

"Balancing Structure and Freedom" 1 Corinthians 14:26-33a, 37-40

Introduction

- Right now in the Hesse house our two boys are fascinated by anything messy. Messy Hesse, get it? Seriously, at the end of a meal there's more food on the floor than on plates or in tummies. This is our life.
 - The yogurt flies straight from my brother
The peaches zoom toward me from sis
When she gets home I bet mother
Says we shouldn't food fight like this!
 - Food fight! Food fight!
There's food on the counter and chairs! And chairs!
Food fight! Food fight!
There's tons of meat loaf in my hair!
 - My brother flicks peas with his fork and
They zip down my shirt with a splat
Next I see a big piece of pork land
On my head like it's a new hat!
 - Food fight! Food fight!
Clean up, there is no time to spare, to spare
Food fight! Food fight!
Got carrots in my underwear!
 - We should stop, but it's so much fun that
I yell for one more ice-cream bomb
It soars down the hall to the front door
And into the face of...our mom!
 - Food fight! Food fight!
There'll be no more food fight for me, for me
Food fight! Food fight!
I'm grounded till I'm twenty-three!
- The Corinthian worship services were a veritable food fight. Disorderly. Messy. Child-like. You have the feeling, at least in chapters 12-14, that if Paul could have grounded the Corinthians he would have done so. What's Paul's answer to messy worship? What does he say?
- As Paul winds down his discussion of spiritual gifts and all the problems that plagued corporate worship in Corinth, the verse that governs Paul's correction is [verse 33](#). Look there. *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.* Paul's answer to the messy worship in Corinth is the character of God. And I want to suggest to you this morning that...

Proposition

- **Our worship must work to reflect the character of God**

- In the words of [Thomas Oden](#), “It is God whom we worship. We gather not to worship ourselves, our desperate struggles for God, our hungers for God, or our immediate feelings for God, but nothing less than God alone... Worship that does not address God, listen to God speak to God, is not Christian worship.”¹ Easier said than done. Sometimes I think that what we call worship is nothing more than the consumption of God. Instead of offering something to God we come to take something from Him—we make our worship of him into a product, a consumable.
- I believe the single biggest thing we can do as Christians to grow in our worship of God is to learn and grow in our understanding of the character of God so that we have something of worth to offer back to him. God is not like us. And it’s impossible to worship what you don’t know.
- I think some of the problems; some of the child-like behaviors exhibited by the Corinthians were a result of a deficient understanding of God’s character. Just as a Vitamin D deficiency causes rickets a deficient understanding of the character of God causes worship rickets.
- In chapters 12-14 the danger Paul seems to zero in on is the danger of spiritual anarchy.² Everybody kind of doing their own worship thing. Nobody on the same page. No common purpose. [Verse 26](#). *What shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.* The picture is of this highly individualized worship with no thought to the common good, with no order. The pandemonium of their worship mirrored their fractured church.³ Again, that’s why Paul says in [verse 33](#) that *God is not a god of disorder but of peace.* There’s nothing disorderly about the character of God. Their worship should reflect God’s character. It should be orderly like God. Paul concludes this whole section on spiritual gifts with [verse 40](#) by saying *but everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*
- What’s Paul’s answer to the messy worship in Corinth? The character of God. Specifically God as a God of peace. But what does that mean? What does it mean to say that God is a God of peace?

Transition

I want to focus on that for a few minutes.

- Eight times in the New Testament God is described as a *God of peace*: 2 Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, Hebrews 13:20, Romans 16:20, Romans 15:33, and our verse 1 Corinthians 14:33. As one theologian puts it, “God’s peace means that in God’s being and in his actions he is separate from all confusion and disorder, yet he is continually active in innumerable well-ordered, fully controlled, simultaneous actions.”⁴ Just think about that for a second. “In God’s being and in his actions he is separate from all confusion and disorder, yet he is continually active in innumerable well-ordered, fully controlled, simultaneous actions.”
- Internally, in God’s character, God himself is free from confusion and disorder. Just think about that in comparison to your own life. Think of your daily dose of chaos. Life is probably anything but peaceful. I don’t know about you but life is confusing, disorderly,

¹ Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, p. 94.

² Constable, p. 159.

³ Garland, p. 664.

⁴ Grudem, p. 203.

messy, and chaotic. In fact, for some of you here this morning, you've known nothing but chaos your entire life; your life is one big chaotic mess. There's nothing peaceful about life. But not for God. He is, by nature, free from all that.

- Now pay attention. God is free from disorder and chaos and confusion primarily because He is free from sin. Sin is chaos. Listen to what Isaiah 57:20 says. *But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud.* The wicked? That's all of us compared to God. Me included. Compared to God, none of us are good. God says we are like the tossing sea. Have you ever been in a boat that's run too close to the shore? The prop froths the water into a muddy mess. This picture of thrashing, raging seas churning up muck; that's life without God and without the peace of God. All that muck your life churned up this past week, that's because of sin. And the harder you try to live life without God the more muck your life churns up—the more chaotic and messy and disorderly life gets. Even worse, because of our sin, our relationship to God gets all mucked up too. Because of sin, we can't have peace with God. Our relationship to him is characterized by chaos, disorder, confusion.
- The answer to this disorderly, chaotic, mucked up existence is Jesus. 1 Peter 3:18 says, *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”* I love the picture of this. Jesus clears the muck between us and God. Jesus, by his death for sins, clears the way to God. He brings us to God. By his blood he makes peace between us and God. His death makes a muck free relationship with God possible. Colossians 1:20 *Jesus made peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*
- When the Bible says that God is a God of peace it also means that God is a God *who produces peace.* And he wants to produce his peace in your life. In other words, he wants you to be like him; free from disorder, and chaos, and strife and muck. He wants to show you a better way to live. But you have to internalize God's peacemaking on your behalf. It's not enough just to know that Christ died for sins. Romans 3:22 says *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.* God asks that we believe by faith that what he says about our condition and his solution is true. It's our faith in what God has done for us through Jesus that changes life. Romans 5:1 says *since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- When we're at peace with God, when that relationship is no longer mucked up—that's when life changes. When you live God's way instead of your own way the less muck your life churns up. And the more we become like God with Jesus' help, the more we become people of peace. *Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*⁵ Life becomes less chaotic, less messy, less disorderly. Jesus promises that for those who follow him. John 14:27 *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.* Life without God is ugly. Life with God is a thing of beauty. With whatever authority I may have let me urge you if you're sick of your messy, chaotic mucked up life to turn to Jesus.

Transition

Let's transition back to 1 Corinthians 14 and corporate worship.

- **Our worship must work to reflect the character of God.** If we are becoming more like God in this area, our lives characterized by the peace of God, our worship as Christians should become more ordered, and uncluttered, and meaningful—less mucked up. Worship

⁵ James 3:18

characterized by God's peace has to be ordered. Please here me on this. When I say ordered I don't mean wooden. Order alone doesn't build up the body. But order is absolutely necessary if the aim is Christian worship.⁶

- What Paul is advocating here, this idea of orderly worship with everything done in a fitting way; is not worship that is stiff and wooden and artificial. Just the opposite. The picture Paul paints of peaceful worship is this perfect balance of freedom and structure; this perfect balance of spontaneity and liturgy. There is great meaning and significance to every part of the service; each part has a purpose, its well-ordered just like God's actions. There are no superfluous parts. Each constituent part of the corporate worship service whether it be, as it says in [verse 26](#), *a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation*, each part works together to harmoniously edify and strengthen and encourage the entire body and bring glory to God.
- Paul's description of speakers stopping and sitting down others sharing and this fluid movement and flow from one thing to the next to the next with the whole thing governed by self-control and deference for others—it's this perfect picture of peace.⁷ It's easy. And light. And a joy. And it's refreshing. It's reverential but not heavy or burdensome or mucked up. And you just want to rest in it. That's the picture I get of the kind of worship Paul wanted the Corinthians to mature and grow up into. And I think it's what we need to aspire to. Someone once said, "No garden exists without order; without it the land merely spawns weeds."⁸ Authentic Christian worship is no different. Worship that is orderly, characterized by the peace of God, is more likely to be fertile, productive, fruitful worship.

⁶ Garland, p. 675.

⁷ Fee, p. 695.

⁸ Oden, p. 94.