

Exploring 1 Corinthians

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PREFACE

The book of 1 Corinthians contains important teachings for Christians, especially about living together as one covenant community of God's people. What should life look like in God's covenant community? First, Paul begins by laying the foundation of Christ-centered life. Christians are to imitate Christ in their lives. Second, Paul gives instruction concerning Christian marriage. Christian families are entities within the covenant community. Husbands and wives should be Christ-centered in their marriage life. Each couple has a covenant love relationship with responsibilities. Third, Paul gives instruction for community life—including gathered worship—and he emphasizes loving one another for the benefit of the community. Love is the essence of a Christian's covenant relationship with God and with one another. Finally, Paul teaches Christians to persevere in this present life and to understand that Christ will complete their salvation and bring them to glory when he returns.

Soli Deo Gloria
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Birmingham, AL
August 2014

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Introduction

The book of 1 Corinthians is a letter written about 55 A.D. by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Corinth. Paul was specifically chosen by Jesus Christ to be his messenger to the international world, bringing the good news of salvation, the message of hope that people can have in him. Acts 18:1-11 tells us that Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months and planted a church. The church consisted of both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jewish people). Corinth was a major city in the Roman world. It was a port and commercial city.

Lesson 1 – Christ is Our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

What did Paul tell the Corinthian Christians about his calling (v.1)?

Have you identified God’s calling for you?

Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, renewing our whole being in the image of God, and enabling us more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness.

What does “Christians are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints” mean (v.2)?

Why is grace and peace important in the lives of Christians (v.3)?

The Corinthian church was blessed and enriched by God with many spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of knowledge and speech (v.5). Knowledge about the truth of Christ and ability to tell other people about him are significant for the growth of the church as a body of Christ, as well as for the growth of each individual Christian.

How can we be more intentional to grow in the knowledge of Christ and in sharing Christ to others?

What does “Christ will sustain you to the end” mean to you personally (v.8)?

Why will Christians be guiltless in the day of Christ—the day Christ will return to judge the world?

What does “we are called into the fellowship of Christ” mean (v.9)?

How do you have fellowship with Christ?

Fellowship with Christ is a covenant relationship that cannot be broken. It is an eternal and personal life relationship with Christ. God, who has called us into this covenant fellowship, is faithful. God has saved us from sin and has united us with Christ. God sanctifies us in Christ. He will make our sanctification complete (Philippians 1:6) and will glorify us (Romans 8:30).

How does understanding about this truth impact your life?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

What did Paul appeal the Corinthian church to do (v.10-11)?

Why is the unity of Christians very important?

In what areas do you need to grow in having the same mind and judgment with others in the church?

A local church will make a great impact on the community when the members are in unity, loving one another and loving non-believers in the community out of love for Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Why should we not be ashamed of the gospel, *the word of the cross* (v.18)?

How is the gospel still a stumbling block to postmodern people (v.23)?

Why is Christ called *the power of God and the wisdom of God* (v.24)?

Why does God choose those who are foolish, weak, low, and despised in this world (v.26-29)?

What does Christ become to us and what does it mean to you personally (v.30)?

“It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and men, the prophet, priest, and king; the head and Savior of the Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom he did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified” (The Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 8 section 1).

In what circumstances are you still tempted to boast in your self-sufficiency instead of in the Lord (v.31)?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

How can our words be more empowered by the Holy Spirit to build up others in faith (v.4-5)?

The mature (v.6) refers to true believers who can understand the wisdom of God, the gospel of Christ.

If non-believers cannot understand the gospel, how can they become believers (v.8-10)?

How does the Holy Spirit help us to understand the will of God for our lives (v.11-13)?

The natural person (v.14) refers to a person who still lives under the slavery of sin and does not have the Holy Spirit in him. All Christians used to live in and under the power of sin, until the Holy Spirit brought us to repentance, gave us faith to believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and gave us a new life in Christ.

Paul did not pay attention to other people's judgment of him, but to God's judgment alone (v.15). As a church leader, Paul faced much opposition and criticism. However, he did not let himself be influenced by other people's judgment, but simply focused on doing what God wanted him to do. As a result, Paul found great joy in God. Often times we worry about what others think about us, and consequently we lose our joy. We should learn from Paul to have our identity, thoughts, and behaviors shaped only by what God thinks about us. This is the key to a great spiritual joy.

What kinds of people's comments shape your thoughts and behaviors and cause you to feel insecure and lose your joy in Christ?

Memorize

"And because of him [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Lesson 2 – Imitating Christ

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

What problem did the Corinthian Christians have (v.1-3)?

Although the Corinthian Christians were *spiritual people*—they were in union with Christ—they had little spiritual understanding. Paul had difficulty in dealing with them because they were spiritually immature—they were *infants in Christ*.

How did Paul try to help them understand their mistake (v.4-8)?

What does “we are God’s fellow workers, God’s field, and God’s building” mean (v.9)?

What does “Christ is the foundation of our lives” mean (v.11)?

What are the possible foundations we can try to build our lives upon?

Why will those things perish and not sustain our lives (v.12-15)?

Why is each Christian a temple of God (v.16)?

If anyone tries to destroy God’s temple—Christians and the work of God in their lives—God will destroy him at the end (v.17).

Why does God see each Christian as holy (v.17)?

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

What advice did Paul give to the Corinthian Christians (v.18)?

Why is worldly wisdom folly with God (v.19-20)?

How do Christians possess all things in Christ (v.21-23, 1:30)?

We have eternal life and death has no power over us, because Jesus has conquered death for us. Present and future things, life and death, all belong to those in Christ.

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:16-17).

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-13

How did Paul want other Christians to regard ministers (v.1)?

What is a significant characteristic of a minister (v.2)?

Paul said two important things about judgment (v.3-5):

1. Paul repeated what he said in 2:15 that he did not let himself be influenced by other people’s judgment upon him, but on God’s judgment alone (v.2-4). What God thinks about us is what matters. If we let our thoughts and behaviors be influenced by people’s opinions instead of God’s, we will not only fall into spiritual idolatry, but will also lose our joy in the Lord.

Spiritual idolatry includes worshiping something else or making something else more important to us other than God alone. When we fall into spiritual idolatry, we basically reject and deny God. Consequently, we lose our joy because God is the true source of joy.

2. Paul did not mean that we should not judge or give opinions about any matters (v.5). He meant that we should not slander people with a judgmental heart. Only God can reveal the real motives within people’s hearts and can judge wisely.

How will you grow in these two areas?

Paul advised the Corinthian Christians not to judge others. God is the One who makes people different and gives different gifts to different people (v.7). Paul also advised them not to boast on the abundant blessing they had received from God (v.8). Some of them became proud and felt superior to the others. This caused divisions among them. Paul addressed their character flaws and immaturity. Paul also said that he and other apostles—who were actually superior to other Christians—were oftentimes treated without honor and became a spectacle to the world (v.9). Paul advised the Corinthian Christians to follow the example of apostles, not to become proud and seek worldly honor. If the world considers Christians as fools because we follow Christ and live for his sake, it is all right (v.10). What God thinks about us is what matters.

What else did Paul and other apostles willingly do for the sake of Christ (v.11-13)?

In what circumstances do you become proud and want to be honored by people, rather than become *a fool or a scum of the world* for the sake of Christ?

Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthian Christians with a loving and heavy heart (v.14-15). He loved them and carried their problems. He wanted them to imitate his lifestyle for the sake of Christ (v.16). There is supernatural joy we experience when we love other Christians and help them to grow in maturity, even though it is difficult. This is true love in action. This will also help our own spiritual growth and maturity to be Christ-like people.

Are there any Christians you currently help to grow in spiritual maturity and to be more like Christ? Share with the group about your experience.

Some of the Corinthian Christians made false accusation against Paul and said that Paul was afraid to come to the church to explain himself (v.18). Paul said when he came, he wanted to see *their power*, if they could provide proof of their accusation against him (v.19). The kingdom of God is about the power of God who rules in our lives. A true Christian, whose heart has been changed by Christ, will have a changed life and produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The power of God will be manifested in his life. Christians, who fall into sin, need to repent and ask forgiveness from God and those they may have offended. Christians should not be troublemakers but be true servants of Christ. Paul wished to come to the Corinthian church with love in a spirit of gentleness, not with *a rod* to discipline them (v.21).

Have you encountered two Christians who disliked each other and tried to reconcile them? Share with the group about your experience.

How can you help the unity of brothers and sisters in your church?

Memorize

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Lesson 3 – Church Discipline

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

What problem did the Corinthian church have (v.1)?

The Corinthian church leaders failed to deal with this sin. Their pride blinded them. Paul told them to remove (excommunicate) the sinner from the church (v.2). There are three steps in church discipline: (1) admonition, (2) suspension from the Lord's Supper, and (3) excommunication. Each step needs to be done biblically, wisely, prayerfully, and lovingly. The purpose of church discipline is to maintain the purity of the church, bring the sinner to repentance, and restore his relationship with the church. [Jesus taught about church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17].

What impact will the church have if the leaders do not deal with a member who commits a great sin that is publicly known?

A public sin must be addressed publicly in the church assembly and in the name of the Lord Jesus (v.4). One of the most negative impacts of a great sin in the church is the dishonoring of the Lord Jesus' name in public. The church must restore the honor of the name of the Lord Jesus. To deliver the sinner to Satan (v.5) means to remove them from the church (v.2) [excommunication]. The purpose is for the sinner to think seriously about his sin and repent. Paul hoped for his spirit to be saved (v.5), his genuine repentance, and his return to the church.

How can a little corruption impact the whole character of a Christian (v.6)?

Paul used an illustration of unleavened bread to teach about purity of life without corruption that a Christian should have (v.7). Christians are to live their lives with sincerity and truth (v.8). For Christians, every day should be a day of festival, celebrating Christ with a life of sincerity and truth. Christ, the Passover Lamb, has died for our sins, redeemed us, and given us a new life of victory and joy in him.

To the Ephesian Christians, Paul advised them "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

How can we be more intentional to daily celebrate a life of righteousness and holiness?

Paul instructed that a church member who "is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler" is to be disciplined (v.11).

Why are these behaviors considered as major sins that require church discipline?

The church can judge only believers who are members of the church, and God judges unbelievers—those outside the church (v.12-13). Paul quotes Deuteronomy 17:7, “Purge the evil person from among you,” and draws an important parallel between the Old Testament’s Israel and the New Testament’s church as God’s covenant community. God has given authority to church leaders to exercise church discipline to maintain the purity of the church as a covenant community of believers in Christ.

How can we be more intentional to pray for church leaders for wisdom and strength to fulfill such a challenging responsibility?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

Besides sexual immorality, the Corinthian church had a problem of lawsuits. The church members filed lawsuits against one another in the city court. Instead of trying to settle their disputes within the church, they took the disputes to public court to be judged by unbelievers. Paul did not teach that all injustice between believers should be resolved only within the church. Some major injustice will surely need the help of government. The Corinthian believers seemed to have unnecessary lawsuits and their disputes could have been solved within the church. They lacked spiritual maturity in Christ.

What negative impact could this bring to the church and the individuals involved?

If all Christians know that with Christ we will judge the world and live wisely with this conviction, honoring Christ with our lives, there will not be any lawsuits among us.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5).

How often do you pray asking God for wisdom to handle issues in your life?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Who will not inherit the kingdom of God (v.9-11)?

Some of the Corinthian Christians practiced these sins before they believed in Jesus Christ (v.11). As Christians, they were justified because Jesus’ righteousness was imputed (credited or applied) to them. They were also being sanctified daily by the Holy Spirit.

Justification is an act of God’s free grace, in which he pardoned all our sins, and accepted us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, renewing our whole being in the image of God, and enabling us more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness.

Do you daily surrender to the Holy Spirit for your sanctification and ask forgiveness when you sin?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Paul addressed the problem of sexual immorality that was practiced in the city of Corinth. Some of the Christians used to indulge in this sin.

What is the principle of Christian liberty (v.12)?

What are potential idols that can enslave Christians nowadays?

What is our body for and not for (v.13)?

Paul reminded them that their salvation in Christ included their bodily resurrection and glorification, where they would be given a new glorified body when Christ returns. Our salvation includes purification of both body and soul from sin and its corruption.

“Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (Romans 6:13).

What are our bodies (v.15)?

God instituted marriage and consecrated sex within marriage between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24).

How does sexual prostitution violate God’s design for sex (v.16)?

As Christians, both our souls and bodies are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit (v.17-20). The Holy Spirit dwells in each Christian. Individually, each Christian’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (v.19). Corporately, all Christians are members of Christ’s body—the universal invisible church.

Paul said to the Roman Christians, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:5). Paul urged them, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

Memorize

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Lesson 4 – Christian Identity and Covenant Marriage

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

Sexual immorality was commonly practiced in the city of Corinth. Prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians, some Christians had written a letter to Paul, in which they suggested that Christians should practice celibacy—abstaining from sexual relations—in order to avoid falling into sexual immorality (v.1). To address this issue, Paul taught them about Christian marriage and the right concept of sex.

What is one of the reasons for marriage (v.2)?

Marriage is a covenant relationship instituted by God (Genesis 2:24). In a covenant relationship, two people promise to be faithful regardless of the actions of the other. A covenant is not the same as a contract. A contract is based on limited liability, while a covenant is based on unlimited liability. A contract can be voided by mutual consent, while a covenant cannot be broken regardless of the circumstances. A covenant is a permanent relationship and commitment. It is a binding promise of love and commitment. When God makes a covenant relationship with us, he is willing to do everything for us even though it meant he had to suffer by sending His Son to bear the consequence of our sin.

“Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed, and for preventing of uncleanness” (The Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 24 section 2).

What mutual responsibility do husband and wife have for each other (v.3)?

What mutual ownership do they have for each other (v.4)?

How does the biblical view of equal rights, mutual responsibility, and mutual ownership differ from the world view of these?

When is abstinence from sex allowed for a married couple (v.5)?

Paul saw his singleness as a gift from God (v.7-8). Being single or being married are both God’s gifts for his people. God has created men and women with sexual desire for marriage. When God calls some Christians to be single, God will give them more grace to exercise self-control (v.9). Self-control is one of the traits of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

What are the two options for a divorced person (v.10-11)?

Because marriage is a covenant relationship, divorce is a violation of this covenant. Jesus affirmed God's institution of marriage, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate ... And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:4-6, 9).

In a new church, Paul was faced with many challenging situations that Jesus had not addressed. That was why he said "I, not the Lord" (v.12). This did not mean that he wrote without wisdom and inspiration from God. He knew he wrote with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (v.40) and divine authority (14:37).

Paul forbids believers to marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). Some unbelievers became believers after their marriage, while their spouse still did not believe in Christ.

What was Paul's advice for them (v.12-13)?

Why (v.14)?

The marriage of believers is holy before God. It is sanctified by the holiness of the believers, even when their spouse still remains an unbeliever. A believer does not need to separate from an unbelieving spouse. When unbelievers become believers and enter into a covenant relationship with God, the grace and blessings of the covenant extends to their family (Acts 2:39). God sees their marriage as holy and their children are holy as well—children of the covenant and holy seeds for Christ's church.

What should a Christian do when his/her unbelieving spouse wants to separate (v.15)?

Believers have only one Lord and Master, who is God himself. A believer should not follow an unbelieving spouse in worshipping idols and becoming enslaved by sin, but should follow God wholeheartedly. If the unbelieving spouse wants to stay in marriage, the believer may win him/her to Christ. However, this is not guaranteed (v.16). If the unbelieving spouse wants a divorce, the believer should let him/her go. Christians are called to promote and live in peace with everyone.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

What is the general command for all Christians (v.17-21)?

When we become Christians, God does not require us to change our marital, ethnic, or social status. God wants us to remain in our marriage, even though our spouses still do not believe in Christ. God wants Jews to remain as Jews, and Gentiles (non-Jewish people) to remain as Gentiles—not seeking to be circumcised. God wants slaves not to be anxious by their social status.

Why (v.22-24)?

All Christians regardless of their marital, ethnic, or social status, are equal in the eyes of God. What matters to our identity is what God thinks about us and nothing else. We have been redeemed by Christ and belong to him alone. God wants us to have our assurance and identity in him alone.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Still discussing the subject of Christian identity in Christ, Paul gave exhortation to Christian singles and widows. Singles also need to see their identity and life fulfillment in Christ alone. Marriage is good, but singles should not idolize marriage and feel their singleness as a lack of significance or fulfillment. Often times, other people, even our families, can make us feel this way. This sense of a lack of significance or fulfillment in life can be enslaving for singles. That was why Paul said “do not become slaves of men” (v.23). It is common that our mind is shaped by the environment we are in. We can be somehow enslaved by the general opinions that exist in our environment, and lose our freedom and identity in Christ.

What are the advantages of being single as contrary to being married (v.28, 32, 35, 38)?

Paul did not teach that Christians should remain single, but taught singleness was a great gift from God. Christian singles who want to remain single, either for a longer period of time or permanently, are free to do so because their identity and life fulfillment is in Christ alone.

Christian marriage is a life-commitment covenant relationship. A widow is free to marry again, but he/she must marry a believer only (v.39). Being single or being married are both God’s gifts for his people.

Memorize

“You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Corinthians 7:23).

Lesson 5 – Christians’ Love and Sacrifice for One Another

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

The city of Corinth had a lot of pagan temples. Animal sacrifices were common practices in pagan worship. A portion of the meat that was not used in the worship would be sold in the market. The Corinthian Christians faced several challenging situations. Some thought they should not eat meat that had been offered to idols. Some thought it was fine. Some thought they should not participate in unbeliever friends’ weddings or other social functions held in pagan temples. The circumstances were even harder for a believer who had an unbelieving spouse who was still accustomed to a pagan lifestyle.

Paul gave several guidelines to help believers to live their lives as a covenant community of believers. He began by laying the foundation: the love of Christians for God and for one another.

How did Paul contrast knowledge and love (v.1)?

Often times we puff up (become proud) because of the knowledge we have. Christians should act wisely and lovingly—according to the knowledge of truth and love at the same time. Corinthian Christians knew that the Greek gods worshipped by the people of Corinth were not real (v.4). They knew they had only one God (the Father), who created all things, and one Lord (Jesus Christ), through whom the Father created all things (v.6). Some of them could simply eat food from idol worship, because they believed idols did not exist, and the food did not impact their spiritual life (v.8). However, some other Christians, who were weaker in their faith, were reluctant to eat this food because it convicted their conscience (v.7). They might think eating this food was the same as participating in idol worship.

There are stronger and weaker Christians. The main principle of Christian behavior is to act wisely and lovingly, and not arrogantly. We need to consider whether our actions will impact other Christians positively or negatively. We have freedom in Christ, but should not exercise our freedom carelessly.

What is the advice given to stronger Christians (v.9)?

Christians are not to be a *stumbling block*, causing other Christians to stumble. All food is clean and God has permitted us to eat all food. Some Christians may be reluctant to eat certain food. Stronger Christians should not exercise their right of freedom and cause weaker Christians to stumble and hurt their conscience. Christians should grow in love for one another. This principle applies to all Christians at all times. Some Christians come from other religious backgrounds that prohibit them to eat certain food. For some of them, it takes time to exercise their freedom in Christ.

What was one example of being a *stumbling block* in the life of the Corinthian Christians (v.10-11)?

Being a *stumbling block* is ultimately a sin against whom (v.12)?

There are things that we can do at home with much freedom and thankfulness to God, but there are things that we need to avoid in public for the good of others. Love always requires sacrifice. We should grow in love, wisdom, and maturity concerning our behaviors. A loving, wise, and mature Christian knows when and how to exercise and limit his/her freedom for the good of others, the mutual building up of all God's people, and the impact to this broken world.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

In this chapter, Paul spoke of surrendering his rights for the sake of God's kingdom. There were some Corinthian Christians who did not like Paul. They questioned and criticized Paul for his apostleship and authority. Here Paul defended his apostleship and explained his willingness and reasons to surrender his rights. Paul attempted to give good examples for the Corinthian Christians.

What were some credentials of Paul's apostleship (v.1-2)?

It is not uncommon for a minister to face criticism and opposition from some believers. They may not like his preaching style, lifestyle, ways of doing ministry, or other things. This can also happen to anyone in a position of Christian leadership in general.

If you are in a leadership role, how will you secure your emotion and identity in Christ (Lesson 4)?

What were some of the things that Paul and Barnabas did to surrender their rights (v.4-14)?

Paul and Barnabas were *tent-makers*. They made tents to earn money for their living expenses while ministering and planting a church in Corinth. Ministers have the right to be financially supported by the church for which they labor. However, often times they still need to work besides doing ministry, because their financial need is not fully met by the people for whom they labor. Church members should meet their minister's financial needs. Paul and Barnabas did not demand the Corinthian Christians to fulfill their responsibility. Paul and Barnabas "endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (v.12). Asking for financial help could also bring criticism from some who did not like them. They wanted to avoid this possibility. Paul teaches a very important principle in sharing the gospel and planting a church: endurance.

What did Paul say if he did not preach the gospel (v.16)? Why?

Paul understood his role and responsibility as an apostle. Christ had entrusted him with stewardship of preaching the gospel (v.17). Paul preached the gospel simply for the sake of others coming to faith in Christ. He did not focus on whether he would be financially supported or not. He was willing to make and sell tents for his living expenses. This is a high sacrifice in gospel ministry.

Paul knew that God would reward him with much spiritual blessing. Paul even considered that the ability to lay aside his right was also a reward from God (v.18). It is a spiritual security and a blessing from God.

His sacrifice would be a good example for other Christians and most importantly for the sake of the gospel to be preached and heard so that people would be saved. Another great reward in gospel ministry is seeing the work of God bringing people to faith in Christ.

What was the reason Paul sacrificed his life in many ways (v.19-23)?

Paul was able to make himself *a servant to all* because he placed his identity in Christ, and not what people thought about him. This is the key to true freedom and joy. Sharing the gospel and desiring to see people come to faith in Christ became the passion of his life. He sacrificed his comfort for the sake of other people. As a follower of Jesus, Paul imitated Jesus. In his life, Jesus' passion was to serve people and to sacrifice himself, dying for the punishment of their sins, so that they could be saved by believing in him.

What is the passion of your life?

What can you learn from Jesus and Paul?

Besides willingness to sacrifice our comfort, sharing the gospel to non-believers also requires our focus, determination, and perseverance.

How does the illustration from the life of athletes help us to understand this (v.24-27)?

Athletes need to exercise regularly and leave their comfort places (home, bed, etc.). When they play a match, they must focus, be determined, and persevere in order not to be disqualified, but to win the prize. Likewise, following Jesus wholeheartedly requires us to do the same. Like Paul, we need to imitate Jesus. Remember the key to true freedom and joy is not to be bound by worldly comfort and our own self-centeredness, but to give all our love to Jesus and to live for the sake of his gospel.

Memorize

“... I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:22-23).

Lesson 6 – Christians’ Covenant Faithfulness with God

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Not all Christians are true Christians. Some people declare they are Christians for various reasons. True Christians have a change of life. Love and faithfulness to Jesus will be seen in their lives. Some people think baptism, church membership, or participating in the Lord’s Supper guarantee their salvation. Experiencing these things does not save a person. What saves a person is faith in Christ alone. Paul gave Corinthian Christians a warning. As members of the Corinthian church and a covenant community of believers, they had tasted spiritual blessings. However, some of them might not be true Christians.

Paul told them about the people of Israel in the time of Moses. They were “baptized into Moses” (v.2). This signified the people’s union with their leader as a covenant community. With Moses, they experienced God’s supernatural blessings together. God’s presence was with them in the pillar of cloud and fire. God divided the sea for them to cross (v.2). God gave them manna and quail for their food and water from the rock (v.3-4). Experiencing these things did not guarantee that they would enter the promised land. God was not pleased with most of them, who were unfaithful to him. God punished them in the wilderness (v.5). They did not enter the promised land.

How does Israel’s history teach and warn us (v.6)?

What were some of the sins of the Israelites and the consequences (v.7-10)?

What is the advice for us (v.12)?

What does it say about temptation, us, and God (v.13)?

All temptations are common to all Christians. Some fall into temptations and some overcome them. Temptations usually begin in the mind. We must not let tempting thoughts dwell in our mind. We must throw them away as soon as they come in. God is faithful in his covenant relationship with us. He is always with us and helps us to overcome temptations.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Paul advises Christians to flee from idolatry (v.14). The first commandment in the Ten Commandments is “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Anything that takes away our heart from God, anything that consumes us, or anything other than God that we look for satisfaction and happiness in are potential idols.

What can be potential idols for us?

Paul explains the similarity of eating the Lord's Supper, eating a sacrificed meal in the Old Testament, and eating a meal at pagan temple.

What does eating the Lord's Supper mean for Christians (v.16-17)?

Eating the Lord's Supper shows that Christians worship Christ and belong together as a covenant community of believers. We eat the Lord's Supper to remember Christ's body and blood that was sacrificed for us. The Lord's Supper symbolizes our union and participation in Christ's death. We are nourished spiritually by Christ in a unique way when we have communion with him. When we partake in the Lord's Supper, we not only worship Christ, but also renew our covenant relationship with him, promising we will be faithful to him as he is faithful to us.

In the Old Testament, when the people of Israel performed animal sacrifices on the altar to God, they would also eat the meat. The eating time was also part of the worship to God (v.18).

What was Paul's command to the Corinthian Christians (v.19-22)? Why?

Some Corinthian Christians participated in pagan worship and feasts. Paul forbade them from practicing this behavior. Even though they knew that idols were not real and eating food that had been offered to idols would not impact their spiritual lives (see also 8:4-10), participating in pagan worship was participating in worshipping demons (v.20). Pagan worship is the work of demons. It is a dangerous demonic worship. We can be subject to significant demonic influence if we participate in pagan worship. Christians should not participate in pagan worship.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23 - 11:1

In our covenant relationship with God, we are to be faithful to God just as he is always faithful to us. Our love and faithfulness to God is the basis of all our thoughts, words, and actions. Paul teaches several principles of Christian life that are based on our love and faithfulness to God.

What is one principle of Christian life (v.23)?

What is one principle of Christian life (v.24)?

These two principles are fundamental. We should question ourselves, "(1) Will my actions build up my spiritual growth and love to God, as well as build up other people? (2) Will my actions bring goodness to others?"

What is one principle of Christian life (v.25-26)?

God is the Creator of the earth and all creatures. God has given meat, fruit, and vegetables for us to eat. When we buy food in the market, we do not need to ask whether or not the food has been used for idol worship. We should not ask questions or think anything that may hurt our conscience. God has given us freedom to eat all food with joy and thankfulness to him.

What is one principle of Christian life (v.27-29a)?

Going to the home of an unbeliever is a great opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ and share the gospel. Jesus often times ate with *sinners* in their homes. We are to eat their food with them without feeling troubled and raising questions that may hurt our conscience. However, if the unbeliever host informs us that the food has been used for idol worship, it is better not to eat the food, if eating the food may hurt his conscience. He may think that it is fine for us as Christians to participate in his belief and worshipping his god. We should not hurt his conscience.

Should our liberty in Christ be determined by other people's conscience (v.29b-30)? Paul tells us that this is a common question that Christians may ask. He already explains that we should not be a stumbling block for others (chapter 8), and be willing to sacrifice our comfort and rights for the sake of the gospel (chapter 9). He gives a fundamental principle in this chapter.

What is the principle of Christian life (v.31)?

Our love and faithfulness to God is the basis of all our thoughts, words, and actions. Paul repeated what he had said that he did everything for the sake of others to be saved, that they might hear the gospel and put their faith in Christ (v.32-33 and 9:19-23). He asked the Corinthian Christians to imitate his lifestyle as he imitated Jesus' lifestyle (11:1 and 4:16). When we love unbelievers out of love for Christ, it will grow our love and faithfulness for him. We learn to live sacrificially for the sake of Christ and his gospel, so that people from all nations may know him and be saved.

Memorize

“So, whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Lesson 7 – Christian Community Worship

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Paul addressed the practice of Christian community worship in this chapter. He commended the Corinthian Christians for maintaining *the traditions* (instructions) that he had taught them. However, there were some Christians who rebelled against Paul's instructions. Paul tried to help the church leaders with creating order in their community worship. The instruction concerning dress code applied to the Corinthian church according to the custom practiced at that time. It does not apply to all Christians in all times, but the fundamental principle does. Paul began with the fundamental principle of Christian life as a covenant community of God's people.

What is the fundamental principle (v.3)?

Jesus Christ willingly submitted to God the Father and took the role as the Savior who came to be man and die on the cross for our sins (Philippians 2:6-8). Christ is the head of the church and the head of man. The man is the head of his wife. This is the structure of God's covenant community. Man has the role and responsibility to be the head of his wife, just as Christ is the head of the church (see also Ephesians 5:21-33). Christ has given men the role and responsibility to lead his covenant community in the life of their respective families and in the life of the church as a community of believers. As leaders, men are to be like Christ, serving, loving, and sacrificing themselves for their families and God's covenant community.

What was the dress code of worship practiced in the first-century Corinthian church (v.4-5)?

There were both men and women in the Corinthian church who rebelled against the dress code and caused concern by other Christians. The Corinthian church had a big problem of unity. There were lots of conflicts among church members in many areas. Paul wanted men to uncover their heads and women to cover their heads in public worship. Paul was trying to bring order in their community worship. Paul continued to address the issue of orderly worship through chapter 14.

To prophesy is to declare the mysteries of God publicly for the building up and encouragement of the people (14:3). To pray here can mean to pray quietly in a community worship.

What is the order of the creation of man and woman and its implication (v.7-10)?

Christian men should reflect the glory of God by being obedient to God and serving God's covenant community. When Christian men disobey God and do not serve God's covenant community for God's glory, serious problems will arise in the church. This was what happened in the Corinthian church. Women, likewise, need to honor and submit to men's leadership. Women need to dress modestly and not be conformed to the godless culture of the society.

Men and women are created by God for mutual companionship and are mutually dependent (v.11-12). God has given different roles and responsibilities to men and women. God wants us to be faithful to him. He is our covenant God and the Source of our being.

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be honest in their thinking and practice of community worship. (v.13-15). If they were being contentious (arguing and quarrelling), they could honestly judge themselves that they were being rebellious, disobedient, and self-centered (v.16). If they loved the Lord, then they would do things that grow their love for one another and for the Lord. They would try not to be stumbling blocks for one another, but to sacrifice their rights for one another, build up one another, and exercise their God-given roles and responsibilities. If they would do these things, then their church would become healthy. They would experience the work of the Holy Spirit powerfully and receive abundant joy. As a church and a covenant community, they would become the kingdom of God that significantly impacted the city of Corinth and beyond, bringing good news and hope to unbelievers. This admonition applies to all churches in all times.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Paul did not commend the Corinthian church concerning their practice of the Lord's Supper in their community worship (v.17). The divisions among them impacted every area of their community worship including the Lord's Supper (v.18-19 and chapter 3).

What happened in their practice of the Lord's Supper (v.20-22)?

The Corinthian church celebrated the Lord's Supper along with a fellowship meal. People brought food and shared with one another. Because there were divisions among them, people sat with their group of friends. There was no unity or harmony in their worship. While celebrating the Lord's Supper and eating meals, some ate a lot, some did not eat enough, and some drank too much wine and got drunk. They were disrespectful to Christ and the holiness of the Lord's Supper. Paul was angry with them (v.22).

Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper (v.23-26)?

The Lord's Supper is a holy sacrament where the believers have communion with Christ and with one another as Christ's covenant community. We celebrate the Lord's Supper to remember his body and blood that have been sacrificed for the punishment of our sins.

Paul wanted to protect the Lord's Supper from the fellowship meal in the Corinthian church. He emphasized the holiness of the sacrament.

What is the warning (v.27)?

Unworthy manners are all self-centered and sinful manners—all manners that do not have a proper respect for the holiness of the sacrament.

What is the advice (v.28)? Why (v.29)?

The Lord's Supper is holy. We sin if we don't respect its holiness. Before coming to the Lord's Supper, we need to examine if there are any major sins we need to repent of. We need to confess them to God and ask for forgiveness. We should come only in a worthy manner to the Lord's Supper. This is pleasing to the Lord, otherwise we will be guilty before him.

What happened to some of the people in the Corinthian church (v.30)?

What is the purpose of God's judgment and discipline for us (v.31-32)?

Paul admonished them to wait for one another to eat the Lord's Supper and the fellowship meal and prepare their hearts for communing with the Lord, so they would not sin and receive his judgment, but blessing (v.33-34). Today, most churches do not celebrate the Lord's Supper along with a fellowship meal, in order to protect the holiness of the sacrament.

There are three significant aspects of the Lord's Supper for believers:

1. The Lord's Supper is a means for our spiritual growth. When we have communion with the Lord, he is present with us and nourishes us supernaturally in a special way.
2. The Lord's Supper is a covenant renewal of our covenant relationship with the Lord. Every time we come to the Lord's Table and eat with him, we pledge again our faithfulness to him. We recommit our love for him.
3. The Lord's Supper is also a covenant renewal of the believers as the Lord's covenant family. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as the believers' covenant communion. Every time we eat the Lord's Supper, it reminds us that we are a covenant family in him. We pledge again our love and faithfulness to one another.

We cannot have a lovely communion with Christ if we are not in a good relationship with him, and neither can we have a lovely communion with one another if we have major problems among us. Therefore we need to ask one another for forgiveness and prepare our hearts to come to the Lord's Supper. Instead of being nourished by Christ in a special and personal way, his judgment will come upon us if we come with unworthy manner.

Memorize

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Lesson 8 – Spiritual Gifts for the Covenant Community

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Paul addressed the issue of spiritual gifts that was a significant problem in the Corinthian church. Christians should not be uninformed or ignorant about this issue (v.1). Spiritual gifts are gifts of the Holy Spirit given to Christians at the moment we are spiritually born in Christ. Every Christian is given at least one spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit. The purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up God's covenant community (the church). Christians can be ignorant by not knowing what their spiritual gifts are, by not understanding the purpose of their spiritual gifts, or by not using their spiritual gifts properly.

Do you constantly exercise your spiritual gifts for the building up of God's covenant community?

If we are ignorant, what are the consequences to us personally and to the covenant community corporately?

Many of the Corinthian Christians used to worship mute idols and were influenced by evil spiritual forces (v.2). Evil spirits can also give people counterfeit "spiritual gifts," enabling them to do miracles, speak in an unknown language, or forecast the future. These are done with demonic influence and power. Some of the Corinthian Christians might have experienced these demonic supernatural manifestations, and Paul wanted them to be well informed about the difference between the work of the demons in their past lives and the work of the Holy Spirit in their current lives. People cannot profess that Jesus is Lord, unless they have the Holy Spirit working in them. If they have the Holy Spirit in them, they will not curse Jesus (v.3). The fundamental principle is: a person can understand and speak the truth of God only if he/she is guided by the Holy Spirit.

Some Corinthian Christians thought that certain spiritual gifts were more important than the others. Some were proud of possessing certain gifts and some were envious seeking to possess certain gifts.

How did Paul answer this (v.4-6, 11)?

What is the purpose of God giving spiritual gifts to us (v.7)?

God has given and empowered each of us with different spiritual gifts to build up his covenant community. The different spiritual gifts are needed for different church ministries and activities. All our gifts are to be used for edification of believers and reaching unbelievers. All our gifts are to be used for God's glory.

What are some of the spiritual gifts (v.8-10)?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

How is the unity of a covenant community of believers as a church of Christ illustrated (v.12)?

Baptism of the Holy Spirit signifies our internal regeneration, and drinking of the Holy Spirit signifies our internal sanctification (v.13). Regeneration and sanctification are the internal work of the Holy Spirit in us, and what make us true believers and members of Christ's body. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ, bringing us to repentance and faith in Christ. We are born again and made into a new person in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Water baptism signifies God's pouring his Spirit on us. The outward baptism by water signifies the inward baptism by the Holy Spirit. Water baptism also signifies our union with Christ, entering into a covenant relationship with him and into a covenant community of believers. Similarly, partaking the Lord's Supper—eating the bread and drinking from the cup—signifies our sanctification and ongoing communion with Christ.

How is the unity of believers with different roles illustrated (v.14-17)?

How is God sovereign in giving different roles to us as members of the body of Christ (v.18)?

God sees that all spiritual gifts to his people are good for the church as one body. To look down on certain spiritual gifts is to dishonor God, the Giver. To look down on certain believers who do not have the same gifts as you have, is to dishonor God, their Creator. Paul warned Corinthian Christians of this serious sin.

What should believers understand (v.19-20)?

What should believers not do (v.21)?

What should believers understand (v.22)?

What should believers do (v.23-24)?

How has God designed the body of Christ (v.24-25)?

Those who serve in the church and are easily seen by others are not more important than those who serve in less visible roles. Those in leadership positions are not more important than those who pray for them or those who go out and share the gospel to their neighbors and friends.

How should the unity of believers be (v.26-27)?

As a covenant community, we should commit to love and be faithful to one another regardless of how we are treated, just as Christ has committed to love and be faithful to us regardless of how we treat him. If each Christian strives to do this, the church will grow healthy and strong. We should build up and carry the burden of one another. We should share our joy and struggles. When unbelievers see this kind of love we have for one another as a covenant community, it will make a great impact on them and draw them to Christ.

What are some other spiritual gifts (v.28)?

Paul reemphasizes that God gives believers different gifts (v.29-30). Many Corinthian Christians valued spiritual gifts for show rather than for usefulness and Paul admonished them for this. If they wanted higher or more important gifts (v.31), then they should seek gifts that build up the church (14:2), such as instructing people rather than speaking in tongues (14:9). Above all spiritual gifts, Paul wants all Christians to exercise the way of love (chapter 13). Love is the essence of our covenant relationship with God and with one another.

Memorize

“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together”
(1 Corinthians 12:26).

Lesson 9 – Christian *Agape* Love: the Center of the Christian Life

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

The Greek word used for *love* in this chapter is *agape*. Other Greek words for *love* are *phileo* (friendship love), *storge* (family and community love), and *eros* (romantic and sexual love). *Agape* is unconditional love. It is love that puts others more important than self. It is sacrificial love. It is love that God demonstrates for us and wants us to demonstrate to him and one another as well.

Paul admonished the Corinthian Christians to emphasize *agape* love as a greater importance in their lives than anything else. *Agape* love is the center of the Christian life. *Agape* love is the essence of Christians' covenant relationship with God and with one another. *Agape* love is the fuel of our covenant relationship, and without it we will be consumed with self-centeredness. Paul stresses the superiority of *agape* love to spiritual gifts and gives three comparisons. First, Paul compares *agape* love with the gift of speaking in tongues, which was overvalued by the Corinthian Christians.

How does Paul emphasize the importance of *agape* love (v.1)?

Tongues of men refers to speaking in other languages of men. *Tongues of angels*—although it may refer to languages of angels—is obviously an intentional hyperbolic expression for comparison purposes. Paul also uses hyperbolic expressions in the next two comparisons. The purpose of using exaggeration language is to make a point and emphasize the significance of the subject that is being compared to. In this context, the subject is *agape* love. Having the gift to speak in tongues of men and angels, without having *agape* love, is useless.

Second, Paul compares *agape* love with the gift of prophecy—understanding mysteries and knowledge of God's truth and proclaiming it to God's people—and the gift of faith.

How does Paul emphasize the importance of *agape* love (v.2)?

Paul's use of the word "all" is an exaggeration to make his point. Third, Paul compares *agape* love with the gifts of giving and service, including sacrificing personal belongings, time, energy, and to the point of being a martyr as an ultimate act of sacrificial service.

How does Paul emphasize the importance of *agape* love (v.3)?

Agape Love is superior to all spiritual gifts and abilities. *Agape* Love is even superior to martyrdom. Someone can be very courageous to die for their belief in Christ, but if he does not have *agape* love, he dies for nothing. Paul defines what *agape* love is in the next few verses.

How is *agape* love defined (v.4-6)? Give an example of each description.

Each description of *agape* love is an action rather than emotion. Christians are to be like God in their thoughts, words, and actions. Each description of *agape* love reflects the character of God.

Which ones do you need to work on?

Jesus teaches us, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). The Greek word used for love here is also *agape*. The Christian life is all about loving God and loving people with *agape* love.

What does it say about *agape* love and what does it mean (v.7)?

Agape love bears and endures all struggles, unkindness, and attacks. *Agape* love continues to love regardless of circumstances. We are able to endure all things and continue to love others by relying on God who gives us strength. “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Agape love also believes and hopes in all circumstances that God works in all things to bring good to his people. “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

How do you apply these verses and exercise your *agape* love to one another as God’s covenant community?

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:7-11).

What does it say further about *agape* love and what does it mean (v.8-10)?

Agape love is far superior to all spiritual gifts and abilities. While all spiritual gifts are temporary for the benefit of God’s church, *agape* love never ends. God’s *agape* love for us never ends. Our covenant *agape* love relationship with God never ends. Our covenant *agape* love relationship with one another as God’s covenant community never ends either.

Spiritual gifts and other blessings we have in this world are temporary and imperfect. When Christ returns and renews the world, he will bring perfection to the new world for us. To this end we bear, believe, hope, and endure all things.

How is *agape* love superior to faith and hope (v.13)?

Agape love is a principle of action. *Agape* love is the nature of God. Our *agape* love originates from God. God's *agape* love requires him to sacrifice himself for us. Our *agape* love also requires us to sacrifice ourselves for God (Romans 12:1) and for one another as well. *Agape* love is the essence of Christians' covenant relationship with God and with one another. *Agape* love is the first characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The law of *agape* love is the summary of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 22:37-40).

"No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12).

How is God's *agape* love perfected in us?

God is perfect and his *agape* love is perfect. God dwells in us and uses us to demonstrate his *agape* love. We are God's agents to show the world what true *agape* love is. God sanctifies and nurtures us daily. The demonstration of our *agape* love to one another shows the *agape* love of God that we have. His *agape* love is perfected in us. When we love one another with *agape* love, the world will see this unique *agape* love that we have and be drawn to Christ.

Is God's *agape* love perfected in you?

What practical steps can you do to develop your *agape* love to your Christian brothers and sisters?

Memorize

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Lesson 10 – Prophecy, Tongues, and Orderly Community Worship

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

What do we need to pursue above everything else (v.1)?

In chapter 13, Paul has explained that *agape* love is superior to all spiritual gifts. As Christians, we need to exercise *agape* love as the priority of our lives. We also need to desire and exercise God-given spiritual gifts. Paul compares the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy. Speaking in a tongue is speaking in another language that is unknown to the speaker. This gift was overvalued by the Corinthian Christians. Paul encouraged them to value the gift of prophecy more than the gift of speaking in tongues.

What does the passage say about speaking in a tongue (v.2)?

Prophecy is about bringing God’s message and proclaiming God’s truth and will to his people. This gift includes discerning mysteries and knowledge of God’s truth, and the ability to predict the future. Preaching and teaching the Word of God is a manifestation of this gift.

What is the purpose of prophecy (v.3)?

What is the difference in purpose between the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy (v.4)?

How can the church community be built up if someone speaks in a tongue in public worship (v.5)?

Paul emphasizes benefiting others in the community worship (v.6). This is a great application of *agape* love. *Agape* love always puts others more important than self. It is totally the opposite of self-centeredness. As a community of believers, we need to continuously think about what benefits others more than ourselves. This is the key to build up our spiritual maturity and grow the church.

How does an indistinct sound of music illustrate the ineffectiveness of speaking in tongues without interpretation (v.7-9)?

The gift of speaking in tongues is surely meaningful (v.10). However, it is ineffective to be exercised in congregational meetings without interpretation, because other people cannot understand it (v.11). The Corinthian Christians were so eager to have the gift of speaking in tongues because they thought it was a great manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. They liked something that could be easily seen outwardly. They were blinded by their pride and self-centeredness. Paul admonished them not to desire personal pride or show-off, but to strive and excel in building up other people and the church as a covenant community of believers (v.12).

What is the advice for someone who speaks in a tongue (v.13)?

What happened to Paul's mind when he prayed in a tongue (v.14)?

When Paul prayed in a tongue, his spirit communicated to God in a special way that his mind did not understand. He did not want his mind to be unfruitful and unedified (v.15). He advised the Corinthian Christians to pray in words that others could understand, affirm (say "Amen") what was being said (v.16), and be built up (v.17).

What would Paul rather do (v.19)?

What was Paul's advice to the Corinthian Christians (v.20)?

Paul quoted Isaiah 28:11-12 in verse 21. Because Israel did not repent and believe in God, God would use Assyrians—whose language was not understood by the people of Israel—to attack and take Israel into captivity. Paul used this as a parallel to speaking in a tongue without interpretation. A language that is not understandable is used by God as a sign to warn people who do not believe in him. In contrast, prophecy is primarily a sign for believers, for the building up of God's covenant people (v.21-22).

What will unbelievers think when they visit a church and hear people speaking in words that they cannot understand (v.23)?

What will happen to unbelievers when they visit a church, hear, understand, and are convicted by the explanation of God's Word (v.24-25)?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

In a community gathered worship, what is the aim of all things being done (v.26)?

What is the instruction for speaking in tongues in public worship (v.27-28)?

What is the instruction for prophecy in public worship (v.29-31)?

The instruction is the same for both speaking in tongues and prophecy. While speaking in tongues is emphasized in private worship and prophecy in public worship, prophecy still needs to be done in order. The individuals who possess either gift need to control themselves (v.32).

There are some Christians who think that we should not try to control ourselves when the Holy Spirit is “empowering” us to speak to the public. This verse clearly teaches that we should control ourselves. Our spirits are subject to us. God wants an orderly public worship. God will never give us an uncontrollable spiritual power.

What is the essential reason for an orderly public worship (v.33)?

Public worship must be done in peace and orderly because we worship a God of peace and order. The Corinthian church also had a problem with women speaking too much during public worship (v.34), perhaps questioning and discussing the meaning of what people prophesied and what people said in tongues. This added to the disorder of their public worship. It was shameful and inappropriate for them to dialogue and cause more disorder (v.35). Paul basically instructed every member of the Corinthian church—those who prophesied, those who spoke in tongues, and those who listened and discussed what they heard—to practice self-control and be able to quiet themselves to assist in making their worship orderly and peacefully.

Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians again that they should not be prideful of God-given insights of his Word and their gifts of tongues and prophecy (v.36).

What did Paul say about his writing and instruction to them (v.37)?

Paul was Christ’s apostle and spoke with authority on behalf of him. His instruction was a command from Christ the Lord. He gave them a warning that if anyone was stubborn and disobeyed his instruction, Christ would surely deal with them directly (v.38).

Paul dearly called the Corinthian Christians “brothers” (v.39). He loved them and wanted to see them grow mature in Christ together as a covenant community of believers. He reminded them to desire the gift of prophecy, while at the same time not to forbid speaking in tongues. “But all things should be done decently and in order” (v.40).

Memorize

“Let all things be done for building up” (1 Corinthians 14:26b).

Lesson 11 – The Christians’ Resurrection and Glorification (Part 1)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

In chapter 15, Paul explains the doctrine of resurrection as it relates to the gospel. He divides it into four sections: (1) the resurrection of Christ, (2) the resurrection of the dead, (3) the resurrection body, and (4) a conclusion. Paul begins by stressing the importance of the gospel. For all true Christians, we have heard, received, and believed the gospel (v.1). Our faith in Christ continuously saves us from our past to the present and the future (v.2). We wait for our resurrection and glorification. We must continue to hold fast to the word of God and to persevere in our faith in Christ.

What is the gospel about (v.3-4)?

Whom did Jesus appear to after his resurrection (v.5-6)?

At the time that Paul was writing 1 Corinthians, there were still many people who had seen Jesus after his resurrection. These people were eyewitnesses, who could be asked to testify if anyone doubted Jesus’ resurrection. Paul purposefully told the Corinthian Christians about the credibility of Jesus’ resurrection.

Whom else did Jesus appear to after to his resurrection (v.7-8)?

What did Paul say about himself (v.9)?

What did Paul say about the grace of God for him (v.10)?

Paul understood that he did not deserve the grace of God. He was not only a sinner but was a persecutor of Christians. He understood that he deserved God’s wrath and punishment more than anyone else. However, God saved him and even made him an apostle. Understanding the overwhelming grace of God, Paul worked very hard as an apostle, bringing the gospel and planting churches in foreign countries. The essence of the gospel is the grace of God for us. We are sinners who deserve God’s wrath and punishment, but are saved by his grace through faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins.

Has the grace of God impacted your life?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Some of the Corinthian Christians did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and the resurrection body. It is also understandable that people question how a decayed body can be resurrected (v.12, 35). “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised” (v.13).

The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our resurrection. Paul describes several consequences if Jesus has not been resurrected.

What is the consequence stated in v.14?

It is useless to preach about a dead person and to ask people to believe and put their faith in that person. There is no hope we can get from a dead person.

What is the consequence stated in v.15-16?

If Jesus has not been resurrected, then all Christians are liars and tell false information about their God.

What is the consequence stated in v.17?

If God the Father left Jesus in the grave and had not resurrected him, then Jesus' death would have done nothing to accomplish our justification. Jesus' sacrifice would not have been accepted. This means no one could have received the forgiveness of God by believing in Jesus. We would still be dead in our sins. Faith in Jesus would be futile (useless).

What is the consequence stated in v.18?

Christians, who have died because of their faith in Jesus, would have died in vain. They would be lost and perishing forever. There would be no eternal life with God for them.

What is the consequence stated in v.19?

All follower of Jesus Christ would be the most pitiful people in the world. They would believe in a wrong God, have a wrong faith, and have no hope for life.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-34

The truth is that Jesus has been resurrected. Therefore, there are significant consequences.

What is the consequence stated in v.20?

Jesus being the firstfruits means he is the first person who is resurrected among the dead to live eternally. Jesus' resurrection is the model and projection of Christian resurrection.

How is Jesus compared to Adam (v.21-22)?

When will the resurrection of those who belong to Jesus be (v.23)?

What will happen then (v.24-25)?

What is the last enemy to be destroyed (v.26)?

Jesus will judge and destroy all evils including death on the day of his second return. Evil and death have an end. Jesus will end our suffering from evil and death. The gospel is good news to everyone and a compelling message, especially to those who suffer from injustice or sickness, or to those who put their hope only in God to make things right for them at the end.

God has put all things in subjection to Christ. Destroying all evils and death is Christ's salvation work for us. He will complete his work at his return. Although Christ is equal to the Father, in his role he subjects himself to the Father (v.27-28).

There were apparently some "people" who practiced baptism on behalf of the dead (v.29). Paul didn't say further who the people were. Although the practice was superstitious and done with false understanding, Paul simply used it as an argument that those people believed in the resurrection of the dead. Paul conveyed that if there is no resurrection of the dead, there was no meaning for his perseverance in facing persecution in his gospel ministry. He was saying, "Why spread the gospel at all? Why even suffer for the gospel? Let's just party and have fun" (v.30-32).

What was Paul's advice for the Corinthian Christians (v.33)?

Paul warned them of false teaching that infiltrated their church. He admonished them to hold firmly to the gospel and not to be ignorant. Some of them boasted about their knowledge of God's truth, but in fact they did not even understand the doctrine of resurrection. It revealed their ignorance (v.34).

Memorize

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"
(1 Corinthians 15:20).

Lesson 12 – The Christians’ Resurrection and Glorification (Part 2)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Previously, Paul explains the gospel and its significance to the doctrine of resurrection. The resurrection of believers is part of the gospel of salvation. Paul explains that the resurrection of Christ is the firstfruits and the model of Christians’ resurrection. In this section, Paul explains that our future resurrected body is different from our current sinful and corrupted body.

In Corinth, there was a pagan belief that the human body was insignificant, and only the human soul was significant. The Corinthian Christians were influenced by this belief, which made them misunderstand. They thought the resurrection meant that they would get their sinful and corrupted body again. Whether they believed this or believed that there was no resurrection at all, Paul saw this as foolish understanding (v.36). Paul told them that they could understand the doctrine of resurrection by looking at nature. There are parallels in nature.

What are some of the parallels in nature (v.36-39)?

A seed cannot produce a new life and body unless it dies (v.36). The seed then grows into a plant and God gives it a body (v.37). For different seeds, God gives different bodies (v.38). God also gives different bodies to different animals (v.39). Therefore, God will give us a different kind of body when he resurrects us. Our earthly bodies are corrupted with sin, but our resurrected bodies will be heavenly and without corruption. The glories of the two bodies are different (v.40).

How does Paul use an illustration in nature to contrast the two bodies (v.40-41)?

How does he further contrast them (v.42-44)?

How does he contrast the first Adam and the last Adam [Jesus] (v.45, see also v.22)?

How does he contrast the origins of Adam and of Jesus (v.47)?

How does he contrast those of Adam and those of Jesus (v.48-49)?

The work of Christ to save us from sin is not complete until he resurrects and gives us a new glorified body, free from sin and its corruption. With the new glorified body, we have no more pain, sickness, corruption, and death. No more sin and its impacts. We will bear a complete image of Christ (v.49).

When we die, our souls return to God in heaven. They are purified and made perfect in holiness. They wait to be united again with a new, purified, and glorified body.

Paul also says, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

The natural, earthly, and perishable body cannot inherit the kingdom of God. It is for the spiritual, heavenly, and imperishable body (v.50).

What is the mystery of the resurrection (v.51-52)?

The resurrection will happen so fast. It will be in the twinkling of an eye. The resurrected body is imperishable and immortal (v.53-54). It is holy in nature. It cannot sin, be corrupted, or suffer pain. It is a glorified body; a body with heavenly glory.

There is a prophecy in the book of Hosea, that death will be destroyed in the end (v.55). This will be fulfilled at the return of Jesus, when he will resurrect us and give us a new glorified body. God will judge all things and glorify his people.

What is the sting of death (v.56)?

What is the power of sin?

From the beginning, God revealed to Adam that sin would bring death. Obeying the law will not save us. The law reveals our sins. The more we try to obey, the more we realize we break the law all the time. But thanks to God for his grace, who gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord (v.57).

What is the final encouragement Paul gives to all Christians (v.58)?

Even though we are in a spiritual war and suffer against the power of evil, we are strengthened by God’s promise that he will end every evil and suffering, including death. Our hope is in Jesus. Therefore, until the end of our lives, we need to share the gospel—the message of salvation to all people.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-11

Paul briefly spoke about the financial collection to help the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He gave the same instruction to churches in Galatia (v.1). Christians must help other Christians who are poor. This is God’s command to his people as one body of Christ.

On what day was the financial collection taken (v.2)?

Who was commanded to give the offering (v.2)?

Since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which was on Sunday, early Christians began to meet on Sunday for a community worship. There was an offering collection every Sunday. Every person was commanded to give generously as God had blessed or prospered him/her. The financial collection was to be stored and handled by people who had been assigned for the job (v.3).

Whom did Paul send to help the Corinthian church and what did Paul asked of them (v.10-11)?

Timothy was a young pastor trained by Paul. Paul asked the Corinthian Christians to respect him although he was young. Like Paul, Timothy worked hard to share the gospel and serve God's people.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:12-24

Paul mentioned that Apollos—whom the Corinthian Christians hoped to come for a visit—would not be able to come (v.12).

What was Paul's admonition to the Corinthian Christians (v.13-14)?

Christians are in constant spiritual war with evil forces. We are to be watchful and stand firm in the faith, and do all things in love—as he instructed them extensively (chapter 13).

Paul mentioned several people, men and women, who labored together with him for the work of the gospel. Paul sent his and their greetings to the Corinthian Christians (v.15-21).

Paul warned them again to watch their lives and love the Lord. If they did not, they would face the Lord's anger (v.22).

What was Paul's benediction to them (v.23-24)?

Memorize

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Resources

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