

INTRODUCTION TO OVERALL SERIES

Every New Testament church letter was written to an illegal congregation that met secretly in someone's home, usually under bi-vocational leadership. The ecclesiology presented in the epistles was thus *designed* for effective shepherding in a smaller setting. The result? God's kingdom spread like yeast throughout the Roman Empire.

Jesus said: "No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."¹ His point was simply that some actions are inappropriate. Borrowing Jesus' illustration, if we were to compare the new wine to pastoral ministry, then the wineskins might be likened to ecclesiology. Arguably, the best wineskin for small-church shepherding is found in the dynamic small-church practices of the New Testament. These practices won't work in a large church. However, there are, for example, over 40,000 Southern Baptist churches with under 100 in attendance. They are poised to enjoy the benefits of New Testament church practice.

Small churches that have adopted these New Testament practices **1)** have abandoned the business model of church, are **2)** more organic than organized, **3)** more family-like than corporate, **3)** smaller rather than larger, **4)** more relational than programmed, **5)** more informal more than formal, **6)** focus more on one another than on one leader, and **7)** prefer authenticity over expertise. Additionally, first-century ecclesiology was **8)** designed to get far more people involved, making every member a minister. Because genuine, close, solid relationships are developed through these practices, **9)** disciple making can be personalized—tailored to strengthen each person's weakness.

In this workshop, we'll be exploring first-century house churches, what their meetings were like, how they celebrated the Lord's Supper, how their leaders led, their teaching styles, and the role apostolic traditions should play today. The ultimate goal is to co-labor with Jesus to "present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."²

1. PARTICIPATORY CHURCH MEETINGS

What is a spectator sport? In a spectator sport, professional athletes compete on the playing field to entertain the gathered crowds. People in the stands can cheer, but are never allowed to get down on the field and play in the game. A modern church "worship service" is very much like watching a spectator sport. The congregation is allowed to watch and cheer, but never to go out on the field and play ball themselves.

¹ Mark 2:22. In Job 32:19-20, Elihu said: "Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak, that I may find relief ..."

² Ephesians 5:27.

Premise: First-century church meetings were not a spectator sport. Any member could contribute verbally to the proceedings. The prime directive was that everything said had to be edifying, encouraging, equipping, or motivational. The leaders were more like side-line coaches than star players in this phase of the gathering.

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.”³

Hebrews 10:24-25

****I got a jury summons once that said I was hereby summoned and “commanded” to report to the courthouse. There is a command, an imperative in **10:24-25**. **What is the main command in Hebrews 10:24-25?** The readers were commanded to consider how to spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

1. What in Hebrews 10:24-25 indicates that early church meetings were participatory? The meeting was formatted in such a way as to all opportunity for them to encourage one another to love and good deeds.

In the text we find the word, “us”. **To whom does “us” refer (10:24)? Who was supposed to do all this stirring up?** This was written to non-church leaders. Based on the greetings found at the end of the epistle, the author didn’t expect the church leaders would even read this letter: “Greet all your leaders ...” (**13:24**). Thus, the “us” refers to both the writer and his readers (ordinary church members).

2. The overall command is to consider how to stir others up to love and good deeds. What does it mean to “consider” something (10:24)? It means to think carefully about, to give thought to. The Greek word here (*katanoeo*) means to contemplate.⁴ Each member was supposed to consider *ahead of time* how he might contribute to what happened in the Sunday church gathering.

What does it mean to “stir up” something (10:24)? A stir stick is used to stir cream and sugar into coffee. The Hebrews were to be spiritual stir sticks. It means to excite, 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.

Just based on these two verses (10:24-25), what is the purpose of a church meeting? It is to stir one another up to love and good deeds, and to encourage one another (nothing is said about it being a “worship service”).

³ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 135.

⁴ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 415.

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.”⁵

Principle of Participation: When the Hebrew Christians assembled as a church, it was formatted so that there was ample opportunity for each believer to encourage the others there.⁶

Acts 20:7-11

3. What words used in Acts 20:7-11 indicate that even Paul’s teaching method was participatory?

- **“talked with” (20:7):** From *dialégomai*⁷ (transliterated “dialogue”). Its 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* again, “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*.

Principle of Participation: The early church’s teaching times, even when led by an apostle, were at least to some degree discussion oriented, another indicator church meetings were participatory.⁸

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Context: 1 Corinthians 11-14 is a long section on church practice. Chapter **11** is about the Lord’s Supper, **12** is about spiritual gifts, **13** states that the use of gifts should be motivated by love, and **14** is specifically about the regulation of tongues and prophecy in church meetings.⁹

******What is the overall command (imperative) of 1 Corinthians 14:26?** The prime directive was that anything said had to build up the church. For example:

⁵ John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1999), 402.

⁶ Walking in the Spirit is an essential in a participatory meeting. It is not a religious amateur hour.

⁷ *dielegeto* in the text.

⁸ See our free “How to Lead a Bible Discussion” workshop at NTRF.org.

⁹ The goal here is simply to show that early church meetings were participatory, to teach on tongues or prophecy.

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

Based just on 14:26, what is the purpose of a church meeting? It is for the edification of the saints (nothing is said here about a “worship service”).

4. These instructions were clearly for when “the whole church comes together” (1 Co 14:23). What in 1 Corinthians 14:26 indicates that early church meetings were participatory? The words “each one has” show that there was meaningful congregational 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”¹⁰

5. Why is it significant that Paul addressed this to “brothers” (14:26) rather than to pastors? This shows that church meetings were focused on the brothers, not just the leaders. Amazingly, pastors are not even mentioned in this entire passage on church meetings (1Co 11-14). Pastors are to be more like side-line coaches than star players.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26, it says “each one has”. Suppose it said “only one has” instead. Which option would be more descriptive of a modern worship service? How so?

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.”¹¹ They are responsible to be sure church meetings follow the guidelines laid out in this passage.

— Building Up —

6. The prime directive is that all things be aimed at building up the church. What does “building up” (1Co 14:26) mean? The Greek for “building up” (*oikodomé*) means strengthening or edification. One lexicon described it as the action of someone who promotes another person’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, and holiness.¹² Any comment made in participatory meetings 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.

7. What types of comments would serve to build up (edify) the congregation? The church could be encouraged with words of comfort, spiritual insights, evangelistic testimonies, answers to prayer, etc.

¹⁰ Dennis & Grudem, eds., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2212.

¹¹ Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 243.

¹² Thayer, *Lexicon*, 40.

Why was it important that all things be done for building up (14:26)? *1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12.* Edification is a main reason the church gathers together. Notice the emphasis on edification throughout **1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12** (read aloud).

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 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). Our talk must be edifying, fitting, and full of grace. *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.

Leaders' Role: Some brothers will consistently make unedifying remarks. Suppose a brother got up one Sunday at gave a history lesson on the American Revolution. His lesson may have been accurate, but if it in no way tied into Scripture, it was inappropriate. It is the elder's job to take such brothers aside for private coaching in how to build up the church. Leaders need to continually remind the church that anything said in the meeting must be designed to build up the body.¹³

— “hymn” —

8. What can we learn from 1 Corinthians 14:26 about music in early church meetings? *See also Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16.* They sang!

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.

According to 1 Corinthians 14:26, what must be true of any hymn? It has to be edifying. In some congregations, certain styles of music are not edifying. **Examples:** overly-rocky praise songs or Gregorian chants. It is ultimately the role of the leaders to be sure the music is edifying. Furthermore, the lyrics must be theologically correct. We must avoid both an undevotional theology, and an untheological devotion.

Furthermore, it appears that any musically-gifted brothers could bring a hymn¹⁴ (“hymn” is from *psalmos*, “a song of praise”¹⁵).

¹³ Avoid an interactive discussion wherein a few guys bat something around while everyone else is held hostage.

¹⁴ As Paul is dealing with the use of spiritual gifts, he probably had in mind brothers who had the gift of music.

¹⁵ Bauer, *Lexicon*, 891.

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.”¹⁶ Be careful of worship leaders; their presence too often encourages music consumption, rather than congregational participation. Also, it has been observed that electronic amplification can suppress congregational singing.¹⁷

— “lesson” —

9. What can we observe from 1 Corinthians 14:26 about a “lesson”? Any one of the brothers who had the gift of teaching was potentially free to teach (even if he was not an elder).¹⁸ The leaders certainly had the last say in who taught; it should be limited to those who are mature in the Lord, have sound theology, and are in good standing with church. **Note:** Since all leaders had to be “able to teach” (2Ti 2:24), it follows that the primary responsibility of teaching would fall to the leaders.

Based on 14:26, what is the prime directive for any lesson? It must be edifying. It is not edifying to endure a brother attempting to teach who does not have the ability to do so. Neither does it build up the church if the lesson is shallow, full of emotionalism, based on personal opinions, or full of theological ignorance. The training of teachers by the leaders is essential.

Not Spontaneous: 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.

Teaching is important: The early church was “devoted to” the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42). 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, versus one that had good teaching but was not participatory, we would advise picking the church with in-depth exposition.¹⁹

Principle of Participation: Again, what we see here is a principle of participation. Following Paul’s example in Troas (above), a dialogical approach for longer teachings would better fit the principle of participation, and of “one another” learning.

— Various Charismatic Gifts —

10. How does the mention of a revelation, a tongue and an interpretation (1Co 14:26) further indicate that first-century church meetings were spontaneous (not scripted)? The more obviously supernatural charismatic gifts could not be scripted in advance.

¹⁶ DA Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 212

¹⁷ Jonathan Aigner, “6 Reasons We Don’t Need Song Leaders in Worship”, Patheos.com, accessed 12/28/2019.

¹⁸ The responsibility for teaching the church lies squarely with the men. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 must be taken seriously.

¹⁹ We advise this based on our 30+ years of experience with churches that have participatory worship.

London Bible College lecturer G.W. Kirby: “There appears to have been considerable fluidity with time given for spontaneous participation.”²⁰

11. Why would the cessation of charismatic gifts not nullify a continuing principle of participation? There could still be the introducing of a new song, an exhortation, a testimony, prayer, shared wisdom, Scripture reading, missionary reports, etc.

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 ...

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.”²¹

— The Role of Women —

******12. What, even in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, indicates 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.²² Whatever the sisters were not supposed to do, the brothers were still free to do it.

— 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.

13. What statement was being made through the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36? What we see in this passage is a principle of participation from which the Corinthians had no authorization to deviate, and neither do we.

²⁰ G.W. Kirby, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1982), p. 850.

²¹ Ernest Scott, *The Nature of the Early Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 79.

²² Articles on women’s silence may be viewed at NTRF.org.

— The Lord’s Command —

****What does 1 Corinthians 14:37 indicate about whether these guidelines are descriptive or prescriptive? It is a command from the Lord Jesus.

14. What was it that was commanded (14:37)? This command comes toward the end of a long section on ecclesiology (1Co 11-14) that began with a praise for holding to apostolic tradition (11:2), and closed with this command to follow those traditions (14:37). Everything in-between are apostolic traditions, and are both commended and commanded.

Application: What we see in the passage is a command to allow orderly congregational participation.

— The Penalty —

****15. How were the Corinthians to respond to anyone who failed to recognize this command (1 Corinthians 14:38)? Anyone who advised against a principle of participation was to be ignored.

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.”²³

16. What we see in the New Testament is a principle of participation. What blessing is a church missing that fails to recognize this principle of participation? It can lead to apathy, atrophy, and entropy.

— Three Imperatives —

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

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

18. Criticism or Command? Some argue that 1 Corinthians 14:26 was a criticism of chaotic meetings. Even if so, what was the inspired solution in the verses that followed? The inspired correction was for regulated, orderly participation, not a prohibition of it (14:27-33).

²³ Gordon Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians”, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1987), 698.

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.

— Conclusion —

19. Based on all the above texts, summarize the information about participatory church meetings.

1. Early church meetings clearly were **participatory, with an emphasis on “each one has” and “one another”** (1Co 14:26).
2. Everything said in the meeting had to be designed to **strengthen, edify, build up, encourage** the church (1Co 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 26, 31).
3. Everything was 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).
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).

Application: What we see here is a principle of participation. The alternative is a performance-type worship service where everything is planned in advance, typed out in a bulletin, with only one or two people allowed to speak. 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. As Adrian Rogers once quipped, it is easier to cool down a fanatic than to resurrect a corpse!

**** = 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 answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

- A video, audio, and an article can be found on this lesson can be found at NTRF.org

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— Background Information for Depth —

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!

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.

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.**

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.

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 dissent. 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.

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. Unless they are well known to the leadership, 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! My church goes by 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.

Other Texts

*******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. Thus, it could not be scheduled in advance.²⁴

Why were tongues limited to “at the most three” (14:27)? It was most likely to allow opportunity for the other gifts to operate.

Based on 1 Corinthians 14:27, how do we know they didn’t all speak in tongues at once? It had to be “each on turn” (one at a time). This suggests there should also be a limit on all spiritual gifts to allow time for variety (singing, lesson length, prayer, etc.).

Paul insisted that tongues be interpreted (14:27-28). Based on 14:1-5, why was this? An uninterpreted tongue did not edify the church.

Principle of Participation: Even if tongues ended in the first century, a general principle of spontaneous participation remains.

******What in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a indicates a degree of impromptu participation?²⁵**

- a) Prophecy was the result of revelation, and could not be scripted in advance.
- b) The impromptu nature of prophecy is clear: “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.”²⁶
- c) 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.”²⁷

Why do you suppose there was a limit of three prophecies (14:29)? It may have been to allow time for the other gifts to operate.²⁸

Based on 14:31, how we know that they didn’t all speak at once? They were to speak “one by one” (again, there is to be both spontaneity and order).

Based on 14:31, what was the purpose of prophecy in the meeting?²⁹ See back to 14:3, 4b, 5b. It had to do with learning and encouragement.

Principle of Participation: Even if prophecy ended in the first century, a principle of spontaneous participation remains

²⁴ It is outside the scope of this study to deal with tongues.

²⁵ It is outside the scope of this study to deal with prophecy.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:30.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:29.

²⁸ The command was not that two or three *must* speak, but that they must be *allowed* to speak.

²⁹ Do not get into the difference between teaching and prophecy. The point is that church meetings were participatory.