

T. Shane Martin
 Green Run Baptist Church
 February 17, 2008

GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

#36

**GROWING UP IN OUR WORSHIP PRACTICES
 1 CORINTHIANS 14:20-40**

INTRODUCTION

As Paul concludes his writing designed to correct the Corinthians' public worship gatherings, he writes, *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature (v20)*. Matthew Henry comments, *Christians should be harmless and inoffensive as children, void of all guile and malice; but should have wisdom and knowledge that are ripe and mature. They should not be unskillful in the word of righteousness, though they should be unskillful in all the arts of mischief*. The Corinthians were mature in mischief and immature in worship. The final instructions given are designed to bring their corporate worship into a state of maturity and Paul does this through very practical instructions. This passage is not an exhaustive list of what should or should not be a part of our worship gatherings. There is nothing here about the Lord's Supper, times of teaching or corporate prayer; all of which are prominent in other portions of the New Testament. Paul is correcting abuses in corporate worship, but here we can learn a great deal about what should characterize our weekly gatherings.

1. THE EFFECTS OF TONGUES AND PROPHECY ON UNBELIEVERS (14:21-25)

The Corinthians' obsession with tongues was a demonstration of their childish fascination with the sensational and mysterious. But children are usually very narrow and simplistic in their thinking; their immaturity does not take others into account. As they grow up, they learn to consider others and Paul wants the Corinthians to consider the effects of tongues and prophecy on unbelievers who attend their corporate worship gatherings.

Paul recognizes that when a local church meets, it is not a secret, exclusive gathering of believers only. He fully expects unbelievers to be present (v23). Corporate worship must have an evangelistic aspect to it. The Gospel of Jesus' life, death and resurrection must be the centerpiece of this gathering. This should be true of our prayers, songs, sermons and sacraments. Therefore, a childish fascination with speaking in tongues is not helpful to unbelievers.

Hearing strange tongues does not usually lead unbelievers to faith. Paul makes this point by quoting from Isaiah 28:11-12 (v21). In Isaiah's context, God had spoken clearly to His people and they refused to listen to Him or believe Him. Therefore, He would send an enemy among them, the Assyrian military, and they would hear God's judgment when they heard the foreign language of the Assyrians. Even though Israel would hear the Assyrians speak, they would not understand their words, but they would know it was a message of judgment from God.

It seems that the Corinthians felt that an unbeliever would be impressed by their use of tongues; this would be a sign of God's presence and perhaps bring them to faith. But Paul uses the Isaiah passage to remind them that tongues do not often have that effect. Because unbelievers cannot understand the meaning of the tongues, they receive nothing of God's truth and therefore, cannot

be brought to faith. Instead of believing, they think you are *mad* (v23), continue in unbelief and therefore, incur God's judgment just as the people in Isaiah's day.

But God does not desire judgment for the unbelievers who attend the Corinthians' worship gatherings, so He grants them the gift of prophecy to bring unbelievers to faith. Thus, prophecy functions as a sign of God's presence by proclaiming truth and creating faith in unbelievers.

When God enables His people to speak the truth with clarity, the results on unbelievers will be profound and the presence of God will be confirmed. First of all, the unbeliever will be convicted by the truth prophesied (v24). Simply put, overhearing the prophecies will make him aware of his guilt before the Lord. Secondly, he is called into account by the truth. These two actions describe the *deep probing work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives, exposing their sin and thus calling them to account before the living God (Fee)*. Paul sees this guilt-producing declaration of truth as an essential aspect of corporate worship and especially, evangelism. For through this gift, *the secrets of his heart are disclosed* (v25a). The sinner is exposed for what he truly is when God's truth is clearly made known in the congregation. And finally, *he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you* (v25b). The goal of God's truth is to expose us to our sin and make us deeply aware of the danger we face, the judgment of God. But that is not the ultimate goal. The final goal is to bring us to repentance and faith so that we humble ourselves and flee to God for safety that comes through repentance and faith in Jesus.

Paul reminds us that uninterpreted tongues cannot produce such an effect and it is childish to become fascinated by such phenomena. Instead, maturity demands a love for the spoken truth and its effects on unbelievers. We should pray that the Spirit would renew His work among our congregation so that when we speak to one another, our words come with His power to convict and heal. This demonstrates *that God is certainly among you*.

2. PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR TONGUES AND PROPHECY IN PUBLIC WORSHIP (14:26-36)

Having described the general effects of both tongues and prophecy upon those within the church and those outside of it, Paul now regulates the use of tongues and prophecy so that no confusion results. Rather than confusion, Paul desires that the exercise of any and all gifts lead to edification (v26).

(2.1) Limitations placed on speaking in tongues (14:27-28)

Paul offers 3 regulations for those who speak in tongues: (1) someone with the gift of interpretation must interpret, (2) one person may speak in tongues at any given time and (3) at the most, three persons may speak in tongues. Notice that this kind of thing does not lend itself to someone being out of control while exercising his or her spiritual gift. He can easily sit quietly if speaking would violate these regulations.

(2.2) Limitations placed on prophesying (14:29-33a)

Only 2-3 prophets can speak and then the congregation is to evaluate their words and weigh them carefully (v29). The message must be weighed because, as we have seen, it may contain some mixture of error due to the fallibility of the prophet. In other words, prophecy was not automatically binding upon the local church; it was subject to evaluation. That was not true of Apostolic writings [see verse 37]. Prophecy operated at a lower level than Apostolic writings which were not subject to human judgment. The prophets are to speak one at a time while the

others keep silent so that *all may be exhorted* (vv30-31). No one could claim that he had no control over when or how often he prophesied because he is in control of his own spirit (v32). Again, neither speaking in tongues, nor prophesying, were a demonstration of divine mania over which the speaker had no control *for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints* (v33).

(2.3) Limitations placed on the women's role in weighing prophecies (14:33b-36)

Paul's instructions regarding a woman's role in corporate worship extended to all the churches (v33b). Here in verses 34-36, Paul forbids the women from speaking in the corporate worship gatherings and instead, if they have questions, they should ask their husbands at home. This cannot be as absolute as it first appears because Paul has already permitted a woman to both pray and prophesy in corporate worship (1 Corinthians 11:2-16), but she is to do so with her head covered as a sign of submission to God's established order. So here, it seems to me that Paul forbids women only from weighing prophecies given during the gatherings. The men, as leaders in the church, must bear the responsibility for regarding or disregarding certain prophecies. And the women are to submit to those decisions in a proper manner suitable for Christian women.

Verse 36 implies that even though this was the common pattern in all the churches, the women in Corinth may have been departing from the Apostle's teaching on this matter. Paul appeals to Old Testament Law (v34) as a basis for the traditional position of the Apostles. Perhaps he refers to Genesis 2-3 where God established man as the head of the home. This same pattern is to be found in all Christian churches. So a woman can prophesy, but she cannot then weigh the prophecy and offer it as authoritative teaching for the church [See 1 Timothy 2:9-15].

3. OBEDIENCE TO THESE INSTRUCTIONS IS THE OUTWORKING OF THE CHURCH'S CONFESSION, JESUS IS LORD (14:37-40)

Paul knows that the Corinthian church tends to be contentious. He knows they are immature, but dreadfully deceived about the true nature of their immaturity. So these verses help set things in order. In verse 37 he reminds them that a truly spiritual person will obey the Apostles' commands. This obedience is the outworking of Jesus' Lordship since the Apostles' commands are His commands. Anyone who refuses to recognize and obey Paul's commands will not be recognized by God or the church as a truly spiritual person (v38). So prophecy and tongues have their place. Prophecy is to be desired and tongues are not to be forbidden (v39), but both must be subject to the Apostles' teachings. To do otherwise is to demonstrate that you are rejecting the Lordship of Jesus. Because our God is a God of peace and order, all corporate worship must be defined by proper obedience to these commands and a Biblical order.

CONCLUSION

We as a congregation desire to submit to the Lordship of Jesus in all things, especially in our weekly gatherings. That means these gatherings are to be characterized by certain commanded attitudes and actions. Just from the passage we have studied today, we should be able to identify some of the necessary attitudes and actions about which I speak.

(1) We must recognize Paul's assumption that believers will assemble for corporate worship (v26). We must work and study harder to develop a better theology of The Lord's Day. Church is not simply our best option for Sunday, it is commanded. To observe the Lordship of Jesus, we must recognize the first of each week is to involve an assembly like this one.

(2) Such assemblies exist to edify believers (v26) and proclaim the truth to unbelievers (vv22-23). Weekly gatherings for worship must primarily exist to strengthen the church; that is the purpose of spiritual gifts [1 Corinthians 12:7]. But one additional benefit of assembling and exercising our gifts is that unbelievers hear the truth of the Gospel and are converted. As I stated earlier, these are not secret gathering off-limits to those outside the faith. In Corinth, prophesying was not preaching, but it was a more spontaneous proclamation of the truth about God. But for my purposes here, whether we speak of preaching or prophesying, both must benefit believers and unbelievers.

(3) When churches assemble and the truth is proclaimed in any form, we should expect such response as conviction of sin, a calling into account before God, falling on our faces in humility and genuine worship. In other words, sin must be addressed and guilt must lead us to Jesus in repentance and faith. We simply cannot ignore sin and its devastating consequences. Neither can we fail to proclaim the Gospel with all of its healing benefits.

(4) The key to all of this is *God is certainly among you*. This meeting has power to change lives because God promises to meet here with His people. The gifts are effective because they are gifts of the Spirit. Only God can change us in the manner required by Scripture, so let us remember that when we gather, we gather in faith to celebrate His presence among us.