

only?" asks if Corinth was the sole destination of this message. In other words, "Was it to you alone that it reached?" The clear-cut answer is again negative.

In effect, what Paul has done in verse 36 is to return his readers' thoughts to the consideration with which he began the paragraph, namely, the universal custom in the churches (v. 33b). For Corinth alone among all the churches to grant women freedom to speak in worship services amounted to erecting double standards, one for Corinth and another for the rest of Christendom. It was the height of arrogance on the part of this church (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4 and was inexcusable. The suggestions of verse 36 need no reply, and are flatly rejected because of their sheer absurdity. No option remained but for the readers to comply with the standards of verses 34-35.

Chapter Six

UNIFIED PERSPECTIVE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS: ORDERLY CONDUCT

14:37-40

Returning to the main theme in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul has two elements to treat in summarizing and concluding his extended remarks. One is the authority on which he bases his directives (vv. 37-38), *and the other, orderliness in carrying out the directives (vv. 39-40).*

A. DIVINE AUTHORITY(14:37-38)

37If any one thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.

38But if any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

14:37-Written commandments of the Lord. The question of whether Paul, a writer of inspired Scripture, was aware of his own authority while writing receives its specific answer in the explicit statement of verse 37. In the verse he makes acknowledgment of his writing's authoritative character a criterion for testing the genuineness of "a prophet or spiritual" person. A person's estimation of himself and his own spiritual gift is in focus in verse 37. "Prophet," of course, alludes to a conception of oneself as possessing the gift of prophecy. "Spiritual" refers to a self-evaluation of one having the

capacity of a tongues speaker. That Paul would take "spiritual," which has had a general sense in 12:1 and 14:1, applying to spiritual gifts of all kinds, and give it in 14:37 a sense restricted to the gift of tongues, marks a continuation of his sarcasm from verse 36.¹ The readers were inclined to view the gift of tongues as the spiritual gift par excellence because of their pagan background. Hence, Paul in an ironic tone concedes their evaluation by referring to the gift in terms of its spiritual source. The prominence of prophecy and tongues as the sole topic earlier in this chapter (14:1-5, 20-33a) verifies that tongues only is in view in the term "spiritual." The two continue to be featured subsequent to verse 37 (cf. v. 39). Any pretense to possessing either of the two gifts was measurable only by a willingness to concede Paul's position as an apostle, prophet, and author of inspired Scripture (cf. 12:28). Through him came the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (cf. 12:8) recorded in permanent form for the church of all generations. In effect, Paul presented to the Corinthians his own gift status as a means for measuring their own.

Paul is uncompromisingly dogmatic in declaring that it was the Lord who originated the commandments he had written, not himself. As a divine appointee to the apostolic office, he was absolutely certain that he wrote the words as the mouthpiece of Christ Himself (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16; 7:40; 2 Cor. 13:3; 1 Thess. 2:13). It was imperative that a prophet or spiritual person fully recognize Paul's infallible authority if he was to verify his own legitimacy as a divine oracle. In essence, verse 37 pits authority against authority, Paul against those in Corinth who might be unwilling to accept the strictness of regulation set down in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Paul's willingness to stake his own

reputation and status on the accuracy of his written words discloses the degree of importance he attached to them. His readers had to accept the words as binding or else label him an impostor. Only the former course was feasible because of the countless evidences of Christ's commissioning of and presence with this apostle to the Gentiles.

14:38-Consequence of ignorance. An unwillingness to accept the apostolic leadership advocated in verse 37 was tantamount to ignorance, according to verse 38. "If anyone does not recognize this" (v. 38) hypothesizes a staunch refusal to accept Christ as the source of Paul's rulings on spiritual gifts. This was more than just innocent ignorance, of course. It was a willful ignorance, a rebellion against divinely constituted authority.

Verse 38 builds around an interesting play on words. With the best documented reading in the last part of the verse, English could represent the Greek terms by "If any man be ignorant, he is ignored"; or, "If any man does not know, he is not known"; or, "If any man does not recognize [this], he is not recognized." The connotation of "he is ignored" or "he is not recognized" is that such a person was not recognized as a prophet or spiritual one. He was to be ignored by the church because of his failure to recognize an apostle of God. That kind of ostracism did not necessarily estrange him from the church's fellowship (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-5[, but it did exclude him from exercising his speaking gifts in public services. For him to go on speaking would have created a dilemma of conflicting authority, Paul's against his own. More of such confusion was the very thing Corinth did not need.

B. DECENT APPLICATION (14:39-40)

39Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy,
and do not forbid to speak in tongues.

40But let all things be done properly and in an orderly
manner.

14:39-Proper perspective of prophecy and tongues. The final two verses of chapter 14 offer a summary of the main points discussed in chapters 12-14. The appearance of "brethren" in verse 39 signals Paul's return to an affectionate tone following his sarcastic and severe censure of the readers (vv. 36-38). He tenderly reminds them once again of the proper balance between prophecy and tongues. The words "desire earnestly" (cf. 12:31; 14:1 and "forbid not" portray well the marked preference for prophecy over tongues in a Christian gathering. The chapter has repeatedly featured this comparison (14:1-5, 20-25~. Prophecy was one of the "greater gifts" (12:31), and one that would in Christian worship bring greater benefit to saint (14:1-5~ and sinner (14:20-25) alike. The value of tongues under such conditions was relatively small. Yet, Paul has not expressed hostility toward the latter gift or those who used it, unless they insisted on using it apart from his clear-cut rules of procedure (14:27-28). Value from tongues, as from prophecy, could come to such a first-century congregation if the church rigorously applied specified stipulations, but they could assure edification through prophecy with a much higher degree of certainty. Therefore, instead of being simply not forbidden, prophecy was to be zealously sought for the building up of the congregation.

14:40-Beauty and order in worship. The final point in summary is a regulative principle to govern all parts of public worship: "Let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner" ~v. 40). Reaching back to where the larger section begins at 11:2, the words exceed the scope of spiritual gifts, not only explaining the summary instruction of 14:39 but encompassing also all that Paul has written regarding Christian meetings. He recommends two general guiding principles as the chapter and section draw to a close: decency and order.

"Properly" is a term of beauty. It literally means "well-formed," and carries the connotation of comeliness. In Christian worship, a pleasing impression on all the right-minded attendants is the desirable object. Ecclesiastical decorum ought always to be beautiful and harmonious, not unseemly (cf. 13:5). Though not without application to spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14), the former word is especially appropriate to matters discussed earlier in reference to the dress of women and celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11~).

The word translated "orderly manner" is of military origin. A well-disciplined military force puts every man in his proper place with a knowledge of his particular responsibility. He knows how to perform his task at the proper time and in the proper way. A condition of tumult such as characterizes an unreasoning mob should not characterize church worship any more than it does the well-ordered military unit. The need for order in connection with chapter 11 is clear, but the need was especially prominent in relation to spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14~).

Though differing from the Corinthian picture in some details,

modern church worship does well to adopt the same twofold criterion of beauty and orderliness in conducting its worship services. It is through this balance that the most effective job can be done in building up the saint and converting the sinner wherever Christian churches convene.

Appendix A

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:11 REVISITED: AN EXEGETICAL UPDATE

In 1974, I proposed an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:10 that assigned to *teleion* the meaning of "complete" or "mature" instead of the more frequent rendering of "perfect." At least three developments show that the subject needs a renewed look: (1) a misconstruing or confused statement of my view by others;' (2) a continuing claim that biblical exegesis yields no explicit indication of the termination of some spiritual gifts;' and (3) a growing personal realization that explanations of the passage have overlooked the important contribution of 1 Corinthians 13:11 to the meaning of *teleion*. A renewed discussion of the issue can probably do little to remedy whatever it is that causes (1) above, but perhaps a focused treatment of the exegetical nuances related to 1 Corinthians 13:11 and their impact on the meaning of *teleion* in 13:10 will contribute to a recognition that (2) is wrong in light of the