

1 Corinthians 12 – 14: the use of a text for Christian worship

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The sketchy and incidental nature of the evidence for Christian worship in NT times sometimes leads to the distorted use of such evidence as there is. Patzia compares the task of writing about early Christian worship to assembling a complicated jigsaw puzzle.¹ The problem is that so many of the pieces are missing and there is no picture on the lid of the box for us to follow. It is not surprising then that given Paul's comments to the Corinthians, and particularly in 1 Cor.14, these are seen as primary evidence for our understanding of principles of early Christian worship. Yet they are often used in ways which do not appear to be listening to Paul.

1. Doubtful recommendations

1. It is argued that the description of the church as the body of Christ in 1 Cor.12 is the justification for congregational participation in worship in the sense that all should take a vocal lead. It is said that opportunity should be given for all to pray publicly and to use spiritual gifts, particularly prophecy, tongues and interpretation, and that no one person should lead alone.² Now the phrase 'congregational participation in worship' is ambiguous. It can mean either that everyone present worships God, or, it can be understood to mean that everyone present can lead the congregation in some vocally active role in worshipping God. Nobody questions the former; it is the latter which is contentious.

2. Appeal is sometimes made to 1 Cor.14:5 to argue that Paul wants all the Corinthian Christians to prophesy.³ This is supported by the claim in

1 A.G. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership & Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP /Apollos, 2001), 183.

2 W. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism, origins and developments worldwide* (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 269-72; B. Liesch, *People in the Presence of God: Models and Directions for Worship* (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1990), 71-74, 82-83. Only numbers limit the participation of everyone according to this writer, 74.

3 W.Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Press, 1988), 193-94, 198-99, although Grudem goes on to argue that while Paul wanted all to have the ability to prophesy, not all had that ability, 199-201.

many commentaries and translations that Paul's words at 12:31 and 14:1 are commands to seek the gift of prophecy despite his earlier insistence that God alone distributes the gifts as he wills (1 Cor. 12:4-11).⁴

3. These chapters are said to teach that spontaneity prompted by the Spirit should characterise Christian worship even if that spontaneity operates within some ordered framework.⁵ Hill borrows the phrase 'spontaneous involvement' from Erickson and comments, '[a]s Christians yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit, the charismata or gifts of the Spirit are unleashed for the edification of the church, in this case gathered for worship (1 Cor.14:26)'.⁶

4. This spontaneous inspiration sometimes breaks out in congregational singing in tongues or 'spiritual songs' whose justification is found in 1 Cor. 14:15, sometimes supported by Col. 3:16 / Eph. 5:19. Smail calls singing in the Spirit the 'quintessence of worship in its charismatic mode'.⁷

5. It is frequently assumed that 14:26 is Paul's recommendation for the elements of a gathering for Christian worship.⁸ I shall argue that Paul is describing a state of affairs which he goes on to correct in the verses which follow.

To test the validity of these recommendations it is essential to study particular references in their context. This paper will begin with an overview of the three chapters and then attempt to follow Paul's argument through them commenting on details in the course of the exposition.

2. The shape of 1 Corinthians 12 – 14

Although chapters 11 – 14 of 1 Corinthians all address matters related to Christian worship it is possible to take 12 – 14 together. Chapter 12 opens with

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- 4 C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968); C. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (NIV Application Commentary) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* NCB (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1971); R. Collins, *First Corinthians* SP vol.7 (Collegeville Min.: Liturgical Press, 1999); G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1987); R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians* [Interpretation] (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997); G.J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2000); M.L. Soards, *1 Corinthians* NIBC (Peabody: Hendrickson / Carlisle: Paternoster 1999); NIV text; NRSV; NASB.
- 5 W. Hollenweger, 270f.; D.P.Hustad, *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder & Mystery* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, Hope Publishing Co:) 1998), 105; R.L. Roxborough, *Renewal Down to Earth* (Eastbourne: Kingsway 1987), 173-79.
- 6 A.E. Hill *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books 1993), 55.
- 7 Hustad, *True Worship*, 124-28; G.D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994, 1995), 230; T.A. Smail, 'In Spirit and in Truth: Reflections on Charismatic Worship', *Charismatic Renewal, The Search for a Theology*, T.A. Smail, A. Walker and N. G. Wright (London: SPCK, 1993), 109.
- 8 M. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 297, 300; G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 690.

the subject of spiritual gifts, or perhaps spiritual people, and chapter 14 ends with Paul's conclusion about prophecy and speaking in tongues, two of those gifts. The issue of 'spiritual gifts' was probably one of a number of subjects raised by the Corinthians in their letter to him.⁹ The overall shape of the argument in these chapters is important for interpreting the details.¹⁰ It can be analysed as follows:

1. The test of the Holy Spirit's inspiration is the content of what is said, 12:1-3
2. God gives different gifts as he decides, 12:4-11, 28-30
3. The different gifts should be used to complement each other and work in harmony like the different parts of the human body, 12:12-27
4. The best way, 12:31-13:13
5. The necessity for intelligibility in worship, 14:1-25
6. The necessity for order in worship, 14:26-40

Although there are many controversial details in these chapters and probably insufficient evidence to resolve them all, the overall thrust of Paul's argument is clear. He stresses divine sovereignty in the distribution of different gifts, the best way to exercise them and then applies these principles to the practice of worship.

3. Paul's argument

Paul begins with a warning that not every means of being carried away is the work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ The phrase 'being carried away' is variously interpreted from being swept along in a festival parade,¹² or influenced by evil spirits,¹³ or being led away to idols.¹⁴ The description of idols as 'dumb' may suggest that those who speak for them are operating on self-induced spiritual experiences.¹⁵

9 1 Cor. 7:1. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 7, understands the letter written by the Corinthians to be a response to an earlier letter of Paul's in which they had taken exception to some points he had made. This accounts for the combative nature of much of 1 Cor.

10 The justification for this outline comes from a combination of reading the text and the commentary on it in the rest of this article.

11 Carson argues that Paul's point is that all Christians share in the things of the Holy Spirit, rather than to provide a test to distinguish between true and false claims of inspired speaking, D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12 – 14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 24-27.

12 T. Paige, '1 Cor 12.2: A Pagan Pompe?' *JSNT* 44 (1991), 57-65.

13 E.L. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications 1977), 609.

14 A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC] (Grand Rapids / Carlisle: Eerdmans / Paternoster, 2000), 911-912.

15 Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 914.

The test of the spirits is the confession in life and worship. Either that confession rejects Jesus or acknowledges that Jesus is Lord.¹⁶

1. *The diversity of spiritual gifts.*

In a remarkable paragraph (12:7-11) Paul asserts that the same Spirit, the same Lord and the same God are three ways of indicating the source of the different gifts.¹⁷ He 'works all the different kinds of work among/in all Christians'. The presence of the gifts is visible evidence of the presence of the Spirit through whom the different gifts are given and these verses end emphatically that the Spirit is the one who determines the allocation of the gifts. This theme, that God Himself is the one who decides how the gifts are distributed, is underlined in vs.18, 24 and 28, 'God has arranged... God has combined... God has appointed'.

Then Paul illustrates the diversity of gifts and indicates that their purpose is not for the sake of the person who has the gift, rather for everyone else, 'for the common good' (v.7). This is why he goes on to argue that all belong to each other in the body of Christ, each needs the others and each should honour the others. The emphasis on diversity ends most emphatically with a series of questions all of which expect the answer, 'No' (vs.29-30). It is the only reasonable conclusion to draw from this that there is no one gift which is exercised by all Christians, or which should be treated as the distinguishing mark of all Christians.

I want to give special attention to 12:31 and 14:1 but I will take them together after a brief consideration of chapter 13.

2. *The best way*

The opening three verses of this famous chapter show that it is integral to Paul's argument and it is difficult to accept Fee's description of it as 'an interlude'.¹⁸ In contrast to the attitude of the Corinthians, or some of them, Paul stresses that in the exercise of spiritual gifts, love is the one essential. This picks up his point in chapter 12 that the gift is given, not for the sake of the one who receives it, but for the common good [12:7] and his stress on the need to work collaboratively and in harmony. It also anticipates his argument in chapter 14 that intelligible prophecy is to be preferred to un-interpreted tongues, for only what is understood benefits the hearers, whether they are insiders or outsiders who just happen to visit [14:3, 16-17, 23-25]. Without love, that self-sacrificial, self-denying love, so clearly seen in Jesus our Lord, even the most spectacular gifts amount to nothing, nothing more than a noise.

16 Winter has an interesting argument that Jesus is the subject of the curse, people were using his name to curse others. This is based on the use of curses in pagan religion to harm opponents in love, law, politics or commerce, examples of which have been found in Corinth. The formula would have been 'Jesus (grants) a curse'. The omission of the verb is common in texts which may well have been spoken aloud. B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 164-83. This can be no more than a possibility.

17 Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 162-63.

18 Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 198.

Then Paul portrays the nature of this love (vs.4-7). He presents its characteristics positively and negatively and then says what love always does. The negative list is longer than the positive. Among the negatives, note the following: 'it is not envious' (v.4). Love is content with the gift received. It does not envy those with other gifts. It does not boast, is not proud or rude or self-seeking because the focus of love is on the good of others, those served by the exercise of the gift of the Spirit, not on oneself.

The chapter ends with a paragraph that contrasts the gifts that are for now and the virtues which last for ever. This should lead to a humility in the exercise of the gifts, in a context in which we know so little: and our treasure supreme should be love.

3. An imperative or an indicative?

Now, in the light of the story so far, different gifts given as God decides, to be exercised for the good of others and without despising or envying those with different gifts let us come to 12:31 and 14:1. The controversy concerns the mood of ζηλοῦτε. Is it imperative or indicative? In the light of the drift of the argument described so far, the indicative reading would appear preferable (compare 14:12).¹⁹ Thiselton, who takes it as imperative, has to suggest that Paul speaks tongue in cheek 'do not stop being zealously concerned about the "greatest" gifts, provided that you follow me in transposing and subverting your understanding of what counts as "the greatest"'.²⁰ I am not averse to the argument that Paul uses irony, as will be seen below, but here Thiselton's case for the imperative rather than the indicative, seems rather forced.²¹ It seems incredible that Paul should command them to desire higher gifts for that would encourage the competitive element to which some of them were already prone and Paul elsewhere seems to be curtailing. Instead, over against competing for spectacular spiritual gifts perhaps as 'high-status indicators'²² Paul teaches them the true use of the gifts, or even to refrain from using them in public [14:28], in a spirit of self-denying love for others.

Why then do so many scholars take the verb to be imperative?

1. Because in 14:1 and 39 it occurs among other imperatives.²³

19 A. Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces: A Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12 – 14* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1967), 73-75; R.P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12 – 15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1984), 34. I find Forbes' arguments far too woodenly literalistic here and on 14:24; see C. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech In Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody: Hendrickson 1997), 254-55. Baker takes the reference to being zealous as an imperative but argues it is a Corinthian slogan which Paul quotes, D.L. Baker, 'The Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12 – 14', *EQ* 46 (1974), 227-28, 232-33.

20 Thiselton's emphasis, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1024.

21 Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1025.

22 Dale Martin's phrase; see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 916.

23 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1024, citing Smit.

2. Because the adversative force of καὶ ἔτι is not strong enough to bear the weight required by the indicative.²⁴
3. Paul has concluded one argument with v.30 and is now launching his second argument that he develops in 14:1-25. He interrupts himself with the passage on love and 14:1 resumes from 12:31.²⁵

But these arguments are not irrefutable. The fact that ζῆλοῦτε may be imperative in 14:1 and in 14:39, should not over-ride the significance of the context. A word does not have to carry the same freight from one setting to another. In any case it is possible to take 14:1 as indicative too. We would then have one of Paul's incomplete sentences, 'Pursue love, you are keen for spiritual gifts but [I would prefer] rather that you prophesied'.²⁶ That Paul is introducing the passage about love may well have influenced the expression of 12:31.²⁷ The third point is not so decisive if chapter 13 is integral to Paul's argument and not an interlude. One might argue that chapter 13 itself is the climax of the argument. It provides the base of operations for chapter 14. It seems reasonable then to conclude that in both 12:31 and 14:1 ζῆλοῦτε is indicative describing the Corinthian attitude which Paul gently modifies, exemplifying the love he describes in chapter 13.

4. *Intelligibility in worship*

Chapter 14, I suggested above, falls into two parts: vs.1-25 the necessity for intelligibility in worship, vs.26-40 the necessity for order in worship.²⁸ Intelligibility is necessary for edification in Paul's view. That the setting is the church gathered together for worship is clear from vs.4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 23, 25, 26, 28, 33, and 35. In keeping with Christian love that considers other people Paul urges that prophecy is to be preferred to tongues unless those tongues are interpreted²⁹ and so understood by everyone present. That is his principal point. Tongue-speaking is a private affair between the individual and God for no-one else understands, the speaker benefits him / herself. As Carson notes, 'speaking in tongues is a form of prayer'.³⁰ In contrast, the one who prophesies benefits the church [vs.2, 4]. When the church is gathered together what is given for personal

24 Carson, *Showing*, 54.

25 Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 624.

26 BAGD: 'μᾶλλον δέ' introduces an expression or thought that supplements and thereby corrects what has preceded'. They point to Rom 8.34, Gal 4.9 and cf. 1 Cor 14.1.

27 Note Sanday and Headlam's comment on Paul's use of ἔτι in Rom 9.19 'The ἔτι implies that a changed condition has been produced which makes the continuation of the previous results surprising' which is quoted with apparent approval by C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1975, 1979), vol.2: 489, and this suggests the flavour of a mild adversative in 1 Cor 12.31.

28 Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 148.

29 Turner says that Paul assumes 'it is the tongues-speaker who should interpret usually'. M.M.B. Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 233.

30 Carson, *Showing*, 104.

encouragement is to be translated into what can be used to encourage, comfort and build up the faith of all (v.3).³¹ If that is not possible the tongue-speaker should keep quiet (v.28). When Paul goes on to say that he would like all to speak in tongues [v.5] there must be a note of irony here unless Paul has forgotten his earlier point that not all speak in tongues (12:30).³² That same principle, made so clearly in chapter 12, that no one gift is exercised by all Christians, must govern our understanding of vs. 23 and 24. Everybody speaking in tongues or prophesying was how the Corinthians loved to have it and part of the chaotic situation to which Paul tries to bring order. We can see his view in vs.18-19.

Paul tells the Corinthians to grow up (v.20) and this introduces an interesting but difficult passage (vs.21-25) in which Paul quotes Is. 28:11-12 from which he draws the conclusion that tongues are a sign for unbelievers while prophecy is for believers. Then to our surprise he depicts a scene where unbelievers come into the church. If they hear tongues they will conclude you are mad but if they hear prophecy they will hear God's word and apparently become believers. In Isaiah the use of strange tongues is a judgment on the people of God for failing to listen to him. Alien tongues are a sign of God's wrath, God's strange work, on the drunkards of Ephraim. This suggests that Paul understands tongues as a possible judgment on unbelievers among God's people, those who will not listen to his word.³³ On the other hand prophecy can turn unbelieving outsiders into believers. This puts a different evaluation on the exercise of tongues in a church meeting.

Following this how are we to regard singing in tongues, what Canty calls 'a holy hubbub'?³⁴ Dunn deduces from 1 Cor 14:15 that Paul recognised 'a kind of charismatic hymnody – both a singing in tongues (here = with the Spirit) and a singing with intelligible words ('with the mind')'. He thinks that this is what is meant by the hymn (ψαλμός) in 14:26 and the 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' of Eph 5:19 / Col 3:16.³⁵ What is somewhat surprising is that few seem to have evaluated this activity in the light of what Paul actually says in this chapter. Fee rightly argues on 14:14-15 that praying or singing with my S/spirit

31 W. Richardson, 'Liturgical Order and Glossolalia in 1 Corinthians 14:26c-33a', *NTS* 32 (1986), 144-53, especially 147.

32 Cf. Carson's point that Paul's desire here should not be taken any more strongly than his desire in 7:7 that every Christian should be celibate, *Showing*, 102.

33 O.P. Robertson, 'Tongues: Sign of Covenantal Curse and Blessing', *WTJ* XXXVIII (1975), 43-53, especially 44-48, although Robertson's development of this point to argue that tongues are a sign that God is turning from the Jews to the Gentiles seems to go beyond 1 Corinthians.

34 G. Canty, *The Practice of Pentecost: A Handbook on discerning and developing the Gifts of the Spirit* (London: Marshall Pickering 1987), 110.

35 J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press), 238; cf. R.P. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 51-54. He distinguishes the three kinds of song.

is implicitly relegated to the private setting and only intelligible praying / singing recommended for church.³⁶ However beautiful singing in tongues is³⁷ and however much like the language of heaven [13:1] it is doubtful that this practice (which apparently does not require interpretation) should be separated from speaking in tongues which does.³⁸ Both would seem to come within the restraint of the need for intelligibility in the church gathered for worship. On singing in tongues Carson comments, 'There is no evidence that this justifies entire congregational participation, as in many contemporary charismatic churches... Still less is there justification for linking this with the hymn singing of Ephesians and Colossians: that the latter was "in the Spirit" is not a sufficient criterion.'³⁹

5. Order in worship

The last section of chapter 14, with Paul's call for order, is full of difficult points of detail but there is sufficient clarity in the main flow of his argument for our purposes. Verse 26 is in three parts. The first signals his move to sum up and conclude this discussion. The second is a description of the state of affairs in Corinth and not a recommendation.⁴⁰ Only with the third part of the verse do we come to the beginning of a series of principles that Paul formulates for the regulation of worship in the gathered church. Instead of allowing everyone to speak [or sing?] in tongues Paul says 'two – or at the most three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speakers should keep quiet in the church' (vs.27-28). The final words of v.28 'and speak to themselves and God' mean when they are on their own in private. A similar pattern is applied to those who prophesy. This time no interpreter is required, obviously, but what is required is discernment, the weighing of the words. A similar control requiring silence in a certain situation indicates that the gifts are under the responsible control of those to whom they are given. When Paul says in v.31 'you can all prophesy in turn' this does not contradict his earlier instruction about two or three. It is not opening the flood-gates in contradiction of all he has said so far. He must have in mind those who will occupy the positions of the two or three. The goals of all this order are the strengthening of the church [26] and the peace of God (33a).

Some writers have tried to fit Paul's remarks about the women into the pattern of his remarks controlling speaking in tongues and prophesying. They conclude that women are not to participate aloud in weighing of the words of

36 Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 671; *God's Empowering Presence*, 230-31. Fee justifies his translation 'S/spirit'; cf. Carson, *Showing*, 104-05, and Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation*, 75.

37 B. Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids / Carlisle: Eerdmans / Paternoster 1995), 283 n. 31.

38 Turner appears to accept such a distinction, *The Holy Spirit*, 234.

39 Carson, *Showing*, 104.

40 Cf. Witherington, *Conflict*, 275.

the prophets.⁴¹ This seems rather forced. It is simpler to suppose that the women concerned were the wives of Christian husbands. Only so could they ask their husbands at home.⁴² While Paul may have originally had perhaps the evaluation of a prophecy given by their husbands in mind, he broadened his reference to rule out any behaviour which would have been counted as disgraceful in that social setting.⁴³ There are indications in the Pauline literature and elsewhere in the NT that the writers were concerned about the reputations of the church in local society.⁴⁴ Winter develops a plausible scenario for 1 Cor 11:2-16 in which Christian weekly meetings were regarded with suspicion and monitored by the authorities to ensure that no seditious or scandalous behaviour went on.⁴⁵

Paul concludes chapter 14 by arguing that the Corinthians cannot define Christian belief or behaviour on the basis of the words of their prophets without reference to the Christian traditions of other churches and especially the authority of Paul, the Lord's apostle. Martin translates v.39 '*you are striving to prophesy and you are not forbidding speaking in tongues* [Good]; let everything (you do) be done in a seemly manner and in good order'. He describes the italicised words as 'A self-defensive Corinthian statement... which Paul accepts but only with the modification in verse 40'.⁴⁶ In this way he accounts for all the *ζηλούτε* references [12:31, 14:1 and this one] without taking any of them as imperative.

4. Conclusions for Christian worship today

1. While we rejoice in the gifts of God's Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 1:4-7) we recognise that God alone distributes his gifts and that different gifts are given to different people. The description of the church as the body of Christ does not therefore imply congregational participation in the sense that anyone or everyone should give a vocal lead.

2. It follows that it is unlikely that Paul was urging all the Corinthians to seek to be prophets. Rather than fostering a competitive spirit for the publicly prestigious gifts Paul taught that those who lead or participate aloud should exercise their gifts in Christ-like, self-denying love for others. This same principle

41 W.A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 239-55; J.B. Hurley, *Man & Woman in Biblical Perspective: A study in role relationships and authority* (Leicester: IVP 1981), 188-91.

42 E.E. Ellis, 'The Silenced Wives of Corinth (1 Cor. 14:34- 1). This seems to me preferable to the argument of L.A. Jervis, '1 Corinthians 14.34-35: A Reconsideration of Paul's limitation of the free speech of some Corinthian women', *JSNT* 58 (1995), 51-74, that the reference to 'their men' refers to any number of household relationships.

43 Cf. A. J. Rowe, 'Silence and the Christian Women of Corinth', *Communio Viatorum* xxxiii 1-2 (1990), 41-84.

44 Phil. 2:15, Col. 4:5-6, 1 Thes. 4:11-12, 1 Tim. 3:7, Tit. 3:1-2, 1 Pet. 3:16, 4:14-16. Forbes is quite good on this, 274-77.

45 Winter, *After Paul*, 133-138.

46 *The Spirit and the Congregation*, 75-76.

should govern the expectations of leaders and members in our churches both of themselves and of others.

3. It also follows that care needs to be exercised about spontaneous spiritual words and actions. One of Paul's principles is consideration for the outsider who might come to the conclusion that these people are mad instead of hearing God speak and calling him / her to the recognition of God himself. The principles of intelligibility and order should govern the behaviour of all for the encouragement of all.

4 The practice of congregational singing / speaking in tongues seems to violate the requirement of intelligibility in a public meeting open to outsiders. We should keep in mind Paul's concern that intelligibility is necessary for edification.

5. If 1 Cor. 14:26 is not a recommendation for the contents of gathering for worship, it is not a licence for the expectation that different members of the congregation will all have their contributions to make and all that is required of the 'worship leader' is to allow space for these to happen.

Abstract

Christians often seek to justify particular practices by appealing to scripture to authenticate them. On the subject of worship the paucity of relevant material can lead to the misuse of what is available. In recent times 1 Corinthians 12 – 14 has been exploited to find grounds for practices which seem to distort Paul's teaching. A brief account of some of these flaws is followed by an exegetical study which seeks to demonstrate how the structure and coherence of Paul's argument requires particular verses to be understood, in ways which are not widely recognised. This suggests modifications of some practices when Christians gather together.

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