

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 “Spiritual Gifts – Love and Order” September 7, 2014
Job 12
Psalm 68

The task of a prophet, according to Paul, is to edify, encourage, and console.

You might say that Job’s three friends came as “prophets” to comfort him –
to explain how Job’s situation fit into the cosmic scheme of things!

Job’s approach is pretty straightforward:

God is just – I am innocent – and therefore we have a problem!

The three friends would all make good Presbyterian pastors.

They are trying to do everything “decently and in order,”
and they are especially eager to vindicate God’s justice.

Their approach is equally straightforward:

God is just – you are guilty – and therefore we *don’t* have a problem!

Job challenges them in the next chapter – 13:7,

“Will you speak falsely for God and speak deceitfully for him?
Will you show partiality toward him? Will you plead the case for God?”

It’s a stunning challenge:

if you are a lawyer, and you could either take the case for God or for a man,
whose case would you plead?

I’ll defend God, thank you! I’m not going to take a case against him!!

Oops!

Wrong answer!

At the end of the book, God shows up and says, “Guess what, boys? Job was right!”

God does not need a lawyer.

The danger in apologetics (the defense of the faith)
is always that we are tempted to become a defense attorney,
seeking to vindicate God.

God has called us not to be lawyers, but to be prophets:

those who *proclaim* and *announce* the tidings of what Jesus has done.

Psalm 68 speaks of the victory of God –

as well as the *women* who announce the news –
the good tidings of the victory of God over their enemies.

Paul will be very clear in 1 Corinthians 14 that women should not speak *in the assembly* –
but that does not mean that they should not speak *at all!*

Sing Psalm 68
Read 1 Corinthians 14

I realize that each of you will hear Paul differently.

Some of you hear “women should keep silent” – and it’s like nails on a chalkboard.
Others hear that and are eager for a sermon against modern feminism.

What’s a preacher to do?

I want all of you to remember Paul’s own strategy in writing to the Corinthians.

As Paul talks about the gifts –
as Paul works through matters of daily life and worship –
he centers his whole discourse around *love*.

1 Corinthians 13 is at the center of what Paul is doing here.

After all, Paul is writing to a church that is divided on many points.

And Paul wants them to *love* each other!

So as we hear what Paul says to *us* –
let us remember what Paul has said about *pursuing love*.

Love waits patiently.

Love does kindness.

Love does not insist on its own way.

Love does not rejoice with wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Today we are talking about “love and order” in the church.

In verses 26-33, Paul talks about the “assembly” – as he puts it in v25, “in church” –
what we would call “the worship service.”

1. Edification and Order – the Worship of the Church (v26-33a)

²⁶ *What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.* ²⁷ *If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.* ²⁸ *But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.* ²⁹ *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.* ³⁰ *If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.* ³¹ *For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged,* ³² *and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.* ³³ *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.*

In the first part of chapter 14, Paul centered on the theme of “edification” –
that everything done in the worship service (in church)
should be for building up one another.

Verse 26 repeats that and uses that as the starting point
for his discussion of order in the church.

First, I’d like to make sure that we understand *what* is happening in the service.

Paul uses five different words:

First, “a hymn” – this is the word *psalmos* – which probably means a Psalm, though it could include uninspired compositions as well.
Notice that Paul puts this in the category of something that *one person* does.
He is not talking here about congregational singing.
The idea here is that one person would chant a psalm or hymn.
Possibly it could include a refrain sung by the congregation – but even that is uncertain in the apostolic era.

Second, “a lesson” – or “a teaching” – something to instruct the congregation

Third, “a revelation” – this word refers to something that is divinely disclosed.
While this *can* refer to ‘immediate’ revelation,
it could also include what we would call ‘illumination,’
where God opens our eyes to understand truths previously revealed
This makes sense of verse 30 –
where it says that if “a revelation is made to another sitting there,
let the first be silent.”
This doesn’t mean that the Spirit was regularly giving “new revelation”
to random prophets in the early church –
rather, it means that the Spirit was opening the eyes of the prophets
to what the scriptures had been saying all along.
Just think of how exciting it must have been
to have been a Christian in the first century –
studying the scriptures, and realizing for the first time
how every page of the scriptures points to Jesus!

The last two (tongues and interpretation) go together:
Scripture always identifies tongues as speaking in a known language.
And so “interpretation” would be the ability to interpret the tongue to others.

As I said a couple weeks ago, much of what passes for tongues
in the modern church
is just spontaneous vocalization –
not the biblical concept of tongues.

And I would repeat what I said then –
that spontaneous vocalization is not evil –
it’s a valid musical form, called scatting.
If you want to scat before God, that’s fine.
It’s just not a spiritual gift.

And as we saw last week,
Paul says that whereas knowledge and prophesy will pass away
(more accurately, will be *brought to an end*)
when the “perfect comes”
(which Paul identifies as the time when we will see face-to-face),

tongues will simply cease.

And Paul explains the *purpose* of tongues in the language of Isaiah 28 –
that just as the “foreign tongues” of the Babylonians
signaled to Israel the end of David’s kingdom
so also tongues in the NT
signal to unbelieving Jews their impending doom.
That’s why I would argue that after the destruction of the temple in AD 70,
the sign-value of tongues *ceased* –
just like Paul said it would.

(I will grant that Paul does not *say* exactly *when* tongues will cease –
but given that tongues died out of the early church
shortly after the destruction of the temple,
it would appear to make sense!)

The main point is that Paul expects tongues to cease,
whereas he does not expect knowledge and prophecy to cease.

Some of you may be puzzled about the whole “tongues and interpretation” business.
After all, if tongues is a spontaneous, unpredictable gift,
then how am I supposed to know whether someone can interpret it
before I start to speak?

But why do you say that tongues is a spontaneous, unpredictable gift?
Paul seems to think that speaking in tongues is analogous to prophesying –

and in verses 31-33, Paul rejects the idea that prophecy must be spontaneous and ecstatic.
He says, no, “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.
If someone is out of control, that is *not* the Spirit of God.
Because God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

So what’s the takeaway point from verses 26-33?

Verse 26 has sometimes been used to suggest that early Christian worship was very egalitarian.
“Each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.”
In fact, 1 Corinthians 14:26 was the starting point for the Quakers –
who embraced a radical egalitarian form of worship,
where everyone sits around, waiting for the Spirit to move them in this way.

And it’s true – I will admit that if all we had was 1 Corinthians 14,
I would be tempted to think that the Quakers were right.
But 1 Corinthians 14 needs to be understood in the context of the rest of scripture.

When Paul says “each one” who is he referring to?
Does he mean “everyone present”?
Including children? Unbelievers?

By the time you get to verse 34, it becomes clear that women are to be silent –
so I think it is safe to say that children were expected to be silent as well.
And the “uninitiated” or “outsiders” (the catechumens) of v16 are not expected to speak.

So when Paul says, “each one” in verse 26, it’s pretty clear
that he’s only referring to mature Christian men –
and then throughout the rest of the section, he excludes some of them!

In verse 27, he limits those who speak in tongues –
and in verse 28, he eliminates tongues entirely (if there is no one to interpret).
In verse 29, he limits the number of prophets to 2 or 3.
Yes, over time, there will be opportunity for more than 2 or 3 prophets –
but in each given worship service,
there should not be an endless parade of speakers.

So, ironically, the passage that is often used to promote a more egalitarian approach to worship
actually seeks to *limit* the number of people involved in leading worship!

If you want to understand NT practice, it can sometimes be useful to triangulate between
what we know of the synagogue,
what we know of the temple,
and what we know of the early church (by the 2nd century we have some clear material).

We know that the synagogue was not considered a worship service.
The synagogue was more of Sabbath school,
where people gathered to study and discuss the scriptures.
If you think back to the Gospels and the book of Acts,
you never see people singing and praying in the synagogue –
you see them reading the scriptures and discussing what the scriptures teach.
In that respect the synagogue was a community center not a place for worship.

The temple was the place where you gathered for worship.
In the temple you find the regular prayers, the singing of Psalms,
the liturgy of the various offerings.

Paul has already made it clear that the Lord’s Supper is a participation in the sacrifice of Christ.
In chapter 11, he rebuked the Corinthians
for their failure to observe the Lord’s Supper properly.
Now in chapter 14, he is seeking to correct abuses
in how the Corinthians are conducting the assembly.

I think it would be accurate to say
that the Corinthians took the fairly free assembly model of the synagogue,
and moved it in the looser direction of the Roman dinner party.
Paul objects to this,
and reminds them that their gatherings should reflect more of the heavenly temple

Certainly that is the result of the apostolic teaching (as seen in the second century).

Paul envisions a situation where 2 or 3 prophets speak.

As late as the 3rd and 4th centuries, it was still common in the Syriac churches for each presbyter to preach, and then the bishop would conclude.

Actually, we've done this before.

When we have our regional services,
we gather with our sister churches,
and we usually follow a "lessons and carols" approach,
with each minister reading a lesson, and then briefly commenting on it.
We have 2 or 3 prophets each speaking!

It's part of the reason why we have the elders leading in prayer in the service.

And in the coming weeks we'll move slightly further in this direction!
With Jon Bonomo moving to South Bend,
and Blair Smith being in town for a couple years,
we'll usually have at least two prophets involved in the service.

I know that we don't usually use the word "prophet" to refer to pastors,
but we saw a few weeks ago that different churches in the NT
used different words for the leaders of the church.

In Antioch (Acts 13) they spoke of "prophets and teachers."
When Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he writes to "the bishops and deacons."
In Jerusalem, we hear of the "apostles and elders" –
and then, after the apostles leave, you just hear of the "elders."

And in verses 33-35, Paul turns to the question of the role of women in the worshiping assembly.

2. Silence and Prophecy – Women in the Church (v33b-35)

As in all the churches of the saints,³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

There are a couple of questions that need to be addressed here:

First, what kind of speaking is forbidden?

The word translated "to speak" (lalein) is the verb used throughout ch 12-14.
e.g., 12:3 – "no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed.'" or any time you see the phrase "speak in tongues" (12:30, 13:1, 14:2, etc.),
and when he talks about "speaking five words with my mind."

The verb "to speak" is used a total of 24 times in chapter 14!

In other words, when Paul says that women are not permitted to speak in the churches,

he is using the word that he has used of all forms of speech in the whole chapter.

Some people have tried to say that Paul is only objecting to “chatter” –
or to the specific practice of questioning prophets –
but Paul does not qualify his use of the word “to speak.”
Indeed, he states it rather forcefully, when he concludes that it is
“shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (v35)

Second, how should we understand Paul’s appeal to the Law?
they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.

Some have argued that Paul would never appeal to the Law –
since he believes that we are not under law, but under grace.
Of course, throughout 1 Corinthians Paul has often appealed to the Law:
think back to 1 Cor 9:8 –
“Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same?”
and for that matter, just a few verses earlier in 14:21,
Paul appealed to the Law to explain what tongues are doing in the NT.

More importantly, when Paul appeals to the Law, what passage is he referring to?
Some have appealed to Genesis 3:16 –
“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” –
which may be partly in view –
but Genesis 3 focuses on the *curse*,
and in 1 Corinthians 11,
Paul’s discussion of the relationship between man and woman
focused on *creation*.

I would suggest that Paul’s appeal to the Law in 1 Corinthians 14
presupposes that you remember what he said in 1 Corinthians 11.
“For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.
Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (11:8-9)

Submission is not a bad thing.
Submission is not something that entered the world because of sin.
We submit to those in authority over us
because there can be no order in the world without submission.

If people did not submit to the highway authority,
then those yellow lines in the middle of the road would be meaningless,
and there’d be traffic fatalities every day.

We rely heavily on the assumption that there is widespread submission
to safe food packaging practices.

When you fly on an airplane, you become exceedingly grateful
for how submissive the airlines are to safety protocols!

Submission is a necessary part of life.

But what does Paul mean by this very general and sweeping statement:

“they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.”

Fortunately, Paul himself provides a little more context:

“If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home.”

The word translated “ask” has the overtones of “interrogation.”

So we’re not just talking about questions of curiosity.

(You could translate this “if there is anything they wish to inquire about, let them interrogate their own husbands at home.”

This does not sound like the stereotypical “submissive wife”!)

In fact, this is the reason why some think that Paul is just forbidding women from asking questions in church.

But if Paul was just trying to say, “they shouldn’t ask questions,”

then he would have used a different verb than “to speak” in v34 and v35.

After all, he has used the verb “to speak” more than 20 times in this chapter – and so if he wanted to say that women should refrain from something else, then he would have used a different verb here!

Certainly Paul seems to presuppose a noisier assembly than we have.

But Paul is clearly trying to quiet it down a bit!

The goal is edification –

the point is that you might learn, be challenged, encouraged, built up in the Lord.

Of course, all this leads up to the question of what to do about chapter 11, verses 4-5.

In chapter 11, we heard Paul say that women (or wives)

should pray and prophesy with their heads covered,

while men (or husbands) should pray and prophesy with their heads uncovered.

Here in chapter 14, Paul says that women should remain silent in the worship service –

saying that it is “shameful for a woman to speak in church”

(literally, in the assembly).

So there are two things that need to be held together.

Women *may* and *should* pray and prophesy.

But women should not speak in the assembly.

This is not a difficult harmonization.

1 Corinthians 14 is plainly dealing with the liturgical assembly – where the church is gathered for word and sacrament.

So the sort of praying and prophesying in view in the first part of chapter 11 is *not* the praying and prophesying of the liturgical assembly.

When you look at the rest of the NT, you see the same sort of thing.
There are certainly influential and powerful women (think of Lydia and Chloe).
There are the daughters of Philip who are called prophets.

But you never see women speaking in the liturgical assembly.

I think that our main problem is that we do not like hierarchy anymore!
In hierarchical culture, there are many levels of authority.
In egalitarian cultures, there are very few levels of authority.

We still *have* authority – no society can truly embrace anarchy!
But we have so little authority, that there is no place for intermediate *levels*.

In the ancient world, there were multiple levels of authority.
If you were an upper-class woman, then you could tell most men what to do!
Any man who was under your husband's authority was under your authority too!
And if you were a widow – or if you had inherited your parents' estate –
then you would have authority over *all those men* by yourself!

Most people were somewhere in the middle.
And for most of human history, there were superiors, inferiors, and equals.
(The Westminster Larger Catechism has a great section this!)

And for most of human history, the church had no difficulty understanding what Paul expected:
there will always be some women who are powerful and influential,
and we should encourage those women to use their power and influence for Jesus.

The early church had various “orders” of widows, deaconesses, virgins, etc.
which were never considered an “egalitarian” office with men –
but were rather various ways that *women* ministered especially to women.
Notice that I say “especially.”
It doesn't mean *exclusively* –
as though a woman could never tell a man what to do!
(Remember that in their world, powerful women were *always* telling lower-class men
what to do!)

And part of that ministry included praying and prophesying.
(And remember that Paul defines “prophecy” in 14:3
as “the one who prophesies speaks to people
for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.”)

So what should it look like today for women to pray and prophesy?
Plainly, women should not pray and prophesy in the liturgical assembly
(the regular worship services of the church).
But there are all sorts of other gatherings –
Sunday school, Bible studies, conferences.

Women *should* be upbuilding, encouraging, and consoling people.
And, as we see clearly in the case of Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos,
that prophesying may be directed toward men as well as women.

The NT regularly holds these two things together:
women *should be* actively engaged in the praying and prophesying of the church;
but women *should not be* those who lead the praying and prophesying of the church.

And indeed, Paul appeals to the same theme of honor and shame that he used in ch 11.
Just as man is the image and glory of God, so the woman is the glory of man –
so the woman who prays and prophesies with her head uncovered
disgraces her head.

Now Paul uses the same idea when he says that it is shameful
for a woman to speak in the liturgical assembly.

These are the only two places in 1 Corinthians where Paul uses this word
(disgrace or shame).

So plainly Paul wants you to think of ch 11 and ch 14 together.
They form book-ends to his discussion of life in the church.

So women, let me ask you:
how are you pursuing the gift of prophecy?
how are you seeking to become more skilled in your ability to encourage and edify?

Every October there is a conference out in Philadelphia
for women who want to improve their expository skills.
Sally has gone several times – and we'd love to send others!

Paul concludes his discussion of the gifts with something of a rebuke to the Corinthians:

3. Decently and in Order – Apostolic Authority in the Church (v36-40)

³⁶ *Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?* ³⁷ *If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.* ³⁸ *If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*

Back in chapter 12, Paul had said that God had appointed in the church,
first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, and then other gifts.

The apostles are first in the church.
Their authority and teaching remains first in the church to this day.
It's not that we don't have apostles today – we *do have* apostles!
We have the same apostles that they had in the first century!
Verses 37-38 makes the same point.

If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

The idea here is that if you do not accept the apostolic teaching –
if you ignore what the apostles' command –
then you are not a recognized Christian teacher.

There has been a lot of debate in church history over the question of “apostolic succession.”
Some have argued that what is important is a continuous line of succession
from the apostles to the present.

But Paul insists on another point:
you must recognize and submit to apostolic teaching.

After all, when East and West divided in the middle ages, both sides had “apostolic succession.”
When the Reformers refused to submit to the papal demands and anathemas in the 16th c,
both sides had “apostolic succession.”

I can trace my ordination to the apostles just as easily as any Roman Catholic!

So, yes, there *should be* apostolic succession!

Those of you who have been ordained as elders and deacons in the PCA
have been ordained by someone who was ordained by someone who was ordained
(all the way back) by an apostle!

That's the way Paul taught Timothy and Titus to do it –
and so that's the way we do it!

But it's not enough to have apostolic succession of *ordination*,
you also need to have apostolic succession of *teaching*.

Do you *teach* the same thing as the apostles?

Do you recognize their teaching as the standard by which all other teaching is measured.

God placed in the church first apostles.

Their teaching must be upheld –
not just in terms of doctrine, but also in terms of practice.

What matters is not the general acknowledgment of “apostolic authority” in general.
What matters is the particular acknowledgment that “the things I am writing you
are a command of the Lord.”

You can disagree with me (Peter Wallace) on how to interpret Paul.

That's fine!

But you need to acknowledge that these things that Paul writes
are what the Lord commands!

³⁹ *So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.* ⁴⁰ *But all things should be done decently and in order.*

1 Corinthians 14:40 has often been called the theme verse of Presbyterians!
“All things should be done decently and in order.”

It’s important to point out that “decently and in order” is *not the goal*,
but the means.

The goal is edification.

As we have seen, the point of the worship service is edification –
so that people may be encouraged, consoled, built up.

The “order” in the service is not an end in itself.

Order is a *means* to edification.

And of course, edification is not an end in itself!

How did Paul begin this chapter?

“Pursue love...”

Remember the “more excellent way” of chapter 13?

Proper order is not a straitjacket to bind and restrict.

Proper order is the path of freedom and love.

On the one hand, if you try to pursue “freedom and love” without order –
then you won’t actually get freedom and love –
you will instead wind up with all the disorders of the Corinthian church!

On the other hand, if you try to pursue *order* as an end in itself,
then you won’t actually get freedom and love –
instead you will find yourself in bed with the Pharisees.

End with LOVE!!!!

[and TH 105 – O God, We Praise Thee]