

About 135 years ago, there was a 23-year old railroad agent in Redwood, Minnesota. He discovered he could order watches from the manufacturer, then re-ship them to agents down the line who sold them to local people. His name was Richard Sears, and he launched a mail-order company to sell watches, later teaming up with a Mr. Alvah Roebuck to sell other items.

Things moved so fast, that about 8 years later, by 1894, Sears Roebuck & Co. had a 300-page catalog, but orders rolled in so fast that there was chaos. It was so bad that when Mr. Sears fell too far behind on filling orders, he simply burned order forms!

To solve this, a brilliant businessman named Julius Rosenwald brought order to the chaos, making many good changes and innovations as he made the company work better. About 14 years later, in 1908, Mr. Sears retired at age 44. Subsequently, in Mr. Rosenwald's massive overhaul of the business, he was wise enough to preserve the best of the past -- the "book", the famous Sears catalog, which has a place in American history.

Mr. Rosenwald knew what Mr. Sears needed to learn – that what made the Sears-Roebuck catalog an iconic success was orderliness. Every page had product numbers for each item for sale. Even today, every online store and online catalog requires orderliness.

Coordination, organization, and harmonious operations are necessary for sales from catalogs, or sales from websites, because order is a principle true in all ages. Paul tells us that order is needed in churches, because Paul tells us that our God is a God of order.

The Lord commanded that we coordinate, organize, and plan harmonious public worship services for the upbuilding of His church.

1. Each person coordinates the use of spiritual gifts during worship for the upbuilding the church. (v.26-33)

Last week we studied chapter 14, and we found that the goal is for the church to understand, resulting in the upbuilding of the church. As we continue our study today in verse 26, still the overriding aim is to build up the congregation. Everything in worship that serves to glorify and worship God, also serves the purpose to deepen the faith, hope, love, and unity of God's people.

Notice how Paul begins with a question – what then? After that, Paul

answered his own question. Based on all that Paul has written so far, this is what must be done in worship – anyone with a hymn to sing, anyone with a lesson to share, anyone with a revelation or tongue to speak, or an interpretation – let any and all of those people do what they are doing for one purpose – for the building up of the church. For that reason, we do these one at a time.

In verse 27, rather than having several people override each other with simultaneous words, the community is best served when one person speaks at a time. An important thing is learned here – that Christian tongues-speaking was not out of control, like the pagan ecstasy speaking was. The Spirit did not possess the person like a demon possesses a person. A demon would overpower a person, robbing the person of the ability to control themselves. In stark contrast, the Spirit of God cooperated with the speaker, providing the ability for the person to start speaking and to stop speaking. Therefore, Paul expected the person to use those abilities to upbuild, and not to confuse.

In verse 28, Paul drew another implication of the community understanding, when Paul taught what to do if there was no interpreter for the tongues-speaking – in that instance, the tongues-speaking must not be shared publicly, but rather only privately - between that person and God.

In verse 29, it was not just tongues that needed to be explained, but even what was prophesied into the people's own language needed to be explained. After one, two, or three prophetic lessons were shared, then the prophets were together to discuss and weigh what was presented, for everyone's gain.

In verse 30, the various speakers controlled themselves with the common good in mind. If a person was speaking a revelation from God, but then a second person began to receive a revelation from God, the first speaker should stop speaking. That would allow the gathered church to hear the second person speak. Anyone who claimed to be unable to stop speaking was wrong, and anyone unwilling to stop speaking was acting wrongly. So, there were no exceptions to Paul's guidelines for worship.

In verse 31, if a person had a message from the Spirit of God, that person might naturally assume that everything else would need to halt. But Paul insisted that each person with a message from the Spirit must follow the same pattern for public sharing of those messages, so that the group heard each teacher one by one. The result was clear - all can prophesy who want to prophesy, all can learn who want to learn, and all can be encouraged who need to be encouraged.

In verse 32, Paul replied to a potential objection that Paul anticipated. Here is the possible objection - what if a prophecy-speaker said, how can I restrain the Spirit coursing through my mouth? How can I prophesy the word of God according to the imposed word-etiquette of Paul? Paul replied that the prophets were able to stop speaking, because the spirit of the prophets remains subject to, or

under the control of the prophets.

Paul logically anchored his guidance in the character of God in verse 33, “*God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.*” Since the source of their words was God, and God Himself is orderly, then even when the Spirit was coursing through their mouths, it would be subject to the Spirit’s etiquette, for the best good of the listeners. God would not inspire two people to speak simultaneously to the same audience.

Consider how James echoes this in James 3:16-18, “...*where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable...*” A mature Christian knows how and when to deliver a good word for God’s good purposes. This is wisdom from heaven. This is the Spirit’s leading. This is mature Christians in worship. God does not promote turbulence. This reflects the nature of God to arrange things well, and the love of God for each person in the church to allow them to absorb the truths being spoken for their benefit.

2. Both genders arrange for and preserve harmony in worship services. (v.34-35)

We must remember the principle Paul gave in verse 33 – that “...*God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.*”

Harmony comes when there are good patterns of speaking and not speaking. In this context, we get these statements from Paul.

Verse 34 – *the women should keep silent in the churches.*

Verse 34 - *women are not permitted to speak*

Verse 35 – *it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*

We must understand these statements within the flow of Paul’s writing here. Paul has been writing this way all along.

The verb “to keep silent” was used in contrast to something. This is the same verb used in verse 28, in the context of a person speaking in tongues to the whole church. Whenever there was no interpreter, then the tongues-speaker was to be silent in contrast to speaking in tongues to the whole church.

The same verb “to keep silent” was used again in verse 30. “Keeping silent” contrasted speaking a revelation from God. It was ceasing to speak, instead of continuing to address the assembled people.

So, when Paul wrote that same verb a third time in verse 34, he contrasted the same action – that a woman should keep silent in the churches as opposed to a woman speaking to the whole church.

So, for example, in verse 29, at the times when the prophets were weighing what had been said, and sifting the messages of prophesying, the women were not to participate by providing comments to the whole church. If they had questions, questions having to do with the prophecies being evaluated, they were not to ask

those questions to the whole church. They were not even to ask their own husbands during the worship service or after the worship service in that same place. Rather, the women were to wait until they had left the gathered believers in worship, and had arrived home. Then and there, women could ask their own husbands. So, we must not understand this as utter silence. Rather, the women were to be silent, as opposed to publicly questioning the teachings, in the presence of the whole church. The women were to remain in silence as opposed to publicly evaluating the public statements made, and silent as opposed to publicly teaching the whole church. Those are the sorts of times and places that Paul declares it to be shameful for a woman to speak. Publicly questioning, publicly evaluating, publicly teaching the church as a whole.

The verb “*be in submission*” in verse 34, carries the meaning of keeping to the stated and arranged way of things. Paul attached that verb to this phrase “*as the Law also says.*” The law of God reveals the same thing that the created order of God reveals - that God has arranged things according to a differentiation between things. God permanently makes boundaries for various things in the Creation and in God’s law. For example, in God’s law in Genesis 1, God separated the waters from the dry land. God put fish in the sea, birds in the air, and animals on land, according to its kind. God created male and female in God’s image, to rule over the fish and the birds and every living creature. In the family, God created a team with a differentiation, God had man as leader, and woman as supporter, and both on the same harmonious team. And in the church, God gave role of public speaking to men. This is the arrangement of God, as Paul writes is the case in all the churches of the saints.

The question that came up in Corinth was this – did the age of tongues-speaking supersede and contradict God’s previous Law in creation and in Scripture? Paul answered no. The categories, the order and the arrangements of God remained the same. The only question is whether we will be in submission.

God established 2 genders, and will we each abide by our assigned gender roles?

God established order in worship, will we cooperate or cause disorder?

God’s top priority in worship is community benefit, will we submit to that, or seek to selfishly benefit ourselves only?

God provided for women to ask questions privately – each woman decides whether to participate as a mature godly women would do, or instead to disrupt.

Paul wrote here about what is shameful compared to what is honorable.

Will each women contribute to order or disorder – to harmony or conflict?

Women, in particular, in verses 33-36, are not being called to submit to their husbands here, but rather it is deeper than that. Each woman is being called to submit to God Himself, and His Law, and the very principle of God ordering

things in creation and in His Word and in His worship services. So, Paul is calling on women to accept the role that God has given to women in the worship service, and not to take it upon herself to teach the whole church, to question the whole church, or to evaluate the whole church publicly. In the same way, Paul is calling on men to accept their role, and not to shirk their role to teach the whole church, to question or challenge the whole church, and to evaluate the whole church community. This is the role of authority and leadership in the role of prophet, priest and king, and in the role of pastor, elder and deacon. These offices are the areas for women not to take, and the role for men to continue to accept. Both genders – both men and women – are called by God to accept the roles of both genders in the church.

Men accept the role of women in public worship, even when holding this Biblical truth is awkward in our generation, because the culture says the opposite.

Women accept the role of women in public worship, even when the culture screams for women not to accept their God-given role.

Women accept the role of men in public worship, and agree harmoniously.

Men have to accept the roles of men in public worship, and not seek to be wiser than God in changing things long established in all the churches of the saints.

How do we do this? We turn to Christ, who accepted His role under God the Father, and was obedient wherever God commanded Jesus to be, and look at the beautiful result. Listen to Philippians 2:6, though Jesus was “...*in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant... (v.8) becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.... (v.9) therefore God [the Father] has highly exalted [Christ] and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name...that every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.*”

Every man confesses that Jesus is Lord.

Every woman confesses that Jesus is Lord.

The problem is a spiritual battle – flesh vs. spirit. In verse 20, Paul wrote about being mature in our thinking rather than being children in our thinking with regard to building up the church in worship. Childish thinking says it is not fair that women don't get to preach. Mature thinking says that Christ has set up His church in a way that is orderly and beautiful, and I'm thrilled to be a part of it. Childish thinking says that Paul is putting down women in this passage. Mature thinking says that Paul is exalting Christ, and the flesh of men and women is being put down, while the spirit of men and women is being built up. Men, when left to their sinful nature, will shirk all responsibility, or else will dominate in a harsh way, and set up wars. Women, when left to their sinful nature, will take over all the responsibilities with pride and greed. Both men and women have pride, greed, laziness, power-mongering, and covetousness. Both men and women, when saved

by Christ and putting on the new self, show patience, generosity, love, passion for God's Word, humility, hope, and unity.

In chapter 11:5, Paul says women do prophesy, but not to the whole church. If there were special times, perhaps on the mission field or in a time of war when a man was not there, that both men and women agree that a woman might bring the message. In the days of Corinth, the women did so with a sign of authority on their heads, in other words, with permission from the church leadership. In our day, the woman need not have the head covering, but she would need the permission of the church leadership.

This church structure of roles for men and women was not just in Corinth, and it was not just ancient culture. Paul explained the same thing to the future generations of ministers in every location and in every generation in I Timothy 2:12, "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.*" Well, what is a woman to do then? Let me reverse the question – how could the church operate without women? Titus 2:3, "*older women are to teach what is good, and so train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure...*" Women teach other women and children, outside of worship services. Women sing the hymns, songs and solos in worship. Women recite the Scriptures that the whole church recites. Women offer the prayers and offerings that the church prays and gives. Women receive the water of baptism, and receive the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Christian women bless everyone with their spiritual gifts used in the way God has arranged. Believing women have abundant gives in administration and mercy and support and perception. God's people who are females are hard-working, and endure much suffering in an uncomplaining way, and women are fierce protectors of children. Godly women are a blessing to other women. Christian ladies are desperately needed by Christian men. Godly women joyfully support this teaching in this area of not speaking publicly, and not taking offices of authority over men, such as pastor, elder, and deacon. Both genders arrange for and preserve harmony in worship services, which brings us to our third point.

3. Each church aligns its worship practices with obedience to God's Word and humble similarity with God's other churches. (v.36-40)

In verse 36, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their fleshly pride in the worship of God. It was a big pride problem to act like the word of God originated with them or that they were the only church that God established. What did they think other churches were doing about this? It is a sign of humility when a church participates in a network of churches, such as a presbytery. Our church practices line up with other churches.

In verse 37, there was a quick test to show whether they had humbled

themselves. Did they see Paul's authority to issue binding commands to all the churches about their worship services? Yes or no? Paul was writing this letter with the authority of his office as an apostle, and so everyone must line up with God, God's Word, and God's apostle writing that message from God. If anyone was a prophet or spiritual, they must align with Paul on this. The command expressed by Paul is the command from the Lord.

In verse 38, if Paul's messages were not followed, there would be serious consequences. The consequences were that those people would be ignored in worship services, rather than having the opportunity to teach something publicly that was out of line with what God commanded. The true ministry is led by the Spirit, and would not cause disruption. Those genuinely gifted by God to bless the church would gladly heed Paul's guidelines, because they love the brothers and sisters in the church. On the other hand, those who refused to follow Paul's instructions, would be demonstrating that they were not truly led by the Spirit.

To wrap up his argument, Paul wrote in verse 39 about the fact that prophecy is superior, but that tongues should not be forbidden.

The last verse is well-known – verse 40. It is a key principle guiding all of public worship. Content in worship is important to God. But is the way that we do things in worship also important to God? Yes, how we conduct our worship services is important to God, not just our content. Listen to the way Paul summarized, not just about speaking in tongues, but about everything in worship services. Here is verse 40, Paul's final word on the matter, "*But all things should be done decently and in order.*"

Paul had no room for behavior that was immodest, self-centered, or disruptive.

Since the purpose of a gathering for worship was to honor God and build up the people of God, everything in that gathering should be conducted in a way that supports and fits that purpose. Christ's Word must be proclaimed. The sacraments must be administered properly. Every person should be blessed. God should be glorified.

Conclusion Change your thinking about worship services.

- 1) *Worship is about upbuilding the church body, not the individual worshipper.* Corporate worship is corporate and not individual. Worship is good if it builds up the church as a whole. Too often we determine whether worship is good if you enjoy it as an individual person. Did you like the selection of hymns? Was the sermon short enough for your liking? No, worship is a group project. Was the church built up in hope and love, and brought together as more unified? That is our question in determining worship services Biblically.
- 2) *True worship follows the beautiful way that God commanded to be*

worshipped. Presbyterians love to do things in an orderly way.

Presbyterians get teased about this, as if it is a silly thing. But now that we have studied verse 40 in the context of the chapter, we see how it is not silly, but a serious command of God.

God was concerned that speaking in tongues not distract and descend into chaos in worship. But here we have seen that God was even concerned about those conversations that happen between a wife and her own husband, and therefore any conversations between family members and friends sitting near each other during a worship service. God observes and regulates when we are whispering to family and friends, or when we are checking our cell phone during worship.

To do things decently and in good order remains a command of God through Christ's apostle to Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and every other Christian. It is in the eternal word of God, and it is an issue of obedience or disobedience.

Disobedience results in people being distracted from the message of the gospel. Disobedience results in particular persons with agendas and egos dominating. God says that the only one who dominates worship is the one that we have gathered to worship - Jesus Christ - the Lord of the Church.

The elders must make sure that everything done in the worship exalts Christ, is understood by everyone, serves the common good, is motivated by love, and is done decently and in good order. A proper arranging of things is necessary for us to be obedient to God.

Worship is about upbuilding the church body, not the individual worshipper.

True worship follows the beautiful way that God commanded to be worshipped.

When we have all of these things in place, the good result is that the Spirit of God works with the Word of God during the worship service to accomplish the goal of upbuilding the church.