

## 4. Participatory Meetings

**\*\*\*\*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 spontaneous and participatory. There was meaningful “audience” input. There was no preset agenda.

**SLIDE: “Everyone”**

In 1 Corinthians 14:26, the word “everyone” (or “each one”) is found.

**SLIDE: “Only One”**

Suppose the author had used the words “only one” instead. Which option would be more descriptive of modern worship services? How so?

**SLIDE: “Lord’s Command”**

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. 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.

**The \$64,000 Question:**

**SLIDE: How does this compare to *your* church meetings?**

**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 be sure our church meetings are not an abomination to the Lord!

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**1. BACKGROUND: Were first century Jewish synagogue meetings open to spontaneous input or closed to participation by those in attendance? Explain?**

**SLIDES (6): 1.) Acts 13:14-15 2.) 14:1 3.) 17:1-2 4.) 17:10 5.) 17:17 & 18:4 6.) 19:8**

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.

— Singing —

**SLIDE: Singing**

**2. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26, who picked the songs that the church sang?**

**Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16.** “Everyone” of the “brothers” had the opportunity to bring a song (“hymn” is from *psalmos*, “a song of praise”—BAGD, p. 891). How different this is from a church meeting today where only one man (the music director) picks and leads all the songs. Notice the “one another” aspects of the singing described in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

**SLIDE: Ephesians & Colossians**

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

**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.”

**Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26, how central should singing be to our church meetings?**

It is interesting that singing is tossed into the mix a very casual way. Seemingly, other things are of more importance. This is not to say that singing is unimportant, but perhaps some fellowships place too much of an emphasis on it?

**NOTES:** 1.) Expect some people to reject the biblical house church concept because there is no choir, no organ, and no minister of music. 2.) Some folks are adamantly against the use of instruments in church meetings, yet *psalmos* (1Co 14:26) fundamentally means “songs accompanied by a stringed instrument.” And, since instruments are not forbidden, and there is no pattern of specifically not using them, it is a freedom issue.

— Teaching —

**SLIDE: Teaching**

**3. What observations can you make about the role of “instruction” in a New Testament church meeting from 1 Corinthians 14:26?**

**A.) Teaching was tossed into the mix in the same cavalier way that singing was!**

Though teaching was (and is) an important ministry, it was not so critical that it was always scheduled ahead of time, nor that only one person was allowed to teach, in the 1 Corinthians 14 meeting. In fact, regularly scheduling teachers ahead of time may serve to squelch the Holy Spirit’s involvement in a 1 Corinthians 14 type of meeting. Perhaps a brother who is not scheduled to teach is impressed by the Lord to study and bring a teaching for a particular Sunday, but is precluded from so doing because someone was already penciled in as the “teacher *de jour*.” Or, perhaps the scheduled teacher has a bad week and does not prepare well, or is not walking in the Spirit, or on the way to church has a fight with his wife; yet because he is obligated to teach and “the show must go on,” he speaks when he otherwise would not have. The 1 Corinthians 14 meetings is not the time nor the place for in-depth teachings. Such should be given prominence at special ministry meetings (more on this below).

On the other hand, house church meetings can easily degenerate into a “pooling of ignorance.” While not scheduled ahead of time, teachings brought to the 1 Corinthians 14 meeting certainly do need to be prepared ahead of time. There simply is no substitute for the careful, systematic, in-depth study of Scripture in private and in advance of the meeting, and no excuse for not so doing (at least by those gifted in teaching).

**B.) “Everyone” of the “brothers” had the privilege of bringing an edifying “word of instruction” during the meeting, if he so desired.** However, for “each one” of the brothers potentially to be able to teach, any teaching would necessarily have to be of short duration. Long, in-depth teachings could be conducted at a separate time (like on a Wednesday night). There are exceptions to this, of course, as in **Acts 15:32**, when a traveling apostle spoke for a long period on the Lord’s Day.

**In many churches, just one man teaches on any given Sunday, and he is usually the only one who ever teaches. What does 1 Corinthians 14:26 indicate about such a practice?** The 1 Corinthians 14 meeting was participatory. “Each one” of the brethren had the opportunity to teach. Evidently, on some Sundays several brothers might have brought a teaching, and on other weeks perhaps no one did.

**C.) All teachings must be for the “strengthening” of the church.** Some controversial teaching topics might be better suited for other occasions (like a Wednesday P.M. Bible study). To be edifying, teachings should be true, inspirational, practical, have 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:**

**D. How can the cavalier mention of teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:26 be reconciled with other texts that suggest the importance of teaching (Mt 28:19-20, Ac 2:42, Ro 12:7, 1Co 12:28, Ep 4:11)?**

**SLIDE: Matthew 28:19-20**

**SLIDE: Acts 2:42 & Romans 12:7**

**SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 12:28 & Ephesians 4:11**

**SLIDE: Church Meetings Vs. Ministry Meetings**

Long, in-depth teachings could be scheduled at special ministry meetings devoted to teaching. There is a difference between a ministry meeting and a church meeting.

Ministry meetings is where on gifted person exercises his spiritual gift as a blessing for the church

**E.) \*\*\*\*What caution does James 3:1 offer?**

**SLIDE: 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.”

Just because there is an opportunity for any brother to offer a teaching does not mean that he necessarily should bring one.

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

**SLIDE: 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 are 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.

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

**SLIDE: 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. (ESV)

— Preaching —

**SLIDE: Preaching**

**4. In modern thought, exactly how might a "word of instruction" (1Co 14:26) 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). Strangely enough, "preaching" 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**.

**SLIDE: Acts 20:7**

**SLIDE: *dialegomai***

Yet even there the actual Greek word used is *dialegomai*, which fundamentally means "consider and discuss, argue" (BAGD, p. 186). It is basis for our word "dialog."

Teaching, on the other hand, is popularly seen as more instructional and not as concerned with oratory or performing. A “word of instruction” is from *didachen*, “teaching” (BAGD, p 192). Also, 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 always in small, in the home, participatory, and not focused on any one person.

### — Charismatic Gifts —

#### **SLIDE: Charismatic Gifts**

**5. Other activities listed in 1 Corinthians 14:26 are revelations, tongues and interpretations, yet in many churches no one is present who has these gifts (1Co 14:26). Why would the absence of such charismatic gifts not nullify these instructions about having a participatory meeting?** Because there could still be teaching, singing, testimony, prayer, etc. The principle of free participation still holds true. Not every gift will be present at every meeting. The imperative is that gifted brothers be allowed to speak, not that they must speak.

### — Other Appropriate Contributions —

#### **SLIDE: Other Appropriate Contributions**

1 Corinthians 14 is not an exhaustive listing of everything that could and should occur in a church meeting. Other appropriate activities include:

**SLIDE: prayer** (Ac 2:42, 1Co 14:14-15) & **public scripture reading** (1Ti 4:13)

**SLIDE: testimonies from missionaries** (Ac 14:26-28).

### — Edification —

#### **SLIDE: Edification**

**Again, 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. The brothers must take the initiative to ensure that they have positive, edifying contributions to make.

**6. What does “strengthen” (1Co 14:26) mean? See Hebrews 10:24-25.** From *oikodome*, (basis for the English words “domicile” & “economics”). It means “building up” (BAGD, 559); “edification” (NASV). Thayer pointed out that it is the action of one

who promotes another's growth in Christianity. Thus, any remarks (including teachings) made in a church meeting have to be designed to help the church. It must encourage, build up, strengthen, or edify the other believers present. Notice the emphasis on edification in **1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12**.

**SLIDE: Proverbs 25:11**

A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (NIV).

**SLIDE: 1 Peter 4:11**

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God (NIV).

**Words of Caution:**

1. Sometimes in small 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, that 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.

**APPLICATION:**

**SLIDE: 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 — and all the more as you see the Day approaching .”

We are to “**consider how**” (Heb 10:24-25) we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. To come unprepared to the 1 Corinthians 14 meeting is like coming to be in a wedding wearing street clothes when you were asked to wear a tuxedo (Mt 22:10-14). 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.

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.

**SLIDE:**

- Is there a **testimony** the Lord would have you to bring?
- Could you not purpose to begin a time of conversational **prayer**?
- Is there a **song** that would edify the church?
- Is there some subject or passage of Scripture to **teach** on?
- What has the Lord **shown you** this week in your time with Him?

**SLIDE:**

- 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)?

— A Worship Service —

**SLIDE: A Worship Service**

**7. Where does the New Testament state that the primary (or even secondary) purpose of a church meeting is to hold a “worship service”?** The New Testament never refers to a church meeting in such terms. To call it a “worship service” implies that the objective of the meeting is to worship God. The problem with this is that people will naturally assume that worship is the reason for the meeting, but then edification (which *is* a stated prerequisite) may not occur at all. If edification does occur, it is almost accidental, or at least incidental, and nobody misses it if it isn't there, because everybody assumes the objective to be worship. Certainly the church is edified through corporate worship, but that is only one way of achieving edification.

**SLIDE: Romans 12:1-2**

Romans 12:1-2 does make mention of a “spiritual service of worship” (NASV), but this refers to offering your body as a living sacrifice; it has nothing to do with a church meeting! Further, Jesus, in **John 4:21-24**, makes it clear that under the new covenant worship has nothing to do with any particular location or time; it transcends 11:00 AM Sunday morning and it is not localized in any church “sanctuary.”

**SLIDE: “Worship”**

There are primarily two Greek words in the New Testament for “worship.” The first is *proskuneo* and refers to an attitude of adoring awe toward God. It is humility toward the Father. It is reverence, appreciation, fear, and wonder. This attitude of inner devotion is very practically worked out in the second word for worship (*latreia*), which refers to a life-style of obedience and service. Worship is thus *both* an attitude and an action.

**SLIDE: Francis Scott Key hymn**

As Francis Scott Key penned in a hymn: “And since words can never measure, let my life show forth Thy praise.”

The Sunday gathering is for the benefit of the people present. It is not God who needs strengthening; He is not weak. The Lord doesn't need to be encouraged; He is not tired or discouraged. Jesus is not lacking in anything — but His people certainly are. It is to equip God's people to go out and worship and serve God another week (**Heb 10:24-25**). It is to motivate the elect to deeper worship. It is to recharge their spiritual batteries.

**Teacher's Note:** The gist of this lesson is finished at this point. However, the rest of the chapter is good supporting information to make the point that New Testament church meetings were spontaneous and participatory. Note that it 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!

### — Tongues —

#### **SLIDE: Tongues**

**\*\*\*\*8. In 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, what rules are there for any one who speaks in a tongue?**

**Why do you suppose tongues are capped off at three, maximum?** 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?** It must be "one at a time." Though the meetings are to be interactive, there is still to be order. See 14:40.

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

**What, in the guidelines for tongue speakers, shows the spontaneous and interactive nature of their meetings?**

**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 not interpreter was present, the tongue would not edify the church. Limiting it to three tongues gives room for other gifts to operate.

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

— Prophecy —

**SLIDE: Prophecy**

**\*\*\*\*10. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:29-33, what guidelines did Paul establish for prophecy?**

**SLIDE: 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22.**

**NOTE:** 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 Gruden (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988).

**NOTE:** 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.

**11. What in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33 indicates the spontaneous nature of their meetings?**

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

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

**What is the difference between prophecy and teaching? See Ro 12:6-7, 1Co 12:29.** Though they can be similar in effect (resulting in instruction), the two are different spiritual gifts.

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

**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).

## — The Role of The Women —

### **SLIDE: The Role of The Women**

**\*\*\*\*What role should women play in church meetings, according to 1 Corinthians**

**14:33b-35?** 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, women are not to address the gathered assembly.

### **SLIDE: Target**

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 a lack 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.

**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’s silence may be viewed at [www.NTRF.org](http://www.NTRF.org).

**13. 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 a problem 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 some 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. The point to be gleaned is that a church meeting is not supposed to be a one way communication. There is to be dialog, interaction, a give and take exchange between the speaker and the church.

## — Two Questions —

### **SLIDE: Two Questions**

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

**14. What were the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36 designed to do? See. 14:37.** These two questions constitute a rebuke. 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 —

**SLIDE: Artillery Picture**

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

**SLIDE: “Lord’s Command.”**

Some house-churchers seem wary of “agendas.” It is as if anyone with leadership inclinations or skills is somehow self-willed, pope-like, or evil. It is obvious that Paul had a “agenda”! We need to be about the Lord’s 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 nor authority to deviate from His plans.

— The Penalty —

**SLIDE: Penalty**

**\*\*\*\*15. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:38, what consequence does not recognizing this instruction carry?**

**APPLICATION:** We should be extremely cautious about subjecting our families to weekly local church meetings that are in violation of 1 Corinthians 14 (i.e., non-participatory).

— Three Imperatives —

**SLIDE: Three Imperatives**

**\*\*\*\*16. With what three imperatives did Paul close this chapter (1Co 14:39-40)?**

**SLIDE: Cemetery Picture**

There is order in a cemetery, but no life. Better life with a little disorder than order with no life!

17. Teacher’s note. Question 17 has been moved and follows question 20.

— The Setting —

**SLIDE: Church Pictures**

**18. Which context would better facilitate a 1 Corinthians 14 type of meeting, a small congregation meeting in a living room setting, or a large congregation meeting in a large, cavernous sanctuary/worship center? Why?**

1. The setting of the church meeting will largely determine what will take place in the meeting.
2. Large gatherings typically redirect the focus toward worship or evangelism, rather than mutual edification.
3. Large gatherings are just not conducive to the biblical objective of open participation in the meeting. For instance, one of people's greatest fears is public speaking.
4. Small groups foster and nurture mutual participation of every member of the body.

— The Emcee —

**SLIDE: Emcee Pictures**

**19. Where does 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 mention a moderator or emcee for the meeting? According to 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, what is the role of a pastor in such meetings?** It does not mention moderator nor emcee; the only moderator is Scripture (14:26b, 40). Neither does it state that the elders are to lead the meeting! Evidently the elders just blended into the woodwork and participated like everyone else. One would not know of their presence unless a problem arose in the meeting, in which case they would necessarily act to keep everything in harmony with the teachings of 1 Corinthians 14.

— Children's Church —

**JOKE:** A Sunday school teacher asked the children just before she dismissed them to go to church, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" To which one little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping."

**20. Paul intended some of his letters to be read aloud to the entire church (Col 4:16). Based on Ephesians 6:1-3, were children in New Testament church meetings, or were they shunted off to some place else? See Mt 19:13-15, Lk 2:41-50, Ac 21:5.**

When Jesus was twelve years old, he spent time with the elders, not a youth group!

— Conclusions —

**SLIDES: Conclusion & 4 points**

**17. What conclusions can be drawn from 1 Corinthians 14 about the way God desires church meetings to be conducted?**

1. Church meetings are to be **participatory**, spontaneous, and not dominated by any one person (1Co 14:26).
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).

3. Everything said or done in the meeting must be designed to **strengthen (edify)** the church (1Co 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 26, 31).
  4. This type of participatory meeting is not optional, not just interesting history, not just quaint information. It is the **“Lord’s command”** (1Co 14:37).
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**21. Read the chapters entitled “Participatory Meetings,” “Preaching & Teaching Ministries” and “Children In Church” in *House Church: Simple, Strategic, Scriptural*. What truths did you discover there that are not dealt with above that you want to share with the class?**

**— PRACTICAL PROBLEMS TO EXPECT —**

1. **Pew Potatoes:** Folks are conditioned to sit silently, 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!
2. **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.” Leaders need to remind the church that anything said in the meeting must be designed to build up the body, to encourage everyone else. Beware of “stream of consciousness” church meetings!
3. **Pooled Ignorance:** This is the opposite of bringing a teaching; it is sort of an anti-teaching. Rather than study a subject and bring a teaching, some folks will come unprepared and plop a question out before the gathered church for an answer. Discourage people from asking such questions to the church out of ignorance. That only edifies the person asking the question and is not designed to edify the church. It is too “me” oriented, to meet a personal need. Since no one will have studied the answer anyhow, the temptation will be to answer the question and pooled ignorance will likely abound.
4. **Over-Scheduled Meetings:** Those used to church bulletins will want to arrange teaching, music, etc. in advance. Beware of quenching the Spirit! It is clear from 1 Corinthians 14 that New Testament church meetings were spontaneous. Long, detailed, in-depth teaching series are best suited to another setting, like a Wednesday evening Bible study time.
5. **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

later, during the fellowship of the Lord's Supper or in a midweek study called for that purpose.

- 6. Population Control:** Meetings that are either too big or too small create their own set of hindrances to interactive gatherings. Too few people can seem dull. Too many people present will intimidate the shy and work against open sharing.
- 7. Worship Leaders:** Musicians are to facilitate the church's singing and worship, not control it. Beware of worship leaders who would take over the meeting and make it into a show.
- 8. 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.
- 9. The Emcee.** Some leaders will tend to want to emcee the meetings, as if they were Jay Leno. Perhaps such prompting will be needed in the infancy of a church, but in maturity this will not be needed. There is nothing wrong with silence occasionally. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide the assembly. Ideally, a visitor in a 1 Corinthians 14 meeting should not be able to tell who the elders are in a church. Unless there is a problem, the elders should just blend into the woodwork! Admittedly, lack of participation is a problem, so elders may need to lead out more in such cases to encourage input for others.
- 10. Children.** 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 taught 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.
- 11. False Teachings.** 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 interactive 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.
- 12. The men of the church are not walking with the Lord.** 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.

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**OBJECTION:** Some feel that the regulations of 1 Corinthians 14 do not apply to normal, weekly house church meetings, but rather to a special, large gathering together of all the house 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.

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## 4. Participatory Church Meetings

1. BACKGROUND: Were first century Jewish synagogue meetings open to spontaneous input or closed to participation by those in attendance? Explain? Compare Acts 13:14-15, 14:1, 17:1-2, 17:10, 17:17, 18:4 & 19:8.
2. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26, who picked the songs that the church sang? Ep 5:19, Col 3:16.
3. What observations can you make about the role of “instruction” in a NT church meeting from 1 Corinthians 14:26? Compare Jam 3:1, Mt 28:19-20, Ac 2:42, Ro 12:7, 1Co 12:28, Ep 4:11, 1Ti 2:11-15
4. In modern thought, exactly how might a “word of instruction” (1Co 14:26) be different from “preaching”?
5. Other activities listed in 1 Corinthians 14:26 are revelations, tongues and interpretations, yet in many churches no one is present who has these gifts. Why would the absence of these charismatic gifts not nullify the instructions about having a participatory meeting?

6. What does “strengthen” (1Co 14:26) mean? Compare Hebrews 10:24-25.
  
7. Where does the New Testament state that the primary purpose of a church meeting is to hold a “worship service”? See Romans 12:1-2, John 4:21-24.
  
8. In 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, what rules were there for any one who spoke in a tongue?
  
9. In 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, why was Paul so insistent that tongues be interpreted? Compare 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 5.
  
10. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:29-33, what guidelines did Paul establish for prophecy? See also 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22.
  
11. What in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33 indicates the spontaneous nature of their meetings?
  
12. Looking at 1 Corinthians 14:31, what was the purpose of prophecy in the meeting? See also 14:3, 4b, 5b.
  
13. What, even in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, further reveals the participatory nature of first century church meetings?



19. Paul intended for some of his letters to be read aloud to the entire church (Col 4:16). Based on Ephesians 6:1-3, were children present in New Testament church meetings, or were they shunted off to some place else? Compare Matthew 19:13-15, Luke 2:41-50, Acts 21:5.

17. What conclusions can be drawn from 1 Corinthians 14 about the way God desires church meetings to be conducted?

21. Read the chapters entitled "Participatory Meetings", "Preaching & Teaching" and "Children In Church" in *House Church: Simple, Strategic, Scriptural*. What insights did you discover there that are not dealt with above that you want to share with everyone else?