

Order in the Church -- 1 Corinthians 14v26-40

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[0 : 00] So that's from 1 Corinthians chapter 14, beginning at verse 26, and that's page 1155 of the Red Church Bible.

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

If anyone speaks in a tongue, two, or at the most three, should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

For you can all prophecy in turn, so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

[1 : 11] For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, 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. Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only people it has reached?

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues, but everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. Thank you, Christine.

Well, should Christine have read or not? That's the question. We'll get to that a little bit later on. Keep your Bibles open. 1 Corinthians 14.

[2 : 24] And there's some pens and sheets.

If you'd like to be able to take notes, then you can do that, or you simply use the back of the new sheet. There's spaces there if you'd like to be able to take notes as we work along. So, just a reminder, we did have a little break from 1 Corinthians last week, but we've been looking at a series which we're entitling The Gathering, which takes us from 1 Corinthians 11 through to the end of 14, which is asking the big, big question, what should we do when we gather together, just as we're doing now?

What should our meeting, our gathering be like? And we come to the very end of that. It's almost like a conclusion to all that's been spoken about.

Thanks, Alex. We're going to pray and ask for God's help to us.

Our Father God, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that you have spoken clearly to us. We ask that in the midst of the chaos of this world and the confusion that we face, that you would speak truth to us, your people today, so that you bring order out of disorder.

[4 : 10] You bring hope in times of darkness, that you bring peace where there is turmoil. So, Father, by your Holy Spirit, speak through your word, through your servant today.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, what did you say to the person you're sitting next to this morning?

Or what was your conversation like over tea and coffee? Well, the writer of Proverbs reminds us about our words.

He says this, reckless words can pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise or the words of the wise brings healing.

You see, our words have great power. They can either build up or they can tear down. They can hurt or they can heal.

[5 : 20] And I'm sure we've all experienced both. That sharp word that crushes us and breaks us or the gentle word that restores and renews.

Our words have great power. Well, in the church at Corinth, they were well known for their, what we might term, their word gifts.

So, look at verse 26. Chapter 14, verse 26. What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, so just as we're gathered together like this in this meeting place.

So, he's saying when you come together, everyone has a hymn or a song or a word of instruction or a revelation, that is a prophecy, a word from God, a tongue, that is another language, or an interpretation of that language.

You see, they've got these wonderful word gifts. But the problem is, as we've seen, their words are causing division and disorder. And in particular, throughout chapter 14, we've seen that if you had the gift of tongues, speaking in an unknown language, the assumption was that your words were more powerful, perhaps you were more spiritual, and therefore you should have more speaking rights.

[6 : 56] The church was like question time in Dolaran. Everyone wanting to have their say, and no one quite understanding what was being said. It was chaotic.

There was complete disorder. Well, as we gather together as church, we've come here today with all of our word gifts.

Everyone might have something to say, but how we use our words with each other is of crucial importance. So, look at verse 33.

For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. You see, when God speaks, he doesn't bring disorder.

God brings peace. God's word doesn't bring confusion and chaos. God's word brings clarity. Think about the creation story, that passage at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1.

[8 : 05] In the beginning, we're told, there was, what, there was like chaos and disorder, and then God spoke. And his word brought order.

And his word brought harmony. He had everything in its place. Everything as it should be. Now, the point is, as we gather together, our gathering here should reflect something of the character of the God we worship.

So, as we come this morning, our words to one another should bring clarity, not confusion.

The words that we speak to one another should bring peace and harmony into each other's lives. It brings peace to the brokenness and the disorder that our world and our lives face.

So, in conclusion, he will say in verse 40. But everything, that is, as we meet together, everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

[9 : 16] Because God is a God of order. And God brings clarity, not confusion. Well, as we gather together, there are two big things that we need to keep in mind.

Here's the first one. All our words should build up the church. All our words should build up the church.

Go back to verse 26. What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, everyone has a hymn or a song, a word of instruction, a revelation, that is, a prophecy, a tongue, or an interpretation.

All of these, and not just those, but indeed all word gifts, must be done for the strengthening of the church.

So, what's that going to look like for us here in Carragallion? Well, three things. First, we should come ready to participate.

[10 : 24] Again, look at verse 26. Do you see in the middle it says, when you come together. When you come together, everyone. So, the expectation is, is that we actually do make it a priority, as God's people, to meet together.

And when we come together as church, we come to participate. That's been encouraged all the way along. Look at verse 12 of chapter 14.

So it is with you. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church or strengthen the church.

What are they? Well, go down to verse 18. He says, I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. So it's not wrong or bad to speak in tongues.

Verse 19.

[11 : 52] To comfort those who are struggling. And to instruct those who perhaps are drifting in their relationship with God. So we don't come waiting to be spoken to by somebody else and sitting in our seats going, why isn't anybody talking to me?

We come ready to participate. Second, we come thinking of others.

The gifts that God gives to us are primarily to strengthen other people and not self. So look at verse 27. If anyone speaks in a tongue, that is, in an unknown or unlearned language, two, or at the most three, should speak.

One at a time. And someone must interpret. You see, if someone speaks in an unknown or unlearned language, it's not going to benefit the church at all because no one understands.

Verse 11. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I'm a foreigner to the speaker. And they're a foreigner to me.

[13 : 14] Verse 13. For this reason, anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. So anybody who has the gift of tongue should, well, they should be praying for that interpretation.

Or somebody else should interpret so that all the church, so that everybody benefits. Verse 28. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. You see, the point I think here is is that we use our word gifts to think of ways of building other people up. It's really not about me.

In contrast then, he goes on to talk about prophecy, which is others-centered. It's about thinking of others.

So again, verse 27. Let's just read the first part of verse 27. It says, if anyone speaks in a tongue. If. So it's not essential.

[14 : 28] But, look at verse 29. Two or three prophets should speak. And why is the priority or the emphasis placed on prophecy?

Well, we're told in verse 31. For you can all prophecy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

You see, prophecy is a priority within the church because it is always thinking of other people. It is others-centered. You might remember that from chapter 14 and verse 4.

He who speaks in the tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. It builds up the church. Now you say, well, that's all great, isn't it?

All this talk of prophecy. Well, let me ask this. When was the last time someone in this church brought a prophecy?

[15 : 39] Never mind two or three. Can you remember? Well, we need to think about that, don't we?

Because if we understand prophecy as this, and we looked at this the other week, as being a revelation from God, that is a word that is tested against scripture, that strengthens, encourages, comforts, instructs, the church body, and can lead unbelievers to Christ.

So what's that going to look like for us? Well, it could be as we've just done over tea and coffee. We don't look at tea and coffee as break time, but as perhaps, do we say, prophecy time?

An opportunity to build one another up? to comfort and instruct and encourage each other with our words? It could be.

But it seems as we read through this, this is talking about two or three speaking to the whole church. Not just one-to-one conversations, but someone speaking to all the church.

[16 : 59] So what's that going to look like? Well, in some sense, preaching is prophetic, as we're doing right now. As we hear God's word explained and applied, it brings instruction, it brings encouragement, it brings comfort.

Those who led the songs, in some sense, were also being prophetic, as they spoke truth. Even the words that we sang today bring us comfort and encouragement in the midst of chaos and turmoil and unknowns of what's going to happen.

But again, as we read through this section here, it seems to be that this is not just planned speech, but there's also a spontaneity.

So look at verse 30. So in the gathering, we're talking, verse 30, and if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

So it seems to me that when the church gathers together, there should be times when there is opportunity to bring a word from God to build up the whole church.

[18:20] And again, we could say, well, we could do that in home groups. Yes, yes, we could do that, but it's not the whole church gathered, is it? Now, I haven't got my head completely around all of this, still thinking it through, but I think it's something we do need to think about.

But what would it look like? Well, it might mean, and this is what I do think, instead of having time for announcements, which we did this morning, and which everybody else can actually read from their new sheet.

We don't need to do it if you just read carefully. Maybe we need to think about having time where church members have the opportunity to speak a word of encouragement to the church.

It's not necessarily all the time, it doesn't say that everybody has that gift, but it might be a word of encouragement in line of what we've been thinking. I leave that for discussion.

we can talk about it again. So come to participate, think of others, and third, learn to be silent.

[19:36] Verse 33, for God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. As in all the congregations, all the churches of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches.

churches, they are not allowed to speak and must be in submission, as the law says. So that's clear, isn't it? Men are encouraged to participate, and all the women have to keep quiet.

Well, before I get something thrown at me, we need to be very careful. I don't think that's exactly what it means. Three things in response to that.

First, Paul is actually given instructions to all the church about being silent. So look back at verse 28.

If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church. In other words, be silent.

[20:45] It's the same in verse 30. And if a revelation or a prophecy comes to someone who is sitting down, well then the first speaker should stop.

That is, be quiet, be silent. So it's not just women that are to be silent. We all need to learn to be silent and quiet.

The second thing is, Paul actually does encourage women to speak. He's very clear about that. We saw that back in chapter 11, verse 5. You can flick back a page.

It's a different situation, a different context. If you want the whole sermon, you can listen to it online. But just the first part of verse 5, chapter 11. And every woman who prays or prophesies.

So the implication is that women are gifted just as much as men to pray and prophesy within the gathering of the church. There's no restriction.

[21:50] So why then, when we get to chapter 14, verse 34, are we reading women aren't allowed to speak? Has he forgotten what he's written? Is he a little bit confused?

I don't think so. I think the answer thirdly comes in verse 35 of chapter 14. If they, who are they?

Well, in particular, I think the wives. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it was disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Now let me try and give a picture of what I think and what certainly some of the commentators point towards. The scene is probably something like this. A man would stand up to give a word of encouragement, an instruction, a prophecy.

And then his wife would publicly start questioning or disagreeing with what he had to say. So husband and wife were having a little bit of a spat in the front row. Not only was that disrespectful to the husband whose role it was to lead, verse 35, we're told it was disgraceful.

[23:10] In other words, the questioning was bringing a disorder to the church, instead of building up the church. Look at the middle of verse 34.

They, the wives, are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. Well, what does the law say? What law is he referring to?

Well, it's the law, the scriptures. And I think it's a reference back to Genesis chapter 2, where we learn that women and men are equal in value and worth before God, but they've been given different roles.

The husband is to give loving, sacrificial care for his wife, to protect, to protect and to provide. He is to give of himself for his wife, to serve his wife.

And the wife in response is to live in submission, that is to live under the loving and sacrificial care of the husband, which is to be a good and orderly care.

[24 : 21] So to start questioning and disagreeing in public was in some way a rejection of God's good and beautiful design for marriage. And that's why I think he gives this specific instruction here.

So I think what we can take from all of this, we're all encouraged, women and men, we are all encouraged to pray and prophesy to one another for the building up of the church.

And there are times when all men and women need to learn to be silent. As we gather together, it's not about me and what I want to have to say and what I want to have to share and give me the mic and let me say what I'm going to say.

It's about respect for each other and letting others speak and letting them strengthen and encourage. and that everything we do, we do for the strengthening and building up of the church family.

So, first, all our words should build up the church. The second, and it's a little bit shorter, all our words should be submitted to scripture.

[25 : 42] scripture. So, as we come together and somebody has a prophecy, does that mean we can say whatever we like?

Well, I don't think prophecy is an excuse to share with the church anything that just pops into our mind and we can confidently stand before everybody and say, thus says the Lord, and out it comes. Verse 36. Did the word of God originate with you? Are you the source of everything that God has to say?

Verse 36. Or are you the only people it has reached? Are we the last word on what God is and what God is not? Like, is it up to us?

It seems to me that it's arrogant for us to think that our thoughts and our imaginations have the same authority as God's word, the Bible, and it's very dangerous to speak to other people as if your words are coming directly from God and your words should be obeyed.

[27 : 01] Two things, I think, will help us here. First, the authority of Scripture. Verse 37. If anybody, if anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.

So Paul is claiming that his words, he's written words to this church in Corinth, and the words that we are reading right now, he says, are the Lord's commands.

In other words, what Paul is saying, God is saying. His words are Scripture, which is why we have them preserved and recorded for us today, and which is why we're reading them and looking at them.

This is God's voice to us today. God's writing. And not God's responsibility to write Scripture. It was consigned, if you like, to the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Their writing is God's word to us.

So again, verse 37, if anyone thinks he's a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. That means none of us can stand up and say, God has told me, or God has said.

[28 : 33] No, the only time that I could ever speak, or you could ever speak, with such authority, is when we're reading from the Bible, when we can stand up and say, this is what God says.

We must be very wary of people who say things like this, God told me to tell you. Which means, secondly, we must test everything against Scripture.

Verse 29. So he's talking about prophets. Two or three prophets should speak, and the other should weigh carefully what is said.

So again, let's try and picture this. If someone brings a word of encouragement or instruction, well, the whole church has a responsibility. We should weigh what the other should weigh carefully what is said.

That is, we should carefully discern if what they are saying is of God. And the best way to do that is to test it against Scripture. Is what the person's saying in agreement with Scripture? Or does it contradict what God has already said?

[29 : 52] Are the words that they're speaking to the church an application of Scripture? A principle that's taken, that's being applied to a specific situation?

So, for example, today we're facing Brexit. What's going to happen? What's the future? Well, we speak God's Word. God's Word says, I am the Lord and there is no other.

We can take refuge in this God. So is what they're saying in agreement with Scripture? Is it an application of Scripture?

Regrettably, it's very common today for so-called prophets to tell people things like this. God has told me to tell you that you're going to be healed or that you will be successful. Well, the fact is that God has never, ever promised anywhere in His Word that guarantees that you will be healed of everything and that you'll be successful in everything.

It's a lie. God can heal. God gives gifts of healing. But we must never, ever mess with people's lives by claiming God said.

[31 : 07] You see, we are not free to say whatever we like and stick a little spiritual God says at the beginning. That is both arrogant and dangerous.

Verse 38. If he ignores this, if he ignores the Lord's command, that is, he himself will be ignored.

We should test and weigh up everything carefully with what God has said. And if it is not in line, we should ignore it completely and do not entertain it.

So, as we gather together, we come with all of our gifts that God has given to us. And we use our words to build up the church.

Speaking words of truth, encouragement, comfort, and making sure that all that we have to say submits to the authority of Scripture.

[32 : 21] For God is not a God of disorder, but a God of peace. let's pray together. Let's pray together.