
Bible Knowledge Commentary - 1 Cor 14:26-40

(4) Propriety in the Use of Gifts ([14:26-40](#)).

[14:26](#)

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(4) Propriety in the use of gifts ([14:26-40](#)).

In this section Paul drew to a conclusion his discussion of gifts ([chaps. 12-14](#)). He also concluded the whole section dealing with Christian liberty in relation to worship ([11:2-14:40](#)). What is most striking to a modern reader is the apparent lack of any fixed order of service and the absence of any reference to particular individuals being responsible for specific ministries. The whole church seemed to exercise their gifts by spontaneously ministering to one another. **14:26.** As he had done throughout the letter, Paul addressed the Christian community in Corinth as **brothers**, a general term including both sexes (e.g., [1:10](#); cf. [1 Peter 5:9](#)). When the church met, anyone was free to participate by contributing **a hymn, or a word of instruction** (cf. [1 Cor. 14:6](#); probably a lesson based on the OT), **a revelation** from one gifted in prophecy (cf. [vv. 6, 29-32](#)), or a word from one gifted in **a tongue** followed by **an interpretation** of what was said. The controlling principle in this free participation was the rule of love. All that was said and done was to have as its goal the need of **strengthening** (pros oikodomēn, “edifying”) others (cf. [vv. 4-5](#)).

[14:27-28](#)

14:27-28. Though there was no established order for a service, it was to be conducted in an orderly way ([v. 40](#)). The services were to have balanced participation on the parts of gifted members. Those gifted with **a tongue** who wanted to contribute to a service could do so but only **two** or **three** at any one service and then only if individuals gifted in interpretation were present who could translate the language. If **no interpreter** were present, the tongues-speaker was to **keep quiet**. Though his gift was without benefit to the church if uninterpreted, it did have some other benefits (cf. [vv. 4, 14-15, 22](#)).

[14:29](#)

14:29. The directions for those exercising the gift of prophecy did not differ from those for tongues. **Two or three prophets** could **speak** at each service and what they **said** was to be carefully considered. Since they would speak in Greek **the others** in the congregation would understand and evaluate their messages. (Or perhaps “the others” referred to those with the gift to distinguish between spirits.) The words **weigh carefully** translate the verb diakrinetōsan, related to the noun diakriseis in [12:10](#), which speaks of distinguishing “between spirits.” It was their responsibility to ascertain if the message delivered was indeed from God (cf. [1 John 4:1](#)).

[14:30](#)

[14:30](#). A prophet might have received a **revelation**, probably in a vision or dream, sometime prior to the meeting of the church at which he subsequently related it. However, a prophet might also experience a revelation during the service. If such occurred, a prophet in the midst of speaking should draw his message to a close to let the other gifted member speak. Whatever the Corinthian services were, they were not dull.

[14:31](#)

[14:31](#). The principle which regulated the exercise of tongues applied similarly to prophets. What was said was to benefit **everyone** by way of instruction or encouragement in the Christian life (cf. [v. 3](#)).

[14:32-33a](#)

[14:32-33a](#). Paul apparently did not believe the **prophets** were any more restrained than their fellow members gifted in tongues. So he gave the prophets an instruction that was similar to what he gave the tongues-speakers ([v. 28](#)). **The spirits** referred to a prophet's spiritual gift, which did not **control** the gifted member, but he controlled it (cf. [v. 30](#)). If two or three prophets spoke in a particular service, others gifted and with something to say could do so on another occasion. The church was not a forum for personal pontification or self-glorification; it was a place where people were to be built up and God was to be honored (cf. [10:31-33](#)). The service and those who took part in it should reflect the character of God. He is a **God... of peace**, not **disorder**, and His Spirit worked to produce the same fruit ([Gal. 5:22](#)) in believers' lives.

[14:33b-36](#)

[14:33b-36](#). Some of the verses in this section ([vv. 34-35](#)) were felt by some early copyists to be out of place at this point in the letter and so were transposed to the end of the chapter. A more drastic approach taken by some recent commentators is to regard these verses as spurious and unworthy of comment. Though the exact meaning of these verses is difficult to determine, neither expedient has much to commend it. In fact it seems that the guiding thread which prompted these comments by Paul about women was the same theme developed in the preceding verses addressed to those gifted in tongues and prophecy. The church members needed to exercise self-control on occasion, a self-control expressed by silence ([vv. 28, 30, 34](#)) in order that the assembly might be characterized by peace.

Apparently certain women in the Corinthian assembly needed to hear this refrain. More than uncovered heads were amiss in regard to their participation in worship services ([11:2-16](#)), and Paul was not about to dodge the problem.

Whether the admonition for silence was directed to all women (cf. [11:2-16](#)) or only to those who were married may be debated. The word translated **women** (gynaikes) was used to refer to women generally (as in all 11 occurrences in [11:3-15](#)), or to unmarried women (e.g., [7:34](#)), or to married women (e.g., [5:1](#); [9:5](#); and all 14 occurrences in [chap. 7](#) except once in [7:34](#)). The context alone aided the readers in distinguishing between the alternative meanings.

Two indications strongly suggest that married women were in view in this passage. The first is the word **submission** (hypotassēsthōsan, [v. 34](#)). When it occurs elsewhere in the New Testament

with specific reference to a woman, it always refers to a married woman who was to be subject to her husband ([Eph. 5:22](#); [Col. 3:18](#); [Titus 2:5](#); [1 Peter 3:1, 5](#)).

The second indication is the phrase **their own husbands** (1 Cor. [14:35](#)), whom the inquisitive women were to consult if they had questions. This would obviously be a difficult assignment for single women (e.g., [7:34](#)) or those with unbelieving husbands (e.g., [7:13](#)).

[First Timothy 2:11-15](#), which enjoins women to be quiet in worship, is frequently cited as a parallel to this passage. But there too, married women were probably in view, as [verse 15](#) would not apply to an unmarried woman. Also, when Eve is named in the Old Testament, it is as Adam's wife ([Gen. 3:20](#); cf. [2 Cor. 11:2-3](#), the only other NT passage besides [1 Tim. 2:13-14](#) that names Eve), and her submission is rooted in that relationship ([Gen. 3:16](#), the text Paul probably referred to in [1 Cor. 14:34](#)). In addition, the noun *hēsychia* in [1 Timothy 2:11-12](#) means “quietness, absence of disorder,” whereas the verb *sigāō* in [1 Corinthians 14:28, 34](#) means “remain silent.” (See comments on [1 Tim. 2:11-14](#) and [2 Thes. 3:12](#)).

Paul then wanted silence on the parts of married women whose husbands were present in the assembly, but he permitted the participation of other women when properly adorned ([1 Cor. 11:2-16](#)). Such silence would express their subordinate (but not inferior) relationship to their husbands. This contrasts with a disturbance caused by their talking to their husbands during the service.

The Corinthian believers were not to think of themselves as exclusive, independent interpreters or recipients of **the Word of God** ([14:36](#)). They, like those in **all the congregations** ([v. 33b](#)), were to submit to God's truth by conforming to this standard of conduct.

[14:37-40](#)

[14:37-40](#). These verses were Paul's conclusion not only to the immediately preceding directives ([vv. 33b-36](#)) but also to all his discussion about Corinthian irregularities in worship and the needed correctives ([11:2-14:36](#)). He expected some opposition (cf. [11:16](#); [14:36](#)), but warned that those who opposed him did so at their own peril (cf. [4:18-21](#)). Anyone who **ignores** the Lord's commands would find **himself... ignored** by Him at the last day (cf. [3:17](#); [Gen. 9:6](#); [Matt. 10:32-33](#)), because his actions would show that he never knew the Lord (cf. [1 Cor. 8:3](#); [Matt. 7:22-23](#); [1 John 4:6](#)).

The conclusion was that the Corinthians should give special attention to the gifts which were most beneficial to the church as a whole ([12:31](#); [14:1](#)) without denigrating the other gifts. They should see that their services were conducted in a **fitting** (cf. [11:2-16](#); [14:34-36](#)) **and orderly** (cf. [11:17-34](#); [14:26-33](#)) **way**.