

## "Why We Gather Together"

*1 Corinthians 14:26-40*

A phrase pops up in 14:26 that has appeared three times since Ch. 11. That's the phrase, "When you come together".

What we miss in this section of Scripture because we want to know what Paul has to say about tongues, is the context of everything he has said since Ch. 11. Ch. 11-14 are all about when the church comes together for worship and instruction. Ch. 11 began with a discussion about head coverings in their assemblies. In 11:17-18 he addressed the larger problem that revealed its ugly head in various ways:

*<sup>17</sup> In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup> In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.*

Then he adds

*<sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else.*

And then in v.34 he summarizes,

*<sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. <sup>34</sup> If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.*

And now at the beginning of this last section,

*<sup>26</sup> What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church*

Paul's teaching about spiritual gifts here in Ch's 12-14 is concentrated on the church's gathering and how the gifts are to be used for the building up of the local body of believers. But this wasn't happening in Corinth. As we've seen it was a confusing, chaotic [dare I say] competition on who was more God-approved than the rest. This is not what any gathering of believers should look like whether it's in your home, in a church, or at a conference or concert. The context here regarding spiritual gifts is not about the gifts themselves;

### **We Gather for the Purpose that All of Us Would Be Edified** **(14:26)**

*All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.*

And that word for 'strengthening' or 'edification' is a construction term meaning 'house-building'. As we've already said, the church is God's temple where His presence presides and we are spiritual stones being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone. I've listed all the references to edification in Ch. 14 alone just to remind us of the context of the chapter but also the purpose of why we gather too. We don't come to sit down and rest; we come to build. Come prepared to use your spiritual tools which are the gifts the Spirit has given you. Perhaps we should all come wearing hard-hats as a reminder of the purpose of why we gather.

In this chapter, Paul has been extolling the supremacy of the gift of prophesying – which I understand as the Spirit-led ability to take God's revealed truth and speak it into people's lives for their strengthening, encouragement, comforting (14:3) and conviction (14:25) – over the gift of tongues simply because when prophesying one speaks the same language of those around you. Speaking tongues has personal experiential benefits Paul says but no corporate benefit if you don't know what was said. Paul is not badmouthing speaking in tongues; he's encouraging the proper use of tongues that must be interpreted. When tongues is used correctly it results in believers being edified and can even lead to unbelievers coming to know Christ as we see in v.25. Which is how tongues was used at Pentecost in Acts 2.

Again, Paul reminds his hearers and readers that corporate edification is far superior to personal experience. A message that we still need to hear today. We're all imperfect saved-sinners who wrestle everyday with the preference for personal growth over corporate growth. Why? Somebody hurts us. We get ignored or not thanked or we have insecurity issues. You'd think after being saved for 10, 20, 30, 50 years we would mature and forgive and understand that body growth is essential to our own personal growth. But we still think we can do fine without other believers. Paul says no. God says no. Jesus says no. We are His body. All parts are necessary for the whole to function healthily. We know from personal experience when even one part of our body hurts or doesn't function properly it affects everything else. So it is with us, the body of Christ. Do not listen to the whispers of Satan when he says, 'you don't need anybody else to grow.'

The whole book is Paul's attempt to correct the Corinthian church's unbalanced preferences about numerous issues and Ch. 14 is Paul's corrective teaching on some believers' unhealthy attraction towards the gift of speaking in tongues. This is important to understand because v.27 is not a prescription for what our services should be like. Their services had become chaotic and confusing. So Paul is helping them by suggesting a format on how they should use their gifts when they are gathered together. And the most important thing about when we gather together is ...

## **Our Worship Gatherings Should Result in Glorifying God** **(14:27-38)**

This wasn't happening at the Corinthian gatherings.

*<sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. <sup>28</sup> If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.*

*<sup>29</sup> Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. <sup>30</sup> And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. <sup>32</sup> The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.*

From Paul's instructions we can infer that more than two or three were trying to speak in tongues and not one at a time. And with no interpretations. People claiming to prophesy were

speaking out of turns. Some claiming to have a revelation from God would interrupt. And in all this no one was weighing what was said whether it agreed with Scripture or not. Paul's corrective commands [not suggestions! There are 13 commands in this section] bring them back to their edification and God's glorification. He states

***Those who serve must collaborate not compete (vv.27-32)***

People were interrupting each other to outdo one another. Thankfully this is not something we experience in our worship gatherings but sometimes in personal conversations. We sometimes interrupt each other because we want to share a similar experience that the other is telling us about. Or we want to show that we know more or just as much as them. Even here we wrestle with individual preference over corporate growth. By letting people share their own experiences without adding our own is a way of 'being quick to hear and slow to speak' and encourages them to share more. Because some people don't share out of insecurities or bad experiences. I need to work on that and most of us probably do as well.

Ministry is not a competition; it's a collaboration and cooperation of God's gifts working together to grow His church and bring glory to God. We are a symphony of spiritual instruments creating our own unique sound of praise to God. Are there more effective preachers out there? Thousands! Are there more skilled singers and musicians out there? Thousands! Are there more educated children's workers and youth workers, wiser elders and deacons, and churches more effective at outreach or more mission minded .... Yes, yes and yes! But they're not here and they're not part of this body that God has placed here. And God isn't as concerned about our being better than others but that we're doing the best we can with the gifts we have to grow together for His glory.

This is what Paul has been driving at in this whole letter to this specific geographical church in time and history and if we miss this we've missed the whole point of Corinthians. The church at Corinth was focused on specific trees in the forest and not enjoying the beautiful forest God made them to be. So he tells them these are the corrections you need to make in their services because out of selfishness few are growing and God was not being glorified.

In vv.34-38 Paul brings corrective measures to a problem that was a logical outcome of the chaotic, competitive and confusing messages being shared when they gathered.

*As in all the congregations of the saints, <sup>34</sup> women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. <sup>35</sup> If they want to inquire about something, they should 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 originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? <sup>37</sup> If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. <sup>38</sup> If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.*

V. 35 is crucial to understanding v.34. In vv.27-32 Paul is correcting those who were ministering in the gatherings and in vv.34-37 Paul is addressing the listeners in the gatherings. The question that Paul doesn't answer for us [but the Corinthians didn't need answering] was why women were inquiring of their husbands in the gatherings which added to the chaos and confusion. And there are many suggestions and all of them are partly correct.

One of the blessings of the early church was the elevation of women. Women were generally less educated than men. Educationally and biblically. Men were more literate than women. The gospel was freeing for women and now they were learning more, being involved more and wanting to know more. We understand from Ch. 11 that some were involved in praying and prophesying in the

gatherings. But with all the chaos of their gatherings with people speaking in tongues and prophesying and interrupting, they wanted to know what was going on, what did they say, what did that mean. And when people are already talking out of place that just encourages more talking out of place. So Paul says

***Those listening must be attentive and not disruptive (vv.34-38)***

Now, if you noticed in this passage, the women weren't the only ones being told to be silent.

*When you come together, **everyone has** a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. <sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, **two—or at the most three**—should speak, **one at a time**, and someone must interpret. <sup>28</sup> If there is no interpreter, **the speaker should keep quiet** in the church and speak to himself and God.*

<sup>29</sup> **Two or three** prophets should speak, and the others **should weigh carefully** what is said. <sup>30</sup> And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the **first speaker should stop**. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy **in turn** so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. <sup>32</sup> The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

There was a lack of peace. There was disorder. The women wanted to know what was going on but Paul said, listen and if you don't understand ask afterwards. Don't interrupt what God is trying to do through the various ways people are ministering. Causing interruptions while others are serving is shameful Paul says. That's a strong word and it spoke volumes to a culture that understood shame. Speaking to your spouse or children while others around you are trying to sing or listen is embarrassing. I understand sometimes we need a quick word or a child asks something and needs to be addressed quickly. But Paul was dealing with unnecessary (even if well-intentioned) speech to each other while others are trying to minister to us.

What's vv.36-38 all about? Here Paul is summarizing all his instructions so far. Unfortunately – and we see this more clearly in 2 Corinthians – there were false teachers always following Paul around, undermining his teaching and his character. Paul was sent by Jesus Himself to share the gospel and plant churches wherever the Spirit led him. Paul is speaking truth and many were not listening to Paul. Paul was being a little sarcastic here when he says did the Word of God start in Corinth or only come to Corinth? Corinthians in general felt very highly of themselves. Paul challenged them and said, check my words with the rest of the Word and see that what I a saying is truth. And if it is truth from God, then you need to apply it. If you don't recognize my words as truth then you are not one who recognizes truth. Those who claim to be prophets or have the Spirit must weigh what Paul says carefully with the rest of Scripture. But if you disagree with Paul that says a lot about whether you're actually gifted or whether you're even saved.

Then he finishes this section on spiritual gifts with this:

<sup>39</sup> *Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. <sup>40</sup> But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*

And in the middle of this section he already stated,

<sup>33</sup> *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*

Too often we come to passages of Scripture and are so focused on specific issues the author addresses that we miss the main point the author is making. The chapter is not about speaking in tongues but rather the need to use all our gifts to build the church, especially gifts we understand.

The passage is not about the role of women in the church. It's actually about a specific problem Corinth was experiencing and a reminder that in all of our churches all of us need to be attentive and not disrupt worship or the Word. Because if people come into our gatherings and we are inattentive, disruptive and self-serving then they will miss the main point of our gatherings:

## **God is in Our Midst and We Want His Presence Known** **(14:33, 39-40; 25)**

In the middle of this chapter when Paul was explaining the need for intelligible and understandable words about God and from His Word that people can understand, the Spirit of God can do His work of convicting unbelievers of their need to know God and build us up because we're reminded God is in our midst. How do we help make that happen?

### ***By Spirit-led ministry resulting in shalom (v.33; Gal. 5:22)***

A lot of what was happening in the Corinthian worship gatherings was selfish, attention-grabbing spiritual emptiness. It was confusing, chaotic and believers were not growing as they should and probably few people were accepting Christ. In Paul's day, many people still had the mentality that everyone's god had it's own place of worship and that's where you found that god. With the church, people were no longer gathering in the temple or synagogue because the temple of God was now the people of God wherever they met. Many were beginning to understand that the true God was found wherever God's people were.

The phrase "God is not a God of disorder but peace" reflects the Old Testament concept of shalom. Shalom means you are experiencing wellness; relationally, emotionally, spiritually because of your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Faith alone in Jesus gives you peace with God and helps you find peace with people, even if circumstances are not always peaceful. God is with you. He is in control even when life is anything but. Through our gatherings, we want people to be directed to God and not ourselves so that they'll know God can be found or reminded God is always with them. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Most of these things were absent from the Corinthian gatherings.

And the tool by which we ensure our gatherings help people know God is among us is that our ministries be

### ***Grounded in the Word (vv.28-32, 36-38)***

All throughout this passage the Word of God is central. Should tongues be spoken in community? Only if there's an interpreter. Why? Because the Word says so. If someone claims to have a word from God or is speaking His Word into our lives, should we believe it and apply it? As long as it lines up with the rest of God's Word. Paul commends the ministry of prophesying over all things simply because it's the Word of God that's being spoken into people's lives. When the Spirit is working His fruit will be evident, the Word will be prominent then we will bow down and give thanks because God is reminding us He is in our midst.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please  
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