

# Sermons on 1 Corinthians:

## Waiting in Line (1 Cor 14:26-33, 36-40)

### I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. There are few things which trouble us like waiting in line.
  1. Perhaps it's because the average American spends two to three years of his or her life waiting in line.
  2. A man in San Francisco had a hard time waiting in line.
    - a. This man wanted to rob a downtown Bank of America, and he wrote, "This iz a stikkup. Put all your muny in this bag."
    - b. While standing in line, waiting to give his note to the teller, he began to worry that someone had seen him write the note and might call the police before he reached the teller window.
      - So he left the Bank of America and crossed the street to Wells Fargo.
      - After waiting a few minutes in line, he handed his note to the Wells Fargo teller.
        - The teller read the note and, surmising from his spelling errors that he wasn't the brightest light in the harbor, told him that she could not accept his stickup note because it was written on a Bank of America deposit slip. He would either have to fill out a Wells Fargo deposit slip or go back to Bank of America.
        - Looking somewhat defeated, the man said "OK" and left.
        - He was arrested a few minutes later, as he was waiting in the back of the line at Bank of America.
- B. The Corinthians had a hard time waiting in line.
  1. They were kinda like a young guy in an expensive sports car.
    - a. You know the type.
    - b. You've been driving around the parking lot at Wal-Mart for the past 15 minutes trying to find a parking place because you're tired & it's pouring the rain. You see someone pulling out, you put on your turn signal and wait patiently, but before you can do a thing that sports car zooms right into that good parking spot.
  2. The Corinthians certainly weren't going to wait.

- a. Notice what Paul says at verse 27: “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and **each in turn**, and let someone interpret.”
    - The phrase “each in turn” seems to be central to understanding this passage.
    - You might have had four or five people are speaking in different tongues simultaneously.
      - Last semester at OVU, I had one class in which students had come from five different countries, which made grading their papers quite interesting.
      - Could you imagine what it would have been like if John had spoken Korean, Chiaki had spoken Japanese, Anne-Claire had spoken Dutch, JC had spoken French, & I had spoken English? What type of confusion would have existed in that classroom?
  - b. That’s quite similar to the confusion which reigned in the Corinthian church. The church would come together & several people would start speaking in foreign tongues all at once & no one could understand a word the other had said.
3. In this passage, Paul writes to the brethren at Corinth to encourage them to wait in line.
    - a. He describes the line, and thereby explains why it’s important for the Corinthians to wait in line.
    - b. Paul speaks of A SERVICE LINE, A SACRED LINE, A SANCTIONED LINE, & A SKILLED LINE.

## II.A SERVICE LINE, vv 26-32.

### A. READ TEXT.

B. Paul, in this passage, provides the Corinthian Christians with a “service line,” a line whereby they could each serve God in the assembly.

C. When the brethren came together, each had a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation, v 26.

1. The Spirit had given each of the Corinthian Christians some teaching tool to give the church at the assembly—whether it be a hymn or a revelation or an interpretation of a tongue.
2. However, as you chapters 12 to 14, it becomes quite obvious that the Corinthians weren’t using these tools as the Spirit intended.
  - a. Instead, these gifts became a way for the Corinthians to seek the limelight.
    - The Corinthian assembly was all about what could I do to make myself look better than you.
    - Worship had become a performance where I could showcase how good I was.
  - b. Has not much “worship” within the broad spectrum of Christendom become nothing more than a performance to showcase the talents of a select few?
    - Congregations will get them a group of four, two guys & two girls, who can sing each of the parts of harmony. They get mics so that these talented few can help the rest of us at least carry a tune in a bucket.

- At Easter or Christmas, we've got to put on a big production of Jesus' birth or death & resurrection so that we can come and be dazzled by the artistic abilities of a select few.
  - Some preachers really want the limelight.
    - They're afraid to go on vacation. What if the fill-in does a better job with rhetoric and oratory than I do?
    - They're leary of asking someone to read Scripture, because: "What if the Scripture reader reads more effectively than the preacher?"
- D. The Christian assembly is not a place to showcase talents. It is not a place to show what all I can do. It is, rather, a service line—a line in which we get to serve one another.
- E. Instead of seeking the limelight, the Corinthians needed to make sure that all things were done for building up.
1. I am aware that the KJV translates this as "edifying."
  2. However, as we have discussed, the idea of this Gr term is building people toward maturity.
    - a. Paul says that one purpose of the worship assembly is to help one another reach maturity.
    - b. We don't come together to demonstrate how talented we are, but we use our gifts to strengthen one another.
- F. How do we use our talents to build one another toward maturity?
1. As we sing, we use whatever ability God has given us to strengthen one another. Is there a one of us who wasn't been strengthened during some difficult time through a hymn we heard in the assembly?
  2. As the Lord's Supper is served, you brothers who are serving are building the rest of us up as our minds go back to the cross of Calvary.
  3. As you brothers read Scripture, you're moving us closer to maturity as we hear the words of God himself.
- G. The assembly has other purposes besides building up, but Paul writes of this purpose here because of the "Show" worship mentality in Corinth.
1. Instead of trying to grab the floor and demonstrate their abilities, the Corinthians should take turns in their revelations, tongues, and interpretations.
  2. Why take turns? Because worship is not about me. Worship is ultimately about God, and in this passage, Paul says that it is also about building others toward maturity.

### III.A SACRED LINE, vv 33, 40.

- A. Here Paul informs the Corinthians why they need to wait in a line at worship rather than all going at once: "God is not a God of confusion but of peace. All things should be done decently and in order."
1. God did not provide instructions for worship arbitrarily, but his instructions come from his character:
    - a. "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24).
    - b. We must worship God "in spirit" because "God is spirit."

2. The idea that a deity was worshiped based upon his or her character is an old idea.
    - a. This was true of Diana—Artemis—of the Ephesians.
      - Diana was a fertility goddess.
      - Young girls became members of her religion at puberty. When the girls married, they had to lay items from their virginity upon Diana’s altar— toys dolls, locks of their hair.
    - b. Why was she worshiped in such a manner? Because Diana was a fertility goddess.
- B. God is not a God of confusion but of peace.
1. God is not a Lord of confusion.
    - a. Other deities were gods of confusion.
      - Again, go back to Diana of the Ephesians.
      - When Demetrius, the silversmith in town, heard Paul’s preaching, he gathered others to riot.
      - We read: “The city was filled with *confusion*, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel” (Acts 19:29). Diana was not a god of peace but of confusion.
    - b. There was, however, a great deal of confusion in Corinth: “If with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air” (14:9).
  2. Rather than being a Lord of confusion, God is a Lord of peace.
    - a. When there is peace, people live in harmony.
      - God has called his people into harmony with one another. “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (12:12-13).
      - Because God has called his people to peace in one body, there did not need to be competition of air time. There was no need for members to be concerned that they get more time than someone else—they were to live in harmony.
    - b. Diana was not a goddess of peace.
      - Demetrius was greatly concerned about his “air time.”
        - Diana brought Demetrius “no little business” (Acts 19:24).
        - He brought the craftsmen of the city together and said to them, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth” (Acts 19:25)
      - Demetrius wasn’t about to give up his “air time” to the true God, so he had to devise a plan to remove God from the picture.
- C. What do we need to learn from this sacred line, a line that is orderly because God is orderly?
1. We need worship clothed in God’s character.
    - a. The Corinthians needed to worship in peace rather than confusion because God is a God of peace rather than confusion.

- b. The message God gave Isaiah for Judah was for them to worship in spiritual purity (Is 1:12-17). Why did the people of Judah need to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, and plead the widow's cause prior to their worship? Because we see throughout the OT God cares deeply about such.
  - c. Do we seek to live like God so our worship can be acceptable?
    - Are we holy because God is? Are we loving because God is? Are we the light of the world because God is?
    - Do we gather for worship as a people living like the God we gather to worship?
2. We also see that those who claim to follow God don't have to live like him.
- a. God is a God of peace, not confusion—but confusion, not peace reigned in Corinth.
  - b. Since the Corinthians were able to worship contrary to God's character, we can claim Christianity while we live and worship contrary to God's character.
    - This is a lesson the world so desperately needs to hear:
      - Just because one nut enters a Unitarian Church to kill because of the denomination's stand on homosexuality doesn't mean the rest of us want to do the same thing.
      - Just because one fanatic bombs abortion centers doesn't mean the rest of us choose to do so.
    - This is also a lesson we desperately need to hear:
      - Just because we are Christians doesn't mean that God is pleased with us.
      - Just because we worship externally according to the NT doesn't mean that our heart is in the right place.
  - c. Do we live like God as well as claim to follow him?

#### IV. A SANCTIONED LINE, vv 36-38.

- A. "Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."
- B. Ancient teachers commonly used rhetorical questions, and Paul uses the rhetorical questions in v 36 to demonstrate that the line he encourages the Corinthians to get in was a "sanctioned line."
  - 1. Paul speaks of the origin and scope of the Word of God.
  - 2. Apparently, Paul envisions the pride of the Corinthians causing them to say, "Wait a minute! We don't need this instruction—we're prophets of God."
  - 3. While the Corinthian congregation contained prophets, the Word of God did not come from them—it came from God—and they weren't the only ones who had received the Word.
- C. Paul also had received that Word and any prophets in Corinth needed to acknowledge that Paul's writing as a command of God.
  - 1. Paul, writing with the Spirit's inspiration, didn't simply write his ideas about how to solve the problems in Corinth, but he wrote the command of God.

2. Paul wrote similar words to the Thessalonians: “We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13).
- D. The one who ignores Paul’s words is to be ignored—such a prophet did not need to be heeded.
- E. Here’s what the Corinthians needed to understand & what we need to grasp as well: We worship the way we do by the command of God.
1. The Corinthians couldn’t decide for themselves how they wanted to exercise their gifts in the assembly.
    - a. Paul was writing a command of God.
    - b. Thus, the Corinthians needed to honor what Paul writes by the command of God.
  2. Likewise, we cannot worship however we determine, but we absolutely must follow the command of God.

#### V. A SKILLED ORDER, v 39.

- A. “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.”
- B. Some of the Corinthians may have read what Paul had just written and thought that tongue speaking should be forbidden in the assembly.
1. It was not to be forbidden in a first century assembly. It was one way that God was honored in the assembly: “One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God” (v 2).
  2. Thus, tongue speaking shouldn’t be denied provided: a) there was an interpreter & b) tongue speaking was done decently & orderly.
- C. Not only should the Corinthians not forbid speaking in tongues, but the brethren should earnestly desire to prophesy.
1. Miraculous gifts in the first century, as well as non-miraculous gifts in our own century, were not controlled by men.
    - a. They are gifts in the true sense: God gave to individuals the ability he deemed most pertinent for that person.
      - “God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb 2:4).
      - Men could not determine what gifts they would and would not receive.
    - b. However, the fact that Paul tells these brethren to desire prophecy implies that on occasion, at least, God gave people gifts they themselves desired.
      - That accords with what Jesus himself had said: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk 11:13).
      - How could people desire and ask for these gifts if they were distributed according to God’s will?
        - It seems that like with any other prayer, God would honor that prayer as long as it accorded with his will.
        - RJ has already started making out his wishlist for Christmas.

- If he puts a chainsaw on that list, he's going to be sorely disappointed come Christmas morning.
  - Why? Because I love him, and I know that's not in his best interest.
2. Are there available gifts that we don't have that we desire?
    - a. Do we desire to be a better teacher? A better leader? A better encourager? Or a better servant?
    - b. Why not pray earnestly that, if that is God's will for us, that he will enable us to have that gift?
  3. The specific gift Paul encourages these brethren to desire is prophecy—that gift of speaking to others for God.
    - a. I believe each of us needs to pray for that non-miraculous measure of that gift.
      - It doesn't matter how much we desire the gift, we're never going to have the miraculous gift of prophecy.
      - God no longer gives that gift: period.
    - b. While the gift of prophecy isn't available today, we can still speak to others on God's behalf.
      - God's not going to come and put his words in our minds as he did first century prophets.
      - But, we have the same truth those first century prophets had. Do we desire to share that gift with others? Do we desire to use our skills to help people understand who God is and what God requires?