

A FITTING AND ORDERLY WAY**1 Corinthians 14:26-40**

Intro: I don't like clutter. I know that's hard to believe if you've seen my office, but it's true. As you know Kathy and I are planning some renovation in our home and it will require moving things around in our bathroom and bedroom and everything will be pretty much a mess for several weeks. I don't like even thinking about it. It's just too cluttered and disruptive to contemplate.

Maybe that's why when, while we were in college, Kathy and I attended a church that was so wild we couldn't get away from it fast enough. It was a riot of people speaking and yelling, being slain in the spirit, and literally madly running around. There was seemingly no order at all. It was a shock to our system and we both felt very, very uncomfortable. It was well over 40 years ago, yet the memory is vivid and even disturbing as we recall it.

Contrast that to the church (and it's just one of many, I'm sure) where the pastor only digresses from the time-honored order of worship at his own great peril. When I was in seminary, I preached in such a church. My friend Ken was the interim pastor there and he needed me to fill in one Sunday. He gave me the bulletin and carefully explained the order of service and stridently implored me to faithfully stick to the order of worship, to which he added, "*And do not, for any reason, forget the Gloria Patri!*" I didn't even know what a Gloria Patri was! Gloria Estefan I knew. Gloria by Laura Branigan was a song I really didn't like and Gloria by the Irish rock group Them and sung by Van Morrison I did like, but Gloria Patri was new to me. It turns out that it is a doxology that is sung in many churches and I was just an uninformed wannabe preacher. And it also turned out that I could not have forgotten it even if I wanted to because at its place in the order of service (I think it was at offering time), the organist just began playing it without my direction. I was home free.

One service was wild, crazy, and even frightening and the other was etched in stone and not to be changed in any way. One was, in my opinion, presuming upon the Holy Spirit, and the other was attempting to squeeze the Holy Spirit out.

As we've looked at 1 Corinthians chapters 11-14, Paul is striving to teach what worshipping God should look like. In a lot of ways, he had to build from the ground up because old pagan habits die hard. Not only that, and to their credit, the Corinthians' newfound freedom in Christ, and the exuberance their salvation brought them was something Paul didn't want to stifle. Nevertheless, they needed to know that worship is about God and not about personal preference and grabbing attention, and for that reason, *everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*. 1 Corinthians 14:40.

Those words are the last sentence of our text for today, so let me read that now.

(Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

This, especially verses 26-33, is a glimpse into a Corinthian worship service in about AD 50. It would be many years until there would be buildings dedicated to worship – that is, what we call church buildings. The early church would meet in any home large enough to accommodate more than a few people. They were truly house churches. A quick aside, the early Brethren in Christ did the same. Until the 1860s they met in larger homes or in barns. Church buildings were considered worldly and our only true split as a denomination came when Bishop Brinser and his churches in the district near Lebanon, PA wanted to build a church building. They were excommunicated. Twenty years later most BIC congregations were building meeting houses – our first building which is out next door to Dale and Pat Dohner's on Township Road 1656 was built about then.

In Corinth we can see that meetings had no order of service. No one constructed a bulletin and there were no designated leaders. Everything was spontaneous and unpredictable. It's easy to get the idea, that since Paul is giving instructions that perhaps Corinthian worship was somewhat like that service Kathy and I attended back when we were in college. The good thing about it was that everyone wanted to take part. The bad thing about it was that everyone wanted to take part. This is why Paul needs to give some direction. As he does it he points out that . . .

There is only one general principle for worship

- And that is, God is not a God of confusion but of peace (v. 32). Earlier in the chapter, in the verses we looked at last week, we saw that Paul was concerned for non-believers who might be confused or even frightened by uninterpreted languages in worship services. He points out that worship is to be orderly. It is not to be mayhem and if it is, seekers will be running for the exits like Kathy and I did back in 1978. Yes,

there must be freedom in worship, but not at the expense of order. The God of peace must be worshiped in peace.

- When the people of God gather, their worship needs to be based on the spiritual nature of God and the spiritual need of men and any worship that expresses the one and fulfills the other is worship God will bless. With that in mind, here are some questions to ask about worship gleaned from what Paul says here.
 - Does it help build Christian character? Paul puts it this way, *When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.* (v. 26). Whether it's what you sing, or say, or prophesy, or speak in an interpreted tongue, the church, that is God's people, must be built up.
 - Do we learn something about God? This is all through Paul's teaching. When we come away from our gathering for worship we need to know, in a tangible way, more and more of who God is and it will be revealed in our words and in our lives.
 - And most of all, do we leave worship with our faith uplifted and stronger than when we came? Do you leave ABC at noon on Sunday changed and growing and better prepared to live for Jesus in the days leading up to the next Sunday? We know this, but let's hear it out loud – gathering together with the family of God on Sunday morning (actually any time) is not something you do because "It's what we've always done before" – it's because it prepares us to live as the people of the living God between Sundays.
- Another quick aside here: As I pointed out and what can be seen in our text is that it seemed everyone had something to contribute and that's really good. . . to a point. In our tradition as Brethren in Christ, the professional ministry is a relatively new idea when all things are considered. Yes, we had ministers but they were rarely paid for their ministry before the mid- 1950s. My dad was an ordained BIC minister his entire adult life and he was one of the two pastors at my home congregation for almost thirty years, but he never received a salary in all those years. In our early years as a denomination, congregations might have had three or four ministers who would preach, but they weren't the only preachers. Through the years and down to the present we have believed that others beside those who are ordained also have a word from God. In other words, it is a mistake to think that only the professional ministry can bring God's truth to God's people. God's people are all anointed to bring God's truth to God's people. All of us.
- That's why, looking at this passage, I want to talk about . . .

What Paul says about women

- Let me read it again. *Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.* 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. This is one of those "smack my head" passages where I say, "*Oh Paul! Why did you have to go and say that?! That does not help me one bit! This is what gives you a bad reputation with those who read two verses of the entire Bible and judge the other gadjillion verses of the Bible by it.*"
- There are different ways of looking at it and we all need to prayerfully determine what the Holy Spirit is telling us.
 - One way is to build an entire doctrine out of these two verses and say women are not to speak or teach or lead in the church at all unless it is in relation to other women or children. I cannot see that here in this text. Oh, the words are very clear, but we need to see that Paul's instruction needs to be seen in the context of its local and contemporary setting, which is to say, in this case, in Corinth. One reason for this is that Paul has earlier discussed the subordinate status of women when he says *But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head* 1 Corinthians 14:5a. It's obvious there that women were prophesying *without* their heads covered. He doesn't tell them to cease and desist their public speaking, he tells them to do it in a way that honors God and in that case, it was by covering her head. It was a cultural instruction. To point that out earlier in the letter and then to say women cannot speak at all here in this passage does not make sense. It's the same letter. He is aware of the need for Christian women to avoid the scandal that would come from ignoring the social conventions of the day.

- It's like this, women had to be careful and wise as they used their newly acquired freedom in Jesus. One person points out that Paul is here protesting against the disturbances of services by *feminine chatter* – since that is the meaning of the word translated as “speak” when he says *They are not allowed to speak* in verse 34 and *it is disgraceful for a woman to speak* in verse 35. Another commentator, conjectures and suggests that some women, since they were seated apart from men, were perhaps calling out questions or commenting knowingly and, no doubt loudly, on things said in the service. This kind of conjecture is belittling to women in my mind but, truthfully, as I think about, it does make sense that an entire portion of society that had been previously silenced and stifled might have been testing their freedom. It's a theory, but who knows?
- I've really appreciated Gordon Fee's commentary on 1 Corinthians as I've done this study. He is a theologian, retired professor at Regent University in British Columbia, and he is an ordained Assemblies of God minister. All to say he is a trusted Bible scholar for me. He gave an extensive discussion on these two verses concerning women keeping silent in the church and offers several options. But the one he settles on is that he simply believes Paul never included this thought in the letter to Corinth. He believes it was a gloss (the definition of a gloss is when a copyist would leave out or add-in something to a scripture when they were copying the Bible before the days of the printing press). Fee believes some unknown copyist added these words because of a sexist bias. He clearly points out he has no proof since the earliest copies of 1 Corinthians all include it – and the earlier the manuscript the more reliable. But he uses the thinking I used a bit ago of why would Paul make this strong restriction here when previously he was giving instruction on the proper way for women to speak in worship. I'm, of course, not a fan of cutting out scripture that I don't agree with or don't understand. I just made a point about that a few weeks ago with Thomas Jefferson's Bible – but I do have to question the disparity between 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.
- My go-to theologian for many years is my former associate pastor and dear friend Pat Oldham. She is a retired ordained pastor in the BIC Church and she and her husband Gene have worshipped with us here at ABC countless times. I texted her and asked for her take on these verses and here is what she wrote: “*Paul worked with women that he respected but in this situation these women were not likely trained how to behave as a Jewess would and had a few things to learn like saving your questions and comments for an appropriate time.*” She then adds, “*It would be wise to remember that Paul was a very forceful person and didn't pull any punches when he spoke. I think of this passage as Paul saying “Would you please shut up so I can speak?!”*”
- So here is my point and this is where I come out and what I believe: Paul did not condemn women to complete silence in worship by what he says previously in chapter 11. Also, one of his most trusted colleagues was Pricilla who was married to fellow preacher Aquilla and it was they who disciplined the eloquent preacher Apollos into the faith. It was clear case of a woman teaching a man. Also, in Acts 21:9 we read of Philip's *four daughters who prophesied*. These are just a couple examples. Here is what I know, women were NOT silent in the New Testament Church! For that reason, I don't believe Paul is calling them to be silenced here in our passage for today. He is merely cautioning them to be silent when silence was called for in the same way men also are told to be silent and listen for God's voice since there are often times when, only in quietness can the voice of God be heard and absorbed. Putting it crudely, I need to agree with my trusted friend Pat, there are just times when we need to shut up and listen.

Conclusion: I've gone very long again but I know you've seen Paul's teaching here: As we worship, we must do all in a fitting and orderly way, remembering that God must be magnified and God's people built up. That is the church being the church and God is pleased. Amen.