

1 Corinthians 14:37 — The Command the Church Ignores

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“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” — 1 Corinthians 14:37 (KJV)

Paul does not say “suggestions.” He does not say “guidelines for the early church.” He does not say “cultural practices that may be adapted.” He says **commandments of the Lord**.

And what are these commandments? They are everything Paul has just laid out in 1 Corinthians 14 — and by extension, chapters 12 and 13 — about how the ekklesia gathers.

What Paul Commanded

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26:

“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”

This is not a description of one man standing behind a pulpit while hundreds sit in silence. This is an open, participatory gathering where **every one of you** contributes. A psalm. A teaching. A revelation. An interpretation. The body functioning as a body — every member active.

Paul then gives order to this participation:

Two or three may speak in tongues, and one must interpret (v. 27)

Two or three prophets may speak, and the others judge what is said (v. 29)

If something is revealed to another sitting by, the first must hold his peace (v. 30)

All may prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be comforted (v. 31)

This is a gathering governed by the Spirit, ordered by mutual submission, and open to every member. **This is the commandment of the Lord.**

What the Institution Replaced It With

Now walk into any institutional church building on a Sunday morning. What do you find?

One man speaks. Everyone else listens. The congregation is an audience. The “worship” is a performance led by a team on a stage. The “sermon” is a monologue — no one judges, no one contributes, no one is permitted to speak. If a revelation comes to someone sitting by, they are expected to stay silent. The order of service is predetermined by a bulletin, not by the Holy Spirit.

Where in 1 Corinthians 14 do you find a worship team? Where do you find a senior pastor delivering a 45-minute sermon while the body sits passive? Where do you find a liturgy, a program, an order of service printed on paper?

You do not. Because it is not there.

The Institutional Model Has No Scriptural Authority

The one-man pulpit ministry traces not to the apostles but to the Roman system that absorbed Christianity in the fourth century. The clergy-laity divide — where one class of Christians ministers and the other receives — contradicts the plain text of 1 Corinthians 12:

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” (v. 7)

Every man. Not the ordained. Not the seminary graduate. Not the man with the title. Every member of the body has a manifestation of the Spirit, and the gathering is where those gifts are exercised.

When one man monopolizes the gathering, the body is crippled. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21). Yet this is precisely what the institutional model says to 99% of the body every single week: *we have no need of your gift in this gathering.*

The Body Must Function — Ephesians 4:16

Paul makes this even more explicit in Ephesians 4:16:

“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”
Read that carefully. The body grows and edifies itself — not through one man’s ministry, but through **the effectual working in the measure of every part**. Every joint supplying. Every part working. The body builds itself up when every member functions.

When you shut down 99% of the body and funnel everything through one man behind a pulpit, you have not built up the body — you have paralyzed it. Ephesians 4:16 is not possible in an institutional setting. The very structure prevents it. You cannot have every joint supplying when only one joint is permitted to move.

This is why Paul lists the five-fold ministry in Ephesians 4:11 — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers — and then immediately states their purpose in verse 12: **“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.”** The pastor-teacher does not do the ministry for the body. He equips the body to do the ministry. The institution inverts this entirely — the pastor does the ministry, and the saints sit and receive. That is the opposite of what Paul wrote.

Christ Is the Mediator of the Assembly

Here is the reality the institution cannot accommodate: Christ Himself is the active Head of the gathering. He is not absent, waiting for a man to represent Him from a stage. He is present, and He speaks, sings, and prophesies through His body — the ekklesia.

Hebrews 2:12 says:

“I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.”

This is Christ speaking. He declares the name of the Father **in the midst of the ekklesia**. He sings praise **in the midst of the assembly**. How does He do this? Through His body. Through the members. When a brother brings a psalm, Christ is singing through him. When a sister brings a revelation, Christ is speaking through her. When a brother brings a teaching, Christ is declaring the Father’s name through that vessel.

This is why 1 Corinthians 14:26 says “every one of you” — because Christ has distributed Himself across every member. His voice is not singular. His ministry is not channeled through one hired professional. He ministers through the whole body, and the gathering is where that ministry is released.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 confirms this:

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

The “ye” is plural. The temple is the gathered body — Christ dwelling in the midst of His people, ministering through every member. Each believer has liberty in the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17) and each believer carries the presence of God into the gathering. When the body comes together in open participation, it is Christ Himself who is the true Mediator of the assembly — not the pastor, not the worship leader, not the program director.

The institution kills this entirely. It replaces the headship of Christ with the headship of a man. It replaces the Spirit’s leading with a printed bulletin. It replaces the body functioning with an audience observing. And it calls this “church.”

The 58 “One Another” Commands

The New Testament contains at least 58 commands about how believers are to relate to one another. These are not optional appendices. They are the operating instructions for the body of Christ. Consider just a sample:

Love one another (John 13:34)

Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)

Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10)

Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)

Accept one another (Romans 15:7)

Instruct one another (Romans 15:14)
 Greet one another (Romans 16:16)
 Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
 Carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
 Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
 Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32)
 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19)
 Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
 Bear with one another (Colossians 3:13)
 Teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)
 Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
 Build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
 Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)
 Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)
 Pray for one another (James 5:16)
 Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)
 Have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7)
 Every single one of these commands requires **mutual, reciprocal, face-to-face interaction** among believers. Not one of them can be fulfilled by sitting in a pew listening to a sermon. Not one.
 Ask yourself honestly: in which setting can these 58 commands be obeyed? In a building where 200 people sit in rows facing the back of each other's heads for an hour and then go home? Or in a home gathering where 15 believers sit in a circle, know each other's names, share their lives, bear each other's burdens, speak truth to one another, and function as a body?

The answer is self-evident. The institutional structure makes obedience to the "one another" commands structurally impossible. It is not merely inconvenient — it is architecturally designed to prevent the very thing Scripture commands.

The Test of Verse 37

Here is the weight of 1 Corinthians 14:37. Paul says: if you consider yourself spiritual, if you consider yourself a prophet, then **acknowledge** that what I have written is a commandment of the Lord.
 The word "acknowledge" is *epiginōskō* in the Greek — to fully know, to recognize with certainty. This is not optional agreement. This is a test of spiritual maturity. If you are truly walking in the Spirit, you will recognize that the open participatory gathering is not a cultural relic — it is a divine command.

And the converse is devastating. If you do not acknowledge this — if you dismiss it, explain it away, or replace it with your own tradition — Paul's verdict follows in verse 38:

"But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

If you refuse to see it, God will leave you in your ignorance. There is no argument to be had. The command stands. Those who are spiritual will recognize it. Those who are not will remain in the system they have built for themselves.

The Contrast

The Commandment of the Lord
The Institutional Replacement
Every one of you has something to contribute (14:26)
One man preaches, the rest observe
Two or three prophesy, and the others judge (14:29)
One sermon, no evaluation permitted
If a revelation comes to one sitting by, the first is silent (14:30)
The order of service is fixed and printed
All may prophesy one by one (14:31)
Only the credentialed may speak
The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man (12:7)
Spiritual gifts are exercised by the clergy
Christ is the head of the body (Colossians 1:18)
The senior pastor is the head of the church
The whole body fitly joined, every part working (Ephesians 4:16)
One man works, the body watches
Christ sings and speaks in the midst of the assembly (Hebrews 2:12)
The worship team performs on a stage
58 “one another” commands requiring mutual participation
Sit, listen, shake hands, go home
Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor 3:17)
Where the program is, there is conformity

The Institution Is in Rebellion to Apostolic Authority

This must be stated plainly: the institutional church model is not merely a different style of worship. It is in direct rebellion to apostolic authority.

Paul wrote by the authority of Christ. He said so explicitly in 1 Corinthians 14:37 — these are the commandments of the Lord. To replace the open participatory gathering with a clergy-run program is to reject the commandment of the Lord delivered through His apostle.

This is not a secondary issue. This is not a matter of preference or culture. Paul did not leave room for disagreement. Verse 38 settles it — if any man is ignorant of this, let him remain ignorant. There is no third option. You either acknowledge the commandment or you reject it.

Every denomination, every institutional church, every clergy system that silences the body and replaces Christ's headship with human leadership is operating outside apostolic authority. It does not matter how large the building, how polished the sermon, how moving the worship set. If the body is not functioning, if every member is not free to contribute, if Christ is not the active Head of the assembly — it is not the *ekklesia* that Paul described and that Christ commanded.

The remnant sees this. The remnant is returning to it. Not to reform the institution — you cannot reform what was never apostolic to begin with. But to leave it behind entirely and return to the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, gathering as His body, with every member active, every gift in operation, and Christ Himself presiding as Head.

Common Institutional Defenses — and Why They Fail

1. “Paul preached to the church in Acts 20. That’s a one-man sermon.”

Acts 20:7 says Paul “discoursed” (*dialegomai* in the Greek) — the same word from which we get “dialogue.” It means to reason back and forth, to discuss. This was not a monologue. It was an interactive teaching. Paul was also an apostle on a farewell visit before his imprisonment — an extraordinary occasion, not a template for every weekly gathering. The template for the weekly gathering is 1 Corinthians 14:26, not Acts 20.

2. “Ephesians 4:11 establishes the pastor-teacher as the leader of the church.”

Ephesians 4:11 lists pastor-teacher as one gift among five — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. The purpose of all five is stated in verse 12: “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.” The pastor-teacher equips the saints so that they can minister. He does not replace their ministry. The institutional model inverts Ephesians 4 — instead of the pastor equipping the body to function, the pastor does the functioning while the body watches. That is the opposite of what Paul wrote.

3. “Paul was correcting chaos in Corinth. The instructions are restrictive, not prescriptive.”

Read the text again. Paul does not say “stop participating.” He says participate in order — two or three tongues with interpretation, two or three prophets with the others judging, one at a time so all may learn. He is giving structure to participation, not eliminating it. If Paul wanted to shut down open participation, 1 Corinthians 14:26 would be the strangest way to do it — “every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine” is an affirmation of the participatory model, not a rebuke of it. He corrects the disorder. He does not abolish the gathering structure.

4. “2 Timothy 4:2 says ‘Preach the word.’ That’s the mandate for pulpit preaching.”

Paul is writing to Timothy — an apostolic delegate, not a local pastor. Timothy was sent by Paul to specific churches for specific assignments. His role was transitional and apostolic. But even granting that preaching is a gift to be exercised in the gathering — where does Paul say only one man preaches? 1 Corinthians 14:31 says “ye may all prophesy one by one.” The command to preach does not cancel the command for open participation. Both coexist. The institution kept the preaching and deleted the participation.

5. “Jesus taught the crowds from a mountainside. The sermon model comes from Christ himself.”

Jesus teaching crowds in the open air is not a church gathering. The ekklesia did not yet exist — it was not established until Pentecost. Jesus was a rabbi teaching the multitudes and training His twelve. The instructions for how the assembled ekklesia functions were given later through Paul. You cannot take a pre-Pentecost public teaching event and use it to override a post-Pentecost apostolic commandment for how the body gathers.

6. “If everyone speaks, it’s chaos. Someone has to be in charge.”

This is the argument of unbelief. Paul already addressed it. He gave the order: two or three, one at a time, let the others judge. The Spirit of God is capable of governing a gathering without a human CEO running the program. The fear of chaos is really a fear that the Holy Spirit is insufficient — that without a man at the helm, things will fall apart. But Paul said “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (14:32). God is not the author of confusion (14:33). The order comes from spiritual maturity and mutual submission, not from a single man’s control.

7. “Not everyone is gifted to teach. James 3:1 warns about becoming teachers.”

James 3:1 is a warning about the seriousness of teaching — not a prohibition against the body functioning. And Paul does not limit participation to teaching. He says a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation. The gifts of the Spirit are diverse. Not everyone teaches, but everyone has a manifestation of the Spirit given to profit withal (1 Corinthians 12:7). The institutional model does not just limit teaching — it silences every gift except one man’s sermon. That is not what James warned about. That is what Paul commanded against.

8. “These instructions were for the Corinthian church specifically, not for all churches.”

Paul himself eliminates this argument. 1 Corinthians 1:2 addresses the letter not only to the Corinthians but “with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” And 1 Corinthians 14:33 says “as in all churches of the saints.” Paul is not giving local advice. He is establishing universal practice. And in verse 37 he seals it — these are the commandments of the Lord. A commandment of the Lord does not expire at the Corinthian city limits.

9. “The early church eventually developed leadership structures. The pastoral model evolved naturally.”

It did not evolve — it was imposed. The shift from participatory gatherings to clergy-led services happened when Christianity merged with the Roman imperial system under Constantine in the fourth century. The basilica replaced the house. The bishop replaced the body. The liturgy replaced the liberty of the Spirit. This was not organic growth. It was institutional capture. And it directly contradicted what Paul commanded. The fact that something happened historically does not make it biblical. Israel demanded a king too. God called it rejection (1 Samuel 8:7).

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 14:37 is not a footnote. It is a line in the sand. Paul declares that the open, participatory, Spirit-led gathering he has described is not his idea — it is **the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ**. Every institutional church that replaces this with a clergy-run program is not merely following a different tradition. It is in direct rebellion to apostolic authority. And every believer who considers himself spiritual must face that fact honestly.

The remnant is not looking for a better church service. The remnant is returning to what Christ commanded — His ekklesia functioning as a living body, every member active, every gift in operation, Christ singing and speaking through His people, and He Himself presiding as Head.

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