

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WMPC - Men's Bible Study

First Corinthians - Winter-Spring 2017

Lesson 9

Read First Corinthians 14

Three Sets of Questions:

Q1: Most of chapter 14 is about orderly worship. Does worship have to be orderly to be faithful? Can it be so disruptive as to be disorderly? What, in your opinion makes true and faithful Christian worship? What is more important - the well planned service for the Lord's Day or spontaneity — where it all just happens? The sermon the pastor carefully writes every word of or the sermon that he/she makes up on the spot with the help of the Spirit? What does Paul mean by 'tongues?' and what does Paul mean by 'prophesy?'

Write down your answers and share them with the group.

Q2: What to make of Paul's description of worship - verses 14:26 - 14:33? What elements of worship can you recognize there? Does it seem liberating or restrictive? What practices in churches have you seen in your lifetime? Do they meet the test of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14?

Q3: The final verse of chapter 14: verse 14:40 is perhaps the most Presbyterian verse ever. It says, "but all things should be done decently and in order." Does this concluding verse change how you read chapter 14 — including the verses about women from 14: 33-36? Does it color everything which has come before it? Why or why not? And if your answer is "yes" — then how did it change how you read the entire chapter?

What is more important - stability or change? If you have to choose, which one would you choose?

Three Insights:

I1: N.T. Wright (Tom Wright) writes this of the issue at the start of Chapter 14:

"The contrast is between the person who builds up their private spirituality and the person who, in public worship, builds up the whole community. Paul has nothing against private spirituality. It's a fine thing to adorn the inside of one's house and make it a place of beauty, light, and joy. indeed, one often fears in many church circles today that Paul might need to remind some Christians that making time and effort to look after one's own house — to develop and enrich one's own private, deeply personal awareness of God, his presence and his love — is actually a good thing, not at all necessarily a sign of self-centered individualism. There is no virtue in living in a spiritual slum. But Paul was aware — and again, this warning is no doubt needed in various parts of today's church — that there are dangers in the opposite direction as well.

The key question, which he highlights in the first verse, is: are you behaving according to the principle of chapter 13? Are you exercising the gifts God gives you in the spirit of love?" (*Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*. Pages 180-181).

I2: Writer Robert Bryant asks the following question about verses 14: 33-36:

“Paul’s position on the place of women in the life of the church is much debated. What are your thoughts about Paul’s view and other views in the Bible?” (*Kerygma: One in Christ*, page 117).

To wit, most commentators and scholars do not see these verses as a general comment on the role of women so much as they do a reaction to one specific set of troubles in Corinth: namely, a very troublesome group of women in the church there. Tom Wright in his book *Paul for Everyone* writes, “What is clear is that this is a particular problem posed from within the culture setting of the time and that Paul’s overriding concern is for order (page 200).”

How do you feel about the basic premise of Bryant and Wright?

I3: From Richard B. Hays: “Preaching that presents the Christian message as a reassuring word or self-affirmation does not elicit from unbelievers the response that ‘God is really among you.’ Such preaching is analogous to the tongue-speaking assembly of verse 23, offering a form of Christian experience that look little different from lots of other feel-good experiences in the pagan world. Only when our proclamation plumbs the depth of the human predicament and narrates the extraordinary story of God’s costly redemptive act in Jesus Christ will outsiders and unbelievers recognize that something different is here, that the truth is being told and God is really present.” (*Interpretation: 1 Corinthians*, pages 251-252).

Links for Further Study:

L1: Here is a link to the Presbyterian Mission Agency page about worship. Our constitution as Presbyterians includes a directory for worship. Other groups (like the Methodist Book of Discipline or the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer) have similar documents. Read this page, about the Service of the Lord’s Day. Look to the right side of the page for more places to explore — all of them about the purpose and place of worship in the life of the community of faith.

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/service-lords-day/>

L2: Ever heard of Chris Tomlin? You should know him... how does his story fit into a larger conversation about “orderly” worship? If what seems to be spontaneous and “new” is repeated over and over, is it spontaneous anymore?

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/03/09/the-most-sung-artist-on-the-planet/>

L3: A piece called “The Irony of Doing All Things Decently and In Order” —

<https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/daily-reflection/irony-doing-all-things-decently-and-order>