

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
Pastor Stephen Felker
Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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1 Corinthians 14 (read vv.26-35) “Guidelines for Worship”

Intro. Have you ever wondered what we are supposed to do in a worship service? Christians tend to disagree regarding how we should carry out our worship services. Different denominations have different opinions. In addition to worship patterns that are common among Baptists, there is charismatic worship, liturgical worship, and so forth. It is easy to be confused, and we need guidance from the Word of God. So this morning we are going to look for some answers from 1 Corinthians 14.

The Corinthians had their own ideas about worship. I believe that Paul affirms some aspects of Corinthian worship, and corrects other aspects of Corinthian worship. He anticipated that some would reject his correction. Look down beginning at v.36, “Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.”

My goal this morning is to present a good & fair interpretation of the teaching of the Word of God regarding worship. If I achieve my goal, I hope you will submit to the authority of the Word of God, and not cling to any ideas that are contrary to the Word of God.

So what should we do in a Christian worship service? Well first of all:

I. THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD’S WORD TAKES PRIORITY

This is clear from the opening verses of chapter 14. Evidently the Corinthians were putting the emphasis on the gift of tongues in their worship services. But Paul says in v.1, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” Then he says in vv.4-5, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.” To prophesy means to receive God’s message, and then communicate that message to the church. In Paul’s day the message was received from the Spirit. You see, the members of the Corinthian church did not sit in the services with Bibles on their laps. The New Testament was being written and the Old Testament scrolls were expensive and not available to most believers. So God spoke to His people directly through the prophets. But today we preachers proclaim God’s message from His written Word, which contains all that we really need to know. So the end product is the same. And my main point is that Paul gives priority upon the proclamation of God’s Word.

This has been a central tenant of Baptists from the beginning. We believe in the centrality of the Word of God in our worship. That is why our pulpit is front and center. It is not off to the side, as in other denominations.

Many churches today are moving away from the proclamation of the Word of God as the central feature of worship. Many favor a more entertainment-oriented style of worship. Most messages are not driven by the text, but are topical, focusing on current events or on superficial human needs.

For 18 years as pastor of this church, I have been preaching verse by verse through books of the Bible. I see my job as proclaiming the Word of God, not my own ideas, or the latest worldly philosophy. And I believe that God has once again demonstrated that He will bless the proclamation of His Word. Not only has the church more than doubled in size, but I believe we have seen the church develop in maturity.

Now notice from chapter 14 two of the forms that the proclamation of God's Word may take. I will cover other forms later in the message.¹

A. Preaching or Prophesying – Prophesying is referred to the most in this chapter.

One purpose of preaching is to proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers. We see from vv.24-25 that Paul expected that unbelievers would be present in Christian worship services. He said, “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”

This means that we need to invite unbelievers to our worship service. You never know when one will be saved by the preaching of God's Word! Do you ever invite unbelievers to our services?

B. Teaching - This is mentioned in v.6. The role of teaching God's Word is also referred to in vv.19 & 26. Based on my own calling & gifts, my preaching ministry has a lot of teaching. In fact, one of the biblical qualifications of a pastor is that he be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).

In v.31 Paul expressed his desire that the congregation may “learn.” Do you come to church with a desire to learn the Word of God? Do you bring your Bible? Do you pay attention & listen carefully? Do you take notes?

II. THE PURPOSE OF EDIFICATION TAKES PRIORITY

Paul refers to edification 8 times in this chapter. For example, he says in v.3, “But he who prophesies speaks edification...” When we explain and apply the Word of God to individual lives, we have a ministry of edification. Then in v.12 he says, “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.” Then he says in the last of v.26, “Let all things be done for edification.” This was one of Paul's favorite words, borrowed, of course, from the field of construction. To edify means “to build up.” This concept is not alien to the “body” image of the church; even today, we speak about “bodybuilding exercises.”

Edification is a major responsibility of church leaders. Paul said in Eph. 4:11-12 that God “gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” That is why I practice expository preaching, with a focus on preaching to build up God's people. But it is clear from 1 Cor. 14 that the job of edification is not limited to preachers & teachers. All believers are to edify others (1 Th. 5:11; Rom. 15:2-3). Specifically, if you speak or sing in the worship service, your goal should be to build up believers in their faith, or win unbelievers to Christ. If what you do doesn't edify, then more than likely, you should just keep quiet! We should make sure that what we are doing is building up others, not ourselves.

¹ Revelation or knowledge, mentioned in v.6, are 2 others ways God communicated His Word to the church.

Paul gives an illustration of how one may speak or sing in a worship service, & do nothing but edify themselves. In v.16 he says, “if you bless with the spirit...” He is talking about blessing God by praying or singing in an unknown tongue. Then he says in v.17, “For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.” He really questions the value of speaking, praying, or singing in an unknown tongue that is not interpreted. Why? Because it fails the test of edification. Paul is saying that it is better to say something that builds up the church than for you to enjoy some personal spiritual experience.

One basic application of this principle is the importance of speaking or singing with clarity, and with understanding. Paul speaks in v.9 of the importance of communicating with clarity. He said, “unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.” At least 9 times in this chapter Paul refers to the understanding. We must make sure we are communicating with one another in an understandable way. Otherwise, no edification takes place.

Just last Sunday there was a bee flying in the hallway outside the sanctuary. I didn’t want that critter disturbing the service, so I went to the kitchen. Some of our ladies asked what I was looking for and I said, “a fly swatter.” One grabbed a cup. I thought that was strange. Did she expect me to trap the bee with the cup? You see, they thought I said, “A glass of water” instead of “a fly swatter.” I learned I needed to speak more clearly!

So when you sing, make an extra effort to sing clearly. When you speak in a worship service, speak clearly, and loudly enough to be heard. If I call on you to pray, speak loudly and clearly. God can hear you, but others will not be edified if you don’t.

III. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE SAINTS IS IMPORTANT

The Corinthian worship service certainly involved participation by the believers. V.26 says, “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation.” The Corinthians worshiped in a highly participatory and spontaneous fashion. I believe that Paul endorses participation in worship, though he corrects the extent & utter spontaneity of participation. We have already seen in chapter 12 that every member of the Body of Christ has a role or function to fulfill. There must be opportunities for church members to exercise their gifts in public worship. Indeed, I believe that Christians are not to come to church merely as spectators.

Let’s look at some of the more significant ways that you can & should participate in the worship services, based on this chapter:

A. Singing – This is mentioned several times in this chapter. Paul says in v.26, “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm...” He also says in the last of v.15, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” There are other Scriptures that talk about singing in the early church as well. Eph. 5:19 says that when we are filled with the Spirit, we will be “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” (Cf. Col. 3:16).

Singing will be used in various ways. If you can carry a tune, you need to participate in the worship service by singing in the choir. If you can sing well, you need to use your talent by singing special music. And all the rest should participate in congregational singing. And just sing from your heart to the Lord. Ps. 95:2 says, “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.”

There's a story about a man who, leaving church one Sunday, complained about the music. "I didn't like the hymns you chose today," he said. The pastor simply replied, "That's okay; we weren't singing them for you." His point was we aren't spectators attending a show; we're participants in the greatest and most uplifting enterprise in the universe -- worshipping God.²

B. Prayer – In vv.13-15 Paul makes several references to prayer during a worship service. For example he says in v.15, “What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding.” In Acts 2:42 we see that prayer was an important aspect of the worship of the early church.

Some of you can participate in worship by leading others in prayer. And when someone leads in prayer, you need to pray from your heart along with that person.

C. Say “Amen” – Paul says in v.16, “Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say ‘Amen’ at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?” Paul expected people to say “Amen” during the worship services!

Now what does the word “Amen” mean? It is a Hebrew word that has been transliterated into many languages. In other words, it is not translated, but just brought over into other languages as it is spoken in Hebrew. The word simply affirms that you believe the truth of something said. It’s almost like saying, “That’s right.”

Now in v.16 the congregation would be saying “Amen” to a prayer or a song. But another important time to say “Amen” is during the preaching & teaching of God’s Word. This is one other way that you can participate in the service even while someone is preaching. When you say “amen” you are giving testimony that what the preacher has just said is the truth. You are helping others accept as true what has just been said. So don’t be shy about saying an occasional “Amen” during the sermon! You will not only help others in the audience believe God’s Word, but you may also help the preacher preach better!

There is a blind professor at Southeastern seminary. I enjoy chapel service especially when he is present. Coming from the black church tradition, he listens and frequently responds to the message. He doesn’t use the word “Amen” often. I believe that he prefers to translate it’s meaning. Fairly often you will hear him say something like, “Right” or “That’s right.”

By the way, Acts 2:42 mentions 2 other aspects of worship in the early church: fellowship and breaking of bread. The latter probably referred to the Lord’s Supper. Another way that the Corinthians participated in worship was by speaking in tongues. I will deal with that in just a moment.

Finally, let’s take a look at:

IV. THE PROCEDURES FOR VARIOUS FORMS OF WORSHIP

I want to start off by giving a basic principle regarding all that takes place in a worship service:

A. There Should Be Order, Not Confusion – Paul concludes this chapter by saying in v.40, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” In v.33 Paul explains why there should be order in worship, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of

² Turning Point Daily Devotional, 8-12-05 [Illus.#C-1411].

the saints.” Apparently there was a tendency for some of the Corinthians to lose control of themselves as they exercised their gifts. The Corinthian worship service must have been rather disorderly.

This meant that the exercise of spiritual gifts such as prophecy or tongues were to always be under control. Believers in the process of exercising their spiritual gifts are never to be so "out of control" that they are unable to stop or regulate their behavior. If so, they are not under the Spirit's control, for one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control (Gal. 5:23). Furthermore, I believe that we should not distract from the ability of people to learn or be edified while worshipping. We should be careful about talking to our neighbor during the service, or getting up and walking around.

In an effort to follow this guideline for worship we do 2 things. First, we have an order or worship. This should not remove all spontaneity or leadership by the Spirit. But remember: the Spirit can lead in the planning of a service as well as during the service itself. Yet having said that, we must allow for some departure from the order of service as situations arise, and as the Spirit leads. Secondly, our bylaws state that the worship services “shall be conducted under the direction of the pastor....” [Article XI, A]. Can you imagine what would happen if 20 different people tried to control the worship service?

Evangelist D.L. Moody was leading a service and asked a man to pray. Taking advantage of his opportunity, the man prayed on and on. Sensing that the prayer was killing the meeting instead of blessing it, Moody spoke up and said, “While our brother finishes his prayer, let us sing a hymn!” At times the pastor just needs to take control!

B. Know the Procedures Regarding Preaching – This is addressed in vv.29-32. As in tongues, Paul limited this to 2 or 3 prophets, each taking a turn. In most cases I believe that the other preachers just added to what the previous preacher said. So they were not to have a situation where 2 or more preachers were preaching at the same time!

One important procedure that Paul adds is found in the last of v.29, “and let the others judge.” “Others” is from *allos* in Greek, “another of the same kind.” Thus Paul is saying that the other prophets were to judge, or evaluate, the message.³ They would compare what was said with Old Testament Scripture, apostolic tradition, and the leading of the Spirit. Some no doubt were aided by the gift of discernment (12:10).

Why did they do this? A preacher or prophet is not infallible. At times, the other preachers would correct what was said. If so, v.32 comes into play, “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”⁴ At times, the evaluation resulted in the opinion that the person was a false prophet. In that case, he would be silenced for good!

I believe that in many charismatic churches there is a common failure to judge and evaluate prophecies, words of knowledge, & revelations. They are just assumed to be true.

Now I believe that even others in the congregation should judge what is being preached or taught, at least in their own heart & mind. You should not believe everything you hear from the pulpit without first evaluating what has been said. We read in Acts 17:11, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” I would not mind it a bit if you go home and discuss the sermon as long as you do with a proper attitude.

³ Carson sees it differently: “If Paul had wanted to say 'the rest (of the prophets),' the Greek more plausibly should have been οἱ λοιποὶ [the rest] rather than οἱ ἄλλοι [the others].”

⁴ See Blomberg, 285 for a good illustration of evaluating prophecy, based on Acts 21.

I want to give you 5 of the criteria that Michael Green gives for evaluating Christian prophecy. (1) Does it glorify God rather than the speaker, church, or denomination? (2) Does it accord with Scripture? (3) Does it build up the church? (4) Is it spoken in love? (5) Does the speaker submit ... to the judgment and consensus of others in spiritual humility? (Green, *Corinth*, 77-78).

C. Know When to Speak, & When to Keep Quiet – 3 times in this text Paul describes various times or situations when someone is to “keep silent” in church. In v.28 we see that if someone is inclined to speak in tongues, but realizes that there is no one to interpret, he is to keep silent. In v.30 we see that a prophet is to stop speaking & keep silent when it’s time for another prophet to speak.

Now women have a responsibility in this regard. Paul says in vv. 34-35, “Let your women keep silent in the assemblies, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in [the] assembly” (NKJV modified).

What does this mean? Does this mean that women are never to speak in a Christian assembly? No. Paul had said back in 11:5 that women could pray or prophesy as long as they maintain a spirit of submission, which in the Corinthian context was manifested by a head covering. Surely Paul has not so quickly contradicted himself. I believe in this context Paul has in mind a specific type of speaking in the whole assembly of believers. The most immediate context has to do with a group of prophets who judge or evaluate when someone gives a prophecy. And so Paul may be saying in vv.34-35 that women are not to participate in adding to the prophecy, or questioning the prophecy in the assembly. An authoritative evaluation of prophecy would ultimately have been the responsibility of the church leadership, which was exclusively male. Paul said in 1 Tim. 2:12, “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” And based on the reference to “learning” in v.35, I believe Paul’s instruction had to do with speaking during the instruction period of the worship service. So this seems to be the best interpretation.

We can fine tune the interpretation a bit more. Paul *may* actually be referring to the wives of the prophets. The Greek word for “women” & “wives” is the same. If the wives of the prophets challenge their husbands in church, that would contradict their God-ordained role of submission, it would show lack of respect for their husbands, and be a poor example to the other wives. This is why Paul refers to the general teaching of the Law⁵ on this subject in v.34. God ordained from the very beginning of creation that the husband was to have a headship responsibility. Furthermore, this explains v.35 better. The preachers would be in a better position to answer their wives’ biblical questions than the typical husband in the church. Sad to say, in too many Christian homes today, it is the wife who has to answer the questions for the husband because *she* is better taught in the Word. By the way, this principle could apply to a S.S. class, in reference to the wives of a teacher.⁶

⁵ The word “law” was a synonym for the Old Testament Scriptures, especially the first five books.

⁶ On the other hand, the broader context refers to speaking in tongues, and this may be the type of speaking that Paul has in mind. The verb “speak” in v.34 is regularly used throughout this chapter for speaking in tongues. He may be putting yet another restriction on the exercise of the gift of tongues. Perhaps this was due to the culture of that day. On their way to the temple of Aphrodite, the sacred prostitutes would speak in ecstatic babble and clearly indicate the kind of women they were. He didn’t want Christian women to be confused for such women.

D. Know the Procedures Regarding Tongues – We see from v.39 that Paul did not want to prohibit the use of tongues. They were certainly a valid gift in Paul’s day, and we should be careful not to quench the Spirit in any age. But he did put strict regulations upon the use of tongues in public worship. Paul says in vv.27-28, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.”

One primary guideline for the public manifestation of tongues is that they must be interpretation. Paul said in the last of v.5, “he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.” If a tongues speaker is truly speaking a message from God, then the church would be edified by hearing a translation of that message. Otherwise, there is no benefit to the church. Edification of believers was Paul’s major concern, as we have already seen. Without translation, a message in an unknown tongue does not truly edify. Paul’s instruction presupposed that the congregation knew which believers had the gift of interpretation. If one of those persons was not present, there was to be no speaking in tongues.

But unfortunately, what is passed off as interpretation has been shown to be not true interpretation. Persons who have tested an interpreter by speaking in Hebrew or Greek have had their words “translated” into messages that had absolutely no correspondence to what was spoken. Furthermore, I believe it may be significant that 1 Corinthians is the only book of the Bible that mentions interpretation of tongues.

I believe that even some charismatic churches are seeking to follow these biblical guidelines. One commentator said, “Some of the fastest-growing charismatic churches today have caught on and play down the role of tongues to such an extent that most services do not contain them, and a majority of members have never spoken in tongues in public” (Blomberg, 276).

Sources: Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: 1 Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).