

Decently And In Order  
Luke 13:10-17

As I've mentioned to you on other occasions, I have had the blessed privilege of having been born and "half-raised" in the very rural, sometimes "backward", but very beautiful, hill country of Virginia.

And there, in those days, the church life was very different from the church life that I now experience. There in those hills, there were very few of the popular church denominations of our day, very few Baptist churches, no Methodist churches, one Presbyterian church. But there were Pentecostal churches, many of them, of all different varieties.

And my momma was Pentecostal, and very much so. And from my earliest memories of being in those churches, I can say that the order of worship and the proceedings of those church services were very different from those that I have attended now in my adult years.

I can recall that as a small child, I would stand beside my mother, holding onto her leg and feeling a trembling taking place within her body as she would sing and shout and worship.

When I would ask her what caused her to shake and to shout, she would say that it was the "Holy Ghost Power" in her.

Now in my adult years and living in a city environment, I have attended the more modern Baptist and Presbyterian Churches. And as we well know, our church services and proceedings are most often at the other end of the worship spectrum, very different from those rural Pentecostal Churches.

The first church that I began attending after I gave my heart to Christ was a traditional Presbyterian Church. And there, in that very conservative environment, it wasn't considered appropriate to openly express ourselves during a worship service, even to applaud when someone would sing a special solo hymn. On occasion, one elderly man in our congregation would give our appreciation some relief by uttering a loud melodious "Amen". And it seemed that the rest of us appreciated him for it.

I also recall that the Baptist church that my brother attended experienced a major split in the congregation with over half of the members leaving because of the way some of the other members responded to the “worship team” music by clapping their hands to the beat of the songs and “moving around too much”.

With all that being said, may we pause and read these words given to us here in Luke chapter 13, and we’ll read how those church leaders of Jesus’ day also preferred to do things in a strict orderly manner. Listen, there beginning in verse 10.

<sup>10</sup>Now he (the Lord Jesus) was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. <sup>11</sup>And there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.

<sup>12</sup>When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” <sup>13</sup>And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

<sup>14</sup>But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”

<sup>15</sup>Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? <sup>16</sup>And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” <sup>17</sup>As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.  
(Luke 13:10-17)

As we begin our consideration of these words, and how these words might give us guidance within our own modern day churches, first a question . . . “While order and structure are obviously a good thing within the church and within the worship services, are there also some dangers that can go along with strict adherence to order and structure?”

One of the signature verses that is used most often to establish and to maintain structure within the order of worship in our mainline Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist Churches is the one given in 1 Corinthians 14 that tells us simply to,

<sup>40</sup>Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40)

And as we observe the response of this “synagogue ruler”, we can see that he was obviously intent on enforcing a similar form of order within that synagogue meeting that day.

But unfortunately, as we can easily see from this circumstance, misinterpretation of God’s intent can lead us down wrong paths of legalism, causing us to maintain order and structure to the detriment of hurting and suffering people.

Listen to this man’s words again as he responded to Jesus having healed this suffering woman!

<sup>14</sup>But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” (Luke 13:14)

Bible commentators tell us that the ruler of the synagogue probably had ulterior motives when he became “indignant” about Jesus healing the woman, that perhaps he was just jealous, or some other reason.

But aside from that, assuming that he genuinely wanted to make a proper application of the Law, it does not take much Spiritual sense to discern that such rigidity, at the expense of a crippled and suffering woman, does not bespeak the true, loving and compassionate heart of God.

And for us, as we look back at this incident, we think this church leader’s response to be absurdly foolish, without any form of love or compassion, a rigidity that is out of place, especially when done for the simple purpose of maintaining an orderly structure of worship.

But . . . with that being said, can we really claim to be very much different with the demands that we make for structure and order within our own church services? Are we perhaps, in many ways, just as rigid as was this ruler of this synagogue?

Would we deny dear and suffering saints access to the cleansing and healing power of God, solely for the purpose of conducting our church services “decently and in order”?

I can't speak so much for the Methodist Churches and other mainline denominational churches, but I have spent a lot of time in Baptist and Presbyterian Churches, mostly Presbyterian Churches. And I can speak from personal witness that we really will do most anything to make sure that we do maintain our revered order and structure.

You'll note that except for those special times of worship, perhaps a communion service, or when we have some special music, our usual order of worship is as predictable as the clock. We do the very same things in the very same way most every Sunday.

And no, not all Presbyterian and Baptist and Methodist churches conduct their services in exactly the same way, but you can be sure, they are very similar and they do usually stay very, very orderly.

In most of our churches, we are well trained concerning when we are to stand up and when we are to sit down, mostly having very little to do with real worship and more to do with order and structure.

So the question again . . . do we hold fast to our own structures of a predesigned worship service arrangement? The answer is yes, we do, and very much so.

Another question . . . is that a right thing for us to do, or is it a wrong thing? In itself, it is probably neither right nor wrong, good nor bad. But it does provide a setting for either to take place . . . good things because some otherwise well-meaning people might lead the congregation astray into very wrong directions . . . bad things, in that within a rigid religious system there can be many lost opportunities for true worship.

Let's take a moment and ask ourselves, "what are some of those things that a congregation might do that could lead it down wrong pathways?"

One that seems to be most feared by our mainline conservative churches is that we might do something really "charismatic", like wave our hands in the air, or shout uncontrollably, or perhaps talk in tongues, or display some other form of strong emotion.

Those are things that seem to take place often in many of the Charismatic

congregations, and those things would seem not to fit within our conservative Presbyterian, and Baptists and Methodists church services.

But are those things really wrong? Are they unscriptural? Or are they simply uncomfortable to our conservative natures?

I want to be very careful and not misuse this opportunity and speak words that are not from the Lord, and I especially don't want to defame other brothers and sisters in Christ.

So, I will simply say that while I can't fully discount some of the things other folks do in their worship services, neither can I find some of their activities to be clearly defined in the scriptures.

But in amongst all of the uncertainty of such matters, I do believe it to be also proper for us to question our own selves and to ask, "Is it right for us to straight away cast aside what might be some very good things, just because we don't understand them or we feel uncomfortable with them?"

Should we, just because of the theatrics and questionable displays by some of the so-called faith-healers, turn our backs and ignore very legitimate healing instructions from God, words like those plainly given in James chapter 5, words that instruct us to go to the Elders of our church and to ask them to pray for our healing.

Folks, I personally know of three, perhaps four, very clear evidences of God's healing provision taking place.

When we ignore or when we "side-step" some of these "out-of-the-ordinary" possibilities within our worship services, are we any different than that "ruler of the synagogue". Are we perhaps guilty of denying crippled and suffering saints access to the healing power of Jesus, just for the sake of maintaining a strict order of worship in our church.

And on another matter of order and structure within our church services, what about the words of John the Baptist when he said in Luke chapter 3,

<sup>16</sup> . . . "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:16)

Just because some churches use the words "Baptism of the Holy Ghost" in ways that we do not understand, do we just ignore those words . . . or ignore the same words spoken by Jesus in the Book of Acts where He said to His disciples, "you heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:4-5)

And also, there in Acts where He said,

<sup>8</sup> . . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

And in the Book of Joel, God gets even more emphatic with prophecies about the soon-coming "Day of the Lord" saying,

<sup>28</sup> I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. <sup>29</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29)

These words about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and about the Holy Spirit being poured out upon us, are powerful words folks, and they are pure scripture. And although these words are uncomfortable to our sedate and conservative senses, we dare not ignore or side-step them.

We need always to make serious inquiry into these scriptures, asking what these and other words like them should mean to us personally, and what they should look like when they are taking place? And just because such things don't seem to fit within the prescribed order of worship that we love and revere, that does not mean that those things are wrong.

So the question again . . . in our own rigid adherence to our customary order of church service, can we really claim to be very much different from this ruler of this synagogue?

As we hold strongly to our order of worship, are we perhaps denying, or quenching the work and the power of the Holy Spirit within the life of our church, and within our own lives, personally?

And again, would we unintentionally deny dear and suffering saints access to the cleansing and healing power of God, solely for the purpose of conducting our church services “decently and in order”?

This is a very difficult question for us, but it really ought to be dealt with.

And folks, our only source of real truth on this or any matter is this scripture. We dare not simply rely upon our own personal feelings, and especially our personal opinion, no matter what those feelings and opinions might be. And neither should we simply rely on the things that we have been taught. All matters of belief must be subjected to examination by these scriptures.

And as we study these scriptures, we need to be careful to always take them within the context that they are given to us, an excellent example being, these very words that we have been speaking about here in 1 Corinthians 14. We usually only quote verse 40,

<sup>40</sup>Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40)

But folks, there is more being said within that context that many of our conservative brethren tend to shy away from. Turn for a moment to that passage and let's read all of its words carefully. First beginning in verse 39, and then moving on to verse 40. Verse 39,

<sup>39</sup>Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. <sup>40</sup>Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:39-40)

Note carefully that these words do not, in any way, prohibit “prophesying and speaking in tongues”. These words simply instruct us to do those things “decently and in order”.

And note also, that these words actually command us to “desire earnestly to prophesy”, to speak forth the words of our Lord. In the early history of the church, none of the lay members had bibles as we do today. Only the professional clergy owned bibles and were allowed to give forth the teachings within these scriptures.

But also, great care needs to be exercised in that some people would desire to give some “new prophetic words”, words that can't be found within our scriptures. And that really must not be allowed.

But again, we really should not hinder our brethren from giving forth the scriptural truths given within this bible as long as it is done decently and in order.

As for the “speaking in tongues” spoken about here. Many of my most trusted Christian mentors truly believe that some of the “Spiritual Gifts”, one of which is the gift of speaking in tongues, has ceased to be effectual in our current day, that those gifts were only given for and used during the initial beginnings of the Christian Church.

I personally have not as yet been convinced by these scriptures that those gifts have ceased. And while I myself am not gifted with that gift and I don't know anyone who is, I personally would not restrict a brother from “speaking in tongues” as long as it is done “decently and in order”, and as long as an interpreter is present to tell the rest of us what has been said.

May I pause for a moment and just say, Wow! Would that not be a very different form of worship service in our otherwise very conservative churches?

Folks, I don't know what is going through your minds right now in response to these words that I'm saying. But I am convicted that, just as the ruler of this synagogue sought to prohibit the work of God, and to deny relief and comfort to a hurting, suffering crippled woman, solely for the sake of maintaining order in the worship service, that we may possibly also be guilty of doing the same. By organizing each Sunday service into a tightly structured process, we might in fact be hindering the work of God's Holy Spirit.

Looking back at our scriptures for today . . . a question . . . was that Ruler of the Synagogue being sinful by his behavior? There is no doubt that he was, because Jesus called him a “hypocrite”.

But even if that man was doing what he was doing from a confused ignorance, the results would still be the same.

God does not want you and me to be arrogant but neither does He want us to be ignorant. He wants us to search these scriptures and to respond to them by the power of His Holy Spirit. And if that means that we would occasionally look odd or sound odd, then that should be OK with us.



We might surprise or even disappoint some of our fellow Christians, but let me assure you, we will be pleasing to the Lord.

As for myself, I confess that I probably have, on occasion, acted the “hypocrite”. Hopefully it was unintentionally so, but nonetheless, by my actions or by my inactions, I might have still done what this synagogue ruler did. And if so, I repent of it and I don’t want to do that anymore. Jesus called that man a hypocrite. I don’t want to be a hypocrite. And I don’t want you to be a hypocrite either.

One final thought . . . returning to those sweet childhood memories that I experienced standing there hanging onto my momma’s leg as she trembled and shouted and worshiped the Lord . . . as of today, in my aged years, I have never personally experienced what my dear mother was experiencing in those moments of worship. I do hope that it has not been because I have quenched the fire of the Holy Spirit. I do hope instead that it is simply that God ministers to each of us in different ways, and that my experience is simply the plan that He designed for me personally.

I guess that I might have to wait until I reach heaven to find that out for sure.

And remembering that all those many people and creatures in heaven, the Four and twenty Elders, the Cherubim, the Seraphim, the Living Creatures and all the many others, they all worshiped God with differing words and in differing ways, I’m looking forward to the way and the manner of glorifying worship that I’ll do then.

Until then, may I encourage you, and me, to have and to exhibit the freedom and the power of the Holy Spirit within the church setting that we attend? And if perchance we might then do something we have never done before, may we do it “decently and in order” and bless our Lord with our worship.

Listen again, as we close,

<sup>39</sup>Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. <sup>40</sup>Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:39-40)

Let’s pray.

