

"Let All Things Be Done..." - Worship and the Order of Service

God was doing some amazing things at this church in Corinth. What we read here is very consistent with what we see happening a lot in the early New Testament church. A bold movement of the Spirit among God's people. A widespread gifting of the Spirit in some amazing ways. When the day of Pentecost happened in Acts chapter 2, and the Holy Spirit was poured out on the young New Testament church, we see a lot of out of the ordinary things start to happen with the church. Things like widespread speaking in tongues, gifts of interpretation, prophecies; lots of extraordinary movements of the Spirit among the early church. I'm sure it was a very exciting time. Seeing God work in so many bold ways as he established his church and formed the New Testament Scriptures.

And yet it's in the context of this amazing time that Paul writes this set of corrections to the Corinthian church. Good things, even good things that come straight from God, can still be used in wrong ways. That was the problem with the Corinthians. Here they have all these people with these gifts of tongues and prophecy and interpretations, but they're not being used properly. Amazing gifts that were basically being perverted by how they were being used. And so Paul with his authority as an apostle intervenes to direct the Corinthian church back on track. The problem wasn't these supernatural gifts. The problem was how they were using them. These wonderful gifts, if they were going to be used in the official church worship services, needed to be used for the right purpose and in the right way.

And so today we are going to be thinking about Worship and the Order of Service. This is our final sermon in our mini-series on worship. Broadly speaking, this passage talks about how the worship service of the church is to be ordered. As Paul addresses the abuses going on in the Corinthian church, we find several principles for how to rightly order the church worship services. And so I want us to look at this passage in three points. And I'm organizing these three points by the three main admonitions that are given in this passage. Verse 26 starts out by saying, "Let all things be done for edification." And then the passage ends in verse 40 by saying, "Let all things be done decently and in order." And so that's our three points for today: First, let all things be done for *edification*. Second, let all things be done *decently*. Third, let all things be done *in order*. And as we look at these three things we'll see that they address the overall order of the worship service.

So let's turn to our first point then. Let all things be done for edification. Let's begin with verse 26. Up to this point in the chapter, Paul had been talking about the function of these extraordinary spiritual gifts. Now he begins to apply this teaching to the worship service. In verse 26 he talks about the church coming together. He speaks of different individuals coming together. And these different individuals are coming together with the different spiritual gifts that God has given them. Some have psalms from the Lord, some have a teaching or revelation, some a tongue or an interpretation, etc. Again, some amazing spiritual gifts that God had given that early church. But Paul lays down an important command here. Yes, he says it's great that you've got so many, with so many different gifts. But when you come together, it's not an individual show. No, you are coming together as a group, as a body. The purpose of your gathering is to be for edification. In other words, Paul says that the goal of their gathering is to be a blessing to the entire congregation. It's not just a time to come together and show off your own

individual gifts, or to bring attention on yourself. No, the gathering of the church is to build up the church as a whole.

That's what Paul's talking about when he says that everything is to be done for edification. When you hear that word "edification," think "edifice." Edification - edifice. The word for edification is a building term. It's about building up a building. So Paul's using a building metaphor here. This big word for edification is so commonly used in the church that we can forget what it's specifically referring to. He's saying that when the church gathers, everything that happens during the service should be for the sake of the building. Now Paul is not talking about an actual church building. This truth applies whether the church has a building of its own or not. Whether you own a church building, or rent, or meet outside or in a home, this truth applies. You see, Paul is not talking about the *where* but the *who*. Paul's saying that the church is made up a people not bricks. So when the church gathers, everything should be done to build up the church. The image of a building is the right one - laying bricks upon bricks, maintaining and growing the structure, etc. But then apply that to the people and their spiritual growth. That's what the worship service is supposed to be about. It's group focused, not individual focused.

Just notice the way Paul keeps bringing out the group focus in this passage. Verse 26, the people are "coming together." Then in verses 28, 33, and 34 he keeps mentioning the church. And the word in Greek for church here is *ekklesia*. That can be translated most literally as the "assembly" or the "congregation." The assembly of God's people is especially talking about the gathered community of Christians. And here, as it's commonly used, it's used in the sense of God's people coming together in their formal worship service. It's talking about the holy assembly of the church members. And when that happens, there's a specific priority and focus. It's on group edification. Just look at how that's explained in verse 31. "That all may learn and all may be encouraged". When God's people gather, the learning and encouragement is not just for some; not just for whoever is loudest in showing off their gifts. No, it says that "all" may learn. That "all" may be encouraged.

And so this is part of what's involved in the ordering of the worship service: it's to be ordered in such a way as to bring about growth for everyone. The order of the service is not about what helps a single individual. It's geared toward growing together. This means that there are certain things that you can do at home as a Christian that you shouldn't do at church, during the formal worship service. Things like your own personal quiet times. It's right and proper at home to have a personal, one-on-one, time with the Lord, but not at church, believe it or not. When you come to church and the official service starts, the focus changes to grow *together*.

Just look at the specific examples Paul cites. He places a limit on those with the gift of tongues and prophecy. For both the tongue speakers and the prophets, there are not to be more than two or three of each speaking at the church service. Evidently more than that would be deemed less edifying for the church. By the way, this might be a side note of instruction for pastors to not let the service and sermon be too long with too much in it. We need to have discretion on how much we feed the church at a time. This might be an argument for a three point sermon, instead of a fifty point sermon!

But there are more limitations that he mentions here. For those who speak in a tongue, they are only allowed to speak if there is someone to interpret it. Otherwise there is no corporate benefit. Maybe that individual tongue speaker might be blessed in some way, but the whole congregation won't benefit from it.

Notice Paul says in verse 28 that if that's the case, the person should be silent, *in the church*. He can speak to himself and God with this gift of tongues, but he's to be silent in church. What he could do at home, then, between him and God, is different than what he could do once he comes to the church worship service. There's a different focus. It must be edifying *to all*.

A similar restriction is put on the prophets. Verse 29 says that the prophecies must be judged. Paul doesn't spell out exactly who's supposed to be judging, either the other prophets, or the whole congregation. Likely it's both. But what this means is that when someone gets up and claims to have a prophecy, there is supposed to be some discernment going on. Is the prophecy consistent with Scripture or at odds with it? If it's at odds with Scripture, then it won't be edifying. The church isn't to just accept anything that claims to be truth. We need to be discerning, and this discernment is for the purpose of edification. Prophecy that's given in the church has to be true in order to be a help to the whole church.

And so with these two examples, Paul shows how the church service is to be ordered in such a way as to promote *church* edification. That's our first point then from this passage. Whatever we do in ordering our church's worship service, the purpose of our ordering of the service must be supportive of this goal: that we are looking not as much for individuals to be blessed individually, but for each to be blessed as part of the whole assembled church. Everything must be ordered to bring about corporate blessing, growth, and encouragement. Let's each make sure we contribute to that as well by checking our attitude appropriately at the door when we come to church. Our focus shouldn't be about what you individually can get out of the service, but how can you individually contribute to the overall growth of the church. Focus on individual growth between you and God at home in your quiet times. When we come together, look at how we can all help each other grow.

Let's look at our second point now: Let all things be done decently. Again, this is from verse 40. The word *decently* is getting at appropriateness here; it has a sort of almost visual category to this word, like in terms of modesty or what's becoming and proper to be done. It gets at our propriety in worship. The worship service should have sense of godly decorum throughout it. Well, this is another metaphor to describe how the service should be ordered. How does the church worship service have becoming and proper behavior? What's propriety in our worship? Well, if we know that it's unbecoming of a woman to wear very revealing clothes, what does that sort of image tell us about how we worship God? Well ultimately, I think it means that whatever we do in our worship service should be fitting behavior for the people of God, especially given the circumstance that we've gathered to worship the all-holy God. And what instructs us on such fitting behavior? Well, God's word. His laws. They tell us what is becoming of a Christian. God's laws tell us what is proper for when we gather worship God!

I think this command for decency in our worship is really illustrated by Paul's discussion about the women in verses 34-35. We're not told a lot of details about what exactly the background was for Paul addressing this situation with the women. All we can gather about the situation is from what we have here. Presumably you had some women who were questioning the speakers as they were giving their teachings or prophecies. Paul says this is shameful in verse 35. This word for "shameful" in the Greek is really a word that's an opposite of the word "decent." In other words, I think Paul's got this example of the women in mind when he tells us at the end that our worship should be done "decently." His assessment of the women's conduct was that it was shameful; it was not becoming of them in the church worship service. If they had a question or concern, they should wait until they get home, and then ask their husbands. Again, by the way, you see in this passage

that there are things that are appropriate for a Christian to do in their homes that are not appropriate for the public worship service.

Now I don't think Paul is just picking on women here. I don't think he's some male chauvinist pig as some people want to think. He's not just appealing to some cultural stigma over what makes something shameful versus what makes something decent and proper. No, just look at verse 34. He appeals to the Law of God. He says that the Law of God has assigned a role of submission to the women. Now Paul doesn't tell us which laws he has in mind here. Several passages come to mind, but he probably doesn't get into those passages because he already talked about that in this letter. Back in chapter 11 he talked about the importance of male leadership both in the church and at home, and he got into some of the biblical basis for that back then. And so with regard to this specific situation here, it seems he has some concern over how the women's conduct is not keeping with biblical submission. The fact that he tells the women to ask their husbands at home, suggests that his concern was that the women were effectively subverting their husbands leadership. If a woman was speaking up to ask a question of the speaker, or to raise a concern, that would not be following her husband's lead, who maybe didn't share that concern. Paul's saying that the husband and wife should talk about the issue privately first. Maybe then if the question or concern is still there, they can go together to talk with the speaker then. That kind of approach by the women would be in keeping with the leadership role God has demanded of husbands, instead of going around that structure.

So my point is this: Paul sees the women's conduct as an example of indecent behavior. But his language of something being shameful versus something being decent is just an illustration for us. He's using colorful language to get at an important matter. What we do in worship should be faithful to God's Word. Our conduct in a worship service should be fitting for a Christian, which means it should not violate or undermine God's laws. This situation with the women is ultimately just one example of a larger principle.

And I think he then drives home that principle immediately after this example with the women. Look at verses 36-38. Paul now turns to the big picture: the Word of God. This is the larger principle. Here he lays out what it means for the worship service to be done decently. It means that it's in accordance with God's Word. Paul's tying together everything he's been talking about. This isn't just about the women's conduct. Everything he's been telling them about the worship, this is all about worshipping according to the order laid out in Scripture. Look how he challenges them in verse 36. Did the Word of God originate from them? You know they had taken so much pride in these supernatural gifts. They were receiving all these words from the Lord. But any new words from God had to be consistent with what he had already said. If the way they administered these spiritual gifts were inconsistent with God's Word, then they needed to reorder things. And Paul then appeals to their claims to be a prophet. Verse 37. If they really are prophets, then they'll know what he is saying is from God. If so, verse 38 says that those prophets should be recognized. I think the translation in verse 38 is a little too wooden, by the way. This is basically saying what I just said: if they are recognizing what Paul's said is from God, then they themselves should be recognized. Otherwise, Paul calls into question whether their claims to have the gift of prophecy is even valid! In other words, this is my point: What ultimately makes something done decently in worship, is if it'd done following the authority of God's Word. God's authority dictates the order of worship.

The third and final point: Let all things be done in order. Verse 40. You could translate the word "order" here as "successively." The idea in the word is that there should be a fixed sequence for the service. There should be an organization

to it. We really see that throughout this passage, and ultimately it flows from the character of God. Verse 33 tells us the reason for this order. God is not a God of confusion but of peace. The word for "confusion" is really the opposite of the word for "order." It sometimes is translated as "disorder" or "unruliness." The word has a sorta sense of anarchy or rebellion. That's why verse 33 contrasts it specifically with "peace." Peace is a word about tranquility and harmony. There's peace in orderliness. That's quite different from confusion and chaos. Just think about the Corinthians. Evidently they were coming to the worship service and all trying to exercise their gifts over and on top of each other. They effectively were competing for the center stage, and the result was numerous people speaking at the same time. It would have been distracting, chaotic, and hard to follow or hear anyone. The spiritual gifts may have come from God, but how they were being used was not.

God is a God of peace and order. The worship service ought to reflect this. This makes sense if the worship service is to celebrate the benefits of God's covenant of grace. Those benefits include peace. They don't include confusion and chaos. Before we became a Christian, we lived in rebellion against God. We did not have a life ordered by God, but a life of rejecting God. We did not have true peace, but sat under God's judgment because of our sin. Jesus Christ died on the cross to give us freedom from sin and the peace that comes from that freedom. And so clearly our own faith is in a Lord who gives us peace. Our worship service should reflect that, if indeed it is Christ at work in us as we worship! That's ultimately what Paul is looking for, that the order of our worship would be consistent with the Spirit of Christ that is in us. If that same Spirit gives us gifts to be able to worship, then let's use those gifts according to the same Spirit of peace and order that lives inside us.

So Paul gives some specific examples here. Verse 27. When the speakers speak in tongues, he says that each must do it "in turn." No speaking over each other. He basically says the same thing for the prophets in verse 30. Only one prophecy at a time. "Let the first keep silent, for you can all prophesy one by one." When it says in verse 32 that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets it's probably referring to this. That the prophets have the ability of self-control. A true prophet is not so overwhelmed by the Spirit that they lose control of their abilities to orderly speak out the prophecy. That wouldn't be consistent with God's character as a God of peace. And so because of all this, whoever would use a spiritual gift in the service had to be governed by the sort of orderliness that Paul is describing here. The service was to be organized, not a chaotic mess. That's what Paul means when he says let all things be done in order.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Paul presents here a pastoral plea and admonition. The formal assembly of the church is to be ordered with the principles we see here. It's for edification of the church as a whole, not just an individual experience. It's to be done decently in the sense that what we do in the service must be in accordance with God's Word, not against it. It's to be done in order so that we plan out what we are going to do in the service and how we are going to go about doing it. Of course, the elders of the church are especially tasked with making sure this happens. If you look at your bulletins, you'll notice a rather fixed liturgy for our service. This is our heart-felt desire to obey what Scripture commands us here. Maybe some people might look at this and think we are quenching the Spirit, that it's overly organized or just too fixed. But at the end of the day we want to be faithful to God's Word. And God's Word lays out these principles for an orderly worship. And so this is our genuine attempt at heeding these principles. Now this exact format of our liturgy isn't fixed in stone. You know that we've changed the liturgy here and there, from time to time. But whenever do we make changes to our liturgy, we ought never to change them in a way that departs

from the underlying principles of order that we find in this passage. We don't just show up to worship on Sunday, unprepared, and see what happens. No we come with a plan and an order. We do this to maximize this time for God's glory and for the growth of the church.

Now before we close for today, I'd like to mention two final specific exhortations to us. The first is this: We can take God-given blessings and use them in the wrong way. Think about this. God was doing an amazing work at that time in the Corinthian church. All these extraordinary gifts of tongues and prophecy! Obviously God was very intentional in giving these gifts at that time. But if they back then could go so wrong, so off course, when clearly God was at work in such powerful ways, isn't this a sobering warning to us? If they could go wrong in the face of such extraordinary blessings, how much more do we have the danger to get off course in the regular, everyday, happenings of the church? How easy would it be for us to find ourselves out of order in some way in our worship service, perverting the good gifts of God in our church? What good things has God blessed our church with, that we might end up using the wrong way in our worship services? You know one possibility I can think of us is this. In our circle of likeminded churches, one thing that really stands out to me is the commitment to good teaching and doctrine. Our churches really put their pastors and elders through rigorous training and examination. Our churches really emphasize biblical teaching and Christian education. The history of our denomination really finds its roots in the Protestant Reformation where there was a resurgence in real in-depth study of God's Word. And our churches have followed through in that tradition with great zeal. This is one of our greatest strengths. In my humble opinion, this is one of our greatest blessings and gifts from God in our denomination. But do we sometimes run the risk of an imbalance in our worship service because we so emphasize the mental and academic exercises to the detriment of some of the other aspects that need to be a part of our worship service? You know, we can look at other churches and other denominations and maybe think the teaching is not quite as strong in the Word. But yet they might have some other aspects of their worship that are very strong. Maybe they might have a very heartfelt time of praise. Maybe their prayer life is fervent. Maybe they really excel in living out the things that they learn in the service. Maybe their service really spurs them on to a very active work of evangelism all week long. In other words, part of the order in our worship service needs to have a sense of biblical balance. For the Corinthians they had gotten unbalanced with too great of an emphasis on using their miraculous spiritual gifts. We too could have an imbalance in our service if we over emphasize the blessings say of solid teaching to the detriment of other aspects of the service. I'm not prepared to say today that we need to make this or that specific change. But I do think we need to keep self-examining our worship as a church. We need to keep excelling in the things we are good at, and learn from what other churches do well. All under the authority and instruction of Scripture, of course.

The second exhortation I want us to think about is a little more specific. We need to really make sure that we don't let ourselves become a distraction during the service. This passage mentions in a few places about people keeping silent. Those with a gift of tongues shouldn't speak if there's no one to interpret. The prophets should be silent until it's their turn to speak. The women were to be silent and save their questions for at home. This call to silence has the application that we shouldn't be a distraction during the service. There are so many ways we can end up being a distraction and a disruption to the order of the service, especially with us all being in a small little room like this. Now certainly there are times where we just absolutely need to get up during the service. Some emergency or something. Maybe one of the little children is excessively acting up and you just need to step out with them for a moment. If you really need to go to the bathroom, then, please, go. But let's really strive to

cut out the unnecessary distractions. Let's not have unnecessary getting up and down during the service. For example, during a potluck Sunday, or if you have snacks, I know the temptation can be to get up during the service to do something in the kitchen. But from the call to worship until the benediction, I really make an appeal to you to limit the distractions. Really, the food can wait. I don't mind if after the service when I'm giving announcements you want to go and check on something in the kitchen or run to the bathroom. That's fine. But during the official service let's make getting up for something the exception, not the norm. This is for at least two important reasons. One, so that we're not a distraction to others, so that we don't affect the corporate edification. And second, because of the holiness of God. We're worshipping in reverence, and when we are reading his Word or singing praises to him, he deserves our complete devotion.

I hope that this passage reminds us of the significance of what we are here to do as the people of God. And I hope that this passage reminds us that the order in our service is very important to God. If God cares about this, then we should too. And not only that, God knows that this is for our best! So that all God's people would grow to know him and his majesty more. That we'd grow to be more like him. Amen.

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