

Paul has thoroughly laid out the principle of edification as opposed to excitement. Believers are to receive real lasting spiritual blessing through understanding what is spoken. The superiority of prophesying to the use of foreign tongues (languages) without an interpreter is clear. The gift of tongues was to reach unbelievers and was a special sign to Israel. So he continues then to apply this principle to the whole assembly being come together. This implies the gift of tongues was more properly used outside of the assembly. In fact he makes the case that one visiting the meeting place where tongues were in use would come to the logical conclusion they were mad. On the other hand, if all that speak prophesy, the visitor will be convicted in his or her heart. He will be touched in ways unexpected and brought to his knees. The secrets of his heart will be made manifest (be plainly recognized or known). This occurs even if the visitor is a total stranger to those present. He will come to realize and acknowledge the very presence of God among them, Matthew 18:20. And he will realize his sinful condition and bow to the God in their midst. If unsaved he is brought to repentance and salvation, even if the purpose of the meeting is worship, prayer or edification of the believers, not a gospel meeting. Here we learn incidentally, that visitors that are unbelievers, or believers who are "untaught," are not to be barred from attending meetings of the assembly (although not to participate until received by action of the assembly). A number of sincere believers worshiping the Lord who died for them is a touching gospel testimony to the grace of God.

Paul then proceeds to discuss their common practice when assembled. Whatever they had on their heart, it was to contribute to edification. "Let all things be done unto edifying." They might have a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation. All were appropriate in assembly meetings. There are at least two ways we can view this verse. Is it criticizing them or is it commanding them? Were they pressing themselves forward with what they had to give, some seeking prominence and attention at the expense of order and the leading of the Spirit? Or were they each coming prepared with one or more exercise but ready to allow the Spirit to lead the various ones in the assembly as He wished? At least they did not seem to have a problem with too few willing and ready to participate.

1Thessalonians 5:18 ... in everything give thanks, for this is [the] will of God in Christ Jesus towards you; 19 quench not the Spirit; 20 do not lightly esteem prophecies; 21 but prove all things, hold fast the right; 22 hold aloof from every form of wickedness.

Quenching the Spirit differs from grieving the Spirit mentioned in Ephesians 5:30. Grieving the Spirit is

something we do personally that grieves Him who is dwelling in our physical bodies. We grieve Him when we neglect the word, forget to pray, ignore His prompting, or do something that is sinful. Personal communion with God is hindered or interrupted. God immediately initiates work through our Advocate with the Father (1John 1:9) to bring us back and to restore us. But if we come to meeting having grieved Him without repenting, we then become an agent that dampens or quenches the Spirit's activity in the midst of the gathered assembly. This condition allows self to insert itself into the proceedings. Not only is the one away from the Lord liable to offend but all are weakened and are less able to keep self out of the action. The assembled believers locally are one body, 12:27. Our meetings are affected by each member's spiritual state, for better or worse. That is why we are each exhorted to examine (judge) ourselves before we come to partake of the emblems at the Lord's Supper, ch 11:28-32.

Chapter 14:26 especially applies to gathered believers where the Holy Spirit is accorded liberty to preside and direct the various participants of the meeting. As we have seen, we can quench the Spirit by coming in an un-judged state.. If we do, we may become too pushy as the Corinthians seemed to have been. Some who were to be used by the Spirit are bumped aside, robbing others of the edification they might have received. On the other hand some may be too **self conscious** to pray, speak or even give out a hymn. (Isn't "self consciousness" simply that, **SELF?**) We can even come with no intention of letting the Spirit move us to participate. This robs others of the blessing the Spirit might have given through our participation. Sometimes this is fear of making a mistake. Having been treated harshly, or having seen others "jumped on" for something they said in meeting can also discourage participation. While we are to weigh what is said, we can quench the Spirit by jumping another for something he said. Rather we are to faithfully deal with these incidents gently but firmly. It costs nothing to patiently ask what was meant and seeking to determine the truth of scripture together. The exhortations in chapter 13 regarding love come into play in these situations. The exhortations of 2Timothy also encourage resorting to the inspired scriptures when apparently erroneous thoughts have been expressed. Rarely is something said that is so totally blasphemous that it must be sharply rebuked right then and there. The very fact that Paul is writing these patient, instructive epistles indicates most things needing correction can be handled apart from open rebuke. On the other hand the epistle to the Galatians is an example of a sharp response that was needed.

He now begins to prescribes what is needed for

orderly meetings basing his remarks upon the preceding comments beginning with chapter 11. The use of tongues is treated first. If they were used at all in assembly it was to be one speaker at a time, limited to two, or at the most three speakers per meeting. No one was to speak in assembly in a foreign language without an interpreter. He was to keep silent. If he was indeed gifted to speak in tongues he was to do so privately between himself and God. This requirement would thwart any tendency to show off the gift. He would be brought face to face with God and made to feel his responsibility to the One who had freely given the gift.

Now the very fact that such disorder described here was possible tells us much about the liberty for participation by all believers present. There is no human agent authorized anywhere in scripture to preside over a meeting of the assembly of God. And the remedy for disorder was not human arrangements or human direction of meetings of the assembly. Paul does not direct them to place a leader up front to prevent disorderly conduct in meetings. No! Doing that would displace the Holy Spirit

from His appointed place. He does not spell out a ritual to preserve order. We need to avoid slipping into a defacto ritual in our meetings. Groups of humans can do that you know. We don't always have to open with a hymn, or close with a prayer, or bless the emblems near the end of the meeting. He does not suggest a liturgy (prescribed religious service requiring certain written required statements, written prayers and sermons). While these arrangements fill in silences in meeting, relieve others from exercise to participate, and prevent some overzealous brethren from imposing themselves upon the meeting, Paul does not suggest them. No! To do so would be **systematically quenching the Spirit**. He instead lays down basics of order for all to observe. He uses the term "let" instead of "thou shalt." Each was responsible to do his part to maintain order and to yield to the leading of the Spirit. There is one body, one Head, and many members.

Listen! Trust! Obey! Enjoy!

By Ron Canner, November 26, 2003.