

PPT>>> 3. Spirit-led Participatory Worship

Introduction: How could early church practice make your worship services more meaningful? Consider *unleashing the laity*. In the first-century church, ordinary believers regularly and significantly contributed to corporate worship. This open format allowed those prompted by the Spirit to offer testimony, share a spiritual experience, give an exhortation, lead out in prayer, testify, sing, give praise to the Lord, etc. In general, each person who spoke operated out of his spiritual gifting. According to Scripture, the prime directive for anything said or done was that it had to edify (strengthen, build up, encourage) all the other believers present.

PPT>>> Major Benefits:

- Allows for a fuller expression of the spiritual gifts that involve speaking.
- In keeping with the principle of the many “one another” passages of Scripture.
- Gets people more involved in church meetings.
- Congregational interest is heightened, since the proceedings of the meeting can be contributed to in a truly meaningful way.
- Since the things shared come directly from the congregation, they tend to be practical, from the heart, and drawn from the application of God’s Word to everyday life situations.
- This is how Jesus wants us to conduct our church meetings.

PPT>>> In a full service gas station, everything is done for you. In a typical Western “worship service”, everything is done for you (it is almost a performance). New Testament church meetings were not “full service” per se. Early church meetings were participatory.

— Scholarly Testimony —

PPT>>> Church historian Ernest Scott wrote in *The Nature of the Early Church* that “The exercise of the spiritual gifts was thus the characteristic element in the primitive worship. Those gifts might vary in their nature and degree according to the capacity of each individual, but they were bestowed on all and room was allowed in the service for the participation of all who were present . . . Every member was expected to contribute something of his own to the common worship.”¹

PPT>>> Professor John Drane, in *Introducing the New Testament*, wrote, “In the earliest days . . . worship was spontaneous. This seems to have been regarded as the ideal, for when Paul describes how a church meeting should proceed he depicts a Spirit-led participation by many . . . There was the fact that anyone had the freedom to participate in such worship. In the ideal situation, when everyone was inspired by the Holy Spirit, this was the perfect expression of Christian freedom.”²

¹ Ernest Scott, *The Nature Of The Early Church* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 79.

² John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1999), 402.

PPT>>> Concerning public worship in the New Testament church, London Bible College lecturer G.W. Kirby concluded, "There appears to have been considerable fluidity with time given for spontaneous participation."³

PPT>>> William Barclay pointed out that "The really notable thing about an early Church service must have been that almost everyone came feeling that he had both the privilege and obligation of contributing something to it."⁴

— Scriptural Evidence —

What scriptural evidence is there that early church meetings were participatory?

Rhetorical.

1. Jewish Synagogue Meetings⁵

1. Were first century Jewish Synagogue meetings open to input from its members or closed to participation by those in attendance? Explain. See Acts 13:14-15, 14:1, 17:1-2, 17:10, 17:17, 18:4 & 19:8.

Paul never could have evangelized the way he did unless the synagogues were open to audience input:

PPT>>> **ESV Acts 13:14-15** . . . on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." << This was in Pisidian Antioch

PPT>>> **NAS Acts 14:1** . . . in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. << So too in **Iconium**

PPT>>> **NAS Acts 17:1-2** . . . they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures . . . << And **Thessalonica**

PPT>>> **NAS Acts 17:10-11** (Berea). . . when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews . . . they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. << And **Berea**

PPT>>> **NAS Acts 17:17** . . . he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles . . . <<And **Athens**

³ G.W. Kirby, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan 1982), p. 850.

⁴ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 135. Barclay's "everyone" needs qualification. The Scripture states that each one of the "brothers" was free to contribute something (1Co 14:26). For more in this see Appendix A.

⁵ Teacher's Note: In order to save time, do not take time to read aloud the below texts. Flash them on the screen and make reference to the city and the fact that everywhere Paul went the synagogues were open to audience input.

PPT>>> NAS **Acts 18:4** . . . he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. << And **Corinth**

PPT>>> NAS **Acts 19:8** . . . he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. << And **Ephesus**

Observation: The point to be observed here is that New Testament church meetings were consistent with the synagogue's practice of participatory meetings. Since the earliest churches were made up Jewish believers recently departed from the synagogue, it is not surprising that church meetings were also participatory.

2. Hebrews 10:24-25

******What is that we are supposed to consider when we meet with the church (Hebrews 10:24-25)?**

PPT>>> NAS **Hebrews 10:24-25** . . . let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

We are to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Everything said must be carefully offered to the church with the goal of edifying the others present. To come unprepared to the gathering of the church is like coming to a wedding wearing gym clothes when you were asked to wear a tuxedo (Mt 22:10-14).

Application: When we assemble as a church, it is to be characterized as a meeting where there is ample opportunity for each of us to encourage one another. This is to be true of both the worship time and the Lord's Supper as a holy meal. It is not to be focused on only one person. It is about each person doing his part. Rather than a lot from one person, the goal of participatory meetings is a little from a lot of people. Yet everything said must be carefully offered to the church with the goal of edifying the others present.

PPT>>> NAS **Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another . . .

2. What does it mean to "consider" (Heb 10:24-25) something? It is from *katanoeo* (2657) and means look at, observe or contemplate (BAGD, p. 415). Our English word "consider" means to think carefully about, to give thought to.

What do you think of when you think of stirring up (ESV) something (10:24)? It means to agitate, foment, provoke, stimulate. Negatively, one is said to stir up trouble. We are to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

3. Who is supposed to do all this considering and stirring up (10:24)? We are each to encourage "one another". It is everyone's job.

4. Where is this one another encouragement supposed to happen; what is the setting? The setting is our assembling together.

The Point: Church meetings are to be structured to create an environment where this “one another” encouragement can take place. The focus was not exclusively on leaders. It was about each member doing his part as led by the Spirit.⁶

String Example: If a string were stretched across a stream at water level, various things would become attached to it as the day passed, things that otherwise would have floated on past. Similarly, thinking all week long about what to bring to the meeting helps greatly. If no one brought food for the agape love feast, there would not be much of a feast. If no one comes to the meeting prepared to contribute, there will not be much of a meeting! We need to prepare *ahead of time* to contribute something to the meeting.

PPT>>> Is there a **testimony** the Lord would have you to bring?

PPT>>> *Could you not purpose to begin a time of conversational **prayer**?*

PPT>>> Is there a **song** that would edify the church?

PPT>>> *Is there some subject or passage of Scripture to **teach** on?*

PPT>>> What has the Lord **shown you** this week in your time with Him?

PPT>>> Men, do your wives spend more time preparing for the meeting (in cooking food for the Lord's Supper) than you do (in considering something to say)?

3. Acts 20:7

Paul Talked with Them: Acts 20:7 records that Paul, when visiting the church at Troas, spoke until midnight. The Greek verb describing what he did is *dialegomai*.

PPT>>> Acts 20:7 KJV And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

PPT>>> *dialegomai*. “consider and discuss, argue” (BAGD, p. 186); it is a reciprocal conversation. It is basis for our word “dialog.” Our word “dialogue” is transliterated from it. It primarily means to discuss.⁷ Thus, the ESV states that Paul “talked with” them, not that he preached to them (KJV). In Acts 18:4 and 19:8, the same word is rendered as “reasoned” and “reasoning”. Paul undoubtedly did most of the speaking that night, but the way he taught was not via an uninterruptable sermon, as if broadcasting over the radio. Thus, we see the early church's teaching times, even when led by an apostle, were at least to some degree discussion oriented, another indicator church meetings were participatory.⁸

⁶ The Spirit's prompting is an essential element in participatory worship. Otherwise, it would merely be a religious version of the amateur hour. Every believer has been given a spiritual gift to be used to build up the church and is to operate out of this gifting. It is leadership's duty to equip the church to understand and practice this.

⁷ Baurer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 185.

⁸ Allowing for questions and dialog is good. Not so good are endless bull sessions with off-the-cuff comments, unedifying add-ons, or allowing the undisciplined to go off topic.

4. 1 Corinthians 14

Contextual Consideration: 1 Corinthians 12-14 concerns the proper use of spiritual gifts.

Chapter 14 is specifically regulates with the use of the more supernatural speaking gifts in the meeting (tongues and prophecy). Paul did not intend it to be an exhaustive passage on what or could not happen in a church meeting. The point to be gleaned is that there was a participatory aspect to the use of spiritual gifts in early church meetings.⁹

******1 Corinthians 14 contains a description of a New Testament church meeting. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26, what, in general, were first century church meetings like?**

PPT>>> ESV 1 Corinthians 14:26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

They were participatory. There was meaningful “audience” input.

PPT>>> In 1 Corinthians 14:26, the words “**each one**” is found (read text).

1. Suppose 1 Corinthians 14:26 said “only one” rather than “each one” (ESV).

PPT>>> Only One

Which option would be more descriptive of modern worship services? How so?

5. Criticism or Command? Suppose 1 Corinthians 14:26 is actually a criticism of what the Corinthian church was doing (allegedly chaotic meetings); was the inspired solution a prohibition of participatory meetings or a regulation of them? Explain. Almost every New Testament letter is an occasional document, meaning it was written in response to some local problem. Thus, some see 1 Corinthians 14:26 as a criticism of what the Corinthian church was doing (chaotic meetings). Even so, the inspired correction was for regulated, orderly participation, not a prohibition of it.

PPT>>> Later on, we are informed that these regulated, participatory meetings are “**the Lord’s command**” (14:37b). Thus 1 Corinthians 14 is not merely descriptive, it is actually prescriptive.

PPT>>> The \$64,000 Question: How does this compare to *your* church meetings?

— Building Up —

According to 1 Corinthians 14:26, what very important prerequisite is there for *anything* that is said in a church meeting?

⁹ Teacher’s Note: The objective here is not a thorough exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14. Rather, the goal is simply to persuade that New Testament church meetings were to some degree participatory. It simply is not practicable in one lesson to attempt to teach directly on tongues, prophecy or the role of women in ministry. Resist the temptation to do so in this lesson.

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:26** What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

PPT>>> **BUILDING UP (The prime directive)**

There is a certain decorum that is to accompany church meetings: everything said must be edifying. It must build up the church. Each brother must take the initiative to ensure that he has a positive, edifying contribution to make.

6. What does “building up” (1Co 14:26) mean? The Greek for building up (*oikodomé*) means strengthening or edifying. One lexicon described *oikodomé* as the action of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, and holiness.¹⁰ Any comment made in participatory worship was driven by the Spirit and lovingly designed to encourage, build up, strengthen or edify the other believers present. If not, it was inappropriate and was to be left unspoken. Every testimony had to be thought out so as to build up the church. To be edifying, all teaching had to be both true and application-oriented. Any music had to honor the Lord and be theologically sound. Those who prophesied spoke to others for “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (1Co 14:3).¹¹ The Corinthians were told, “since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church” (1Co 14:12). All this points to the participatory nature of early church gatherings as each person ministered according to his oral spiritual gift.

7. Why is it so important that everything said build up the church (14:26)? See also *1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12*. It is important because edification is the main reason the church gathers together. *Edification is the prime directive.*

Notice the emphasis on edification throughout **1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12** (read aloud).

Elders’ Role: This is precisely where the wisdom of elders is needed to gently hold the meeting to the standard of edification. Some brothers will consistently make unedifying remarks; it is the elder’s job to take the person aside and privately talk with him about his comments, coaching him on what is, and is not, edifying. Leaders need to remind the church that anything said in the meeting must be designed to build up the body, to encourage everyone else. There is to be a certain level of decorum in the meeting. Also to be avoided is an interactive group discussion, with a few people batting some idea back and forth between themselves as everyone else endures the banter.

Just as in the Old Testament the worshippers brought sacrifices into the temple, so too the words we speak in the meeting are to be like offerings to God. They are to be measured, weighed and considered.

PPT>>> **NIV Proverbs 25:11** A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (NIV).

¹⁰ Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 40.

¹¹ Even convicting reproofs can be edifying.

PPT>>> **ESV Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear (ESV).
How much more does this apply to church meetings!

PPT>>> **NIV 1 Peter 4:11** If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

PPT>>> — Singing —

8. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26, who determined the songs that the church sang? See Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16.

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:26** What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

Considering the fact that Paul is here dealing with the use of spiritual gifts in the meeting, he probably had in mind primarily those who had the gift of music using that gift to edify the church. “Each one” of the “brothers” (14:26) gifted in music had the opportunity to bring or lead a song (“hymn” is from *psalmos*, “a song of praise”— BAGD, p. 891).

Since early church meetings were clearly participatory to at least some degree, the principle may remain that any brother (gifted or not) could at least request a song. Notice the “one another” aspects of the singing:

PPT>>> **NIV Ephesians 5:19** — Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

PPT>>> **NIV Colossians 3:16** — Admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Sing-A-Long? Since Paul’s thought here (14:26) probably was not of church members randomly flipping through a song book and calling out songs to sing it might be good to encourage those who request a song to state *why* singing a particular song has meaning to the person or would have significance to the congregation.

According to 1 Corinthians 14:26, what must be true of any song that is sung in the church meetings? It has to be edifying. To sing an unmodified Beatles song would not be edifying. In some circles, certain styles of music are not edifying (overly rocky praise songs or monastic dirges). One must be sensitive to the needs of each church. It is ultimately the role of the elders to be sure the singing in a church meeting is edifying.

PPT>>> — Teaching —

Teaching is an important part of any church meeting. What is interesting is *who* the early church allowed to teach.

9. What observations can be made about who brought a lesson in a New Testament church meeting (1 Corinthians 14:26)? See Acts 2:42.

PPT>>> ESV **1 Corinthians 14:26** What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

Considering the fact that Paul is here regulating the use of spiritual gifts, it would seem that “each one” of the brothers with the gift of teaching could potentially bring a teaching.¹² A man did not necessarily have to be an elder in order to teach, though elders would certainly have the last say in who taught. Those gifted to teach would need to get with the elders in advance to schedule their teachings. Any unscheduled, spontaneous teachings would necessarily have to be of a very short duration to allow for multiple teachers on any given Sunday.

Acts 2:42 reveals that the early church was “devoted to” the apostles’ teaching.

PPT>>> ESV **Acts 2:42** . . . they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching . . .

How does this devotion to teaching relate to the “lesson” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26? The apostles were in Jerusalem and this was in Corinth. However, the principle remains that it is the job of the elders to be sure the church received in-depth Bible teaching. Since all elders must be able to teach (**2Ti 2:24**), it makes sense that the primary responsibility of teaching would regularly fall to an elder. However, Paul clearly expected that such teaching opportunities would also be open to any gifted brother who had the approval of the elders.

******10. What caution does James 3:1 offer?**

PPT>>> ESV **James 3:1** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

James’ caution makes sense in light of the participatory meetings that characterized the early church.

PPT>>> — Various Charismatic Gifts —

PPT>>> ESV **1 Corinthians 14:26** What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

11. How does Paul’s mention of revelations, tongues and interpretations in 1 Corinthians 14:26 indicate that some aspects of first century church meetings were spontaneous and not scripted? Unlike teaching, the more charismatic gifts (such as tongues, revelation and interpretation) could not be scripted in advance. Either the Spirit moves or He doesn’t. He does not consult with us first!

¹² The responsibility for teaching the church lies squarely with the men of the church. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 must be taken seriously.

Application: Again we see the principle of participation, along with some degree of spontaneity.

12. Many Christians believe supernatural charismatic gifts (14:26) ceased in the first century. Why would the absence of such charismatic gifts today not nullify these instructions that church meetings be participatory? The principle of free participation would still hold true. There could still be teaching, singing, testimony, prayer, etc. Not every spiritual gift will be present at every meeting anyway.

PPT>>>

— Tongues —

*******13. How does 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 further illustrate that early church meetings allowed some degree of audience participation?**

PPT>>> ESV **1 Corinthians 14:27-28** If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

The supernatural gift of tongues was not something one had to study for, prepare for or practice in advance. The speaker was supernaturally and spontaneously moved to utter words of a language he did not know. It could not be scheduled in advance.¹³

PPT>>> **14. Why do you suppose tongues are capped off at a maximum of three?** It was most likely to allow time for the other gifts to operate. Though one might have the liberty to do something, love for others may mean holding back, not exercising our liberty.

PPT>>> **According to 1 Corinthians 14:27, how many brothers could speak in tongues at any given time?** See 14:40. It must be “one at a time.” Though the meetings are to be participatory, there is still to be order.

15. In 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, why was Paul so insistent that tongues be interpreted? See also 14:2, 4, 5.

PPT>>> ESV **1 Corinthians 14:2-5** . . . one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him . . . The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church . . . The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

14. If there is no interpreter, the tongues-speaker is to remain silent:

PPT>>> ESV **1 Corinthians 14:27-28** If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

¹³ An entire series could be taught just on the gift on tongues. For now, the point to be observed is that this clearly fits the New Testament pattern of participatory meetings that are open to contributions from the congregation.

Why would God give a person a gift that He did not want him to use in the assembly?

God sometimes gave a speaker a supernatural tongue that was not to be delivered at the time of revelation (“If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet,” 14:28). The same held true for the fourth man with a tongue: he was not allowed to speak it (14:27), even though it was from God! In this case it would be for the greater good. If not interpreter was present, the tongue would not edify the church. Limiting it to three tongues speakers allows room for other gifts to operate.

PPT>>>

— Prophecy —

****16. What in **1 Corinthians 14:29-33a** indicates both a participatory and a spontaneous aspect to first-century meetings?¹⁴

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a** Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

No matter how you understand the gift of prophecy, the participatory nature of New Testament gatherings is seen in the guidelines for prophecy: “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”¹⁵ The impromptu nature of prophecy is clear: “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.”¹⁶ The goal of prophecy is “so that all may learn and all be encouraged.”¹⁷

PPT>>> **Based on 14:31, how many prophets spoke at any given time?** It was to be done “one by one” (again, there is to be both spontaneity and order).

PPT>>> Evidently, as with tongues, there was to be a maximum of three prophets who were allowed to speak.¹⁸ There is both a principle of participation and a principle of order.

16. Looking at 1 Corinthians 14:31, what was the purpose of prophecy in the meeting?¹⁹
See back to 14:3, 4b, 5b.

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a** Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged . . .

Based on 14:32-33a, why could Paul expect the prophets to speak “in turn” (14:31) and not all at once?

¹⁴ As with tongues, it is outside the scope of this study to deal fully with the gift of prophecy. For further information, see *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, by Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988).

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:29.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:30.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:31.

¹⁸ The command in 14:29 is not that two or three prophets *must* speak, but that they must be *allowed* to speak if they so desire. As with tongues, Paul probably intended to limit prophecies to three.

¹⁹ People will naturally ask about the difference between teaching and prophecy. Resist the temptation to deal with this in depth or you will not finish the main task of convincing people that New Testament church meetings allowed for input/participation from the brethren.

PPT>>> 17. Prophets were sometimes to be silent (14:30). Why would God give someone a prophecy that He did not want him to deliver? As with tongues, God sometimes gave prophets a prophecy that was not to be delivered at the time of revelation (“And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop”, 14:30). Here, it is a matter of serving others by holding back. It is to put others first. As the next paragraph shows, this principle of holding back was also true for the women (1Co 14:33b-35).

PPT>>> — The Role of The Women —

PPT>>> Target. May I just point out that I did not write what we are about to read? If you don't like the message, please don't shoot the messenger!

****18. What, even in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, further reveals the participatory nature of first century church meetings?

PPT>>> ESV 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 As in all the churches of the saints, 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. 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.

Whatever it was that the women were not supposed to say, this would not have been written unless first century church meetings were participatory. It would not have been an issue if there was a “one man show” in progress. It is obvious that people were free to ask questions of the speakers during the church meetings. Even if Paul only meant that women were not to be the ones doing the questioning, it still remains that at least the men were free to quiz a speaker.

As with the tongue that was not to be spoken or the prophecy not delivered, the requirement for women to be silent is not a matter of divine worth or gifting, but rather of order. Just as both the tongues speaker and the prophet are to be silent under certain conditions, so too the women are to be silent. The silence asked of the women is not static, but rather dynamic, designed to draw the men out to be the leaders that God intended them to be in both the family and the church. According to the text, their silence is actually a form of submission.

The context here is the regulation of one person at a time speaking to the whole church. It does not apply to congregational singing or corporate responses. According to this passage, there are some situations when women are not to address the gathered assembly. Perhaps Paul meant not at all (never) or perhaps he meant for them to be silent only with respect to the judging of prophecy (through asking questions of the prophet).²⁰

PPT>>> — Two Questions —

****What is the answer to the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36?

²⁰ A full treatment of correct application of this passage is beyond the scope of this session. It is dealt with much more fully in the chapter entitled “Silence in Church.” It may be good to skip ahead to that chapter in next week's study. Other articles on women speaking in church may be viewed at NTRF.org.

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:36** Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?

19. What were the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36 designed to do?

PPT>>> **Stay in Line!** Evidently some in Corinth wanted to conduct their meetings differently than this passage requires. These questions are to convince them they had no right or authorization to conduct their meetings in any other way than that prescribed in 1 Corinthians 14. The same holds true today!

— The Lord's Command —

****In this next passage, Paul really pulled out the big guns. **What heavy artillery did Paul fire in 1 Corinthians 14:37?**

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:37** 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.

PPT>>> **Divine Direction**

20. What does 1 Corinthians 14:37 indicate about whether the guidelines of 1 Corinthians 14 are merely descriptive or are actually prescriptive?

We need to be about the agenda of helping His churches come into compliance with everything the Lord commanded. The Lord gave Moses minutely detailed instructions on the construction of the tabernacle. It is no surprise that this same Lord would also have detailed instructions for the meetings of His people. We have no right or authority to deviate from His plans.

— The Penalty —

******21. How should we respond to anyone who fails to recognize this truth (1 Corinthians 14:38)?**

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:38** If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

PPT>>> **IGNORE.** Those who argued against Paul's instructions were to be ignored (not recognized).

— Three Imperatives —

******22. With what three imperatives did Paul close this chapter (1Co 14:39-40)?**

PPT>>> **ESV 1 Corinthians 14:39-40** So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.

PPT>>> **NAS 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22** Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

PPT>>>

— 4. Other Appropriate Contributions —

23. 1 Corinthians 14 is not an exhaustive list of everything that could or should occur in a church meeting. It is simply about the regulation of the more spontaneous spiritual gifts (revelations, tongues and interpretations). **What other contributions to a church meeting can be made, based on Acts 2:42, Acts 14:26-28 and 1 Timothy 4:13?** Other appropriate activities include:

PPT>>> NAS Acts 2:42 . . . they were continually devoting themselves to . . . prayer.

PPT>>> NIV 1 Timothy 4:13 . . . devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture . . .

PPT>>> NIV Acts 14:26-27 . . . they sailed back to Antioch . . . On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. **(Missionary Testimony)**

— Conclusion —

PPT>>> **Cemetery Picture.** In a cemetery there is perfect order, it is quiet, there is no questioning, but there is no life. Better life with a little disorder than order with no life! It is easier to cool down a howling fanatic than to resurrect a corpse!!

Joke: One little boy kept trying to get another little boy to go along with him to his church. The other boy finally said, "I can't go; we belong to a different abomination!" Let us pray our church meetings are not an abomination to the Lord!

Pew Potatoes: Western folks are conditioned to sit silently in church, as if watching TV. It takes time and prompting to overcome this! It will seem awkward to people at first. If no one brought any food to contribute to a potluck dinner, it would not be much of a meal. So too if no one comes prepared to contribute to a 1 Corinthians 14 meeting, it will not be much of a meeting!

PPT>>> 24. **What are some guiding principles for congregational participation in church meetings, based on 1 Corinthians 14 and Hebrews 10:24-25?**

PPT>>> 1. Church meetings are to be at least somewhat **participatory** (1Co 14:26).

PPT>>> 2. Everything is to be done in a **fitting and orderly way**; there are definite guidelines to be followed (1Co 14:40). Only **one person at a time** is to address the assembly (1Co 14:27, 31).

PPT>>> 3. Everything said or done in the meeting must be designed to **strengthen (edify)** the church (1Co 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 26, 31).

PPT>>> 4. This type of participatory meeting is not optional, is not just interesting history, is not just quaint information. It is the **"Lord's command"** (1Co 14:37).

— Miscellaneous Issues —

1. The Size of a Congregation

Which context would better facilitate a 1 Corinthians 14 type of meeting, a smaller congregation or a mega church meeting in a cavernous worship center? Why?

The size of the congregation will largely determine what will take place in the meeting. Really large gatherings typically redirect the focus toward lectures, worship or evangelism, rather than mutual edification. Huge gatherings are not conducive to the biblical objective of open participation in the meeting. For instance, one of people's greatest fears is public speaking. Smaller churches foster and nurture mutual participation of every member of the body.

Population Control: Meetings that are either too big or too small create their own set of hindrances to participatory gatherings. Too few people can seem dull. Too many people present will intimidate the shy and work against open sharing. The picture painted by the New Testament is of very crowded house churches; not tens of people, but not thousands of people either. Scores of people in a church seems to be the New Testament norm. For instance, the house church in Dura-Europa could easily hold 65 - 75 people. There were 120 in the upper room in Acts. Great diversity of spiritual gifts is seen in 1 Corinthians 14; it was not a micro church!

2. The Elders' Role in Meetings

According to 1 Corinthians 14, what role should elders play in participatory phase of the meeting? Amazingly, elders are never mentioned in this passage on the participatory aspect of church meetings.

Elders are needed to help keep the meeting edifying. The leaders may sometimes need to guide and prompt and encourage, taking on the role of emcee. They will also minister behind the scenes coaching and encouraging the brothers to be sure the meetings are edifying. For example, when lack of participation is a problem, the elders will need to lead out more to encourage input from others.

Insight: Edifying participatory church meetings do not just "happen". Unlike traditional church services where everything is pre-planned and typed up in a bulletin, New Testament church meetings are more Spirit-led. However, some people over-react to the stifling confines of a worship service and run into the opposite ditch of anarchy. Church meetings are to be Spirit-led, but the Spirit partially uses elders to help make it edifying. The elders are behind-the-scene coaches, encouraging and training so that everyone operates from out of his spiritual gift.

Based on 1 Timothy 1:3, what was one of Timothy's jobs at Ephesus?

NAS 1 Timothy 1:3 Command certain men not to teach strange doctrines any longer.

Timothy's job was to prohibit the teaching of false doctrine. Just because any one of the brothers has the opportunity to teach, it does not follow that he can teach just anything he wants to. Any teaching that is contrary to the essentials of the faith is not to be allowed. A good indicator of the consensus of the church over the past two thousand years is the early creeds (such as the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed). These creeds are not authoritative in and of themselves. What is significant is that virtually every church group since these creeds were written has

reached the same interpretations of those basic doctrines. All teachings must be within the bounds of historic Christian orthodoxy.

If someone teaches grievous error in a church meeting, whose job is it to stop it? The lure of an interactive meeting may be strong enough to draw in those with aberrant theology who are looking for a place to promote their unique doctrine. Following the biblical pattern of open meetings must not become an occasion for false teachings to flourish! The prevention and correction of error is precisely one reason elders are needed. Elders must be men who are mature and grounded in the Faith. They must detect and refute error when they hear it. Even though all the men in the church should take responsibility for dealing with the false teacher, it is ultimately the elders' duty. The elders are the quality control men.

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Having an open format could conceivably attract heretics who would seek to advance their novel views. How should this be prepared for and handled?

3. Disruptive Visitors

Uninformed **guests** can easily hijack a meeting by unedifying remarks. **Egomaniacs** may try to take over. The **mentally unstable** may speak loudly and often, to the chagrin of the assembly. **Critics** may attack what the church does or believes in the meeting. Elders are needed in such cases to restore order with wisdom and patience, or to bar unstable people from speaking at all. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! One idea is to allow only members in good standing with the church to speak (not visitors).

4. Children's Church

Paul intended some of his letters to be read aloud to the entire church (Col 4:16). Based on Ephesians 6:1-3, what evidence is there that children remained in the church meeting with their parents? See also *Matthew 19:13-15, Luke 2:41-50, Acts 21:5.*

When Jesus was twelve years old, he spent time with the elders, not a youth group! The New Testament pattern seems to be for children to be present in the meeting with their parents. However, very small children who begin crying loudly in the meeting need to be removed from the meeting by a parent until the child is quieted. Older children must be trained to sit and play silently so as not to disrupt the meeting. Some parents will be oblivious to this need and in such cases the leadership must speak to the parents in private to enlist their cooperation in controlling their children.

5. Carnal Christians

What if the people of the church are not walking with the Lord? What will the meeting be like? The participatory meeting will be very quiet if the men are not walking with the Lord and

thus have nothing to share. This problem will show itself rather quickly and the result will be most unedifying.

Joke: Just before she dismissed them to go to church, a Sunday school teacher asked her children, "Why must we be quiet in church?" To which one little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping in there." *May this not be true of our church meetings!*

**** = Ask this question before having someone read the text aloud.

Next Lesson: E-mail the next set of discussion questions out to the class (or print them up and hand them out at the end of this lesson). Ask them to consider the issues, answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

Teacher Preparation: To help you prepare to teach this, go to www.sermonaudio.com/ntrf, go to our series on Early Church Practice and find this lesson.

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