3. Worship Strategy of the Ancient Church to Encourage, Build Up.

Introduction: Jesus left the ancient church with a strategy for worship designed to encourage, to stir up love and good deeds, and to build up the church. How could this early church strategy make your worship services more meaningful? The strategy was to unleash the laity to fully use the various spiritual gifts God had given them. There was an open format for sharing, with orderly spontaneity, designed to strengthen the church.

In a full service gas station, everything is done for you (gas pumped, oil checked, windshield cleaned, tire pressure checked). In a typical modern “worship service” everything is done for you too (it is almost a performance). Professional musicians often lead in worship, followed by an interesting message by a professional pastor. People like this very much. It is quite edifying. However, as good as this is, it is rather like playing a guitar with only one or two strings. Wouldn’t it be better to have twelve strings?

A modern worship service is very much like watching a baseball game. You are allowed to cheer, but never to go out on the field and play ball yourself. Your contribution to the typical modern worship service is like one more gallon of water going over Niagara Falls.

In contrast, New Testament church meetings were not “full service” per se. Early church meetings were characterized by a principle of participation. In the first-century church, ordinary believers regularly and significantly contributed verbally 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.

Major Benefits: Allowing participation by the congregation at large helps prevent apathy, atrophy, and entropy. It takes advantage of the net benefit of many, not just one or two. The more input, the more ideas, the more experiences, the better and deeper the insights that are gleaned.

There are richer contributions to the meetings. Practical, heartfelt testimonies are shared that come from everyday struggles to apply God’s word to real-life situations. This will result in greater Christian growth by the congregation, and more opportunities to raise up leaders.

- Most importantly, this is how Jesus wants us to conduct our church meetings.

— Scholarly Testimony —

Church historian Ernest Scott: “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.”

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1 Ernest Scott, The Nature Of The Early Church (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 79.
Professor John Drane: “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.”

London Bible College lecturer G.W. Kirby: “There appears to have been considerable fluidity with time given for spontaneous participation.”

William Barclay: “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.”

— Scriptural Evidence —

Now let’s look at the scriptural evidence is there that early church meetings were participatory.

I. Jewish Synagogue Meetings

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:

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." << Pisidian Antioch

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. << Iconium

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 . . . << Thessalonica

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. << Berea

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

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

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The Practice of The Early Church: A Theological Workbook

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. «< Ephesus

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

II. Hebrews 10:24-25

****What is that we are supposed to consider when we assemble together as a church (Hebrews 10:24-25)? 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).

Principle of Participation: 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.

2. What does it mean to “consider” (Heb 10:24-25) something? The Greek word means look at, observe or contemplate (katanoeo, BAGD, p. 415). Our English word “consider” means to think carefully about, to give thought to.

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.

What do you think of when you think of stirring up (ESV) something (10:24)? It means to excite to activity or growth, agitate, foment, provoke, stimulate. Negatively, some people “stir up trouble”. On the positive side, we are to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

Example: A stir stick is used to stir cream and sugar into coffee. We are to be spiritual stir sticks!

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. The focus was not exclusively on leaders. It was about each member doing his part as led by the Spirit. All members of Christ’s body bear equal responsibility to encourage one another.

4. Where is this one another encouragement supposed to happen; what is the setting? The setting is our assembling together. Worship must be formatted in such a way as to allow ample opportunity for mutual, one another encouragement.
Examples:
Who is discouraged that you might encourage?
Who needs to be prayed with?
Who can you purpose to fellowship with?
Who should you take an interest in?
Who could you get to know better?
Is there a testimony you could share?
Can you bring a new song to the church?
What did God do in your life you could report?
What did the Lord show you this week in your time alone with Him?
Can you use your gift of exhortation to exhort the church?
Do you have a word of wisdom to declare?
Can your gift of discernment be helpfully shared?
Has God given you a word of knowledge?
If any man’s gift is teaching, let him teach!
Have you an encouraging word?

Principle of Participation: 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.5

The church meeting is not the only place this encouraging can go on. The early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper as an actual meal, every Lord’s Day. This uninterrupted time of fellowship is a great venue for one another type encouraging and stimulating to love and good deeds.

III. Acts 20:7

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.

Paul Talked with Them: Acts 20:7 records that Paul, when visiting the church at Troas, spoke until midnight, took a short break, then spoke the rest of the night. The Greek verb describing what he did is dialegomai (our word “dialogue” is transliterated from it): “consider and discuss, argue”; it is a reciprocal conversation. It primarily means to discuss.6 Thus, the ESV states that Paul “talked with” them, not that the 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.

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5 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.

Principle of Participation: 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.  

IV. 1 Corinthians 14

Contextual Consideration: 1 Corinthians 11-14 is all about church meetings, especially as concerns the use of spiritual gifts in a meeting. 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. 

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

“These verses give a fascinating glimpse into the kinds of activities that took place when the early church gathered as the body of Christ to worship the Lord”

The context: ESV 1 Corinthians 14:23 “the whole church comes together” 

What we see here is a principle of participation.

To whom was this addressed (14:26)? Who were the readers? The word Paul used to address the readers was “brothers”. Based on modern church meetings, one would expect it to say “pastors” rather than brothers, because it is mostly only pastors who speak in a typical church meeting. Amazingly, pastors are not even mentioned in this passage on church meetings (1Co 11-14).

Pastors are important. They are the responsible to be sure church meetings follow the guidelines laid out in this passage. Thayer said that an overseer is, “one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done rightly.” Their job is to be sure the meeting follows the guidelines laid down in 1 Corinthians 11-14.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26, the words “each one” is found (read text). Suppose 1 Corinthians 14:26 said “only one” rather than “each one” (ESV). Which option would be more descriptive of modern worship services? How so?

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7 Allowing for questions and dialog is good. Not so good are endless bull sessions with off-the-cuff comments, undifiying add-ons, or allowing the undisciplined to go off topic. 
8 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. 
9 Dennis & Grudem, eds., ESV Study Bible (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2212. 
10 Thayer, Lexicon, 243.
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.

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.

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

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.¹¹ 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).¹² 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.

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

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).

¹² Even convicting reproofs can be edifying.
**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.

**ESV Malachi 1:8** When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.

**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!*

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

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The context here is the regulation of the use of spiritual gifts in the church meeting. Everything done is to be motivated by love:

**ESV 1 Corinthians 12:7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 13:1-2** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers . . . but have not love, I am nothing.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 14:1** Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts . . .

**ESV Romans 12:6-8** Having gifts . . . given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

**ESV 1 Peter 4:10-11** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another . . . whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God . . . in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

**Perspective:** This is not amateur hour. This is a time when we loving use our spiritual gifting to serve the body of Christ.
NIV 1 Corinthians 14:12 . . . try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

—“A Hymn”—

8. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26, who determined the songs that the church sang? See Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16. 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 a song ("hymn" is from psalmos, "a song of praise"\(^\text{13}\)).

Principles of Participation:
a) “The music must not turn the church into an audience enjoying the music, but into a congregation singing the Lord’s praises in His presence.”\(^\text{14}\) Thoughts on music: Be careful of worship leaders; their presence too often encourages music consumption, rather than congregational participation. Also, it has been observed that electronic amplification suppresses congregational singing.\(^\text{15}\)

b) 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 even with regard to singing:

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

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.

ESV Psalm 95:2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

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. One must be sensitive to the needs of each church. In some circles, certain styles of music are not edifying (overly rocky praise songs or Gregorian chants). It is ultimately the role of the elders to be sure the singing in a church meeting is edifying. Furthermore, the lyrics must be theologically correct. We must avoid by an undevotional theology and an untheological devotion.

\(^{13}\) Bauer, *Lexicon*, 891.

\(^{14}\) DA Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 212

—“A Lesson”—

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. 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. 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. It would be limited to those with spiritual gift of teaching who are mature in the Lord and have sound theology and who are in good standing with church.

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.

Again, what we see here is a principle of participation. A major duty of pastors is to teach the Scriptures. However, those same Scripture clearly state that brothers with the gift of teaching could also bring the lesson.

Teaching is important. It should be an integral part of every church meeting. Acts 2:42 reveals that the early church was “devoted to” the apostles’ teaching:

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

Does the above describe your church?

ESV 2 Timothy 4:1ff I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and 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 receives 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.

As relates to the primary teaching time, there probably was no spontaneity. Such an important aspect of a church meeting would require scheduling in advance so as to allow time for ample preparation.

As before, the prime directive is that everything that is done be edifying. All teaching must be edifying.

16 The responsibility for teaching the church lies squarely with the men. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 must be taken seriously.
**What caution about teaching does James 3:1 offer?**

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.

10. How does James’ caution indicate that early church meetings were participatory (James 3:1)? James’ caution makes sense in light of the participatory meetings that characterized the early church.

— Various Charismatic Gifts —

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!

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.

— Tongues —

13. How does 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 further illustrate a principle of participation in early church meetings?

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.\(^\text{17}\)

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 and not exercising our liberty.

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.

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:40 . . . all things should be done decently and in order.

Pastors are Important. As Thayer pointed out, a pastor is “one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done rightly.”

\(^{17}\) 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.
14. In 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, why was Paul so insistent that tongues be interpreted? See also 14:2, 4, 5.

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:2-5 ... one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him ... unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

If there is no interpreter, the tongues-speaker is to remain silent. 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 no interpreter was present, the tongue would not edify the church. Limiting it to three tongues speakers allows room for other gifts to operate.

--- Prophecy ---

15. What in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a indicates a principle of participation in first-century meetings?18

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.”19 The impromptu nature of prophecy is clear: “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.”20 The goal of prophecy is “so that all may learn and all be encouraged.”21

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).

Evidently, as with tongues, there was to be a maximum of three prophets who were allowed to speak.22 There is both a principle of participation and a principle of order.

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:40 ... all things should be done decently and in order.

Pastors are Important: “one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done rightly”

Looking at 1 Corinthians 14:31, what was the purpose of prophecy in the meeting?23 See back to 14:3, 4b, 5b.

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18 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).
19 1 Corinthians 14:29.
20 1 Corinthians 14:30.
21 1 Corinthians 14:31.
22 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.
23 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.
Based on 14:32-33a, why could Paul expect the prophets to speak “in turn” (14:31) and not all at once?

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).

The Effects of Prophecy:
- “that all may learn”
- “all be encouraged”
- “upbuilding”
- “encouragement”
- “consolation”

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a . . . you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged . . .

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:3-4 . . . the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation . . . the one who prophesies builds up the church.

— The Role of Women —

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

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. 

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24 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). 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 lesson in next week’s study. Articles on women speaking in church may be viewed at NTRF.org.
— V. Other Appropriate Contributions —

17. 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:

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

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

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)*

What we see here is a principle of participation. Ask yourself, *how does this compare to your church meetings?* The alternative is a worship service where everything is planned in advance and typed up in a bulletin and only one or two people are allowed to speak. Of course, pastors rightly fear chaos. Remember, there is complete order in a military cemetery, but no life. It is better to have life and risk a little disorder, than to have perfect order and no life. It is easier to cool down a fanatic than to resurrect a corpse.

We are all too familiar with an overweight person who is a couch potato, who simply sits on the couch eating and watching television. Sadly, in the church today we have pew potatoes in our worship services.

Gordon Fee: “By and large the history of the church points to the fact that in worship we do not greatly trust the diversity of the body. Edification must always be the rule, and that carries with it orderliness so that all may learn and all be encouraged. But it is no great credit to the historical church that in opting for ‘order’ it also opted for a silencing of the ministry of the many.”

— Two Questions —

****What is the answer to the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36?** The answer to both is no. The church in Corinth was not the only church that had the Scriptures, nor was the church in Corinth the source of the Scriptures.

18. **What were the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36 designed to do?** They were intended to persuade the church in Corinth to 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! What we see in this passage is a principle of participation from which the Corinthians had no authorization to deviate, and neither do we.

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The Practice of The Early Church: A Theological Workbook

Lesson 3: Participatory Worship

— The Lord’s Command —

****19. What does 1 Corinthians 14:37 indicate about whether the guidelines of 1 Corinthians 14 are merely descriptive or are actually prescriptive? This is not merely a good suggestion, or a creative idea, or Paul’s opinion. It is a command from the Lord Jesus. Jehovah 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.

How does this compare with your church meetings?

What we see in the passage is a principle of participation beyond congregation singing and making financial contributions.

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!

— The Penalty —

****20. How should we respond to anyone who fails to recognize this truth (1 Corinthians 14:38)? Those who argued against Paul’s instructions were to be ignored (not recognized).

Anyhow who advises against a principle of participation is to be ignored.

— Three Imperatives —

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

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.

— Conclusion —

22. What are some guiding principles for congregational participation in church meetings?

1. Church meetings are to be participatory/each one has/one another. (1Co 14:26).
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).
3. Everything said or done in the meeting must be designed to strengthen (edify)/encourage the church (1Co 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 26, 31).
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).
Participatory Worship is a Strategy of the Ancient Church to:
  - Unleash the Laity
  - Heighten Interest
  - Increase Participation
  - Strengthen the Church
  - Multiply Use Spiritual Gifts
  - Reduce Chances of Boring Service
  - Obey Direct Command of the Lord
  - Lessen Over Dependence on Pastors
  - In Keeping with One Another Passages

— Practical Applications —

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 conductive 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 were 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.

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.
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!*  

Controversial Topics

Everything shared in the meeting should be designed (crafted, calculated) to edify (build up, strengthen, encourage) those who are listening. There has to be purpose and intentionality to it. Things that would be appropriate to share in one church might not be appropriate in a different church. For example, a Presbyterian church would be edified to hear a teaching promoting infant baptism, whereas a Baptist church would not. It would wise not to share anything in the 1 Corinthians 14 meeting that goes against the general consensus of the church’s beliefs. To that end, the pastors of a Baptist church might set a principle that nothing be shared in the meeting that contradicts anything in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000. Since the Baptist Faith and Message might be wrong about something, the pastors should be willing to meet in private with any dissenter to discuss it, but the 1 Corinthians 14 meeting is not the occasion to raise that dissention. Imagine two rams fighting in a flock of sheep; it is likely some little lambs are going to suffer collateral damage!

NIV 1 Corinthians 14:40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Other topics are not contrary to the Baptist Faith and Message, but are none-the-less controversial, and should be dealt with humbly and cautiously. For example, regarding end times events, the Baptist Faith and Message basically only says that Jesus is coming back again in person. Obviously, it would be inappropriate to teach that Jesus is not coming back again. Beyond that, there are several competing interpretations of other prophecies (such as preterism, historicism, futurism, or idealism; there are differing views on the millennium, and on Israel). If a person is bold enough to teach on one of these secondary issues (fools rush in
where angels fear to tread), he must be sure his teaching is presented in such a way that those who hold to differing view are not made to feel like second-class citizens. The speaker must also be careful to deal with differing views accurately, so that those who hold to those other views feel their view has been fairly represented. If those who differ feel they must leap up to present their side of things, the speaker has not taught in an edifying way.

So, pray before you speak, be sure the Holy Spirit is prompting you to get up, and be sure to present your material in a way that is calculated to build up the church.

ESV Ephesians 4:15 . . . speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ . . .

ESV 1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

NAS 1 Timothy 1:5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

**** = 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.

• A video on this lesson can be found at NTRF’s YouTube channel.

• An audio of this lesson can be found at SermonAudio.com/NTRF.

• An article on this lesson can be found at NTRF.org.

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