

Our perception of what a church gathering should be is strongly colored by our personal experience and traditions. It is colored by our culture. We seldom challenge such presuppositions as we sometimes need to do. Paul begins and concludes this section with general instructions concerning local church gatherings. Most of verse 27-35/39 deal with special application to tongues and prophecy. problem issues in the Corinthian church.

I. *Instruction for orderly gathering (14:26)*

Verse 26 introduces a conclusion and logical application to the previous explanations. Paul's particular concern here is for the manner in which they gather together.

1. Believers came to give, not just receive. Each person was expected to be able to participate. This reflects the diversity which Paul developed in chapter 12 and it reflects the responsibility of each believer to participate in the body.
This is different from many of our traditions and from the formality and audience orientation which we find in many churches today. Even our vocabulary, e.g., auditorium, reinforces non-participation. Whenever we come together, we should be as much concerned about what we give to others as about what we receive.
2. Second, all participation was to be done to spiritually build up the church. The activities in the gathering of the church should focus on making believers more like Jesus Christ.

Early church gatherings were primarily concerned about believers, not unbelievers. This is different than the growing emphasis of the last 20 or 30 years. What we call "church" is the gathering of believers. It involves the participation of believers for the building up of believers.

II. *An application to tongues and prophecy (14:27-35)*

1. The proper practice of tongues in the assembly limited the number to two or three, one at a time, and only with interpretation (vv 27-28).
2. The proper practice of prophecy in the assembly also meant that participation was regulated (29a, 30-33a) and it required appropriate evaluation (vv 29b, 33b-35).
 - a. The number of prophets speaking was limited to two or three, even though Paul had encouraged them to seek the gift of prophecy. It was not to show off one's own person but was to build up believers in an orderly gathering.
 - b. The prophets were to speak only one at a time. Orderliness represented God's character and fostered learning and encouragement.
 - c. The prophets were to give priority to current revelation (v 30).
 - d. There was to be appropriate evaluation. "The others" are probably other prophets who were to discern the meaning and/or application of what was said. (Cf. Mt 16:3; Acts 11:12; 1 Cor 6:5 for the use of "weigh carefully...") Prophecy was not always clear (cf. Num. 12:6-8) and needed to be considered carefully, like what gifted teachers do with the written Word of God.
 - e. Women were excluded from the evaluating process (vv 33b-35).

Many explanations for this text are inadequate in my opinion. There is no manuscript evidence that would exclude these verses nor adequate reason to place these verses elsewhere. Ch. 11 appears best understood as addressing a public context and not given by concession, which means that 14:34 should be understood as limited by the context. A proper understanding of inspiration rules out accommodation to Jewish prejudice against women. He is not responding to a strictly local situation since he rests his answer on the law. Neither can he be refuting (v 36) and quote (vv 34-35), since the verses do not have the character of a quote and verse 36 reinforces rather than contradicts.

Within the context Paul is discussing prophesying and in verse 29 refers to the evaluation of prophecy. It is probably from this evaluation process that the women are excluded. (For the "Law" see Genesis 2:20-24, cf. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13 where should not teach or usurp authority over a man.)

This teaching might not be readily accepted or only with embarrassment, since it is not politically or culturally acceptable in some places. But this does appear to be the NT teaching. Remember 1) that God defines for us what is right and not our human culture, and 2) that what God requires of us is for our good.

II. *Final exhortations (14:36-40)* Paul apparently anticipated a negative reaction to his teaching.

1. The Corinthians were to submit to Paul's instruction as to the Lord. Those who were truly led by the Spirit and through whom the Spirit of God spoke would agree with Paul had written. Rejection of these instructions revealed a heart without the Spirit of God. Such people would be denied by the Lord in the last day.
2. The gifts of the Spirit had their place and the Corinthians should accept that.
3. In all they were to act in a fitting (appropriate or in accord with correct teaching) and orderly fashion.

All things are to be done for the edifying of the Body and everything should be done in a fitting and orderly manner. This is contrary to the world philosophy of self which the church has embraced. Church is not about what I can get or how I can express myself.

Perhaps the most popular expression of wrong thinking is one small, but revealing sentence: "I didn't get anything out of the service." That might be true. But I need to ask, "what did I give to the gathering? How did I build someone else up? We need to think correctly and come prepared to share something to build up others spiritually. We need to prepare ourselves spiritually to participate together.