

Decent and Orderly Worship

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 28th of November 1999. The preacher is Phil Muleman. His sermon is entitled Decent and Orderly Worship and is from 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verses 26 to 40.

Jesus, our friend, our saviour, our Lord, we pray that you would open our hearts and our minds, help us to understand your word and to live it in our lives, and may your fruit bear much fruit for your glory. Amen.

Please be seated. You may like to open your pew Bibles to page 934 as we look at 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

Over the past five weeks we have been looking at the chapters 12 to 14 from 1 Corinthians. And the Apostle Paul in these chapters has given a long discourse about spiritual gifts and the use of them within the private life as well as the public life.

It's been necessary for him to instruct in this area as it has caused some division within the Corinthian church. And the division that has occurred, it seems, is due especially, it seems, to the nature of people's gifts regarding tongues and prophecy.

[1 : 3 1] And Paul's highlight in these three chapters from 12 to 14 is possibly chapter 13, where he talks about the gift of love. In all that we do, and with whatever gifts that we may be endowed with, we should be exercising love in the use of them.

We've also seen that the gifts that God has given us are gifts from him, from God to us. And we need to remember it, that they come from God to us.

So therefore they should be used for his glory and not for our own selfish benefit. And one of the other key things he says in these chapters is that we shouldn't shirk away from the spiritual gifts, the gifts that he has given us.

Chapter 14 tells us that we should eagerly desire the spiritual gifts for the purpose of building up the church. 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verse 12 talks about that, and we spoke on that last week.

Now here in these concluding verses of chapter 14, Paul asks in the beginning of verse 26, What should be done then, my friends?

[2 : 5 5] Although the Apostle Paul might have some issues with the Corinthian church, he is still able to call these people his friends. He's not interested in the church disbanding because they all have different giftings and so on.

He wants to see them work together as a body with Christ as the head. That's an important thing for us to remember, that we might have differences and we might be arguing over some issues and that's bound to happen.

But God wants us to work together as a body and remember who is our head. Christ is our head. Now Paul goes on to give some sound advice to these people, particularly relating to public worship.

And the list he gives here, he gives four pieces of advice. I don't think this list is exhaustive as pertaining to what exactly happens in worship.

But he speaks here on four things which is relevant to this congregation in Corinth. So he says, when you come together, each one has firstly a hymn.

[4 : 09] Now this could literally mean an Old Testament psalm. But singing was also common amongst the early Christians, just as we've sung a couple of songs already this morning, we'll sing a few more by the end of today.

In the New Testament there are hymns. In Luke's Gospel there's the Magnificat and all those sorts of things. In Philippians 2, that's a hymn, we think, that was probably used in the early Christian church, which speaks about Christ's glory, his starting in heaven, coming down to be with humans, and then ascending again.

His glory is seen through the cross. So we're to come together with a hymn. Secondly, we're to come together with a lesson, a piece of Christian teaching, a meditation on Scripture that may have been encouragement, and it could be an encouragement to the congregation, to those who are coming to worship.

The third thing we're to do is to come with a revelation, perhaps some specific matter that the Lord has revealed to a believer. It could be a prophecy or something of a similar nature.

And the fourth piece of advice he gives is that we come with a ton or an interpretation, and that the interpretation is that of a ton, that has been brought to public worship.

[5 : 33] Now it goes without saying that the worship of the Corinthian church would have been lively, and there was a variety of ingredients within the service, and there's just four aspects of it there.

But there's a guiding rule that Paul puts into this advice that he gives, and he says this, Let all things be done for building up.

Let all things be done for building up, at the end of verse 26. Love must be the motivation of the Corinthian Christian taking an active role in worship.

And this last piece of advice that Paul gives, let all things be done for building up, is a very important and instructional thing for us all to consider when we come to worship, when we're involved in the leading of public worship.

Everything done in worship services must be beneficial to those who come along, to the worshippers. It must be seeking to build them up in their faith and adoration of God.

[6 : 35] And the same principle, as I've said, is here for us today. Those contributing to the services, whether they be singers, whether they be musicians, readers, preachers, prayers, service leaders, community assistants, sidespeople, welcomers and so on.

All things that must be done, and it must have love as their chief motivation. Speaking useful words, or participating in a way that will strengthen the faith of other believers.

So, singers and musicians offer themselves in worship to glorify God. Not themselves. In worship, they offer themselves to glorify God, to build up the people.

Prayers. Pray on behalf of the people. They come and they pray prayers which we will want to pray together so that we can say amen. They don't come and pray prayers pertaining to themselves and just themselves.

Welcomers and sidespeople similarly. Welcome and make sure that people understand they have the right things for coming into a church service, that they have the right prayer book.

[7 : 44] Just imagine if we gave them the Book of Common Prayer today when we were using the Third Order Holy Communion. It would be a distraction. We do things here to help build people up in the worship of God.

In the congregation at Corinth then, Paul now deals with two big issues that were creating problems within their context. And these two issues are tons and prophecy.

And Paul treats each one in turn. Firstly, he deals with tons. And he gives good sound advice. He limits the speakers of tons to two or at most three people. Each is to speak in turn because there's to be order within public worship, not disorder.

And if you're going to speak in a ton, there's got to be someone there to interpret. If there's no one to interpret, then that person must remain silent.

The reason being is that worship, again, is for the edification or for the building up of God's people. If there is no interpreter and someone is speaking in a ton, then how can the people be built up?

[8 : 53] We learnt last week that those who speak in a ton build themselves up. And unless there is an interpreter, then the person who speaks in a ton must remain silent.

Secondly, he deals with prophecy. And this is also subject to regulation. As verse 29 tells us, two or three prophets are to speak at one service, while the others weigh up what is said.

Now the others, I think, refers to the rest of the church, the congregation. Again, this is all to be done with a sense of order in the whole process so that we can discern what is going on.

Now if, for example, as verse 30 tells us, someone has a revelation while they are sitting down, they should wait until it is their turn to speak.

The purpose of prophecy is that everyone may learn and be encouraged. Now these two gifts that Paul speaks about are gifts which they should use, but gifts which they should also exercise control over.

[10 : 00] And by this I mean the person who has the gifts of ton or prophecy is able to control their gift. Tons or prophecy are not some irresistible compulsion that comes upon the person and it has to be blurted out the moment they receive it.

We're told, he goes on, he says, the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. In other words, it is up to the prophets to control their prophetic inspiration. And this arises from the fact as verse 33 tells us, that God is a God not of disorder, but of peace.

God is a God not of disorder, but of peace. Now what should we as a church do if someone here has a ton to proclaim or a prophecy to tell?

I find that a very hard question to answer because to be honest, I've never had anyone speak in a ton or prophesy in my time as an ordained minister. And I don't think it's ever happened in the context of a service that I can recall.

And in the context of Anglican worship, there really isn't any room for someone to speak in a ton or a prophecy within the order of service in Anglican liturgy.

[11 : 26] Well, what should we do if that is the case? Well, this is my advice. If someone had a ton or a prophecy, I'd encourage them to come and to see me or whoever the leader is first and to make sure that it was okay to proclaim it.

If someone wanted to speak in a ton, in a ton, then there would have to be an interpreter, wouldn't there? Because it's what the Bible tells us. And if someone had a prophecy, then I would want to test it alongside Scripture first and with others in the congregation who could wisely weigh up what has been said.

And whatever the ton is or whatever the prophecy is, it should be for the edification of the church. So if you have a ton or a prophecy, ask yourselves that question. Is this going to build up the church?

And if it is, come and see me or whoever the leader is. If it's Paul, sometimes he's here. Paul's our boss.

He's away. It should be for the edification of the church, whatever the ton is or whatever the prophecy is. It should be for the building up of God's people.

[12 : 33] I think that this is a good procedure to follow because it's not creating disorder, but it's seeking to maintain peace. Well, those verses are easy.

Now we have some other tricky words. A hot potato has landed yet again in my preaching diary. And the last time this was tricky was the last time I preached.

At the morning service it was 1 Corinthians 11 when we had to talk about women in church. And now we've got it again. And Paul is away again when this comes up. What's going on here?

Why does the Apostle Paul return to the subject of women in worship? Now I was hoping that when I asked Barb to read that she would skip over these verses and I wouldn't have to worry about them.

But that's not the case. Let me read them to you. Verse 33b. As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches.

[13 : 44] For they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate. As the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached? I wish Barb hadn't read it so she could ask me at home.

Well there are various views about how we should understand these difficult verses. First of all, you'll notice that in the second part of verse 33 to the end of verse 36 you will notice that they are surrounded with parentheses here in the NRSV version.

Now some theologians, I'm going to present to you three views and then try and help you understand what my view is of this. Some theologians suggest we ought to see these verses as a later addition to the original words that the Apostle Paul wrote and spoke and in fact as a result we ought to throw them out.

We ought to dismiss them. Well I don't agree with that view because it could cause us to throw out other parts of scripture that we don't like.

[15 : 04] And once we start to reduce scripture we start to make scripture into whatever we want to be and you get situations like happened in Texas years ago with the David Koresh saga and so on.

Now that's an extreme point of view but I think that that is what happens if we dismiss scripture and we throw it out. Another view suggests that women should remain silent in public worship.

Now some men may like this idea as well as their wives staying quiet at home. The problem with this though is that Paul clearly allows women in public worship to pray and to prophesy.

Go back to chapter 11 verse 5 if it's quite clear that women are allowed to be involved in the process. The other overwhelming evidence for this is seen in Acts on the day of Pentecost that women are allowed to be involved in prayer and prophecy if you like.

And on that day in Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the whole church and people spoke in tongues and they prophesied and all sorts of strange things were happening. And then Peter the Apostle Peter he addresses the crowd that had gathered around and he preaches his first evangelistic sermon if you like.

[16 : 20] And in this sermon he tells how the Old Testament looks forward to the day when God's Spirit will be poured out on both men and women and that they shall both prophesy.

Acts chapter 2 verse 18 says that. Women were not to be silent in worship. And the good news about the gospel then is that it is liberating women of the years of oppression that they had endured under Judaism that was going on in the Roman world at that very time.

I'll speak more about that in a few moments. So this second view suggests that women should remain silent although I don't agree with that as well. Third view suggests that women should be allowed to prophesy and speak in tongues etc.

in public worship. but they should not be involved in the weighing up process of prophecy. Now this is a good view.

It's a great move forward for women because as you may recall as I said a minute ago women were really a second rate citizen a second rate person within the Roman world.

[17 : 30] The majority had no education. Only the men and the boys received that education and therefore they had little or nothing to contribute to the life of public worship.

Women also had to sit separately within the Jewish synagogue. But now the liberating news of the gospel allows them to step forward allows them to prophesy and speak in tongues thus involving them in public worship.

And this view is a significant step forward but it also contends that women today should not be involved in the weighing up process of prophecy as verse 29 talks about.

Now the problem with this view is that I think it doesn't take into account the education status of our women today. Last night in New Zealand we heard that a it's been a woman who's been elected as Prime Minister over there.

In various parts of the world there are women leaders around and so on. Now I would want to say that I agree with the third view but I would also add that we need to bear in mind the changes that have come about in particular for women especially over this last century.

[18 : 49] I think that it is a brave person who says that a woman should be silent in church today. It's an even braver person who says a woman is unable to contribute to public worship whereas once women may have been unable to contribute theologically or even practically due to their lack of education today women have lots to offer.

They are educated they are sophisticated if you can use that sort of terminology. Now I'm not dismissing these verses of scripture at all.

I'm simply saying that our culture of this 20th century world is vastly different to that of the world that the apostle Paul wrote in. He's obviously addressing a problem of which we lack the details but what he writes in these verses I think shows us the advancement that the gospel has made already for women.

It's not noticed as frequently as it should be that Christianity from the very outset assumed that women would learn as freely as men.

In the gospel of Luke that's quite paramount in that situation there's the story of Mary and Martha where we see Jesus here recognises that while he carried out his ministry that women should be equal should be involved in learning the learning process and so on.

[20 : 21] Let me read to you Luke chapter 10 verses 38. Jesus and the disciples had gone on their way. They entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

She had a sister named Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened or learned to what he was saying. Listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks so she came to him and asked Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?

Tell her then to help me because that's where she thought that woman's place was just to help out and so on. But the Lord answered her Martha Martha you were worried and distracted by many things.

There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken away from her. Mary's desire was to learn about the kingdom of God.

We shouldn't ignore the house cleaning and all those sorts of things but the priority is to learn and to be educated, to learn about the kingdom of God. Now I think that there are lots of people who blame Christianity for its oppressive treatment of women over the centuries.

[21 : 47] But I think that there is a lot that we as men and women ought to be thankful for in freeing up the role of women in society. Christianity includes women in worship.

Now if you look at Islam, one of the world's biggest religions, today women are still oppressed. They are still treated as second rate humans.

A friend of mine who is going probably out to Pakistan as a missionary in the next 12 months, two years, was telling me the other night that within Islam, within that religion, a woman's salvation could still be dependent upon the man.

It's up to the husband as to whether or not the women will be saved. Women have little or no involvement in the mosque and in fact they are not even really expected to be there. Now within our own faith, within Christianity, there are all sorts of views about women's ordination within the church.

But at least it's an area which is debated. In Islam the role of women in ministry is not even an issue. There's no forum at all for discussion about women's involvement in ministry and so on.

[23 : 11] So to sum up then, you could say that within Christianity it recognises that men and women are different. We are obviously different. We're all made in the image of God but we're man and woman.

But we are equal. And within Islam you could say that men and women are different, we agree on that, but that we are not equal.

Friends, we have lots to thank God for in giving us Jesus because he showed us all to be equal. In him salvation is merited to anyone whether it's man, woman, slave or free who puts his or her trust in him as Saviour and Lord.

Now in the first century culture it was shameful for women to speak in church. Paul desires, Paul's desire is that women learn but they should ask questions of their husband at home and not disturb the assembly.

And it seems that this is the issue that was not taking place at Corinth. There was distraction going on. Women were not being subordinate and there was a spirit of defiance amongst some of the people.

[24 : 27] The church was not being built up as a result. And worship, if you like, was not edifying. The people, the Corinthian Christians were being pig headed.

So Paul asks two rhetorical questions in verse 36. First of all, he asks this question, Did the word of God originate with you? Of course it didn't.

Their answer to that has to be no. Paul is the agent, is the one who brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to them in the first place. He taught them the scripture and how to live as God's people in Corinth.

The second question he asks, Are you the only ones that it has reached? Are you the only ones that the gospel of Jesus Christ has reached? Of course it's not. Paul's gospel message has not been just there for the people of Corinth.

It is for whoever receives it, wherever he travels. And Paul by this time has done quite a bit of church planting in various places throughout Asia by now.

[25 : 34] So the gospel is not just for the people in Corinth. And they are not the only ones who have received the gospel. And the Corinthians therefore must not think that they alone know what it is to be Christian.

They must give consideration to the customs and the thinking of all the churches of the saints as we're told at the very end of verse 33. And we too ought to give due consideration to the way other Christians in different cultures worship worldwide and locally.

Now I'm not being universalist or liberal about my thinking about the Christian gospel. I'm not saying that all roads lead to heaven and so on. Far from it. I'm saying that as Christians we need to recognize that the way people worship is going to be different in various cultures, even within our cultures here in Doncaster.

You see the way we worship here at Holy Trinity is our particular cultures, the culture that the majority of us are used to. And what makes us Christian though is not due to our Anglicanism, is not due to our prayer book and all those sorts of things, but it is in what we believe about God and the work that he has done through the Lord Jesus Christ in bringing us back into a relationship with him.

It just so happens that the way we express our love and adoration of God happens to be Anglican. Similarly, if our Church of Christ brothers and sisters up the road, they're not Christians because they are the Church of Christ.

[27 : 15] They are Christians because of what they believe about God and the work that he has done through Jesus Christ. God hasn't revealed himself in a special way to Anglicans, to the Church of Christ, to the Baptists, to the Assemblies of God and so on.

But he has revealed himself to all people through his son Jesus. And when we turn to him, then we are brought into his kingdom.

And he wants us to worship him, building up ourselves and our brothers and sisters in the context of a Christian community. Learning from his word, obeying it and living it out daily in our lives.

The styles of worship may change, but the essentials about what we believe and where it comes from, that is it comes from the Bible, must not and can never ever change.

The last few verses of chapter 14 then really are a summary of chapters 12 to 14. They're not just on these verses that I have spoken about this morning.

[28 : 25] And that's, I guess, the difficulty of preaching in small blocks because you sort of focus on the passage that we've just sort of looked at this morning. But I think Paul's summary here is really for the whole of chapters 12 to 14.

And it could perhaps be for the whole of the letter of Corinthians. And you'll notice here that Paul makes a high claim on all that he has written. Not just about women being silent in church or speaking in tongues and prophecy.

It's about an all that has been written. And he says this in verse 38. What he has written is a command of the Lord. Now that's a tall order that he's given.

But we're reminded, or they're reminded of his apostolic discernment and so on. And it's a tall order that he's given. And any spiritual person will recognize the voice of God in what Paul says here.

And they will only ignore it to his or her peril. His closing remarks are that all things in the context of public worship should be done decently and in order.

[29 : 35] Public worship is very important. It's vital to the life of the individual and to the whole of the church. So then our church services should be conducted in an orderly way so that we can worship, so that we can be taught, and that we can be prepared to serve God, to continue on serving God.

Because it's not easy out there. It's a tough world, and it's a tougher world, I think, in the last ten years than it's been for a long time. Those who are responsible for planning worship should make sure it has order and direction, rather than chaos and distraction.

Let me conclude. We're going to sing a song, a hymn on the organ in a moment. It's a Charles Wesley hymn, which sort of picks up the ideas that we've looked at over the recent weeks about the gifts within the church and so on.

It's hymn number 491. Let me read to you a few verses. Christ, from whom all blessings flow, by whose grace your people grow, Christ whose nature now we share, work in us, your body here.

Work in us, your body here in Doncaster. Send your spirit from above and unite us in your love. Still for more to you we call, with your fullness fill us all.

[30 : 59] Move and motivate and guide, varying gifts for each provide, placed according to your will. Let us all our work fulfill.

Let's stand and sing hymn number 491.