

46-14-01.wpd—An Early Church Service meeting, participation, sharing, body life
1Co.14:26

Jesus works through His people as they participate in ministry.

INTRODUCTION: (1 Corinthians 14:26-31 as Scripture Reading)

–**Read text: 1Co.14:26**, *What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.*

“*What....?*” (these were concluding remarks) “*Brothers*” (it’s like the word, *kindred*: “You’re my *brother*, whether you’re my brother or sister.”)

– **A unique passage: *What*** was an early church service like? ***Where*** was it held? ***When*** did it change? ***How*** can we retrieve its vitality?

I. A Practice of Coming Together (“when you come together”)

- A. Christ's **promised presence**-- **Mt.18:20**, For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. [Someone telephoned **President Roosevelt's church** and asked: “*Do you expect the President in church this Sunday?*” The rector answered, “*I can't promise it, but we expect God, and that should be incentive enough for a reasonably large attendance.*”]
- B. But the emphasis is not just on *attendance*.... It's on **attention** [**Why I stopped attending church** after working all night: I couldn't stay awake!]
- C. **Read Acts 20:7-11**, On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don't be alarmed,” he said. “He's alive!” Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. (Sleepy Eutychus couldn't blame Paul's *preaching* [it was a **synagogue-like dialogue** with congregational participation]. Maybe it was the *oil smoke* from the lamps, or a **hard day's work**, but not the *lively discussion* that was going on!)

TRANS: Poor Eutychus? He wasn't enough involved to stay awake, but Jesus is present when we meet, not just *to observe*, but **to join in**. Through us, by the Holy Spirit inside us, Jesus participates. The early church provided Him that opportunity, and so should we today!

II. A Participation among the People of God (the *laity*: [people])

- A. “*everyone has*” something to share [**testimony of early church father Tertullian** (160-230), “In our Christian meetings we have plenty of songs, verses, sentences and proverbs. After hand-washing and bringing in the lights, each Christian is asked to stand forth and sing, as best he can, a hymn to God, either of his own composing, or one from the Holy Scriptures.”]
- B. **Participation should be rich**– **Col.3:16**, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
 1. “*a hymn*”– *psalm* (poems or songs, like those composed by a simple shepherd boy on a Judean hillside)
 2. “*a word of instruction*”– *teaching* (explaining a Scripture verse or passage, as it's done in a Bible study)
 3. “*a revelation*”– *unveiling* of wisdom or truth (enlightenment or an insight often through a parable or an illustration [like Rhea Zakich's **Mrs. Butterworth bottle** stories])
 4. “*a tongue or an interpretation*”– *tongues* was an *attention-getter*, but Paul elevated *prophecy*– **1 Co.14:4**, He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.
- C. **Freedom should have order**– **1 Cor 14:31** For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. [**Theologian Charles Hodge** wrote: “This passage, and indeed the whole chapter, presents a lively image of an early Christian assembly. Although there were officers in every church, appointed to conduct the services and especially to teach, yet as the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were not confined to them or to any particular class, any member present who experienced the working of the Spirit in any of its extraordinary manifestations, was authorized to use and exercise his gift.”]

TRANS: The *laity*, God's people in the early church participated freely and with order. Today **Jesus is calling** across all denominational lines for a **return to the practice of lay participation**. **He works through His people as they participate in ministry**, as this text describes.

III. A Purpose Beyond Self-Interest [“*All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.*”]

- A. **Leadership** was given not to build up the Body, but to equip the Body to build itself up in love– **Eph 4:11-16**, It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors

and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

- B. The need for *mutual ministry*: we do not meet for ourselves alone—**Heb10:24**, 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.

CONCLUSION:

–**Jesus works through His people as they participate in ministry.** As a leader in the Church, and as a pastor in this congregation, *my job* and *my ministry* is to help other believers fulfill their calling to be the Lord's servant or *ministers*. {repeat last sentence}

–Lay participation in church meetings was a relatively new concept in those early days. But it has been a dynamic force in every revival in the Church's history since then. Let's recapture this important NT and early church practice of the involvement of God's people during the “sharing” times in our church services. Let's allow Jesus to speak through us to each other by our participation in sharing.

Scripture Reading:

1 Corinthians 14:26-31 (NIV)

26What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

27If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.

28If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

29Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.

30And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

31For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.