

# **Challenges Christians Face**

**Let All Be Done Decently and In Order**

*1 Corinthians 14:33b-40*

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# Let All Be Done Decently and In Order

## Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of spiritual gifts. Let's conclude our section on spiritual gifts in a message I am calling, "Let All Be Done Decently and In Order."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 14:33b-40:

<sup>33</sup> . . . As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. <sup>39</sup> So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. <sup>40</sup> But all things should be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:33-40)

## Introduction

Science writer Winifred Gallagher argues that what we call boredom (which she defines as "the unpleasant sense that there is nothing that interests you"), is largely a recent problem that still doesn't exist in many places around the globe. She writes:

Situations that would strike us as unbearably dull, say, waiting for hours or even days for a bus, are considered just the way life is in many developing countries. Anthropologist Henry Harpending has

done extensive fieldwork in the backcountry of [Africa], where in most ways, he says, “folks are just like you and me. But one thing that the Westerners that go there just can’t understand and are open-mouthed about is the people’s tolerance for tedium. They can just sit all day under the trees . . .” [Harpending] is fluent in Bushman and he has tried for twenty years to elicit a word for boredom, but the closest he has gotten is the unsatisfactory [word for] *tired*.

Gallagher also adds, “[In the English language] *boredom* has no derivation: That is, it doesn’t come from any other word but was specially created. Moreover, the word didn’t appear in English until the later eighteenth century.”<sup>1</sup>

Our culture is averse to boredom, isn’t it? Winifred Gallagher defined boredom as “the unpleasant sense that there is nothing that interests you.” Thomas Szasz defines boredom differently. He says that boredom “is the feeling that everything is a waste of time.”<sup>2</sup>

“Worship is boring” is one of the most common reasons people give for not attending worship services. So, what do many churches do to address the boredom issue? Why, they spice up their worship services with all kinds of things that God never commanded to be done in worship.

## Review

The Corinthian Church had a similar problem. I don’t know that boredom was their primary problem with regard to worship. But I do know that they were doing things in worship—and in the church—that should never have been done.

*The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* is a very important letter in the Bible. As you know, the Apostle Paul planted the church in Corinth. He had moved away, but he was still very concerned about the welfare of the church.

He had received communication from the Corinthian Church in which they had asked him to address a number of challenges

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<sup>1</sup> Winifred Gallagher, *New: Understanding Our Need for Novelty and Change* (Penguin, 2011), 126.

<sup>2</sup> <http://best-funny-quotes.blogspot.com/2010/09/funny-boredom-quotes.html>.

## Challenges Christians Face

that were facing the Christians in the church. So, *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* is a letter intended to address various challenges that the Christians in Corinth were facing.

In fact, the Corinthians had communicated to Paul at least 6 challenges they were facing. Each time Paul responded to them with a phrase that tips us off that he was responding to one of their questions. He said, “Now concerning . . .” in 7:1, 7:25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, and 16:12.

One of the challenges facing the Christians was the issue of spiritual gifts. Beginning in 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul said, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers,” and continuing all the way to the end of chapter 14, he addressed the issue of spiritual gifts.

In chapter 14 Paul wrote about the spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy. The church in Corinth was very confused about the proper use of the spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy, not unlike some churches in our own day.

Now, *prophecy* was used in 1 Corinthians in two senses. In one sense it was used of “fore-telling the future” (and thus giving new revelation from God to the church), and in the other sense it was used of “forth-telling God’s truth to people” (and this was the more common use whereby God’s truth—which had been previously revealed—was proclaimed to people, much like preachers do today).

*Tongues* was also used in 1 Corinthians in two senses. In one sense it was used of unintelligible gibberish, and in the other sense it was used of understandable language.

In the first five verses the apostle compared prophecy and tongues, and concluded that prophecy was superior to tongues.

As we have already learned in our study of chapter 14 so far, Paul used the word “tongue” in both the singular form and the plural form throughout chapter 14.

Paul used the singular form for “tongue” in verses 2, 4, 13, 14, and 19 to indicate unintelligible gibberish, the kind of tongues similar to pagan and ecstatic utterances. These were false tongues.

Paul used the plural form for “tongue” in verses 5, 6, 18, 22,

23, and 39 to indicate an understandable language. These were true tongues.

The only exception is found in verses 26 and 27, where the singular form of “tongue” was used to refer to a person speaking a genuine, understandable language.

Beginning in verse 26, Paul began to give regulations concerning proper order in the church meeting, particularly with regard to the use of tongues and prophecy.

As Paul wrapped up this very important section on the issue of spiritual gifts, he wanted the Corinthians to understand that in the worship service all things should be done decently and in order.

## Lesson

In today’s lesson, we learn that in the worship service all things should be done decently and in order.

Let’s learn about this as follows:

1. The Rule (14:33b-35)
2. The Rebuke (14:36)
3. The Test (14:37-38)
4. The Summary (14:39-40)

### I. The Rule (14:33b-35)

First, notice the rule.

The second half of verse 33 seems to fit best with verse 34 and not with the first half of verse 33. The phrase, “**As in all the churches of the saints,**” is not logically related to God not being a God of confusion. The phrase does, however, make a logical introduction to the section that follows. In other words, what Paul was about to say was applicable **in all the churches**. Paul’s rule was not local, geographical, or cultural, but universal.

The rule that Paul gave is in verse 34a: “**the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak.**” Now, before I go further, let me say that commentators are

divided about whether verses 34-35 were written by Paul or were an insertion by a later scribe. There are numerous arguments on both sides of the issue. My own view is that Paul wrote these verses, primarily because these verses are included in every ancient manuscript.<sup>3</sup>

Paul's rule that **women should keep silent in the churches** is in the context of his regulations regarding tongues (that is, speaking in an understandable language that was then translated for the congregation) and prophecy (that is, the powerful proclamation of God's revealed truth). Women were not to exercise such ministries in the worship service.

Paul had instructed the Corinthian Church that they were to bring order to their cacophonous meetings. Apparently, people were speaking simultaneously in tongues and prophecy. Paul's regulations to the church included that they were not to speak simultaneously but sequentially—two or at most three could speak in any meeting.

The reason that Paul gave for women **not being permitted to speak** was that they **should be in submission, as the Law also says** (v. 34b). Paul did not specify chapter and verse. The principle was first taught in the Old Testament (Genesis 2:20-24; 3:16) and then reaffirmed in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:11-12). In reflection of that principle, women were not permitted to speak in Jewish synagogues.

One of the designs of creation, as well as one of the primary consequences of the Fall, was the submission of wives to their husbands (Genesis 3:16). Paul echoed that principle when he said in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." Paul's argument was not based on cultural standards but on two historic and foundational facts:

1. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and

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<sup>3</sup> See D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1 Co 14:26-36.

2. Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor (1 Timothy 2:13-14).

Now, I want to affirm that many women, just as many men, are extremely gifted as teachers of God's word. Nevertheless, those teaching gifts are not to be exercised over men in church meetings. God has ordained different roles for men and women.

The context of our present verse in 1 Corinthians suggests that wives were questioning their husbands in the worship service itself. Paul's solution is given in verse 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."**

## II. The Rebuke (14:36)

Second, let's look at the rebuke.

The Corinthians did not submit themselves to God's word. They either ignored it or interpreted God's word in ways that fit their predisposed notions. They went so far as to challenge the authority of the apostle Paul himself.

So Paul challenged them in his most biting and sarcastic words yet when he asked them two questions in verse 36: **"Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?"** In other words, Paul was saying to them, "Did you write the word of God? Of course you did not! Are you the only ones who have received God's word? Of course you are not! God's word is for all his people. Therefore, obey it as the word of God!"

No Christian has the right to overrule, ignore, alter, or disobey the word of God. To do so is to put yourself above the word of God.

How do you regard God's word? Do you read it regularly? Frankly, if you don't regularly read God's word, you cannot know what he is saying to you. When you come to the word of God, do you have a plan to put God's word into action in your life?

Let me suggest a very simple but helpful way to read God's

word. When you read God's word, ask yourself the following questions of the section you are reading:

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to confess?
- Is there a doctrine to believe?
- Is there a warning to heed?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a promise to claim?

If you do this, you will personalize God's word. His word will be active in your life and you will see your life transformed.

### III. The Test (14:37-38)

Third, let's look now at the test.

As I mentioned earlier, the Corinthians really challenged Paul's apostolic authority. So he said in verse 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.”**

In the context of chapter 14 where Paul had been focusing on prophecy and tongues, it seems that **spiritual** may refer to those who spoke in tongues, the ecstatic gibberish that the Corinthians prized so highly. Paul's point was 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 acknowledgment that what I teach as an apostle are in fact the truths of God. If a person is truly called or gifted by 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.” In other words, what Paul taught was not something optional to be accepted. What he taught had to be obeyed.

So Paul said in verse 38, **“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 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.

Paul perhaps gave his strongest claim to authority as God's apostle in these verses, verses 37-38. Certainly, Paul had personal limitations and blind spots, which he freely recognized (see, e.g., Philippians 3:12-14). But when he spoke for God, his views were not tainted by cultural or personal bias. He did not, for instance, teach that women were not permitted to teach men because of his Jewish background or in order to conform to any male chauvinism. He taught that truth because he himself had been so taught by the Lord. He did not claim omniscience, but he claimed unequivocally that everything he taught about God, his gospel, and about his church was God's own teaching, **a command of the Lord**.

No matter what their position, training, experience, expertise, or talents, Christians who reject Paul's teaching reject God's teaching, and are themselves to be rejected as teachers or leaders in God's church.

#### IV. The Summary (14:39-40)

Finally, notice the summary.

Paul concluded this chapter with a summary exhortation for the Corinthians to hold prophecy in the superior position in their services, but not to despise or reject legitimate speaking in tongues. Whatever they did in the Lord's name had to be done in the right way.

So, in their worship services, Paul said in verse 39: **“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.”**

It is helpful to note that the phrase, **“earnestly desire to prophesy,”** is in the plural in Greek. In other words, Paul was not exhorting individuals to desire to prophesy, but rather that the congregation was to desire the ministry of prophecy. Prophecy, that is,

the powerful proclamation of God's revealed truth, is the great edifier, instructor, and teacher. Prophecy is so important because edification is so important.

But, although secondary to prophecy, legitimate **tongues** were not to be forbidden. Interestingly, the phrase, "**do not forbid speaking in tongues,**" is also plural. Paul was not advocating individual speaking in tongues, but rather that the church as a whole allowing the proper exercise of the gift of tongues.

Finally, Paul said in verse 40, "**But all things should be done decently and in order.**" The Greek word for **decently** (*euschemonos*) means "pertaining to being proper, with the implication of pleasing."<sup>4</sup> And the Greek word for **order** (*taxis*) means "right order, good order, in order, in an orderly manner."<sup>5</sup>

Many people believe that this verse is the Presbyterian verse in the Bible: we like to do things decently and in order!

We may smile at that, but the reason we do so is because we believe that God is a God of order.

## Conclusion

Many of us lead chaotic lives. Take a look at your home, your office, your bedroom, or your car. If you keep these things in order all the time, you are an unusual person!

Now, imagine if our worship services were as chaotic as these aspects of our lives? What would we accomplish in worship? What good would come of it? Chaotic worship soon becomes no worship at all. That is why Paul insisted that in the worship service all things should be done decently and in order.

In chapter 14 Paul taught that everything that is done in the worship service must be done to build others up. Certainly our worship is directed toward God. But, it must also include the edifi-

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996).

cation of others. We do not simply worship as individuals in the corporate worship service on the Lord's Day. We worship as a church. And so corporate worship must emphasize and build up our corporate unity in Christ.

We may sing enthusiastically, pray earnestly, give cheerfully, listen attentively, and our worship may still fail to please God. Certainly, if we don't do these things, our worship will not please God. But, we need to keep in mind that corporate worship means that we are part of the body of Christ. Part of our worship is designed to build up others in our church body. And so we need to keep in mind that we are to honor others and build them up in our corporate worship.

Further, we need to rethink our concept of worship. Most people evaluate a worship service by how it makes us feel. A worship service is "good" on the basis of our enjoyment of it. We even pick churches on the basis of how they will fulfill our desires. Now, the concern about our needs is not entirely improper, but the focus on meeting *our* needs is inappropriate for Christians. Worship is good if it builds up the church as a whole when individuals are strengthened and are united to one another.

May God help us to build one another up as we seek to worship him. May he be glorified and his church strengthened as a result of our worship of him. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [word.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://word.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for this important section of your word. Help us to remember that we are to build one another up in the church. You have given us spiritual gifts that are designed to build up the body of Christ. You have also given us the ministry of your word as the primary means of strengthening your church. May we as a people grow in our love for you and your word.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and use the spiritual gifts that God has given you for the common good!