

What should “Worship in a church service” look like?

- a couple of decades ago, worship in some of the biggest denominations involved a very ‘set’ and ‘regimented’ order;
 - Some denominations actually had the order of service published in a book (or a booklet), and that order would be followed No.1; No.2; No.3....
 - The priest or the pastor would say his bit;
 - The congregation would say their bit...;
 - we’d stand at this point;
 - we’d sit at that point;
 - we’ll pray here;
 - we’ll sing there....
 - all set out in the book, no question – you knew exactly what you were going to get ...

It’s like going to McDonalds – it’s definitely not the best burger in town, but at least you know (pretty much what it’s going to be like)

- Other denominations – well, they **didn’t** have a book to go by, but the order was just as set – there would be the traditional 3 (or 4) hymn sandwich...

And for many people today, that remains their preferred form of worship – a set order, where there’s not many surprises – we know exactly what’s going to happen, and we know that everything’s going to be ‘correct’ and ‘in order’.

- But **today**, the most popular form of worship, is ‘the Mega-Church model’, where you turn up and have church done to you...
 - The band up the front’s going to have excellent music you can sing along to, or you can just stand there and take it all in;
 - There will probably be some kind of multi-media presentation to engage your senses.
 - Then a professional speaker’s going to get up, and give a very interesting and captivating message, that will make you laugh; and enthuse you; and lift you up...
 - You know, you’re going to leave that place feeling “Wow, wasn’t that amazing”...

And many people love that sort of service..

- But others prefer a service where **everybody** gets a chance to do their bit (or to say their bit). I guess it’s the opposite of the other two models, which are essentially ‘leader-led worship’... this becomes ‘**participant-led** worship’... There’s no expectations upon anybody, as long as we all feel comfortable to share...

Which model is right? (There’s the question, isn’t it)... What should worship in a church service look like?

The thing is, each of those models, have good points to them, but they’ve also got problems and dangers... And I actually believe, that whether worship is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, has more to do with:

- our hearts and our relationship with God; and
- our attitudes towards others; and
- what place we put **ourselves**; and

- what place we put others in worship

You see, we could have, what **we** feel to be, “the most **amazing** worship experience”, but God hates it, because it didn’t flow from an inner holiness, and an out-lived righteousness...

Righto, now before we begin, I think we really need to make a distinction between what a ‘church’ is, and what a ‘church service’ is:

What’s a church? Some people think of the church as a building, or Sunday morning activities – that’s church. In the New Testament, the Greek word is ἐκκλησία “ekklesia”, which is the assembly; meeting; congregation.... Disciples of Jesus clump together. **We are the church**... And whether it be in home groups; or Bible studies; or gathering together for a cup-a-tea and a yarn, we are the church.

But **this** bible reading, is particularly referring to when the whole church, gathers together. He says “**when you come together**, do this”... You know, some people picture the New Testament church as a very **informal** gathering, sort of like our small groups / our home groups / our bible studies.... Now, I don’t doubt that they did that too – these groups are very important, but here, he’s particularly talking about when the **whole** church gather together. He’s talking about the equivalent of our Sunday morning worship service. This isn’t a new thing – it’s been happening right from the beginnings of the Christian church.

In our Bible Reading today, we have a picture of ‘inclusive worship’ (alright, it’s not just done by the one person). Several people (as they are gifted by God), will have input into the service, for the building up of the whole church... But that **doesn’t** mean that **everybody** has some kind of leadership input at every service (or at **any** service, for that matter). Rather, those who have gifts that are useful for the building up of the church, are able to use those gifts, as long as it’s all **done decently and in order**...

You see, the problem with us Christians (or people in general), is we can be a bit like a pendulum... For some of us, our experience of church, has been so bound up in the tightness of a set, regimented order, we’ve been pulled right over into this extreme of control and constraint... And we just want to be free of it – we just want to have freedom in worship...

And so we let it go, and we rebel against control and constraint, and we swing right over into the opposite extreme:

- where there **is** no set order
- because a set order means “constraint”, and we’ve felt enslaved by constraint
- and we would describe what we’ve found over this side, as “**freedom**”

- **Everyone** can tell a story about what God has done in their week
- **Anyone** can bring a word from the Lord
- We don’t need people to choose songs – we’ll just choose them on the spot

- We don't need a prepared message – God can give a bible reading to anybody, and we can share our thoughts on that with each other

And for some people, the lure of **that** sort of freedom in worship – well, it can feel like being released from slavery...

And for some people, when they read today's reading, they see how very different this church in Corinth is, to their own experience of '**constraint** in worship', and they go, "Well that's the way it's supposed to be, and they rebel against all constraint."

But they fail to realise, that the church in Corinth, was in an utter mess...

- It **was** a church without constraint.
- It was disorderly;
- It was unloving;
- It was a church filled with pride (I'm more spiritual; I'm more godly; I'm more educated; I have knowledge). I don't need you to teach me – I already know stuff. In fact, I'm going to do some of the teaching here...
- And this pride led to wrong teaching; wrong morals; a wrong understanding of God and Jesus Christ; a wrong understanding of the church
- They rejected Godly leadership
- They had a wrong understanding of what freedom **really** is;
- And they were disorderly and unloving in their use of Spiritual gifts...

The church in Corinth, was a church in chaos... And therefore, it was an ungodly church. V33 ³³ **For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.**

And so, Paul's task here, at the end of chapter 14, is to get that Corinthian church, back on track. He recognises the validity of the participation of the people of God in worship, but he also sets parameters, to bring order and propriety (decency, respectability, decorum) to worship.

..... He says:

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

Now, when Paul says "each one", that doesn't mean "everyone"... Not everyone is a song-writer... Do you get that? When he says "**each one has a hymn**", that doesn't mean everybody's going to open the songbook and say, "Well, let's have number 457 today, because that's my favourite – let's sing that one." **There was no songbook...** This is the beginnings of Christian worship. And it's highly probable he's saying "Hey, have you got a composition? Have **you** written a song of praise to the Lord? There might be a place for sharing it in church."

- Not everyone is a songwriter
- Not everyone has a gift of teaching
- not everyone has a gift of prophecy; or
- a gift of tongues

- Not everybody has a gift of interpretation...

The point he's making here, is not that everybody gets a go... When he says "**Let all things be done for building up**", he's not saying "everyone gets a go (let's do everything), and that will build us up" – he's not saying that, because for the next couple of paragraphs, he explains why we should **refrain** from doing stuff... What he's saying, is that when we gather together for worship, let's do, only what's going to build the **whole** church up in its faith.

When the opportunity does arise for us to participate in worship, the aim of our participation, isn't so we can gain a sense of self value, because "Hey, I've participated in worship!"... The aim of our participation, is that what we offer, and how we offer it, builds the church up...

Alright, it's not about "Me getting my turn" – it's about "Building up the church". ...

So, let's look at these examples of how we as the people of God, contribute to the building up of the church:

1. Some will bring a hymn: Now, whether it be a composition that you bring to share with the church, or whether it **is** a song from a songbook: Singing, has always been a natural expression of our worship of God...

And it's not only the minister, or the pastor, who's supposed to pick the songs for the day. If you have musical ability, **you** can help lead us in singing. (We're always looking for more

people, who are willing to lead worship). – Who are willing to choose some appropriate songs, and get the music to the musicians, so that together we can share in singing praises to God.

But get this: It's **not** about **us** picking our favourite songs... *And so if I love rap/hip-hop gangster music, and I never get to sing it here, because everybody else hates it, volunteering to choose the songs just so I can make everybody else get a dose of **my** style of music, isn't a good reason to lead worship.*

Why? Because I'm not doing it to build others up – I'm doing it to satisfy my own tastes...

I should choose songs that **everyone** can engage with – songs that have words that praise God, and teach us about God... Did you know, that we learn by what we sing? How did you learn that Jesus loves you? You sang "Jesus loves me". How did you learn that God's grace is an amazing gift? You sang "Amazing grace"... We learn, when we sing songs that teach.

Anyway, Some **are** gifted in music, but not everybody is gifted in music. If **you** are gifted in music, we'd love to have you helping to lead. If you're not so gifted, but there's still a song that hasn't been sung here for a while, that you're wanting to so sing, so that we can all be built up, why don't you share that with someone who's going to be leading in a week or two, so that they can bring that song to worship?

2. A second example, is to bring "a lesson".

Some of us are gifted in teaching. But does that mean that we should all give it a go? Of course not. When every Tom,

Dick and Harry has a go at teaching, we end up with some of the most crazy theologies, and utter rubbish being shared in church, ... and yet some people, will take it as a ‘Gospel truth’. And so, it’s the responsibility of the leaders of the church, to sometimes make some hard decisions about who can and who cannot bring a lesson to the church.

Throughout the New Testament, we’re constantly being told to watch out for false teachers. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he explained to him his role as a pastor and an elder of that church:

1 Timothy 1:³ As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons **not** to teach any different doctrine,⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. ⁵ The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶ Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Wow, that’s pretty blunt, isn’t it? Not everybody is a gifted teacher... To be a gifted teacher, isn’t merely having enough confidence to get up and speak in front of a crowd... The content needs to be right... Those who teach, should be **stewards** of a sincere faith.

And, here's the thing about false teachers – most false teachers have no idea, that what they're teaching is false.

They make confident assertions – they're very confident about their views, but often they end up promoting speculations – all this weird stuff that might interest them, and maybe interest a few others, but it's irrelevant... They desire to be teaching, but under it all, they don't have a sound understanding themselves...

And so, teaching isn't for everyone – the leaders of the church are responsible for ensuring that those who give a lesson, are up to the task...

And somebody might be up to the task of giving a lesson on the simple Christian faith to a Sunday School, or in a kids story, but they mightn't be up to the task of 'going deeper' with those who are more mature...

3. The third example, is “prophecy”. Even if everyone here has a gift of prophecy, only 2, or at the very most, 3, should share a prophecy in any one day... And we don't just take it for granted that every prophecy is a word from the Lord – we're supposed to test them.

4. And likewise the gift of languages. Not everybody has a gift of languages, but even if they do, that gift isn't for using in church, unless there's someone there to interpret it.

5. And not everybody has the gift of interpretation.

The point Paul is making, is we all participate in worship for praising God for sure, but as we worship God **together**, our **primary** concern should be about building up our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So, how **are** we built up? **What does it even mean** to be built up? I think V31 gives us a bit of a hint: It's speaking from the perspective of prophecy, but the purpose is for our **learning**, and our **exhortation** – our **urging** on in the faith. What we do in a church service, is for our learning, and to urge us on in the faith.

OK..

So, have you noticed yet, that Paul isn't removing constraint for the Corinthians – he's **adding** constraint...

But remember the problem I said we Christians so often have, is we're like pendulum...

Sometimes people get so burnt by worship without constraint (and the chaos; and disorder; and the disastrous teaching; and the selfishness of it all), where they pull it right back over to this other side again, where:

- only the ordained minister or pastor is allowed to teach;
- and if **he's** not available, only a recognised reader is allowed to read a message that **has** been written by an ordained minister or pastor;
- When I was at theological college, some of the lecturers didn't like the theology (or lack of theology) of some of the contemporary Christian music coming out, and so

they put together a list of allowable songs for the students to choose for worship. If it wasn't on the list, it wasn't getting sung;

- In some churches, the paster leads nearly everything in worship, because he's recognised as the one who will do it right.
- By the way, sometimes here the pastor leads nearly everything, but that's because I'm just filling gaps. It'd be better if more people were willing to step up.

And so, while Paul adds constraint to worship, let's not bind it up so tight, that people aren't able to use the gifts that God has given them.

In our church services, we need to find the 'sweet spot'. The 'sweet spot', is the participation of appropriately gifted people, and everything being **done decently and in order**.

And it's in this context, that Paul brings up the contentious topic of women speaking in church. Everything has to be done decently and in order, and in their culture, women were rarely educated, and it was **not** 'the done thing' for them to take leadership over men...

And so, the generally accepted practice (in all the churches), was that the women would keep silent. They weren't permitted to speak.... But hang on a minute, Paul's already told us (back in chapter 11, how women are to conduct themselves **when** they pray or when they prophesy...) When Paul says "They're not to speak in church", is he banning all speech? or is he banning a particular type of speech? ...

He can't be banning 'all speech', because they're allowed to pray. They're allowed to prophesy...

What's he getting at??? Well, it comes back to that other contentious passage back in chapter 11, where it talked about prominence and shame... And in particular, God's order, that a wife should not shame her husband...

V26-32 are talking about prophecy, and how only 2 or 3 prophets should speak and that everybody else should weigh up, what has been said.

V36-40 are also talking about the gift of prophecy...

What do you think Vs 34 & 35 might be talking about right there in the middle???

We've just been told, "When we hear a prophecy, we weigh up what's been said". That means, we have to decide, "Is this from God?" "Is it true? or is it false?"... And we talked about this last week, we actually have to judge what the prophet has shared:

- Does it line up with Scripture
- Is it consistent with other prophecies?
- What about the content of the character of the one who brought the message???

And I think what Paul's saying here, is the wife shouldn't disrespect her husband by being the one who interrogates him or judges him and his prophecy, there in church... If **she** wants to question him about what he's said, she can do that at

home. It would be shameful for her to do that in front of everyone, and to cut her husband down...

Now, having said that, there **are other** passages that indicate that it **is** God's order for men to be the teachers in a church... And in 1 Timothy 2, Paul's quite open that it was **his** practice, not to allow women to teach men... But I don't want to get into that today – but I did need to acknowledge that...

It seems to me that here in 1 Cor 14, the issue is an issue of respectability in their culture, and proper respect between husbands and wives, but I don't want to pretend that there isn't more at play here... We just don't have the time today, to do the full biblical study on it.

Something that **is** at play here, is something that Paul's been building on, through this whole letter: "Love limits liberty". It's about "Giving up my rights, for the sake of the other."

- Whether it be "**not** speaking in tongues because there's no one to interpret; or
- not giving a prophecy because we've already heard enough today; or
- not teaching in the church service because it's not culturally proper for me to do it

It's about giving up my rights for the sake of the other.

When we are a people who give up our rights for the sake of the other; for the sake of propriety; for the sake of order,,,

that's when we begin to grasp how the church is supposed to be.

Jesus has told us, that true worshippers will worship in Spirit and in truth. Today we've learned that in our meetings, we should be decent and orderly. And everything we do, should be for the building up of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Questions: