

1 CORINTHIANS 14.26-40

Concerning Spiritual Gifts (4)

Intro: These verses conclude Paul's teaching concerning the use of spiritual gifts. Paul began by addressing their attitude, emphasizing that each gift came from the same Spirit and that each gift was essential to the body (chapter 12). Next, Paul focused on the necessity of love, that the gifts were useless to them if not exercised in love and that love was permanent whereas the gifts were temporary (chapter 13). Finally, Paul began to address their issues regarding the gifts. In 14.1-25 Paul emphasized the value of prophesying over speaking in tongues in the assembly. The reason being that prophesy edifies because all can hear and understand. Now, Paul finishes by addressing how their assemblies should be conducted.

THE PRINCIPLES:

1. Assemblies should edify (vss. 26, 31)

- » Recall from vss. 1-25 that the reason Paul emphasized the gift of prophesy over speaking in tongues was that prophesy would edify the church (note vss. 3-5). One of the main purposes of an assembly is to edify (literally build up) the faith of those present.
- » However, it would seem that the Corinthian assemblies were so disorderly that edification was not possible! This seems to be Paul's point when he says in vs. 26, "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalms, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." In their rush for everyone to be heard, no one was truly heard, therefore no one was truly edified.
- » That the Corinthians pride and arrogance played a role seems apparent from Paul's words in vss. 36-38. (Note: vs. 36 appears at the end of Paul's teaching regarding women, but would seem to apply to all that

Paul has said) This church, that had in so many ways rejected the teaching of Paul and other approved teachers, had done so again by setting up assemblies that were confusing, disorganized and that did not lead to edification. Thus, the rhetorical question, "Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?" (vs. 36), and the stern reminder, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized." (vss. 37-38).

2. Assemblies should reflect the God we worship. (vs. 33)

- » God is not a God of confusion. "It has to do with the character of God, probably vis-à-vis the deities of the cults, whose worship was characterized by frenzy and disorder. The theological point is crucial: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship. The Corinthians must therefore cease worship that reflects the pagan deities more than the God whom they have come to know through the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 12:2-3). God is neither characterized by disorder nor the cause of it in the assembly." (Gordon Fee)
- » God is a God of peace. "the sense of harmony that will obtain in a Christian assembly when everyone is truly in the Spirit and the aim of everything is the edification of the whole (v. 26)." (Gordon Fee)

3. Assemblies should be "decently and in order" (vs. 40)

- » The natural result when the first two principles are considered. If assemblies are to 1) edify the saints and 2) reflect the nature of God, then it follows that assemblies should be decent and orderly.

- » Note: that doesn't mean stuffy and formal. Our God is deserving of emphatic, heartfelt praise, of worship that involves the whole person. Such worship is not at odds with this passage, rather such worship is to be conducted in such a way that edifies everyone and reflects God's nature (one of order and peace, not disorder).

HOW THE PRINCIPLES TO DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE ASSEMBLY:

1. Tongue Speakers (vss. 27-28)
 - » None of these instructions are difficult to understand, and when seen in the light of the above principles, make perfect sense.
 - » The limitations on tongue speaking go back to the point of edification in (vss. 3-5). Uninterpreted tongues would not edify the church.
2. Prophets (vss. 29-33)
 - » Paul has already emphasized the value of prophecy (vss. 3, 24-25). Prophecy, giving the word of God, would edify, exhort, console and convict!
 - » Yet, even this gift needed to be regulated in the assembly. Only 2 or 3 should prophecy (the other prophets could judge if the message was truly from God). Thus, the rest would be silent. Furthermore, if a revelation was given to a prophet in the assembly, the prophet currently speaking was to keep silent.
3. Women (vss. 34-35)
 - » That some women in the congregation possessed these gifts is clear from 11.5. However, in the assembly they were to keep silent.
 - » That statement seems so harsh to our ears, but I urge you to consider it in the overall context of the passage. It wasn't just the women who were to keep silent, but the majority of the church! A man might have the gift of speaking in tongues, but if no one could interpret he must keep silent. A man might have a prophesy, but if he were

not one of the 2 or 3 chosen he must remain silent. It could even be a man's "turn" to prophesy, but if another had a prophesy revealed, then the first man must keep silent.

- » We consider more of what the Scriptures teach regarding the silence of women below, but just a note on vs. 35. That passage can be pressed too far. A woman present in the assembly can/should learn just as men do. After all, the purpose of the gifts was for the edification of all. Thus, it is clear that Paul is NOT saying that a woman should receive all instruction from her spouse. Rather, this verse is probably best read in light of vs. 29 where others were passing judgment on a particular prophesy. A woman might have some questions regarding this prophesy. Rather than raise her voice in the assembly to question, as others might do, she should wait and ask at home.

REGARDING WOMEN:

1. Some objections:
 - » "This is just an opinion of Paul." Yet, Paul would say, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." That carried much weight in the early churches as was reflected by their practice. This teaching may not be popular today, but there is no reason to say it was simply Paul's opinion.
 - » "Limited by cultural context." Many commentators see this as limited to the culture of Corinth. However two clues in this passage show that a particular culture was not in mind. First, Paul begins by saying "as in all the churches of the saints." While the NASB has this phrase with vs. 33, it is generally agreed that the phrase introduces Paul's teaching regarding women in vss. 34-35. Second, Paul appeals to the Law in vs. 34. While there was no particular command demanding the silence of women in the Mosaic Law, Paul uses the term "Law"

for the entire OT (see vs. 21 which references Isa 28.11f). It is likely that Paul is referencing the Creation account as he had previously done in 11.8-9, specifically what was said to Eve in Genesis 3.16.

» Limited to the time of spiritual gifts.

Given that these instructions to women occur within a section regulating the use of spiritual gifts in the assembly, I have no issue with saying that Paul was forbidding a woman using from using these gifts in the assembly. However, recall that in 12.28 we see that not every gift was miraculous in nature (i.e. one might teach without being directly inspired like a prophet. One might “help” in many ways that do not require supernatural abilities). Furthermore, Paul will have much the same teaching in 1Timothy 2.8-12 where spiritual gifts are not in view.

2. What This Passage Does Not Say:

» That women cannot “talk” in the assembly. “The silence imposed in the special circumstances of 1 Cor. 14: should not be interpreted to mean she could not, under any circumstances, speak in the presence of the assembled saints. She sings (teaching, Col. 3:16) and Peter asked one woman to speak (Acts 5:8). (I am reminded of one church which took a woman out of “the assembly” so she could confess faith in Christ.)” (Robert Turner. • Plain Talk. Vol.XVI No.I Pg.7. March, 1979)

» That women cannot be involved in the teaching of a man. You may recall that one of Jesus’ most successful disciples was the Samaritan woman who told her entire village about Jesus (John 4.28-29, 41-42) and that it was Priscilla and Aquilla who took Apollos aside and “explained to him the way of God more accurately,” (Acts 18.26).

» That women are not deserving of MUCH honor in the church. Consider how much honor Paul sought to give various sisters in Christ: Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4.2-3), Priscilla (Romans 16.3; 1Cor 16.19); Mary (Romans 16.6); Junia (Romans 16.7),

Trypnaena and Tryphosa (Romans 16.12), Phoebe (Romans 16.1-2) and Nympha (Col. 4.15).

3. The Real Issue: Headship

» You will recall that this was the true principle under discussion in 11.3-12 when discussing the covering. In that situation, a woman who was exercising her gifts OUTSIDE of the assembly should have her head covered, to show her respect for the headship that God has set forth. But what of a woman INSIDE the assembly? She recognizes that headship by remaining silent.

» I conclude with a portion of an article written by Bette Wolfgange in the April 1986 issue of Christianity Magazine. The article was titled, “Women Are Second Class Christians.” I pray that none of us think of any woman in such a way.

“God’s prescribed order is given in its clear, elegant simplicity in 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (NASB). Does this mean that a woman is inferior to the man? That would be the case if the assumption that women are second-class citizens is true.

That appears to be a dangerous assumption, since logically it would also be true, based on this verse, that Christ is inferior to God! But scriptures such as Philippians 2:5-8 and John 1:1-3 teach that Christ is not “less than” the Father, even though He voluntarily submitted Himself to assume the form of humanity and establish Himself as the Mediator between God and man. Likewise, a woman, if she is to be pleasing to God, voluntarily submits herself to the role designated by God in the rank order: God-Christ-the man-a woman.

Is Christ less worthy of respect? Was He ever discounted by the Father? Is He a second-class deity? The parallelism is clear: one’s position does not necessarily imply inferiority of mind, character, or spirit.

The matter does not rest on the logic of this passage alone. Galatians 3:26–29 assures women of spiritual equality: we are “all one in Christ Jesus,” and all “heirs according to the promise.”

Yet, in practicality, women are all too often treated in the church as if they are indeed “second class,” almost non-existent. Paul did not consider women so, but gave honor and recognition to workers for the Lord such as Phoebe, Priscilla (who taught the Word to Apollos and others), as well as others identified in Romans 16.”