

## TWO PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

**14** Follow [the way of] love, but [also] have a keen interest in spiritual [gifts], especially [the gift of] prophecy—<sup>2</sup>for the one who speaks in a [foreign] language is not speaking to men but to God, for no one understands him, by the Spirit he is speaking mysteries. <sup>3</sup>But the one who prophesies is speaking to men words that will strengthen them and encourage them and comfort them. <sup>4</sup>The one who speaks in a [foreign] language is edifying himself. But the one who prophesies is edifying the church. <sup>5</sup>Now I wish that all of you could speak in [different] languages; but more than that, [I wish that all of] you could prophesy. The one who prophesies is [of] greater [value] than the one who speaks in a [different] language—unless he is able to interpret—because the church may be edified.

<sup>6</sup>Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in a [foreign] language, what benefit will it be to you—if I do not speak to you with a revelation, or with a word of knowledge, or with a prophesy, or with a word of instruction? <sup>7</sup>Even [in the case of] lifeless instruments that make sounds, whether a flute or a harp, if there is no distinction in the notes, how will anyone know what tune is being played on the flute or the harp? <sup>8</sup>Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will prepare himself for battle? <sup>9</sup>So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how can anyone understand what you are saying? You will [just] be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup>Undoubtedly there are all kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without meaning. <sup>11</sup>So then, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the one who is speaking, and the one who is speaking will be a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup>So it is with you. Since you are greatly interested in spiritual [gifts], seek to excel in the gifts that will edify the church. <sup>13</sup>For this reason, the one who speaks in a [different] language should pray that he may interpret [what he says]. <sup>14</sup>If I am praying in a [different] language, my spirit is praying, but my mind is not being benefited.

<sup>15</sup>What [then should I do]? I will pray with my spirit, and I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, and I will also sing with my mind. <sup>16</sup>Otherwise, if you praise [God] with your spirit, how can someone who is an inquirer say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup>Your giving thanks is good, but the other man is not edified. <sup>18</sup>I thank God that I speak in [different] languages more than all of you; <sup>19</sup>but in the church I would rather speak five words with my mind, so that I might also instruct others, than speak ten thousand words in a [different] language. <sup>20</sup>Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. With regard to evil, be infants; but in your thinking become mature men.

<sup>21</sup>In the Law it is written, “I will speak to these people by men who speak a foreign language and by the lips of foreigners, but not even then will they listen to me,” says the Lord.” <sup>22</sup>So then, [foreign] languages are [intended to be] a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers, but for believers. <sup>23</sup>Therefore, if the whole church is assembled together and everyone is speaking in [different] languages, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are insane? <sup>24</sup>But if everyone is prophesying, and some unbeliever or inquirer comes in, he will be convicted by all of you, he will be judged by all of you. <sup>25</sup>The secrets of his

*heart will be revealed; and so he will fall face down and worship God, confessing that God truly is among you.*

*<sup>26</sup>So then what [shall we do], brothers? When you meet together, each one should have a hymn, or [a word of] teaching, or a revelation, or [an utterance in a different] language, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for the edification [of the church]. <sup>27</sup>If any would speak in a [different] language, let it be done by only two or at the most three speakers, let them take turns speaking, and let someone interpret. <sup>28</sup>But if there is no interpreter [present], let the one[ who would speak in a different language] remain silent in the church—let him speak to himself and to God. <sup>29</sup>Let only two or three prophets speak, and let the others evaluate [what is said]. <sup>30</sup>But if a revelation is given to one of the others who is sitting there, let the first speaker be silent—<sup>31</sup>for you can all prophesy one at a time, so that everyone may learn and everyone may be exhorted. <sup>32</sup>The spirits of the prophets are under the control of the prophets; <sup>33</sup>for God is not [a God] of confusion, but of peace.*

*As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup>women should keep silence in the church [assemblies], for it is not permissible for them to speak. On the contrary, they should be in submission, just as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup>If they want to inquire about something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

*<sup>36</sup>Did the word of God come forth from you, or did it only come to you? <sup>37</sup>If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or that he is a spiritual man, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the commandment of the Lord. <sup>38</sup>But if anyone disregards this, disregard that man. <sup>39</sup>So then, my brothers, be especially interested in the [gift of] prophesying, but do not forbid the speaking in [different] languages. <sup>40</sup>But let everything be done properly and in an orderly manner. (1 Cor. 14:1-40)*

## **Introduction**

A T.V. documentary featured several types of worship services in contemporary American churches. A Christian writer, commenting on that program, remarked,

I liked some of what I saw, but I was troubled by an emphasis on being entertained instead of being led in worship. The focus of many services was on having fun rather than on worshipping the Lord. (*Our Daily Bread*, 2/18/96)

Another Christian writer makes this comment on the contemporary Christian church:

Some people think that going to a church service is not much different than going to a music concert ... [*But*] the purpose of church is not for entertainment. That's where a lot of believers have the wrong idea. They think the people on the platform are putting on church for their sake—to excite, enthrall, and entertain them. Wrong. All wrong. The focus of the church is to be on God. We are there to worship Him. (*Our Daily Bread*, 2/23/97)

Still another Christian writer expresses it like this:

Worship is not meant to please me, to make me feel good, to meet my criteria, my standards, my taste. Worship is for God! I am not to be the center of worship. God is to be at the center. (*Our Daily Bread*, 2/23/97)

This is something the Corinthians needed to realize, and something of which we need to be reminded; namely, when we come together in Christian worship it is more important that we adhere to the will of Christ than that we satisfy ourselves. Because it is Christ's church, we must conduct our worship in accordance with the principles He has given. Let us now consider two such principles as they are presented to us in 1 Corinthians 14.

### **I. All Things Must Be Done for Edification (14:1-26)**

In verse 1 the apostle exhorts the church to "*follow [the way of] love*" and he instructs them to "*have a keen interest in* (or, appreciation for) *spiritual gifts*"—especially the gift of prophecy. The Corinthian church was placing an excessive emphasis on the fascinating gift of speaking in different languages (or, "tongues"), and disparaging the more useful gifts, such as prophecy, (which in the early church would be a means of edification for the entire assembled body.) As we consider Paul's counsel to the Corinthians, we discover the biblical principle that applies to us as well: all things must be done for edifying (vs. 26c.)

The reason the apostle urges the church to place a higher premium on the gift of prophecy in comparison to "tongues," is due to the fact that prophecy has more value for edifying the entire congregation (vs. 2.) The one who speaks in "tongues" does not speak to men, but to God; that is to say, he cannot address the entire congregation in an edifying manner because no one can understand the unknown language in which he is speaking. But the one who prophesies is able to address the assembled congregation in a meaningful and edifying way; he can speak words of exhortation, comfort, or instruction by the Holy Spirit (vs. 3.)

The one who speaks in "tongues" edifies himself (vs. 4.) Without the gift of interpretation, he is unable to communicate the meaning of his utterances to the church—nor was he able to understand those utterances himself. Nevertheless, his personal involvement in the experience of speaking in an unknown language under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was edifying for himself. According to verse 14, when the Holy Spirit caused one to exercise the gift of "tongues," that person was not merely a passive instrument employed by the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, he was actively engaged in the experience of worshiping God and holding communion with God with his spirit, but not with his understanding. In verse 5 Paul makes it clear that he does not disparage the gift of "tongues," but he desires the church to appreciate the greater usefulness of the gift of prophecy. The gift of prophecy edifies the entire congregation; whereas "tongues," when exercised in the absence of the gift of interpretation, can only edify the individual—and can only edify his spirit, not his understanding.

In verse 6 it is again stressed that “tongues,” in the absence of the gift of interpretation, is unprofitable to the church as a collective body gathered together in public worship. The apostle (in verses 7-11) gives a series of illustrations demonstrating the fact that unintelligible sounds or utterances are of no benefit: musical instruments played off key and out of harmony; an indistinct call to arms; inarticulate speech; and speaking in a foreign language. The church is better served if there is a revelation, a word of knowledge (that is, an explanation of some portion of biblical truth), a prophecy, or a teaching (vs. 6b.)

Paul recognizes that the Corinthian Christians were deeply interested in spiritual gifts—his desire is not to dampen that zeal, but to channel it into more profitable paths for the edification of the entire church (vs. 12-13.) The Corinthians should be concerned that their use of spiritual gifts be employed for the building up of the whole church, producing greater spiritual maturity in Christ and greater service to Christ.

In verses 16-17 Paul points out how the use of “tongues,” in the absence of interpretation, isolates the speaker from the rest of the body. We must be cautious that we do not practice what we might term “elevator Christianity”—ascending to God in a private cubical, isolated from the rest of Christ’s body. In verses 18-19 the apostle gives his own testimony and example. He possesses the gift of “tongues” to a greater degree than any of the Corinthians—he informs the church of this fact so that no one can charge him with an effort to silence the use of “tongues” out of a sense of jealousy or as one who is personally unacquainted with this particular gift of the Spirit. But when the church is assembled together for public worship, he much prefers to speak a few intelligible words of instruction rather than a multitude of unintelligible words that may be impressive to the hearers, but of no value for their edification.

Next (verses 21-22) Paul goes on to explain the significance of “tongues” and prophecy for the covenant community. Quoting from Isaiah 28:11-12, Paul indicates that “tongues” were used by the LORD as a sign of judgment against Old Testament Israel:

*“... with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, <sup>12</sup>to whom he said, This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and, This is the place of repose—but they would not listen.” (Isa. 28:11-12)*

For so many years the LORD spoke to the people of Israel by means of the prophets, (speaking the language the people understood)—by means of the prophets the LORD called His people to covenant faithfulness, promising His blessing and warning of His judgment. But when the people persistently refused to listen to the word of the LORD spoken through His prophets, the final consequence was judgment in the form of invasion by a foreign army—an army speaking in “tongues,” (that is to say, speaking in an unintelligible foreign language.) So then, within the context of the Old Testament covenant community,

prophecy was the means the LORD used to hold communion with His people, speaking to them words of instruction, blessing, warning, and counsel; and “tongues” was the sign the LORD used to indicate that covenant communion had been broken and judgment had come.

What does all this mean for the New Testament covenant community, the church? We must recognize the significance and usefulness of prophecy, (i.e.; the proclaiming of the Word of God.) It is a significant part of God’s communion with His people. Furthermore, uninterpreted “tongues” cannot be—and are not intended to be—a means of blessing to the church as it is gathered together in corporate assembly.

Verses 23-25 present yet another argument against the use of uninterpreted “tongues” in the public assembly. Not only is it the case that uninterpreted “tongues” cannot be a means of blessing and edification to the assembled church (vs. 21-22); but furthermore, the exercise of uninterpreted “tongues” can be a severe hindrance to the church’s witness and to the honor of God (vs. 23-25.) Paul presents the scenario of the entire assembled church speaking in “tongues” with no one to interpret. There now enters the assembly one who is an inquirer, (probably one who is interested in the Christian faith, but has not yet come to full understanding of the faith,) or an unbeliever—with the whole congregation engaged in speaking in “tongues,” these men who enter the assembly cannot comprehend what is happening. Upon observing the scene before them, they will conclude that these Christian people are insane. Consequently, the inquirer may be tempted to abandon any further inquiry into the Christian faith, and the unbeliever may be confirmed in his unbelief and even blaspheme Christ based on what he has experienced among a group of people who profess to be disciples of Christ. But, Paul continues, if the entire congregation is engaged in the act of prophesying, what will be the result? There will be the conviction of sin and the acknowledgment of the presence of God (vs. 24-25.)

The apostle’s main point in this whole discussion of “tongues” and prophecy presented in verses 1-25 is summed up in verse 26b, *"Let all things be done for the edification [of the church.]"*

Here then is the first biblical principle that must govern our worship: All things must be done for edifying. The proclamation of the Word of God, (which was a central function of the New Testament gift of prophecy,) must be pre-eminent in our public worship. Our public worship must engage the intellect as well as the emotions; indeed, the intellect must be especially addressed in public worship—such can be derived from Paul’s concern that prophecy be exercised in the worship service and his admonition against the practice of uninterpreted “tongues.” Furthermore, when the church assembles together for public worship, the emphasis must be upon the collective body of Christ, rather than upon the individual Christian in isolation from the collective body of believers.

## II. All Things Must Be Done in the Way Christ has Appointed (14:27-40)

In verses 27-40 the Apostle Paul is dealing with a series of matters that can all be grouped under the principle stated in verse 40, *“let everything be done properly and in an orderly manner.”*

Paul’s point is that all things pertaining to the public worship service must be done in accordance with God’s will, in accordance with His instruction and His commandment, as he writes in verse 37, *“If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or that he is a spiritual man, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the commandment of the Lord.”* Paul is presenting the Lord’s instructions concerning public worship, and he expects that the church will appreciate this and adhere to these instructions.

In verses 27-28 the principle of doing all things in a decent and orderly manner—a manner that is in accordance with the Lord’s instructions and His divine will—is applied to the use of “tongues.” When the gift of “tongues” was exercised in the public worship service, it was to be used by no more than two or three persons. Each one was to speak in succession, rather than all of them speaking at the same time and thereby creating a babbling confusion. The gift of “tongues” was only to be used in the public assembly if there was also present the gift of interpretation. If no one with the gift of interpretation was present, those who possessed the gift of “tongues” were to keep silent and only exercise the gift in private.

In verses 29-33 the principle of doing all things decently and in an orderly manner is applied to the gift of prophecy. As with the gift of “tongues,” only two or three persons are to exercise the gift at any given public assembly of worship. Each was to deliver his prophecy in turn and in an orderly manner, not everyone speaking at the same time. As one person is prophesying, the others are to *“evaluate [what is said;]”* the others with the gift of prophecy were to verify if indeed a genuine word of prophecy was being spoken. This is in accordance with the biblical principle that a thing is established as true by the affirmation of two or three witnesses, note Deuteronomy 19:15, *“A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”*

If a revelation were suddenly given to one of the prophets sitting quietly in the assembly, the prophet presently exercising his gift must yield to the one to whom a revelation has just been given. Apparently, such a revelation as is described in verse 30 was an urgent communication of the Holy Spirit; whereas the normal exercise of the prophetic gift was under the control of the prophet, even though it was a divine communication of the Holy Spirit (vs. 32.) Perhaps the word spoken by the prophets in the worship service was a divine communication given to the prophet earlier and in private, and now in the worship service he would share that message with the gathered congregation.

In verses 33b-38 the principle of doing all things decently and in an orderly way is applied to the role of women in the public worship service. The Apostle Paul, speaking in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, gives the following instructions to the church: let the women keep silence in the public worship service of the church. If any woman desires to learn something, let her ask her own husband at home.

The basis for the apostle's instruction is as follows: Women are not permitted to speak in the public worship service, but rather let them be in submission, as the Law instructs (vs. 34.) The apostle is probably referring here to the entire teaching of the Old Testament when he speaks of the instruction of the Law, but especially Genesis 2:18,21-23, a passage that emphasized the woman's subordinate role in God's authority structure as it pertains to societal relationships:

*And Jehovah God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him ... <sup>21</sup>So Jehovah God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While he slept, [Jehovah] took one of [the man's] ribs, and closed up the flesh [of the man's side]. <sup>22</sup>Then Jehovah God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>Then the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Gen. 2:18,21-23)*

Also consider Genesis 3:16, a passage in which the LORD addresses Eve following the fall: *"To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing: in pain you shall give birth to children; and your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you."* The reference to the woman's desire for the man appears to be a reference to a sinful desire to usurp the role of leadership assigned to him by God.

What exactly was the situation which the apostle is addressing? Apparently, in the worship service of the early church, the men of the congregation actively participated in the teaching ministry: asking questions, discussing the meaning of a portion of Scripture, proposing applications to everyday life, etc. The early New Testament worship service may have been modeled along the lines of the Jewish synagogue service, note Acts 13:13-15, where Paul, as a Jewish man, is invited to speak and bring teaching or exhortation to the assembled congregation in the synagogue:

*From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. <sup>15</sup>After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak. (Acts 13:13-15)*

In the Corinthian church the women were entering into this part of the worship service; and by so doing they were failing, or refusing, to respect the distinctive roles assigned by God to men and women respectively, the role specified by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11-13,

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent—<sup>13</sup>for Adam was formed first, then Eve. (1 Tim. 2:11-13)*

Note: The subject addressed in this passage is not a matter of equality before God, but a matter of respecting and fulfilling the distinctive roles assigned by God to the man and the woman respectively. Genesis 1:27 presents the clear teaching of Scripture on the equality of man and woman before the LORD God: *“So God created man in his own image, in the image God he created him; male and female he created them.”* The New Testament reinforces that teaching concerning the fundamental equality of man and woman in Christ, stressing the spiritual unity of all believers in Christ: *“there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal. 3:28.)

Furthermore, the instruction presented in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 does not forbid the woman from any form of participation in the public worship service. The apostle has previously stated that the woman is free to participate in the ministry of prophecy and public prayer, provided she does so in such a manner as to respect the subordinate role God has assigned to her: *“every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head”* (1 Cor. 11:5.)

Finally, note that this instruction pertains to the woman’s role and conduct in the public worship service. As we learn from such passages as Acts 18:24-26, the woman is free to engage in an informal teaching ministry apart from the public worship service. In that passage of Acts we find both Priscilla and Aquila took part in teaching Apollos, with Priscilla mentioned more prominently than her husband, Aquila:

*Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup>He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup>He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. (Acts 18:24-26)*

Anticipating protest and resistance from the Corinthian church, the apostle poses to them the following two questions (vs. 36.) *“Did the Word of God come forth from you?”* That is to say, are you Corinthians the human instrument by which God spoke His Word, so that what you Corinthians say and do is the authoritative word and practice for the entire church of Christ? The answer to Paul’s question



is obviously, "No!" *"Did [the Word of God] only come to you?"* Are the Corinthians the sole possessor of God's Word, so that all the church of Christ must look to them and accept their word and practice as authoritative? Once again, the answer to Paul's question is obviously, "No!" The point the apostle is making is that the Corinthian church, and every other Christian congregation, must regulate their faith and conduct by the Word of Christ communicated to His church through His apostles.

Once again, the apostle's main point pertaining to all the matters discussed in verses 27-40 is stated in verse 40, *"let everything be done properly and in an orderly manner."* That is to say, all things pertaining to the public worship service must be done in accordance with God's will, in accordance with His instruction and His command.

Here is the second biblical principle that must govern our worship: All things must be done in the way Christ has appointed. The Word of God, as opposed to our own desires or the spirit of the age in which we live, must be our guide for matters relating to public worship as well as all of life.

## **Conclusion**

When we come together, it is more important that we adhere to the will of Christ, than that we satisfy ourselves. Because it is Christ's church, we must conduct our worship in accordance with the principles He has given, two of which are outlined for us in 1 Corinthians 14,

All things must be done for edifying, not for entertainment or personal satisfaction.

All things must be done in the way Christ has appointed; our worship must be governed by the will of God as revealed in His Word rather than by the spirit of the age in which we live.