

## Themes Of I Corinthians (Part 5)

Order in the Church

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Given 21-Apr-07; Sermon #825

When the Church of the Great God started in January 1992, we continued to conduct services and church operations much as they were done in the Worldwide Church of God, just as they have been done for years and years. In many respects, we still do conduct our services and church operations along the same lines. Our church service is identical to what we did in the Worldwide Church of God down to the very same hymns; we have not changed the hymnal. The only exception of which I can think is that we added a roll call in the midst of the service to verify against the telephone bill.

Basically, if someone were transported by time machine from any time between 1950 and 1986—or even 1992—and plopped down right here with us today, he would not find very much difference at all. Only the faces may have changed. We still do three hymns, an opening prayer, a sermonette, another hymn, then announcements (if we have any), special music (if there is any), a sermon, a final hymn, and then a closing prayer, just as we have always done. It is quite traditional for us, having been set in the church by Herbert Armstrong many long years ago. When my folks came into the church of God back in the 1950s, this was already pretty much how things were organized.

Back in 1992, because we had made the break from the Worldwide Church of God, there were many people who thought that we should redo everything from scratch—rethink everything, come up with new ways of doing everything. There was a sizeable group of members who wanted to make some fairly radical changes to the worship service. Their suggestions were all designed to make the service less structured. They wanted things to be more free flowing. They wanted it to be more open with question and answer or give and take. They wanted people in the congregation to be able to shout out challenges to things, like, "Wait! Hold it! You did not talk about this," or "Did you consider this or that?" Some wanted debate. Some wanted a round table discussion. They wanted all these things instead of what we think of as a worship service.

Of course, since we did not want this at all, my dad said, "No, we will keep what we have because it has worked and its principles are proven." Most, if not all, of these people have gone to the four winds. I do not even know if any of them are still attending in other groups because there were very few others who broke away from the Worldwide Church of God that accepted their suggestions—demands—either. Many of them ended up bunched together because they were the only ones that could accept

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such things. I do not know if any of them are still active any more.

What their suggestions revealed to me was that they did not know their Bibles very well. I want to pull out one verse here in I Corinthians to show you the principle, as the apostle Paul writes,

**I Corinthians 11:2** Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

He was the apostle; he was the one whom Christ had chosen; and with his example and with his experience among the other apostles, they had come up with ways of doing things. By the time you get into the 50s A.D., there were already church of God traditions of which Paul said, "I have put these into the church, and I want you to do them. It pleases me that you do those things." If those people in 1992 understood this principle, maybe they would not have been so quick to ask for change. This asking was at the Feast of Tabernacles in 1992, when we had been out of the Worldwide Church of God for only seven or eight months. They already wanted to make some very radical changes in the way that we did things.

I do not know how much scripture they tried to cite when asking for their changes, but I did notice that they wanted to change the worship service because—whether it was said or not—it represented the authority of Herbert W. Armstrong or Joseph Tkach. It represented hierarchical organization; it represented the "ministry's stranglehold" on the church (in the various ways that they stated it); and they wanted to do away with any resemblance of what the Worldwide Church of God had been. It must have been such a bitter taste in their mouth.

What they never really realized was that the principles underlying the Worldwide Church of God traditional church service are found right here in the Book. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was something of a careful fellow. He did not just come up with things right out of the air and say, "This is how we are going to do things, and this is why we are not going to the other thing—because I say so!" He really was not like that. He may have seemed like that because he was an authoritative person, but when Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong came up with things that the church of God was going to do, he thought long and hard about what the Bible said about them. That is why they were put into the church of God.

Thus, what we do today has good biblical basis. In fact, several of the Bible's principles of order within the church, perhaps some of the most important ones, are found in the

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book of I Corinthians. This afternoon, I am going to address these particular matters to show that what we do as the church of God and how we do them are not arbitrary at all. They are based upon apostolic construction and practice. This is another one of the themes of I Corinthians, and I have entitled the sermon "Order in the Church."

It is impossible to read the book of I Corinthians and not see Paul's authority coming through. When he was three hundred or so miles away writing this, he was still in charge. Despite being separated by all this distance, he was the one in charge of this church, and it comes through in his writings.

With a few strokes of a pen, though a few hundred miles away, he disfellowships the man who had his father's wife. He gives instructions and directions like a general commanding his officers. He gives orders concerning judging, lawsuits, fornication, marriage and divorce, meats offered to idols, idolatry, the Passover service, preaching, church services, taking up a collection for the Jerusalem saints, and the way the Corinthians need to treat the ministry. His epistle is just chock-full of instructions, commands, and orders. Only a person who is obtuse or intentionally blind would fail to see the authority in Paul's writing.

I would like to start in I Corinthians 4. It is interesting and somewhat of paradoxical that although Paul was in charge of the people in Corinth, the people did not think so, or at least they were divided about it. Here he was, gone away to Ephesus or wherever, and they were saying some pretty demeaning things about him. Therefore, he writes some of these things to make sure that they understand that he is the one ultimately in charge of this church.

**I Corinthians 4:14-15** I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors [teachers] in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers...

What he does in this section is compare and contrast the difference between an instructor or teacher and a father—how a father treats his children as opposed to how a teacher treats his pupils.

**I Corinthians 4:15** ...yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

He says that he is more like a father to them.

**I Corinthians 4:16-18** Therefore I urge you, imitate me [just as a child imitates his father]. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.

They had imagined that he was going to stay away, but he said, "No, daddy's comin'!"

**I Corinthians 4:19-21** But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

I do not want to actually go into all the things that he meant in terms of the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power, etc. I do not want to explain that, but I want you to get the perspective that he had of his position. He saw them as his children in the Lord, and he understood that such a position gave him certain freedoms, prerogatives, and privileges. He could do certain things as their "father" that a teacher could not do. He could speak to them, kindly and gently teaching them, or he could command them and use his power.

It just depended on how they would react to his instructions. If they would repent, change, and do what he said, then he could come to them kindly and gently and pat them on their heads and tell them, "Very good!" and have a very peaceful and loving relationship with them. If they did not, however, then he might be forced to use more sternness, measures and discipline just as a father would use. It would still be loving, but it would not necessarily be considered kind by those on the receiving end. It would not appear gentle, even though the discipline (Hebrews 12) would be done in love. Thus, he asked them, "How are you going to treat me? Because how you treat me will dictate how I respond to you."

I went through this because I want you to understand Paul's perspective on his position. He was their father in the Lord, and this gave him great authority.

Paul's instructions on administration within the church are primarily in four chapters, namely 9, 11, 12, and 14, although there are bits and pieces in various other sections. These particular chapters cover the subjects of ministerial prerogatives, privileges, and rights; the principle of headship; conduct of the Passover service; the organized division

of labor within the church; and the order in church services. These are all fairly basic subjects, but we must remember that the church of God in Corinth was a very young church. It was by this time maybe only five years old; it may have been less than that. Since most of its members had been converted only a few years before, they did not have a great deal of background in the church of God. Some of them may have been Jews and had background in the synagogue, and some of these things might have been brought from there. Not all of them were, though. We have to remember where Corinth was and the makeup of its residents, where they all were from, and the backgrounds they had.

Paul was trying, in an entirely new situation, to bring order out of chaos, to get people from Egypt, Judea, Asia Minor, Europe, and wherever else the people came from to all do and speak the same thing. He had a gargantuan task. The first thing he did, of course, was to set down who is in charge: He was. From there, they could work out the details.

There were problems in the Corinthian church, and they had been reported to Paul. The situation was becoming worse. Remember, there were various factions: "I am of Paul. I am of Apollos, etc." Paul thought the best thing to do in this situation was to set down plain and understandable directions, and that is exactly what he does in I Corinthians.

What we are going to do today is take an overview of these five major sections. We are not going to try to go through every little detail, because that would take too many sermons and I want to do this in only one. Therefore, we will take the highlights out of this in order to understand the principles from which that Paul was working. Then we can understand why Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, back in the distant past, put these same structures into the church of God.

I have titled this first section "Ministerial Authority, Rights, and Privileges." Paul clearly wrote I Corinthians 9 because he felt defensive about his own position. The reports that he had received from those who had come from Corinth included some that were very critical of Paul himself. In other places, it talks about how Paul sounded strong in his letters but in person he was rather weak. The people did not think he was quite the personality in person that he was through the written word. He came across strong in those epistles; but when they saw him in person, he was not what they expected. Perhaps he seemed to be a pushover?

This tells us something about Paul. He was a very kind man and a regular "Joe." He was not an imposing figure, although when he wrote, he sounded as if he were ten feet tall. When people met him, they might have thought less of him after they got to know

him a little bit. His speech was supposedly contemptible. Remember back in those days among the Greeks, rhetoric was the prime skill sought out. If a person could speak well like Apollos, they were considered to be almost among the gods. Paul's speech, though—which might have had a lisp or stutter—they considered contemptible. He also sought to only preach Christ crucified. Paul was feeling a bit defensive, and he felt that he needed to set the record straight.

Because Paul had refrained from doing certain things among the Corinthians, they came to the conclusion that he was not a high ranking person. They seemed to think, "Well, if he is as great as he claimed to be, he would have done this or that." He would have brought a wife or lived on the people's contributions; he would have set himself up in a nicer place; he would not have worked as a tentmaker. Since he did not do these things, they thought, "He is just some flunky sent out from Jerusalem, who is making himself out to be more than he really is."

You can imagine the situation. They did not have the ability to call Jerusalem on the phone and say, "Hey James! Did you send this guy, Paul, up to us? We need to know." They had to take the word of Paul himself. If he were really contemptible looking in person and yet was saying, "I am leader," or something like that, they might think that he was trying to pull the wool over their eyes. Who knows? Maybe this is what they thought. It certainly comes across that it was something similar to that.

Paul could not win. He went into Corinth, decided not to take their tithes, and to work for himself making tents. We do not know if he was married; but if he were, he did not bring her along. He brought no one with him as far as we know. Here he has decided to do these things to help persuade them to the gospel, because he did not want to appear to be demanding things of them. He did all of this in the goodness of his heart, trying to be a good example to them, and it all gets thrown back into his face. "Paul, you are not as big a person in this church as you say that you are. You do not have the authority that you claim."

Paul, then, has to set the matter straight, and in defending himself he explains the principles behind the authority that he has. As we start, notice the rhetorical questions he asks here. If you understand rhetorical questions, the answers are usually obvious. I read in one of the commentaries that what we are about to read in this section is actually a Hebrew rhetorical device, rather than a Greek one (though written in Greek); and a Hebrew understanding of this first one, "Am I not an apostle?" would be understood as, "Yes, indeed, I am an apostle!"

**I Corinthians 9:1-14** Am I not an apostle? [Yes, indeed, I am an apostle.]

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Am I not free? [Yes, indeed, I am free.] Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? [Yes, indeed, I have seen Jesus Christ our Lord.] Are you not my work in the Lord? [Yes, indeed, you are my work in the Lord.] If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal [certification, proof] of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

They should have been able to figure these things out, and that is what all these rhetorical questions are designed to do. It is actually a way that Paul is cutting down those who were saying these things. He was saying to them, "You should already know this, and you should know that, and you should know this other thing, etc. But you are so puffed up with knowledge that you have not been able to figure these things out." He is really taking them to task.

His teaching style here is very infantile. It is the same way that you teach a little child. "Do you know what one is? This is one thing. One. Do you know what this other one is? This is another one. If you put them together, how many do you get? Two."

That is the way that Paul is doing this here. "Am I not an apostle? [Point number one.] Am I not free? [Point number two.] Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? [Point number three.] Are you not my work in the Lord? [Point number four.]"

He is just putting point after point after point, leading them to an obvious conclusion. The bottom line and conclusion is in verse 14: "A servant of God who preaches the gospel should receive support from those he teaches." That is the end of the matter for him.

The key word in this whole section is translated into English as *right* or *power*. "Do we have no right or power to eat or drink?" That word is a Greek word, *exousia*, and it means "power," very much like *dunamis*, another Greek word that means "power." *Exousia* has a somewhat different meaning, however. Where *dunamis* tends to be in terms of great strength and power, *exousia* has the idea of freedom of action, a right to do something.

It is the authority to do something rather than brute strength. They are very much alike with this little bit of difference. This one has more to do with freedom and the right to do something. This word can be translated, "a right, authority, power, freedom, privilege, leave, permission, power of rule or government." It could be translated any one of those ways, and even some others. What he is saying throughout this whole chapter is that Paul certainly does have permission from Christ to do these things if he should need to. They are part of the package of being a minister and certainly of being an apostle.

What he does is not only take them step-by-step through asking these rhetorical questions and leading them to an irrefutable conclusion, but he also cites the law. First, he cites Deuteronomy 25:4—"You shall not muzzle the ox"—which is a very simple principle. If a person does a job, he should be able to eat from the proceeds of his labor. If a person works in a bottling factory, he should be able to drink one just about any time he wants to. If a person works in an orchard, he should be able to eat some of the fruit of it. That is the basic understanding.

He also cites Leviticus 6 and 7 and Numbers 18. In all three of these chapters are instructions from God to Moses and the Levites that there were certain sacrifices and certain things brought to them to offer to God in which they were to take a part, whether they were to offer a handful of grain on the altar and take the rest for their use, or whether they were to take a portion of an animal that was theirs to eat. He is saying that these Old Testament, Old Covenant examples give us the principles for the way that the New Testament ministry can function.

He also cites Jesus Christ Himself:

**Matthew 10:9-10** "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a

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worker is worthy of his food."

This is from Jesus Christ Himself in sending out the apostles. These are the instructions He gave. They were, as Paul says back to I Corinthians 9, to live by the gospel.

Paul does not press his rights in this case. He had permission, he had leave from Jesus Christ to do these things; but he had decided in the case of the Corinthians that he would not do this, instead supporting himself when he went there. He had his reasons for doing this. In verse 12, he said that he did not want the gospel hindered. Maybe he had advance warning that the Corinthians would take it less than kindly if he had told them that he needed to live off them and decided not to do it. I do not know.

The second thing he says, coming up in verses 15 through 18, which we will not read, is that he did not do this because it is a point of boasting for him. You could say glory, but probably better yet, it was a point of joy to him. It was just a personal thing with him. It fulfilled his joy that he would not do so, because (1) he was a wonderfully converted man, and (2) my speculation is that maybe Paul's feeling of guilt had turned into a feeling of obligation to repay the church of God in service for his former persecution of it. In I Corinthians 15:9, this comes up when he says that he is the least of all the apostles because he persecuted the church of God.

It seems that this point of joy, glory, and boasting with him was perhaps a personal vow that he took, that he would not take any more from the people, that he had taken enough from them in the past. Perhaps he decided that he would not do that. Again, this is my speculation. Since it comes up a bit later in I Corinthians, I sort of put the two things together. I do not know if I am right, but it is something about which to think, at least.

**II Thessalonians 3:7-9** For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

He says almost exactly the same thing here in II Thessalonians. We will see yet another, similar thing, more along the lines of the entire principle of the ministry being able to live from the gospel.

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**I Timothy 5:17-18** Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor (remuneration), especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

I went to these two places because II Thessalonians was written fairly early in his ministry, and I Timothy was written fairly late in his ministry. What I want you to see is that, combined with I Corinthians 9, this was a consistent teaching of Paul throughout his ministry. This was not just something he did for the Corinthians or the Thessalonians or Timothy for the next generation. He was consistent. It is a tradition of the church of God.

To sum up this section: Christ gives His ministry authority within the church—which includes preaching, teaching, disfellowshipping, organizing, having a wife—supported through contributions, including during ministerial visits, and other smaller areas. Paul's example, however, is that ministers must never abuse their authority by any means, so as to bring glory to God and place no hindrance to the preaching of the gospel. In many of these cases, it is a judgment call. It is a privilege given; it does not have to be taken.

The next section I have entitled, "Leadership, Headship, or Hierarchy."

**I Corinthians 11:1** Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

This must have spurred a thought, because then he says,

**I Corinthians 11:2-3** Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Skipping the portion regarding head coverings and hair lengths,

**I Corinthians 11:16** But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

I did not want to get into the head coverings and hair lengths situation. That is not my

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subject. I am interested in the principle that Paul lays down here at the beginning of the chapter, which I called "headship." Notice the progression of his argument. It is very simple, and it is verse by verse.

He said, "Imitate the apostle as he follows Christ's lead." This in itself shows hierarchy: The apostle is under Christ. Then he says in verse 2, "Keep the traditions of the church of God as they have been delivered to you." In verse 3, he says, "There is a natural God-ordained order of authority." There is God the Father; there is Christ the Son; there is man; and then there is woman.

Then the fourth thing, in verse 16, "One person's contentions are not enough to overturn the long-standing practices of the church of God." Just because one person may think that something may be a good idea does not mean that whoever is in charge should jump to make the change. It is much better and wiser to see what the whole church is doing. The *we* in verse 16 probably indicates the Jews and their long-term association with God. Then, he mentions the churches of God.

What he is talking about is this: Just because one person want to bring up something, we should not make the change if it contradicts what has been traditional in the church of God and cannot be proven to be any better. We have had many contentions in the past over this principle—headship, leadership, and hierarchy—but Paul states it clearly and unequivocally. As a matter of fact, in the next chapter, he gives a kind of organizational chart for the church of God.

**I Corinthians 12:28** And God has appointed these in the church [and then he uses numbers]: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

He is giving us a ranking from top to bottom of authority, power, and importance.

We can also go to Ephesians 4. We all know this one pretty well, too. We often come here when talking about such things.

**Ephesians 4:11** And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

This is a very similar list. Between I Corinthians and Ephesians, Paul has the same general order. That is how it goes under Christ, who is under God.

What this organizational chart does, what this stacking of leadership on levels of authority does, is provide organization—order within the church—a tool that God has used since the very beginning. In fact, in I Timothy 2, Paul reaches back to Adam and Eve—"The man was created first, and then the woman"—to show the proof that this is the way that God works. Everywhere we look in the Old Testament, it is the same. It worked for the patriarchs; it worked for Moses and Joshua, David and the kings, Elijah and Elisha, as well as it worked for the apostles in the New Testament era. It is a consistent way that God works.

If we would go to John 14:28, we would see that Jesus recognizes the same thing Himself, when He says, "The Father is greater than I." There is a chain of command. Since God finds that this works, He has put it in the church; and it will work for us as long as those who are in that line of command—and the members themselves, also—are converted. ***The most important part*** of any kind of organization and government is ***conversion***. If authority is handled in godly love, that is, looking out of the best interest of others and of everyone, then it will work.

That does not mean that there will not be any hurt feelings. That does not mean that there will never be any kind of discipline. That does not mean, as we have seen in this particular book, that there will not be people disfellowshipped or that schisms could not arise in the church, or what-have-you. However, if it is done in love, it is going to produce what God intended for it to produce. Overall, we can say that if we use this principle, the best interests of the church can be served.

To sum up this section: The principle of headship provides organization within the church and enforces God's righteous standards within the church.

The third part is also in I Corinthians 11, and it has to do with the conduct and order within the Passover service. Remember, Paul had just finished talking about the last section on headship, and he goes into this problem with the "Lord's Supper." We have to be thinking that this is the way that Paul was thinking as he starts to write about this. He has this in mind. He is going to use his authority, given to him by Jesus Christ, as head of the church to straighten out the Corinthians regarding their unchristian practice of the Lord's Supper, which we call today in the church of God, the Passover service.

**I Corinthians 11:17** Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.

Things were degenerating.

**I Corinthians 11:20** Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? [He was speechless!] Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.

**I Corinthians 11:26-32** For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge [examine] ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

That is what he is doing. He is saying, "I am going to make a judgment, and I am chastening you. The reason why I am chastening you is so that you might not be condemned with the world." They were doing something very wrong.

**I Corinthians 11:33-34** Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat [the Passover], wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment [repeating what you have done wrong, and have to be judged again]. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

It says here that the way the Corinthians were observing the Passover was for the worse. It was divisive, unloving, self-serving; and as Paul sums it up, it was unworthy. In verse 20, when they came together to observe this festival, it was not to keep Passover. It was something far different. The way that he goes on to explain it, it was almost some sort of pagan rite that they were doing. They were getting drunk. They brought more than just one bottle of Passover wine, I guess. What they were calling the Lord's Supper was unfair, because some could eat, and some could not; some got drunk, and some did not. They were actually shaming those who did not have the means to eat with them. It was not of the same level as the others.

Remember, this city was very diverse, with very poor people and very rich people. There were Egyptians, Jews, Syrians, and more from all over the Mediterranean, all with different customs, who brought their ideas into the church of God, evidently all mixed together. They were having this out and out riotous feast to the point that the people were actually getting drunk during what should have been the Passover service.

What Paul essentially says is that their practice was dishonoring Christ in the worst way. As a matter of fact, His supreme sacrifice does not seem to have entered into their thinking at all. He had to remind them, "Look, this is why we come together for the Passover: It is to honor Christ. It is to take the bread and remember His body. It is to take the wine and remember His shed blood, and all the things that go with it."

He was telling them that it was to be a sober evening, in more ways than one. He had to lay down the law to them. He told them that if they were really spiritually discerning, they would know better; but they were such carnal people that he had to command them and judge them.

What he tells them in those few last verses we just read is that they were to take the Passover together, as a church, because he says, "When you come together to eat," to partake of the Passover symbols, "wait for one another," meaning to do it all at the same time, be in the same room. Then he says that if any were hungry and needed to eat, they should do that at home first. The Passover service under the New Covenant is not a meal any longer; it is simply to partake of the symbols of bread and wine. When you have the meal, you lose sight of the reason why you are there. If they had had the lamb and this and that, they would soon forget that the bread symbolized Christ's body and the wine symbolized His blood.

Paul said to get rid of all the extraneous stuff. "We are having a service to concentrate on the broken body and the shed blood of our Savior. Therefore, when you all come together, eat before you get there. We will have the service; we will do it all at once; we will have just the bread and wine as symbols." Then he says that he will take care of the rest later. Perhaps he was talking about the arrangements for the foot washing or whatnot. Paul mentions only these two things here, the bread and the wine, but says that it will all get worked out once he gets there. We still follow these instructions today when we partake of the Passover. Once a year, we all come together, in the same place if possible, and we all take the symbols of the bread and wine at the same time. We have order in the Passover service.

In summary of this section: The church should not treat the Passover like a potluck or feast. That is the next night, the Night to be Remembered as the first of the Day of

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Unleavened Bread begins. That is the time we feast. We have come out of Egypt! We have come out of sin! The Passover itself is a sober commemoration of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and should be observed with due solemnity.

This next section is "Organization and Division of Labor within the Church."

**I Corinthians 12:12-14** For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

**I Corinthians 12:18** But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

**I Corinthians 12:27** Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Paul uses the analogy of the body to show how the church is organized and how it is directed. The body—yours, mine, everybody's—is directed by the head. All the functions of the body begin in the mind and go through the nerves to the rest of the body, and those parts perform their functions.

The body of Christ is the same way. He is the Head, and He sends His orders through His Holy Spirit to the rest of the body. Since those who are in His body have the Holy Spirit and can receive and be inspired by the Holy Spirit, those members do what Christ tells them to do. Everything works together because we are all working toward the same goal.

Paul says here, putting this into my own words, that the body of Christ is a spiritual organism. Every part has a place and a function. You may be in the knee, and the knee's function is to bend in prayer, or something like that. Every part has a place and a function, and he emphasizes that these places and these functions are determined by God the Father Himself and are directed by Jesus Christ Himself. They are involved. The Father puts us where He wants us, and then Jesus Christ says, "Okay, Dad. I can use this person," and He gives the orders.

In the intervening verses, which we did not read, Paul takes great pains to show that we should not make a great deal out of where the Father has placed us or what function He

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has given us, because in the end, the less prestigious places and functions may very well prove to be more vital and honorable than the ones that may have been out front for all to see, that some might, for some reason, envy. We should not envy what others in the church are doing, because God in His sovereignty has put each one in the best place for Him and for the church at that particular time.

Obviously, we know of people who have moved around within the church. Some come in and a few years later become a song book greeter; then they are involved with other activities. Pretty soon, they are found out to be quite good at this, that, or the other thing, and they become deacons. They help the church even more, and later they might become elders. Whatever or however the course may take, people do not always have the same positions and functions all the time. It is a matter of God's placement and Christ's direction. If we believe that, then we can be pleased and content where we are; we can be patient if we should desire a greater office or function. We need to understand this principle that God places, Christ directs, and they both have our best interests in Their hearts at all times.

Paul makes an important point that we have to remember:

**I Corinthians 12:3-6** Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

**I Corinthians 12:11** But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

The point here is that no matter what a person's spiritual gift may be, where he has been placed in the body, or what his function is, if he is using it in a way that profanes Christ in any way, he does not belong in the body. That is one way of looking at this.

The other way is that we need to be very discerning, because Paul says here that there are diversities or differences—there are variations—in these gifts. There are differences in the way that people minister or serve. There are differences in the way that people use their authority or not, or the way they structure things or not. There might be someone who likes certain activities and is good at them, and there might be someone who does not like certain activities and is not good at them. We have to be discerning so that we understand that although there are differences and variations among people, it

is the same Spirit that is driving them.

Whether a person—a minister, perhaps—likes to play softball or not really does not make a difference, does it? If he played softball all the time and forsook his ministry to play softball, then there is a problem. Liking to play softball, however, does not make him any better or worse a minister than one who likes to play racquetball, as long as it is done in its proper place. A minister who plays racquetball is no better than one who plays softball.

Let us ratchet this up. You might have a minister who is very hospitable and has people over to his house often and is always visiting other people at their homes, talking to people, being quite gregarious—seemingly a wonderful person. Then, there is another minister who tends to be more studious, spending more time studying, thinking deeply on things, and may not be the best person at interpersonal communications, but he gets it. Which one is the better minister?

Well, neither, of course. God has used the one man's gifts for one thing, and he has used the other man's gifts for something else. If they are both preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, pointing people toward Christ, and actually helping people to mature, there is no real difference between them. They are both being guided by the same Spirit. How they do things should not make a difference.

One may rub us wrong, one way or the other, because we might like the gregarious fellow rather than the studious fellow. However, just because one is one way and another one is the other does not mean that the same Spirit is not working within them to bring the church to where it needs to be. This is where we have to be discerning.

Thus, there is the negative way at looking at this, saying that if someone is using his gifts in a way that is profaning Jesus, he should not be there—but on the other hand, just because there are differences in the way that they do things does not mean that they have a different spirit. We need to be very discerning of these things. God has put very many different people into His church, and if we are all being drawn by the same Spirit toward the same goal, then we should be able to get over some of these differences.

Why is this so important in Corinth? There were just so many different people in Corinth. Paul was certainly not like Apollos, and Apollos was not like Peter. Timothy, who would come later, was not like any of them. He might have followed Paul more closely than Apollos, but he was a different person, too. The people there had to understand the principle of "from many, one"—*E Pluribus Unum*. As long as we are all under the one

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Spirit and directed by Jesus Christ, then we will have to put up with those differences and learn to work with them.

Here is a parallel scripture passage from Paul to the Ephesians:

**Ephesians 4:7** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

**Ephesians 4:11-16** And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, [all working together] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry [service], for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

We all work together. It is not just these in verse 11, but "every joint...every part," supplying and doing its share to meet these goals, to equip the members to serve, to build up the church, to come into unity in doctrine and understanding, to bring members to spiritual maturity all the way to the image of Christ, to strengthen members against deception. The ministry certainly bears a great deal of that work, but the rest of the body supports it in many indispensable and absolutely necessary ways. No person is unneeded if God has put him into the Body of Christ.

To sum up this section: The church of God is organized by God under Christ to fulfill God's purpose in the church. Each member has a place and a function that are necessary to reach the goal. Wherever we have been placed, we should be content; if we desire something more, we need to wait for God's providence. In the meantime, continue working.

The last section is found in I Corinthians 14, "Order in Church Services."

Again, I want to avoid the subject of tongues for now and concentrate on the points of order Paul brings out in this chapter. However, we do need to understand that the

reason tongues is a problem in Corinth is that who-knows-how-many languages were spoken there. Remember, Corinth was a crossroads of trade and culture. There were Egyptians, Jews, Anatolians, Romans, and Greeks, and who knows who else coming through Corinth most of the time—and there were probably local dialects also. Therefore, Paul had to come up with a way to deal with this very unusual situation because he did not want church services to descend into chaos—of all things, not church services. He begins with priorities.

**I Corinthians 14:1-5** Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

I certainly would like to go kick every one of those translators who worked on this chapter, in either the New King James Version or the Authorized Version. It would have been so much easier and more understandable to everyone if they would have just not used *prophesy* and *tongue*. Paul is not speaking about something strange or arcane but about a normal situation in Corinth. He is talking about people who speak different languages. His argument is so much easier to understand if we use the words *preach* and *foreign language*.

Listen to this:

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may preach or teach. For he who speaks in a foreign language does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries [meaning that he could be speaking something helpful, but since nobody understands him, it is a mystery as to what he is saying]. But he who preaches or teaches speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a foreign language edifies himself, but he who preaches or teaches edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with foreign languages, but even more that you preach or teach; for he who preaches is greater than he who speaks with foreign languages, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

Is this not simpler and more understandable? That is all that Paul is talking about in this section. His point is that preaching is of a higher priority, because it builds up the members of the church, just as he said in Ephesians 4. It teaches them something profitable, even if it is only just because they can understand what is being said. If it is something simple and understandable, if they are preaching in the same language that the people can hear and understand, then they receive benefit from it.

**I Corinthians 14:20-23** Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips [foreign languages] I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. Therefore tongues [foreign languages] are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying [preaching] is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues [foreign languages], and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

"If everybody is babbling in all these different foreign languages, would not somebody coming in off the street say that you are all mad?"

**I Corinthians 14:24-25** But if all prophesy [preach], and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

What Paul is doing is harkening back to the original Pentecost miracle (Acts 2), and he is saying that people coming across a scene like that thought they all to be mad. They did: They thought they were drunk. Then, thought, they noticed that each hearer heard the apostles in his own *dialect*. What effect did that have? They understood the gospel perfectly, because it was in a language that had all the nuances that they understood—their own dialects, their own little twists on words. They all understood, and they could be converted.

However, if they are all babbling and nobody can understand what they are saying, it does no good. Paul says that we need to have some order, because we have a lot of different languages in the church at Corinth, and we need to place some sort of order on

this situation. He does:

**I Corinthians 14:26** How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

That is the first big point. What ever you decide to do, make sure that it builds up the church.

**I Corinthians 14:27** If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.

He sets down some rules. At most, then, there should be three in a whole service, and make sure that there is an interpreter there, or make sure that person who gives a message in a foreign language can interpret what he has just said in the language of the other people.

**I Corinthians 14:28-30** But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets [preachers] speak, and let the others judge [listen, discern, contemplate]. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

He is saying that if there is a time when somebody has a sudden inspiration and something needs to be said, then the speaker should sit down and let the other speak.

**I Corinthians 14:31** For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

He is saying, "Have some order here, one person at a time. Out of this we can all be comforted, encouraged, and taught. Those things cannot happen if you all go at the same time."

**I Corinthians 14:32** And the spirits of the prophets [preachers] are subject to the prophets [preachers].

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This basically means that those who are preaching have to be careful of what they say. They just cannot do or say things that are unacceptable and strange.

**I Corinthians 14:33-37** For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet [preacher] or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

A final thing there that he said was that no one is to preach anything that does not conform to what Jesus or the apostles lay down as doctrine, after directing that no women should speak in church.

The five things that he sets up here are these: (1) Paul limits the service to two or three speakers—any more would be too much to absorb in one service. (2) No one is to preach in a foreign language unless someone can interpret the message into the majority language. (3) Speakers should preach one after the other, not all at once, so that the congregation can learn. (4) Women are not allowed to preach and, using the principle of headship, should direct their questions either to their husbands or privately to the ministry. (5) Nothing should be preached that does not conform to the message brought from Christ through the apostles.

The summary, then, is that the church service, which is designed to teach and encourage the brethren, should be orderly, following a known procedure. In this way, everyone benefits, and God is glorified.

I would like to close with this:

**I Corinthians 14:40** Let all things be done decently and in order.

In this time when the whole world rocks in confusion and chaotic individualism, the church of God stands as a bulwark of decency and order. Thank God for that!