

**The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe**  
**Week #17 – Adult Bible Study**  
**Study Notes**

**1 Corinthians 14: 1-40**

**February 4 & 5 2025**

1. Having laid the groundwork in Chapters 12 and 13, Paul now addresses the problem of the Corinthians' worship in more specific terms.
2. The Corinthian community's worship assembly has fallen into disorderly confusion. Various members speak simultaneously and unintelligibly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, perhaps even competitively seeking to outdo one another in the display of glossolalia.
3. The Corinthian attitude poses a difficult pastoral problem for Paul because he firmly believes that spiritual manifestations—including tongues—are gifts (charismata) of the Holy Spirit given by God to the church.
4. Paul shares with the Corinthians a vision for community worship as the setting where God will speak and act powerfully through spontaneous, supernatural revelations.  
How, then, can he seek to create order in the community's worship without squelching the Spirit?
5. Over the entire chapter looms the theme of building up the church. The verbs oikodomein (to build up) and oikodome (upbuilding or edification) occur seven times in this chapter, including the summarizing formulation of verses 5, 12, and 26.
6. Chapter 14 falls into two major parts. In verses 1-25, Paul argues for prophecy as the preferable mode of manifestation of the Spirit in the community's gatherings. The second part (vs. 26-40)
  - Gives specific guidelines for orderly worship,
  - Asserts Paul's authority to decree such guidelines
  - And briefly recapitulates the message of the chapter as a whole (39-40)
7. In the midst of this last section appears an abrupt and thematically innocuous demand for women to be silent and subordinate (vv. 34-35)
  - Vs. 34-35 are thought to be an early commentary inserted by an unknown into the text of the letter.
  - Several ancient manuscripts place verses 34 – 35, not in this location but as an addendum at the end of the chapter. At least one manuscript includes markings suggesting that the scribe considered these words a commentary by someone other than Paul inserted into the text.
  - Nowhere else in 1 Corinthians does Paul shift in this way to generalized instruction for the churches at large. This makes no sense rhetorically in a letter to a specific congregation. However, it would make sense rhetorically if the passage had been added later when the letter was being circulated for the guidance of a wider circle of communities.
  - Overall, vs. 34-35 are best explained as an insertion introduced into the text by the second—or third-generation Pauline interpreters who compiled the pastoral epistles

8. Paul has finished explaining why prophecy (along with other modes of comprehensible revelation and teaching is preferable to tongues in the gathered Christian community. He now offers some general guidelines about how the Corinthian worship meetings should be conducted.
9. Paul expects all members to follow the Holy Spirit's prompting and take turns offering their gifts for the assembly's benefit
10. Paul's concern here, as elsewhere throughout chapter 14, is that all things in this Spirit-led assembly should be done for building up the community.
11. In order to facilitate good order Paul lays down some ground rules.
  - Only one person at a time should speak in tongues; thereby, the scene imagined in verse 23 – a room full of babbling believers – is excluded.
  - There are to be no more than two or three utterances in tongues at any one meeting.
  - Each prayer in tongues is to be interpreted for the benefit of the whole congregation. If someone with the gift of interpretation is absent, the tongue speakers are to be silent.
  - One can choose whether to speak out in tongues or to remain silent. This shows that Paul does not think of the gift of tongues as an overpowering emotional experience in which the Spirit possesses the speaker in some sort of ecstatic trance
12. One of the most intriguing aspects of Paul's directives is that the other members of the church (not just the other "prophets") are told to judge the prophetic words spoken to the assembly, exercising spiritual discernment about whether these words really are authentic words from God.
13. The gifts are for the service of the community, not the community for the gifts.
14. In a community that consistently exercised such discipline, no one prophet should ever be able to seize undue authority or influence.
15. When Paul writes, "You can all prophesy," he is not giving permission but acknowledging a power given to all by the one Spirit
16. Paul paints a picture of a community steeped in agape (love), manifesting the spiritual gifts with humility and clarity. The Spirit is palpably present, flowing freely in communal worship through the complementary gifts of different members.
17. Paul rhetorically anticipates that the Corinthians might protest the directives of verses 26-33. Paul defuses this objection by pointing to the practice of other Christian communities whose worship conforms to more orderly norms.
18. Once again, as in 4:18-21, Paul concludes a long section of the letter by challenging the "puffed-up" Corinthians to yield to his authority., an authority backed by sanctions of divine power.
19. The order that Paul desires to see in the Corinthian assembly allows for great flexibility and the diverse and unpredictable spiritual contributions of all members of the body of Christ.

## **QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LIFE TODAY**

1. What is Paul's primary concern as he responds to yet another demonstration of the Corinthian elite's predisposition to use signs, wonders, and gifts to elevate themselves?
2. Discuss the place of these ancient gifts of the spirit in the modern-day church. If you have participated in the phenomenon of speaking in tongues or prophetic speech, and you are comfortable doing so, share your experience.
3. Why is Paul's concern that the gifts shared in the assembly benefit the whole community so vital to the health of the fledgling church?
4. After Christ introduced new freedom for the inclusion of women in leadership and Paul's demonstration of elevating women to seats of authority and leadership, why did the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>-century churches begin to retreat from these freedoms and tout a return to the exclusionary and subordinate practices towards women that were part of the culture before Christ?
5. In what ways does the modern church continue to struggle with the Corinthian problem of differentiating members based on socioeconomic factors, as well as, race, gender, educational level

**RESOURCES**

1. First Corinthians, Interpretation, Richard B. Hays
2. First Corinthians, New Covenant Commentary, B. J. Oropeza
3. First Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner
4. Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor Editors
5. Unveiling Paul's Women, Lucy Peppia

## Why Have Women Traditionally Been Excluded from Ministry? And Other Objections to Women in Ministry (Pt. 4) By Derek Demars *On July 18, 2019*

While I truly believe that Scripture takes priority over tradition, we should not overlook the significance of tradition in evaluating our interpretations. If we are going to disregard a substantial amount of historical precedence, we should have a compelling reason. To achieve this, we need to ask: *Why* did the tradition gain prominence, and is it genuinely reflecting biblical truth?

In this case, we've already seen that women held prominent leadership positions during the first century when the New Testament was written. Junia was an apostle (Rom 16:7), Phoebe was a deaconess (Rom 16:1-2), and Paul considered Priscilla one of his coworkers (Rom 16:3; Acts 18:24-26). This means that any universal bans on women in ministry would have been *post-biblical developments*.

So, did the earliest churches in the post-apostolic era include female ministers?

Turns out, many of them did! There is archaeological evidence for female deacons/ministers throughout the first several centuries of the church, as well as written evidence attesting to women in leadership positions.

In a letter to Emperor Trajan (111 C.E.), the Roman governor Pliny mentions that he obtained information by torturing two Christian women "called by them 'deaconesses' (Latin: *ministrae*)." In the 300s C.E., we find in a Christian letter a curious reference to a woman called "Madame Teacher." In the fifth century, a woman named Olympias was lauded as a deaconess and founder of a monastery.

Also, in the fifth century, Theodoret of Cyrus makes this interesting comment in Romans 16:7, where the female apostle Junia is mentioned: "...[Paul] says that they are of note, not among the disciples, but the teachers; nor among ordinary teachers, but the *Apostles*." In other words, it seems this ancient church father took Paul's words to be affirming a very authoritative female teacher.

However, although women often ministered in the earliest churches, there is a **noticeable movement toward male-only leadership by the third and fourth centuries** that became overwhelmingly dominant throughout the Middle Ages. Why the change?

According to church historian William Witt, there is one key reason, "*Historically, there is a single argument that was used in the church against the ordaining of women. Women could not be ordained to the ministry (whether understood as Catholic priesthood or Protestant pastorate) because of an inherent ontological defect. Because of a lack of intelligence, or a tendency to irrationality or emotional instability, a greater susceptibility to temptation, or an inherent incapacity to lead, women were held to be inferior to men, and, thus, were not eligible for ordination. Moreover, this argument was used to exclude women not only from clerical*

*ministry, but from all positions of leadership over men, and largely to confine women to the domestic sphere.”*

Witt goes on to cite a number of comments from prominent church fathers and theologians (including Origen, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, and several Reformers) that clearly exhibit their misogynistic assumptions. These men were deeply enmeshed in the prejudices of their times, so it’s hard to blame them *too* much.

But it’s also hard to follow them on this.

The major problem with their line of reasoning is that *it is simply not true* — women are not inherently intellectually inferior to men. Science doesn’t back it up, experience doesn’t back it up, and Scripture nowhere legitimates such a view (unless we take a wrong view of 1 Tim 2:13-15, as I’ve belabored already).

The major flaw with the “argument from tradition” against women in ministry is that **the reasoning behind it is flawed**. It relies on incorrect assumptions about women that, while common in the ancient and medieval periods, are not exactly in keeping with the truths we see in Scripture and in nature—that women and men are equally created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), equally redeemed and united in Christ (Galatians 3:28), and equally capable of leading, teaching, and stewarding authority.

But there were always outliers, in spite of the larger consensus on male priesthood that built up during the medieval period. *It simply isn’t true to say that arguments in favor of female ministers only show up after the feminist movement of the modern era*. As New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg points out,

*“Some of this history has, in fact, been suppressed during the last century by those who have wanted to pretend that it was only with the rise of modern, secular women’s liberation in the 1960s and 1970s that any churches have opened all leadership doors to both genders. . . . E.g., the facts that the Evangelical Free Church of America ordained women and Moody Bible Institute supported the ordination of women before the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1910s and 1920s.” — Craig L. Blomberg, A New Testament Theology (Baylor University Press, 2018), pg. 286.*

And as Witt concludes in his article, *“It is all to the good that Catholics and Protestants have embraced the inherent ontological equality of men and women and no longer argue against women’s ordination based on an inherent inferiority, irrationality, or sinfulness of women. However, in so doing, they can no longer argue that they are simply adhering to the church’s historic stance against the ordination of women.”*

In other words, if you *don’t* think that women are inherently inferior to men, but you still want to exclude women from ministry, then your position technically isn’t the “traditional” one; rather, it’s a quite recent innovation!