

Week of July 22-28

SPONTANEOUS ORDER

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Corinthians 14

Spontaneous order? That certainly sounds like a contradiction of terms, doesn't it? You can be spontaneous or you can have order but how can you have both? Well, you can if God is in it. At least, that's what Paul certainly seems to imply in today's chapter reading.

As we have pointed out in the devotionals on 1 Corinthians, the church at Corinth had a number of problems that Paul had to address. One of these was the chaotic nature of their worship services. Because the church was so enamored with speaking in tongues, it seems like everyone who could was doing so at the same time, showing off their so-called spirituality. Also, people were shouting out in the services, asking questions, disrupting speakers. The services were more of a circus than they were a sacred gathering of God's people. When unbelievers came in, Paul feared they would conclude that the church was filled with crazy people and never get a chance to meet with God.

Paul's solution to the problem was to provide a balance for the church, a spontaneous order if you will. He didn't want to stop the move of the Holy Spirit. He challenged the church to be eager to prophecy and expressly told the church not to forbid people from speaking in tongues (14:39). Paul also expected that when they came together, each member would have something to contribute: *"When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation."* This implies that the services were not preplanned events where a few did ministry and the rest spectated. There seems to have been no set "order of service" other than that directed by the Holy Spirit. There was a freshness and spontaneity to the services where the Holy Spirit used everyone who was available and the gifts were in operation.

At the same time, although there may not have been an order of service, Paul certainly advocated for order in the service. He allowed only two or three messages in tongues. They had to come one at a time and each was to be followed by an interpretation. He also allowed only two or three prophets to speak, one at a time, with time given to evaluate what was said according to the Word of God. Questions were no longer to be shouted out in the services. Since God was not a God of disorder or confusion but of peace, the church's services were to be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Spontaneous order! There is spontaneity in that the creative God moves in infinitely diverse ways. There is order because He is not a God of confusion and chaos. Spontaneous order! It is possible when the Spirit directs the service, empowers the saints, and gifts all to take part so that God is glorified, the church edified and the lost hear a clear and orderly presentation of the gospel.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: As you prepare for next Sunday's worship service, spend time in worship, prayer and the Word before you get to the service so that you are ready to participate and not spectate. Be open to God's Spirit working through you in an orderly spontaneity.

Take-a-way: *Spontaneous order is possible when we reflect the creative God of order.*