

## Restraint Put on Speaking in the Assembly

Certainly in 1 Cor. 14: 27-29 there are restrictive rules put as to speaking in the assembly. The very disorder in the church at Corinth furnished the occasion for the profit of all afterwards. "If any speak with a tongue, two or at most three, and in turn (or, separately), and let one interpret; but if there be no interpreter, let him be silent in an assembly, and let him speak to himself and to God. And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge."

The apostle had just laid down the great principle, "Let all things be done to edification." Then he applies it to the two typical or representative cases; to a tongue on the one hand; and on the other to prophesying. He begins with what the vain Greek mind affected most, speaking with a tongue, because it was so open and surprising a witness of divine power. It electrified people. But in an assembly, if alone, it did not edify. Therefore if he who had "a tongue" could not interpret, or no interpreter was there, he must be silent and content with speaking to himself and to God: an excellent lesson, where there was the desire to display that gift. Even if there was an interpreter, edifying required only two or at the most three.

Next, he turns to prophesying which had the highest character of direct edifying, and directs that two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge, not add their lesser mites, which could only distract, instead of edifying, but rather hinder the profit of what came from God. Under this regulation comes teaching of any kind in assembly for edification, encouragement, consolation, exhortation, warning or any other spiritual aim. More than "two or three," even if possessed of the most weighty of God's gifts, is forbidden in the most distinct and absolute way.

The question is, if we believe that grace still preserves meeting in an assembly, and if we in divine mercy cherish so signal a privilege, spite of its absence in general. Are we subject to the "Lord's commandment" in these things as in all else? It is to be feared that many forget it, and think that prevalent ruin opens the door to laxity and self-will. Perhaps others too have heard not many years since of no less than eight speakers, occupying a professedly Christian assembly, and rather boasting of this plethora of talk, as if it were a proof of zeal, simplicity, or the freedom which the Spirit of the Lord creates. It really indicated their lack of intelligence, in subjection to the inspired word which they could not but know, but failed to recognise; and love of letting their voices be heard on such a solemn occasion, which is meant to witness that God is verily in or among them.

In vers. 34-36 is another and a prohibitory rule, "Let the women keep silence in the assemblies; for it is not permitted to them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in an assembly. What! went the word of God out from you? or came it to you alone?"

Such is His regulation of His assembly. Would we as Christians prefer, or even tolerate for ourselves, an assembly independent of God, where man speaks as he pleases? How necessary it is to judge ourselves, especially if we exercise the title to judge other people. What is more excellent than obedience?

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