

### 3. Spirit-led Participatory Worship

#### **PPT>>>** Spirit-led Participatory Worship

**Joke:** One little boy kept trying to get another little boy to go along with him to his church. The other boy finally said, "I can't go; we belong to a different abomination!" Let us pray our church meetings are not an abomination to the Lord!

**PPT>>>** ESV **Acts 2:42** . . . they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Three things were generally true of the meetings of the early church:

- 1) They had times of in depth study of the teachings of the apostles.
- 2) They had wonderful fellowship during the celebration of the Holy Meal (the Lord's Supper).
- 3) They were devoted to prayer.

These three activities are critical for the health of any church. Maybe they did all three in the same gathering or maybe they were broken up into several different gatherings (such as a Sunday gathering and a mid-week gathering). Yet there was one more aspect of their gatherings that is not mentioned here: that of Spirit led participatory worship. In participatory worship, each person who spoke did so as he was prompted by the Spirit, using his spiritual gift to edify the church. The prime directive is that everything said or done in such a meeting must be designed to build up (encourage, strengthen) the gathered assembly.

#### 1 Corinthians 14

**Teacher's Note:** The objective here is not a thorough exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14. Rather, the goal is simply to persuade that New Testament church meetings were to some degree participatory. It simply is not practicable in one lesson to attempt to teach directly on tongues, prophecy or the role of women in ministry. Resist the temptation to do so in this lesson!

\*\*\*\*1 Corinthians 14 contains a description of a New Testament church meeting. Based on **1 Corinthians 14:26**, what, in general, were first century church meetings like? They were participatory. There was meaningful "audience" input.

**PPT>>>** In 1 Corinthians 14:26, the word "**everyone**" (or "**each one**") is found.

#### **PPT>>>** Only One

1. Suppose 1 Corinthians 14:26 contained the words "only one" rather than "each one" (ESV). Which option would be more descriptive of modern worship services? How so?

**2. Criticism or Command? Suppose 1 Corinthians 14:26 is actually a criticism of what the Corinthian church was doing (allegedly chaotic meetings); was the inspired solution a prohibition of participatory meetings or a regulation of them? Explain.** Almost every New Testament letter is an occasional document, meaning it was written in response to some local problem. Thus, some see 1 Corinthians 14:26 as a criticism of what the Corinthian church was doing (chaotic meetings). Even so, the inspired correction was for regulated, orderly participation, not a prohibition of it.

**PPT>>>** Later on, we are informed that these regulated, participatory meetings are “**the Lord’s command**” (14:37b). Thus 1 Corinthians 14 is not merely descriptive, it is actually prescriptive.

**PPT>>>** **The \$64,000 Question: How does this compare to *your* church meetings?**

**The Proposition:** Integrated along with the apostle’s teaching and the fellowship in the breaking of bread (the Lord’s Supper as a holy meal), there was an aspect in which early church meetings were participatory. In a full service gas station, everything is done for you. In a typical Western “worship service”, everything is done for you (it is almost a performance). New Testament church meetings were not services per se.

**Critical Contextual Consideration:** 1 Corinthians 12-14 concerns the proper use of spiritual gifts. Chapter 14 is specifically regulates with the use of the more supernatural gifts in the meeting (tongues and prophecy). Paul did not intend it to be an exhaustive passage on what or could not happen in a church meeting. The point to be gleaned is that there was a participatory aspect to the use of spiritual gifts in early church meetings.

### **Jewish Synagogue Meetings**

**3. Background: Were first century Jewish Synagogue meetings open to input from its members or closed to participation by those in attendance? Explain. See Acts 13:14-15, 14:1, 17:1-2, 17:10, 17:17, 18:4 & 19:8.**

**PPT>>>** **ESV Acts 13:14-15** . . . they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."

**Teacher’s Note:** In order to save time, do not take time to read aloud the below texts. Flash them on the screen and make reference to the city and the fact that everywhere Paul went the synagogues were open to audience input.

**PPT>>>** **NAS Acts 14:1** . . . in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. << So too in **Iconium**

**PPT>>>** NAS **Acts 17:1-2** . . . they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures . . . << And **Thessalonica**

**PPT>>>** NAS **Acts 17:10-11** (Berea). . . when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, *to see whether these things were so.* << And **Berea**

**PPT>>>** NAS **Acts 17:17** (Athens) So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles . . . <<And **Athens**

**PPT>>>** NAS **Acts 18:4** (Corinth) And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. << And **Corinth**

**PPT>>>** NAS **Acts 19:8** (Ephesus) And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God. << And **Ephesus**

**Observation:** Paul never could have evangelized the way he did unless the synagogues were open to audience input. The point to be observed here is that New Testament church meetings were consistent with the synagogue's practice of participatory meetings.

**PPT>>>** — Hymns —

4. **Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26, who determined the songs that the church sang?** See *Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16.* It sounds as if any of the brothers had the freedom to pick/suggest a song. However, considering the fact that Paul is here dealing with spiritual gifts, he probably had in mind primarily those who had the gift of music using that gift to edify the church. It seems that “each one” of the “brothers” (14:26) gifted in music had the opportunity to bring a song (“hymn” is from *psalmos*, “a song of praise”— BAGD, p. 891).

Since early church meetings were clearly participatory to at least some degree, the principle may remain that any brother could bring or request a song. For example, notice the “one another” aspects of the singing described in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 (it is not simply one person picking all the songs in advance):

**PPT>>>** NIV **Ephesians 5:19** — Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

**PPT>>>** NIV **Colossians 3:16** — Admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

**Sing-A-Long?** Since Paul's thought here (14:26) probably was not of church members randomly flipping through a song book and calling out songs to sing it might be good to encourage those who request a song to state *why* singing a particular song has meaning to the person or would have significance to the congregation.

**According to 1 Corinthians 14:26, what must be true of any song that is sung in the church meetings?** It has to be edifying. To sing an unmodified Beatles song would probably not be edifying. In some circles, certain types of music are not edifying (overly rocky praise songs or monastic dirges). One must be sensitive to the needs of each church. It is ultimately the role of the elders to be sure the singing in a church meeting is edifying.

**PPT>>>**

— Lessons —

**5. What observations can be made about who brought a lesson in a New Testament church meeting (1 Corinthians 14:26)?** See Acts 2:42. Considering the fact that Paul is here regulating the use of spiritual gifts, it would seem that any one of the brothers with the gift of teaching could potentially bring a teaching.

A person did not have to be an elder in order to teach, though elders would certainly have the last say in who taught. Those gifted to teach probably got with the elders to schedule their teachings in advance so that they did not all try to bring a lesson on the same Sunday. Any unscheduled teachings would necessarily have to be of a very short duration to allow for multiple teachers on any given Sunday.

**How does the lesson mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26 relate to the apostle's teaching mentioned in Acts 2:42?** It is the job of the elders to be sure the church is fed a solid diet of sound Bible teaching. Since all elders must be able to teach (2Ti 2:24), it will regularly fall to an elder to teach each week. However, Paul clearly expected that such teaching opportunities were open to any gifted brother who was approved by the elders.

**According to 1 Corinthians 14:26, what must be true of any lesson?** It must be edifying (and of course, true!). When an ungifted brother attempts to bring a lesson, the result is often unedifying. It is the elders' responsibility to keep someone not gifted in teaching from droning on and on in an unedifying way.

Some controversial teaching topics are better suited for other occasions (like a Wednesday p.m. Bible study). To be edifying, teachings should be true, inspirational, practical, with a clear application, and be of general interest. An example of unedifying teachings would be pet topics that are overemphasized.

**6. What restrictions on teaching are specified in 1 Timothy 2:11-12?** The responsibility for teaching the church lies squarely with the men of the church. This text means something and must be dealt with seriously.

**PPT>>>** **ESV 1 Timothy 2:11-12** Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

**Teacher's Note:** The topic of teaching in a church meeting will be developed more below.

**PPT>>>** — Revelations, Tongues, Interpretations —

- 7. How do revelations, tongues and interpretations indicate that some aspect of first century church meetings were spontaneous and not scripted?** Unlike teaching, the more charismatic gifts (such as tongues, revelations and interpretations) could not be scripted in advance. Either the Spirit moves or He doesn't. He does not consult with us first!
- 8. Many Christians believe supernatural charismatic gifts (14:26) ceased in the first century. Why would the absence of such charismatic gifts today not nullify these instructions that church meetings be participatory?** The principle of free participation would still hold true. There could still be teaching, singing, testimony, prayer, etc. Not every spiritual gift will be present at every meeting anyway.

**PPT>>>** — Other Appropriate Contributions —

- 9. 1 Corinthians 14 is not an exhaustive list of everything that could or should occur in a church meeting. It is simply about the regulation of the more spontaneous spiritual gifts (revelations, tongues and interpretations). What other contributions to a church meeting can be made, based on Acts 2:42, Acts 14:26-28 and 1 Timothy 4:13?** Other appropriate activities include:

**PPT>>>** NAS Acts 2:42 (Prayer) . . . they were continually devoting themselves to . . . prayer.

**PPT>>>** NIV 1 Timothy 4:13 (Public Scripture Reading) . . . devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture . . .

**PPT>>>** NIV Acts 14:26-27 (Missionary Testimony) . . . they sailed back to Antioch . . . On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

**PPT>>>** — Building Up —

**One more time: According to 1 Corinthians 14:26, what very important prerequisite is there for anything that is said in a church meeting?** There is a certain decorum that is to accompany church meetings: everything said must be edifying. It must build up the church. Each brother must take the initiative to ensure that he has a positive, edifying contribution to make.

- 10. What does “building up” (1Co 14:26) mean?** From *oikodomé*, it means “building up” (BAGD, 559) or “edification” (NASV) or “strengthening” (NIV). Thayer pointed out that it is the action of one who promotes another’s growth in Christianity. Thus, anything said or done in a church meeting has to be designed to promote the church’s growth. It must encourage, build up, strengthen, or edify the other believers present.

**11. Why is it so important that everything said build up the church (14:26)?** See also 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12. It is important because edification is the main reason the church has gathered. Edification is the prime directive.

Notice the emphasis on edification throughout **1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12** (read aloud).

**Unedifying Remarks:** Sometimes folks start talking and get too casual. Chitchat abounds. Just because it is an “open” meeting does not mean people can say anything they want to say. Beware of a blabbing “stream of consciousness” church meetings! Leaders need to remind the church that anything said in the meeting must be designed to build up the body, to encourage everyone else.

There is to be a certain level of decorum in the meeting. Just as in the Old Testament the worshippers brought sacrifices into the temple, so too the words we speak in the meeting are to be like offerings to God. They are to be measured, weighed and considered.

**PPT>>>** NIV **Proverbs 25:11** A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (NIV).

**PPT>>>** ESV **Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear (ESV).  
*How much more does this apply to church meetings!*

**PPT>>>** NIV **1 Peter 4:11** If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

1. Sometimes in smaller participatory meetings people get **too casual and unedifying** remarks abound. Just because a meeting is participatory does not mean people can say anything that comes to their minds. Whatever is said must be thoughtfully *designed* to edify the church.
2. Church meetings are not to be **therapy sessions for the wounded**, with everything focused on one person and his needs. Though such people do need counseling, this is generally to be done at a time other than the corporate assembly (the same as in 1 Corinthians 14:4).
3. Neither is the meeting to be an **interactive group discussion**, with a few people battling some idea back and forth between themselves as everyone else endures the banter. A certain amount of decorum and **thoughtful formality** is in order. This is precisely where the wisdom of leaders is needed to gently return the meeting to the standard of edification.

The prime directive for anything said or done in a church meeting is that it must be edifying. **If things happen in a participatory church meeting that are not edifying, whose job is to take steps to make it edifying?** Ideally, all the people in the church would be involved in the solution. Ultimately it is the elders’ job. For instance, if someone consistently makes unedifying remarks, it is his job to take the person aside and privately talk with him about his comments.

**PPT>>>** — Tongues —

\*\*\*\*\*12. How does **1 Corinthians 14:27-28** illustrate that early church meetings allowed some degree of audience participation? The supernatural gift of tongues was not something

one had to study for, prepare for or practice in advance. The speaker was supernaturally and spontaneously moved to utter words of a language he did not know. It could not be scheduled in advance.

**Why do you suppose tongues are capped off at a maximum of three?** It was most likely to allow time for the other gifts to operate. Though one might have the liberty to do something, love for others may mean result in a holding back, in not exercising our liberty.

**According to 1 Corinthians 14:27, how many brothers could speak in tongues at any given time?** See 14:40. It must be “one at a time.” Though the meetings are to be participatory, there is still to be order.

**13. In 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, why was Paul so insistent that tongues be interpreted?** See also 14:2, 4, 5.

**14. If there is no interpreter, the tongues-speaker is to remain silent. Why would God give a person a gift that He did not want him to use in the assembly?** God sometimes gave a speaker a supernatural tongue that was not to be delivered at the time of revelation (“If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet,” 14:28). The same held true for the fourth man with a tongue: he was not allowed to speak it (14:27), even though it was from God! In this case it would be for the greater good. If no interpreter was present, the tongue would not edify the church. Limiting it to three tongues speakers allows room for other gifts to operate.

An entire series could be taught just on the gift of tongues. For now, the point to be observed is that this clearly fits the New Testament pattern of participatory meetings that are open to contributions from the congregation. Observe that “anyone” (14:27 — actually any three) had the opportunity to speak in a tongue in the meeting.

**PPT>>>**

— Prophecy —

\*\*\*\***15. What in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33 indicates a participatory aspect to their meetings?**

**Notes:**

- 1.) As with tongues, it is outside the scope of this study to deal fully with the gift of prophecy. For further information, see *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, by Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988).
- 2.) The command in 14:29 is not that two or three prophets *must* speak, but that they must be *allowed* to speak if they so desire. As with tongues, Paul probably intended to limit prophecies to three.

**Based on 14:31, how many prophets spoke at any given time?** It was to be done “in turn” (again, there is to be both spontaneity and order). Evidently, as with tongues, there was to be a maximum of three prophets who were allowed to speak. There is both a principle of participation and a principle of order.

**16. Looking at 1 Corinthians 14:31, what was the purpose of prophecy in the meeting?** See back to 14:3, 4b, 5b.

**Teacher's Note:** People will naturally ask about the difference between teaching and prophecy. Resist the temptation to deal with this in depth or you will not finish the main task of convincing people that New Testament church meetings allowed for input/participation from the brethren.

**Based on 14:32-33a, why could Paul expect the prophets to speak “in turn” (14:31) and not all at once?**

**17. Prophets were sometimes to be silent (14:30). Why would God give someone a prophecy that He did not want him to deliver?** As with tongues, God sometimes gave prophets a prophecy that was not to be delivered at the time of revelation (“And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop”, 14:30). Here, it is a matter of serving others by holding back. It is to put others first. As the next paragraph shows, this principle of holding back was also true for the women (1Co 14:33b-35).

**PPT>>>**

— The Role of The Women —

**PPT>>> Target.** May I just point out that I did not write what we are about to read? If you don't like the message, please don't shoot the messenger!

\*\*\*\***18. What, even in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, further reveals the participatory nature of first century church meetings?** Whatever it was that the women were not supposed to say, this would not have been written unless first century church meetings were participatory. It would not have been an issue if there was a “one man show” in progress. It is obvious that people were free to ask questions of the speakers during the church meetings. Even if Paul only meant that women were not to be the ones doing the questioning, it still remains that at least the men were free to quiz a speaker.

As with the tongue that was not to be spoken or the prophecy not delivered, the requirement for women to be silent is not a matter of divine worth or gifting, but rather of order. Just as both the tongues speaker and the prophet are to be silent under certain conditions, so too the women are to be silent. The silence asked of the women is not static, but rather dynamic, designed to draw the men out to be the leaders that God intended them to be in both the family and the church. According to the text, their silence is actually a form of submission.

The context here is the regulation of one person at a time speaking to the whole church. It does not apply to congregational singing or corporate responses. According to this passage, there are some situations when women are not to address the gathered assembly. Perhaps Paul meant not at all (never). Perhaps he meant for them to be silent only with respect to the judging of prophecy (through asking questions of the prophet).

**Note:** A full treatment of correct application of this passage is beyond the scope of this session. It is dealt with much more fully in the chapter entitled “Silence in Church.” It may be good to skip ahead to that chapter in next week's study. Other articles on women speaking in church may be viewed at [www.NTRF.org](http://www.NTRF.org).



**PPT>>>**

— Two Questions —

\*\*\*\*What is the answer to the two questions in **1 Corinthians 14:36**?

**19. What were the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36 designed to do?** Evidently some in Corinth wanted to conduct their meetings differently than this passage requires. These questions are to convince them they had no right or authorization to conduct their meetings in any other way than that prescribed in 1 Corinthians 14. The same holds true today!

— The Lord's Command —

**PPT>>> Artillery Picture.** In this next passage, Paul really pulled out some heavy artillery.

\*\*\*\*What heavy artillery did Paul fire in **1 Corinthians 14:37**?

**PPT>>>**

— The Lord's Command —

**20. What does 1 Corinthians 14:37 indicate about whether the guidelines of 1 Corinthians 14 are merely descriptive or are actually prescriptive?**

We need to be about the agenda of helping His churches come into compliance with everything the Lord commanded. The Lord gave Moses minutely detailed instructions on the construction of the tabernacle. It is no surprise that this same Lord would also have detailed instructions for the meetings of His people. We have no right or authority to deviate from His plans.

**PPT>>>**

— The Penalty —

\*\*\*\***21. How should we respond to anyone who fails to recognize this truth (1 Corinthians 14:38)?** Those who disagreed with Paul's instructions were to be ignored (not recognized).

**Suppose a church leader today resists obeying what Paul has written here. Who should be ignored, Paul him?**

**PPT>>>**

— Three Imperatives —

\*\*\*\***22. With what three imperatives did Paul close this chapter (1Co 14:39-40)?**

**PPT>>> NAS 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22** Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

**PPT>>> Cemetery Picture.** In a cemetery there is perfect order, it is quiet, there is no questioning, but there is no life. Better life with a little disorder than order with no life! It is easier to cool down a howling fanatic than to resurrect a corpse!!

## Hebrews 10:24-25

**PPT>>>** NAS **Hebrews 10:24-25** . . . let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

**Application:** When we assemble as a church, it is to be characterized as a meeting where there is ample opportunity for each of us to encourage one another. This is to be true of both the worship time and the Lord's Supper as a holy meal. It is not to be focused on only one person. It is about each person doing his part. Rather than a lot from one person, the goal of participatory meetings is a little from a lot of people. Yet everything said must be carefully offered to the church with the goal of edifying the others present.

**PPT>>>** NAS **Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another . . .

**What does it mean to “consider” (Heb 10:24-25) something?** It is from *katanoeo* (2657) and means look at, observe or contemplate (BAGD, p. 415). Our English word “consider” means to think carefully about, to give thought to.

**What is that we are supposed to consider (10:24)?** We are to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Everything said must be carefully offered to the church with the goal of edifying the others present. To come unprepared to the gathering of the church is like coming to a wedding wearing gym clothes when you were asked to wear a tuxedo (Mt 22:10-14).

**What do you think of what you think of stirring up (ESV) something (10:24)?** It means to agitate, foment, provoke, stimulate. Negatively, one is said to stir up trouble. We are to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

**Review: Who is supposed to do all this considering and stirring up (10:24)?** We are each to encourage “one another”. It is everyone's job.

**Where is this one another encouragement supposed to happen; what is the setting?** The setting is our assembling together.

**What if the people of the church are not walking with the Lord? What will the meeting be like?** The participatory meeting will be very quiet if the men are not walking with the Lord and thus have nothing to share. This problem will show itself rather quickly and the result will be most unedifying.

**Joke:** Just before she dismissed them to go to church, a Sunday school teacher asked her children “Why must we be quiet in church?” To which one little girl replied, “Because people are sleeping in there.” << *May this not be true of our church meetings!*

**Pew Potatoes:** Western folks are conditioned to sit silently in church, as if watching TV. It takes time and prompting to overcome this! It will seem awkward to people at first. If no one brought any food to contribute to a potluck dinner, it would not be much of a meal. So too if no one comes prepared to contribute to a 1 Corinthians 14 meeting, it will not be much of a meeting!

**String Example:** If a string were stretched across a stream at water level, various things would become attached to it as the day passed, things that otherwise would have floated on past. Similarly, thinking all week long about what to bring to the meeting helps greatly. If no one brought food for the agape love feast, there would not be much of a feast. If no one comes to the meeting prepared to contribute, there will not be much of a meeting! We need to prepare *ahead of time* to contribute something to the meeting.

**PPT>>>** Is there a **testimony** the Lord would have you to bring?

**PPT>>>** *Could you not purpose to begin a time of conversational **prayer**?*

**PPT>>>** Is there a **song** that would edify the church?

**PPT>>>** *Is there some subject or passage of Scripture to **teach** on?*

**PPT>>>** What has the Lord **shown you** this week in your time with Him?

**PPT>>>** Men, do your wives spend more time preparing for the meeting (in cooking food for the Lord's Supper) than you do (in considering something to say)?

— Conclusions —

**23. Taken as a whole, what are the various indicators throughout 1 Corinthians 14 that combine to show the participatory aspect of early church meetings?**

**PPT>>>** **24. What are some guiding principles for congregational participation in church meetings, based on 1 Corinthians 14 and Hebrews 10:24-25?**

**PPT>>>** **1.** Church meetings are to be at least somewhat **participatory** (1Co 14:26).

**PPT>>>** **2.** Everything is to be done in a **fitting and orderly way**; there are definite guidelines to be followed (1Co 14:40). Only **one person at a time** is to address the assembly (1Co 14:27, 31).

**PPT>>>** **3.** Everything said or done in the meeting must be designed to **strengthen (edify)** the church (1Co 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 26, 31).

**PPT>>>** **4.** This type of participatory meeting is not optional, is not just interesting history, is not just quaint information. It is the "**Lord's command**" (1Co 14:37).

— The Size of a Congregation —

**PPT>>>** **25. Which context would better facilitate a 1 Corinthians 14 type of meeting, a smaller congregation or a mega church meeting in a cavernous worship center? Why?**

The size of the congregation will largely determine what will take place in the meeting. Really large gatherings typically redirect the focus toward lectures, worship or evangelism, rather than mutual edification. Huge gatherings are not conducive to the biblical objective of open participation in the meeting. For instance, one of people's greatest fears is public speaking. Smaller churches foster and nurture mutual participation of every member of the body.

**Population Control:** Meetings that are either too big or too small create their own set of hindrances to participatory gatherings. Too few people can seem dull. Too many people present will intimidate the shy and work against open sharing. The picture painted by the New Testament is of very crowded house churches; not tens of people, but not thousands of people either. Scores of people in a church seems to be the New Testament norm. For instance, the house church in Dura-Europa could easily hold 65 - 75 people. There were 120 in the upper room in Acts. A great diversity of spiritual gifts is seen in 1 Corinthians 14; it was not a micro church!

**PPT>>>**

### — The Elders' Role in Meetings—

**26. According to 1 Corinthians 14, what role should elders play in participatory phase of the meeting?** Amazingly, elders are never mentioned in this passage on the participatory aspect of church meetings.

Elders are needed to help keep the meeting edifying. The leaders may sometimes need to guide and prompt and encourage, taking on the role of emcee. They will also minister behind the scenes coaching and encouraging the brothers to be sure the meetings are edifying. For example, when lack of participation is a problem, the elders will need to lead out more to encourage input from others.

**Insight:** Edifying participatory church meetings do not just “happen”. Unlike traditional church services where everything is pre-planned and typed up in a bulletin, New Testament church meetings are more Spirit-led. However, some people over-react to the stifling confines of a worship service and run into the opposite ditch of anarchy. Church meetings are to be Spirit-led, but the Spirit partially uses elders to help make it edifying. The elders are behind-the-scene coaches, encouraging and training so that everyone operates from out of his spiritual gift.

### Examples of an Elder's Role in the Meeting

#### Elders & Edification

**27. What should be done if, week after week, few people contribute anything of significance during the participatory phase?** This is another example of where elders are needed. One of their jobs is to encourage the brethren during the week to prepare to share on the Lord's Day.

#### Elders & Singing

**If the singing/music in a church is really bad, whose job is it to try to make it more edifying?** Even though it is everybody's job, and especially those gifted in music, sometimes everybody's job is nobody's job. Ultimately, it is the elders' job to deal with the situation. The elders are the quality control men.

If most of the church only mumbles and mutters when singing, the elder should try to find out why this is. He should consult with those gifted in music. Perhaps hymnals or song books are needed. Perhaps the praise songs being sung are not of a musical style that is appealing to most of the church. Perhaps instrumental accompaniment is needed.

If the musicians play too loudly and drown out the singing, even though everyone else who notices the problem should speak to the musicians, it is ultimately the elders' duty to do so.

If a novice musician shows up whose "playing" is anything but edifying, it is the elders' job to rectify the situation. On the one hand a joyful noise is to be made and it is that good the unskilled person wants to participate. On the other hand, if it is so bad that it becomes unedifying, the situation must be dealt with in wisdom.

### Elders & Tongues

**Suppose someone regularly speaks in a tongue even though there is no interpreter present. Whose job is it to enforce the guidelines of 14:27-28?** Even though everyone should encourage the tongues speaker to not speak, it is ultimately the elders' job to be sure Scripture is obeyed.

### Elders & Teaching

Although the elders will normally most of the teaching, any gifted brother should potentially be allowed to bring a teaching also (so long as the elders judge him to be sound).

**All teachings must be for the "strengthening" of the church.** Some controversial teaching topics are better suited for other occasions (like a Wednesday p.m. Bible study). To be edifying, teachings should be true, inspirational, practical, with a clear application, and be of general interest. An example of unedifying teachings would be pet topics that are overemphasized.

### Other Factors to Consider About Teaching

**28. How can the participatory nature of a church meeting be reconciled with the need for the in-depth exposition of God's Word by gifted teachers (Mt 28:19-20, Ac 2:42, Ro 12:7, 1Co 12:28, Ep 4:11)?** There could be three phases to each Lord's Day meeting: Participatory Worship, In Depth Teaching, the Lord's Supper as a Holy Meal.

**PPT>>>** NAS **Matthew 28:19-20** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

**PPT>>>** NAS **Acts 2:42** And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching

...

**PPT>>>** NIV **Romans 12:6-7** We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach . . .

**PPT>>>** NAS **1 Corinthians 12:28** And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . .

**PPT>>>** NIV **Ephesians 4:11** It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers . . .

**PPT>>>** **Church Meetings — Versus — Ministry Meetings**

There is a difference between a ministry meeting and a church meeting. A ministry meeting is where typically one gifted person exercises his spiritual gift as a blessing for the church. Examples: The Bill and Gloria Gather's worship services, Bill Gothard's life seminars, Billy Graham's evangelistic meetings, etc. Super long teachings and seminars should be offered at times other than during the Sunday worship.

\*\*\*\***29. What caution does James 3:1 offer?** Just because there is an opportunity for any brother to offer a teaching does not mean that he necessarily should bring one.

**PPT>>>** NAS **James 3:1** Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

\*\*\*\***30. Based on 1 Timothy 1:3, what was one of Timothy's jobs at Ephesus?**

**PPT>>>** NAS **1 Timothy 1:3** Command certain men not to teach strange doctrines any longer.

Timothy's job was to prohibit the teaching of false doctrine. Just because any one of the brothers has the opportunity to teach, it does not follow that he can teach just anything he wants to. Any teaching that is contrary to the essentials of the faith is not to be allowed. A good indicator of the consensus of the church over the past two thousand years is the early creeds (such as the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed). These creeds are not authoritative in and of themselves. What is significant is that virtually every church group since these creeds were written has reached the same interpretations of those basic doctrines. All teachings must be within the bounds of historic Christian orthodoxy.

**If someone teaches grievous error in a church meeting, whose job is it to stop it?** The lure of an interactive meeting may be strong enough to draw in those with aberrant theology who are looking for a place to promote their unique doctrine. Following the biblical pattern of open meetings must not become an occasion for false teachings to flourish! The prevention and correction of error is precisely one reason elders are needed. Elders must be men who are mature and grounded in the Faith. They must detect and refute error when they hear it. Even though all the men in the church should take responsibility for dealing with the false teacher, it is ultimately the elders' duty. The elders are the quality control men.

The lure of a participatory meeting may be strong enough to draw in those with aberrant theology who are looking for a place to promote their unique doctrine. Following the biblical pattern of open meetings must not become an occasion for false teachings to flourish! The prevention and correction of error is precisely one reason elders are needed. Elders must be men who are mature and grounded in the Faith. They must detect and refute error when they hear it.

**31. Having an open format could conceivably attract heretics who would seek to advance their novel views. How should this be prepared for and handled?**

**32. What risk does a church take when meeting for a time of participative encouragement without an elder (1Co 14)?** There could be no one to detect and deal with false teachings. There could also be lack of leadership and lack of direction for the church. There could be no quality control at all, no prompting to begin on time, no coaching behind the scenes to keep things edifying, no one who take responsibility to prepare an edifying teaching in case everyone else comes unprepared.

**PPT>>>**

— Elders & Preaching —

**33. In modern thought, exactly how might a “lesson” (1Co 14:26, ESV) be different from “preaching”?** In modern thought, preaching is usually associated with the art of oratory; it is seen as a polished performance and is typically a monolog (a one way communication).

**Confusing:** Strangely enough, “preaching” (in the sense of evangelism) is never associated with New Testament church meetings! From either *euaggelizo* or *kerusso*, “preaching” in the New Testament is connected with evangelism and occurs outside of church meetings (and instead in synagogues or the market place). The one supposed exception is found in **Acts 20:7**.

**PPT>>>** KJV **Acts 20:7** And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

**PPT>>>** *dialegomai*. Yet even there (Acts 20:7) the actual Greek word used is *dialegomai*, which fundamentally means “consider and discuss, argue” (BAGD, p. 186), a reciprocal conversation. It is basis for our word “dialog.” The ESV renders Acts 20:7 as “Paul talked with them.”

Teaching, on the other hand, is popularly seen as more instructional and not as concerned with oratory or performing. The “lesson” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26 is from *didachen*, “teaching” (BAGD, p 192). Teaching is usually thought of as more interactive than preaching. Notice in the gospels that Jesus often employed the Socratic method of teaching, constantly questioning those he was teaching in an effort to guide and provoke their thinking.

**Note:** Preaching in church meetings was popularized by a man named Chrysostom (“golden mouth”) who lived in the late A.D. 300s, long after the New Testament era. Clearly, there are gifted preachers in the body of Christ. Much good comes from their ministries. However, large assemblies focused on one gifted individual properly should not be called church meetings.

Such meetings would really be more accurately classified as ministry meetings. Church meetings in the New Testament were relatively small (Roman villa sized), participatory, and not so focused on any one person.

Although preaching as we now know it was not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14, neither was it prohibited. A church may decide that at time of preaching is needed. If so, care must be taken that the preaching time does not squelch nor replace the opportunity for other brothers to bring teachings in the meeting.

### Elders & Punctuality

Relation-based churches are notoriously bad about starting late. If it is announced that a meeting will begin at a certain time, then the leaders need to be sure that it does start at that time. It is a matter of courtesy and respect for the value of other people's time. Arriving on time also shows respect. Consistently being late for a meeting is often a sign of passive aggression. At the very least it is rude and inconsiderate. One job of an elder is to be sure the meetings start on time and stay on track.

### Elders & Disruptive Visitors

Uninformed **guests** can easily hijack a meeting by unedifying remarks. **Egomaniacs** will try to take over. The **mentally unstable** will speak loudly and often, to the chagrin of the assembly. **Critics** may attack what the church does or believes in the meeting. Leaders are needed in such cases to restore order with wisdom and patience. **Visitors** must be prompted in advance of the divine guidelines found in 1 Corinthians 14 (see attached letter at end). An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! It may be appropriate to invite the critic to air his opinions to the elders later in private.. One idea is to allow only members to speak.

-----

### — Children's Church —

**34. Paul intended some of his letters to be read aloud to the entire church (Col 4:16). Based on Ephesians 6:1-3, what evidence is there that children remained in the church meeting with their parents? See also Matthew 19:13-15, Luke 2:41-50, Acts 21:5.**

When Jesus was twelve years old, he spent time with the elders, not a youth group! The New Testament pattern seems to be for children to be present in the meeting with their parents. However, very small children who begin crying loudly in the meeting need to be removed from the meeting by a parent until the child is quieted. Older children must be trained to sit and play silently so as not to disrupt the meeting. Some parents will be oblivious to this need and in such cases the leadership must speak to the parents in private to enlist their cooperation in controlling their children.

-----



**OBJECTION:** Some feel that the regulations of 1 Corinthians 14 do not apply to normal, weekly church meetings, but rather to a special, large gathering together of all the churches that comprise the church of the city. (This is derived from comparing 1 Corinthians 1:2 to 14:23.)

**ANSWER:** While this is certainly a theoretical possibility, it is fairly obvious that 1 Corinthians 11 - 14 is to be taken as a literary unit dealing with the Lord's Day meetings of the church. The 1 Corinthians 14 meetings flowed out of the 1 Corinthians 11b Lord's Supper gathering. Whatever Paul was describing, it was the normal, regular meeting of the church in Corinth. It is possible that there was only one house church in Corinth. As the church grew, other house churches would be formed and each would hold its own meetings. Further, there is no real scriptural warrant for regular, massive, city-wide church meetings. (The church in Jerusalem did hold at least one plenary session [Ac 15], but that was a unique response to a unique problem, and was not a Lord's Supper gathering nor a 1 Corinthians 14 meeting).

\*\*\*\* = Ask this question before having someone read the text aloud.

**Next Lesson:** E-mail the next set of discussion questions out to the class (or print them up and hand them out at the end of this lesson). Ask them to consider the issues, answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

**Teacher Preparation:** To help you prepare to teach this, go to [www.sermonaudio.com/ntrf](http://www.sermonaudio.com/ntrf), go to our series on Early Church Practice and find this lesson.

Stephen E. Atkerson  
www.NTRF.org  
Revised 02/10/17