



GROWTH GROUP STUDIES | TERM 4, 2018
Leaders Notes

PREACHING SERIES

21 Oct	1 Corinthians 8:1 – 11:1
28 Oct	VISION 2020
4 Nov	VISION 2020
11 Nov	1 Corinthians 11:2-16
18 Nov	1 Corinthians 11:17-34
25 Nov	1 Corinthians 12 – 13
2 Dec	1 Corinthians 14
9 Dec	1 Corinthians 15
16 Dec	1 Corinthians 16

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If you think there will be time, it would be helpful to recap 1 Corinthians 1 – 7. Perhaps you could devote week one of Growth Group to this. Or you could ask members of your group to come prepared with a 30 second summary of one of the chapters.

Especially important to remember is 1:2 – who the Corinthians are. And 1:17-18 – the power of the cross.

There are lots of issues in the Corinthian church (and any church!) – money, sex, greed, communion, idolatry, etc. But the root of all of them is a failure to follow Christ faithfully. The solution? The message of Christ crucified is powerful, because the message brings you to Jesus himself. That is what will transform the church in Corinth.

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STUDY 1: 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1 – 9:23

READ THE PASSAGE

1. What issue in the Corinthians church does Paul now turn to address? How does he begin to address it? Why start here? (vv. 1-3)

*Addressing issues around idolatry. This concerns 1 Cor 8:1 – 11:1. Notice the slight change between v. 1 and v. 4 for example. V. 1 = “**about** food sacrificed” (general). V. 4 “**eating** food sacrificed” (specific).*

Begins with a discussion about knowledge and love. Because what you think shapes the way you live. Or, your theology shapes your practice. How we think about idols (or anything!) must be shaped by our knowledge of God and our love for others in Christ.

2. Is the statement “knowledge puffs up” general or specific? Can knowledge be a good thing?

Knowledge can puff up, but it doesn't have to:

V. 2: true knowledge knows how to love others. A true understanding of the gospel (knowledge) will shape how you live (love).

V. 3: Knowledge is good, but don't let it puff you up, because it doesn't define you. Being known by God does. God has knowledge, it is good. He is not puffed up, but is love.

3. In v. 4-6 Paul focuses in on knowledge. Who has knowledge? How do they know it? What is it?

The two statements in v. 4 are probably quotes from the Corinthians themselves. Paul agrees with them “we know”. But this is not knowledge the Corinthians have discovered themselves, that's why Paul can agree. It's most likely from Deuteronomy 6:4, or similar.

“We” = God's people. True knowledge comes through His word. His people can know what they need in order to live as His people.

The knowledge is that Christians are free to eat food that has been offered to idols, because we know that there is one God and that idols are nothing. The sacrifice of food by non-believers does nothing 'spiritual' to the food itself. So if you eat it, it won't do anything to you.

Note: 1 Cor 10:19-21 – Christians are not to be involved in the offering of a sacrifice.

4. What is the knowledge that some don't possess? Where has it come from? How does it shape their lives? (vv. 7-8)

It seems that 'not everyone' includes some Christians. They don't know/understand v. 4-6. Therefore, it impacts how they approach food sacrificed to idols.

*To their knowledge, the food has been defiled. Because **they are accustomed to thinking that way (v. 7)**. Therefore, it becomes a heart issue for them. Even though food doesn't impact in anyway on our relationship with God (v. 8), in their mind to eat is an act of rebellion.*

5. From vv. 9-13, how do knowledge and love work together in the Christian life?

Love is given up your 'rights' for the sake of others = Jesus. “Love builds up” (v. 1) it doesn't lead others into destruction. If you are 'puffed up' by your knowledge – “I'm free in Christ do what I want!” – then the danger is that you will lead others into sin. Important to note that this means you are therefore sinning too! (v. 12)

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6. In 9:1-23 Paul uses his Apostleship to illustrate his point. What does Paul know? (vv. 1-14)

He is an apostle – personally appointed by Jesus (v. 1) and proven to the Corinthians through his work amongst them. i.e. they know it from God himself.

As an apostle he has rights from God (v.5 and v. 6). He knows this, not just from common sense (v. 7), but from the Law (v. 8-12).

7. How does Paul love? Why does he do it? (vv. 12b, 15-18)

He “does not use the right” (v. 12b, 15, 18). He would “rather die”! (v. 15)

He does not want to hinder the gospel of Christ (v. 12b), that is, he does not want to put a stumbling block in the way of people being able to hear the gospel.

v. 16 – he doesn't have a choice in preaching, God has simply given him that task. V. 17 – he is entitled to be provided for. But even if he isn't, he'll be rewarded. What is the reward? V. 18 – the privilege of being able to offer the gospel free of charge, and in doing so, his life becomes an example of the gospel itself.

8. What is Paul teaching the Corinthians with regards to their eating practices? (vv. 19-23)

The Corinthians, it seems, had put some of their fellow Christians in spiritual danger, through their eating practices. “I'm free in Christ to eat food offered to idols, I don't care what you think!”

The reward they ought to be pursuing in life is not the freedom to do what they want, but the privilege of freely abstaining so that the gospel might not be hindered.

This, of course, is to live like Jesus Christ (cf. 11:1).

THINKING IT THROUGH

9. What are some examples of when we demand our 'rights' as Christians? Where do we get this knowledge from?

The Bible tells us that there are many good things, and so we can find ourselves asserting our right to have them: we become “puffed up” in the knowledge.

e.g. how we consume alcohol, how we spend our money, personal preferences about how church is conducted, movies we watch, etc.

10. For each example above, how have others become “accustomed” (9:7) to their different thinking about these things?

e.g. alcohol: “Christians don't drink.” Perhaps that is a view someone has grown up with.

In each example it will be the case that their thinking is not informed by the Bible, but something else. Perhaps tradition, culture, experience.

11. How will love shape our approach to these matters?

Being prepared to sacrifice what is good, for the best: the gospel go out unhindered: building up + reaching out, for the glory of Jesus. Cross-shaped living.

In love, we will also long to help each other to grow in knowledge about these matters. Patiently, humbly, opening up the Bible and listening to each other's thoughts about what the Bible says, on whatever the matter is.

12. What will produce this love in us? How can we be proactive in producing it in ourselves?

A conviction that the gospel being unhindered is a greater reward than our own personal desires. Not always as simple or obvious to us as it sounds! Cross-shaped living.

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STUDY 2: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24 – 11:1

1. Thinking back to 8:1-3, what is the root issue that Paul is addressing in 8:1 – 11:1? With regards to that issue, what has he discussed so far?

The root issue is Idolatry. From there he has discussed eating food that has been offered to idols and the danger of causing someone to stumble by acting against their conscience. This is meant to be a quick question.

READ THE PASSAGE

2. In 8:3 – 9:13 Paul wrote about self-constraint for the sake of others. What does he now begin to address in 9:24-27? What images does he use? How do they contribute?

This section sets up the rest of the passage.

He is turning to the issue of self-constraint in regards to living as one of God's people. We are not yet at the end of the race (heaven/new creation). How we live, on the way there, matters. There is an aim in life, a prize to receive, disqualification is possible.

3. In 10:1-13, Paul turns the attention of the Corinthians to the history of Israel in the wilderness.

- a. What is significant about the fact that Paul writes, in v. 1: "our ancestors"

The Corinthian church would have been full of Gentile Christians. Yet having come to Christ, they have been adopted into the covenant people of God. We too then, are to think of ourselves as being the adopted children of the Israelites of the exodus. Their story is our story.

- b. What period of Israel's history is Paul recalling in vv. 1-5? What is significant about this for us?

It's covering the period from:

The Exodus (salvation + redemption) → through the wilderness → journeying to the promised land of Israel.

It's the period that foreshadows our experience:

Salvation + redemption (in Jesus) → through life in this world → on the journey to the (eternal) promised land.

- c. Who was present amongst the Israelite community during their time in the wilderness? What is the implication for Christians?

God was, and He constantly provided for his people: food and water. The rock? In Deut 32 = God. Paul identifies it with Christ. The point? Christ is with us throughout our journey through this world, constantly providing what we need to get to the promised land.

- d. What is the warning of v. 5? Why did this occur, vv. 6-10?

Most of them, an entire generation, didn't make it to the promised land.

Good to draw out the 'evil things' that are identified:

> Idolaters

> Sexual Immorality

> Testing God (the Rock = Christ)

> Grumble

- e. According to vv. 11-12, why have these events been recorded in the Old Testament?

For our sake. That we will be careful not to fall.

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- f. What assurances does Paul give us in vv. 13-14? How do we weigh them against the warnings from Israel's history?

Might be helpful to work through the verses a phrase at a time:

- Temptation is normal, a part of being human, common to all. Jesus was tempted. It's not sinful to be tempted.
- God is faithful to you, He saved you. So keep trusting Him.
- He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. So, not only is he faithful, he is in control of the situation you are in. c.f.: God led Jesus "into the wilderness" to be tempted, for 40 days (Israel 40 years).
- When you are tempted, God will provide a way out. You never have to sin. You can endure. Notice: He will provide the way = you require His help to do it = the Holy Spirit.

- g. Stop and reflect on your own personal experience. When are you tempted with/to:

- i. Idolatry
- ii. Sexual Immorality
- iii. Put Jesus to the test
- iv. Grumble against God

- h. How will vv. 13-14 help you address each of these situations?

For g. and h. encourage people to take time to reflect on their own. It might be helpful if group members know they won't be asked to share their responses. Or perhaps they might like to share something encouraging, but not necessarily specific, from question h.

4. In 10:1-13, Paul has reminded us of the importance of putting off sin so that we can finish the race well. In 10:14-22 he now returns specifically to the root issue of his discussion: idolatry.

- a. What is his command, and what is the reason for it?

Flee from idolatry! It has no place in the Christian life. For as we share in the Lord's Supper, we show our faith in the sacrifice of Jesus. We are, by faith, participants in the body and blood of Christ.

- b. Again Israel is used as the example. What point do you think Paul is making about idolatry in v. 18-22?

In the Old Testament the priests participated in making the sacrifice at the altar, and then were permitted to eat parts of the sacrifice. As they ate the food, they knowingly ate food that has been clearly identified as a sacrifice. Therefore, it identified them as a willing participant in the sacrifice.

The problem is not the food – (v. 19, cf. 8:4-6). But to knowingly, and intentionally, eat food that has been offered to an idol is to participate in the sacrifice that has been made. And how can a Christian, who shares the Lord's supper also be a participant with demons!?

- c. What do you think might be some implications of this for us, as Christians?

There will be implications for eating with those of other religions, perhaps not yet a big issue for us. But encourage your group to think about other forms of idolatry that are prevalent in our context. What do the people around us make sacrifices to? What do they worship? How do we get caught up into participating with them?

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5. In 10:23 – 11:1 Paul brings together all his teaching on idolatry, which began in 8:1.

What are the principles he leaves us with? How will they help you as you run the race?

a. 10:23-24

Be prepared to give up your 'rights' in Christ, for the good of others. Sacrifice the good blessings God gives you, and pursue the greater reward of building up and reaching out with the gospel.

b. 10:25-30

Don't worry about whether or not something you eat has been sacrificed, because the sacrifice does nothing to the food. However, never participate in the sacrifice. The purpose, again: for the sake of others.

c. 10:31 – 11:1

Flee idolatry, pursue the glory of God in everything.

Note: don't cause anyone to stumble – Non-Christian or the church of God.

Goal = seeing people saved, finishing the race, receiving the prize.

Follow Paul, as he follows Christ. i.e. this is how Jesus lived. Giving up his rights for the good of others, that they might be saved.

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STUDY 3: 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

Helpful resource: <http://paa.moore.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/01-Plenary-1-Danny-Rurlander.mp3>
Talk at Priscilla + Aquila Conference 2015, Moore Theological College

READ THE PASSAGE

1. In v. 2, Paul praises the Corinthians. Remembering 1 Cor 10:31, what would lead Paul to this?

10:31 – whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. He is praising them for their actions that have led to God being glorified.

2. What specifically does he praise them for in 11:2? What do you think he is referring to? (see also: v. 16, 1 Cor 11:17 – 14:40)

The traditions that Paul has passed on to them. Keeping the traditions (i.e. living in light of his teaching) is an action that brings glory to God.

Starting to flesh out what we can know about 'the traditions' ...

1) They are passed on from Paul, suggests they didn't originate with Paul. These are not simply his personal preferences.

2) Think about the situation Paul is addressing – that it concerns prayer and prophesy suggests he is talking about the public gathering of God's people. This is made clearer when we notice what follows our passage: 1 Cor 11:17 – 14:40 is also about how God's people ought to act when together.

'The traditions' then, seems to concern how Christians will bring glory to God when they meet together.

3) 11:16 – these are not just traditions for the church in Corinth, but all Christians everywhere.

3. What is Paul implying about the Corinthians when he begins v. 3, "But I want you to realise ..."?

There are some teachings that the Corinthians have either a) failed to understand; b) failed to live out; or c) both. To put it positively, Paul wants to move them increasingly towards behaviours that will bring glory to God, as they meet together.

4. What is the order of relationships in the church that Paul sets out in v. 3?

Notice that there is an order. Everyone except God has a head, a leader, someone in authority over them. Men and women find themselves in an order of authority and responsibility, established by God. V. 3 shows that God himself, within His eternal being, exists in an ordered relationship that is mirrored into the human race and expressed between men and women.

Some scholars argue that 'head' should be understood in the sense of 'source'. However, this appears to not make sense of the passage, especially as it continues on.

- a. Explore together how the relationships of men and women in the church are interpreted by:
 - i. the relationship of Christ and every man.

Male headship over women is tied to Christ's headship over man. a) Male headship is always exercised under the rule of Christ who will hold them to account. b) Male headship is to be a copy of Christ's over the church. Servant like, sacrificial, giving up one's rights and life for the sake of the other.

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- ii. the relationship of God and Christ.

Female submission is paralleled with Christ's submission to God. This is so important. Submission therefore, does not mean a loss of dignity or value. But joyful and willing, trusting in God's good ordering.

- b. Whether you are male or female, who is God calling to model your life on?

Jesus lovingly models headship, and he willingly models submission. In each case without any change in his value or status as God. Whether we are male or female, we get to be like Jesus.

5. In vv. 4-6, how does Paul apply God's ordering of relationships, to the church?

When prophesying or praying, Paul wants men to be men, and women to be women. Especially, he seems to be talking about our appearance. Why? Because that brings glory to God by honouring the order and differences He created. Put negatively, like Paul does in v. 4-6, visually we can signal our desire to subvert God's good design of men and women.

Prayer + Prophecy: we will cover prophecy in a later study (1 Cor 14). For now, it is enough to recognise that a) men and women able to do both in the public gathering; b) Paul is talking about public activities, that are entirely relational: Speaking God's word to others in the church, and leading others in prayer to God. Therefore, it would be shameful and dishonouring to not uphold God's ordering.

6. In vv. 7-12, Paul further grounds the order of relationships, this time in creation. How do the following passages from Genesis illuminate what Paul says in Corinthians?

- a. Gen 1:27 and 1 Cor 11:7

Creation of male and female is an expression of the image of God. The maleness and femaleness of the human race images/reflects something of the nature of God. To live as male and female therefore brings glory to Him.

- b. Gen 2:18, 23 and 1 Cor 11:8-9

The woman is the 'helper'. Not because he was lonely, but because He was incapable of being the image of God without her. She was created 'for man' in a very positive sense. From him = same as him. But she is different – called woman, not man. The woman corresponds to and differs from the man. Together, in their complementary roles, they reflect the image of God.

- c. Gen 2:23 and 1 Cor 11:11-12

Fills out further the point above. Important to note: in the original Greek text, Paul does not write "born". You could translate it: "For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, and all things come from God." i.e. man and woman are interdependent upon each other, because that is how God designed it.

- d. Paul says 'a man ought not to cover his head' (v. 7) and 'a woman ought to have [a sign of authority on] her own head' (v. 10). In light of what we have seen, why is this Paul's command?

Again, it is simply an expression of what God has created. Visually, by how we present ourselves, we can affirm or subvert God's good ordering of creation.

v. 10 – note the translation in the footnote of the NIV [in brackets in the question]. It seems to be saying that a woman, like a man, should present herself as a woman when praying or prophesying in church. The sign of authority being dressed in such a way that signals her desire to honour God's good ordering of creation.

'Because of the angels' – perhaps this could be a reference to the role of angels as those who celebrate and honour the glory of God. Their concern is that spiritual realities of earth bring glory to God. i.e. show order because the other world is watching with great interest, that God might be glorified.

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7. Having spoken of the nature of God, and the design of creation, what does Paul now urge the Corinthians to consider? (vv. 13-15)

v. 13: To use their own brains: "Judge for yourselves". "Is it proper" for a woman to present herself in a deliberately masculine way, when praying to God, who made her to be woman? That is, is it proper in the eyes of God, the one you are talking to?

v. 14-15: Paul appeals to the Corinthians to take a hint from nature. Men and women by nature are different, and by nature look different. It seems that Paul is suggesting that the pattern established by nature, or human custom, provides further evidence reinforcing what he has already said.

It might be helpful to notice in v. 15 that women, like men, are created with glory. How God made her is glorious. And that glory is seen when she lives in accordance with how God made her.

8. Paul ends this section with a warning (v. 16). How does it contrast with how he began (v. 2)?

How we relate to each other is an important part of our lives together as God's people. When we gather, it is important and good for us to express what God has created. As we honour what He has made, it glorifies Him.

It's a warning for us too – that the teaching of the Bible is what must take precedence in determining how we live life together.

THINKING IT THROUGH

9. Should women wear hats in church? Can a Christian man have a pony tail? What about a Christian woman who is undergoing chemotherapy? What biblical principles need to shape the way we relate to each other, and to God?

One of the challenges of this passage is that most of us would love Paul to just give us a dress code! But he doesn't. Instead he is correcting a blurring of boundaries, which in turn are signalling to others our desire to blur the ordered relationships God has made.

How those differences are displayed, will to some degree be determined by the culture in which we find ourselves. And likewise, over time what those expression look like may well change. However, at the heart of our decisions ought to be the desire, that whatever we do, we do it for the glory of God. That is a desire that cannot be shaped by the culture around us, but only by His Word, in the Bible.

It might be helpful to think through the examples above as case studies. There are many more you could add!

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STUDY 4: 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

READ THE PASSAGE

1. What appears to be happening when the Corinthians come together as a church? (vv. 17-19)

The irony of coming together as the united people of God, yet being divided.

v. 19 is sarcastic – no doubt some were claiming to have God's approval because they were different to the others. But what follows shows that the behaviour they displayed could not be approved by God at all.

2. How did this impact on their eating of the Lord's Supper? (vv. 20-22)

They are eating divided. It appears that the wealthy (who have homes to eat and drink in) are excluding the poor (who have nothing). The wealthy are dividing off for their own private suppers. The poor remain hungry, the wealthy are getting drunk. Perhaps because they are drinking themselves the entirety of the wine that has been sufficiently provided for the whole church.

Excluding the poor, humiliating them = treating them as not worthy of being included in the meal.

They 'despise the church of God'. This is a serious matter. That is why what they are doing cannot be called the Lord's Supper.

3. In vv. 23-26, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the traditions (cf. 11:2) concerning the Lord's Supper. As you work through the details of these verses, reflect on: a) what each part contributes; b) the seriousness of what was happening in Corinth.

- a. "The Lord Jesus" – *This tradition originated with Jesus himself. That's why it matters. Jesus passed it on to the disciples, they in turn passed it on, Paul learnt it, and now he has passed it on the Corinthians.*
- b. "on the night he was betrayed" – *not only sets the meal in the context of the cross, but is a warning that from the very first time, the meal has always been in danger of being eaten by those who fail to live out its meaning.*
- c. "took bread ... gave thanks ... broke it" – *this started the meal. It was the role for the head of the household. Christ is the head of the new family he creates at the cross. Also, the original Lord's Supper was celebrated at Passover, and the thanksgiving would not only be for the provision of bread, but the provision of redemption for God's people.*
- d. "this is my body, which is for you" – *"This is" = representation of, equivalent of. In contrast Roman Catholicism teaches that the bread actually turns into Jesus (transubstantiation). But, just as different parts of the Passover meal were designed to remind Israel of the exodus, so too, the bread is to remind us of Jesus' body. "For you" – what took place on the cross was a substitution. He provided for the forgiveness of our sins.*
- e. "do this in remembrance of me" – *the point of this meal is to remember Jesus' death on the cross. The meal itself is powerful because it brings us back to what is powerful: the message of the cross (1 Cor 1:17-18). The wealthy in Corinth were denying the poor the opportunity to share in this reminder, instituted by Jesus.*
- f. "after the supper he took the cup" – *at the completion of the meal. Therefore, the entire meal had significance. Therefore, the Lord's supper is not something done as individuals. It is done in fellowship together. That is the tradition Jesus began. The meal celebrates the unity that Christ won on the cross.*
- g. "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" – *cup in the Old Testament can signify the wrath of God. The shedding of Jesus' blood established the new covenant (cf. old testament, a sacrifice is made/blood shed at the establishment of a covenant – e.g. Gen 15, Exod 24:8). The drinking reaffirms that we are indeed not just in fellowship with each other, but with Jesus himself.*
- h. "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" – *proclaiming: this meal is designed to be done in communion together, helping each other to remember the cross, the power of God. Until he comes: a reminder that Jesus is*

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no longer dead. While the cross shapes life now, the resurrection shapes the life to come.

4. Having clarified what the Lord's Supper is, what is Paul's warning to the Corinthians? (vv. 27-29)

The Lord's Supper is no trivial matter. Because the simple act of eating and drinking is actually participation in a profoundly spiritual matter. To claim to eat the meal in worship of Christ, while excluding and humiliating those he died for, and loves, is a horrendous sin.

Examine yourself before participating in the meal – don't mock Christ.

5. What has happened to the Corinthians because of their sin? Why has God done this? What does it tell us about God?

Weak, sick and dead. It is the judgment of God. Some of them really had sinned seriously. And they died for it. But notice, v. 32, God did it to keep them from going to hell. We don't know how Paul can connect their sin directly with their suffering, but he does. We know from elsewhere in the Bible (e.g. Job) that it is not always true that illness is the direct result of a particular sin, but somehow, Paul is able to see it in this case.

Perhaps more importantly, what happened to them is a sober reminder to us that the worship of God is no small thing. He is not to be mucked around with.

6. What is Paul's conclusion about how to eat the Lord's Supper?

It is to be done together, in fellowship. Not excluding some, not as individuals either. Eat before you come = so you won't be tempted to start before everyone has arrived. And also so that your focus will be on Christ during the meal, not your stomach.

THINKING IT THROUGH

7. What has this passage caused you to reflect upon personally, regarding the Lord's supper?

8. Although we may not shame, humiliate, or dishonour other members of God's church when we share the Lord's supper, can you think of other examples where we might see this happening? What would it mean then, for us, when we do share the Lord's Supper?

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STUDY 5: 1 CORINTHIANS 12

READ THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

1. Despite most English translations, the word 'gifts' (Greek: *'charisma'*) is not used by Paul in v. 1. Instead he uses the Greek word *pneumatikon* ('spirituals'). Literally then, v. 1 reads: "Now about spiritual things/matters ...".

To put it another way, Paul begins with a broad issue before addressing the particular issue of 'spiritual gifts'. Using vv. 1-3, what broad issue is Paul addressing?

There's no doubt that Paul will go on to talk about 'gifts'. But as he introduces the topic, he begins with a broader issue. Paul's concern is to move the Corinthians from being 'uninformed' to 'knowing' with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit. This is a matter for us to think about.

More info if you wish to explore:

'gifts' = *charisma*. 1 Cor 1:7, 7:7, 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31.

'spirituals' = *pneumatikon*. 1 Cor 2:15, 3:1, 9:11, 12:1, 14:1, 37.

Why do English versions translate v. 1 as 'gifts' when Paul does not use that word? Perhaps because sometimes we are too ready to read our issues back into the text, rather than letting the text speak for itself. A big issue of our day concerns much of what Paul discusses in these chapters – speaking in tongues, miracles, the work of the Holy Spirit. And because that is what Paul goes on to talk about, it gets read back into v. 1. However, doing that obscures the broader concern Paul wants us to know before beginning to talk about gifts.

2. As a group, brainstorm some examples of how Christians today might have been influenced or lead astray in their thinking about spiritual things?

Some e.g's:

- There is no such thing as spiritual realities, just the physical.
- Certain 'gifts' are a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence with you – e.g. miracles/tongues. (c.f. Matt 7:21-23).
- That we need not bother thinking about the Holy Spirit. Paul says here: "Think! Know!"

3. What is the work of the Holy Spirit? What is not? How do you think these opening verses might shape what Paul will go on to say about 'spiritual gifts'?

Not about saying magic words! Anyone can utter the words. But it's what the words mean when you say them. To oppose Jesus is a clear indication that someone doesn't have the Spirit, even if they claim to. Similarly, if you do have the Spirit, then you will acknowledge Jesus is Lord. The question is: What is your attitude to Jesus? The true sign of having the Holy Spirit is the lordship of Jesus Christ in your life.

It provides the framework. If you want to understand spiritual gifts, you first need to understand the role of the Spirit: **He is bringing the lordship of Jesus Christ to bear in the life of the believer.** This has to shape our understanding of the place and purpose of spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

4. Complete the following and share with the group things you notice:

v. 4: different _____, same _____

v. 5: different _____, same _____

v. 6: different _____, same _____

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Things you could discuss:

- Spiritual gifts are connected with the work of the Trinity.
- The Spirit distributes diverse gifts, for the service of Jesus, and this is the work of God.
- God's is the source of the gifts, the Spirit distributes, so that Jesus is served (glorified, because He is Lord).
- The work of the Holy Spirit cannot be disconnected from Jesus. In fact the work of the Spirit is to glorify Jesus.
- The one God gives diverse gifts.
- Everyday acts of serving Jesus are gifts of the Spirit. Not just the spectacular (miracles/tongues etc).
- Spiritual gifts are not for your glory. They are not from you, or for you.
- Praise God that He uses us, by the work of the Spirit, to do His work of glorifying Christ.

5. According to v. 7, why are gifts given?

Given for the common good. i.e. given for others, not you. Good to tie this back into vv. 1-3: the Spirit is bringing the Lordship of Christ to bear on people's lives. The purpose of gifts is that they be used to bring the Lordship of Christ to bear on the lives of others. Their good is to know Christ and be built up in him. That's the purpose of spiritual gifts.

6. What examples of gifts does Paul give? Do you think it matters what gifts you have been given?

Message of wisdom, message of knowledge: Perhaps the distinction is that knowledge is more theoretical/doctrinal, wisdom is more practical. But 2:6ff suggests that wisdom is the fundamental knowledge of Christ. And 8:10-11 shows that knowledge can be immensely practical. Maybe just a distinction in shading, in emphasis.

Faith: must be different to the faith all Christians possess. Perhaps an extraordinary God-given confidence in his saving power and presence.

Gifts of healing: Notice it's 'gifts' plural, not THE gift of healing. Suggests that *each* healing and miracle may be understood to be a separate gift of God. i.e. just because a person heals another once, it does not therefore mean they will be given that gift again.

Miraculous powers: See healing.

Prophecy: Speaking God's revelation = Jesus Christ. More on this in chapter 14.

Distinguishing between spirits: whether or not someone belongs to Christ. Perhaps as they prophesy, perform miracles, speak in tongues, etc.

Speaking in tongues: speaking in a real language, human or angelic, that is unintelligible, that may or may not be understood by the speaker.

Interpreting tongues: interpreting tongues!

V. 11 – all of them are from the Spirit, all of them have the same purpose. There is not a greater manifestation of the Spirit in one over the other. Praise God for whatever He has gifted you with.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

7. In vv. 12-31 Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to explain the reality of spiritual gifts in the church. How does that metaphor contribute to our understanding of the diversity, unity, and equality of people and their gifts?

8. What happens if everyone wants to be a head? What happens, on the other hand, if there are only "unpresentable" parts and no "more presentable" ones?

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9. Compare the list of gifts in vv. 8-11 with the list in vv. 28-31. What is different? What is the same? What are some implications of this?

This time the list is presented as first, second, third, then To say that Paul thinks some are more important than others would fly in the face of everything he has just said. Most likely then, it is connected to chronology – first the 12 Apostles were appointed (Acts 1), then prophets (Acts 2), then teachers Implication: there aren't new apostles today. This is not a ranking of Christians.

The fact that the lists are different means that neither are comprehensive. Romans 12:6-8 gives different gifts again. An implication: the gifts of the Spirit are not limited to those explicitly stated in the New Testament. That in turn shapes the way we think about gifts. Rather than taking the lists to single out what our gifts are and pigeon holing ourselves, it encourages us to look around us for places where we there is opportunity for us to use our lives in the service of Christ, building up others in Him. Those are the gifts that God has given us.

There are some gifts defined as 'greater', worth desiring - v. 31. This becomes much clearer in 1 Cor 14:1ff. But it can be answered from 1 Cor 12 too: the purpose of gifts is for the common good, bringing the Lordship of Jesus to bear on people's lives. All gifts are for this purpose, but some are greater in this purpose. E.g. prophecy vs. tongues that can't be interpreted. Implication: while all gifts are from God and distributed according to the Spirit, it is also true that we ought to desire what is greater = desiring, praying, for opportunities to serve Jesus in new and different ways that increasingly bring the Lordship of Jesus to bear on people's lives.

THINKING IT THROUGH

10. How has this passage helped you better understand "spiritual things"?

11. Where can you see opportunities to serve for the common good?

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STUDY 6: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:31 – 13:13

1. As you come to read the passage, take a moment to remember the context. What issue is Paul addressing?

12:1-3 – spiritual things/matters.

READ THE PASSAGE

2. From 12:31, what is Paul now setting out to do?

3. What examples of spiritual giftedness does Paul give in vv. 1-3? Do you think he is depreciating their value?

Not depreciating them in anyway. But simply he refuses to recognise any positive evaluation of any of them if they are not discharged in love.

4. If we do not have love, how does it affect others?

How does it affect others: v. 3: "I gain nothing". i.e. you will not have contributed anything to the common good.

5. What does a lack of love do to *us*? Why is this the case?

What does it do to us: "I am a resounding gong ... I am nothing".

Important to tie this back to 12:1-3. The work of the Spirit is to bring Jesus' Lordship to bear on our lives. And if that is the case, then a fundamental work of the Spirit is to produce in us love for others. For that is what Jesus is like. c.f. John 13:34, Gal 5:22-23. Therefore, if love does not characterise your exercise of whatever gift God has graciously assigned you, then you remain spiritually bankrupt, a spiritual nothing.

6. List out the ways Paul describes loves in vv. 4-7. For each, decide what kind of love it is: sentimental or behavioural.

- | | | |
|----|-----|-----|
| 1) | 6) | 11) |
| 2) | 7) | 12) |
| 3) | 8) | 13) |
| 4) | 9) | 14) |
| 5) | 10) | 15) |

7. How does this kind of love serve as "the most excellent way"?

Important to draw out how this is a description of God's love for us, in Christ.

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8. What makes love different to the spiritual gifts? (v. 8)

There will be a time when spiritual gifts are needed no more.

9. According to v. 10, when "completeness" comes, what is "in part" will disappear. What eras of time is Paul referring to? And how do his illustrations help us understand the connection between them?

He's referring to the time when Christ returns. We are growing already to be more like Christ – love shows that. But when we look at ourselves now, we are still just a reflection of who we will one day be. When Christ returns and we reach perfect maturity (transformed to be just like Christ himself) we will no longer be looking at a reflection of who we are meant to be. We will be who we are meant to be.

The implication is that when Christ returns, there will no longer be any need for spiritual gifts, because no longer will we need to build each other up. We will be built! Further implication: but love will remain, because we will all be just like Christ.

10. Paul concludes with the famous triad of "faith, hope and love". Consider each one and explain why love is greater than any spiritual gift, or any other virtue.

The reality of heaven puts faith and hope in a category subordinate to love. Love, as Paul has shown, is eternal. But faith and hope won't be needed in the new creation, they are only for a time.

THINKING IT THROUGH

11. How has this passage helped you better understand "spiritual things" (12:1-3)?

12. As a group, take time to reflect upon opportunities you can see for us to grow in our love of each other:

a. in our Sunday Gatherings

b. in our Growth Groups

c. throughout the week

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STUDY 7: 1 CORINTHIANS 14

Helpful resource on 1 Cor 14:26-40. Talk at Priscilla + Aquila Conference 2015, Moore Theological College
<https://paa.moore.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Plenary20220-20Danny20Rurlander.mp3>

1. As you come to read the passage, take a moment to remember the context. What issue is Paul addressing?

12:1-3 – spiritual things/matters.

12:4-31 – spiritual gifts given for the common good.

13:1-13 – spiritual gifts worthless without love.

READ THE PASSAGE

2. What are the two spiritual gifts that Paul focuses on in 1 Corinthians 14? What information can we glean about each from vv. 1-5?

Gift: Prophecy

v. 1 – especially to be desired.

v. 3 – speaks to people. Purpose/result = the strengthening, encouraging and comfort of others.

v. 4 – edifies the church.

v. 5 – Greater than the speaking of tongues. Because it edifies the church.

Gift: Speaking in tongues

v. 2 – speaking to God, not people = unintelligible to the listener. But still from the Spirit. It's only with an interpreter that they become words for people too.

v. 4 – edifies the self.

v. 5 – still a desirable gift, because all gifts are from God, for the common good. But not as great as prophecy for, unless it is interpreted, it will not as effectively edify the church.

3. According to 14:1 prophecy is the gift that is to be especially desired.
 - a. What is prophecy?

This could be a study in itself! Extended notes below. You'll need to figure out what will be helpful for your group to cover and consider how much time you have.

A simple definition might be that **prophecy is speaking the revelation of God**. If that is a right definition, it tells us that prophecy in the Old Testament is different to prophecy in the New Testament. For Jesus is the full and final revelation of God – John 1:1, 14, 18. Heb 1:1-4. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made in Deut 18:14-22, Acts 3:17-23.

Therefore, prophecy today is not about speaking a new revelation of God. **Prophecy occurs when Christians speak the truth about Jesus, for he is the revelation of God.** Rev 19:10.

Acts 2 (the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32) is key. The disciples having received the Holy Spirit speak in tongues 'declaring the wonders of God' (2:10). It's not spelt out exactly what they spoke of, but it must have been the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Peter then explains to the crowds that this tongues speaking was evidence that the last day promised by Joel had dawned, the day on which the sons and daughters of God would *prophesy* (2:17-18).

1 Cor 12:3 highlights that every Christian is a prophet. For when you declare, by the Spirit, that "Jesus is Lord", you are speaking the revelation of God. This is why, in 14:1, Paul can call on us to desire the gift of prophecy. **Because if you have the Spirit, you have this gift.** But like any gift, it is something you can grow in.

What about prophesying the future?

There are extremely few examples of this in the New Testament and they seem always connected to living out

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what has already been revealed in Jesus. e.g. Acts 11:27-29: Agabus predicts a famine, so they decide to provide help for the church. Acts 21:11: Agabus predicts what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem. It's questionable whether he got all the details right! Rev 1:1-3 + 22:19 describe the whole book as a prophecy given through John the Apostle.

That God can reveal the future through 'prophets' is beyond question – He has. But if he does, it will not be in contradiction, or addition, to the revelation of Jesus in the Bible. Neither will we be able to know with certainty it's accuracy until it comes to pass (or doesn't).

This further suggests that Paul has a much broader understanding of 'prophecy' in 1 Cor 14 than predicting the future. The context of 1 Cor 14 appears to support this: prophecy is speaking the truth of Jesus. That is what will strengthen, encourage, comfort, edify the church (14:1-5).

- b. Why is it to be especially desired? How can we desire it?

Especially desired – because speaking the truth about Jesus is the most effective way of building others up.

How can we – because this is a gift we all have. Therefore, pray that God will help you grow in your understanding of Jesus through the Bible (that's the work of the Spirit!) so that you will be better equipped to share Jesus with others (the work of the Spirit!). Or to put it another way, desire that we will be a church which prioritises every member word ministry that builds the church.

4. What principles, positive and negative, does Paul layout in vv. 6-25 about speaking in tongues?

vv. 6-12: What is most helpful is clarity/intelligibility – e.g. music, battle call. Seek to excel in what will build up the church.

vv. 13-17: The mind matters in Christianity. Understanding is important. So choose to exercise your gifts in a way that helps people to understand, and therefore be edified, in Christ. It might mean choosing the ordinary (5 intelligible words) over the spectacular (10000 words in a tongue).

vv. 20-25: Tongues and Prophecy extends to the non-believer too. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers that the gospel is inaccessible to them. So not only is important that we seek to edify each other when we are gathered for church, Paul expects that non-believers will be present too. How will they come to know Jesus if everyone is speaking in a language they cannot understand!

5. In vv. 26-40 Paul outlines what should happen 'when you come together'.

- a. What is the goal whenever we gather together? What has God given us for this? (v. 26)

- b. What instructions does Paul give about tongues? (vv. 27-28)

Worth noting that the gift of tongues is one that a person can control: take turns, no interpreter don't do it. Sometimes 'tongues' are not expressed this way – it's claimed to be spontaneous, uncontrollable, perhaps even an 'out-of-body/mind' experience. In which case it could be: a) that love is not evident in the expression of the gift, in which case it is worthless (1 Cor 13); b) it's not the work of the Spirit.

"Keep quiet" in v. 28 is the same Greek word as "stop" in v. 30 and "silent" in v. 34.

- c. What instructions does Paul give about prophecy? (vv. 29-33)

In the same way as tongues, this gift is controllable and to be exercised with love. The reason is given in v. 33. i.e. the gifts He gives won't contradict this.

Prophecy must be tested and weighed. Some will be rejected as bad and some accepted as good. Unlike teaching and preaching it is not authoritative on its own. Hence, 1 Cor 11:5, it is good for women to prophesy in church.

The weighing must be against what is authoritative = the apostolic message. Prophecy must therefore be in

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response to the gospel. "A revelation" (v. 30) seems to be along the lines of a penny-dropping moment as you listen to someone else talk about Jesus.

"Keep quiet" in v. 28 the same Greek word as "stop" in v. 30 and "silent" in v. 34.

- d. What instructions does Paul give about the role of men and women in the weighing of prophecy? (vv. 34-35)

Remain silent in the churches: "Keep quiet" in v. 28 is the same Greek word as "stop" in v. 30 and "silent" in v. 34. Like the other two groups then, this is a decision of the Spirit filled woman about how she will actively contribute to the meeting, by choosing to be silent, in the role of weighing prophesy. Allows the word to be heard.

It's not then, about certain women or a Corinthian specific issue. Or about wives asking questions of their husbands in socially awkward ways.

Not allowed to speak, but must be in submission: ties the activity of speaking and not speaking to the relationships between men and women in the family of God (c.f. 11:3). Asymmetrical relationship is the important thing. Expression of a permanent complementary relationship.

As the law says: Which part? Must be Genesis 1-2 (cf. 1 Cor 11). Therefore not a restriction, but an invitation to serve God as he created us to do. It's not a restriction, but an invitation to the true freedom that is found in Christ, living how we were created to live.

If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home: A positive instruction, encouraging the complementary partnership of a husband and wife to be expressed in both the home and church.

Disgraceful for a woman to speak in church: Not a cultural situation of that day and age. But Paul is talking about the shame of overthrowing God's good order. The shame of trying to make church look like the culture around us, when God is transforming us to glory. (cf. 11:7-12)

6. In vv. 36-40 Paul brings his argument to a conclusion with a final warning and encouragement. How has this passage helped you better understand "spiritual things" (12:1-3)? How has it challenged the way you gather with your brothers and sisters in Christ? What are you eager to do differently?

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STUDY 8: 1 CORINTHIANS 15

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-34

1. In vv. 1-11, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel that they have received and believed. What is the gospel?

Christ's death for our sins (v. 3) and his resurrection (v. 4-7).

2. What sources of authority does Paul give for the truth of Jesus' bodily resurrection? (vv. 1-11)

- Many eyewitnesses
- The Scriptures (= Old Testament) (e.g. Ps 110, Ps 16:10)
- Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus (Acts 9). The personal story of his conversion from church persecutor to recipient of God's grace legitimizes the resurrection.

3. From vv. 12-19, why is Paul puzzled by the Corinthians? Why is their error so crucial?

We don't know why they were saying that Christ hadn't risen from the dead. Perhaps they thought he had ascended straight into heaven. Or that he rose spiritually not bodily, as some Christians suggest today.

If Christ has not physically, bodily, risen from the dead then our faith is futile. And we are still lost in our sins.

4. In vv. 20-28, Paul describes Christ as the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep". What does he mean? When will our resurrection happen?

Use the comparison and contrast of Adam and Jesus.

Firstfruits: It's the picture of a fruit tree. When the first fruits appear on the tree, you know that many more fruits will follow. Likewise, the fruit that grows on a tree will be of the one/same kind. In other words, we will be resurrected just like Jesus. What's true of him already will become true of us on the day of his return.

Fallen asleep: Death is not the end for the Christian, rather we await our resurrection. Our state between death and the return of Jesus is not an unconscious one however. Revelation makes clear that gathered with Christ in heaven are those Christians who have died before his return. 1 Thes 4 likewise shows that when Christ returns he will bring *with him* those who have fallen asleep.

5. In vv. 29-34 Paul uses several scenarios to show how the coming resurrection ought to motivate life now. In what ways does/should the resurrection motivate people?

vv. 29 – probably better translated 'baptised [on account of] the dead'. That is, non-Christians are seeing the example of faithful Christians dying with the hope of resurrection and being converted by their witness. So, truth of resurrection brings people to Christ for salvation.

vv. 30-31 – Paul and the Apostles risk their lives to tell people about Jesus. Because eternity is real.

vv. 32 – if there is no resurrection, nothing matters. You die in your sin.

vv. 33-34 – there is a resurrection. Make sure you are ready!

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READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-58

6. In vv. 35-49, Paul is comparing our present bodies with the future resurrection body. Explore the different ways Paul explains the resurrection:

- a. A seed and a plant (vv. 35-38)

A seed looks nothing like a plant. But everything the plant is, was already in the seed. To put it another way, when a seed becomes a plant it is the fulfillment of everything the seed was always meant to be.

Our body now is the seed. Our resurrection body the plant. It really will be our body, but our body will be different!

- b. Different kinds of flesh and bodies (vv. 39-44a)

There is a type of flesh that is suitable for the new creation. There is a type of body that has the splendour befitting of the eternal kingdom. A body just like Jesus': v. 42 imperishable, v. 43 glory, power, v. 44 spiritual (in the sense of being filled with the live giving Holy Spirit).

- c. Natural and spiritual bodies (vv. 44b-49)

Just as we are of dust now. We will be made just like Jesus. Spiritual in the sense of 'life-giving spirit'. We tend to think of spiritual as floating around on the clouds of heaven. But we will bear the 'image of the heavenly man': Jesus, who rose physically, bodily, from the dead. Our 'spiritual' body will be a physical one, just like Jesus.

7. According to vv. 50-57, why is it essential that we be resurrected, bodily? How has, and how will, God achieved this?

Because flesh and blood (mortal) cannot inherit what is immortal. He has achieved it already through the death of Jesus, he will achieve it when he resurrects us on the final day.

Notice the order of v. 56: Law → Sin → Death. When Jesus died on the cross he fulfilled the law for us, breaking its power over us. Therefore, God is able to forgive our sins. And because he has, death no longer has any claim over us.

If Jesus', and our, resurrection bodies are not physical, then death wins, for God wasn't able to defeat it. It claims a part of us. But the tomb was empty, and God will raise us too!

8. In v. 58, Paul gives a final exhortation in light of his entire argument up to this point. What two implications of the resurrection does Paul put before the Corinthians? Discuss as a group what each one will mean for our lives too.

- a. **Stand firm. Let nothing move you.** Keep trusting Jesus! How? Takes us all the way back to chapter 1 – the powerful message of the cross. The message of Christ crucified is powerful, because the message brings you to Jesus himself. It brought you salvation, it grows you in Him.
- b. **Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.** What is the work of the Lord? V. 58 tells us that it is a work that is not in vain = work that lasts into eternity. And what lasts into eternity is people. Commit yourself fully to making and growing disciples of Jesus. Because the resurrection is coming! How? The powerful message of the cross: reach out and build up.

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STUDY 9: 1 CORINTHIANS 16

Note: in many ways these closing verses appear scattered. But the aim of the study is to see that underlying them all is the theology of the cross. The message of the cross is powerful and in each situation Paul writes about here, we see that power at work.

READ THE PASSAGE

1. As Paul concludes this letter he reminds the Corinthians of something they already knew: that he would be returning to them and collecting money for the church in Jerusalem.

- a. How was the money to be collected?
- b. How would this collection embody the main ideas of this letter?

Generosity for the gospel is a sign of a cross-shaped church.

Sacrifice your freedoms for the sake of others.

The Corinthians would have been mostly Gentiles, the church in Jerusalem mostly Jewish. Unity in Christ.

Love, building up fellow believers.

Lord's people: together we are the people of the age to come. To support each other is the work of the Lord.

- c. How do these instructions challenge us?

Good advice for how to be organised with your giving!

This is cross-shaped living.

2. Paul has had some harsh words for the Corinthians in this letter, but as he describes his travel plans in vv. 5-9, what does it reveal about his heart for the Corinthians? How can that be an example for us to imitate? (c.f. 10:31-11:1)

It reveals too that Paul is shaped by the cross in his relationship with the Corinthians.

3. As Paul informs the Corinthians of the situation in Ephesus, what two reasons compel Paul to stay there long? How can that be an example for us to imitate?

Proclaiming the cross, no matter the cost. Both = cross shaped living.

4. What can we learn from the instructions regarding Timothy? (vv. 10-11)

That Paul has to warn the Corinthians to make sure Timothy has nothing to fear suggests two things: a) like Paul in Ephesus there would be opposition to his ministry in Corinth from non-believers; b) it also seems that there may have been potential for opposition from within the church in Corinth, given its disunity and apparent opposition to Paul who was in partnership with Timothy.

The implication for us is to be aware of our own actions, ensuring we love those who are 'carrying on the work of the Lord', and aware that we are capable of opposing those who are doing Christ's work. And remembering too, this is not just 'ministers' we are talking about. For every Christian is to devote themselves to the work of Lord – 1 Cor 15:58. This means we should be supporting each other in love, not working against each other.

This is cross-shaped living.

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5. What can we learn from the instructions regarding Apollos? (v. 12)

We don't know why he didn't want to go. Perhaps it was because there were people in Corinth claiming to follow him (3:4) and he didn't want that encouraged, or even negatively, that he was unhappy with the church. Or that he felt Timothy and the brothers were enough. However, we're not told the reason why. Paul does let Corinth know that when the right time comes, Apollos will visit them.

It's purely speculative as to whether or not it was the case in this situation, but it is true to say from other parts of the Bible that if there is a breakdown in our relationships with each other, that forgiveness and reconciliation is essential. Perhaps the case of Apollos demonstrates too that this can take time, and Paul doesn't put a timeline on Apollos. Yet the goal would be reconciliation when Apollos thinks the right time has come.

This is cross-shaped living.

6. In v. 13-14 Paul gives five commands. What are they? How does each relate to the larger themes in 1 Corinthians?
7. In v. 15-18 Paul urges the Corinthians to submit to Stephanas and other gospel workers. How might the Corinthians have had their minds shaped regarding servanthood, submission, and giving recognition to others?
8. There were lots of issues in the Corinthian church – money, sex, greed, communion, idolatry, speaking in tongues etc. What do the final greetings in vv. 19-24 show us about the power of the cross? How do they help us think about what needs to shape our church?

Given the situation – immaturity and brokenness – of the Corinthian church, these are staggering words to end the letter with. Rather than instructing the Corinthians to 'pull their socks up', Paul writes these rich and warm words of encouragement.

He identifies the Corinthians as in fellowship with other churches, and well known leaders (Aquila + Priscilla). They are not close to being the 'perfect' church (no church is!) but the grace of Christ found in the cross, and our love for each other formed by the cross, is more powerful than our sin.