

“Tools and Rules”¹ (1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

Raising three children is no easy job. The enormity of this task is compounded when you are homeschooling all three children. In order to have some degree of order, my wife and I have put into practice “Krell Household Rules.” Our top twelve rules are as follows:

1. I will not hit, kick, pinch, or squeeze any person with the intention of hurting or annoying them.
2. I will not throw anything in anger.
3. I will not look over my parents’ head in rebellion when they are speaking to me.
4. I will not say “blah, blah, blah” (or any such talk) when a parent is instructing me.
5. I will obey when sent to do something without stomping, screaming, kicking, whining, wailing, or arguing.
6. I will not yell to be obnoxious, loud, or rude.
7. I will not make obscene noises in public.
8. I will not interrupt or talk over someone else when they are speaking.
9. I will not wear outdoor shoes on the carpet.
10. I will keep all body parts (hands, feet, etc.) off the walls.
11. I will not leave lights on after leaving a room.
12. I will not flip light switches on and off, on and off, on and off.

These rules are posted on our refrigerator. Each of our children is quite familiar with these rules. They are responsible to adhere to these rules in full submission. If these rules are disobeyed, there are consequences. At the bottom of our list of household rules there is a note that states, “If these rules are disobeyed, I will be disciplined at the first infraction.” The purpose of this list of rules is to turn chaos into order, confusion into peace. In order to remain sane, I would suggest that every family adopt their own personal “house rules.”

Like a good parent, Paul communicates his “house rules.” He insists that there must be order in the church. If chaos and confusion reign supreme, worship will not build up the body of Christ. While worship can be creative and free, it still needs to be orderly. In 1 Cor 14:26-40,² Paul cries out, “*Order in the Church.*” In the course of these fifteen verses, Paul shares two directives that will help us maintain order in the church.

1. Pursue order in worship (14:26-33a). In this section, Paul tells us how to have an orderly worship service. He begins with a general principle in 14:26: “**What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.**” The first expression in this verse, “What is the outcome then?” is one of Paul’s typical methods of summing up a discussion before moving on to the next section.³ Before he concludes this topic of spiritual gifts, he wants to give a general perspective on their use in the worship setting. His counsel is for all of God’s people to come prepared to participate. When the house churches in Corinth met for worship, it was normal for everyone to come ready to contribute. Some would bring a song they had written, some a teaching, some a revelation (“God impressed on my heart this week that we should do such-and-such . . .”), and some a tongue or an interpretation. These five gifts are not exhaustive; Paul is merely saying that he longs for God’s people to come to church ready to build up the body. God says, “*Order in the Church!*”

Paul concludes 14:26 with a command: “Let all things be done for edification.” The gifts that manifest themselves during worship must be done for the strengthening of the church. The corporate worship service is not a time for self-edification, showing off, or entertainment. It is a time for edification or strengthening of the body.⁴ Church is not about the individual, it is about the body.

The principle here is: the Christian must come to receive and to give. There can be no passive listeners. When you come to church, is this your mentality? Do you come to participate or to spectate? Historically, the church has usually grown the fastest in small, informal fellowships. These may be fledgling “church plants” or small groups within larger more established congregations. The church grows in health and size when people recognize their spiritual gifts and get involved. Do you know your gift? How are you presently using your gift in the body?

Paul now moves from the general principle to specific guidelines. In 14:27-28, Paul provides regulations on how tongues should manifest themselves in the corporate worship service. He writes, **“If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.”** Here are Paul’s rules for speaking in tongues:

- No more than three, preferably two, should speak in tongues in a given service.⁵
- Only one person should speak in tongues at a time.

No one should speak unless an interpreter is present and identified. “He is to be silent” is a command. A tongue speaker *can* control his gift. The interpreter can be the tongue speaker (cf. 14:13). The reason I add that the interpreter must be identified is that 14:28 says, “If there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church.” Before one speaks in a tongue he must *know* there is an interpreter, not just *hope* there is one. Of course, if there is no interpreter present the tongues speaker doesn’t have to stifle his or her gift, he or she simply must use it silently: “let him speak to himself and to God.” God says, *“Order in the Church!”*

The chairman of our elders, Blythe Stanton, has five grown children. When his children were growing up, he explained that there are God’s rules and Stanton rules. As the spiritual leader of the home, Papa Stanton had additional rules that he had deduced from biblical principles. Similarly, I’d like to articulate Emmanuel’s rules on tongues:

- There will be no audible tongues in public church meetings. This goes back to the problem of uninterpreted tongues and their ability to build up worship.
- In small groups or adult fellowships, ask permission and consider who is present. If there is no interpretation, then the leader should graciously state, “The Lord has no word for us at this time, but we encourage you to exercise your gifts. We know that He will speak at another time.”⁶

After providing regulations on tongues, Paul now offers some restrictions on prophecy as well. In 14:29-32, Paul writes, **“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.”** Paul’s rules on prophecy are as follows:

- Limit prophesying to two or three speakers. The mind can only absorb what the seat can endure!
- The church is to weigh carefully what is said.⁷ Certainly, when prophecy is taken to include Spirit-filled preaching, it seems clear that the ordinary “layperson” is often in a better position to determine how well or accurately the preacher has communicated than are fellow-preachers, who are absorbed in the fine points of the theology or technique of the message.⁸ The word used here is *diakrino*, meaning “to evaluate carefully.”⁹ Sometimes this could take days. A prophecy might be controversial, and the elders may need some time of prayer to determine its validity.¹⁰ See 1 Thess 5:21; 1 John 4:1.
- One prophecy at a time. Prophesying is to be done in turn. If one person desires to speak, he or she should be given the floor. Paul made clear that there was to be no speaking over another person’s words. If this control is lost, a prophecy is not of God. Paul declares that people can control themselves and that a sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence is order and courtesy. The entire purpose of prophecy is to strengthen, encourage, and comfort.

We do not know why Paul includes this instruction, for it would seem to show disrespect both for the person who is prophesying and for the spiritual revelation that individual has received. Perhaps the reason for this notation is that Corinth had a problem with certain people monopolizing “prophecy time.” Since Paul insists that all may prophesy one by one (not in the same worship service, of course), it is only fair that everyone who has this gift should receive the opportunity to exercise it at one time or another.¹¹ God says, “*Order in the Church!*”

We have just listed Paul’s rules on prophecy; now we will consider our rules on prophecy:

- If you think God has given you a word for someone, go to that person rather than to others. Many experienced leaders estimate that 80% of prophecies are for one other person; therefore, rarely are they a message for the entire body.
- Introduce what you have said with, “It seems to me” or “I feel impressed to say.” Then end that comment with, “Does this make any sense to you?” or “I don’t know what it means, but I believe it is for you.” There is no place in the church for the person who says, “God told me such-and-such and you need to follow me.” A person can legitimately say, “I believe God wants us to do such-and-such,” or “I have a very strong impression that God wants us to do such-and-such,” but he has no right to say, “Thus saith the Lord,” unless, of course, he can show us in the Bible where the Lord really said it. Every prophecy given in the church is subject to evaluation—careful weighing—by the mature believers in the body.
- If the message is for the church, deliver a message to the pastor in private. If the pastor believes it is of God, he will deliver it. If he cannot decide, then the elders will need to hear it.¹²

Paul concludes this section in 14:33a by sharing a crucial principle worth bearing in mind: “**God is not a God of confusion but of peace.**” Paul wants the procedures in the worship setting not to be disruptive but to be orderly. He has already stated one reason for this principle, namely, that unbelievers will be turned off to the church if there is pandemonium through a free-for-all exercise of tongues (14:22-25). But there is another reason: “God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” Orderly worship reflects the character of God.¹³ God says, “*Order in the Church!*”

[Paul has said that we are to pursue order in the worship service. Now he will also say...]

2. Respect God-ordained authority (14:33b-40). In this section, Paul will provide a number of thoughts on how we can respect the authority that God has put in place. In 14:33b-35, he begins with a very sticky wicket.¹⁴ Again, Paul will bring up the issue of women in ministry. I spoke in some detail on the place of women in the church a while ago, when we were studying 1 Corinthians 11, and I’d rather not go back to that subject. (I survived it once; I don’t want to push my luck.) I would simply say that I do not think that 14:34-35 are a blanket denial to women of a public ministry in the church.¹⁵ In chapter 11, Paul clearly acknowledged that under certain situations a woman may pray or prophesy.¹⁶ Here he writes, “**As in all the churches of the saints. The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.**” The phrase, “As in all the churches of the saints” belongs with 14:34-35. It is customary for Paul to reinforce his teaching by saying that it is common practice among all the churches.¹⁷ The Greek verb translated “to be silent” (*sigao*) does not mean no speaking whatsoever in the local church. There are always contextual limitations on the word. The restriction may be temporal or topical. In the case of the former, someone is to be silent *while* someone else is speaking.¹⁸ In the case of the latter, the one who is silent does not speak in a certain manner or on a certain topic, but he or she can speak in other ways and on other issues.¹⁹ Thus, Paul is restricting speech designed to critique prophetic utterances, but would not prohibit other forms of verbal participation.²⁰ Paul is forbidding women to speak in church only in regard to the judgment or evaluation of prophetic utterances.²¹ Evidently, he believed that this entailed an exercise of authority restricted to men only.

The word “subject” was a military term describing the chain of command. It is used of Jesus²² and is a universal truth for the church.²³ All of God’s people are to practice biblical submission. In this context, Paul commands women to respect the God-ordained authority of their husbands. What sort of situation might produce a challenge between the views of husbands and wives? One of two seem probable, both connected with prophecy (which is the immediate context of this section).²⁴ Since both men and women could prophesy (cf. 11:4-5), it is not impossible that a husband and wife might say different or even contradictory things, and this could lead to an argument in front of the rest of the church body. Or if when one prophet spoke and the church evaluated what was said (14: 29), once again a husband and wife could end up in an open, public disagreement as to the content of that prophecy. This Paul would consider disgraceful, and it would damage the witness of the church to the culture around them.

This view explains Paul’s appeal to “the Law” (i.e., the Old Testament) in 14:34. The Old Testament does not teach that women are to remain silent at all times in worship.²⁵ But it does endorse male headship in the home and in worship, consistent with Paul’s teaching here and elsewhere. Paul is thinking about Gen 2:18-25 (cf. 11:8-9). Man was created first. Then the woman was created to be a helpmate for him. It was in that order, not the other way around. In a matter of authority, the woman’s authority over creation involves her own being under the authority of male leadership.²⁶

Now we turn to Paul’s conclusion of his study on gifts with a call to focus on the Word of God as the norm for critiquing spiritual gifts. In these closing verses, Paul is drawing this entire section to a close (12:1-14:35). In 14:36, Paul writes, **“Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?”** The two questions that Paul asks in 14:36 both expect a “no” answer. Paul is seeking to humble the arrogant Corinthians.

Paul now drives home the point of his argument. It is short and not necessarily sweet. An imperative appears in each verse.²⁷ In 14:37-38, Paul writes, **“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”** Paul gives what can be read as a stern warning: anyone who ignores the advice/command he has just given will not be recognized as a leader. Moreover, God will ignore these individuals and accomplish His work without them.²⁸

Paul is now ready to sum up this lengthy section. In 14:39, he writes, **“Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.”** Again, we should desire prophecy and refuse to forbid tongues. However, tongues operate best in a small group context. In such a venue, believers know one another. Ideally, each member of the group knows the other members’ spiritual gifts. Hence, if someone has the gift of interpretation, there is freedom to speak in tongues. Furthermore, there needs to be balance on this matter of speaking in tongues. Many Christians error in extremes: everyone speaks in tongues or no one speaks in tongues. The whole focus of this chapter, I believe, has been to discourage the public use of tongues. In fact, the three principal positive statements in the chapter are each followed by the word “but.”

- 14:5: “I wish you all spoke in tongues, but...”
- 14:18: “I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; but...”
- 14:39: “Do not forbid to speak in tongues, but...”

In each of the above examples the “but” introduces concerns for the church at worship. Our worship will focus on the Word of God, will be decent and orderly, and will follow the biblical guidelines on tongues. I’ve always wanted to be able to roll my tongue. The rest of my immediate family members can. But no matter how hard I try, I can’t. It’s not within my skill-set. I’m not gifted. The same is true with the gift of tongues. I don’t believe the Bible teaches that everyone can speak in tongues. Even though I have sought the gift, the Lord has not seen fit to give me this gift. But this allows me to truly appreciate those who have been given the gift.

Paul's final words in this section sum up all of his concerns: **“But all things must be done properly²⁹ and in an orderly manner”** (14:40).³⁰ The word “order” is a military term for falling in rank. Paul only uses this word in one other context and it is translated “stability or firmness.”³¹ When the body of Christ functions the way it should, there will be a sense of firmness.

I don't know about you but I am a sucker for infomercials, particularly those advertising a new piece of exercise equipment. If I wasn't such a shrewd steward, I would be tempted to buy up every new invention to build firm muscles. After all, everyone loves firm muscles, right?

Well, God says the way to firm muscles in His body is order. *“Order in the Church.”* Yet, He balances this with the exercise of His Holy Spirit. The greatest church growth tool is God's presence. If people experience God's presence in worship, they will come back, they will tell their friends, they will long for it. It's all here—conviction of sin, a dissection of the heart, and awareness of God's presence.³² God wants His church to come together and experience all that He has for her.³³ Will you be a part of all that God wants to do?

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Scripture Reference

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

James 1:19; 2:12

James 3:1; 4:11

Romans 12:6-8

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

1 Thessalonians 2:11-13

1 John 4:1

Study Questions

1. The Bible assumes that believers will attend worship as active participants (14:26). When I attend a church function, what do I seek to receive from God and others? What do I intentionally give to God and others? Have I struck the balance between being edified and building up the body?
2. What spiritual gift can I contribute to my church family? Am I presently using this gift within the body? If so, how has God used me in my service? If not, what will I do this week to ensure that I am serving the church as soon as possible?
3. Why does God value peace and order so much (14:33a)? How can our church further prioritize these characteristics? Are there ways that we have confused both believers and unbelievers? If so, how can we rectify this error?
4. Paul says that if we fail to recognize the truth of his words, God will not recognize us (14:37). What does this mean in the context of spiritual gifts and the corporate worship service? What can I do to avoid this consequence?
5. Has my understanding of tongues and prophecy changed as a result of my study through 1 Corinthians 12-14? If so, what do I now believe about these gifts? What commitments will I make in response to my learning (e.g., I will consider visiting a charismatic church. I will refuse to poke fun of any charismatics).

Notes

¹ This title comes from a section from Bill Hull, *Straight Talk on Spiritual Power* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 192.

² Garland points out some fascinating parallels between 1 Cor 14:26-40 and 10:23-11:1. See David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 656.

³ Sometimes using the verb “to be,” sometimes not (see Rom 3:9; 6:15; 11:7; 1 Cor 3:5; cf. also Rom 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30; 1 Cor 10:19). See Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).

⁴ See Paul’s use of edification in 1 Cor 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17; cf. 81; 10:23.

⁵ Fee allows that Paul could mean no more than two or three tongues before an interpretation. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*: The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 691. However, this seems unlikely due to Paul’s use of the phrase “at the most” (*to pleiston*).

⁶ Hull, *Straight Talk on Spiritual Power*, 192-194.

⁷ Some have suggested that it is the prophets who are to judge the prophecies. However, “If Paul had wanted to say ‘the rest (of the prophets),’ the Greek more plausibly should have been *hoi loipoi* [‘the rest’] rather than *hoi alloi* [‘the others’].” See D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 120.

⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*: NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 279.

⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 662.

¹⁰ What criteria can be deduced, then, for evaluating Christian prophecy? Michael Green gives seven suggestions: (1) Does it glorify God rather than the speaker, church, or denomination? (2) Does it accord with Scripture? (3) Does it build up the church? (4) Is it spoken in love? (5) Does the speaker submit him- or herself to the judgment and consensus of others in spiritual humility? (6) Is the speaker in control of him- or herself? (7) Is there a reasonable amount of instruction, or does the message seem excessive in detail?²⁰ Even after using criteria such as these, there will often remain ambiguities, further reinforcing our conviction that such messages cannot be trusted perfectly. But where several of these principles are clearly violated, the church should lovingly but firmly insist that the speaker stop claiming gifts of inspired utterance, or at the very least work with a mentor in smaller, less public settings to cultivate his or her gifts so as to be able to use them more accurately or appropriately. Michael Green, *To Corinth with Love* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982), 77-78.

¹¹ Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians.”

¹² Hull, *Straight Talk on Spiritual Power*, 194-195.

¹³ Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians.”

¹⁴ Evangelical scholars differ on how to reconcile 1 Cor 11:5 and 14:34-35. Here is a sampling of proposals.

(1) Some say 14:34-35 is a post-Pauline interpolation (i.e., an insertion into the text of chapter 14 by some scribe after its original composition by Paul. Those who embrace this view appeal to the fact that there are a number of ancient manuscripts that place 14:34-35 at the end of the chapter rather than between 14:33 and 14:36. However, this is somewhat understandable given the seemingly intrusive nature of 14:34-35. One can see how later scribes, convinced that these verses interrupt Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts, would move them to the end of the chapter where they might function as the beginning of a new discussion. We should note, however, that there are no manuscripts whatsoever that omit 14:34-35 from Paul’s argument.

(2) In 11:5 Paul does not actually endorse women speaking in church. He says only that *if* they were to do so with uncovered heads it would be a disgrace. He withholds condemnation of the practice until 14:34-35.

(3) Some suggest that 11:5 describes an informal meeting different from the public, corporate gathering of the church. Thus, women may pray and prophesy in smaller, private groups but not in the public assembly.

(4) Others say that only *wives* are in view in 14:34-35 and that single women may therefore pray and prophesy in church. However, chapter 11 also has wives in view and it permits them to speak. Also, why would Paul prohibit the most likely older and more mature married women from speaking while allowing the younger and possibly less stable single women to speak (see Titus 2:3-5).

¹⁵ In Paul’s lengthy list of ministry partners in Romans 16 women are mentioned prominently. A third of those who are mentioned are women. It’s especially interesting that the two people described as “working hard” are women.

¹⁶ In Peter’s speech on the day of Pentecost he explicitly said that characteristic of the present church age is the Spirit’s impartation to both men *and women* of the prophetic gift. Look closely at his citation of Joel’s promise: “And it shall be in the last days,” God says, “That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your **daughters shall prophesy**, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even upon My bondslaves, both men **and women**, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit, **and they shall prophesy**” (Acts 2:17-18; emphasis mine).

¹⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 16:1.

¹⁸ See Acts 12:17; 15:12-13; 1 Cor 14:30.

¹⁹ See 1 Cor 14:28 where the tongues-speaker could certainly participate in singing, praying, reading Scripture, while remaining silent in that realm of concern to the apostle.

²⁰ See D.A. Carson, "'Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36":

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2821. See also Daniel B. Wallace, "The Textual Problem of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35": http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1192.

²¹ The word "speak" (*laleo*) in twenty of the twenty-one appearances of this verb in this chapter outside of 14:34-35, refers either directly or by analogy to one of four very particular kinds of speech: tongues, their interpretation, prophecy or its evaluation. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 281.

²² See Luke 2:51 to His earthly parents and 1 Cor 15:28 to His Heavenly Father.

²³ Eph 5:21.

²⁴ 1 Cor 14:39-40 show that Paul is still dealing with the theme of prophecies and how they are handled. This is surely the key to 14:33b-34. Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: 1 Corinthians 10-16* (Kent, England, 2000), 89-90.

²⁵ See Exod 15:20-21; 2 Sam 6:15, 19; Ps 148:12.

²⁶ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 282.

²⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 674.

²⁸ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 282. Though no agent is given for this passive voice, this is almost certainly a "divine passive" i.e., the Lord will ignore that person. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians."

²⁹ The only other uses of *euschemonos* appear in Rom 13:13 and 1 Thess 4:12. Paul's thought is appropriate or decent behavior."

³⁰ Fee writes, "It is of some interest that people who believe so strongly in the Bible as the Word of God should at the same time spend so much energy getting around the plain sense of verses 39-40. Surely there is irony in that. What Paul writes in these chapters he claims to be the command of the Lord; one wonders how he might have applied verse 38 to those who completely reject this command." Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 713.

³¹ Paul's only other usage of "orderly" (*taxis*) is Col 2:5 where is translated "stability" or "firmness."

³² Hull, *Straight Talk on Spiritual Power*, 189.

³³ Banister suggests the best of both worlds in a model called, "The Word & Power Church." Here are the ten distinctives of such a church:

- 1) Expository preaching
- 2) An emphasis on the authority of Scripture
- 3) A realistic affirmation that the kingdom of God is not yet fully here
- 4) A belief that spiritual growth is a process
- 5) A belief that the Word can best be studied in applied in the context of relationships
- 6) An emphasis on prayer
- 7) A hopeful affirmation that the kingdom is here in part
- 8) A belief that God speaks today
- 9) An emphasis on participatory worship
- 10) A belief that the Spirit's charismatic gifts can be best experienced in the context of relationships.

See Doug Banister, *The Word & Power Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 56-90.