

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: I Corinthians 14

Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 14: 1-40

1. Two activities of participatory worship: v. 1-25

When early Christians met for worship/ fellowship meetings, they took part in the service with prayers [v. 14], singing [v. 15], prophesying [v.1] and speaking in tongues [v.4], while the most important part of such services was the communion of remembering the sacrifice of the Lord on the cross. This chapter is the only portion of NT Scripture that addresses what occurred in the early Christian worship service. Here, Apostle Paul provides guidelines for the two participatory activities as well as the principle of the worship service.

In particular, he deals with the two participatory activities -- prophesying and speaking in tongues. Here we examine what they are, problems associated with them and Paul's guidelines:

First, Paul encourages the Christians to learn how to prophesy. The Greek word, *prophēteuō*, means "to speak an inspired message, sometimes encouraging obedience to God, sometimes proclaiming the future as a warning to preparedness and continued obedience" [The Strongest Exhaustive Concordance by Goodrick and Kohlenberger III]. The Hebrew word for prophesy, *nābā*, also means "speaking as a prophet with focus on encouraging or restoring covenant faithfulness, the telling of future events to encourage obedience or warn against disobedience." One of the roles of the OT prophets was to deliver God's messages to the leaders and the people so as to guide them to the truth of God. In order to speak God's message they had to receive messages from God. This unique experience of being able to see visions and to have dialogue with the Lord God was uncommon to the people and thus was a special privilege assigned to a select few persons who became the Lord's prophets. But God foretold through Joel that the Spirit of God would be given to believers in a future event:

"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions" [Joel 2:28].

The Pentecost event was the fulfillment of this prophesy. Now the privilege of prophesying came to be open to all believers. And Paul is encouraging the Christians to seek the gift of prophesying as the OT prophets did. What he is telling them is to seek to have the close relationship these OT prophets had with God -- a relationship of being chosen by God to receive visions and messages from Him so that they could become God's spokesmen and messengers. And to Paul this was a far greater gift than being able to speak in tongues.

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for[a] he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues [v. 4-6].

What about speaking in tongues? What is the nature of this gift and why was it a part of Christian worship service in the early church? The Greek word for tongue, *glōssa*, has two meanings according to the concordance: 1) Tongue, language, sometimes refers to the supernatural gift of tongues; 2) Languages. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues had been foretold by Jesus as follows:

And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues [Mark 16:17]

This prophesy was fulfilled at the time of the Pentecost event when the disciples, upon receiving the Holy Spirit, began speaking in numerous dialects of other regions so that the Jews who were from such regions

could understand their own languages being spoken simultaneously by these disciples and were marveled:

[Acts 2:4] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

[Acts 2:11] Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”

This gift of speaking in other dialects was repeated in other occasions when people accepted the gospel message and the Holy Spirit fell upon them as Luke recorded:

[Acts 10:46] For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

[Acts 19:6] And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

Paul claims he can speak in tongues more than anyone [v. 18]. Yet, he does not hide his concern about the unruliness of speaking in tongues in worship services, particularly by those who speak in babbling that cannot be understood and therefore do not edify the church [v. 19]. Apparently, this practice has become a problem in the churches and is still a problem in contemporary charismatic churches. Paul makes clear the guideline that speaking in tongues must be interpreted by another person who understands the speaker's content [v. 5]. By laying down this guideline Paul is in fact prohibiting the practice of speaking in incomprehensible babbling ways. Finally, Paul characterizes that the gift of speaking in tongues had been given by God as a sign for the unbelievers [v. 22].

2. Principles of worship: v. 26-40

In v. 5 Paul emphasizes the principle of the participatory activities in a worship service as *“the church may receive edification.”* Any wonderful worship program is worth nothing unless it contributes to edification of the church as a result. Speaking in tongues just to prove that one has received the Holy Spirit is not edifying unless the speech is translated as having come from God. Singing and prayers likewise must be done to edify the congregation, not for boasting or vain show purposes.

In the second part of this chapter Apostle Paul lays down the most important principle to be observed by all Christians when they meet for worship or activities in a church. And he declares this principle *“as a commandment of the Lord”* [v. 37]. And the principle that must be kept is *“Let all things be done decently and in order”* [v. 40]. In keeping this principle the Christians need to remember that *“God is not the author of confusion but of peace in all churches of the saints”* [v. 33]. To Paul the desired effect of such worship service is as in v. 24-25:

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Discussion topic:

Different denominations have different traditions in the manner of worship services; some emphasize charismatic elements while others emphasize liturgical routines. Lately the influence of rock and roll in the form of Contemporary Christian Music [CCM] has come into church worship as a strong vogue for the purpose of attracting the young generation. We need to ask ourselves, *“Is our church's worship in accordance with the principles laid down by Apostle Paul for the early Christian church?”*