

Church Life Revisited- 1 Corinthians 13

by Ron Bailey

Ron Bailey's sermon emphasizes the importance of edification in church life as outlined in 1 Corinthians 13 and 14, focusing on orderly worship and the roles of individuals within the community.

Duration: 21:16

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8:1, 1 Corinthians 10:23, 1 Corinthians 14:3, 1 Corinthians 14:12, 1 Corinthians 14:17, 1 Corinthians 14:26-27, 1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Corinthians 14:34

Topics: "Church Life", "Spiritual Gifts"

Description

This sermon focuses on Paul's criteria for what is useful in the church, emphasizing the importance of edification and building up the covenant community. Paul's key question throughout Corinthians is whether actions edify and contribute to the growth of the church. Various Bible verses from 1 Corinthians are highlighted to illustrate the emphasis on edification, orderly conduct in spiritual gifts like tongues and prophecy, and the role of women in doctrinal teaching within the church.

Transcript

You discover that Paul has a criteria for what he thinks is useful in the church and obviously that's what the Spirit of God is teaching him. And Paul's criteria for what is useful in the church, it's a very simple question that Paul has, does it edify? That's his question. That's his real test as to how useful this is in the church.

Not how eloquent is the preacher, not how powerful is this healing ministry. His simple question that's running right the way through this section of Corinthians is does it edify? Does it build people up? Does it build the church up? Is it building up? Remember I've often referred in some of these sessions to the local church as a covenant community. Does it build up the covenant community or is it just building up one individual? And he says, there's a whole list of them through there.

Let me, if you look at, just see these in the Bible as you go through. This is 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 1. Now concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Have you found it? 1 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 1. Concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge.

Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies, love builds it. There's the first one. Chapter 10 and verse 23.

Chapter 10 and verse 23. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.

Chapter 14 and there are four times in this chapter you'll get this. Chapter 14 and verse 3. For he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. Chapter 14 verse 12.

Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for edification of the church that you seek to excel. Verse 17. For indeed you give thanks well.

He's talking about giving thanks in tongues. You indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. And verse 26.

How is it then brethren when you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation, that all things be done for edification. That's Paul's bottom line for 1 Corinthians 14. There are some gifts which are a blessing, but they're not, they don't have the E factor.

They're not edification gifts. These are edification gifts. Revelation, knowledge, prophesying, teaching and the interpretation of tongues.

Those are edification gifts. But there are other gifts which actually don't have the E factor. Faith, gifts of healings, miracles, descending of spirit, different kinds of tongues.

These are valid gifts, but when you come into 1 Corinthians 14, the whole purpose of this is that Paul wants the church to be built up. And the simple question is, does it build up the church? That's his question. And he's talking about these different things.

I want to say something that I think Bob mentioned some time ago, in maybe a Sunday morning or something like that. In Pentecostal and charismatic circles, there's a tendency quite often to refer to a thing that's known as a message in tongues. Now, nowhere in the Bible does it refer to a message in tongues.

And to use the label a message in tongues, actually begins to shape what your expectation is. Because once you've said it's a message in tongues, you think it's coming from God to the church. So your expectation is that when the interpretation comes, it will be a message from God to the church.

Now the Bible never talks about a message in tongues. It talks about some very interesting things in tongues. If you look at 1 Corinthians 14, you'll see in verse 13, He says, So there's one of the things, you pray in a tongue.

The point I'm making is the point that you'll see actually very clearly in chapter 14 verse 2. Where he says, That's to say, generally speaking, the general direction of tongues are God's words. When a man speaks in an unknown tongue, he's not speaking to men. He's speaking to God.

This is the general direction of things. And then if you come on later on, you'll see he says in verse 14, If I pray in a tongue, now a tongue isn't man's words, I don't pray at you. I know some people do do some horizontal praying, but it's not recommended.

And that's just usually a way of getting people to do things you can't get them to do any other way. But prayer is supposed to be God's words. That's the way it's kind of prayed.

And then he says here in verse 14, My understanding is unfruitful. What's the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, as God would, and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the spirit.

We sing, and one of the ways we sing, of course, is we sing and we make melody in our hearts unto the Lord. Part of our singing is God's words. And then he says here, and then he talks about blessing, verse 16.

He says, otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, when he says with the spirit, he means in tongues. When you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say Amen at your giving of thanks? So you can give thanks in an unknown tongue. And he makes that quite plain.

So the point I'm making is that if you look at the way he's referring to things in 1 Corinthians 14, tongues, generally speaking, are God words. It's prayer, it's blessing, it's thanksgiving, it's singing. So what would we expect the interpretation of tongues to be? And in most circles, and in most of the churches, I guess, we've been kind of part of, the expectation is that tongues plus interpretation is really just another way of doing prophecy, but using two people instead of one.

I don't think that's the normal function for tongues in the church. I think the normal function for tongues in the church is that it's people, remember we go back to chapter 12, verse 2, it's people being led of the spirit, people being carried in the spirit, and in the spirit, with the spirit, they pray, or they sing, or they give thanks. And of course, the rest of the church wouldn't know what was going on, except that God has added this dimension that we can have an interpretation to what is taking place in someone's spirit.

And so the prayer can be interpreted, and the song can be interpreted, and the giving of thanks can be interpreted. And often, you know, when we give thanks to God, we give thanks for things he's done. One of the things it says, and one can write early on in the beginning, is that God has given us the spirit so that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God.

And only a man's spirit knows what is in the man. So there are times when our spirit will express deep things that are beyond our understanding, that are beyond our knowledge, and it can be a tremendous blessing then if that is interpreted. And the church and the people hear something that was deeper than the conscious level of a man's desires.

I'm not, I don't want to kind of put in place, and I won't, I don't have the power to put in place, anyway, I'm not going to put in place a new law that says interpretations can only be God's. I just want to challenge us, in a sense, really, in our expectation, and just say, when an interpretation begins to form in your mind, in your heart, as you're hearing these things, just be open to the possibility that this may not be like a message from God, but this may be actually someone who's lifting their heart to God, and God is giving you an insight. In the spirit, it says, he speaks mysteries.

The word mysteries, you know, in the Bible, doesn't mean mysterious, it means secrets. So the secrets of hearts are actually being kind of revealed. Okay, I want to go on to another difficult thing, or another possible controversial thing, and this time it's in chapter 14 of verse 26.

This verse, verse 26. How is it then, brethren, whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation, that all things be done for edification? Now here's the question. When Paul says this in verse 26, is he making a statement about every church, throughout the whole world and the whole history of the churches, that whenever you come together, that is, each one of you has a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation.

Is he making a kind of a general statement about all the churches, or is he actually making an observation about the Corinthian church? Is he actually putting his finger on something about the Corinthian church? In other words, is he approving of this statement, or is he actually disapproving of this statement? Do you follow what I'm saying? If you see the context that it's in, where Paul is encouraging people to be disciplined in the way that they do and say things, I think the context of this indicates that Paul is not approving of the fact that this is what's happening in the Corinthian church. That when they come together, it's a free for all. Everybody has got something.

Everybody is bringing something. And that's why he says, let all things be done for edification. Now I was interested, having asked this question, I was looking at John Wesley's notes on the New Testament, and he's got this note on verse 26, and he says, What a thing it is, brethren! This was another disorder among them, says John Wesley.

Every one of them has a psalm, that is, at the same time, one being interested in a psalm, another to deliver a doctrine, another to speak in an unknown tongue, another to declare what's been revealed to him, another to interpret what the former is speaking. Every one probably gathering a little company about him, just as they did in the school of the philosophers. Let all things be done to edification, so as to profit the hearers.

What I'm saying here is, I think in this section of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is actually beginning to set down guidelines for the ordering of the way that things function in the church. And you'll see he comes on very quickly in verse 27, and he says, If anyone speaks in an unknown tongue, let there be two, or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. Now, when he says each in turn, you can see the implication.

It does sound as though John Wesley is right, when he, John Wesley has this kind of concept that everyone was doing everything all at the same time. And Paul is saying, no, you must be orderly in these things. There must be an order to this thing.

And when you're speaking in unknown tongues, in these utterances, two, or at the most three, in turn, and let someone interpret. So again, I'm not trying to kind of lay down hard and fast law, but I do think that the spirit of this section is that Paul is cautioning us, and that God is cautioning us in the way that exercises take place like this, that we are sensitive to one another. We're sensitive to the moving of the spirit in the church, that we're sensitive to what is happening in the church, and we're not over-anxious to get our little bit in, or to make our little contribution, or to give the thing that we felt God blessed to us earlier on in the week or in the meeting or something like that, but that we're conscious of the flow of what's happening and that we're moving in the flow of these things.

So I think as a principle, not as an absolute rule, I do think as a principle that there ought to be no more than two or three utterances, not messages, utterances in an unknown tongue and interpretation. I don't think, according to the way that Paul is expressing things here, I don't think it would be seemly for the whole meeting to be taken up with 20, 30 utterances in tongues and 20 or 30 interpretations. I think he's saying there ought to be moderation in this for the sake of order and decency, which is the way he concludes this section.

Then we've got another one here in verse 29. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. For if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

I think I've said to you before, I find verse 30 a real challenge because it obviously means that people were sensitive to one another. It means that people were watching one another so that even if they were in the midst of a revelation, if they were in the midst of a prophecy, if they saw that someone else wanted to share something, they were willing to stop what they were saying and make way for that other person, which I think shows that these people were not in intensity. They weren't desperate, or they oughtn't to be.

It ought to be possible for people to see what's happening, to have the same care one for another, to be mindful not only of what God has given us, but to be mindful of what God is doing in other parts. And he says, let two or three prophets speak. He doesn't actually say two or three prophecies.

He actually said two or three prophets. But I think there's a similarity here as well. I know that there are times when people might say, well, there's a spirit of prophecy in the meeting.

Anyone can prophecy, and we sometimes come to this verse 31 where it says you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, all may be encouraged. But there's a pattern in understanding scripture when you need to understand the verse in the light of what has gone before. And what's gone before in the previous chapters is that Paul has asked a very specific question.

He said, are all apostles? Are all prophets? Do all speak with tongues? And obviously the answer to those questions was no. So that's one of the limitations to you may all prophets. You can only prophesy if you've got a prophecy.

You can't just prophesy because you've got some kind of right to prophesy. And then everyone may one by one, within the general terms of this, but two or generally at the most by three. In other words, I do think there's a pattern here.

I said these things were controversial, and I'm not laying down any laws. I'm just saying I think that in this chapter Paul is concerned with what he refers to in verse 40 as things being done decently and in order. So there's not an unseemly rush.

And there's not kind of a pandemonium. And then the next thing, and I must finish this now, but you get home to your bets. Verse 34, he says, Let your women keep silent in the church, for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be submissive to the law, as the law also says.

He talks about the women being silent, and this is the third time in this section that Paul's talked about silent. For example, he said that if someone speaks in their own tongue, they ought to be silent unless there's an interpretation. And talking about prophecy, he says one prophet ought to be silent so that another prophet can speak.

And this silence is not the absolute silence of someone not being able to open their mouth at all. The word silence in these passages is context sensitive. The first one has to do with speaking with tongues of interpretation.

The second one has to do with prophecy. The third one has to do with learning. And the other side of learning is teaching.

And we're into the realm here of authoritative teaching. And you know we won't look at it now because we haven't got the time. But you know that Paul when he wrote to Timothy said that he did not give permission for a woman to teach and to exercise authority over a man.

In the Old King James Version it actually says usurp authority. The idea of usurping, that's wrongly taking authority isn't there at all. It's just simply authority.

Paul did not give permission for a woman to teach and have authority over a man. This has to do with the patterns that God has set into the world itself. The patterns which are to be endorsed and strengthened in the church.

So what does it mean? Remember this. This isn't banning a woman from giving a testimony. This isn't banning a woman from standing up and sharing what a verse means to her.

What this is really talking about is it's not appropriate for a woman to have a key role in doctrinal teaching in the church. Because that has to do with authority. And God has decreed that in the church because Jesus is the head of the church and he's the man that in the pattern, the way the church works out it is to the man that God will give authority to give authoritative teaching.

We need to remember that in these days we need to understand really what the word teaching means. It didn't mean for example that someone was going to stand up and expand 1 Corinthians or Ephesians because 1 Corinthians and Ephesians didn't exist. Also, texts of the Bible were very, very expensive.

It would probably have cost to get something like the New Testament it would probably have cost something like 8 or 10 years salary to buy a New Testament or the equivalent of it in Bible days. So they didn't have these things. What was happening is that these teachers were people who were, this is my phrase they were systematizing truth.

As truth came in they were balancing truth with truth. They were combining truth with truth. They were putting truth into order.

That's what they were doing. But it was by revelation. There would be the prophetic element in it but they were bringing truth through.

So they were really setting teaching standards. They weren't just sharing what would be a blessing to their own heart. They weren't sharing something that they thought might encourage somebody.

They were actually laying down truth. What would be the truth for the church. What would be passed from one generation to another.

And Paul is saying that it is not appropriate for a woman to have that role. And that's how I understand these things. So I've taken a controversial line on each of these three things here.

Each of the things that's come through. I've gone against the stream with every single one. I'm going to stop now.

I'm going to have a word of prayer. And then if you've got some questions you can ask them.

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