediately. In other words, when people are told they cannot run amok in the church with tongues but have to control it, they tend to lose all interest in it, or they take it to a church that doesn't insist on the guidelines.

One of the strongest indictments of the modern charismatic movement is the common practice of many persons speaking, praying, and singing at the same time, with no one paying attention to what others are doing or saying. It is everyone for himself, just as it was in Corinth, and is in clear violation of Paul's command that each speak in turn.

b) Regulating Prophecy (14:29-33a)

Like that of the apostles, and unlike that of pastors and teachers, however, the unique office of prophet ceased to exist while the church was still very young. Judging from Paul's pastoral epistles (1&2 Timothy and Titus), prophets ceased to function in the church even before the end of the apostolic age. In those letters he makes considerable mention of church leadership—elders, deacons, and bishops—but makes no mention of prophets. Along with the apostles, prophets were a part of the foundation of the church (Ep. 2:20), and are the first office to have disappeared from the New Testament church.

But when Paul wrote this letter to Corinth, prophets were still very central to the work of that church. In fact, nowhere in this letter is there mention of a pastor, elder, or overseer. The prophets seem to have been the key leaders in the early days of the church (cp. Acts 13:1). Because this was obviously the case in Corinth, Paul was compelled to give some principles for the prophets to follow.

(1) The Rules (14:29-31a)

²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one...

The second area of abuse in the Corinthians' worship was the gift of prophecy. This gift was the supreme gift as far as Paul was concerned (14:1-5). He recognized that its superiority didn't exempt it from abuse, so he offers four guidelines to regulate and control it: 1) there were to be no more than two or three speaking in any given service; 2) the prophets were to be subject to one another – that is, when one prophet was speaking, the others were to judge whether his message was really inspired by God; 3) if one of the prophets who had not been selected in

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advance had a revelation during the service, the designated speaker had to give way; and 4) in time, all the prophets would have their turn.

Next, Paul turns to prophecy, as he has done by way of contrast throughout the chapter. Here, however, the practical procedure is remarkably similar. The prophets would be recognized by their regular use of the gift and the benefit the church had received from them, but the emphasis is on their function rather than their status. The point is that the prophetic utterance is to be ‘weighed,’ or tested with discrimination, to ensure that the congregation is not being led astray. If a spontaneous divine revelation was given to another, then it should be heard at once and the original speaker should give way. Paul’s guideline to ‘prophecy one by one’ probably indicates that they were not making way for one another and that several prophets were speaking at the same time, refusing to give way.

It appears that when a prophet delivered an utterance, presumably in a standing posture, another seated prophet might be granted a revelation. Undoubtedly, the latter would indicate that the Spirit had disclosed something to him. When this happened, the prophet already speaking was to be silent. Here we witness an amazing scene in which it was not unusual for inspired utterances to burst upon a single meeting. Since apostolic times there has, surely, never been anything remotely like this in the churches. But there does not need to be. The Bible, which is all prophecy and beyond which there is no prophecy, expects neither addition nor subtraction.

First, only two or three prophets were to speak at any given service. Those New Testament prophets spoke for the Lord in two ways. In some instances they gave new revelation from God to the church. And, by reiterating what the apostles taught, they also proclaimed what had previously been revealed, much as preachers and teachers of the Word do today.

Second, when prophets spoke in a meeting, the other prophets present were to ‘pass judgment’ (from *diakrinō*). The judging prophets may have had the gift of discernment (cp. 12:10; *diakrisis*, ‘distinguishing’) or they may simply have measured what was said against their own knowledge of the Word and will of God. In any case they were collectively to evaluate the validity of all prophetic messages (cp. 1 Jn. 4:1). Since the prophets sometimes were entrusted with new revelation, it was especially vital that everything they preached and taught was absolutely true and consistent. Because they were helping build the foundation of the church, the validity of their teaching was of the utmost importance. No prophet acted unilaterally in teaching. There was accountability among all of them.

Third, a new revelation took precedence over the reiteration of something that had already been taught. It was not that the truths in the new revelation were necessarily more important than those the being proclaimed, but that, at the moment, the new should be heard while it was fresh from the Lord. That is not an issue in the church today because the revelation aspect of the prophetic ministry ceased with the completion of the New Testament. But apparently in the early church such conflicts sometimes occurred. When they did, the prophet with the new revelation was to be given the floor. In other words, when God spoke directly, everyone was to listen.

Fourth, just as with speaking in tongues, it was imperative that only one person speak at a time.

(1) The Reasons (14:31b-33a)

...so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³²and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

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The conjunction *hina* ('so that') is used to express the twofold purpose for all such prophesying: learning and exhortation.

Not only are prophets to judge the authenticity of what other prophets say, but each prophet is to have control of his own spirit. The Bible knows nothing of out-of-spirit or out-of-mind revelations. Those to whom God revealed His Word did not always fully comprehend the message they were given, but they were always fully aware of what the message was and aware that it was given to them by God. God does not bypass men's minds either to reveal or to teach His Word.

Here again, we see that a man could not plead an irresistible compulsion in the exercise of a gift. The gift of prophecy was to be exercised under control. Paul's concern in the exercise of both tongues and prophecy was that there be peace, not confusion, in the church of Corinth and in all the other churches as well.

Prophecy was not some uncontrollable frenzy or ecstatic disorder. The prophet retains control of himself and where prophetic messages are given, one by one, in their turn, 'all may learn and all be encouraged.' In this way, the prophets, who speak for God, reflect the character of the God whom they claim to represent. Paul justifies intelligibility and order by considering it a divine attribute. Disorder has to be wrong because the Lord, neither confused nor confusing, delights in tranquility.

When speaking, prophets were never controlled by a pseudo-divine influence so that they ranted. Rather, they were able to govern themselves (cp. Acts 16:16). It seems that mental imbalance was accepted generally as an element of non-Christian 'prophecy.' Plato (c. 427-347 BC) wrote that the inspiration of the Delphi prophetess was a type of divine madness, and that no one could utter divinations when in his right mind, but only when his intelligence was chained up, perhaps by disease or by some form of divine inspiration. Cicero described prophecy as a state of frenzy (Latin, *furor*) in which the soul lost its reason. Plutarch insisted that predictive prophecy was essentially 'irrational' (*alogon*).

'For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.' Here is the key to the whole chapter. Our worship of God should reflect the character and nature of God. He is the God of peace and harmony, not of strife and confusion (cp. Rom. 15:33; 2 Th. 3:16; Heb. 13:20). God cannot be honored where there is disharmony and confusion competition and frenzy self-serving and self-glorifying. Chaos and discord in a church meeting is certain proof that the Spirit of God is not in control.

c) Regulating Women (14:33b-36)

(1) As in All the Churches (14:33b)

As in all the churches of the saints...

In this phrase, Paul either rounds off 14:26-33a, dealing with tongues and prophecies, or he leads into 14:34-36 on women in the church. In favor of the latter view, the observation that God is the God of peace (14:33a) is an adequate conclusion to 14:26-32, and the reference to other churches would parallel 11:16 in a context also concerning women.

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(a) Belongs with verse 33 (Naylor)

Nevertheless, this phrase can also be applied to conclude the prior section on tongues and prophecies. To run 14:33b and 14:34 together might generate a contradiction, Paul stating that feminine silence is the rule in ‘all the churches of the saints’ (14:33b), yet urging the silence of women ‘in the churches’ (14:34), not confining his directive to the Corinthians. Further, in 4:17 and 11:16 appeals to this type conclude arguments and sentences. Taken this way, following a consideration of the being of God (14:33a), Paul summons the church to emulate other churches of the saints who are obedient to him in this as in other respects (cp. 14:36).

(b) Belongs with verse 34 (MacArthur)

The second half of verse 33 seems best to fit with verse 34. The phrase ‘as in all the churches of the saints’ is not logically related to God’s not being a God of confusion. The phrase does, however, make a logical introduction to ‘Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak.’ Paul was emphasizing the fact that the principle of women’s not speaking in church services was not local, geographical, or cultural, but universal, ‘in all the churches of the saints.’

(2) Silent in the Churches (14:34-35)

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.*

That brings us to the final area of abuse in Corinthian worship: women speaking in the church. What debate swirls around this passage!

(a) Confusion (Ellsworth)

The whole issue of women in ministry is dredged up when these verses are read. It seems to me that this issue falls outside Paul’s concern at this point. Keep in mind what he is dealing with in this passage, namely, the confusion that was running rampant in the worship services of Corinth.

Evidently, the women were contributing substantially to the confusion and bedlam so characteristic of Corinthian worship. Some think they were actually disrupting the services by whispering loudly to their husbands. Others suggest they were openly and loudly challenging those who were doing the prophesying and the tongues-speaking. If either of these was the case, Paul was simply saying to the women what he would say to anyone who disrupted a service: ‘Be quiet in church!’ Still others think the women were the ones who were responsible for the abuse of the gift of tongues and, Paul, therefore, was forbidding them to engage in tongues-speaking at all. Whatever view we take on the precise nature of the women’s abuse, Paul’s point is clear: confusion has no place in worship. Unorganized bedlam is not worship!

(b) Evaluating Prophecy (Jackman)

At first sight this looks like a blanket prohibition on women speaking at any time, in any congregational meeting. But that is impossible to square with 11:5 where clearly women are praying and prophesying, in the congregational context. Arguments that Paul is inconsistent, or that this is a later interpretation, must be rejected. Others suggest that the word ‘women’ should be translated ‘wives,’ because of the reference to their husbands, but the same word is used in 11:5. Still others suggest that they were undisciplined, noisy chatterers during the meetings, and

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that this was a particularly Corinthian problem, but Paul stresses that this is a rule for all the churches. So what does he mean? The rest of verse 34 and verse 35 help us to work it out.

The immediate context is the weighing of prophecies and these verses are best understood in terms of this activity. The law to which Paul appeals would be the principle of male headship, established at creation and recorded in Genesis 2:20-24. From this the apostle derives a creation pattern of the respective male and female roles, both within marriage and in the church, that is usually termed male ‘headship.’ If the women were to participate in weighing the prophecies they would usurp the male leadership role in the teaching of the church, since weighing the prophecies implies more authority than giving the prophecies in the first place. The women would then be in authority over the church, over their own and other people’s husbands, and not in submission. If they had any problems concerning the prophecies being delivered then the proper course of action was for them to talk it over with their husbands at home, not to intervene verbally in the church challenging or seizing the authority of the leaders, and so refusing to be submissive. It is in these circumstances that ‘it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church.’

(c) Questioning Prophets (Barnett; seconded by Naylor)

This restriction on women is puzzling given Paul’s earlier permission allowing a woman to pray or prophesy provided she bore the ‘sign of authority on her head’ (11:5, 10). My suggested reconstruction of the situation Paul sought to correct is as follows: a prophet has spoken and a time of silence should have ensued before the next prophet rose to speak. Instead, however, various women seated together were breaking the silence by calling out questions to the prophet. Furthermore, it seems likely that the wives in question were addressing the questions to husbands who were prophets. Thus their action suffered from two faults. On one hand, it was disruptive of congregational ‘silence’ following the prophetic word, but on the other, it failed to express wifely submission to a husband in public.

By this reconstruction the integrity of both texts 11:2-16 and 14:33b-35 is preserved. The issue in both texts was but differing aspects of the one problem current at that time in Corinth, namely, the submission of wives to husbands in the public life of the church. In the first, a woman may prophesy, but she may not do so (as some were doing) without the ‘sign’ of a husband’s authority on her head. In the second, she must not subvert her husband’s role by unseemly public questioning of his prophetic utterances (as some were doing).

Paul was deeply concerned that the gathering of believers in Corinth be orderly. Meetings had become dominated by the babble of tongues-speakers and the oracles of many prophets, both of whom failed to wait until others had finished speaking. Wives were breaking the silence by calling out questions to husbands across the assembly, contributing to the din and upsetting the order of the sexes. Such chaos did not reflect the character of the ‘God of peace’ in whose name they were assembled, nor did it facilitate the purpose of their meeting together, their ‘upbuilding’ (v. 26). Not least, such behavior may have brought the Christians into disrepute locally. After all, ‘outsiders’ did visit these meetings and doubtless reported what they had observed to the wider community.

(d) Submission (MacArthur)

Though it embraces tongues, the context here refers to prophecy. Women are not to exercise any such ministries. The principle was first taught in the Old Testament (‘the Law’) and is reaffirmed in the New. In reflection of that principle, no women were permitted to speak at the

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Jewish synagogues. One of the designs of creation, as well as one of the primary consequences of the Fall, was the submission of women (Gen. 3:16; cp. 1 Tim. 2:11-12). Women may be highly gifted teachers and leaders, but those gifts are not to be exercised over men in the services of the church. God has ordained order in His creation, an order that reflects His own nature and that therefore should be reflected in His church. ‘It is improper’ (*aischros*, ‘shameful, disgraceful’) ‘for a woman to speak in church.’ That statement leaves no question as to its meaning.

‘If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home.’ The implication is present in this statement that certain women were out of order in asking questions in the church service. If they desired to learn, the church was no place for them to express their questions in a disruptive way. Paul also implies, of course, that Christian husbands should be well taught in the Word. Many women are tempted to go beyond their biblical roles because of frustration with Christian men, including their own husbands, who do not responsibly fulfill the leadership assignments God has given them.

There are times in informal meetings and Bible studies where it is entirely proper for men and women to share equally in exchanging questions and insights. But when the church comes together as a body to worship God, His standards are clear: the role of leadership is reserved for men.

B. Obedience to the Word of God (1 Corinthians 14:36-40)

1. The Source of the Word (14:36-38)

a) The Word Did Not Come from Corinth (14:36)

³⁶*Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?*

In verses 36-38, Paul anticipates the objections that such instructions may well bring. The Corinthians might claim the freedom to follow their own practice irrespective of Paul’s strictures. But what he is teaching is ‘the word of God’ and it did not originate with them, but with God Himself. Moreover, they are members of a universal church, not just a local congregation, and they are not at liberty to turn their backs upon other congregations and to go their own way.

Having made his plea for orderliness in the worship of God, Paul goes on to attack their notion that unorganized worship is the supreme expression of spirituality. That place is reserved for obedience to the Word of God. The Corinthians were acting as though the Word of God had originated with them, or as if they were the only ones who had received it. Their problem was one that has been repeated innumerable times: wanting to stand arrogantly above God’s Word instead of bowing submissively to it.

The Corinthians put themselves above Scripture, either ignoring it or interpreting it in ways that fit their predisposed notions. So Paul challenges them in his most biting and sarcastic words yet. No believer has a right to overrule, ignore, alter, or disobey the Word of God. To do so is to put himself about God’s Word.

Their many words – whether from tongues-speakers or even of prophets – appear to have led them to think they were some kind of ‘fountainhead’ from which the word of God gushed forth. Therefore, Paul must reassert his authority as an apostle.

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b) The Word Did Come from Paul (14:37-38)

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.*

Thus, he throws the gauntlet down to them in verse 37. He essentially says, ‘If you are so spiritual, prove it by recognizing that what I have written is the Word of God.’ Paul is not only claiming he had written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, but also that any truly spiritual person will acknowledge this and submit to it.

In the context of what Paul has been focusing on in reference to prophets and tongues, it seems that ‘spiritual’ must refer primarily to those who spoke in tongues, the special spiritual language the Corinthians prized so highly. His point is this: ‘If a person claims to be a prophet or to have the gift of tongues or any other spiritual gift, the mark of his true calling and faithful ministry will be his acknowledging that what I teach as an apostle are the truths of God. If a person is truly called or gifted of God and is sincerely trying to follow God, he will submit the exercise of his calling and gift to the principles God has revealed to me as His commandments.’ What the apostle taught was not optional.

Earlier in 12:28, we have been taught that, ‘God has appointed ... *first* apostles.’ Apostolic authority therefore overrules all other gift and claims to revelation. Prophecy may well be revelatory (14:30), but it will not differ from, let alone undermine, the authority of the revelation already given. The mark of the truly spiritual person will be to recognize the Lord’s authority in what Paul has written.

Although Paul does not say as much, he places himself virtually in the situation of Moses vis-à-vis Aaron, Miriam, and other prophets of Israel in the wilderness (Num. 12:6-8). The apostle must have known that he was contributing to a written body of revelation that would replace unrecorded and transient prophecy.

On the other side, ‘But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.’ This play on words carries the idea that anyone who disregards the Word should himself be disregarded. The mark of a false prophet or a counterfeiter of tongues, or of a person who misuses a true calling or gift, was his rejection of what Paul taught. Because such persons rejected the apostle’s teaching, they were rejected as legitimate servants of God.

Important lessons are still to be drawn from Paul’s words. First, it was ‘the word of God,’ the gospel, that brought salvation to this group of people. Only by that word did they come into existence, or will they continue to exist as a true church. The gospel does not come *from* the church but *to* a people whom it forms and shapes as the church of God. Second, only as they confessed Jesus as Lord were they plunged into the Holy Spirit, becoming gifted with utterance of tongues and prophecy. Such prophecy, however, is derived from, dependent on, and to be measured by the gospel. Third, the written words of the apostle determine what we believe and how we order our lives inside and outside the church throughout this age. Like the Corinthians, we are called upon to bend stubborn necks and wills carefully to read the will of God out of the text of the apostle.

Paul is not alone in making obedience to God’s Word the benchmark of true spirituality (cp. Is. 66:2; Jn. 8:31, 47; 17:17; 1 Jn. 4:6). The point is clear. The truly spiritual person is the one who listens to God’s Word and obeys it.

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2. The Summary of the Word (14:39-40)

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.*

Paul's insistence on obedience to the Word of God does not mean that spiritual gifts are unimportant. We are to prize the gifts God is giving today, but we must never let them overshadow orderliness in the worship of God and obedience to the Word of God.

In their assemblies they were collectively to 'desire earnestly' (second person plural) 'to prophesy,' because prophecy is the great edifier, the great instructor and teacher. Prophecy is so important because edification is so important. Again, as the verb form proves, Paul is not suggesting that individuals seek the gift of prophecy. But although secondary to prophecy, legitimate tongues should also be recognized as of the Lord, and not ridiculed or forbidden. 'Do not forbid' is also in the plural and does not advocate individual seeking of tongues, but refers to the church as a group allowing the proper gifts to be exercised.

In verse 39, Paul summarizes 12:1 to 14:25 where he sought to divert their energies away from tongues-speaking to prophesying. To be sure, they are not to forbid tongues, although this ministry is much less valuable than other gifts, and its use in church is to be limited. Let there be no misunderstanding. Since it is an expression of love in seeking the upbuilding of the church, they are to be zealous in their pursuit of prophesying. In verse 40, he catches up his directions setting right the disorder within the church in Corinth (14:26-35). Everything must be 'fitting' (*euschēmonōs* – literally, 'well formed') 'and in order.' During corporate worship there is to be harmony and intelligibility.

Right revelation should be obeyed in the right way, and right gifts should be exercised the right way. The basic meaning of *euschēmonōs* ('properly') is gracefully, becomingly, harmoniously, beautifully. 'Orderly' has the meaning of 'in turn or 'one at a time.' God is a God of beauty and harmony, of propriety and order, and all things that His children do should reflect those divine characteristics.

By way of summary, Paul reiterates the primacy of prophecy, but does not forbid or rule out tongues. What concerns him most, however, is the way in which these gifts are used in the public meetings of the church. Because the character of the God who is being worshipped is that of peace and order, 'all things should be done decently and in order.' That is in direct contrast to the chaos of the pagan temples in Corinth with their noise and frenzy. Paul's gracious, but uncompromising, message is, 'Brothers, grow up!' When even the use of spiritual gifts has been made subject to the self-sacrificing love of the cross, then, certainly, maturity will result.

For next time: Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.