

Day 54: Regulations for Worship

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 14:26:40

Devotion

"But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

1 Corinthians 14:40

In today's reading, Paul issues regulations for worship. Gatherings in which each person could make a contribution under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, need some ground rules. This was particularly so in the case of the Corinthian church. A church in which there was likely to be a "superabundance" of gifts, the allocation of these gifts among a wide variety of people and a gathering that was abuzz with excitement.

However, these elements can be a threat to orderliness. Paul aims to regulate what happens so that the expression of their spiritual gifts contributes to the overall good of the body. Indeed, openness to the Spirit and to the individual expression of spiritual gifts is not to become a pretext for chaos. To that end, Paul offers three criteria to control (and assess) what is done:

1. Edifying others becomes the touchstone to determine the fitness of everything that is done in the Corinthians' worship. Contributions to the church's worship are not to become an ego trip or an exercise to unfettered individualism
2. They are to speak one at a time and may be limited to no more than three speaking at any given gathering
3. They are to do nothing that could bring shame on others. Always being careful not to insubordinate or disrespect others.

As a church that is open to and eagerly pursuing the operation of the gifts of the Spirit in our midst, Paul's words of advice are as timely as ever. Let's continue to exercise the gifts that God has given to us biblically, lest we make the same mistakes as the Corinthians did.

Prayer

God, as we look at creation, it is easy to see that you are a God of order who works things in sequence. May the way that we exercise our spiritual gifts reflect this aspect of your character, for indeed we have been created in your very image and likeness. Amen.

Day 55: Testimonies of Self and Grace

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Devotion

"I am the least of the apostles."

1 Corinthians 15:9

Let's start with Paul's testimony regarding himself. The older he gets, the less he seems to think of himself! In today's reading Paul notes, "I am the least of the apostles." However, later in his ministry he writes, "I am less than the least of all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 3:8). He concludes late in life, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15). Where does that leave us as we age?

We have to read Paul's words in their entire context, though, including his testimony to God's grace. To the Corinthians he adds, "By the grace of God I am what I am." To the Ephesians he comments, "This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). Finally to Timothy he declares, "The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly" (1 Timothy 1:14).

Paul's testimony of himself—bad, worse, worst. His testimony of God's grace—good, better, best. Which testimony is more important? Which testimony has the final word? Which testimony should shape our emotions? Which testimony will take us through today? Which testimony determines our eternal destiny?

Praise God, we know the answer!

Prayer

God of abounding grace, we give thanks today that your good grace negates our bad, your better grace overcomes our worse, and your best grace obliterates our worst. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Day 56: What if?

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Devotion

"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith...if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."

1 Corinthians 15:14, 19

In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul uses logical arguments to teach about resurrection and faith. He asks:

- What if the resurrection never happened?
- What if the Lord Jesus had not risen from the dead?
- What if we have fooled ourselves into believing we serve a risen Saviour?

Then, in response, Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." If Christ has not risen from death, we are to be pitied because our life is without meaning. Without the resurrection, everything will come to an end, and life is a one-way journey to the cemetery. Without the resurrection, we have no future – no hope of eternal life. Our past will catch up with us, and when we die, we will stand condemned before God.

Yet through Christ's resurrection our sins are forgiven, we have purpose in life, and we have a future. In one of our confessions the question is asked, "How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?" The answer is this: "He has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he obtained for us by his death...by his power we too are already raised to a new life...Christ's resurrection is a sure pledge to us of our blessed resurrection."

Thank God that Christ has risen from the dead! Do you have new life in him?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for the power of your resurrection. Thank you that even today we are being raised to new life. Amen.

Day 57: No Condemnation

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Devotion

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Romans 8:1

Guilt can rob us of our peace of mind and take the joy out of our lives. In Psalm 32 King David outlines what guilt did to him – and what it can do to any of us. David writes, "when I kept silent [in the guilt of my sin], my bones wasted away...day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped..."

However through Jesus' resurrection, we can get rid of our guilt. We don't have to go through life looking over our shoulder, afraid that our past will catch up with us. We don't have to live with guilt; we can get rid of it by confessing whatever we have done.

The apostle John affirms, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). The apostle Paul says virtually the same thing: "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus".

If you are burdened with guilt, come to the Saviour, confess, and ask for forgiveness. If you don't know how to pray, ask someone to pray for you. There's forgiveness for all who come to him.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus, thank you for paving the way so that we can be forgiven.
Forgive our sins today, we pray, in your name. Amen.*

Day 58: It All Hangs on This

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

Devotion

"Now if there was no resurrection..."

1 Corinthians 15:29

Paul's argument in this passage shines a light on the negative consequences of there being no resurrection. Amongst other things, Paul's Christian belief in the resurrection clearly impinges on ethical living. He draws a close connection between moral depravity (which was one of the dangers facing the church at the time) and failure to believe in the resurrection. For if there was no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, then hedonistic self-indulgence and overindulgence would be legitimate options, since the ethical prohibitions no longer would have their foundation in a legitimate faith. However, because the resurrection of the dead is true, it imposes on believers the need for moral rectitude in this life.

In light of this, Paul does everything in expectation of the future resurrection. If there is no resurrection of the dead, why not eat, drink and be merry, since life is so short? Why not join the company of those who try to silence the fear of death's imminent approach with endless revelry?

You see, resurrection means endless hope, but no resurrection means a hopeless end. Both our life now – as well as the life to come – is dependent entirely on the resurrection of the dead. It all hangs on this.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you were the first-born from among the dead, conquering the once invincible enemy of the grave and paving the way for the rest of us to enjoy an eternity with you forever. May this paradigm-altering reality shape not only our view of the future but also our actions and decisions in the present. Amen.