

July 30, 2017
Dave Zuleger

Sermon Series - The Weak, Foolish, and Victorious Gospel
Sermon Text and Title: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 - The Loving Goal of Gathering: Gospel-Help that Glorifies God (Part 3)

Sermon Points:

Introduction: Head and Heart, Structure and Spontaneity

When You Come Together Practice...(v.25)

1. Christ-Like Love Through Order in the Service (vv.26-35, 39-40)

2. Christ-Like Love Through Submission to the Word (vv.29, 36-38)

Application: When Sojourners Comes Together: We Boast in Christ

Prayer Points:

1. Pray that God would meet us by the Spirit in our times together to help us treasure and boast in Christ together.

2. Pray that God would help his people through his people by the Spirit and that we would rejoice in each other's gifts.

3. Pray that God would help us gather with a mindset of Christ-like love for our blood-bought family members.

4. Pray that God would use our structure as we prayerfully plan and help us listen to his spontaneous leading as we go for the sake of our help and his glory.

Introduction: Head and Heart, Structure and Spontaneity

Chapter 14 has been a comparison of the use of the gift of tongues versus the gift of prophecy when the church comes together to worship. And that's where it ends. But, let's not forget 14:1:

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

There, Paul set the tone for the entire chapter. The thread that I think is woven through this chapter is Christ-like love. He showed us what Christian love was like, and we showed how Christ is the person and the cross is the ultimate place we should look at if we want to see true Christian love.

So, as Paul encourages them to desire the realm of the Spirit of God, he wants them to do it in a way that shows the love of the Son of God. We should not use the gifts of the Spirit of God in a way that contradicts the love of the Son of God.

And so, even though Paul has admitted that tongues are very helpful for personal joy and comfort in Jesus, and even though he thanks God for it, when the Corinthians gather, the Corinthian church, Paul has made a case for the gift of prophecy because it is more loving. It serves others. Why? Because people can understand it. You see, even though we are very prone to separate the realm of head from the realm of heart, Paul, in all his epistles, and here in chapter 14 holds them both together. He really wants people to get taught in a way that is clear and they can understand. Why?

Because then people get comforted, they get encouraged, they get built up, they get convicted, and they can repent of sin and worship the true and living God. We cannot divorce head from heart and especially not in worship. And so Paul prefers one gift to the other because of Christ-like love.

And if all that is true, then it makes verses 26-35 incredibly profound. You see, so often we think of love as grand acts and grand feats. We think of love as a big theological idea, like it is in chapter 13, and because it's so big and so profound, we can struggle to see what it looks like when the rubber meets the road. But here, in verses 26-35 Paul is giving instructions with the mindset of Christ-like love. Paul is addressing the nitty-gritty details of how to walk through a worship service, when to stand, when to sit, who should talk, and how that should all happen because of love. True, Christ-like love makes its way into the nooks and crannies of life.

And let's also remember that Paul does want the Spirit to move among them and accomplish all sorts of gospel-victories in their hearts. Just as often as we divorce love from the nitty-gritty planning and instructions of a worship service, we are also tempted to divorce the work of the Spirit from careful planning.

In other words, we often assume that "the Spirit was really at work" when something totally unplanned happens. But, we should not divorce love from the nitty-gritty details and we should not divorce the work of the Spirit from the hard work of careful planning. The Spirit can lead and move and work just as powerfully in the prayer-filled preparation of a sermon in the quiet study hours in an office or in the prayer-filled selection of songs as he can work in the spontaneous moments that catch us by surprise. Careful planning is important for the sake of love and to ensure that we're not distracted by sloppiness that averts our eyes from Jesus.

And we're grateful for the spontaneous leading of the Spirit, which shows up in these verses as well. There are many Sundays when the Spirit moves in surprising ways that we did not plan.

Therefore we should hope for worship services that touch head and heart and worship services that have prayer-fueled structure in the name of love and Spirit-fueled spontaneity.

When You Come Together Practice...

Christ-Like Love Through Order in the Service (vv.26-35, 39-40)

Let's look right away at verse 26, where Paul repeats the same theme he's been repeating throughout this chapter:

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

There's singing, teaching, and these spiritual gifts listed. Paul is simply describing what happens when these people come together. This probably isn't a comprehensive list since it is probably safe to assume that prayer was involved as well as the Lord's Table. Rather, the main point comes with the purpose clause. "Let all things be done for building up." In other words, when you gather, whatever you do, singing, preaching, the Lord's Table, prophecy, prayer, welcomes, etc. let all of it be done with the intention of your blood-bought family getting help from this time together through comfort, encouragement, and conviction that leads to a deeper trust in Jesus and fuller obedience to Jesus. That's the goal.

So, if Paul lays out the goal in verse 26, he lays out the way that goal should come about for a few issues particularly going on in Corinth at this time. There are things happening in Corinth in ways that are not helpful for building up and drawing people closer to Jesus. Three things in particular. The first issue comes in verses 27-28:

If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

It seems tongues were being practiced in unhelpful ways at Corinth, so Paul lays some ground rules for the sake of Christ-like love for each other that will help everyone be drawn closer to Christ through their worship.

Paul limits those speaking a public tongue to 2-3 participants. Paul says they must take turns and not speak at once. It is not helpful to have several people competing and talking over each other. And Paul says there must be an interpretation and if there is not an interpretation, then the person should not speak their tongue but remain silent and speak to himself and to God, which likely means speaking quietly enough that others would not hear and be distracted. If God is going to give someone a tongue to speak in public at Corinth, then Paul is confident that God will also give an interpretation so that it can actually help others...and if no one comes forward to say that they think they've had an interpretation come to them, then the tongue isn't spoken. And even if all those things are in place, only 2-3 should speak.

Paul then moves on in a similar way with the gift of prophecy. Let's read verses 29-32:

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

So, he says 2-3 prophets may speak. When they speak, the others in the congregation should "weigh" what is said. The word for weigh is part of a word group that Paul has used often in 1 Corinthians to talk about discernment that leads to judgment. In other words, when someone speaks a prophecy people were expected to be listening, praying, and trying to discern what was said.

This probably involved personal reflection and application to their own lives and simply testing it against the truth about God and the gospel as we'll see Paul remind them of later. Then, Paul says if someone else receives a prophecy, the first person should finish speaking and then be silent and then let the other person speak. Just like tongues, the prophecies should happen one by one, decently and in order for the sake of love. Notice, Paul again emphasizes the why, "so that all may learn and be encouraged."

The reason you should go one by one and not speak over each other, is so that the "others" the "all" can weigh what is said carefully, and then assess its personal application to them and therefore learn and be encouraged.

Now, for people who have this idea that prophecy (or tongues for that matter) is some kind of overwhelming, uncontrollable urge that cannot be contained or brought to any order, this passage says something totally different. Paul says "the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets."

The way we've seen the word "spirit" used personally in 1 Corinthians has to do with the innermost being of a person's emotions and soul. And Paul says here, when a prophecy comes to someone there, something that they weren't thinking before that has now come to mind, the innermost being of that prophet can be submitted to the prophet, meaning the person doesn't just need to blurt out what they've just heard from the Lord, but they can sit, control themselves, pray about it, and then stand when it's their turn. Notice the same thing goes for tongues.

We don't have a picture of uncontrolled chaos and people unable to take their turn, but quite the opposite. The scene is very orderly, under control, and even has clear guidelines about standing and sitting, speaking and silence, so that people can learn and be encouraged. This order is for the sake of Christ-like love for one another. And why should we expect this order even in the midst of great movements from the Spirit of God among his people? Verse 33:

For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

The character of God. The character of the Spirit of God will not differ from the character of God. If God is a God of peace who brings peace through comfort and conviction, then the Spirit of God will not bring confusion and chaos.

Now, where there is chaos, it does mean there is no genuine work of the Spirit, but it does mean that it is a very immature group of believers whose minds are on themselves and not on their blood-bought family. And it does mean that it's not how it's supposed to be in a gathered church. And it does mean that they are muting

the very work that God could do if there was a desire for Christ-like love for one another through order and planning. God is a God of peace, not of confusion.

And God wants to meet his people with his peace that he gives by the Spirit (peace is a fruit of the Spirit!) when his people gather and are comforted and convicted. **God wants to meet his people!** Oh, that we would not mute his work with our selfish personal preferences.

And finally, Paul goes on to deal with another issue that was going on when prophecy was taking place in the Corinthians church. Read verses 33-35 with me:

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Now this is a hard text, both in trying to swallow what it says and in trying to understand what it says. But, let's give it a shot together. Notice that this is the third time silence has been brought up in these verses.

The tongues speaker should be silent with no interpreter. The prophet should be silent and sit down before the next person starts. However, in both of those cases, we would expect that the person expected to be silent *in that moment* would have been free to speak during the rest of the service. I think that is similar here. I don't think this is a call to absolute silence in the worship service for women, but rather silence in a *particular moment* and a *particular context* in the service. I also think that is true because Paul said back in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women were allowed to pray and prophesy in church services as long as they respected their husbands by wearing the sign of respect of that culture. This passage shares a few words with that passage.

First, it appears it is an issue of submission like it was in 1 Corinthians 11, which we know pertains to husbands. Paul appeals to the law here again, which likely means he's going back to Genesis again to show the roles of men and women in a marriage and showing that women should carry out the universal principle of submission to their husbands in a way that carries out that role well in their current culture.

Second, it is an issue of shame. The last time we heard this word was in 1 Corinthians 11 as well, when women not wearing head coverings was a sign of them disrespecting their husbands in that culture and therefore brought shame and distraction to the worship service.

So, why would submission and shame be at play here again? And especially why would they be at play when this woman simply "wants to learn" something?

In that culture women were expected to learn everything from their husbands as they were far less educated. And, it was extremely inappropriate for married women to have conversations and ask questions of another man just like it was shameful for them to leave home without a head covering. Therefore, because Paul cared about keeping the worship service free from distraction and from shame, Paul asked that the wives not ask follow-up questions (of the prophecies) that would make it seem like they didn't trust their husbands wisdom to be able to answer, or that they wouldn't speak to another man and bring shame to the situation because of how distracting that is.

To speak to another man in public in that time period for a married woman would have been as shameful as a married woman keeping a private email chain going with a man in today's world. Therefore, Paul simply asked that they ask their follow-up questions at home of their husbands and then likely they could bring any more questions directly together to that person. Again, Paul is simply trying to bring Christ-like love through order that so that others can be helped and not distracted.

Because these same things are not attached to shame and a lack of submission in our culture, these same kinds of principles of order would probably not apply, but we would want to simply behave in ways that honor our marriages and universal marriage roles when we gather to worship together.

So, Paul wants appropriate order in silence and speaking and the order is motivated by Christ-like love that wants to see people get the most possible help and encouragement from their gathers as possible. Paul sums it up very clearly in verses 39-40:

So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.

Desire the gift that helps most. And don't forbid any gifts. And do it all with decency and order so that people can get help when you gather and that has Christ-like love driving your motivation when you gather.

Christ-Like Love Through Submission to the Word (36-38)

Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

The Corinthians were arrogant. Paul knew they might be tempted to simply ignore him and move on with their arrogant, unhelpful ways of using these gifts that were meant to build up in the way of love.

And so, as an apostle, as one who has authority to speak as the mouthpiece of God, he says, "this is a command of the Lord." And then he says, "if anyone does recognize this, he is not recognized." The language is strong here in greek.

Paul is basically saying, "If you're not willing to submit to the word of God, then you can have no confidence that God recognizes you as belonging to him."

In other words, if you are so obsessed and puffed up with pride, so confident in your own hurtful use of spiritual gifts, that you forget that the word of the Lord has gone around the whole world and that it came to you from me, an apostle, and assume yourselves to be the exception to every other church and even an exception to the very word of God, then you have bigger problems than spiritual gifts, you might not even be known by God.

This is why we say that at Sojourners we will stake our lives and ministries on the Bible. This is why we plead with you to know the Bible. This is why we pray to God to help us love the Bible and know the Bible and treasure the Bible and submit to the Bible and obey the Bible. Because, it is the very word of God. It is able to make us wise for salvation. It is the sword of the Spirit. And it helps us discern truth from error and it helps point us to Jesus and his way of love.

When we open the Bible we hear the voice of God, written in a book from God and by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit takes the word and pierces the depths of our hearts to expose sin and create worship, and helps us move in the way of love.

You see, we test everything by the Bible, but most importantly, we see Jesus in the Bible and it creates Christ-like people because the Spirit works to make us like Jesus. Paul's main point here is that this word came from the Lord and is calling them to use these gifts in the way of love. In other words, in the word of God they should be compelled by the love of God who has purchased them by the blood of Christ, baptized them into his body in the Spirit, given them these gifts, and intends to meet them and help them to treasure, obey, and become like Christ more and more.

Therefore, one of the ways we best love each other with Christ-like love as a church is to submit to the word of God in every nook and cranny of our lives.

Application: When Sojourners Comes Together: We Boast in Christ

So, let me give a picture of the kind of worship service we're praying happens week in and week out at Sojourners and then give you an invitation to help us create it week in and week out from 1 Corinthians 12-14:

1. We want worship services where people come expecting to meet the living God through Jesus and by the Spirit.

People living on the edge of eternity should come with their hope set on Jesus and their hearts set on getting help to persevere through life's joys and sorrows in a way that honors him. With life as a vapor there is not time for games or gimmicks in worship when the living God holds out the offer to come and help us by his Spirit because of the blood of Jesus.

2. We want worship services where people come expecting God to use them to help others and expecting God to help them through others.

In other words, church is not a spectator sport. You can help others with your worship, with your prayers, with your fellowship, and with your gifts. Church is the blood-bought family of God coming together to be fed and stir one another up to go out for the next 6 days and live in such a way that the world sees our works and gives glory to our Father in heaven.

3. We want worship services that are carefully and prayerfully planned to help people understand God, the gospel, and their purpose in light of those things.

We want to prayerfully work hard to get the Bible right and speak the author's original intent week in and week out. We want to give helpful application that speaks to everyday life in relevant ways no matter where we are in the Bible. We want welcomes, songs, and prayers that clearly speaks the truth of God's word. We want gospel-clarity that builds up the blood-bought family and can bring conviction and worship to those who don't yet know Jesus so they join our family.

We want a plan and an order that serves your joy in Jesus because you are built up, focused, and helped to remember the gospel in ways that don't distract you.

4. We want worship services where we are willing to listen to Spirit-given spontaneity as we meet.

We want to be engaged in worship and eager to follow the lead of the Spirit in all we do. We want everything that happens, from the first note played to the last word spoken in prayer to be empowered by the Spirit of God to help us make much of Jesus together. We want to plan well, but be willing to forego those plans if the Spirit is doing something else.

5. We want worship services with people who have been seeking God in the word and prayer all week.

The way you can best be helped and help others when you come on Sunday is if you have been seeking to hear God through the Scriptures and speak to God in prayer throughout the week. People that know Jesus in a first-hand, seek him every day kind of way are able to help others know him in that same way. They are able to speak sensitively to others pain, give wisdom from God's word, and pray effectively for others to God because it's not the first time they're interacting with him that week, but they're really talking to their Father who they know, love, and speak to every day.

6. All to Know, Treasure, and Boast in Jesus Alone

Therefore, in summary, all of us in Christ have been baptized in the Spirit into the body of Christ. That Spirit gives and empowers us with diverse gifts for his one body to build up his church. We are called to gather together in the way of love, dealing with bitterness and frustration in our hearts toward other believers

before we come and coming to help each other and be helped. And all of this, the gifts, the way of love, and the gathering together is so that we are a people more dependent on God and boasting only in Christ and not ourselves.