

Do You Want a Fresh Encounter this Year?

A Vision for a Fresh Encounter with God in 2008

1. Overview

- a. Over the past few months we have all been a part of a shift in our church's practices of worship. Some of you probably are wondering "where are we going" and what will our worship look like when we get there?
- b. The Deacons asked me this very same question and we went to 1st Corinthians 14 to see what God says about where we *should* go. This past Wednesday night during our deacon's meeting, we studied this chapter together and agreed on some principles for our church's vision for worship.
- c. Today, I am going to take you to 1st Corinthians 14 as well, to show you what we hope our church's worship will be like.

2. Background of 1st Corinthians

- a. Before we look at the text, I would like to give you a bit of a background on the Corinthian church in the first century that Paul was addressing in his letter to them.
- b. Worship for most of the Jewish Christians followed a distinctly synagogue-like pattern of worship where a leader led the prayers, readings and the service itself. The Catholic church adopted this pattern in its development of the mass and even going so far as to call its pastors "priests."
- c. But in Corinth, we have a Gentile (non-Jewish) church, one without the Jewish roots or heritage, and they seem to have developed their own pattern for worship, most likely established by the Apostle Paul when he first established this church.
- d. But the Corinth church had some troubles. In fact, most of us have learned that the Corinthian church was a fleshly church which had problems with immorality, its people had petty rivalries and factions, as well as had self-centered worship practices.
 - i. It is precisely because they had these troubles that we have one of the most explanatory letters concerning Christian worship in the New Testament.
 - ii. This letter is filled with recommended practices for worship for this particular New Testament Church.
 - iii. But there is a problem with viewing this book as a list of "approved worship practices".
 - iv. The practices themselves are geared toward a particular church in a particular culture, and attempts to superimpose them on a 21st century American suburban church simply doesn't work. Adopting merely the form of worship of another church does not guarantee that you will in fact have a worship service that comes alive.
 - v. We must read through the practices in order to grasp the PRINCIPLES that Paul was trying to communicate that would lead to a God encountering, people transforming worship experience.

3. 1 Cor 14:1-5 *Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. 4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. 5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.*

- a. This is just the first passage of two we are going to look at today. I want to let you know that this is not going to be a sermon on the gift of tongues.

- i. I will say, however, that I personally believe that all of the gifts of the Spirit are in operation today, and that they did not cease in the first century. However, if you believe differently, that is okay. It does not need to be a divisive issue for argument. I know too many churches that are led by men of God on both sides of this issue, so I have to feel that God isn't as concerned about this issue as people are.
 - ii. So I am not going to try to convince you to believe otherwise, but I do want you to understand where I am coming from.
 - b. In the passage I just read, Paul is addressing practices in the church's worship that seem to be keeping people from encountering God together. He is contrasting the practice of the use of spiritual language with the use of the prophetic gift to make a point.
 - c. Too often we get hung up on the uses of these two gifts and miss the point of the entire passage!
 - i. To find that point, we only need to look for a word that is repeated over and over again as the purpose of the use of these gifts. It is the word "edify."
 - ii. In this passage it is used 3 times, (and in the chapter, it is used 6 times in this chapter) contrasting and comparing the use of several spiritual gifts and their effect upon the rest of the body.
 - iii. The principle discussed in this chapter is not whether or not a local church can use certain gifts or even to establish a "rule" concerning a gift, *but to tell the Corinthian church WHY and HOW gifts are to exercised in the context of worship.*
 - iv. This brings me to our first point this morning.
4. **Worship is to be a corporately edifying experience.**
 - a. **Oikodome** – compound word of "oikos" = "family" or "household" and "dome," is the roof, combined they mean the architecture of a domed building. It literally means to build up or construct a building according to a set of plans or blueprints.
 - b. For our situation, it means to build up a house (of God's people) as opposed to tearing it down.
 - i. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:9 *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building* (oikodome). KJV
 - ii. Romans 14:19 *So let us then definitely aim for and eagerly pursue what makes for harmony and for mutual upbuilding (oikodomos) of one another.* AMP
 - iii. Romans 15:1-2 *Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification (oikodome)."*
 - iv. So to edify meant to build up the people of God, to encourage them. .
 - c. In this passage from 1st Corinthians 14, we find that Paul is correcting those who would please themselves and use their gifts to build themselves up. He is telling them that they have missed ONE of the intended outcomes of corporate worship...that is to build up the body, the family of God
 - d. **Why do you come to church?** There might be lots of reasons. Maybe it is to hear a good sermon, to sing moving songs, to talk with your friends in the faith? Many of you may come to encounter God.
 - i. Some folks come to church to hear a message that will make them feel bad.
 1. They come to church to be brow beaten, to hear how bad they have lived, to have their conscience pricked and to be brought to a low place where they will repent and commit to try harder to live for God. And next Sunday, we will all get together and do it again.
 2. This attitude flies in the face of the purpose for which Christians gathered together in the first place.
 3. It is not what Paul taught nor is it what Jesus taught.
 4. We gather together to encounter God and to edify or build up the body. (Eph 4:10-12)

5. I wonder why so many people have stopped attending church services across our country...could it be that churches are failing to edify the body and encounter God?

5. The Purpose of Prophecy is to edify

- a. We perhaps need to understand what prophesy is and isn't.
 - i. It is not foretelling the future.
 - ii. It is not spouting out new words and revelations from God that contain the weight of scripture. (7th Day Adventists believe their prophet's words have this weight).
 - iii. Prophecy is not speaking out words of doom and gloom or condemnation.
 - iv. It may have been in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, in the church age, it has a completely different role.
- b. Paul says in 14:3 that there will be three obvious effects or results when prophecy is exercised in the church.
- c. *But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.*
 - i. The first effect is edification. A prophet is a home-builder. The word can be used either for laying a foundation, which speaks of stability, or repairing a building that already exists, strengthening it and shoring it up.
 1. So applying this word to our lives, it means that when prophecy is exercised, collectively we will be spiritually strengthened and the church will be strengthened.
 - ii. The second effect of prophesying is exhortation or encouragement.
 1. That means to motivate, to come to a person's side and put an arm around their shoulder, to encourage that person, to give direction.
 2. This word exhortation doesn't mean that you shake your finger in somebody's face and holler at them.
 3. We sometimes have the idea that a prophet is someone who thunders from on high at people.
 - a. Folks, the Old Testament prophets spoke doom and gloom, but the New Testament gift of prophecy is to encourage and exhort, putting your arm around the shoulder of a brother to show them the love of God.
 - iii. The third effect of prophecy is consolation or comfort. It means to speak comfort into a person's life so that they will gather strength to continue their journey.
- d. If edification is to be a primary outcome of gathering as a church when we worship God, then that should tell us quite a bit about God Himself.
 - i. God no longer sees the old you after you have received Christ as your Savior.
 - ii. God only sees His Son when He looks at you. He sees all of the potential that He has put inside of you. He doesn't see your failures or faults or sins anymore. He sees what you can be, what you can become, what you can do and what He desires for you.
 - iii. The devil wants you to dwell on how bad you are, how awful you've been. The devil wants you to be discouraged, defeated and beat down.
 - iv. But God wants you to see what He has made you to become in Christ! God desires that you, His Church, see yourself the way He sees You!
- e. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that he wished that all of you would prophesy.
 - i. Can you even imagine what the church would look like if we all spoke words like I just described, that edified the church and others?

6. What does edification look like?

- a. I listened to a great description of edification this week.
- b. Practically speaking, **Edification means to speak words of life to the spark of potential that God has planted within a person or church.**

- i. Sister Ann Macrum gives prophetic words of edification to our church from time to time. She has shared repeatedly that God is pleased with us and our worship of Him, and is going to do a great and marvelous thing with our church.
 - 1. That is speaking to build up the church according to the plans God has for it.
 - c. You can edify others when you share your praises because we all rejoice with you.
 - d. You can edify others when you pray, because we all agree with you.
 - e. You can edify individuals by looking at their goodness and speaking life to that potential.
 - i. Imagine looking at your children and instead of speaking correcting words, you spoke edifying words. Look at their heart, at that glimmer of potential that they have and speak to it.
 - ii. I did that this past week when Kristina came home. I can find plenty to complain about an 18 year old that knows just about everything. But God told me to speak to her potential and encourage her. So I shared with her how I observed that she had an artistic eye, being able to see what no-one else can see in an object and capturing that in a drawing or a photo. (she rolled her eyes of course, but she heard it.)
 - iii. If I were to edify Debbie Stoltz, I would look at her heart for worship and see that she desires, more than anything, to lead people to enjoy God in worship. She is grieved when people don't look like they are enjoying encountering God. That is the heart God has given her.
 - 1. To prophetically edify her, I would tell her what I believed that God was going to do with her. I think that I can honestly say that God is going to use her to lead us to his very throne, that she will have the joy of being an instrument in God's hand to encounter Him. I would tell her that I believe that God is going to teach and instruct and mentor Debbie *to become an usher to His throne-room.*
 - 2. Wouldn't you love to hear words spoken to God's untapped potential that He has put inside of you? Wouldn't your heart be lit on fire to hear what God can or will do with you?
 - iv. Can you imagine if as Christians we made the practice of edifying one another – I'm not even saying prophetically, just simply looking and speaking upbuilding words to one another... what would happen?
 - 1. We would be an encouraged people, a people looking for good in one another!
 - 2. It would overflow to our home and work as well. Imagine if we spoke edifying words to our families and friends? Imagine if we spoke edifying words to our co-workers, speaking positive words to the potential that God has planted in their lives? They would be drawn to us and to Christ!
 - v. And it all starts with learning how to do it in worship, right here and now.
7. 1 Cor 14:26-33a *What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (there's that word again) 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; 28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. 30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; 33 for God is not a God of confusion but of peace.,*
- a. Can you imagine what our services would be like if things like prophetic words of encouragement, edification and comfort were occurring on a regular basis? We'd be "built up" as a church and changing the world!
 - i. What is the missing ingredient? It is the first thing Paul tells us:
 - b. **Our worship should be participatory worship:**

- i. The passage says “each one of you (or everyone of you) has a teaching, revelation, tongue, interpretation”
 1. This means that folks come prepared to bring something to contribute to the concert of worship. Paul’s list is not exhaustive, it is representative of how we are to contribute to the concert of worship, just so long as its done for edification.
 2. For worship to be powerful and God encountering, we must all participate by giving what God has given us.
- ii. **I believe, now more than ever, that our worship services must be participatory.**
 1. That is part of the reason that we have a praise/testimony time as well as the prayer time.
 2. Will you start off your week asking God to give you a praise to share each week?
 3. Before church starts, will you seek God and ask Him if He would like you to pray aloud a prayer during our prayer time?
 4. Ask God to show you a scripture that might bless the congregation during prayer or testimony time.
 5. Perhaps the Lord will give you a prophetic word that He wants you to share...write it down and share it with me or one of the Deacons so that we can discern with you the Spirit of God.
 6. Perhaps the Lord will give you a word to exhort or teach and you feel led to share that. Simply let me or one of the Deacons know what it is and let us give you the opportunity under authority to share it.
 7. Maybe the Lord will stir you to sing a song of praise to Him.
 8. If it is done to edify others and glorify God, it is acceptable as an act of worship!
 9. I will tell you in a moment HOW it is to be done...
- iii. **Freedom for the Spirit of God** – We believe that God wants to move and speak and encounter us each Sunday.
 1. Many churches, including our own, have at times very rigid orders of service, an eye on the clock and an inflexibility to anything that isn’t in the “plan.”
 2. The opposite is equally as distressing as then you have services that aren’t prepared for, music that isn’t excellent, and sermons that are thrown together on the fly.
 3. Somewhere, in the middle of that is happy medium where we plan and prepare for worship, and yet remain open to the work of the Spirit of God as we encounter Him.
 4. It can be a bit messy because some folks don’t understand how to respond in the Spirit, and others may respond in the flesh...but the rewards of being open to what God is wanting to do are enormous.
 5. As the pastor, I have the responsibility to oversee and protect the flock, so it is within the realm of my calling to ask that prophetic words be “tested” (that is previewed by a deacon or myself) before it is shared. If someone wants to use the podium, it ought to be cleared ahead of time, if someone feels a need to extend the invitation, it should be run through me by approaching me during the invitation
- iv. **Freedom to Respond as God leads you** – You do not have to raise your hands, stand up, sit down, or come to the altar. You have the freedom, without judgment from your leaders, to worship in the manner that is most comfortable for you.
 1. If you don’t come forward during a mass altar call, that doesn’t mean we will think of you less godly.
 2. You may have a reason, it may be as simple as you don’t like being conspicuous, or you aren’t ready, or you have already made such a commitment.

3. If you desire to dance, raise your hands, sing loudly or sing badly, we give you permission! I was in a church two weeks ago where a couple of dozen worshippers came up and began to praise at the altar during the entire service.
 - v. **God Encountering** – We have spoken about this at length. God desires that we meet Him in our worship services. This is the purpose of being here! I believe that many of you prepare your hearts for worship before you even get here on Sunday morning. You understand the value of encountering God in corporate worship. You desire, you hunger to see His glory and to be touched by His Spirit.
 1. Debbie and her team work diligently and prayerfully to construct our services to focus the attention upon Jesus and not on anyone else.
 - vi. **In Orderly Fashion** – God is a God of order not disorder.
 1. **This is the key** – how to do all those 5 things that we just spoke about. Once we get our heads wrapped around this, we will become a church where the Spirit is free to operate and where people are not afraid to participate!
 2. The passage says, *“for God is not a God of confusion but of peace “*
 3. 1 Cor 14:40 *“But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”*
 4. God is not interested in creating chaos or disorder to your soul. He desires to bring order to chaos, and peace to the troubled heart.
 - a. We might be stretched by what God does here, but that is okay, discomfort is not the same as chaos or confusion. Discomfort is something I feel often because God is stretching my comfort zone.
 5. Another way of describing this is principle would be to *“let your contribution to worship be appropriate to the moment and under the Spirit’s direction and control.”*
 - a. Last week, my wife read a scripture during the prayer time. She searched for the scripture and then waited, to see if God would create the “perfect moment” to share it. If he did, she would stand up and read it. If not, she would sit quietly. As it turned out, the scripture edified the body because it was appropriate to the moment, it flowed with the direction that the Holy Spirit was leading the service.
 - b. When God gives you a word, a scripture, a prayer, a prophecy...test it to be sure it is “appropriate to the moment. And under the Spirit’s control.” Don’t hesitate to walk over to me or one of the Deacons and share with us what you think the Lord wants you to do. We are here for this reason, to help bring order, to bring discernment, and to help test the spirits. We are also responsible for the orderliness of service without quenching the Spirit. Act under the authority of your leaders and God will bless you.
 - vii. **Authentic** – We don’t want a bunch of people going through the motions of worship. We desire that you be fully engaged in worship! Authenticity comes from the Holy Spirit. It doesn’t desire to draw attention to oneself but instead to God. If our flesh is edified instead of the church, it is possible we were doing something so we could appear spiritual.
8. So the bottom line is, where is our church headed in worship?
- a. Are we going to get all out of control? Are we going to get so free that no one knows what to expect?
 - b. The answer is no.
 - i. **We are going to collectively encounter God, participating together in an authentic and orderly fashion, within the freedom of the Spirit of God and we will do all things such that the body of Christ is edified.**
 - c. We won’t always be predictable.

- d. We expect God to do some things that are awe inspiring as we encounter Him.
- e. We will seek to hear from God on a regular basis. We EXPECT everyone to come prepared to contribute to the concert of worship!
- f. We will try new things and new songs.
- g. And you (and I) will be stretched!
 - i. Has anyone noticed that I have been stretched in my comfort zone over the past year?
 - ii. I couldn't have imagined myself being up here directing some of the actions of our worship, yet here I am. God is good!
- h. I believe this is the transforming power of worship – the power of God to help the worshipper see his or her value by God and to see God's infinite value to us, and that love and value overflows to all areas of our lives so that it overpowers our problems,
 - i. I believe that God desires to create a church of edified people, made whole because they understand His love for them, who become lovers of others, becoming more concerned about others than themselves. (that's the power of edification).
 - ii. Wouldn't you like to live each day like that? Wouldn't you like to know that God desires to use you to touch someone every day?
 - iii. What if you could go to work and instead of dreading the long boring hours of your night or day shift, actually looked forward to the opportunity to speak words of life into people's lives? What if you spoke into their lives what you believe God sees in them? What would happen? They would be attracted to God!
- 9. Will you ask God for this ability or gift? Paul said he wished or hoped that all would prophesy. That is, be used as an instrument for God to speak to someone through. Ask for the gift! God desires to give it more than you desire to have it! The deacons and myself will be up front to pray with you – including to pray with you for the unleashing of a particular spiritual gift in your life. Won't you let God use you today?
Let's pray!