

The Book of 1 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: Orderly Worship and the Use of Gifts

1 Corinthians 14:1–40

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter teaches how the church is to use its gifts and conduct its worship, and it includes Paul's clear instruction about the roles of men and women in the assembly. What is doctrinally at stake includes the principle that worship exists to build up the body (14:26), the orderly and peaceable character of God reflected in worship (14:33, 40), and the God-given order that men, not women, are to lead and teach in the assembly (14:34–35). The teacher should present the governing principle of edification clearly, show how it makes intelligible, orderly worship far more valuable than impressive but unprofitable display, and handle the instruction about women in 14:34–35 with both clarity and grace. Paul grounds this not in passing custom but in God's order (as the Law also says) and in his own apostolic authority, declaring that what he writes is a command of the Lord (14:37). Understood with chapter 11 and with 1 Timothy 2, it teaches that the leading and public teaching roles in the mixed assembly belong to men. Present this as a matter of God-given role, not worth, and take care to honor the many vital ways women serve in the Lord's church.

At the same time, this chapter is richly formational. It calls each believer to come to worship as a contributor rather than a consumer, to engage the mind and not merely the emotions, to be mindful of the outsider, and to reflect the peaceable character of God by bringing order rather than confusion to the life of the body.

Aim, then, for worship that builds up and reflects God's character. Send students home thinking of worship as the family gathering to edify one another under God's good order, ready to contribute, mindful of the lost, and trusting God's design for the assembly. The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9; handle the role question respectfully, clearly, and without harshness.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul urges the Corinthians to “pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy,” because the one who prophesies “builds up the church,” while uninterpreted tongues edify only the speaker (14:1–5). Why does Paul rank the gifts by how much they build up the church, and what does this teach about the true purpose of everything that happens when God's people gather?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Establish the governing principle early, because it runs through the whole chapter: everything in worship is to build up the church. Paul ranks prophecy above uninterpreted tongues for exactly this reason, prophecy was understood and so edified the body, while uninterpreted tongues edified only the speaker.

Explain the test Paul applies. The question for any element of worship is not whether it is impressive or emotionally stirring, but whether it builds up the gathered body. Edification, not display, is the aim.

Note the link to chapter 13. Paul has just exalted love, and love seeks the good of others. Building up the church is simply love applied to worship.

Apply it. This reorients how we evaluate worship, away from what entertains or impresses, toward what genuinely strengthens the body in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Edification of the body as the governing aim of worship (14:1–5)
- Ranking gifts by how much they build up the church
- The test of worship: does it edify, not does it impress
- Building up the body as love applied to worship
- The true purpose of the gathered assembly

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul rank gifts by how much they build up the church?
- What is the true purpose of everything that happens when we gather?
- How does this connect to the love of chapter 13?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul measures the value of a gift by whether it helps others, not by how it makes the user feel. When you come to worship or serve in the church, how often is your focus on what builds others up rather than on your own experience or preferences? Where do you need to shift from consuming to contributing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the edification principle into the student's posture in worship. Many of us come mainly to receive, evaluating the service by our own experience.

Help students notice the consumer mindset: judging worship by personal enjoyment, preferences met, feelings stirred. Paul assumes every member comes ready to contribute to the good of others.

Reframe worship as participation. Even those without a public role build others up by their presence, encouragement, singing, attentiveness, and care.

Aim for one contributing step. Ask each student to name one way they could come ready to give and encourage rather than merely consume this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The consumer mindset versus the contributor mindset in worship
- Judging worship by personal enjoyment
- Every member as a participant who builds others up
- Coming ready to give and encourage

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more a spectator or a participant in worship?
- Where do you need to shift from consuming to contributing?
- What is one way you could build others up this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says he would rather speak “five words with my mind ... than ten thousand words in a tongue,” so that others may be instructed, insisting that worship engage the understanding and not just stir up feelings (14:6–19). Why does Paul place such a high value on being understood and on the mind being engaged in worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring out Paul’s striking preference in 14:19: five intelligible words over ten thousand in a tongue, so that others may be instructed. Understanding matters more than impressiveness.

Explain the reasoning. A gift that no one understands cannot teach, encourage, or correct anyone. Worship is meant to engage the mind so that people grasp the truth and are built up by it.

Stress the role of the mind in worship. Paul insists on praying and singing with both spirit and mind (14:15). Christian worship is not a matter of stirring feelings while bypassing understanding; truth grasped is what transforms.

Apply it. We should prize clarity and understanding in our teaching, singing, and praying, so that worship feeds the mind and not only the emotions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The high value of being understood in worship (14:19)

- Worship that engages the mind, not only the emotions (14:15)
- Truth grasped as what builds up and transforms
- Clarity prized over impressiveness
- The mind as essential to genuine worship

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul value five understood words over ten thousand unintelligible ones?
- What role does the mind play in true worship?
- Why is being understood so important when the church gathers?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul wants both mind and spirit fully involved in worship, not empty ritual or mere emotion. Is your own worship more often thoughtful and engaged, or distracted and going through the motions? What would it look like to bring your whole mind and heart to worship this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the engaged mind into the student's own worship. It is easy to be present in body while absent in mind.

Help students assess honestly. Is their worship thoughtful and attentive, or distracted, routine, and emotionally passive?

Offer practical help. Engaging the whole mind and heart might mean preparing beforehand, paying attention to the words we sing and pray, and actively meditating rather than drifting.

Aim for one act of engagement. Ask each student to name one way they will bring their whole mind and heart to worship this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Engaged worship versus distracted, routine worship
- Bringing the whole mind and heart to worship
- Attentiveness to the words we sing and pray
- Practical steps toward engaged worship

Discussion Prompts

- Is your worship more often engaged or going through the motions?
- What distracts you most when you gather?
- How could you bring your whole mind and heart this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says that if an outsider or unbeliever comes in and finds clear, understandable truth being declared, “the secrets of his heart are disclosed,” and “he will fall on his face and worship God and declare that God is really among you” (14:23–25). What does this teach about how our gatherings should take into account those who do not yet believe, and about worship as a witness to outsiders?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open up 14:23–25. Paul imagines an outsider entering the assembly. If he meets chaos, he concludes they are out of their minds; if he meets clear, understandable truth, the secrets of his heart are exposed and he falls down and declares that God is really among them.

Draw out the principle. Our gatherings are not sealed off from the world; outsiders come in, and what they encounter matters. Clear, orderly, truth-filled worship can be a powerful witness.

Stress that this is not about performing for visitors but about not needlessly bewildering them. Worship that is intelligible and orderly lets the truth itself do its convicting work.

Apply it. We should gather with an awareness that the lost may be present, and conduct ourselves so that they encounter God and his truth clearly, not confusion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Awareness of outsiders and unbelievers in the assembly (14:23–25)
- Worship as a witness through clear, understandable truth
- The truth itself convicting the visitor’s heart
- Order and intelligibility that do not needlessly bewilder
- Gathering mindful that the lost may be present

Discussion Prompts

- How should the presence of outsiders shape our gatherings?
- How can worship become a witness to an unbeliever?
- What lets the truth do its convicting work in a visitor?

Question 6**Student Question:**

How aware are you of visitors and outsiders when the church gathers, of whether a newcomer would sense that God is truly among us? What is one way you could help make our worship and fellowship more welcoming and intelligible to someone who does not yet know Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes awareness of the outsider into the student's own attentiveness. We can grow so comfortable that we forget how our gatherings feel to a newcomer.

Help students consider the visitor's experience: Would a newcomer feel welcomed, understand what is happening, sense that God is among us, or feel like an outsider looking in?

Encourage practical hospitality. Noticing the visitor, explaining what is unfamiliar, and offering genuine welcome are simple ways to make worship intelligible and inviting.

Aim for one act of welcome. Ask each student to name one way they could make worship and fellowship more welcoming to someone who does not yet know Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Attentiveness to how our gatherings feel to a newcomer
- Hospitality and genuine welcome
- Explaining the unfamiliar to visitors
- Making worship intelligible and inviting

Discussion Prompts

- How aware are you of visitors when the church gathers?
- Would a newcomer sense that God is among us? Why or why not?
- What is one way you could welcome an outsider this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul directs that worship proceed in an orderly way, with people taking turns, with interpretation, with self-control, "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace," concluding that "all things should be done decently and in order" (14:26–33, 40). What does this teach about God's own character and about how that character should be reflected in the way the church conducts its worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring out the order Paul prescribes in 14:26–33. Each contribution should build up; tongues require an interpreter and a limit; prophets speak in turn and weigh what is said; people exercise self-control. The meeting is to be orderly, not a chaotic scramble.

Anchor it in God's character. Paul gives the deepest reason in 14:33: God is not a God of confusion but of peace. The order of worship reflects the very nature of the God we worship.

Draw out 14:40 as the summary: all things should be done decently and in order. This is not stiffness for its own sake but fitting, peaceable conduct that serves edification.

Apply it. A church's worship should reflect the orderly, peaceable God it serves, with self-control and mutual consideration rather than competition and confusion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Orderly worship with self-control and mutual consideration (14:26–33)
- God as a God of peace, not confusion (14:33)
- Worship reflecting the very character of God
- All things done decently and in order (14:40)
- Order in the service of edification, not stiffness for its own sake

Discussion Prompts

- What does orderly worship reveal about God's character?
- Why does Paul ground order in the nature of God himself?
- What does it mean to do all things decently and in order?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul links orderly worship to the very nature of God, who is a God of peace and not confusion. Where in your own life, your habits, relationships, or service in the church, do you tend to bring confusion or disorder rather than peace? How might reflecting God's orderly, peaceable character change that?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes God's peaceable character into the student's own life. We are called to reflect the God of peace, not to sow confusion.

Help students locate where they bring disorder: chaotic habits, drama in relationships, unreliability in service, a divisive tongue. Disorder in us works against the peace God loves.

Point to the transforming pattern. As we reflect God's orderly, peaceable character, our homes, relationships, and service become more stable, dependable, and life-giving.

Aim for one step toward peace. Ask each student to name one area where they could bring order and peace rather than confusion this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reflecting the God of peace in our own lives
- Locating where we bring confusion rather than order
- Peace and order in habits, relationships, and service
- A divisive tongue versus a peaceable one

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to bring confusion rather than peace?
- How might reflecting God's peaceable character change that?
- What is one step toward order and peace this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul instructs that "the women should keep silent in the churches ... they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says," and he insists that what he writes is "a command of the Lord" (14:34-37). Understood alongside the headship principle of chapter 11, what is Paul teaching about the roles of men and women in the assembly, why does he ground it in God's order and his own apostolic authority rather than mere custom, and how can the church honor this teaching clearly while deeply valuing the many vital ways women serve in Christ's church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest and most sensitive doctrinal block of the lesson; handle it with clarity, conviction, and grace. Paul instructs that the women should keep silent in the churches and are not permitted to speak but should be in submission, as the Law also says, and that anything to be asked should be asked at home (14:34-35).

Read it with chapter 11 and 1 Timothy 2. This is not an isolated or merely cultural rule. It flows from the headship principle Paul taught in chapter 11, and it matches his instruction in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that a woman is to learn quietly and is not to teach or exercise authority over a man. Together these passages teach that the public leading and teaching roles in the mixed assembly are given by God to men.

Stress the ground Paul gives. He does not appeal to passing custom but to God's established order (as the Law also says) and to his own apostolic authority, declaring in 14:37 that what he writes is a command of the Lord. This places the teaching on the firm footing of divine authority, not first-century preference, and it is why the church holds to it across cultures and centuries.

Clarify the scope carefully, so the teaching is neither softened away nor overextended. The context is the public assembly of the church, where the authoritative leading and teaching of the gathered body is in view. Paul is not saying women have no voice, no value, or no ministry; in chapter 11 he assumed women pray and take part, and elsewhere Scripture honors women teaching other women and children (Titus 2:3-5) and privately helping to instruct, as Priscilla did with Aquila (Acts 18:26). What is reserved for men is the role of leading and publicly teaching over men in the assembly, including serving as preachers, elders, and deacons.

Frame it as role, not worth, exactly as in chapter 11. Men and women are equally made in God's image, equally redeemed, equally gifted, and equally precious to God. The difference is one of God-assigned role within his good order, not of value or ability. Honor warmly the countless vital ways women serve and strengthen the Lord's church.

Acknowledge the cultural difficulty with grace. Many sincerely struggle with this teaching, and our age finds it especially hard. Commend it gently as God's good design, received on the authority of the Lord's command, and trust that God's order, lived in love, blesses the whole church. Avoid both a harsh, dismissive tone and any embarrassed explaining-away of what the Lord has commanded.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Women not to lead or publicly teach over men in the assembly (14:34–35)
- The teaching grounded in God's order and headship, not passing custom (chapter 11; 1 Timothy 2:11–12)
- Paul's apostolic authority: what he writes is a command of the Lord (14:37)
- The scope as the public assembly, not a denial of women's voice, value, or ministry
- Women honored in teaching women and children and in private instruction (Titus 2:3–5; Acts 18:26)
- A matter of God-given role, not worth, with full equality of value and gifting
- Receiving the teaching with clarity and grace amid cultural difficulty

Discussion Prompts

- How does this instruction connect to the headship principle of chapter 11?
- Why does Paul ground it in God's order and the Lord's command rather than mere custom?
- How can the church honor this teaching while deeply valuing the ways women serve?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. Paul calls the church to pursue love, to build one another up, to welcome the outsider, and to worship in the good order God designed. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Corinthians 14 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone asks students to gather the chapter and name one way Christ is forming them. Let them speak first.

If needed, recall the movements: pursuing love, building up the church, engaging the mind, welcoming the outsider, orderly worship, and God's good order in the assembly.

Aim for a heart that loves the gathered body and trusts God's design. Where the role teaching has been hard, steer toward trust and grace rather than resentment.

Push toward the specific and close in prayer that students would come to worship ready to build others up and to honor God's good order this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal formation through love-shaped, orderly worship
- Coming to build up the body
- Trusting God's design for the assembly
- Moving from general agreement to a specific, named response

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter pressed on you most, and why?
- What is the one truth from 1 Corinthians 14 you most need this week?
- What named step is God asking you to take in response?