

## Why We Do What We Do In Vineyard Worship

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Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle Series

1 Cor. 14

You know, before I get started I just wanted to share a report of a few things that have happened this week at the church that might be an encouragement to some of you. Of first importance is a meeting that I had with pastors of a number of the large churches here in Central Ohio. For those of you who have been here for a little while, you may recall that last year I hosted a meeting for Central Ohio pastors here at Vineyard. And I did that again this past week. There were just wonderful men involved – Lafayette Scales from Rhema Christian Center; Dr. Timothy Clarke from First Church of God; Dennis McCallum from Xenos; Bob Huffaker from Grove City Church of the Nazarene; along with a number of other pastors, both in the African American community as well as the White community.

And I just want to report to you that the sense of camaraderie, the sense that we need to bring our churches together, to work together in this city for the cause of Christ was so strong in that room. And there was a healing and reconciliation of some historically damaged relationships between churches. The sense of unity was so strong that to a man every pastor said, “Can we get back together soon for deeper fellowship and to hear together from God what God is saying to the larger churches in this community.” And I just think that what the Lord is producing here, in terms of the relationships between the larger churches in Central Ohio, has really never been

seen before. This is a new thing. And I think we are in this city. That's something to cheer about.

Secondarily, at our meeting was a pastor from one of the world's largest churches. I had the extraordinary privilege of spending half a day with William Kumuyi, a pastor of Deeper Life Bible Church, centered in Lagos, Nigeria. Pastor Kumuyi got his Ph.D. in mathematics and taught math at the university level. He started a Bible study while he was a math professor at the university with 15 students in 1974. It grew to about 5000 students by 1982, so he decided to start a church.

Well, the church took off. The spirit of God fell on the church in the mid-1980's. Growth just exploded. Pastor Kumuyi now oversees a network of churches throughout Nigeria numbering over 1 million Christian believers. His own church in Lagos, Nigeria has 120,000 members. The church building seats 15,000. He does two services each weekend. And he doesn't let people come to the main church except once a month. He is holding crusades in 40 different nations in Africa. He said to me, "Rich, we gather about 100,000 people together for a crusade. Maybe you could come and help us out?"

So I said, "Well, William, what would an American pastor do in Africa?"

He said, "Well, every day we have pastors' meetings and you could give instruction to our pastors about things like church growth."

I just laughed. I said, “And what exactly would I say to your pastors?”

He said, “Well, you could teach the Bible.”

I said, “I can do that.”

It was a fantastic week. And you may be hearing more about some of our work with Pastor Kumuyi in the future. So, pray for our city and the unity in the relationships in the churches. Because as the body of Christ gets healed, as all the mistrust and historic hurts get confessed and forgiven, the church’s impact on the community is only going to grow.

Well, I’ve been doing this series on worship and today I’d like to talk about what public worship ought to look like. Listen, we all approach the issue of worship out of our particular church backgrounds – whether we are reacting against what we’ve experienced in the past that we view negatively, or we are reacting in favor of positive experiences that we’d like to repeat again. Many of us have a church background that we use to measure worship in public.

But we also have a temperamental bias. Some of us really prefer a high degree of order in life and some like lots of mess. This carries over in our view of worship and what’s appropriate and inappropriate. Someone I know had a relative that was extreme in her demand for orderliness. When this woman was a child and would visit this particular relative, she had to sit on the floor on a piece of plastic because

children are dirty. The relative didn't want her to mess up the furniture. Everything the child touched would be immediately wiped off with a rag. The relative would even clean her glass table with rubbing alcohol to make sure it was sterile.

Wouldn't you feel like a valuable human being if everything you touched got immediately sterilized with alcohol?

Some people have a high degree of need for order. And this can sometimes carry over in their perception of order in public worship.

Other people, typically teenagers, have a much lower need for orderliness. It does seem that there is somewhat of a direct relationship between a person's age and their desire for predictability and order. Typically, the older a person is the more order they like, even in public worship. And the younger a person is, the more they are willing to tolerate disorder and a bit of a mess.

Last week I mentioned other factors beyond temperament and church background and age that affect a person's approach to public worship. Culture, education, the perspective on the scriptures all do.

Today, what I would like to look at are some trans-cultural principles, some principles that apply whether you live in Nigeria, or the United States, whether you are old or young, ordered or disordered. The apostle Paul gives us some universal guidelines

for public worship in the 14 chapter of 1 Corinthians. I've called today's talk, "Why We Do What We Do in Vineyard Worship" Let's pray.

*1 Cor. 14:1-5: Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. 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.*

Now, before we plunge in to the text, I do want to make a point that I've made in a number of prior sermons – that is that most of us are very bad readers and hearers of the Bible. We tend to selectively read those texts that fit our temperament and preferences, our biases. And we over look those texts that don't fit our temperaments and our biases.

For example, there are always some folks in the church who are utterly uncorrectable. They turn the grace of God into license to do what they please. Their sex lives are out of control. What comes out of their mouths is totally out of control. Their spending habits are out of control. They are operating entirely in the flesh most of the time. There is very little fruit of the Holy Spirit. And their favorite verse in the

Bible, which they repeat to themselves all the time, is Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Then there are other people with the weak consciences who feel terrible about some things that are not sins at all. They are over scrupulous. They are constantly guilty. They are the over introspective ones. Well, they never read Romans 8:1. They spend most of their lives in the book of Hebrews, specifically chapters 10 and 12 where they keep wondering if they’ve committed the sin of Esau for which no repentance was possible. They are constantly wondering if they’ve committed the unforgivable sin.

Well, friends, this issue of selective reading particularly applies today as we draw principles from 1 Cor. 14. Listen, those of you who are coming from a conservative evangelical church background or a mainline Protestant background, you may really like 1 Cor. 14 because there are lots of verses in here about the need for order in public worship. So you love 1 Cor. 14, which reads, “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” If something strikes you as disorderly, you immediately run to verse 40 and insist on order in the service.

But I would remind the conservatives in our audience that 1 Cor. 14 was written as a collection to extreme disorder in a worship service, along with gluttony which was surrounding the Lord’s Table. There appeared to be an unholy competition between people regarding who was going to prophesy next. And there also appeared to be a great deal of loud speaking in tongues without any interpretation. 1 Cor. 14 was

written as a collection for excesses, for certain extravagances that were present in the Corinthian church.

And I would say to conservative evangelicals, and I say this with all affection, that where are the extravagances, the excesses, the liberties that would ever need correction? The need for correction may merely indicate that someone is alive. Anyone who is alive, any living thing, needs correction and redirection at times. Children need correction and redirection and so do adults. The only people I know that never need correction are dead people. They are never guilty of excess or extravagance, taking liberties. And dead worship never needs correction either.

Let me turn the guns on some of my charismatic friends here. There are some of you who are just straining at the bit in worship. I mean you just want to let it rip. You want to just blow the lid off. Let's just exercise our liberty. Let me leap; let me jump; let me dance; let me carry on. Well, for you, you need to underline other verses in 1 Cor. 14. For example, you ought to underline v. 12, "So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, [literally, it reads "since you are zealous"] be zealous in gifts that edify the church."

If you want to be zealous about something, Paul is saying, don't be just zealous about your own individual liberty and what will give you the most freedom. Be zealous; really go after what would build other people up in the church.

Do you remember last week, my message from 2 Samuel 6, I said there are some warnings, some words that need to be heard by charismatics and others that need to be heard by conservative evangelicals. The same thing is true this week. Those of you coming from a more evangelical background, a non-charismatic background, you ought to underline in your bibles the following verses: v. 1, v. 18, vv. 24-25, and v. 39.

Those of you not coming from a charismatic background, here's the way you ought to read 1 Cor. "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit..."

V. 18: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."

V. 39: "Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues."

See, it just depends on where we put the emphasis.

Well, what are the principles? The first question one should ask of any Christian worship is "Is the worship spirit-filled?" "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." The assumption of the apostle Paul in



bringing correction was of a worship service in which the Holy Spirit was welcomed into the service and accommodated.

How do you measure worship? Not just by the quality of the singing, the quality of the band, whether the mix in the sound is good or whether worship uses traditional hymns, or contemporary choruses, or choirs, organs or guitars. The trans-cultural question that is behind all New Testament worship is this: Is the worship spirit-filled? Is there elbow room in worship for God? After all of our planning and our preparation is there room in this service to accommodate God and God's spirit?

You can tell whether there is room for God or not; whether worship is spirit-filled or not by measuring the sense of vibrancy, the sense of vitality. When worship is spirit-filled, there is a sense of life. You can see it in the people. There is a sense of expectancy. People expect during worship to meet with God.

Let me ask you an honest question: Do you expect during worship here at VCC to connect with God? This whole business of whether worship is spirit-filled is not so mysterious. One can feel these things. One can discern these things. You can see it in the body postures of individuals in the congregation. If most of the people are asleep during worship, or are standing with their arms folded, unengaged, reading the bulletin, if there is a deadness, a sense that everything is dragging, you might say that this worship is not particularly charismatic, not particularly alive. If on the other hand, we see people who are obviously engaged, some are kneeling, some faces are

glistening, some people are crying, people have their hands raised – they are obviously engaged.

The issue of spirit-filled worship is summarized in v. 25 when it says of a person coming into the worship, “He will fall down and worship God exclaiming, ‘God is really among you.’” See, that’s the issue. Do you come away feeling like God is among us?

Friends, I believe here at Vineyard Columbus we need to make a little more elbow room for God, for some of God’s surprises. I want to open the box a bit in prophecy.

Dr. Steve Robbins, who is on staff here overseeing our school, Vineyard Leadership Institute, produced a paper on guidelines for handling prophecy in a large church like this. You have a copy of that in your bulletin.

See, the whole question is, are people meeting God in the worship service? Is there a sense of vitality and a sense of life?

The second question someone needs to ask regarding public worship is “Does the worship build people up?”

*1 Cor. 14:1-5: Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and*

*comfort. 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.*

In these verses Paul uses the word “building up” or edification four times. He also uses it three other times in the rest of the chapter. Everything that is done in public worship ought to be done to build other people up in the church. The Greek word for building up is *oikodomen*. In Greek *oiko* means “house.” *Domen* means to build. The idea is that in public worship we are building a house. We are building the house for God.

Now, Paul mentions two tools God gives us to build up the house. There are lots of other tools, but Paul mentions the two most prominent in Corinth – prophecy and tongues.

You know, there really is something to using the right tools. I remember once I was trying to fix a water pipe in my basement that was leaking. I had this pipe wrench that was maybe 6” long and weighed 4 oz. A neighbor of mine came over with his pipe wrench and it was a foot and a half long and weighed ten pounds. My little wrench would have been better than my neighbor’s if I was working on dental fillings. But for any serious plumbing, I needed the right tool.

Now, it is really important as you read Paul's remarks in ch. 14 that you not read Paul to be negative about the gift of tongues. What Paul is saying about tongues vs. prophecy is that like tools for home repairs, it just depends on what you want to build, what you are working on. See, Paul is comparing the tool of tongues with the tool of prophecy and he says that they are both good tools, but for two totally different building jobs.

Look at v. 4: *He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church.*

If you want to build yourself up spiritually, the tool of tongues is useful. But if you want to build the church up, don't use tongues, use prophecy.

I don't want to spend a lot of time analyzing in detail the gift of tongues or the gift of prophecy because I think that Paul is using these two gifts as an occasion for discussing deeper principles of worship, which is briefly, for those of you not acquainted with tongues, the word for tongues literally means language. Paul points out in v. 2 that this language is not a language spoken to people, but to God. He says further, that no one other than God understands the language. The speaker doesn't understand it and neither do the hearers.

And this, by the way, is why the tongues described here in 1 Cor. 14 must be different than the phenomena that occurred on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. People understood what Peter was saying in Pentecost. Those tongues were addressed to

the crowd. Here in 1 Cor. 14 the tongue is not understood and it is not addressed to men, but rather to God.

You say, “Well, then, how does speaking in a language that no one, not even the speaker understands, but only God understands be a tool that builds up the speaker?”

I think the answer has to do with understanding what human beings are, what this house is that we call humanity. See, in the Bible humans are not just skin, flesh, and blood. We have to have another component to our being called our spirit. When Adam was created out of the dust, God gave him a spirit. The tool of tongues builds up the spirit, but not the skin, flesh, and bones of the speaker. The tool of tongues builds up the speaker’s spirit.

If you look at vv. 14-15: *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.*

Tongues are the songs of the spirit, the praise of the spirit. These prayers of songs and praise are carried by God’s spirit and they become a valuable aid in intercession and spiritual warfare and worship.

But the most basic value of the gift of tongues is stated in v. 4: *He who speaks in a tongue builds himself up...*that is he builds his spirit up. And this inner spiritual

building up is an experience that Paul wants all of us to have. In v. 5 he says: *I would like every one of you to speak in tongues.* It is important to build your spirit up. In v. 18 Paul says, *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.*

Public worship is not designed to just build up the individual. In public worship, the question that the worshipper should always be asking is: Is my behavior building others up in the church? See, there is a reason why we do what we do in worship and why we don't do certain things in worship. We read our worship through the grid of the questions Paul is presenting here in 1 Cor. 14. Over and over again, it is important for a person to ask themselves, "Is my behavior right now building others up, or is it just building me up?"

For example, there is a reason why during our worship we don't have long guitar lengths or this real extravagant kind of expression on the piano. The reason is that while those things may be wonderful for self-expression and great for artistic creativity, they don't necessarily build the congregation up.

And it is the same thing with our use of dance. Just a couple of weeks ago we had a wonderful simple dance with a woman and a child on the stage. But the dance wasn't just a form of self-expression. "I need to show you how graceful I am." The dance assisted the rest of the congregation to worship God.

See, everything that we do should be pressed through this grid of "is it serving the whole?" So the appropriate question that an artist – whether a dancer, or a painter,

or a musician would ask themselves is not: When can I do my art? When can I showcase my creativity? At least not in worship that's not the question. My need to express myself artistically is not one of the principles that Paul lays out here.

Now, let me quickly add that there is nothing wrong with expression. It is just not part of public worship. Artistic self-expression may be appropriate in an arts fair. You can express yourself musically in the café, a bar, a concert. But you see, everything we do in worship is pressed through the grid of "does it build others up?" So a dance that is useful to others, to assist others to worship God is appropriate. I, jumping up and down in one of the rows, and drawing lots of attention to myself, and becoming a distraction for others, may build me up, like tongues, but it is the wrong tool for building up the church.

Do you get it?

Now, the third principle for public worship is intelligibility. When we are trying to figure out what's appropriate or inappropriate, one of the trans-cultural questions that Paul causes us to ask is, is the worship understandable?

*Vv. 6-12: Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know that tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for*

*battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.*

See, everything that we do in public worship ought to be able to be comprehended, ought to be understood and intelligible to the people around us. I used to teach international business transactions at OSU. One of the things that the students used to just love was hearing about all the blunders that companies made when they were trying to market their products in another country. It all turned on misunderstandings, a lack of intelligibility. Car makers, especially, had problems.

For example, General Motors couldn't sell its Chevy Nova in Mexico, since the words *no va* mean "it doesn't go" in Spanish. No one wanted to buy a car that doesn't go. The Ford Fiera didn't do much better, since *fiera* in Spanish means "ugly old woman." The Rolls Royce had problems selling its "Silver Mist" in Germany, since *mist* in German means manure. Coca-Cola had problems in China because the Chinese characters that were originally used for Coca-Cola meant "bite the wax frog." Apparently, people in China didn't find wax frogs to be especially refreshing. The Japanese once tried to sell a very popular baby soap in the United States, but had real problems because its name in Japanese was "skin-a-baby."



There were hundreds of these types of examples. I remember when President Carter went over to Poland and he had a new translator with him who made some awful mistakes in translation. At one point, President Carter said, “I have a deep love for the Polish people.” His translator translated it, “I lust after you Polish people.” President Carter then said, “I see that you live in pleasant looking homes.” And the translator translated it, “I see that you live in lovely little shacks.”

Understandability is everything—in marketing, in politics, and especially in public worship.

Paul uses three illustrations of a lack of understanding.

*V. 7: Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?*

The first illustration is drawn from the world of music. I can’t play any other musical instruments, other than the kazoo and I don’t play that very well. But if I turned around here and began to bang away on the piano, what effect would that have on you? I wouldn’t be playing a tune that you could sing to. You wouldn’t be inspired. You certainly wouldn’t be ushered into the presence of God. About the only thing that would happen by my banging on the piano is that you would get annoyed and frustrated.

That's what happens when people don't understand what's being said. Have you ever sat through a college class where the teacher just rambled on and on without any direction? I had a professor in college who would sit on the desk and speak for an hour and a half in this stream of consciousness at about 300 words per minute. It wasn't even a stream of consciousness. It was more like a waterfall of consciousness.

But you sit there when you don't understand and you become more and more frustrated. Why is this person going on and on? Without understanding, people don't benefit at all. They just get annoyed.

And here's Paul's second analogy. V. 8: *Again if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?* Paul is using a military analogy here. Bugles in the ancient world, and even up until very recently, were used to communicate the commands of the general to the troops in the field. But if the bugler plays a tune that no one understands, the troops won't know if it is time for lunch, or time to go to bed, or if it's the sound to get ready for battle. The commander's wishes won't be made known.

This is a perfect illustration for what the prophet does, and what the preacher does, in a public worship service. It is the job of the prophet and the preacher to blow the bugle, to assist people to break through their apathy and get engaged in the battle. It is wonderful to entertain ourselves, to go to dinner, to go to the movies – I love to do those things. I enjoy being a couch potato. But there is a battle going on. There is a

real war happening between God and Satan for the hearts and minds of everyone around us.

And when all of our material and all of our consumerism lulls us into indifference, it is the Word of God spoken in an understandable way that shatters our apathy and reminds us that human life ends in one of two ways: either under the reign of Jesus Christ; or under the reign of the Prince of Darkness. And we are constantly being called upon by the preacher and the prophet to decide now, this very moment, whose reign we are going to live under. Who will I serve – Christ or Satan?

And the third analogy Paul uses to show us the effect of a lack of understanding is in v. 11: *If then, I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker and he is a foreigner to me.* Now, this is a very basic fact of our human interaction. When you don't understand something, you feel like an outsider. You feel like a foreigner.

You come into a worship service and all these people are whooping it up and you don't understand what's going on. What's the affect of all of that? Well, the circle is drawn and you are left out.

Let me illustrate this principle of intelligibility and understandability in terms of a dinner so that I can show you why we do what we do here at Vineyard. Imagine you are a child and you are invited to a dinner at someone's home. But before you go, you are forced to wear some really uncomfortable clothes. Your shirt is too tight and you

have to button the collar and wear a tie. Or you must wear your best dress and really uncomfortable shoes.

Then they usher you to this table that has a hard straight back and serve you a bunch of strange food that looks really gross to you, as a child. Food you've never eaten before. And you are sitting in a crowd of strangers, everyone is speaking Hungarian, and you don't speak Hungarian. Every once in a while they will laugh. And the only time you speak in English, they talk about events and people you don't know about. They tell insider stories about their Aunt Millie and "remember the summer we spent in the Rockies." What kind of evening do you think you'd have?

The circle is drawn and you are outside of it. Well, I think that is the experience of a lot of people in church services. And I don't mean just seekers, unchurched people. I mean it's that way for believers too.

I remember the very first church I went to. I walked into this church. I had never been in a church before. And we sat on these hard, wooden benches. I had to get all dressed up and wear a tie. I was 18 years old and I was used to wearing jeans and a work shirt – pretty much what I wear today. And during first song, an older woman (she was probably 60 – when you are 18 someone 50 or 60 seems ancient) said, "Are there any guests here?"

So Marlene elbowed me and said, "You're a guest."

The lady said, “If you are a guest, will you stand?”

I didn’t know what they wanted me to do. Were they going to ask me questions? I was really intimidated by the whole thing. I had never been in a church before. I had just become a Christian just a few days before. So I stood up. She said, “Why don’t you come up front?”

I slowly started to walk up front and she put a pin on my lapel. It was like a visitor pin. And she put her arm around me and sang me a song.

“There’s a welcome here

There’s a welcome here,

There’s a Christian welcome here.

There’s a welcome here.”

She was very sweet and very sincere. But I’ll tell you there was nothing done that day that was understandable to me; that included me; that didn’t embarrass me.

On the other hand, imagine going to a meal as a child where you don’t have to get dressed up; they include you in the conversation; the food served is mostly food you’ve seen before; the dishes you haven’t seen before, someone at the table explains what it is; you are able to laugh along with the jokes; there’s not a lot of insider conversation. Which meal do you think you’d prefer being at?

The question of understandability is a question we constantly ask here at the Vineyard. Is what we're doing in public worship welcoming people or shutting them out? Do people get the meaning of what we are doing? Does a guest get the meaning? Does the average Christian get the meaning?

See, there is a reason why we discourage the use of banners, or glow wands, or pompoms. It is not that these things aren't useful in self-expression; it's not that they don't add to pageantry. It's just that for most people, they just don't get it. It is not understandable. It is confusing. And the result is to exclude people, rather than include them.

So Paul's counsel regarding unintelligible things is that you do unintelligible things, things that won't have any meaning to others, privately.

*V. 18: I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

The final question that one could ask of public worship: "Is the worship orderly?"

*Vv. 26-33: 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. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must*

*interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*

You know, there seems to be a balance between life and freedom; vitality and really going for it on the one hand and order, control, regulation on the other. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean.

When the kids were younger, everyone in our family was an avid camper. We went tent camping virtually every annual vacation. There are different types of campers out there, and different types of campsites. Some campers enjoy wilderness. They throw a little tent on their backs; hike deep into the woods where there is no one else. They have their water purification pills. They have their little spade to dig their little dirt toilets. They have very little food packed. They plan to eat roots and wild mushrooms and various kinds of molds. They like things very wild. Camping near the thorn bushes right next to the swamp. Mosquitoes are all around.

There are other campers like the ones that Marlene and I once encountered at a KOA Campground. Once we were on the road going somewhere and we were really exhausted. There was no state or national park near where we were. We saw on the map that there was a KOA Campground nearby – like one of those Camp Jellystone

with the big Yogi Bear sign. The clerk at the entrance gate assured us that they had lovely sites. We paid our money and went in.

Well, like all of these principles, loveliness is one of those subjective judgments that is really in the eyes of the beholder. The lovely sites were actually on a gravel parking lot. I'm not kidding. All these people had their trailers, popup campers, tents on this gravel site. They had their TV's going and their air conditioners going. So we set up our tent on a bed of gravel for the evening.

Now, it was orderly. There were no thorn bushes or mosquitoes or anything living or green for miles around. But the place didn't have the kind of camping, shall we say, ambiance that we were looking for.

What the apostle Paul is communicating throughout 1 Cor. 14 is that there ought to be in public worship life – the life of God. There ought to be this vitality, this feeling that we read in v. 25, "Surely God is in your midst." People ought to come away from public worship with a sense of having been in the presence of God.

But that life, that vitality, Paul tells us in vv. 26ff ought to be under control. V. 40: *Everything, all of this wonderful diversity of life, should be done in a fitting and orderly way.* The image of worship that should come to our minds is not some deep woods camping experience in a jungle somewhere where you clear the ground with a machete. Things growing wild everywhere. But nor is it a parking lot camping experience, or some computer clean room where no life exists. Worship should be



more like a well cared-for park or a beautifully attended garden. Lots of life; lots of green; lots of vitality; lots of refreshment. But it's shaped, it's tended, it's administrated.

And it's not just to increase the enjoyment of those who are coming. The reason that Paul adds this last issue in measuring public worship: "is it orderly?" – is because of the character of God. It is not just that people will think we are weird or be offended if there's lots of disorder everywhere in the public worship. No, if it were only because of people, we could take a slightly condescending attitude and say, "Well, they just don't get it. But we are just going to let it rip anyway. We are going to celebrate our liberty without any control, without regulation, without proper administration and let them fend for themselves. It's the Marie Antoinette thought, "Well, if they don't have bread, let them eat cake." They don't understand what we are doing, so too bad.

The reason for order is not the effect of disorder on the masses. That someone might be confused. The reason Paul gives for order in worship goes much deeper. It is because order expresses the character of God. Listen to what he says in 1 Cor. 14:32: *The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.* Another way that this is translated is "God is not a God of confusion, but of peace."

The Greek word for disorder is used in Luke 21:9 where Jesus says, *When you hear of wars and revolutions, don't be frightened.* It means insurrections, tumults.

Sometimes you walk into a worship service and it's like a tumult, a war is going on in there. It is just bedlam.

And the bedlam is not just in those churches that permit speaking in tongues. I remember years ago going to a church that forbids speaking in tongues, a church that believed that the gift of tongues had ceased with the apostles. The pastor stood up and said, "Let's pray" and 150 people stood up and began shouting in English to God at the top of their lungs. No one was amen'ing anyone else's prayers, but it was just instant bedlam. And I was sitting there as an outsider to this worship thinking, "O speaking in tongues is disorderly, but this isn't?"

Paul gives the reason for order. It is because it expresses the character of God. God is a God of peace. That word harkens back to the Hebrew word "shalom." It means health, soundness. God's peaceful nature brings harmony, not a cacophony.

Let me press here in this place for a moment before I close. The principle Paul is laying out is very simple. The character of our worship depends on the character of our God. Back in the OT remember the story of the prophets of Baal, who were challenged by Elijah on top of Mt. Carmel? How do these prophets worship this God of fertility and warfare and blood? It says in 1 Kings that they began screaming and shouting and they cut themselves until blood flowed. They spun around like crazy and they became more and more fanatical and ecstatic.

The character of our worship reflects the character of the God we are worshipping. As A.W. Tozer wrote in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that comprises the church. Always, the most revealing thing about the church is our idea about God. The church can never express the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.

See, ultimately, friends, what should happen in public worship is a reflection of who we believe God is. What our conception about God is. So let me close with this question: what comes into your mind when you think about God? Someone who exists, but who exists a billion light years away and is utterly uninvolved in this world, in your life, in your circumstances?

Well, if what comes to your mind when you think about God is someone who is uninvolved, it is no wonder that you approach worship apathetically with your arms folded. What comes into your mind, friends, when you think about God? Do you think about someone who is extraordinarily kind and merciful to you? Someone who keeps loving you despite your many and obvious sins? Someone who is hanging in there with you in all of your ups and downs? Someone who loves you so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to die in your place on a cross – a bloody sacrifice to rescue you out from under the power of Satan and out from under the power of sin?

Is what comes to mind, when you think about God, an eternally patient, eternally faithful, infinitely kind rescuer and Savior who stands with you and by you in

steadfast love? When you think about God do you think about someone who is always good? That no matter what life dealt you last week, or last year, or in the last 40 years – life may be hard; life may stink; but God is good.

Would your conception of God, friends, be anything like the conception of God in that ancient hymn:

Immortal, invisible God, Only Wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious,  
The ancient of days,  
Almighty, victorious,  
Thy Great Name we praise.

What is public worship like? What should our public worship look like? It should be spirit-filled, touched by the life of God. People should come in and say, “Surely God lives in this place.” It should look like a group of people not only concerned for their own liberty and freedom, but also to build others up. It should be accessible, relevant, and understandable. And it ought to reflect the character of God, who is glorious, good and kind – and a God of peace and order. Let’s pray.

## Why We Do What We Do In Vineyard Worship

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Rich Nathan

February 9-10, 2002

Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle Series

1 Cor. 14

- I. Is God Present in the Worship? (1 Cor. 14:1, 25)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- II. Are People Built Up? (1 Cor. 14:1-5)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- III. Is the Worship Understandable? (1 Cor. 14:6-25)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- IV. Does the Worship Reflect God's Character? (1 Cor. 14:26-40)