

INTRODUCTION

From a study of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, the following truths emerge:

- 1) Corinth was experiencing confusion in the Lord's Day assembly, hence Paul's instructions, and his concluding admonition: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).
- 2) Many members customarily played a public part in Corinth's Lord's Day assembly: "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" (1 Corinthians 14:26).
- 3) Paul had no intention of depriving them of this mutual ministry--he intended only to order it: "For you can all prophesy **one by one**, that all may learn and all may be encouraged" (1 Corinthians 14:31).

A PLURALITY OF PARTICIPANTS

Clearly, Paul was pleased with a plurality of participants in the Lord's Day assembly. Despite the fact that such an arrangement came with potential hazards--such as the disorder Corinth was experiencing due to *excessive* member involvement--he wrote nothing to discourage the Corinthians from their mutual edification. Instead, he laid down several guidelines for its effective exercise (i.e. "two, or at the most three," 1 Corinthians 14:27, 29), lending authoritative, apostolic affirmation to its practice. An assembly in

which multiple persons had the opportunity to bring a song, offer a teaching, or exercise a miraculous gift was a good thing.

WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF IT?

Sounds strikingly dissimilar to the practice of many of today's churches, doesn't it? What are we to make of it? Were Paul's instructions to the brethren at Corinth unusual? No. Paul stated four times in his letter to the Corinthians that what he taught them, he taught everywhere else (1 Corinthians 4:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1). Was Corinth an isolated case which stood out among the New Testament churches because of its participatory meetings? From a careful examination of the New Testament Scriptures, we can offer a definitive "no" on that question, as well. **What was true at Corinth, was true elsewhere.**

TWO MORE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES

Antioch

"Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain **prophets and teachers...**" (Acts 13:1). As at Corinth, God had inspired more than one individual. And, as at Corinth, along with the prophets, there were multiple uninspired "teachers" (1 Corinthians 14:26). Even when an apostle was present there, many members shared the role of edifying, as evidenced by Acts 15:35: "Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, **with many others also.**" It was not Paul's--nor the church's--prerogative to put the "best man" in

the pulpit, if even there was a pulpit. There were many with the ability, so many participated.

Ephesus

The same practice existed at Ephesus. Though Timothy the evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5) was there, he shared the work of public edification. Paul began his first epistle to Timothy by stating, "remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that **they teach** no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). His job wasn't to do all the teaching, but to make sure that others' teaching was sound. The same idea is emphasized in Paul's second epistle to this young evangelist: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to **faithful men who will be able to teach** others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Was Timothy the resident exhorter? Did the brethren come every Sunday morning to hear him? The Scripture doesn't lead us to that conclusion.

ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY

Finally, there is the cumulative message of various other passages. In Romans 15:14, Paul wrote that he was confident the brethren there were "filled with all knowledge, able also to **admonish one another.**" To the Ephesians, he wrote that the body grows "according to the effective working by which **every part** does its share" (Ephesians 4:16). Paul said that members possess the gifts of teaching and exhorting (Romans 12:7-8), and according to Peter, **those who possess gifts are to use them: "As each one has received a gift, minister it**

to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). The assembly is one place to do just that (Hebrews 10:25).

THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY

Historians unanimously declare the practice of member-shared, mutual public participation in the assembly to be the original and apostolic practice of the Lord's church. There is *no dissent* among them that the practice of limiting the public participation to a special group and/or one individual developed during the second century.

Philip Schaff writes:

"In the apostolic church preaching and teaching were not confined to a particular class, but every convert could proclaim the gospel to unbelievers, and every Christian who had the gift could pray and teach and exhort in the congregation."

(History of the Christian Church, vol. 1, p. 124)

J. W. Richard and F.V.N. Painter state:

"With the exception of women, every Christian, by virtue of his priesthood, was allowed to teach the Church. There were no functions specially reserved for ministerial or clerical hands."

(Christian Worship: Its Principles and Forms., p.)

A.H. Newman, D.D., LL.D. comments:

"The participation in worship was not confined to the official members, but to every male member it was permitted to utter his apprehension of truth"

(Manual of Church History, p. 141).

A CALL TO CONSIDER

With all of the above in mind, can there be any doubt that the New Testament church permitted and encouraged multiple persons to be involved in its assemblies?

What about your church?

For more information on this subject, including additional historical information, as well as responses to common objections, please see tract entitled, "Mutual Edification: Answering Objections"

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"Mutual Edification":

in the
Lord's Day
Assembly

by

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