

A STUDY OF

1 Corinthians





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Paul the Apostle

Corinth the City

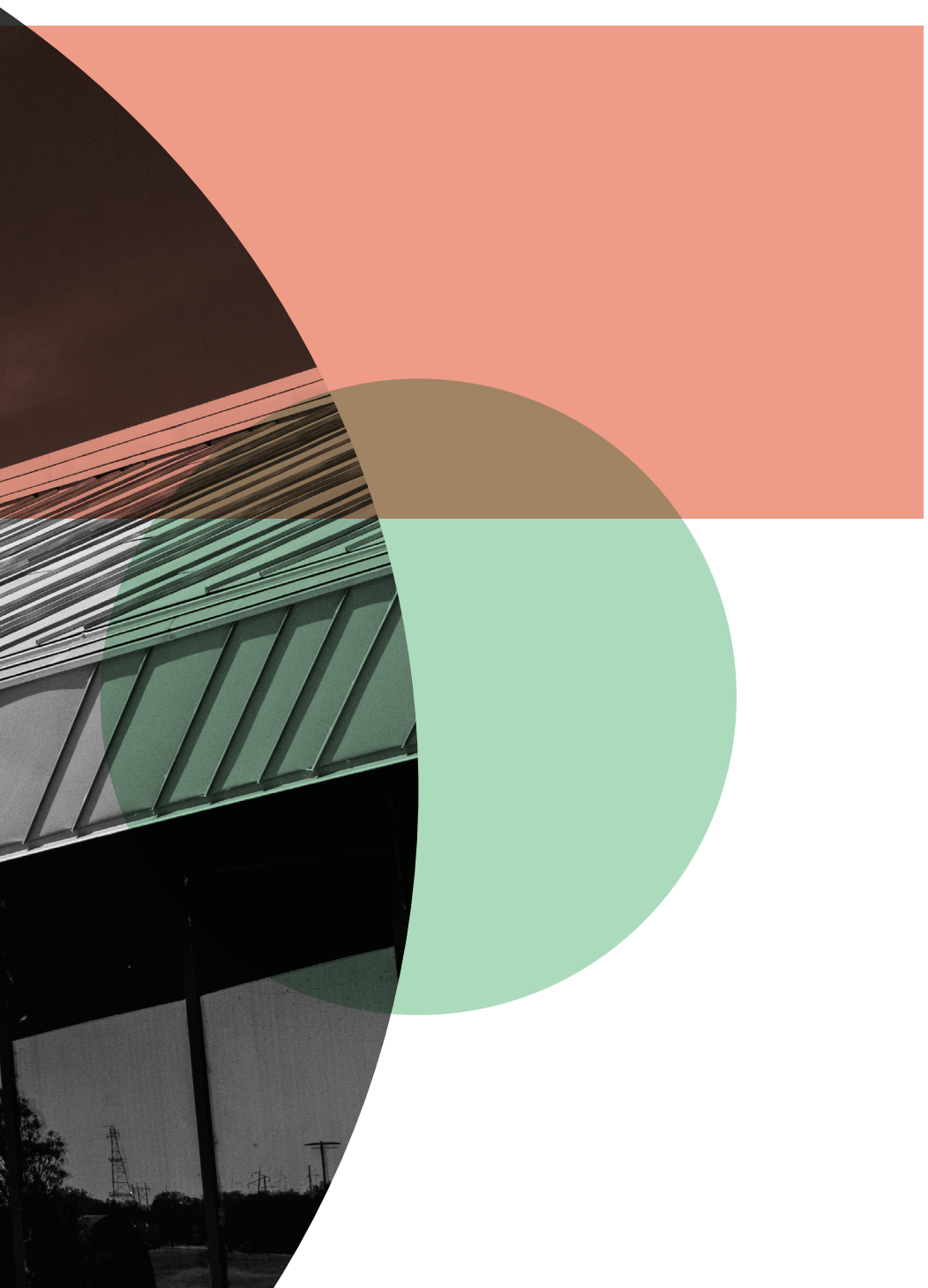
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INTRODUCTION



Paul the Apostle

With this second volume, our study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians continues. We encourage you to review volume one on our website at fellowshipnwa.org/1corinthians. Once again, it requires that we get to know the author and his audience.

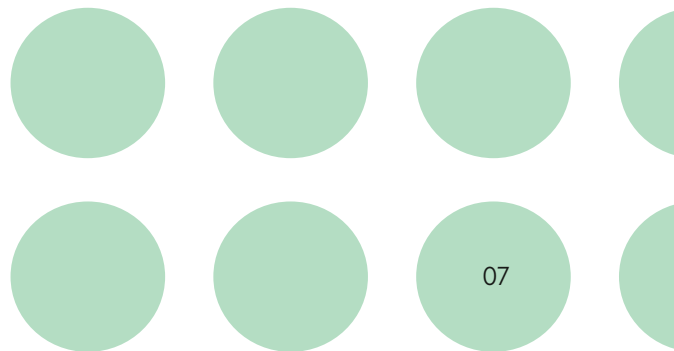
The Apostle Paul was a first-century Jew who grew up between two worlds. Even his name points to this reality. He goes by both Saul and Paul. Experienced readers of the Bible will have encountered people with two names before: Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah, Jacob/Israel, Simon/Peter. However, Saul/Paul is a different story. Those other examples all involved a dramatic moment in which God gave them a new name to represent a new call on their lives. Paul's two names do not come from a dramatic call moment, rather they come from his background. Paul was a Jew and a Roman citizen. Like so many other people who belong to two worlds and language groups, the apostle had a name for each group: a Jewish name (Saul) and a Roman name (Paul).

Paul grew up in Tarsus, a city in what is now modern-day Turkey. He was born a Roman citizen, which granted him great privilege and status in the empire. It was a rare honor for people living in the provinces of Rome and likely points to his father or grandfather performing some great service to the empire, perhaps military service. This meant that Paul "belonged" in the Roman world. He was an insider.

However, there is another half to Paul's life, or perhaps it is better to say Saul's life. Though his ancestry is in Tarsus with Roman citizenship, Paul was raised for a significant portion of his life in Jerusalem and was educated under one of the finest Jewish Rabbis of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). There was no finer pedigree for proving one's commitment

to Jewish faith and heritage than to be trained by a famous Rabbi in Jerusalem. Paul became a passionate religious leader at an early age. He was passionate about suppressing what he saw as a “heretical” new Jewish sect. That group claimed that a man, accused and crucified as a criminal, was actually the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

This Messiah executed by men appeared to Paul very much alive, even resurrected from the dead. Paul’s life was turned upside down when Jesus showed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus. The sect he had been persecuting was actually central to God’s promised redemption. Paul found new purpose in extending this movement to the ends of the earth rather than trying to suppress it. He recognized that God had prepared him for a special role in this movement. As a man of two worlds, he was uniquely suited to bring the good news to gentile people—the Jewish Messiah was the King of the whole world. Paul could easily move between discussing the Jewish Torah and the Greco-Roman athletic games, showing how both worlds can be connected to Jesus. Salvation for the Jews meant salvation for all.



Corinth the City

When reading New Testament letters, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the culture in which the letter was received. For example, we would have a different expectation for a letter written to the people of Las Vegas, Nevada, compared to one written to Charleston, South Carolina. Each city is unique with its own strengths and challenges.

The ancient city of Corinth was located at a vital isthmus in Greece. The city had previously been destroyed by Rome but was rebuilt as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. by Julius Caesar. By the time of the New Testament, Corinth was the Roman capital of Greece. Once reestablished, masses of people moved there for new opportunities. The city was financially prospering, leading to many merchants with newfound success. Many of them were former slaves building a new life, desperately wanting to prove they belonged. The Corinthians were spending their wealth to demonstrate that this city deserved to be named as one of the great cities of the empire. Part of this attempt at belonging was the building of temples for worship much like those found in Rome. The desire for prestige and social recognition drove the culture. With rapid growth and wealth came vulgar immorality and gross materialism. Corinth was legendary in Rome for its sexual corruption.



The Church in Corinth


Paul's missionary work in Corinth is recorded in Acts 18. Paul was coming from serious difficulties and disappointments. In Philippi, he had been beaten, jailed, and run out of town (Acts 16). A riot broke out around Paul's preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17), and though he had only been with that young church for a short time, he was again run out of town. After a brief stint of ministry in Athens, Paul came to Corinth likely tired and discouraged. In fact, Paul says that he came to the Corinthians "in weakness with great fear and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). He went to the Jews first, telling them in their synagogue that their Messiah had come to Jerusalem, died and rose again. Again, Paul was rejected. So he turned to the non-Jews of Corinth with the gospel message.

Then something special happened. Many Corinthians believed in Jesus. In fact, Paul was able to stay with the new church in Corinth for 18 months, gathering in homes and teaching them about Jesus. (It is probable that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians during this time.) Many of these new believers likely had little familiarity with the God of Israel. They were living a Roman lifestyle—chasing wealth, significance, and pleasure. Paul taught them about a new way of life, walking in the grace of Jesus, in the way of the cross, and in the power of the Spirit. Then he entrusted the church to local leaders and began his journey back to Jerusalem. A young preacher named Apollos, after some training in Ephesus, would be sent to Corinth to help pastor the church (Acts 19:1).



The 1st Letter to the Corinthians

After Paul left Corinth, he arrived in Ephesus and spent three years ministering in that city. But Paul's heart never left any of the churches he helped start. He continued to pray regularly for them (1 Corinthians 1:4). Prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians, there had been back-and-forth communication between Paul and church leaders. Two events occurred that spurred Paul to write a letter back to the Corinthian church. First, a group of people from "Chloe's household" came to Paul and told him about divisions growing within the church (1 Corinthians 1:11). Corinthian believers were divided based on which leader they chose to follow. Then, Paul also heard about a case of sexual immorality among them and deep arguments within the church. 1 Corinthians 1-6 addresses this report, critiquing the pursuit of pride and significance within the church. Apparently, the Corinthians had allowed the ways of the city of Corinth to infect how they approached life together in Christ. Paul wrote to remind them that the wisdom of the cross is entirely different.



At some point in his time at Ephesus, Paul also received a letter from the church with a series of pastoral questions. By the time 1 Corinthians was written, the teacher Apollos had joined Paul in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:12). Perhaps Apollos or some other leader brought the letter to Paul with a series of specific questions. 1 Corinthians 7 begins with “Now concerning the matters you wrote about...” (ESV). Chapters 7-14 address several practical questions the church sent to Paul concerning marriage, worship, and spiritual gifts.

Finally, in chapter 15, Paul reminds the church what is most important, the gospel of Jesus. He reminds them of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and the future hope they have in Him. In chapter 16, Paul makes personal requests for generosity to the poor and sends his pastoral greetings.

1 Corinthians is a special letter for the Christian church because it shows us that the good news about Jesus should shape every aspect of how we live. It should inform and transform the way we see the world and approach life. It is deeply practical and relevant to aspects of morality, community, humility, worship, and hope. Every facet of the Christian life must be shaped by the life of Jesus and the wisdom the Spirit brings. To that end we study Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

How to use this Study Guide

The 1 Corinthians Study Guide is laid out in weekly sessions with resources for daily engagement to help us grow together.

Each session includes the following:

- daily readings to guide your study throughout the week
- contextual introduction to aid in the study of the week's passage
- scripture passage for the week
- discussion questions to help you process the passage in personal and small group settings

Use this guide wherever you study 1 Corinthians—in your personal time with God, in small group meetings, and in corporate worship. Discover how Paul's instruction and encouragement to the church at Corinth can guide and encourage you today.



NEED HELP?

This study guide and included bookmark are designed to help you understand and apply the Scriptures accurately to your life. The Inductive Bible Study Method is an effective tool in accomplishing that goal. This method equips you to make key observations in a passage of scripture, interpret it within its proper context, and then apply it to daily life.

For a brief introduction to the Inductive Bible Study Method, The Training Center of Fellowship Bible Church has prepared helpful videos to get you started. You can watch them at fellowshipnwa.org/1corinthians or simply scan the QR code with your smart phone camera to access the link.

Additionally, The Training Center offers Personal Bible Study, a class that goes much deeper into this method of study. If you have not yet taken this class, we encourage you to do so to experience the riches that come from intentional exploration of God’s written Word.

Visit trainingcenternwa.org/events to sign up for the next available Personal Bible Study class or contact our Training Center team at training@fellowshipnwa.org for more information.

DISCUSSION GUIDE SUGGESTIONS

This guide helps small groups engage in discussion. Use discretion in determining which questions will work best and be most beneficial. You will likely find a few questions for each lesson that will prompt your group into deeper discussions. You can even create questions of your own. The prompts begin with broad “getting to know one another” questions and lead into deeper observations of the passage, quotes, application thoughts, and prayer suggestions. Blessings to you and your group as you journey with Paul through the complexities of 1 Corinthians.



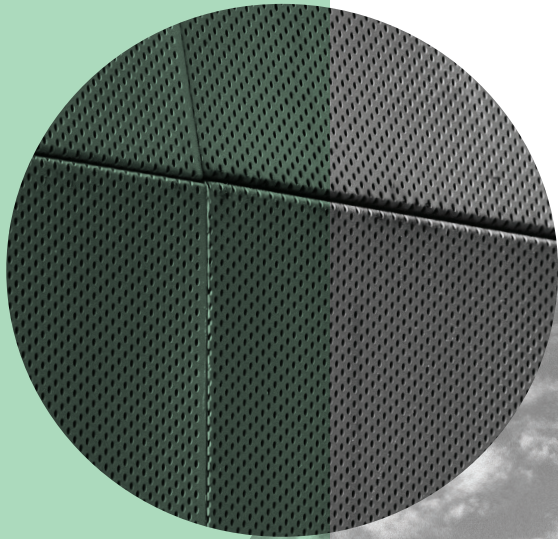
A Visual Exploration of 1 Corinthians

The 1 Corinthians Study Guide explores a visual narrative that merges the ancient world with the contemporary, portraying the theme of connection between two worlds. The use of black and white imagery intersecting dual-color design elements symbolizes the relationship between past and future, foundation and the structure built upon it. This is particularly evident in Volume 1, where Paul addresses the overarching issues facing the church. Central ideas of wisdom and holiness are represented through photography of libraries, museums, and churches, reflecting the interconnectedness of historical and contemporary worlds.

In contrast, Volume 2 goes deeper into the specifics of the church's challenges, still maintaining a focus on wisdom and holiness but shifting the imagery. While Volume 1 uses broader architectural landscapes to mirror the big picture themes of the first half of 1 Corinthians, Volume 2 concentrates more on the finer details and materials, representing the intricacies of larger themes.

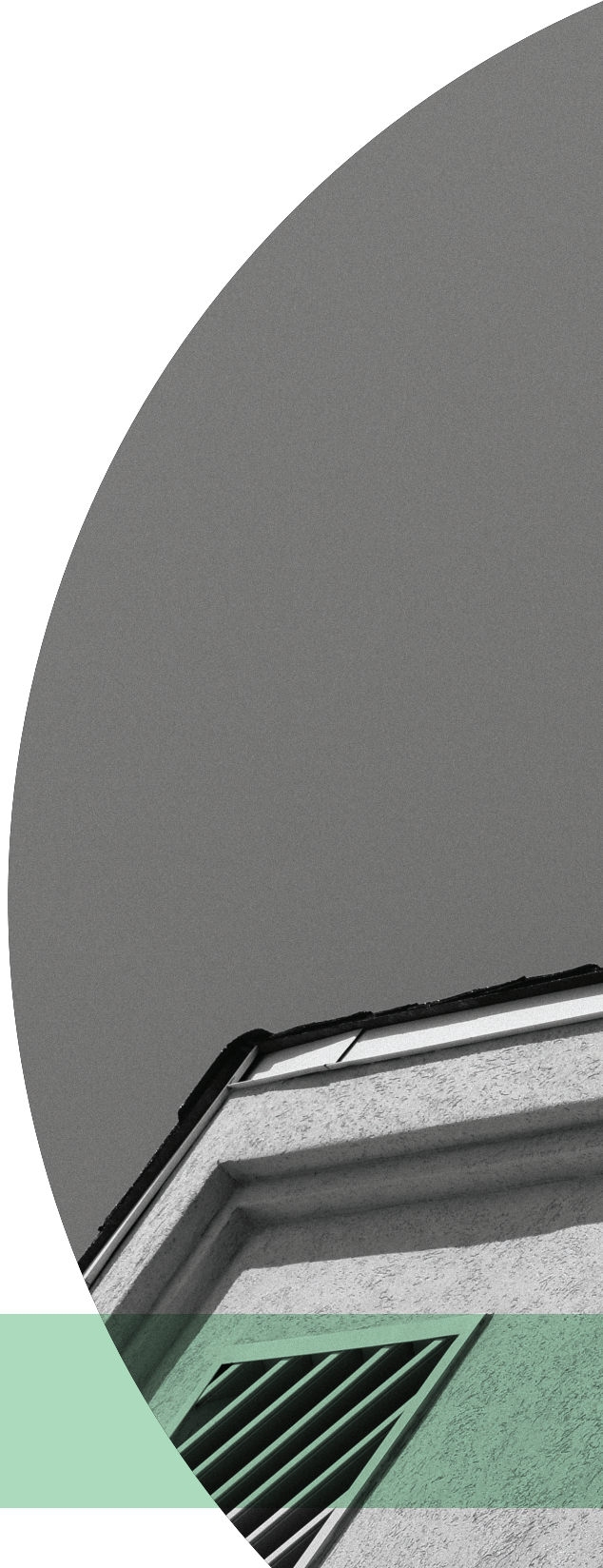
Another significant aspect of Volume 2 is its focus on local landmarks, emphasizing the modern-day relevance of Paul's letters to the ancient Corinthian church. This artistic approach highlights a mixture of old and new architecture in and around Northwest Arkansas, showcasing both wide and macro views of the buildings. Through this interplay of ancient and contemporary imagery, the study guide invites the audience to reflect on how the lessons of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church can be applied to the modern culture of Northwest Arkansas.

CREATIVE SUBMISSIONS: special thanks to Andrea Darby, Denise England, Carly Allen, Brandon Jennings, Kerri Hoffmann, Caroline Wright, and the Fellowship Spectra Arts Ministry. (fellowshipnwa.org/spectra).



HOLINESS IN FREEDOM: THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 9:1-27



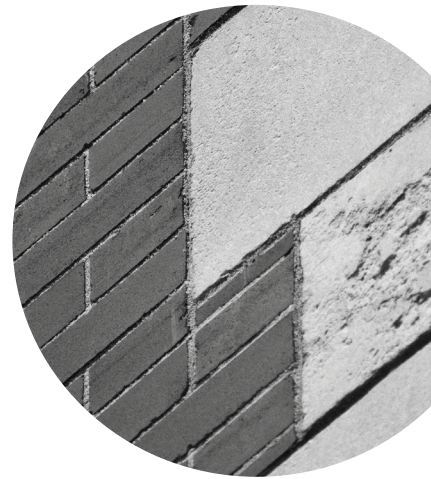
01





Daily Readings

- 01 Philippians 4:10-14
- 02 Matthew 10:5-13
- 03 Acts 9:20-30
- 04 Galatians 1:13-2:10
- 05 1 Thessalonians 2:5-9
- 06 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15
- 07 Luke 10:1-9



WEEK 01

Holiness in Freedom: The Gospel

Chapters 8-10 form a unit concerning the use of Christian freedom. In this week's study, Paul is continuing the conversation about food sacrificed to idols that began in chapter 8. Paul's primary message to the Corinthians around this controversy was to be loving and considerate of other brothers and sisters in the Lord, even if that means limiting one's own freedom.

Chapter 9 appears to present a shift to an entirely new topic, that of money and payment for pastoral leadership. In fact, Paul is using his own ministry as an example of the kind of self-limiting love he is calling the Corinthians to imitate. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Apostles (those sent by Jesus to start new churches) are typically supported financially by the church. An apostle's ministry is his job. Yet, Paul has regularly chosen not to accept payment from new churches, working his trade as a tentmaker while preaching and establishing churches.

Paul is not sharing this example randomly or to inspire praise for his self-sacrifice. It illustrates the point he was making in chapter 8—love for others should surpass love of our own freedoms and rights. What drove Paul to give up his rights was his commitment to preach the gospel of Jesus to everyone. He is willing to give up his rights, privileges, preferences, and even his national heritage for the sake of people hearing about Jesus. As we read this passage, we reflect on whether our love for Jesus and others leads us to the same kind of self-sacrifice.

PAUL'S RIGHTS AS AN APOSTLE

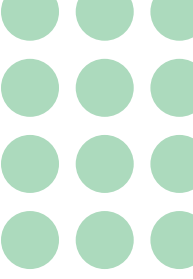
Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? ² Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³ This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. ⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?

⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? ⁸ Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

¹³ Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.



¹⁵ But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. ¹⁶ For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

PAUL'S USE OF HIS FREEDOM

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

THE NEED FOR SELF-DISCIPLINE

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

WARM UP

Have you ever won a race, tournament, or contest? Tell us about it! In what areas are you most competitive? (sports, cards, board games, etc.)

Some card games require partners or teams. Tennis can be singles or doubles matches. Do you like to “go it alone,” or would you rather have a partner when competing?

Have you ever been part of a championship team? What does it take to become a champion?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-27

Paul indicates that some in the church at Corinth were judging him. Due to his past (as Saul), he was not always warmly received by the early church. Read Acts 9:19b-30. Why were they afraid of him?

In verses 1-18, Paul addresses questions about his apostleship. In verses 1-3, what evidence does he give in defense? (Reference Galatians 1:13-2:10.)

In verses 7-12a, Paul goes to great lengths to illustrate that those who devote their lives to the preaching of the gospel are worthy of support. What illustrations does he use to prove his point?

In verses 19-23, what is Paul willing to do to reach others for Christ? Does his zeal inspire or intimidate you? Who is someone who has inspired you to run the race well?

APPLICATION

Read verses 24-27. Share at least three disciplines you could further develop as you run the race marked out for you.

Consider asking someone in your group to hold you accountable to developing these disciplines.

THINK

See "*The Race*" on the following pages.

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns you can share with your group.

THE RACE

1 “Quit! Give up! You’re beaten!”
They shout at me and plead.
“There’s just too much against you now.
This time you can’t succeed.”

And as I start to hang my head
In front of failure’s face,
My downward fall is broken by
The memory of a race.

And hope refills my weakened will
As I recall that scene:
For just the thought of that short race
Rejuvenates my being.

2 A children’s race—young boys, young men
How I remember well.
Excitement, sure! But also fear.
It wasn’t hard to tell.

They all lined up so full of hope
Each thought to win that race.
Or tie for first, or if not that,
At least take second place.

And fathers watched from off the side
Each cheering for his son.
And each boy hoped to show his dad
That he would be the one.

The whistle blew and off they went
Young hearts and hopes afire.
To win and be the hero there
Was each young boys desire.

And one boy in particular
Whose dad was in the crowd
Was running near the lead and thought:
“My dad will be so proud!”

But as they speeded down the field
Across a shallow dip,
The little boy who thought to win
Lost his step and slipped.

Trying hard to catch himself
His hands flew out to brace,
And mid the laughter of the crowd
He fell flat on his face.

So down he fell and with him hope
— He couldn’t win it now —
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished
To disappear somehow.

But as he fell his dad stood up
And showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said:
“Get up and win the race.”

He quickly rose, no damage done,
Behind a bit, that’s all,
And ran with all his mind and might
To make up for his fall.

So anxious to restore himself
To catch up and to win
His mind went faster than his legs:
He slipped and fell again!

He wished then he had quit before
With only one disgrace.
“I’m hopeless as a runner now;
I shouldn’t try to race!”

But in the laughing crowd, he searched
And found his father’s face;
That steady look which said again:
“Get up and win the race!”

So up he jumped to try again
Ten yards behind the last
“If I’m to gain those yards,” he thought,
“I’ve got to move real fast.”

Exerting everything he had
He regained eight or ten,
But trying so hard to catch the lead
He slipped and fell again!

Defeat! He lay there silently
 A tear dropped from his eye.
 “There’s no sense running anymore:
 Three strikes. I’m out. Why try!”

The will to rise had disappeared:
 All hope had fled away;
 So far behind, so error prone;
 A loser all the way.

“I’ve lost. So what’s the use,” he thought
 “I’ll live with my disgrace.”
 But then he thought about his dad
 Who soon he’d have to face.

“Get up,” an echo sounded low.
 “Get up and take your place;
 You were not meant for failure here.
 Get up and win the race.”

“With borrowed will get up,” it said,
 “You haven’t lost at all.
 For winning is no more than this:
 To rise each time you fall.”

So up he rose to run once more,
 And with a new commit
 He resolved that win or lose
 At least he wouldn’t quit.

So far behind the others now,
 The most he’d ever been,
 Still he gave it all he had
 And ran as though to win.

Three times he’d fallen, stumbling;
 Three times he rose again;
 Too far behind to hope to win
 He still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner
 As he crossed the line first place:
 Head high, and proud, and happy;
 No falling, no disgrace.

But when the fallen youngster
 Crossed the line last place,
 The crowd gave him the greater cheer,
 For finishing the race.

And even though he came in last
 With head bowed low, unproud,
 You would have thought he’d won the race
 To listen to the crowd.

And to his dad he sadly said,
 “I didn’t do too well.”
 “To me, you won.” His father said.
 “You rose each time you fell.”

3 And now when things seem dark and hard
 And difficult to face,
 The memory of that little boy
 Helps me in my race.

For all of life is like that race,
 With ups and downs and all.
 And all you have to do to win
 Is rise each time you fall.

“Quit! Give up! You’re beaten!”
 They still shout in my face.
 But another voice within me says:
 “GET UP AND WIN THE RACE!”



HOLINESS IN FREEDOM: IDOLATRY

1 Corinthians 10:1-22



WEEK 02

Holiness in Freedom: Idolatry

In chapters 8 and 9, Paul presents the need for those who are more established in the faith to exercise wisdom in showing love to others within the church. It was a shift from a self-centered view of personal rights to one of being others-focused.

In chapter 10, Paul presents another angle: the believer's vulnerability to sin. If one danger in exercising freedom is the lack of concern for others, another is the lack of concern for one's own potential to sin. It is easy for believers to become too comfortable in their newfound freedom that arrogance can creep into their hearts.

To illustrate his point, Paul reminds the reader of the sin of ancient Israel in the wilderness. It is difficult to imagine a more dramatic deliverance by God than the exodus out of Egypt. This makes that generation's turn to drunken partying, sexual sin, and ultimate idolatry all the more shocking (Exodus 32). Reading the story, one is tempted to question, "How could they be so dumb?" But Paul reminds the reader that, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us" (1 Corinthians 10:11). If Israel could so easily slip into idolatry in the wilderness, the Corinthians should treat the idolatry around them with sober concern rather than reckless arrogance.

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 10:1-22
- 02 1 Peter 2:9-16
- 03 1 Peter 5:6-12
- 04 2 Corinthians 6
- 05 2 Peter 3:1-9
- 06 2 Peter 3:10-18
- 07 Galatians 6:1-10

WARNINGS FROM ISRAEL'S HISTORY

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.³ They all ate the same spiritual food⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.”⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.⁹ We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

¹¹These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

IDOL FEASTS AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

¹⁴Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

¹⁸Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? ¹⁹Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. ²²Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

WARM UP

Think of a few blessings of God you are privileged to enjoy. List three to five that come to mind and share these with your group.

Considering the list you just made, what are a few blessings of God that you often take for granted? If any were taken from you, how would that disrupt your life?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-22

In verse 1-4, Paul points to Israel's history. What were some of the blessings they enjoyed?

We are told in verse 5 God was not pleased with most of them, and they paid a stiff penalty. What examples of disobedience are listed in verses 7-10?

It seems Paul is warning the Corinthians that their situation is similar to that of the Israelites. What contemporary wisdom do we learn from verses 11-12? Have you ever been at a place where you thought you were standing firm but fell? What assurance do you gain from verse 13?

In verse 14, what encouragement does Paul emphatically give the Corinthians? Read Tim Keller's definition of an idol in the "Think" section. List some things we idolize, intentionally or unintentionally.

APPLICATION

How does Communion, the observance and remembrance of the Lord's body and blood, promote and exemplify unity in the body of Christ (verses 14-22)?

THINK

"An idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, and anything that you seek to give you what only God can give."

- *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller

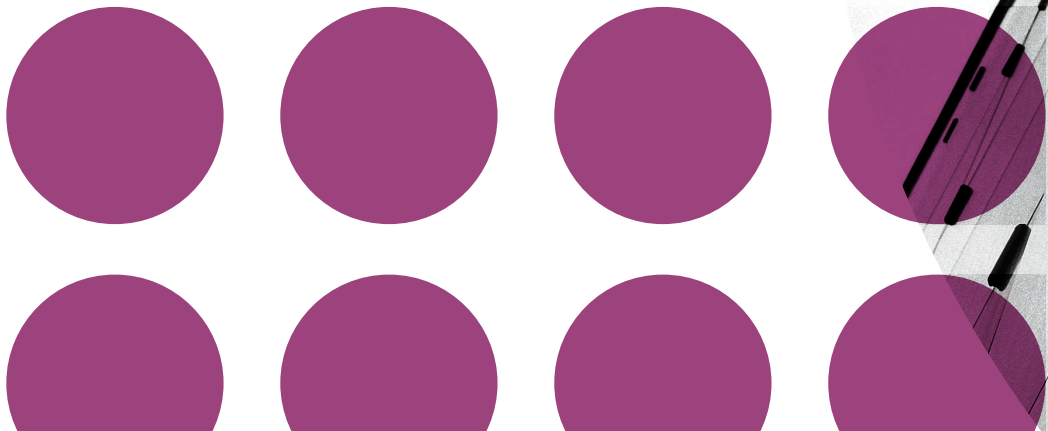
PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns you can share with your group. Take time to thank God for the blessings of life.



HOLINESS IN FREEDOM: UNITY

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1





03

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1
- 02 Psalm 24
- 03 Philippians 2:1-8
- 04 1 Timothy 4:1-8
- 05 Colossians 3:17
- 06 Romans 14:10-14
- 07 Romans 14:15-23



WEEK 03

Holiness in Freedom: Unity

The long discussion of eating meat sacrificed to idols comes to a conclusion in this week's passage. While Paul defends the believer's freedom concerning matters of food, he also reminds the believer to be very concerned about the well-being of others. He presents hypothetical situations involving eating in the homes of non-believers—a practice Paul assumes believers *will* engage. A believer's pursuit of holiness should not involve distancing from non-believers. How could there be a witness to the gospel if that were the case? To eat in someone's home would show an intimate kind of friendship.

In Paul's hypothetical scenario, the non-believer serves the meal without any discussion about the food's origin. The question posed is whether the believer needs to investigate if the food was previously offered to a pagan god.

THE BELIEVER'S FREEDOM

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial.

“I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.

²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

²⁵ Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”

²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience.

²⁹ I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience? ³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— ³³ even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

11 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.



WARM UP

Consider this saying: “It’s easier to ask for forgiveness than permission.”
Has this mindset ever led you into trouble?

Have you ever stood firmly on your convictions, not being swayed by others?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-11:01

In verse 23, Paul calls out two phrases the Corinthians use to justify their freedom. How does he correct them? How does verse 24 instruct them on properly using and applying their freedom?

Paul makes the point that pagan worship did not contaminate meat that had been sacrificed to idols and mature believers were free to eat it. In verses 25-30, what is Paul saying about Christian liberty? Why does he encourage them not to eat the meat in the presence of unbelievers? Reading verses 32-33, how important is it to avoid becoming a stumbling block?

Many find it difficult to navigate “gray areas.” How do you manage these types of situations?

How does verse 31 relate to Colossians 3:17? What is the benefit (to you, to others, the church) of seeking to glorify God in everything we do?

In 11:1, Paul makes it clear that it is his ultimate goal to follow the example of Christ. What characteristics of Paul's life inspire you? What is the ultimate goal of *your* life?

APPLICATION

Perhaps there are “gray areas” you have been careless with lately that may be stumbling blocks to others. List them. What are steps you can take to remove those barriers in your relationship with others?

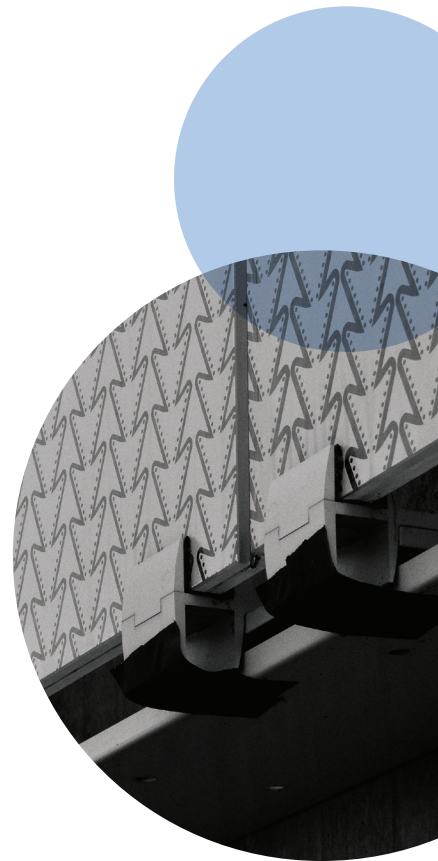
THINK

Compare your participation in the Christian life with a football game. Which phrase best describes you?

- In the bleachers (I'm just watching from a distance.)
- On the bench (I'm excited and ready to get in the game!)
- On the field (I'm in the game and loving every minute of it!)
- In the locker room (For some reason, I'm done. I need help.)

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns you can share with your group. If you have one, share a praise with the group.





04

HOLINESS IN WORSHIP: HEAD COVERINGS

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

WEEK 04

Holiness in Worship: Head Coverings

This passage begins an important section of 1 Corinthians that focuses on holiness in the gathered worship service. Paul addresses how believers should behave when coming together to grow in the Lord. This includes instruction on proper dress, the Lord's supper, and the exercise of spiritual gifts. This week's passage focuses on proper dress in worship.

Paul praises the Corinthians for holding on to the traditions that he passed on to them. For some, "tradition" can be a trigger, but in fact there are many good traditions. Any tradition passed down from the Lord is good. It is loyalty to manmade traditions over the word of God that Jesus reprimands (Mark 7:8).

Paul then challenges the Corinthians for their approach to head coverings in times of prayer. While there is much about the specific cultural implications of head coverings that is misunderstood, Paul's main point is rooted in sound theology. Paul describes a series of relationships between God, Christ, man, and woman, each of which

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 11:2-16
- 02 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17
- 03 Colossians 1:15-20
- 04 2 Thessalonians 3:1-6
- 05 1 Timothy 2:9-13
- 06 Genesis 1:26-28
- 07 Ephesians 5:21-32

is described as the “head” of the other. The meaning of “head” as a metaphor has been subject to intense debates over issues of *authority, preeminence, and source*. Whatever the specific nuance, Paul theologically argues that there is a distinct relationship between men and women that corresponds with their relationships to Christ. This relationship should be reflected even in the ways we dress during worship.

There is both partnership and distinction noted here. Neither sex is more valuable than the other. Both are made in the image of God. Both depend on each other. And both serve alongside each other in the church, praying and prophesying. And yet, while there is partnership, there is also a distinction of male and female that should be reflected in the worshipping practice of the church. Great discernment is required in determining how this should be reflected in contemporary church cultures.





1 Corinthians 11:2-16

ON COVERING THE HEAD IN WORSHIP

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. ³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

WARM UP

What was your favorite television show when you were growing up?

We all have people who have influenced the direction of our lives. Who influenced you in significant ways to become the person you are today?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

Paul addresses topics that deal with behavior in corporate worship. How do worship services today differ from those you may have experienced as a child? What are positive things you see today?

What are things we should be mindful of in corporate worship so we do not distract others?

After previously confronting believers in Corinth regarding how they abused their freedom in Christ, what does Paul praise them for in verse 2?

Aspects of verses 3-16 have been difficult for theologians to interpret. This is in part due to our lack of understanding of the cultural norms of the day and how head coverings (or hairstyles) communicated different messages. One thing is for sure, Paul has been informed some have taken their freedoms in worship too far. How do verses 11-12 clarify Paul's respect and understanding of the roles of men and women in the church?

Is it possible to be equal as people and yet have distinct roles? How does this manifest itself in the workplace, athletics, and other areas of life?

How might this ideal regarding male and female roles in the church be related to Ephesians 5:21-32?

APPLICATION

How can we best model God's heart for us in corporate worship? Here are a few words to set your mind in motion: consistency, participation, humility, deference, attitude, openness, respect, friendliness, generosity...

THINK

"Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half-full) of artificial admirers (like people who write generic anniversary cards for a living). On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God, rooted in truth, are the bone and marrow of biblical worship."

-John Piper

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group. Pray for the Elders and leaders of your church.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

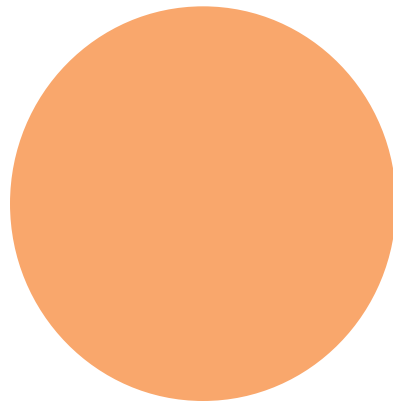
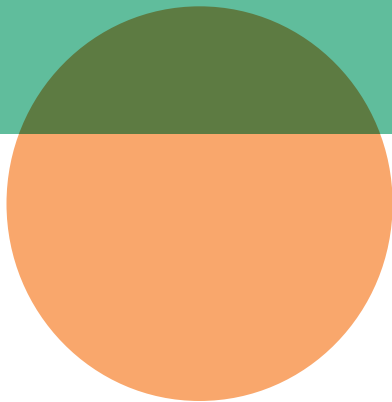
05



HOLINESS IN WORSHIP: THE LORD'S SUPPER

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
- 02 Luke 22:14-20
- 03 Matthew 26:26-30
- 04 Mark 14:22-26
- 05 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
- 06 Acts 2:42
- 07 John 14:1-4



WEEK 05

Holiness in Worship: The Lord's Supper

In this passage, two themes from 1 Corinthians come together: proper worship and divisions in the community. Earlier in chapters 1-4, Paul addressed the problem of the church separating and dividing according to significance and party lines. The church at Corinth was fractured and often failed to experience and enjoy unity.

When the church gathered for the Lord's Supper, apparently they were dividing themselves between the "haves" and the "have nots." The one group was having a feast while the other went hungry. Paul argues that this betrays the very meaning of the Lord's Supper, which was to remind us of the loving sacrifice of Jesus. Thus, Paul gives the weighty challenge that we examine ourselves before eating. Eating in an unworthy manner could bring sickness on those who do so.

This passage has caused great fear for many believers, dreading the possibility of taking the Lord's Supper without having confessed forgotten sin. This misses Paul's point. The meal is supposed to be a reminder of God's grace, not a spiritual beat-down. Paul is more concerned that believers would engage the practice in a flippant way that divides the church and hurts others. The call is to take the supper with the reverence and love of which it is worthy. This may in fact involve confessing sin that we have been harboring, but it also includes offering love and grace to others. None of us comes to Christ already clean. We come to Christ to be cleansed.

CORRECTING AN ABUSE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

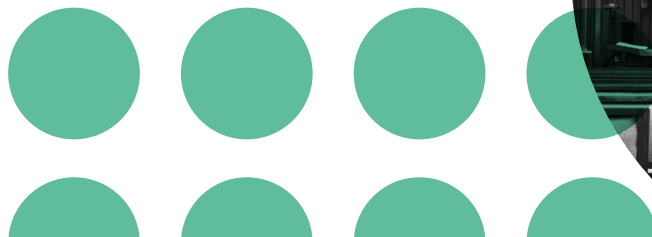
In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. ²⁰ So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. ²² Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. ³⁴ Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

And when I come I will give further directions.





WARM UP

Which is your favorite meal? Breakfast, lunch, or dinner? What is the most memorable place you've ever eaten? What is your favorite restaurant?

Do you have a memorable moment regarding taking communion, the Lord's Supper?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

Based on verses 17-22, what was going on in the Corinthian gatherings where the Lord's Supper was observed? How were they abusing the observance? (Remember the cultural setting of the city.)

What are Paul's directions for observing the Lord's Supper in verses 23-26? What does Paul mean when he says he "received this from the Lord?"

What does Paul mean when he speaks of observing the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner (verse 27)? Does this mean one has to be "perfect" before partaking?

Paul points out that we should approach partaking of the Lord's Supper seriously. How can one best prepare to take the Lord's Supper to avoid being disrespectful or careless?

Discussion Guide

APPLICATION

Discuss these elements of the Lord's Supper: participation, remembrance, and proclamation. How are each of these essential for every believer?

THINK

Individually, take a moment to prepare your heart to remember and proclaim the Lord's death.

As a group, read this passage aloud, in unison together, then observe the Lord's Supper.

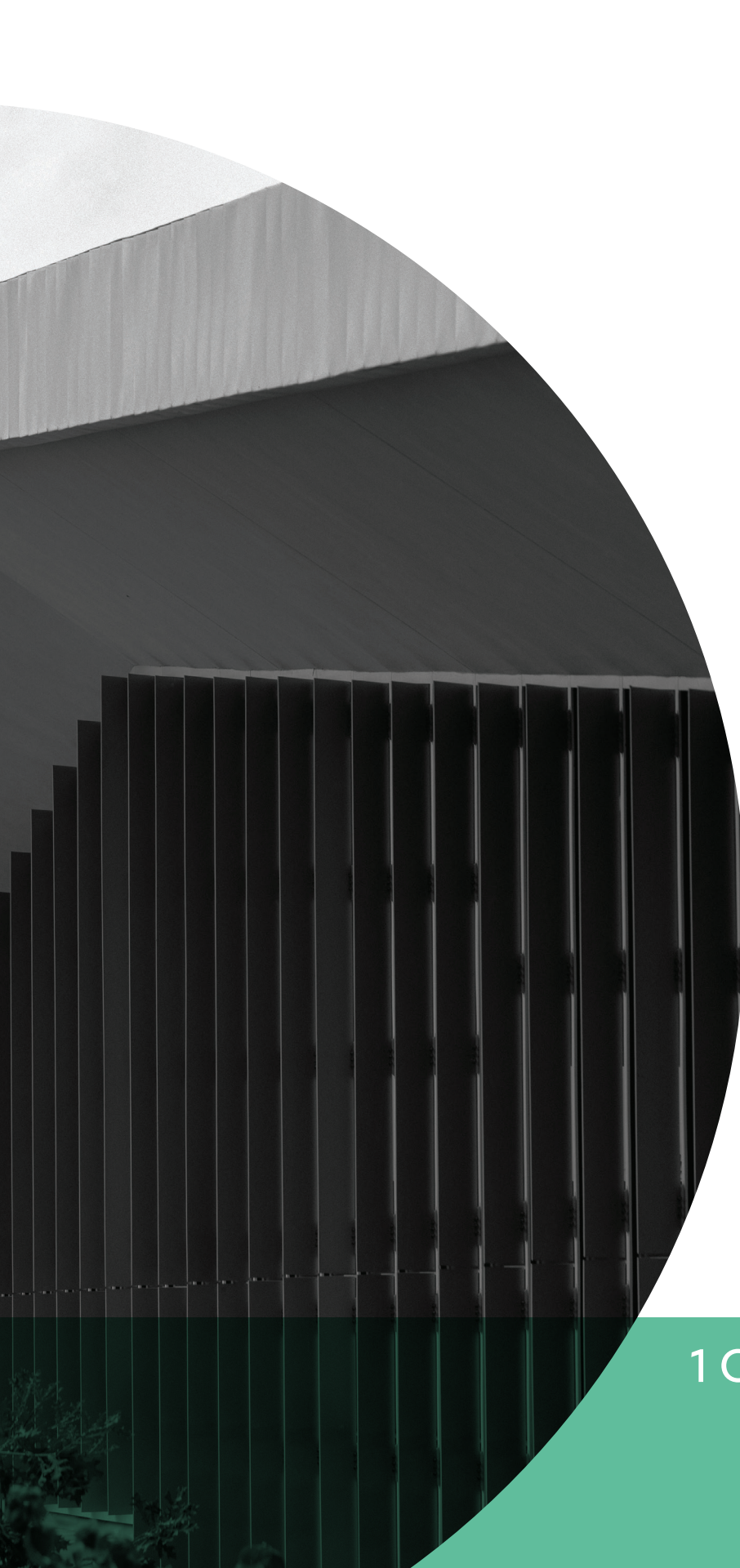
When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Luke 22:14-20

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.

06



TRUE SPIRITUALITY DEFINED

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

WEEK 06

True Spirituality Defined

Continuing his discussion of proper worship, Paul now turns to the use of spiritual gifts in the church. It appears that Paul is continuing to answer questions posed to him in the letter sent to him by believers at Corinth (see 7:1). They had asked Paul about “spiritual gifts,” but something very interesting happens here. Each time Paul addresses a topic, he reframes it using terms they could understand. In this case, the literal rendering of the topic is “spiritual things.” We can almost imagine the question: “Paul, tell us about spiritual things, like speaking in tongues and giving prophecies! We want to be spiritual!” The competitive Corinthians want to have spiritual abilities.

We can also imagine Paul's answer: “Sure I'll tell you about spiritual things...” He then goes in a surprising direction. He defines the evidence of the Spirit as being able to confess that “Jesus is Lord” (verse 3). The real mark of spirituality is our trust in and obedience to Jesus. Then in verse 4, Paul chooses an entirely different word. Instead of “spiritual things,” Paul talks about “gifts.” Paul says there are many different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit; different kinds of service but the same Lord; different kinds of work but the same God—all existing for the common good of the church.

What is Paul doing? He is reframing the Corinthians' understanding of spiritual gifts. Gifts and abilities alone do not make one “spiritual;” that is the work of the Holy Spirit. The gifts and abilities the believer receives from the Holy Spirit are truly just gifts—acts of grace. Their purpose is to serve Christ and others, not to elevate one's self or standing in the church.

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 12:1-6
- 02 1 Corinthians 12:7-11
- 03 John 14:16-17
- 04 Acts 1:8
- 05 Acts 16:5-15
- 06 Romans 8:5-11
- 07 1 Peter 4:10-11



CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

WARM UP

Think about gifts for a moment. What are some of the most meaningful gifts you have ever received?

Gift-giving is a talent. Who is one of the best gift-givers you know?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

Paul continues to instruct the Corinthian church on how to conduct orderly worship services. According to verse 1, what is Paul's intent in this section?

How might their former ways of worship (verse 2) have influenced their current worship practices? (Remember that these cultures recognized pagan idols and emperors as deities.) How does verse 3 tell us that some may have been rejecting the divinity or humanity of Christ?

Verses 4-6 introduce the idea that there is variety in the kinds of gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit to those in the church. What is the important statement Paul is making in these verses?

According to verse 7, what is the purpose of these gifts?

We are uncertain as to how some of the gifts mentioned in verse 10 may have been understood in the 1st century. With that in mind, discuss the gifts at work in the body of Christ mentioned in verses 8-10. According to Paul, do they serve the common good?

APPLICATION

Verse 11 indicates that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to *each* one in the body. What is your primary spiritual gift? (If you are uncertain, visit fellowshipnwa.org/spiritualgifts.) Are you maximizing its use in the church?

THINK

Spiritual Leader: a maturing disciple with a ministry focus.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

- Source of Spiritual Power (John 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 16:5-15).
- Bonds us to Christ and each other (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- Enables us to know God's will and control our sinful nature (Romans 8:5-11).
- Transforms our character and makes us more Christ-like (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
- Equips us for ministry, distributing spiritual gifts that enable us to aid in the salvation and growth of others.

PRAYER

Pray for a deeper awareness of the Holy Spirit and His gifts in your life.





HOLINESS IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

07

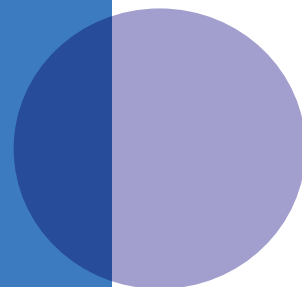
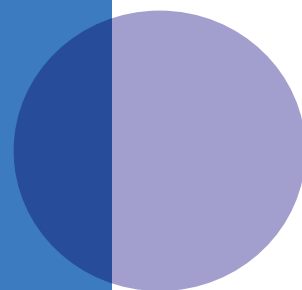
WEEK 07

Holiness in Spiritual Gifts

In 12:1-11, Paul reframes spiritual gifts or abilities as being less important than one's loyalty to Christ. Starting in verse 12, Paul gives another important framing for gifts: their place in the larger church. He does this by describing the church as a body with many members. There is unity and diversity.

In this week's passage, Paul emphasizes the unity of the church that comes from the fact that "all were baptized by one Spirit" (verse 13). There is some debate as to whether this verse refers to the receiving of the Holy Spirit at conversion (also called the indwelling of the Spirit) or water baptism in the name of the Spirit (along with the Father and the Son). It is a difficult issue to settle, but it is clear that Paul believes the followers of Jesus in Corinth share this one Spirit. There is no indication that some believers have been baptized by the Spirit while others are still waiting for a "second blessing." To divide the church into two groups, one with the Spirit and the other without, would completely defeat Paul's point about unity. Paul teaches that everyone who is in Christ has the Spirit (Romans 8:9-11).

Paul's goal is to dispel any tendency to divide the church based on gifting. The Corinthians are very good at creating divisions of rank and superiority. Giftedness is just one more way to do so, but Paul rejects this approach. If we are unified by one Spirit, who distributes abilities as He sees fit, then there is no reason to treat people as more significant because of their gifts. In Paul's metaphor, this would be like one body part looking down on another because they do different functions (verse 21). Rather, if we truly value the health of the whole church, then we should celebrate and cherish what each member brings to the body—even if that member looks and functions very differently from us. This applies not only to different abilities but to every different kind of person in the church (verse 13).



- 01 1 Corinthians 12:12-31
- 02 Galatians 3:26-29
- 03 Colossians 1:18-24
- 04 Ephesians 4:16
- 05 John 7:37-39
- 06 Philippians 2:1-4
- 07 Romans 12:6-8



UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE BODY

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be?

²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts

that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

LOVE IS INDISPENSABLE

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

Discussion Guide

WARM UP

What was your favorite team sport when you were younger? And now?

What are the different responsibilities of team members? (For example, in football—offensive tackle vs. running back.)

How does each individual fulfilling their assigned roles inspire and unite the team?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

Read the passage aloud. How does Paul draw a parallel between the body of Christ and team sports?

List various roles and gifts essential to the health of a local church. How is the church affected when one or more of those roles is missing?

Do verses 14-21 make you think of the toy, Mr. Potato Head?

Remember the reason for Paul's letter was division in the body (1:11; 3:3). Note verses 24b-26, "...God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,²⁵ so that there should be no division

in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” Do you think there was quarreling and strife among them regarding spiritual gifts?

What command does Paul specifically give them in verse 25 that should be preeminent in every church? How do we accomplish this?

APPLICATION

Identify at least one thing you can do to promote unity within your church. How might the expression of your gifts convey concern for and edify others?

How might you demonstrate that another person’s interests are more important than your own (Philippians 2:1-11)?

THINK

Humility is the lynch pin of unity.

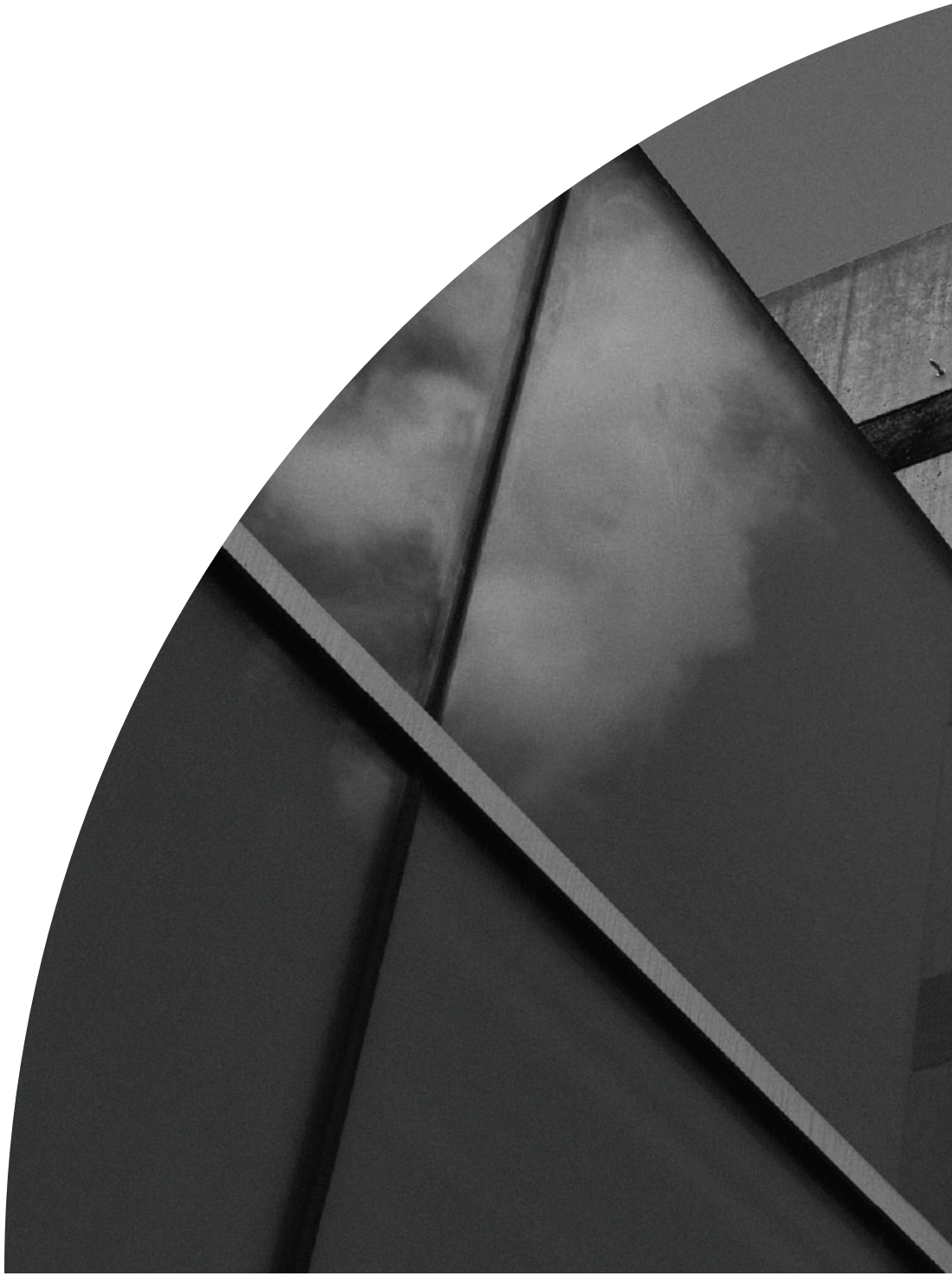
PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group. Pray for others in your group and their use of the gifts God has given them.



HOLINESS IN LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

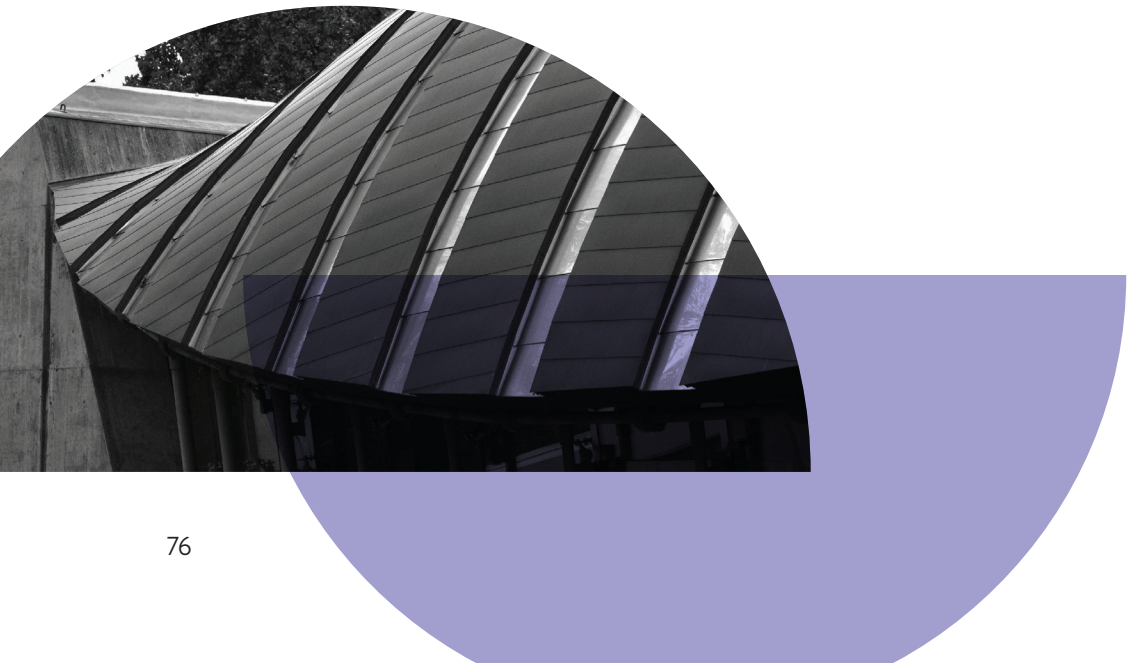




08

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- 02 1 John 3:16
- 03 1 John 4:7-12
- 04 Galatians 5:13-14
- 05 Romans 5:1-5
- 06 Galatians 5:22-26
- 07 Romans 13:8-10



WEEK 08

Holiness In Love

Chapter 13 sits like a small refrain in the middle of Paul's extended teaching on proper worship. Paul has just finished challenging believers in Corinth not to treat those of different abilities as less essential to the church than themselves. This leads Paul to reflect on what quality must be cultivated in order for this unity to occur. In contrast to fueling division, "the most excellent way" to live is the way of love (12:31). This poetic description of love is organized around the importance (13:1-3), the characteristics (13:4-7), and the endurance (13:8-13) of love.

Paul has acknowledged the need for spiritual gifts and abilities in the church, but here he warns that the effectiveness of those gifts can be completely undermined without love. To make his point, Paul uses extreme examples which could lead to the following questions: What if a mere human could speak an angel's language? What if prophets could fathom *all* mysteries? People trust God for big things, but what if their faith could actually move mountains? These three examples all appear to be exaggerations. Paul does not appear to believe that anyone in Corinth spoke in angel's languages, understood all mysteries, or could move a mountain. He's simply saying, even if someone were gifted in these areas beyond anything we have ever seen, that incredible gift would mean nothing without love.

Paul then beautifully describes the characteristics of love in verses 4-7. He concludes by explaining that love is what lasts when everything else fades away. Our acts of service as the church have a purpose for a season, but everything we do now is "in part" (verse 12). We don't actually know everything (despite our often inflated view of ourselves), but when we ultimately see God face-to-face, we will "know fully" and find what remains is love. Therefore, love must characterize everything we do in this life.

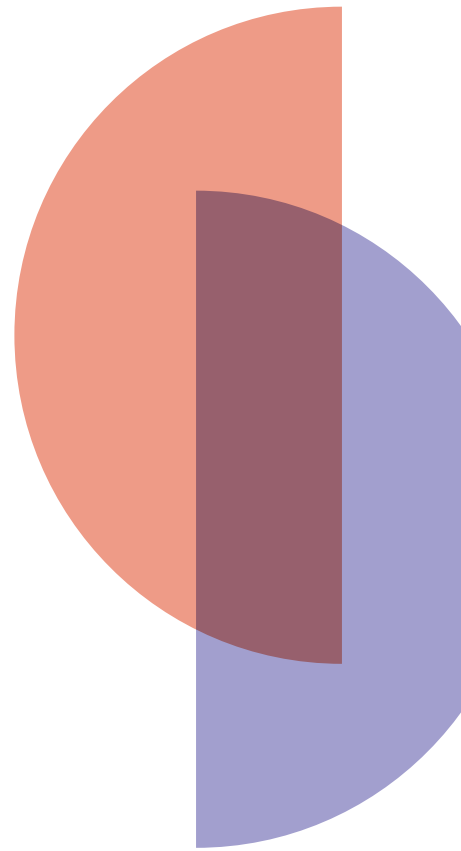
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.



WARM UP

What was your favorite band or singer when you were in high school?

Do you remember having a favorite “love” song?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

How do you define love?

Why is love such an important companion to spiritual gifts?

List the characteristics of what love is in verses 4-7. What do these have in common?

How can recognizing these characteristics of what love *is* and *isn't* foster healthy relationships inside and outside the church?

How would focusing on love help the struggling Corinthian church address their issues?

There has been much debate among scholars about the intended meaning of the word “completeness,” or “perfection” in verse 10 (i.e., the end of the apostolic age, completion of the biblical canon, second coming of Christ...). Regardless of the view one holds, what do verses 8-13 tell us about which gift endures forever? Why is that important for us?

Read the following verses and consider the preeminence of love.

- John 3:16
- 1 John 3:16
- 1 John 4:7-12

APPLICATION

How might you express the love as described in 1 Corinthians to someone this week? Go ahead, step outside your comfort zone.

THINK

“Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who are on this dark journey with us. Therefore, be swift to love, make haste to be kind—and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

- Huguenot Blessing

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.





ORDER IN WORSHIP: TONGUES

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

09



WEEK 09

Order in Worship: Tongues

After a detour in chapter 13 to discuss the nature of love and its centrality in the exercise of all gifts, Paul returns to the use of specific gifts in corporate worship. The two gifts, tongues and prophecy, were gifts of *speaking* in the early church. Theologian, David Garland, observes that the believers are to “*pursue*” love but to “*desire*” gifts with which to serve the body. This has two important implications. First, we cannot “muster” spiritual giftedness; it is something we receive from God. Second, our active work and focus should be on cultivating love for others. That is the context in which giftedness finds its home.

Background is needed to understand the two gifts being examined. The word “prophecy” refers to a word or message given to someone from God to be shared with others. Prophets speak words from God. People disagree as to what extent prophecy is still a ministry in the church today. Wherever one falls on this issue, we should agree on two boundaries. First, no one today speaks the authoritative word of God apart from the Scriptures. The Bible is the final, complete, and sufficient word of God for the church, and it cannot be added to. Second, the Holy Spirit is active in leading and guiding His people. He will often prompt and lead people in how they should follow Him and serve others. However we speak of the Spirit’s work today, we must avoid two extremes: claiming His promptings match the authority of Scripture or denying His ongoing ministry in the life of people.

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 14:1-9
- 02 1 Corinthians 14:10-19
- 03 1 Corinthians 14:20-25
- 04 Colossians 3:15-16
- 05 Romans 14:19
- 06 Ephesians 4:16
- 07 Ephesians 5:21-33

If the gift of prophecy is difficult to identify today, the gift of tongues is moreso. The phrase “speaking in tongues” can sound strange, but it is rooted in the concept of a *tongue* as a *language*. Acts 2 tells the story of the original disciples on the day of Pentecost in which, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). The Spirit supernaturally enabled the disciples to speak in foreign languages they did not previously know. This example of being able to proclaim Christ to foreigners is miraculous and clear in purpose.

Apparently, people with this miraculous enablement were speaking in foreign tongues in the worship gathering, missing the original purpose of “tongues” from Pentecost. While much is mysterious to us about precisely how this gift operated in the first century or its relevance for today, Paul’s main point is clear—spiritual gifts are not given for believers to show off or elevate their own standing. They exist to build up the church and to love others.

INTELLIGIBILITY IN WORSHIP

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. ³ But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. ⁴ Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? ⁷ Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? ⁸ Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. ¹¹ If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. ¹² So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

¹³ For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit,

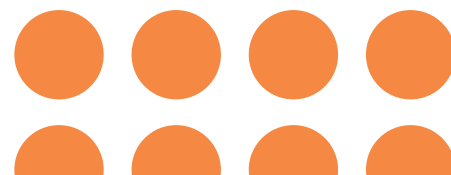
but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.¹⁶ Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying?¹⁷ You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.

¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

²⁰ Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.²¹ In the Law it is written:

“With other tongues
and through the lips of foreigners
I will speak to this people,
but even then they will not listen to me,
says the Lord.”

²² Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers.²³ So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?²⁴ But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all,²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”



Discussion Guide

WARM UP

Have you studied a foreign language? Do you speak it fluently? What is the most difficult part of learning another language?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-25

Keep in mind that Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is propriety and order in worship. Remember the conflicts that characterize the Corinthian church. What is the significance of the phrase, "Follow the way of love," from chapter 14 regarding spiritual gifts? Do you think Paul is prioritizing love over seeking spiritual gifts? Why?

Discussions over the use of tongues in corporate worship often lead to divisions among believers, missing the purpose of this section of Paul's letter. However, the interpretation of this section is the topic of much debate. Those from more charismatic backgrounds are accustomed to the public expression of the gift of tongues. Others believe tongues refer to foreign languages. According to verses 3-5, why does Paul say prophecy should take precedence over tongues? (Note: In this case, prophecy is not foretelling the future, but *forth-telling* the gospel for the edification of the body.)

In verses 6-12, Paul warns against using unintelligible, ecstatic language, which appeared to be an abusive practice of some within the worship services at Corinth. What was the negative effect of this practice? In their immaturity and worldliness (3:1-3) and with the context of this week's passage, do you think the Corinthians may have been obsessed with the gift of tongues?

How does Paul illustrate in these verses that prophecy is preferable to tongues? Why does *forth-telling* the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit have such a great effect?

What principles do you find in this passage that are most beneficial for the church today? Should we be cautious of practices in public worship that draw attention to ourselves and confuse unbelievers in our midst?

APPLICATION

How might you most effectively follow the “way of love” this week in the lives of others?

THINK

“When I was little, we used to play church. We’d get the chairs into rows, fight over who’d be preacher, vigorously lead the hymn singing, and generally have a great carnal time. The aggressive kids naturally wanted to be up front, directing or preaching. The quieter ones were content to sit and be entertained by the up-fronters. Occasionally we’d get mesmerized by a true sensationalistic crowd-swayer—like the girl who said, “Boo! I’m the Holy Ghost!”—but in general, if the up-fronters were pretty good, they could hold their audience for quite a while. If they weren’t so good, eventually the kids would drift off to play something else—like jump rope or jacks. Now that generation has grown up, but most of them haven’t changed too much. Every Sunday they still play church. They line up in rows for the entertainment. If it’s pretty good, their church may grow. If it’s not too hot, eventually they’ll drift off to play something else...”
- Anne Ortlund

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.



1 Corinthians 14:26-40

ORDER IN WORSHIP: STRUCTURE

10



WEEK 10

Order in Worship: Structure

This passage concludes the discussion on proper behavior and order in the church's gatherings. The principle is one of balance. Paul writes, "each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation" (verse 26b). The principle here is apparently that of participation. Everybody has something to bring. Reading 1 Corinthians 14, a form of worship where one person "performs" while the congregation only "observes" cannot be justified.

However, there is a balancing principle of order. The speaking must be "one at a time" (verse 27b) and made understandable by all. What drives this balance? Paul commands that "...Everything must be done so that the church may be built up" (verse 26c). The goal is for the church to be built up in Christ and strengthened in faith, hope, and love. If the gifts of every member are not activated, the church misses out. If it is chaotic and difficult for an individual to be heard, the church misses out. Therefore, the goal of those organizing worship services should be to create ordered space for members to serve and encourage the body.

Verses 34-38 are some of the most difficult verses in all of Paul's writings. In isolation, this passage seems to be an absolute command for women not to speak in the church gathering. This is quite problematic because, earlier in his letter, Paul gives instructions on how women should pray and prophesy in the assembly. Apparently, it is not all speech but a particular kind of speech, or at a particular time. Two options stand out. The word "woman" can also be translated "wife." Paul encourages the "women" to wait until they are home to discuss with their husbands. The situation he is addressing may be one of a marital disagreement breaking out in the church after a husband speaks. He could be saying, "This is shameful and awkward for a husband and wife to have a public fight."

- 01 1 Corinthians 14:26-31
- 02 1 Corinthians 14:32-40
- 03 Ephesians 5:15-20
- 04 James 3:13-18
- 05 Ephesians 4:11-13
- 06 Philippians 1:27
- 07 1 Timothy 3:14-15

Another option is that he is specifically addressing the work brought up in verses 29-33 of weighing the words spoken and ordering them. Someone is doing this work of assessing what is said and giving people permission to speak in an orderly way. Presumably, this would be the work of the elders. So, Paul could be saying it is the work of the male elders to structure the service.

Whatever the conclusion, the main point of this passage is that worship gatherings should be structured in a way that maximizes the encouragement of the church through the orderly use of gifts.

GOOD ORDER IN WORSHIP

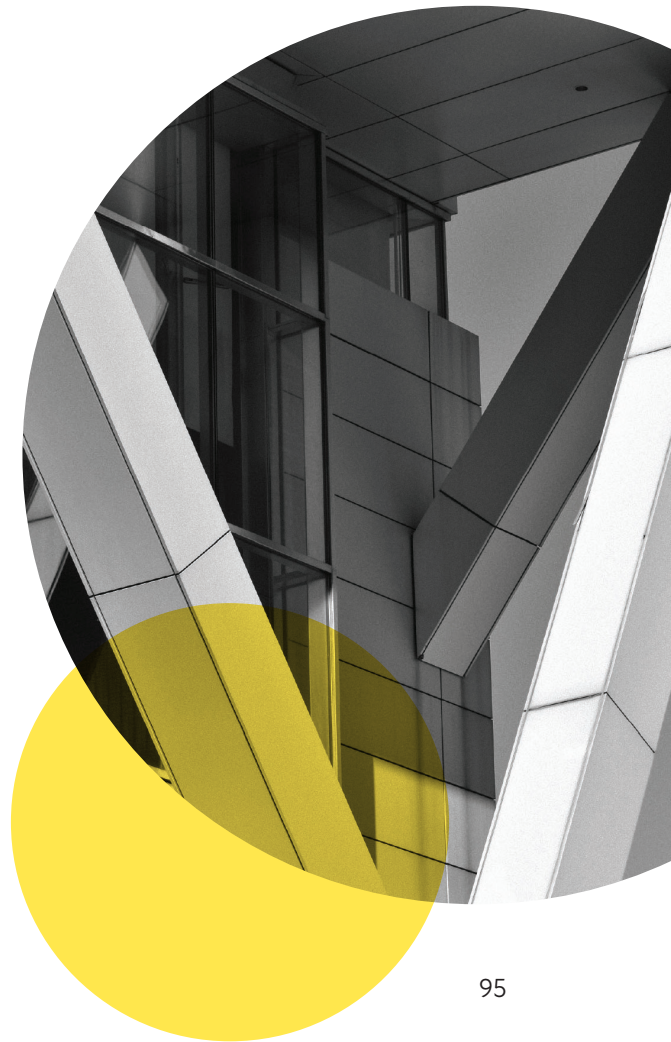
What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

²⁹ Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰ And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹ For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. ³⁸ But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

³⁹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.



WARM UP

What is one of the most memorable church (or religious) services you have ever experienced? What was so special about it?

What part(s) of worship services do you look forward to most? Are there any that you dread?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-40

Paul continues to write to the church in Corinth about orderly worship practices. Worship gatherings were undoubtedly very different in Paul's day from what we experience today. How might we be relevant or sensitive to the culture without compromising scripture?

Paul gives direction for specific practices of the day in verses 26-33, but his summary in verse 33 seems to address a central issue the church was experiencing—disorder. Their behavior in the worship gathering was to be regulated by the church's leadership to maintain order. What would it be like to attend a church with no order, structure, or leadership? What if a service included several people talking over one another (likely a problem in the Corinthian church)?

In verses 34-35, Paul makes a statement often taken to extremes by those on both ends of the spectrum. Context is key to understanding this passage. Paul is focusing on the duty of men, serving as church leaders, to evaluate the validity of prophecies shared during worship gatherings. But remember that in 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul indicates that women can prophesy in church gatherings. The idea of him saying that all women are silenced in every way would be inconsistent with other passages where women are not prohibited from speaking. It is also possible that Paul is referring to women whose husbands were present in those services. In previous verses, Paul has sequentially addressed speaking in tongues and their interpretation, followed by prophecy and its evaluation. He is not saying that women are to never have a voice in worship gatherings. However, they are not to take on the authority and responsibility of assessing the legitimacy of prophecies, which have been assigned to the male leaders of the Corinthian church. As in Chapter 11, Paul's aim is not to undermine equality of personhood but to define the distinct roles of leadership within the church. How do we best maintain order in church gatherings? How important is it to have confidence in church leadership?

Paul asks two pointed questions in verse 36. What do you think he meant by this? In verses 36-38, was he telling them to submit to God's truth in this matter? Do you think he expected opposition to his instructions?

How does Paul summarize these thoughts in verse 40 regarding his hope for the Corinthian church?

APPLICATION

Consider your calling and giftedness. How can you better contribute to the order and structure of your church so that newcomers feel welcome and not confused?

THINK

Healthy church members lead to healthy churches. What characteristics make for healthy church members? List at least 3 or 4.

PRAYER

Ask your group for prayer over any area you believe is keeping you from serving Christ with your whole heart.



THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:1-34





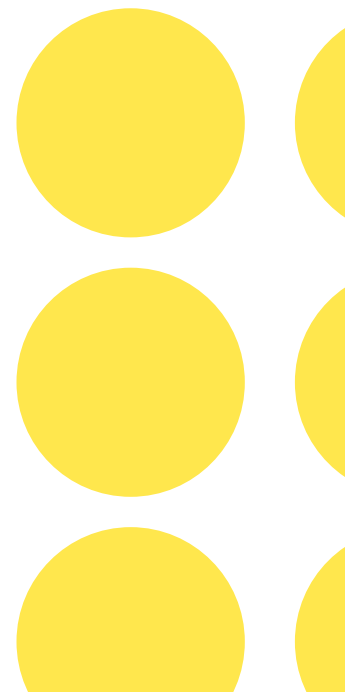
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WEEK 11

The Fact of the Resurrection

There is a major shift in tone when we arrive at chapter 15. The first 14 chapters of this letter have primarily been a response. In chapters 1-6, Paul responds to the report about the church from Chloe's people. In chapters 7-14, he responds to questions about marriage and church worship. Up to this point, the concerns of the Corinthian church have set the agenda for Paul's letter. But, chapter 15 begins with, "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you..." One can almost get the sense that Paul has patiently dealt with the others issues and now gets to direct the conversation. And what is his focus? It is "the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand" (verse 1).

Paul sees the gospel as central to the Christian faith because it is the foundation of our salvation. This gospel is good news about a historical event, and it is spelled out in verses 3-4. Central to Christianity is the good news that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. This good news forms the heart of the Christian faith. The cross has a theological purpose, "Christ died for our sins." The death of Jesus was not just a tragedy or a great example of love (though it is both). The death of Jesus atoned for the sins of all who would place their trust in Him. The greatest problem we face as humans is not from without—but from within. We must be saved from ourselves.



- 01 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
- 02 1 Corinthians 15:9-11
- 03 1 Corinthians 15:12-34
- 04 Psalm 16
- 05 Romans 4:18-25
- 06 2 Corinthians 11:23-27
- 07 2 Timothy 1:6-12

Further, Paul points out the connection of the resurrection to the formation of New Testament leaders. Jesus ascended to heaven, but not before He called a group of people to be His leaders, or messengers. He called these messengers His “apostles” which means something like “sent ambassadors.” These people proclaimed His message and represented Him to the world. Paul lists these apostles: the 12, James, the rest of the apostles, and last of all, Paul. This important passage creates an end date for the ministry of apostle. The ministry of these apostles created the missionary foundation of the church and written words of the New Testament as inspired by the Holy Spirit. While we still represent Jesus today, we stand on the foundation established by Jesus and His apostles.

Finally, Paul responds to the claim made by some that there will be no resurrection of the dead. Paul points out how serious a problem this is with a concise argument. Theologian, David Garland, compares it to a series of dominoes that fall if the resurrection of believers is denied. First, if no one is raised from the dead, then that would imply Christ was not raised either (verse 13). However, Paul sees the destiny of believers closely tied to Christ. Where Christ goes, we go. If Christ did not rise, then the apostles are liars and the believers’ faith is useless because their sins are not paid for and death is not defeated (verses 14-15; 26). But, Christ has been raised! So we will be also (verses 20-22).

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

²By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

¹⁵More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead

are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.²⁷ For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

²⁹ Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?³⁰ And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?³¹ I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord.³² If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised,

“Let us eat and drink,
for tomorrow we die.”

³³ Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

³⁴ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.

Discussion Guide

WARM UP

Have you ever had to “take a stand” for something you strongly believed in? How did you feel after gathering the courage to stand up for your beliefs? Share this with your group.

Have you ever had to “take a stand” for the gospel or your Christian beliefs? Was it difficult? If so, why?

Most of us want to be remembered for something. At the end of your life, how would you like to be remembered?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-34

What proclamations do verses 1-8 make concerning the gospel? List a few you find interesting.

Paul is a bold spokesperson for the gospel of Jesus Christ, but what does verse 9 say about his humility? How did Paul persecute the church of God (Acts 22:4; 1 Timothy 1:15-16)? What does verse 10 tell us about how we should view our personal sin and His forgiveness?

Some Corinthians asserted that there was no resurrection of the dead (verse 12). What are a few of the ways Paul counters their assertions (verses 13-28)? Why does Paul mention Adam?

What does fighting beasts at Ephesus have to do with the broad theme of the resurrection (verse 32)? What beasts do you fight to be faithful to your calling?

Call to mind the Corinthian culture and Paul’s reasons for writing this letter. Regarding verse 33, How do we balance being “in the world, but not of the world?” Is this a problem only experienced by the young?

In verse 34, Paul returns to the reason for writing this letter—prevalent sin and division in the Corinthian church. Do you think verse 34 is a rebuke intended to awaken them? What do you imagine were the influences and behaviors that took the Corinthians down the path of deserving such a correction?

APPLICATION

Write down a few ideas about how you can be bolder and more courageous in your faith this week, without being offensive or obstinate.

THINK

“We should live as if Christ died yesterday, rose today, and is coming tomorrow.”

- Martin Luther

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group. Pray for one another’s boldness in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.



1 Corinthians 15:35-58

12

THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION



WEEK 12

The Nature of the Resurrection

Paul continues his discussion of the resurrection with two very practical questions: how will the dead be raised and what will those bodies be like (verse 35)? For those who have been around Christianity for a long time, it is easy to lose sight of what a strange doctrine this is. The resurrection of the dead was a unique idea in the ancient world, only taught by Christians and a group of Jews. For those not accustomed to the idea, it could have spooky, zombie-like connotations. So, in this section, Paul is kindly answering some very reasonable questions concerning how bodies come back to life.

Paul answers his questions in reverse order, first describing what the body will be like, and then describing how it will happen. Paul compares death and resurrection to a seed being planted. It goes into the ground in one form and comes back out in another (verses 37-41). This implies there is both continuity and discontinuity between our bodies before and after resurrection. The body before death is merely “natural,” but after the resurrection it is “spiritual.” Now, it is common for modern readers to assume natural/spiritual is the same as material/immaterial, but that is not the case. Jesus’ resurrected body was clearly material. He enjoys a meal with the disciples and seems to go out of His way to prove that He is physically present (see Luke 24:36-43). The contrast between natural and spiritual likely has more to do how we relate to God. A natural body is in some way less connected to God’s Spirit. According to theologian, Anthony Thiselton, a spiritual body is apparently a body that is fully healed and submitted to God’s Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:14-15).

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 15:35-44
- 02 1 Corinthians 15:45-50
- 03 1 Corinthians 15:51-58
- 04 Hebrews 11:1-3
- 05 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- 06 Romans 8:18-25
- 07 Philippians 3:20-21

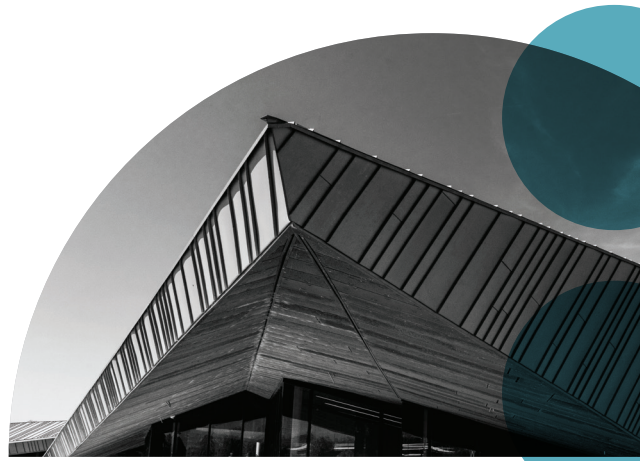
How will this happen? Paul teaches us that all believers will be transformed at the second coming of Jesus. In verse 50, Paul says, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...” However, that does not mean we will not have bodies. Apparently Paul is suggesting that our bodies, as they are, cannot participate in what is coming. We must be healed and restored. This even means that those who are still alive when Christ returns will not die but will be transformed in an instant (verses 51-52). The gathering and transformation of living believers at Christ’s return is often called the rapture. Christ will transform His people, both those alive and already dead, before He ushers in His Kingdom. Our sin was defeated on the cross; on that day death will finally be defeated forever.

THE RESURRECTION BODY

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.³⁹ Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.⁴⁵ So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven.⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the



earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven.

⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?
 Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

WARM UP

Do you remember when the idea of death first became a reality to you? Describe what led you to ponder the certainty of death. How did you respond and what did you learn in the days, weeks, and months to follow?

What does the hope of resurrection mean to you? What role does faith play in this hope? How do you live this out from day-to-day?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-58

How does Paul use the illustration of the seed as it relates to death and resurrection? Does this visual illustration give you a better understanding of death and the resurrection body? Specifically note verses 42-44. Why do we find it difficult to accept the concept of resurrection when it is so clearly demonstrated in nature?

What is the relationship between Christ and Adam as mentioned in verses 45-49? Why can flesh and blood not inherit the Kingdom of God?

In verses 51-56, what is the mystery that Paul mentions? When Paul says, “the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality,” how does this affect your perspective of things yet to come?

In verses 57-58, Paul affirms that Jesus secured our victory through His death. How does verse 58 instruct the Corinthians (and us) on the proper response to His sacrifice?

APPLICATION

Make time this week to contemplate the meaning of Ephesians 3:14-19 and pastor Kent Hughes' reflections on this passage in the THINK section:

THINK

"A love which is wide enough to embrace the world.

A love which is long enough to last forever.

As Spurgeon said, "God's love is so long that your old age cannot wear it out, so long your continual tribulation cannot exhaust it, so long that your successive temptations shall not drain it dry; like eternity itself it knows no bounds."

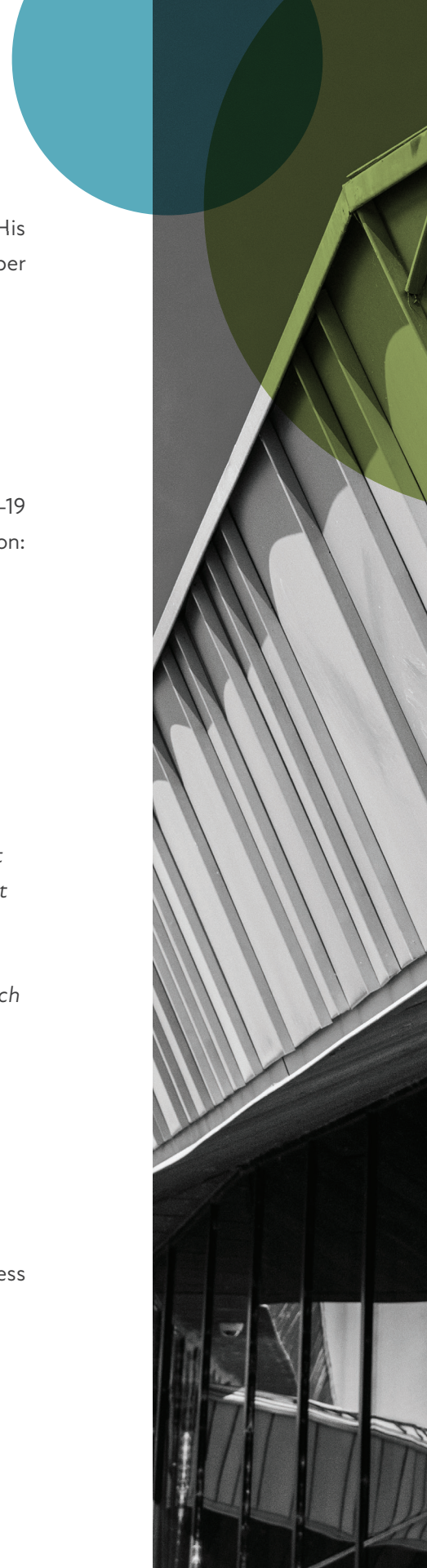
A love which is high enough to take sinners to Heaven.

A love which is deep enough to take Christ to the very depths to reach the lowest sinner."

- Kent Hughes

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group. Express gratitude to God for the hope of the resurrection.



GENEROSITY AND GRATITUDE

1 Corinthians 16:1-24





13

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 16:1-12
- 02 1 Corinthians 16:13-24
- 03 Acts 18:1-17
- 04 2 Corinthians 9:6-15
- 05 1 Timothy 6:18-19
- 06 Ephesians 6:10-17
- 07 2 Timothy 1:13-14

THE COLLECTION FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE

Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

PERSONAL REQUESTS


⁵ After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. ⁶ Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷ For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸ But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

¹⁰ When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. ¹¹ No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.

¹² Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.

¹³ Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.

¹⁴ Do everything in love.



¹⁵ You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, ¹⁶ to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. ¹⁷ I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. ¹⁸ For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

FINAL GREETINGS

¹⁹ The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. ²⁰ All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

²¹ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

²² If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

²⁴ My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

WARM UP

Have you ever received an unexpected gift of money that came just at the right time? Have you ever “paid it forward” and blessed someone unexpectedly? Do you have a “pay it forward” story you can share with the group?

In reflecting on the study of 1 Corinthians, what is an applicable truth you have learned this year?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-24

As Paul begins his final exhortation to the Corinthians, he responds to an inquiry about giving. Paul encourages them to “lay aside” funds to be used for ministry purposes. When and how did you learn the importance of giving tithes and offerings to God?

What does Paul mean in verse 2, “in keeping with your income?” How might the following phrase be aligned with Paul’s encouragement: not equal giving, but equal sacrifice.

After Paul highlights the importance of men who would steward gifts to the church with integrity (verse 3), he shifts his focus to future plans and the care of his disciple, Timothy. Why do you think Paul was concerned for Timothy’s well-being in Corinth (verses 10-11)?

What is the significance of Paul's five commands in 13 and 14? Consider and discuss the distinctions and reasons for each (read Acts 18:1-17 for context):

- Be on your guard –
- Stand firm in the faith –
- Be courageous –
- Be strong –
- Do everything in love –

How does this last chapter differ from the body of Paul's letter? Why do you think his tone is softer at the end? How does this relate to the beginning of the letter?

APPLICATION

In verse 15, Paul describes how the household of Stephanas has "devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people." What are practical ways we can follow their example? Could these words be used to describe your service to the Lord?

THINK

"Generosity isn't an act. It's a way of life."

- Chip Ingram

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group. Make time to pray for one another and thank God for His Word.

