

1. "EACH ONE HAS" CHURCH MEETINGS

Introduction: 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.

Premise: Jesus and the apostles left the first-century church with a strategy for church meetings designed to encourage the saints, to stir up love and good deeds, and to build up the church. Jesus' 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 the early church there was a principle of participation. Church members were free to spontaneously speak in the meeting. There were, however, rules of engagement! The prime directive was that anything said had to be motivated by love and designed to build up the church.

Commentator 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."¹

Synagogue Meetings

1. In the following texts, what indicates that first century synagogue meetings were open to audience participation? 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**

¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 135.

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

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

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: The earliest churches were made up Jewish believers recently departed from various synagogues. Thus, it is not surprising if early church meetings were also participatory. The point to be observed here is that New Testament church meetings would have been consistent with synagogue practice of participatory meetings.

Hebrews 10:24-25

******What is the main command in Hebrews 10:24-25?** The readers of Hebrews were to consider how to may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

2. What in Hebrews 10:24-25 indicates that their church meetings were participatory?

What does it mean to “consider” something (10:24)? In English, the word “consider” means to think carefully about, to give thought to. The Greek word here (*katanoeo*) means to contemplate.² For the original readers to come unprepared to the gathering of the church would have been like attending a wedding wearing sweat clothes when you were asked to wear a tuxedo (**Mt 22:10-14**).

If no one brought food for a family reunion, there would not be much of a feast. Similarly, if no one came to the meeting prepared to contribute, there would not be much of a meeting. Each member needed to consider *ahead of time* what he could contribute to the Sunday church gathering.

Who was supposed to do all this stirring up? To whom does “us” refer (10:24)? Hebrews was written to ordinary church members. They were to encourage “one another.” It was every believer’s job. The focus in New Testament church meetings were not exclusively on leaders. It was about each member doing his part. Each member of Christ’s body bore equal responsibility to encourage the other.

What does it mean to “stir up” 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, the Hebrews were to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

Example: A stir stick is used to stir cream and sugar into coffee. The Hebrews were to be spiritual stir sticks.

² Bauer, *Lexicon*, 415.

Based on 10:25, what was the setting for all this one another stirring up? The setting was when they met together. Early church meetings were formatted in such a way as to allow ample opportunity for mutual, “one another” encouragement.

Theologian 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.”³

Principle of Participation: When the Hebrew Christians assembled as a church, it was to be characterized as a meeting where there was ample opportunity for each believer to encourage each other. It was not focused on only one person (the pastor). It was about each person doing his part. Rather than a lot from one person, the goal of participatory meetings was a little from a lot of people. Everything said had to be carefully offered to the church with the goal of encouraging the others present.⁴

The participatory church meeting is not the only time this encouraging occurred. The early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper as an actual meal, every Lord’s Day. This uninterrupted time of fellowship over food was a great venue for one-another encouragement and to stir up love and good deeds.

Acts 20:7-11

3. What in Acts 20:7-11 indicates that Paul’s teaching method was dialogical?

- **“talked with” (20:7):** From *dielegeto*, the lexical form of which is *dialégomai* (transliterated “dialogue”). It’s primary meaning is “to conduct a discussion.” In other places, *dialégomai* is rendered as “reasoned” and “reasoning.”
- **“speech” (20:7):** “Speech” is from *logos*, a very broad term. Although it certainly can refer to a speech, *logos* can also simply mean speaking as in talking.
- **“talked” (20:9):** From *dialégomai*, “to discuss.”
- **“conversed” (20:11):** In English, the “converse” is obviously related to “conversation.” The underlying Greek is *homileo*, “to speak with someone.” In this passage, *homileo* is a virtual synonym with *dialégomai*.

Help With Dialogical Teaching: Download our free “How to Lead a Bible Discussion” workshop at NTRF.org.

³ John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1999), 402.

⁴ Walking in the Spirit is an essential element in participatory meetings. 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: Based on **Acts 20:7-11**, it appears that Paul did not deliver the information in the form of a lecture. Paul's teaching method was clearly more of a discussion than a monologue. He got other people involved. It certainly was not an uninterrupted message as if broadcast on 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.⁵

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Contextual Consideration: 1 Corinthians 11-14 concerns ecclesiology. Chapter 14 specifically regulates the use of tongues and prophecy in a church meeting. The overall point for us to glean is that there was a participatory aspect to the use of spiritual gifts in early church meetings.⁶

******4. What in 1 Corinthians 14:26 indicates that their church meetings were participatory?** They were clearly participatory ("each one has"). There was meaningful "audience" input.

ESV Study Bible: "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"⁷

The Point: What we see here is a principle of participation.

Why is it significant that Paul addressed this to "brothers" (14:26) rather than to pastors? 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 entire passage on church meetings (**1Co 11-14**).

Caveat: Pastors are important. The lexicographer **Thayer** said that an overseer is "one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done rightly."⁸ They are the responsible to be sure church meetings follow the guidelines laid out in this passage.

Based on 14:26, what was the setting for all this activity? It was a regular, normal church meeting ("when you come together"):

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:23 "... the whole church comes together ..."

⁵ Allowing for questions and dialogue 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Dennis & Grudem, eds., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2212.

⁸ Thayer, *Lexicon*, 243.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26, the words “each one has” is found. Suppose it said “only one has” rather than “each one has”—which option would be more descriptive of modern worship services? How so?

— Building Up —

What is the overall command of 1 Corinthians 14:26? Everything said had to build up the church. Each brother who chose to speak had to take the initiative to be sure that he had a positive, edifying verbal contribution to make. This is the prime directive.

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:12** ... since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

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

What does “building up” (1Co 14:26) mean? The Greek for “building up” (*oikodomé*) means strengthening or edification. One lexicon described *oikodomé* as the action of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, and holiness.⁹ Any comment made in participatory had to be lovingly designed to encourage, build up, strengthen or edify the other believers present. For example:

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:3** ... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:31** ... you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged ...

Insight: All this points to the participatory nature of early church gatherings as each person ministered according to the spiritual gifts that involved speaking.

5. Why is it 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).

Leaders’ Role: “Each one has” participatory meetings is where the wisdom of leaders is needed to hold the meeting to the standard of edification. Some brothers will consistently make unedifying remarks; it is the elder’s job to take him aside and privately coaching. Leaders need to continually remind the church that anything said in the meeting must be designed to build up the body. There is to be a certain level of decorum in the meeting. 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.

⁹ Thayer, *Lexicon*, 40.

Just as in the Old Testament the worshippers brought sacrifices into the temple, so too the words spoken in the church meeting are to be like offerings to God. They should be measured, weighed and considered to build up the congregation.

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.

6. What can be learned about the use of spiritual gifts in church meetings from the following texts? 1 Corinthians 12:7, 13:1-2, 14:1, Romans 12:6-8, 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Everything said was to be motivated by love and designed to serve others:

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 **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.

NIV **1 Corinthians 14:12** ... try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

Perspective: This is not amateur hour. This is a time when we lovingly use our spiritual gifting to serve the body of Christ.

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."¹⁰

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

¹⁰ Ernest Scott, *The Nature of the Early Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 79.

— “a hymn” —

7. What can we learn from 1 Corinthians 14:26 about music in early church meetings?

See also *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) who were gifted in music had the opportunity to bring a song (“hymn” is from *psalmos*, “a song of praise”¹¹).

Since early church meetings were clearly participatory, perhaps any brother (gifted at music or not) could at least request a song be sung:

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

D.A. Carson: “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.”¹² 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.¹³

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 at least 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 hymn sung? It has to be edifying. One must be sensitive to the needs of each church. In certain congregations, certain styles of music are not edifying (**examples:** 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 both an undevotional theology, and an untheological devotion.

— “a lesson” —

Teaching is an important part of any Lord’s Day church meeting:

¹¹ Bauer, *Lexicon*, 891.

¹² DA Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 212

¹³ Jonathan Aigner, “6 Reasons We Don’t Need Song Leaders in Worship”, *Patheos.com*, accessed December 28, 2019.

ESV 1 Timothy 4:13 ... devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

8. What can we learn about the weekly “lesson” (14:26)? In short, **a)** any “brother” with the gift of teaching could potentially teach (he didn’t have to be an elder), and **b)** it had to edifying.

a) Considering the fact that Paul was here regulating the use of spiritual gifts, “each one” of the brothers who had the gift of teaching could bring a teaching.¹⁴ However, since all leaders must be able to teach (**2Ti 2:24**), it also makes sense that the primary responsibility of teaching would regularly fall to an elder. However, 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.

Principle of Participation: Again, what we see here is a principle of participation. A major duty of pastors is to teach the Scriptures. However, those same Scriptures clearly state that brothers with the gift of teaching could also bring the lesson. Following Paul’s example in Troas (above), a dialogical approach for longer teachings would better fit the principle of participation and “one another” learning.

Spontaneity: As relates to the “lesson” (**14:26**), 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. Those gifted to teach would need to schedule it with the elders in advance. Any unscheduled, spontaneous teachings during the share time would necessarily have to be of a very short duration to allow for multiple teachers on any given Sunday.

Teaching is important: Teaching 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 ...

How does the early church’s “devotion” to teaching (Acts 2:42) relate to the “lesson” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26? It is the job of the leaders to be sure the church receives in-depth Bible teaching. So important is teaching, that if one had to choose between a church that had a participatory meeting but no in-depth teaching, and one that had good teaching but was not participatory, we would advise picking the church with in-depth exposition.¹⁵

b) Based on 14:26, what was the prime directive for any lesson taught? As before, the prime directive was that everything done be edifying. It is not edifying to have to endure a brother attempting to teach who does not have the ability to do so. Furthermore, it does not build up the church if the lesson is shallow, and full of emotionalism, personal opinions, or theological error.

¹⁴ The responsibility for teaching the church lies squarely with the men. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 must be taken seriously.

¹⁵ We advise this based on our 30+ years of experience with churches that have participatory worship.

— Various Charismatic Gifts —

9. How do revelations, tongues and interpretations (1Co 14:26) indicate that some aspects of first-century church meetings were spontaneous (not scripted)? Unlike the lesson, the more obviously supernatural charismatic gifts could not be scripted in advance. Either the Spirit moved or He didn't. He does not consult with us first!

Application: Along with a principle of participation, there was also a degree of spontaneity.

London Bible College lecturer G.W. Kirby: "There appears to have been considerable fluidity with time given for spontaneous participation."¹⁶

Why would the cessation of charismatic (14:26) not nullify a continuing principle of participation? The principle of free participation would still hold true. There could still be teaching, singing, exhortation, testimony, prayer, Scripture reading, missionary reports, etc.

— Tongues —

*******10. How does 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 indicate a degree of spontaneous participation?** The tongues speaker was supernaturally and spontaneously moved to utter words of a language he did not know. He did not have to prepare for it in advance. Thus, it could not be scheduled in advance.¹⁷

Why "at the most three" tongues (14:27)? It was most it was likely to allow air 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 could speak in tongues at any given moment in time? Though their meetings were both spontaneous and participatory, there was still strict order. It had to be "each on turn" (one at a time).

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

Leaders are Important. As Thayer pointed out, a pastor is "one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done rightly."¹⁸ It is the elders' job to enforce the guidelines.

Paul insisted that tongues be interpreted (14:27-28). Based on 14:1-5, why was this? An uninterpreted tongue was not edifying to the church, and so failed the prime directive test!

¹⁶ G.W. Kirby, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1982), p. 850.

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.

¹⁸ Thayer, *Lexicon*, 243.

God sometimes gave a speaker a supernatural tongue that was not to be spoken (“If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet,” 14:28). The same was true for the fourth man with a tongue: he was not allowed to speak (14:27). Why would God give a person a revelation that He did not want him share? Just because a person can do something, does not mean he should do it. The holding back was for the greater good, because if no interpreter was present, the unknown tongue would not edify the church. Limiting it to three tongues speakers allowed room for other gifts to operate.

Principle of Participation: A case can be made that the gift of tongues ended in the first century. Even so, the general principle of spontaneous participation remains.

— Prophecy —

******11. What in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a indicates a degree of impromptu participation?**¹⁹

- a) 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.”²⁰
- b) The impromptu nature of prophecy is clear: “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.”²¹
- c) Prophecy is the result of revelation, and cannot be scripted in advance.

Prophets were sometimes to be silent (14:30). Why would God give a revelation that He did not want delivered? 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). It is a matter of serving others by holding back. It is to put others first. Also, it presumably could be given at a later time.

Based on 14:31, how many prophets spoke at any given moment in 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.²²

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

Leaders are Important: A pastor is “one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done rightly.”²³

Based on 14:31, what was the purpose of prophecy in the meeting?²⁴ See back to 14:3, 4b, 5b. It had to do with learning and encouragement.

¹⁹ As with tongues, it is outside the scope of this study to deal with the gift of prophecy.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:29.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 14:30.

²² The command was not that two or three prophets *must* speak, but that they must be *allowed* to speak if they so desired.

²³ Thayer, *Lexicon* 243.

²⁴ 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 saints.

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

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:5b The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

According to 14:31, why could Paul expect the prophets to speak “one by one” rather than all at once?

Principle of Participation: A strong case can be made that prophecy ended in the first century. Even so, the general principle of spontaneous participation remains

— The Role of Women —

******12. What, even in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, further reveals a principle of participation?** 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.²⁵

— V. Other Appropriate Contributions —

13. 1 Corinthians 14 was not an exhaustive list of everything that could occur in a church meeting. It mainly concerns the regulation of tongues and prophecy. **What other contributions to a participatory church meeting could 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 **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)**

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

²⁵ As with the tongue that was not to be spoken or the prophecy not delivered, the requirement for women to be silent was not a matter of divine worth or gifting, but rather of order. Just as both the tongues speaker and the prophet were to be silent under certain conditions, so too the women were to be silent. The silence asked of the women was 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 was actually a form of submission. The context here is the regulation of one person at a time speaking to the whole church in a tongue or prophecy. It does not apply to congregational singing or corporate responses. It is clear from this passage that there are some situations when women were 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. Articles on women speaking in church may be viewed at NTRF.org.

Application: What we see here is a principle of participation. Ask yourself, *how does this compare to your church meetings?* The alternative is a performance-type 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. 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.

Example: A couch potato is someone who simply sits on the couch eating and watching television. With reference to participating in church meetings, we have pew potatoes in our worship services. They've been conditioned to sit down, shut up, and passively listen.

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."²⁶

— Two Questions —

******What is the answer to the questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36?** The answer to both is no. The church in Corinth was not the only church that had instructions from the Lord regarding church meetings, nor was the church in Corinth the source of that instruction.

14. 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.

— The Lord's Command —

******15. What does 1 Corinthians 14:37 indicate about whether these guidelines 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.

What is it that is being commanded by the Lord (14:37)? This command comes toward the end of a long section on ecclesiology (1Co 11-14). It began with a praise for holding to apostolic tradition (11:2), and closed with a command to follow those traditions.

Application: *How does this compare with your church meetings?*

²⁶ Fee, *Corinthians*, 698.

What we see in the passage is a principle of congregational participation that goes beyond congregation singing and allowing them to give financial offerings when the plate is passed.

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 —

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

Application: Anyhow who advises against a principle of participation is to be ignored (!).

— Three Imperatives —

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

If tongues and prophecy have ceased, then two of these three commands are irrelevant.

17. Why did Paul repeat that everything was to be done decently and in order (14:40)? It was to emphasize even with a principle of open, spontaneous participation, it was not “anything goes.”

18. Criticism or Command? Some argue that 14:26 was a criticism of chaotic meetings. Even so, what was the inspired solution in the verse that follow?? The inspired correction was for regulated, orderly participation, not a prohibition of it (**14:27-33**). Later on, we are informed that regulated participatory meetings are “the Lord’s command” (**14:37b**). Thus, 1 Corinthians 14 is not merely descriptive, it is actually prescriptive.

— Conclusion —

19. Based on all the above texts, summarize the information about “each one has” 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). For example, 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, build up, 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 meetings are an apostolic strategy to: Unleash the laity, heighten interest, increase participation, strengthen the church, multiply the use of spiritual gifts, reduce the

chances of a boring service, obey a direct command of the Lord, lessen over-dependence on pastors, and is in keeping with various “one another” texts.

Example: 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?

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 meetings of the whole church. 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.

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.

Major Benefits: Allowing participation by the congregation at large helps prevent apathy, atrophy, and entropy. It takes advantage of the net benefit of many believers, not just one or two leaders. 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.

**** = 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.

Stephen E. Atkerson
NTRF.org
Revised 01/03/2024

— 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 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, archaeologists estimate that 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 neither micro church nor mega 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. However, elders are very much 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 utters grievous error in a church meeting, whose job is it to stop or correct it? The lure of a participatory 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? It is good to have a statement of faith that the church agrees to. It should be made known that no teachings are to be made that contradict or undermine church's beliefs. It might be a good idea to only allow members in good standing to speak.

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: Only allow 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!*

6. 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 be 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.

Extra Thoughts

Opening Welcome & Comments

“During our Testimony/Exhortation Time, please keep it short (under 7 minutes) so others will have time to share, and be sure it is edifying. Today I want to fine tune what it means to be edifying.

1. **Don't contradict what we as a church generally believe.** For us, that means in general the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 2000 and in particular the *First London Baptist Confession* of 1644. Let's say you are convinced infant Baptism is true. The sharing & testimony time is not the place to try to fix us! If we're wrong, we want to know it. But talk to the leadership in private. If you make a good enough case maybe we'll give you a special teaching time to try to convince us on a Wednesday night or something. If you succeed, we'll be come Presbyterians.
2. **Don't introduce controversial, extra-biblical topics that have little or no bearing on the application of Scripture.** Suppose you are convinced the lunar landing never happened, but rather was a government ploy to intimate the Soviets. Maybe you're right, but so what? This is not the time or place to air that conspiracy.
3. **Don't assume everyone agrees with you on various disputable matters.** What I'm talking about here are biblical applications believers struggle with: military service vs pacifism, politics (tea party, republicans, democrats), the observance (or not) of Christmas, the prophetic significance of geo-political Israel, the consumption of alcohol, owning a television, head coverings, voting, end-time events, vaccines, government economic policy, immigration, etc. **Be careful!** Be very humble and circumspect about it. Ultimately, if it is not edifying, maybe it should not be talked about at all. If it hurts the weak among us, don't say it. If there are visitors that week, don't say it. Is there a time and place? Yes! During the fellowship of the Lord's Supper, when we see each other during the week, etc. What's a fun discussion in private is not necessarily suitable for public consumption.
4. **'Let the others pass judgment.'** The elders don't enjoy having to publicly state that they judge something said to incorrect, or to distance ourselves from it. But we have done and will do it. We've even had to flat-out stop people mid-sentence before. It's no fun, but we'll do it!"

FAQs

Who should be allowed to participate? Allow any member in good standing to participate. Visitors are asked to refrain from speaking (membership has its privileges)! We say that to speak we have to know you and love you. However, we don't encourage children to speak. We do allow the youth to speak, but it often leads to lots of coaching them afterwards to help them understand what is and is not edifying. Of course, we do a lot of coaching with all ages to help ppl get what is appropriate and what is not, but especially if

youth speak, which they often do. Sometimes the youth are a little too eager to speak, so we ask in general that if a person shared last week, not to share the next week. We prefer to give airtime to more mature believers.

What are your fellowship's guidelines for what is considered an unedifying remark? An edifying comment is one that encourages or builds up people in their faith: an answered prayer, divine provision, testimony of an evangelistic opportunity, a short exhortation from Scripture, something learned in one's quiet time, a praise to the Lord, etc. Unedifying examples: Long, rambling, confused ideas are not edifying; they are like sounding a trumpet call that no one knows. Even if a sharing is generally edifying, we ask it be kept short, no more than 5 minutes (we'll give them up to 7); if not, elders coach afterwards. Like a pencil it should have a point! Tell us what time it is, not how to build the clock. Other examples of unedifying comments include a July 4 history lesson on the American Revolution with no reference to how Scripture does or does not support what happened or should have happened; a statement on how bad the Canaanites were to help understand why God didn't want Abraham to take a wife for Isaac from among them, but without any New Covenant parallels (such as that believers are not to marry spiritual Canaanites!); a political rant against President Obama or Biden or Democrats in general; teaching infant baptism in a church already committed to believer's baptism; promoting something questionable/disputable that the church as a whole is not concerned about (anti-Christmas, anti-Easter, anti-civil marriages, anti-Christmas, pro cloth head coverings, that the IRS is unconstitutional, etc.).

Should a specific time be scheduled for singing or a time for prayer, or is it just as the Lord burdens someone to share? In order to create more of a worshipful atmosphere, we sing 3 songs the musicians have pre-picked at the beginning of our time together (usually takes about 15 minutes), then we open it up to testimonies. If a person requests a song during the testimony, we'll sing it. We spend time on Sundays in congregational prayer as the Lord leads; our corporate prayer occurs mid-week.

Should anyone who teaches be required to adhere to specific doctrines to protect from confusion or contradictory lessons? Absolutely! In general, we go by the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 2000 and more specifically by the *1st London Baptist Confession* of 1644. No one who shares is free to contradict or attempt to undermine anything taught in those two documents. Church leaders must protect the sheep from needless wrangling or confusion.

