

Sermon 52: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40: Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth

OUTLINE

Spiritual worship aims at edifying saints
Spiritual worship upholds creation norms
Spiritual worship acknowledges apostolic authority

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality; spiritual people; spiritual worship, what connotations do these words call to mind? There is a lot of confusion around spirituality in general. Outside the church in a post Christian vacuum 'spirituality' is self-help ideology dressed up in new age terms and practices. Today's spiritual person does not subscribe to the traditional religions or denominations, today's spirituality is just another avenue of our individual, autonomous, self-certain, self-expression. Inside the church things are not always better, on the lunatic fringe all manner of nonsense is done in the name of the Holy Spirit. You will see 5 year olds being allowed to preach in the pulpit, because they are 'filled with the Holy Spirit' and cannot be denied to speak. I know of pastors who have been left with less than 20 minutes to preach a sermon because the worship leader who was 'following the lead of the Spirit' decided to repeat a song too many times. In one church service where I used to attend the pastor decided that he was not going to preach but instead grabbed the cow bell from the drum kit and when he rang the bell someone would have to come and give their testimony, and whenever he liked he would ring it again to allow the next person and so on. Pastors being delivered to their pulpits on zip lines or riding in on Harley Davidsons. Worship services dominated by a concert style worship band or disintegrating into people laughing, rolling around, or running about the auditorium. What abuses have you seen done in the name of being spiritual? Maybe a group of church leaders who claim to be led by God, and as a result do destructive things to the church. Maybe a young man going to a young woman and saying to her that God told him she was going to marry him, and she feel pressured to date him. Maybe a sincere young person who wants to serve God who fixates on trying to find some internal voice and ends up making really foolish decisions. Claiming to be led by the Holy Spirit or speaking by the Holy Spirit is something that gives many license, a blank cheques to do what they want, to cause problems and disruptions. To speak up against such exhibitionism; such brazen presumption; to speak of them as harmful and forbid them, is to run the risk of being accused of quenching or blaspheming the Spirit. Well, Paul dares. Today many associate 'spiritual' with liberty and freedom, expression, anti-tradition, anti-authority, of the lettering killing (the bible) but the Spirit giving life. The Corinthians were suffering as a church because of those who insisted they had the Spirit, that they knew better, that their gifts should be aired, that their voices should be dominant. They too had trouble with disruptions, and people dominating, and the apostle's authority being challenged, and restrictions being resisted. They like we are often confused about what is meant about being spiritual, about what the Holy Spirit will produce in a worship service which glorifies God and benefits his people. The portion before us is a needed remedy for those who think that being spiritual means following an internal voice not an external norm; for those who think that being spiritual means being without rules and directions from authority.

Paul has been laying a foundation in 1 Cor. 14:1-25. He has helped us remember that love seeks to use its gifts in service of the body, that edification is the goal,

and this should direct us as to what gifts we emphasize and how we use them. He has stressed the importance of understanding in order to be edified. Having laid a good foundation of working principles Paul gets to work on the specifics. We will explore these instructions to the Corinthians under three headings. In v26-33 we will see that true spiritual worship aims at edifying saints; in v33-35 we will see that spiritual worship upholds creation norms; and in v36-40 that spiritual worship acknowledges apostolic authority.

Spiritual worship aims at edifying saints

V26, '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.' Paul begins by describing the sorts of things that should in the Corinthian church. Someone was to bring a hymn, it is not clear whether this was a spontaneous spiritual song or a known song; someone was to bring a lesson/teaching; another was to bring a revelation, a word Paul uses for prophecy; another a tongue; another an interpretation. We have insight here into what an early church service properly conducted would have looked like. During the times when miracles were regular in the life of the church, there would have been a greater diversity of activities than we have today. Continuationists believe that this should be the norm, we have already explained that certain types of revelatory gifts are not for this stage of the church.

But following up this list of what could be expected to be used is the driving principle that Paul wants the Corinthians to get. Like a hammer driving in a nail he repeats himself, 'Let all things be done for building up.' I thought this would be a good point to help you think about why we do what we do. When it comes to worship why do we do what we do? Well firstly, there are certain things that are commanded in scripture, when the early church met, they sat under the apostles teaching, they broke bread, they prayed, they read the scriptures publicly, they sang, they contributed their finances, they fellowshiped with one another, they baptized and they laid aside officers for service. So if for no other reason we do those things that the Bible teaches, the bible is our authority, the Reformation fought hard to get back to the Bible as our only authority for what we do in worship. We call that the regulative principle, we only do in worship what God commands, we dare not make up stuff when it comes to honouring God. As sinners we are ignorant and idolatrous and need correction and instruction on how to worship and God gives us that instruction in His word. Secondly, because we believe that the sword of the Spirit is the Word, and because God saves us by the word and sanctifies us by the Spirit through the word, in order for us to be built up we have a word rich and therefore a Spirit rich worship. So the word in the benediction calls us to worship, this is God's command and invitation for us to approach, it is His inspiration to move our hearts. We sing the truths of the word in the elder approved songs we sing; we sit under the public reading of the word; we give to support the ministry of the word; we pray in accordance with the patterns and promises of the word; we sit under the exposition of the Word; we view the visible word of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and we end the service with the assurances of the benediction, that God goes with us as we go into our weeks to obeyers of the Word we have heard. There is no inspired shape of liturgy but there are various things that the Spirit uses to edify and build up the Church. We are committed to these. This raises a very important paradigm around worship, we come together to be ministered to by God; we come together not to give God our gifts as if we could add to Him. No, we are the broken, the needy, the empty, the sinful, the

wounded, and God has gathered us as a Shepherd gathers His flock and He ministers to us by these appointed means. Too often we have the wrong idea about worship that it is about having something relevant and entertaining that keeps us interested; or that we bring our singing and good works to God. No, God is here to minister in His grace to needy sinners. God has gathered us into a body so that He can use the various gifts He has appointed to pour out His gifts into our lives. Imagine thinking that you could be a Christian and that you don't need to go to Church. God has appointed church and these means to build us up. God is invested in our spiritual health and church is where He meets us to edify us. You will experience a greater blessing at church than you will in your quiet times.

Next Paul alerts us to the fact that true spiritual worship is not a free for all, it is not an arena of liberty and expression, that Spirit fueled worship does not result in bedlam and chaos but is orderly. V27-33, 'If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.' Paul is not fearful to commit the unforgivable sin when it comes to being spiritual, to lay down rules and restrict activities. This was one of the great no-nos when I was a Charismatic. The Bible could be questioned because the letter kills but the Spirit gives life; liberty not law was proof of the Spirit's presence, and breaking free from conventions and traditions and having a new move of the Spirit doing some new thing was the unquestioned sign of being spiritual. Always changing always unhindered. This attitude would hit a brick wall with Paul. Paul acknowledges the gifts, calls the church to pursue them but insists on guide lines. He lays down four regulations for tongues. Only 2-3 may speak; each must go in turn and not all at the same time; make sure that the tongue is interpreted; but if there is no interpreter, then the combined worship service of the church is not the place for tongues. Paul admits that tongues are a gift of God and miraculous, but if it does not edify the church it is not for the worship service. Now in our day and age where miracles are few and far between we would want to give this phenomena front and center, wouldn't it help people believe to see these miracles and lots of them? Paul is not interested in creating a spectacle but only that which edifies the church. The modern practice where many are encouraged to have a private prayer moment that no one else can enter into and that no one understands is not acceptable to Paul.

Likewise Paul gives four regulations for prophecy. Again only 2-3 prophets at most; the word of the prophets must be weighed; don't let one prophet hog the limelight if another receives a revelation let them speak too; let the prophets speak one after another not all at the same time. A few things can be noted, firstly, that the word of God is welcome in the service, but it must be weighed. Paul is encouraging the people of God to be discerning in what they hear, that they are test what they hear. We are bound by the authority of God's word alone, it is true that God uses human instruments to communicate His word, and therefore we should have teaching offices in the church, but we must ensure that we only believe and practice that which is approved as God's own word. In the early church there would likely have been a gift of discernment, and a consensus of Spirit taught prophets which would help with this, we compare all things with

the written word of God. Secondly, please notice that Paul says that prophecy is for the purpose of instruction and encouraging. Instruction means that we put on our thinking caps and we come together to learn from God. Educating our understanding, correcting our errors, illuminating our ignorance. The presence of the Spirit and the effect of the Spirit among us is not measured by how many goosebumps I get but whether I am being renewed after the image of God through knowledge. Encouragement! Some pastors sermons are filled with political rhetoric; others are always criticizing other denominations, no doubt there is a time for things like this but Paul summarizes the impact of Spirit revealed truth as encouragement. Because the heart of what the Spirit reveals is God's work of salvation through Christ in the gospel, it is no wonder that prophecy can be summed up as encouragement. The Spirit that reveals our sin to us also reveals that we have a sin bearer in Jesus Christ who paid for our sins where we cannot; the Spirit that reveals that we have broken God's law and are condemned before Him also reveals that God is gracious to sinners and has sent Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins; the Spirit that convicts us of the sins that we have committed during the week, also ministers the truth of God's fatherly forgiveness because of Christ. Thirdly, notice that the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. Too often spirituality is equated with spontaneous outbursts. In pagan contexts false prophets would act possessed and speak and not even know what they said. God's Spirit is not like a demon. He reveals things to our minds and does not possess us in that fashion. Some have given the impression that they have a word from the Lord and it is a fire in their bones and the pastor better get out of the way and give up the mic so that they can give it. Paul says, nonsense, you don't understand how the Spirit works.

And over all these regulations and instructions Paul adds a big principle based on the character of God, 'For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.' The Holy Spirit has too often been used to give vent to outrageous outbursts; emotionalism; bedlam and confusion. Paul says that the Spirit of God does not produce these things, which means that they are either people handing themselves over to the flesh in their ignorance, or if true spiritual phenomena they are works of satan. In my experience there were many who under false understandings allowed themselves to get worked up in the flesh and acted in very unnatural ways all in the name of the Spirit. Many might rush to call all they see on the lunatic fringe demonic, I would say most of it is not. Regulations, order, restrictions, an emphasis on teaching, self-control, not allowing any one personality to hog the mic, these and other principles are what we can draw from Paul's teaching.

Spiritual worship upholds creation norms

V33b-35, 'As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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.' Freedom from sexual restrictions; freedom from traditional marriage norms; freedom from the traditional roles for men and women in the home and in the church. These so called freedoms have all been preached in the name of the freedom of the Spirit. Not only that many an argument has been made that if a woman has the gift of pastor and teacher then who are we to stand in her way and say that she cannot be the pastor in a church? That she cannot preach in church? Well, the apostle Paul is happy to be the man who stands up and says

that the Spirit of God does not eradicate the differences between men and women. The Spirit filled Christian leans into these God given roles and differences and any so called freedom of the Spirit that manifests in tearing down these differences is not the product of the Spirit of God.

For the second time in this letter Paul has to point to the universal practice of the churches to address a wrong practice among the women of Corinth. 1 Cor. 11:16, and 14:33. It appears that they were veering from the common practice in more than one way. From 1 Cor. 11 we see that Paul has to reinforce the universal practice of first century married women wearing head covering and not adopting the practice that resembled prostitutes who did not. And now here it appears that they were not showing proper decorum in the worship service of God's people. Paul showing that he does not have a culturally shaped practice but a common practice for all churches calls for the women to remain silent and not to be speaking in a teaching role in the church. He says the same thing to Timothy, 1 Timothy 2:11-15, 'Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.' It is clear that Paul does not allow women to have authoritative or teaching roles in the church, leadership in the home and church is male and this means that the men were to do the leading and teaching roles. An obvious application from this that is without dispute is that Paul does not allow women to be elders or preachers. And his reasons are not based on culture, he is not merely practicing a principle of accommodation to the culture so that the church would not be out of step with the culture, he grounds his thinking in the word of God and the teaching of God's order in creation.

What is not altogether clear and good men disagree on is whether 'silence' refers to prophecy as well. If Paul had not written 1 Cor. 11:1-16 where Paul tells women to pray and prophesy with their heads covered there would be no question, but because Paul does the question is raised. Did Paul allow women to prophesy though not to preach as elders? There are a few views on this question. Firstly, Calvin thinks that Paul only speaks hypothetically in 11, and his real beliefs are revealed here. Secondly, scholars like D A Carson think that the silence is with regards to the eldership function of testing the prophecies given not prophesying itself. Thirdly, Paul is dealing with some other problem related to women speaking not related to prophecy that has something to do with being disruptive and asking questions. Calvin's view seems to be the most logical but for Paul to build up a 16 verse hypothetical situation only to tear it down later is not found anywhere else in Paul and creates confusion. Carson's view fits well with other verses about male authority but it rests on complicated and not necessarily convincing arguments in the Greek. The view that says that a different type of disruptive speaking by women is Paul's target seems plausible given that women could be acting in a familiar way given the church was in a home and saw each other as family and were forgetting the acceptable way of acting in public; it likewise accounts for a cultural use of 'shameful'; however it does not answer all the questions raised by the text. I find myself moving between the views and then unsatisfied. But here is what we can know for certain. Women were not to teach in the congregation nor serve in the office of elder. We know that the Spirit does not make male headship irrelevant wherever the Spirit is working, but rather we see Paul insisting that creation norms continue.

This must be emphasized. We live after the feminist revolution; the homosexual revolution and the transgender revolution. They were all unbiblical and they have all wrought so much terrible destruction in society. God has a way for human beings to live, a way for us to prosper. It consists of one man and one woman coming together in life long marriage, where the man is the head of his home and the wife is in submission. This is important not only because God says so, not only because it is the way we are made to work, but because Paul tells us it is a picture of the gospel. The husband represents Christ and his wife the church. Her submission is a reminder to humanity of the proper place of all human beings before their Savior Jesus Christ. the devil hates the teaching of a wife in submission to her husband because he wants to eradicate the gospel wherever it is found including in marriage which is a picture of Christ and His bride. When the Holy Spirit fills us it does not lead us to break down these creation norms but reinforces them. Christians do not act like the women in Corinth who were casting off traditional roles and dress, no we are traditional, we are conservatives, we hold fast to these God given norms. We live in an age that is seeking to blend the sexes, to blur the lines of difference. Those who are Spirit filled and not filled with the Spirit of the age uphold these differences between men and women.

Spiritual worship acknowledges apostolic authority

Paul expects a little push back, it often happens that those who are self-assured in being tools of the Holy Spirit do not to be told what to do, so Paul ends this section by insisting on his apostolic authority, v36-40, 'Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?' ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. ³⁹ So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order.' They are not the source of God's word, all spiritual people including prophets have to accept the word of God as it comes through an apostle. Those who reject Paul's apostolic authority and teaching are to be rejected. Sadly there are those who think that their inward subjective so called Spirit led ideas are greater than the apostolic witness recorded in the Bible, they are wrong. Those who are truly filled with the Spirit will submit themselves to the apostolic teaching of the word of God.

Lets conclude. Who is the spiritual person and what characterizes spiritual worship. Many think that spontaneous outbursts, a rejection of tradition and authority, a preference for mystical experience than orderly teaching, a flaunting of roles in the name of freedom, a view of the bible as inferior to personal experience, we see that this is not Paul's belief. He teaches that that those who are spiritual aim at edifying the saints; pursue creation norms, and acknowledge apostolic authority.