Reexamining the First Principles of the Local Church

Weeks 4 + 5: 1 Corinthians 14

Over these next two weeks we'll look at another NT passage that is foundational for a biblical understanding of the local church—namely, 1 Corinthians 14. But before we do that, let's review what we've seen over these last several weeks.

01: First Principles We've Identified So Far

Preliminary Principles and Core Presuppositions

1. We want WPBC to be a lighthouse for the Lord Jesus in in North County. God is working in peoples' hearts all around us, which means that we have a tremendous opportunity to be an oasis of the living water of God's Word in this community.

2. God blesses His way, not man's way. He blesses the biblical blueprint, not our skill or creativity (Acts 2:41, 47, 6:7; Eph 4:11–16).

3. The right starting point is not what people want in a church, but what Christ wants in His church, because He is the Lord of the church (Rev 1–3).

4. We can't assume on generalities—e.g., '*The Bible says do all to the glory of God, and that's what we're doing!*' Biblical faithfulness is not the result of good intentions (let alone assumptions), but of the intentional effort to tie everything we do to the Word of God.

5. The essentials can never be taken for granted. We never get to a point where we can move on from the basics. The most stable and successful institutions—whether it's a family, a business or a church—are those that are most solidly grounded in what's most important.

Principles from the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20)

1. The overwhelming bulk of Great Commission effort is found in teaching disciples (lit. "learners") the whole counsel of God, which takes place in the local church. Therefore, the local church exists to be an educational institution, designed to teach believers the Word of God.

2. Following that, the church exists solely for the truth of God's Word. Many things can be found in the church that can be found in other human organizations—like social welfare, relationships, and even entertainment. But because the church exists for the truth, all those things are incidental by default, secondary at best, and must exist in the service of the truth. In the church, they do not and must not ever exist for their own sake.

Principles from Acts 6:1–7

1. The local church exists to educate; it exists for biblical instruction. At all costs and no matter the expense, the ministry of the Word in the local church must remain the priority.

2. The elders are the church's leaders, and their responsibilities are prayer, the ministry of the Word, facilitating ministry, and establishing policy in the local church.

3. Deacons are biblically-qualified servants[1] who are responsible for managing the church's material assets to ensure A) that its ministries continue and B) that the ultimate priority of the ministry of the Word is protected.

4. The church is not a collection of competing factions or special interest groups. The church is one body—the body of Christ—and the Lord's people are members of it and of one another.

02: What should happen in our worship services? (1 Corinthians 14)

What do you think of when you think of 1 Corinthians 14? The chances are that Paul's *actual* concern in this chapter is not what comes to your mind.

The Corinthian church was full of problems, the bulk of which could be directly traced back to the self-centeredness of individual members (cf. 1:11–13, 3:1–4, 4:6–10, 6:1, 8:1–12, 11:17–22). Unsurprisingly, those problems had spilled over into their worship services, and Paul addresses those problems in this chapter. As a result, no passage in the NT has more to say about the corporate assembly than 1 Corinthians 14. Here Paul presents the foundational priorities that must govern *every aspect* of a church's worship service. When the apostle's instructions are honored and God's principles are governing, a worship service can truly be called "biblical" and glorifying to Christ.

Before moving on to the questions, read the entire chapter of of 1 Corinthians 14.

1. Read the first two words of verse 1 and all of verse 40. What are the two primary principles that must govern every aspect of our worship services?

2. The Greek noun *oikodomé* means "edification," or "a building/structure." The verb form of that word, *oikodoméo*, means "I edify, build up, construct," etc. Based on what we can see in the English, how many times do these words appear in the passage?

[1] Acts 6:3b; see also 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

3. How many explicit references are there in the chapter to ‘learning’ or ‘instruction’ as the goal?

4. In the context, are ‘edification’ and ‘learning’ the same thing, or two different things?

5. How many references are there in this passage to intelligibility, the mind, understanding, clarity of what is communicated, etc.?

6. How many references are there in this passage to the whole church—‘others,’ ‘the church,’ ‘all,’ ‘everyone,’ etc.?

7. In every instance of ‘the whole church’ in this chapter, what is Paul’s singular concern?

8. When it comes to the individual worshiper, what does Paul repeatedly prohibit in this passage as entirely inappropriate for the corporate worship service? How does this inform our understand of what Paul means in verse 4?

9. As cessationists, 1 Corinthians 14 is our ‘trump card’ when it comes to tongues. But in light of Paul’s main concern, how are tongues not really the point of this chapter?

10. There are at least three secondary principles for corporate worship in this passage, the first of which is found in verses 27 and 31. What is it?

11. Besides mitigating against the ‘orderliness’ that God requires, what is the impact on other believers when someone doesn’t regard this principle in the assembly?

12. Another secondary principle isn’t explicit but is still implied in verses 34–35. What is it?

13. A third secondary principle is found in verses 21–25. What is it?

14. What are the four aspects of corporate worship that Paul names in this passage (v.26)? Is this list *prescriptive*—as in, '*These must be aspects of your worship services*'—or does it seem like Paul is presenting a list of examples of things that might be or are common in corporate worship?

15. If verse 26 is *not* prescriptive and Paul's point in the verse *isn't* to tell us what to include in our services, what *is* his point? How does this cohere with everything else in the chapter?

16. In light of the context, what does it mean in application when Paul tells us to 'pursue love' (v.1) in our corporate worship services? In the context, what does *not* pursuing love look like?

17. In the context, what does it mean in application when Paul tells us to 'do all things decently and in order' (v.40)? What would an 'indecent, disorderly' worship service look like?

18. Verse 33 is one of those well-known Bible verses that everyone is familiar with. In the context, what does Paul mean by it?

19. In your own words, give a one- or two-sentence summary of Paul's point in this passage.