

Questions for Discussion

1. As you grow older, do you find your heart creating more prejudices against people, or knocking down old walls of prejudice? Do you feel less welcoming of others, or more gracious? Either way, why do you think this is?
2. Explain ways in which your church has made you feel welcome in the Lord's presence. In your estimation, are there some things that could be done better?
3. On a human level, what are some things that might make others feel unwelcome with us, even though they're not really unwelcome at all? Something going on in their lives? In our lives? Some nagging distraction? Illness? Worry? What?
4. How can we challenge someone's wrong choices, and still make them feel welcome? with us? with the Lord?

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ACCEPTANCE. The church, as per Paul's "memo," was to make Timothy feel at peace as he left and went on his way. The church was absolutely not to scare Timothy (v. 10). No heavy-handed intimidation allowed, especially toward someone who, by nature, was not a forceful personality (2 Tim. 1:3-2:7). This was Paul looking out for his son in the faith. This was a kind, caring "godfather" being sensitive to Timothy's unique personality. **You Truth:** (1) Is Paul saying here that spiritual leaders should receive a loftier welcome than laypersons, or the "unchurched"? Why your answer? (2) Why is it important for us to gain an understanding of someone's personality when we are welcoming them into the life of the church?

(3) APOLLOS / Verses 12-14 / Hospitality, that is, making someone feel welcome, is an ongoing series of events. It's not a one-time "we gotta be nice today" and then kicking back into our comfortable nastiness recliners. Apollos, for whatever reasons, was not going to go with "the brothers" at that time, but promised to go when he was able. The Corinthians were to be ready for his visit when he did arrive. This implies that a welcoming heart is a lifestyle, born out of a sincere concern for the comfort and wellbeing of another brother or sister in the faith. It's real, never pretend. A truly welcoming person does not have to be told to be ready for guests – that person is ready to show love by his/her spiritual nature. "Come right on in!" is a joy for that soul to say. In fact, Paul counsels the Corinthians to do EVERYTHING IN LOVE. (v. 14) **You Truth:** Can a person grow into becoming welcoming? Can we learn over time to be more thoughtful and gracious in how we allow others to enter our personal space, or into the fellowship of the saints? Explain your answer.

(4) STEPHANAS / Verses 15-18 / Stephanas was a member of the cavalry who came swooping in to support Paul as he revealed Calvary to the church. For that, and them, Paul was obviously grateful. Their "service to the saints," and to Paul personally, was welcome and wonderful. According to *Strong's Concordance*, the word "refreshed" in verse 18 (NIV) means to relax, take a break, stop working for awhile so as to regain your strength. That is a great word, because even the most dedicated of saints needs a vacation once in awhile – *especially* the most dedicated of saints needs a break once in awhile. Paul was appreciative to Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. They were Paul's three musketeers, as it were, coming to save the day for one who was dedicated to saving souls. **You Truth:** (1) Have you ever felt as though you *really* needed a break? a vacation? What do recesses from work do for our attitudes and our outlooks on life? Why is such physical and mental refreshment so important? (2) Jesus: "Come to me, all

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Lesson 1

September 2, 2012

Lessons from the Wilderness

Golden Text: "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved." (1 Corinthians 10:5-6)

Key Thought: God uses the trials in the wilderness to reveal Himself to His children.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 (NASB)

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." ⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Background to 1 Corinthians

It seems that a reason for Paul's letter was addressing immorality that had bled over from the pagan culture into the Corinthian church. Paul urges believers, "not to associate with sexually immoral people" (5:9). Among the main reasons Paul has for writing this letter:

1. "I appeal to you . . . that there may be no divisions among you . . . that you be united in mind and spirit." (1:10)
2. "It is reported that there is sexual immorality among you." (5:1)

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Bible Learning

Verses 1-5

Paul begins by telling the Corinthians that he does not want them to be unaware (ignorant) of the examples of their fathers in Israel. All that is written has a purpose. We would all do well to understand that we need to take seriously and learn examples from the stories told in the Old Testament. Paul presents several examples that should serve as warnings for us, just as they were written to warn the Corinthians.

He begins with their deliverance from Egypt. They were "under a cloud and all passed through the sea." What was for them a path to safety through the sea served as a watery grave to the Egyptians who tried to follow. In a way this is a type of redemption by Christ as he saves us from our enemies.

Paul's examples here are seen by many commentators as types of Christ. He speaks of baptism, eating and drinking spiritual food and drink, and drinking from a spiritual rock that followed the Jews. Paul tells the Corinthians that the rock was Christ. This is not a literal Christ, but Paul's description symbolically refers to Jesus Christ. When Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," in response to Jesus' question about who he thought he (Jesus) was, Jesus answered, "Upon this rock I will build my church" declaring that he, Jesus, was that rock which the gates of hell would not be able to overpower.

Verses 6-13

After Paul finishes listing historical situations of the Jews he begins to take us through their sins and punishments. These are listed as examples to us, a warning that we can expect the same fate if we follow their examples. He warns strongly against idolatry, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play," which was in reference to sin of the golden calf (Exod. 32:6). Before wagging a finger of shame against the city of Corinth for needing such warnings, we may want to consider the magnitude of influence our modern internet pornography holds. Another stark reminder of how relevant God's word is yesterday, today, and tomorrow!

Paul warns repeatedly of murmuring against God. Israel murmured when they met difficulties on the way to Canaan, desiring instead to return to the slavery they had so hated in Egypt. Paul may have been up against murmuring from Corinth as they seemed to want to violate his teachings concerning eating at the idols' temples. Such conduct was very risky in the face of a God who had proven to punish such behavior in the past.

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3. Instructions concerning the Lord's supper (11:17)
4. To show the best way is loving one another (13:1-13)
5. To correct false teachings about the resurrection of Christ (chapter 15)

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is very relevant for Christians in our society, which faces many issues of morality that parallel what the Corinthian church faced. If you believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, then it is reasonable to also believe that the words written were preserved for a reason. Paul issued stern warnings to the church at Corinth, and those words should be heeded just as much, perhaps even more, today.

Introduction

"The spiritual life cannot be made suburban. It is always frontier, and we who live in it must accept and even rejoice that it remains untamed."

– Howard Macey

"the heart of man is driven into the high country, into remote places"

– John Eldredge

Rarely does one viewing the handiwork of buildings and landmarks while driving through a city begin to think about the God of creation, no matter how grand they may be. But it is common for a person to feel a sense of God's creative energy when gazing upon a mountain peak, viewing a magnificent sunset, soaking in the sounds of a winding river canyon, or walking enveloped in a lush green forest. Perhaps this is because the former was created by man, the latter by God Himself. While man's created things can be lavish, even striking, they pale in comparison to the intricacy and magnificence of God's creation. So it would seem that in order to draw closer to God one would want to get away from man-made things and spend time surrounded by God's creation. And how better for God to facilitate getting a person's attention than by meeting that person in the wilderness He created? The Old Testament records God operating with His people in exactly that way, which testifies to how God can reveal Himself even now.

Paul gave the Corinthians serious warnings about idolatry and sexual immorality that had infiltrated the church of his day. It is imperative that we, the church of Jesus Christ today, learn from these examples. We must apply sound biblical principles to overcoming the temptations presented to us on a daily basis.

Paul strongly admonished learning from the Israelites' time in the wilderness, most notably from their penchant for idolatry, immorality, and disobedience. Paul's plea is that they not set their hearts, as their forefathers did, on evil things (v. 6, NIV).

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References:

Psalm 105:39 (Cloudy pillar to lead their way)
 Numbers 11:4 (God fed them with manna, but they wanted meat)
 Exodus 32:6 (Sin of the golden calf)
 Numbers 21:5-6 (Israel bitten by the serpents)
 Numbers 14:37 (Struck down for murmuring)
 (*Matthew Henry Commentary* used for this outline)

Bible Application

A few years ago I was going through an extremely difficult time in my life due, in part, to a new job which kept me away from family for weeks at a time. In that time I was traveling through downtown St Louis at sunrise, and I reflected on how beautiful the Gateway Arch was. I thought, "That is quite a remarkable landmark and quite impressive lit up against the morning sky." Soon, as I headed north in Illinois, I had to catch my breath at the sight in front of me. Never before had I seen such a huge and remarkable rainbow! Gazing to the west and then to the east I could barely see the edges of this arch, which appeared to stretch across the sky for hundreds of miles. I recall hearing a voice in my mind, as if God was speaking: "You think that man-made arch is magnificent? I'll show you an arch that is truly magnificent!" In the days prior to that event I had been questioning if God was with me. Satan had been working hard testing my faith, knowing I was vulnerable with having to be away from family for such long periods. But at the right time God gave me a gentle reminder, letting me know He was indeed there with me.

Life Response

It is interesting to consider that the examples Paul uses to show the ways God dealt with His people were set in the wilderness. It has been said the closer one gets to nature, the wild, the closer one is drawn unto God. In his song "In the Wilderness" Michael Card captures the thought of God using the wilderness to draw His people from their selfish ways back unto Himself.

In the wilderness, in the wilderness,
 He calls His sons and daughters to the wilderness.
 And He gives grace sufficient to survive any test.
 And that's the painful purpose of the wilderness.

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of you who are worn out and weighed down by life, and I will give you rest." How is spiritual refreshment like physical refreshment?

Bible Application

In the adult Sunday School class I teach a lot of us are over sixty, and when we stand at the end of class stiff joints are accompanied by moans and groans. I suggested one day that, when we rise from our chairs, we should all moan in harmony. That way we might ease the corporate agony with a bit of musical "misery loves company." We tried it and sounded pretty good – not exactly Gregorian chant or the Gaither Vocal Band, but not bad. Try it in your class. You'll be surprised at the result. I envision that if we get to sound polished enough, someday we might even cut a CD. I have a title in mind: *Joy Cometh in the Moaning*. (Did I just hear a moan? Good for you! You're already practicing!)

Whenever someone comes into our home or church, we hope that they don't utter a spiritual moan under their breath as they rise to leave ("Thank goodness *that's* over!") – a heart groan rising from having been made to feel unwelcome with us. Ideally, we open our arms to them, we open our hearts to their needs, and we open their eyes to the love of God through our goodwill. That's the divine plan. Seeing God's love made real in our words and actions can reveal a grace and peace that the world finds hard to match.

A while back I wrote some new words to the tune of "I Know whom I Have Believed" in an effort to come up with a "fellowship" song to be sung on special days:

I fill my heart with gentle thoughts
 Of good friends close and dear
 I feel their handshakes and their hugs
 I hear their words of cheer
 And I see there, upon their faces
 The love of Jesus, His tender graces
 And I know then that I am welcome
 In the arms of my dear Lord

"Come right on in!"

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saying farewell. **You Truth:** Review some of the problems in the Corinthian church which Paul addressed. Take a moment to quietly review any problems in your own attitude – are you a caregiver? are you a cancer? Are you a "welcomer" or a "shunner"?

Though some of the people in Corinth had been questioning Paul's ministry "technique" and challenging him personally, the apostle continued to welcome the Corinthians as friends and objects of his gracious affection (v. 23-24). Through Paul, God was putting out a welcome mat for anyone who wished to walk through the door leading to peace in *His* presence: "Friend, you are welcome here!" **You Truth:** (1) If you could design a welcome mat for your home, what words would be on it? If you were designing a welcome mat for your church, what words would you use? (2) How do you think visitors feel whenever they walk into your home or your church? Share your strengths and weaknesses.

Bible Learning

Let's put out a Welcome Mat for . . .

(1) PAUL / Verses 5-9 / Paul sketches out a tentative itinerary in these verses. Note the many phrases (here from the NIV) which imply that Paul expected welcome, or hospitality: I will come; I will be going; I will stay; spend the winter; help me on my journey; spend some time; stay on at. Consider the *immense* change in circumstance that would motivate a former hater and punisher of the church to now seek welcome fellowship with hospitable Christians. This sort of re-creation can come only through the work of a Creator who fashions order out of chaos. The welcome which lets one very inhospitable devil turn into a saint, so that he welcomes others with love and grace, can only find its source in the heart of God. From the raw material of a satanic zeal a heavenly motivation is hammered into shape. Such is the power of the unloved and unlovable being made to feel loved and welcomed in this world. **You Truth:** The New Covenant word "devil" is *diabolos* in the Greek. This word is derived from two Greek words meaning literally "to throw across." (Think: a tree blows down in a storm and blocks the road.) What sort of "things" did Saul/Paul throw across the Way of the Christians before his transformation? In what ways does our spiritual hospitality differ from what Saul was doing? What can we do in our own lives to keep from throwing something across the path of a searcher? How can we make them feel welcome and not preyed upon?

(2) TIMOTHY / Verses 10-11 / Paul commands the church to welcome Timothy because he is "carrying on the work of the Lord" just as is Paul. One key word that's at the heart of any welcome, any hospitality, is

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Lesson Background

There are times when I have no idea what's going on around me. I could have a clue written on posterboard in LARGE letters duct-taped to the end of my nose and I still wouldn't catch on. Take what happened a couple of months ago. The church was having a rummage sale and one of the ladies asked me to bring an item from her car. I went to her car, looked in the back seat, searched the front seat. Nothing. I looked in the trunk. I got down on my hands and knees and looked under the car. I opened the hood (a stretch). Nothing – anywhere. We were having the sale in a busy part of town along a well-traveled highway, so I even considered the possibility of someone having stolen the item. Finally I headed back to see if maybe she'd taken the thing in without remembering. As I was grabbing the handle of the glass door, I noticed the reflection of two cars parked side-by-side in the parking lot. Yep, you guessed it. I'd been looking in the wrong car, even though I knew full well which car was which. I walked back to the correct car and found the item right away. I figured I could simply play dumb and not tell anyone what had happened. When I walked through the door, though, the lady said, "What took you so long, preacher?" *Ur, uh, well.* I finally 'fessed up, telling the lady who owned the car I'd trespassed against what had happened: "If your car ever gets stolen and is found again and the police find *my* fingerprints all over it, please explain to them what happened. Try not to use words like 'nitwit' or 'clueless.'"

Everyone laughed *with* me when I told them about my wayward search, but you never quite know what you'll face when you walk through any of Life's doors. Hostility? Apathy? Hospitality? I'm guessing that most of us would want to feel welcome, no matter what the circumstance might be. I also figure that most of us would want to make others feel welcome in this world as well. **You Truth:** (1) Do you sometimes have a hard time staying focused? Share an example. (2) Share a situation in which you felt out of place or unwelcome. How about a time when you felt especially *welcome*?

Paul had founded and built up the Corinthian work over the course of perhaps eighteen months (Acts 18:1-18). Corinth was a rich, big, bustling city with all the big city problems: vice, violence, a wearying struggle to survive. It was also an active center of philosophy and art, as well as being a melting pot for many popular religions of the day. So it's no surprise that Paul's church-planting effort took some time. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians three or four years after the establishment of the church, in response to reports of various spiritual diseases spreading through the work (covered in previous lessons in this quarterly). Today's text winds up Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. He'd challenged the pagan culture of the city, he'd challenged the church over some heavy-handed arrogance, and now he was

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Life Response

Knowledge of God's ability to raise the dead and change their nature from mortality to immortality should bring great comfort to all of us. Each one of us faces weaknesses in our bodies that will be rectified by our change. We hear of fantastic advances in metallurgy and super-plastics which allow weak raw materials to form virtually indestructible items – and this is coming for us, too. One day we will acquire enhanced, indestructible bodies. Knowing this should give us great cause to praise God who offers such a gift. God has laid in your hands a document of proof that something so indescribable is available to you. So what in return is your response to Him?

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In the wilderness we wander, in the wilderness we weep.
The wasteland of our wanting where the darkness seems so deep.
We search for the beginning, for an exodus to hold,
We find that those who follow Him must often walk alone.

Groaning and growing amidst the desert days,
The windy winter wilderness can blow the self away.
. . . and that's the painful promise of the wilderness

This song shows insight to how God sometimes works in our lives. The wilderness need not always be a physical one. Often when going through rough spiritual times a person must travel through a wilderness in spirit or of the mind to find the way back to God. God may need to shake off the environment that encumbers and distracts us to get our attention, with it being left behind as we enter the wilderness of God's purging.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you find your way back to the wilderness where God can draw you unto Himself?
2. Why does Paul use examples from Israel's past?
3. How do the four examples from Israel's past relate to the Corinthian church's situation?
4. How do the four examples from Israel's past relate to the modern church of Christ?
5. What temptations most consistently face you? How do you attempt to overcome these temptations?
6. Do you think a person is closer to God in the "wilderness" (and why, or why not)?
7. Is there evidence from scripture to support the future Kingdom of God being urban or wilderness?
8. What is one thing you have learned about God from the Bible text or this lesson?

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Introduction

Our text today deals with a long section in which Paul addresses the ramifications of the freedom that we have in Christ. There is a long list of things that some Christians have found acceptable which others have considered sinful. Let me share one example from my life.

Back in my teens, a friend from the south visited me in Ohio. We were at the mall and I said, "Let's play pinball." I started playing a game and realized that he was looking at me with an odd expression on his face. "I can't believe that you play pinball," he said. That stunned me. My dad, who never touched a drop of alcohol, never smoked a cigarette, wouldn't play games with dice or playing cards, was an incredible pinball player. I remember a family vacation where he played one ball and was racking up so many points that everyone in the arcade was watching him play. He had so many points that I and my brothers were able to play for another 20 minutes before we used up all his credits. I remembered him telling us how he wouldn't hold a friend's cigarette while the friend played because he didn't want anyone to think that he smoked. I said, "My dad plays pinball and he wouldn't do anything that is wrong." I've learned since that in the south, pinball was a gambling game and really was looked down upon. That became a good lesson to me that something that some think is innocent could be frowned upon by others.

The issue in today's text is multifaceted. The issue isn't simply what people were doing, it also included where they were doing it. Some in the Corinthian church were eating meals in temples dedicated to various pagan gods. It appears that this was a common social outlet for the people of Corinth. Gordon Fees, in the New International Commentary on the New Testament makes a good argument that Paul had already told the Corinthians, either in person or in an earlier letter, that this behavior wasn't acceptable but the Corinthians challenged Paul on this (p. 365, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, NICNT). Paul probably gave the gist of their argument in chapter 8: "Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'no idol in the world really exists,' and that 'there is no God but one'."

In chapter 8, it appears that Paul seems to accept that argument but challenges the Corinthians that not everyone has that knowledge. They might be hurting the faith of immature believers who have turned to God through Christ but might still believe that other gods exist (8:7-11).

But that's not the end of the story. Fees argues that throughout this letter Paul is dealing with people who have challenged his authority and teaching in many areas, including such things as visiting temple prostitutes, (chapter 6), marriage (7), spiritual gifts (12-14) and the resurrection (15).

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Do Everything to the Glory of God

Golden Text: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Key Thought: Our freedom in Christ includes our freedom to give up our rights.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 10:14–11:1 (NRSV)

¹⁴ Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

²³ All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful’, but not all things build up. ²⁴ Do not seek your own advantage, but that of others. ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, ²⁶ for ‘the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.’ ²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice’, then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience – ²⁹ I mean the other’s conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgement of someone else’s conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. ³² Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. ^{11:1} Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

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With these other issues, it appears that Paul deals first in generalities, then gives personal examples, and concludes with stronger statements which demonstrate his authority and get to the heart of the matter. It appears that Paul does the same with this topic, giving a soft answer in chapter 8, giving personal examples of the way that he has exercised his freedom in Christ in chapter 9, and concluding with a stronger teaching which is today’s lesson text.

Bible Learning

14. Paul said “flee from the worship of idols”; he used a similar expression in dealing with prostitution: “shun fornication” (6:18). There is no doubt that Paul condemns eating in the idol temples. The “therefore” at the beginning of the verse ties this admonition back to the warnings about how Israel had fallen even though it had received the blessings of God.

15-22. Paul brings in two realities for the people of God: the meaning of the Lord’s supper and the sacrificial feasts of the Jews in the Old Testament (Deut. 14:22-27). The greater reality is the Lord’s supper but he brings in the Old Testament reference because it actually involves an animal sacrifice to God before the meal is shared.

Paul isn’t making an argument that the Lord’s supper is a partaking in the literal body and blood of Christ. He emphasizes the upward relationship with Christ in speaking of the cup but he emphasizes the horizontal relationship with each other in the partaking of bread. This fellowship (*koinonia* in the Greek) is a sacred relationship. How can we have that type of fellowship with non-believers?

He introduces a thought that while there aren’t any other gods, the reality is that there is demonic power involved in idol worship. That might sound strange to us but Fees makes a good point:

In a variety of ways this paragraph has continued to be a Word for the church. Converts in Third World settings, of course, often have an immediacy with it that many others do not, as they struggle over the religious intent of meals of various kinds, sometimes even in their ancestral homes, where the meal is eaten in honor of the “god.” In Western churches interest in the text has usually been over vv. 16–17, with some passing historical interest in the rest. What Paul is finally forbidding is any kind of relationship with the demonic. How that translates into modern Western cultures may be moot; probably what most Western Christians need to learn is that the demonic is not as remote as some of them would wish to believe (p. 475).

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“Come Right On In!”

Key Thought: As God has shown us hospitality by welcoming us into his family, so should we show such grace to others – in our homes, in our churches, and anyplace else where the love of God in Christ needs to be expressed.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 16:5-24 (NIV)

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ Do everything in love.

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

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

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

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

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

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

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We will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The key word for the Corinthians is the word “changed.” Our mortal bodies that die will not only be raised from the dead, they will be changed. Like someone putting on a new garment, the perishable must put on the imperishable and the mortal must put on immortality. Immortality is inherent to the nature of God; He lives forever without the fear of death having any power over Him. It is as Paul wrote to another church about the resurrection nature of Jesus, “Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over him” (Rom. 6:9). This truly is God’s gift of salvation from death and all sin’s curse. We have the example of Jesus whom God raised from the dead never to die again. This becomes the motivation for all believers to live their lives in humble submission to the will of God. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.” (v. 58). A wondrous gift awaits all those who put their trust in the will and power of God.

Bible Application

Thanks to Corinthians’ doubts about God’s power to raise the dead we have Paul’s excellent portrait of our hope. God has supplied all the evidence that is needed for us to believe in His power and His word. He has been shown capable to grant the gift of life and immortality to every believer who has fallen prey to death, and to all who have yet to fall. We can know we will not only be raised from the dead but will be changed in nature such that death will no longer have any power over our bodies. God wants this good news message broadcast far and wide for all people everywhere to have opportunity to hear, understand and accept. It is a message which can allay many fears we face in this life. It can bring hope, comfort, joy and peace to troubled hearts and minds.

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nature. It will have a beauty and glow resembling the glory of God. And in its life will be a power which will sustain it without harm throughout eternity. Yes, we are born with a human body, a mortal body, a frail body, a body made of the natural elements. But when this body is raised from the dead, God will make it a spiritual body, a body suitable to dwell with God. It is important to note that Paul calls it a “spiritual body” and not a “spirit”. This is not an immaterial form, the ghostly phantom of a former mortal person. This is that person raised from the dead but now possessing a body like the resurrected body of Jesus.

Paul goes on to elaborate more on the difference between the two bodies (v. 45-49):

So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.” The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Both the earthy and the heavenly bodies are material in nature, but they differ in the quality of the life they possess. The earthy is from the earth (the dust of the ground, as with Adam). It is temporary. It dies and returns to the earth. But the heavenly is spiritual in nature, meaning it receives a nature akin to God’s own spiritual nature. God’s nature is indestructible.

Finally, Paul solidifies his meaning about how the resurrection body differs so dramatically from our mortal bodies. He states his punch line: “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (v. 50). The Corinthians could not conceive how raising a mortal body from the dead could be of much use in the eternal kingdom of God. And they were right. What they did not figure on was the change that this mortal body could undergo by the power of God. *You are right*, Paul agreed, *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*.

So what is the answer, the Corinthians wondered? Paul was now ready to reveal the wondrous truth. “Behold, I tell you a mystery.” (v. 51a). Just as God revealed the truth to Paul so now Paul will reveal to the Corinthians what had long been God’s secret in His plan of salvation. “We will not all sleep,” (v. 51b) meaning we will not all die before Jesus returns to raise the dead – but something dramatic, something truly amazing will happen to all believers (v. 51c-57):

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⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.

⁵⁵ O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?”

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

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

Introduction

In last week’s lesson text Paul wrestled with Corinthian believers having been persuaded that he was wrong in teaching the mortal body can be raised from the dead. In today’s text Paul examines the source of this disbelief. It appears they were mistaken about what kind of body would exist in the eternal kingdom. They could not fathom the appeal in restoring a decrepit mortal body to life, for a person who died of age or disease would not live very long if returned to life in that condition. They had problems imagining a body, especially one which had decayed and turned to dust, being raised again. They did not imagine it being restored to any kind of life that would be worth living. Paul uses several illustrations to show that God intends believers to continue to live in a body, one which will be changed to live forever in His eternal kingdom. The key point is that a *change* must take place. The Corinthians did not understand that change, so Paul explains it very clearly and practically.

Bible Learning

Here Paul begins to expound on some of the Corinthians’ specific questions regarding the nature of the resurrection body. Apparently some of them were curious to know Paul’s explanation of how a resurrected body could live forever. Paul notes two questions specifically: “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’” (v. 35). He dispenses succinctly with the first by saying, “You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.” (v. 36-38). First, Paul points out the system by which the life of some species of plants depends on the deaths of plants. God gave plants seeds to reproduce their kind. But in some cases it is only after a plant dies that its seeds reach the ground and

23-24. The phrase, “All things are lawful,” is put in quotes in many translations because it appears that Paul is referencing a slogan of the Corinthians. He referenced that also in 1 Corinthians 6:12. He counters that not all things are beneficial and not all things build up. Paul strongly argues for freedom in Christ, but how can we be free if we are giving something power over us? Paul said in chapter 9 that he used his freedom in Christ to serve others, no matter what the circumstance. The Corinthians are focused on exercising their rights, Paul exercises his freedom to benefit others and challenges them to do the same.

25-27. These verses might sound odd in light of the previous verses but it shows how radically Paul views his freedom. The Jews wouldn’t have agreed. They wouldn’t eat meat sold in a pagan marketplace because it might be the leftovers from an idol feast. It appears that many Jewish Christians held to the same practice, as illustrated by the command that the Gentile converts not eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:20, 29). Paul appears to apply that teaching only to the actual sharing of a meal in an idol’s temple, but states that Christians need not worry about where the meat sold in the marketplace came from.

28. In this verse Paul appears to be concerned about the conscience of the unbeliever. The unbeliever might be warning him because he is aware of Jewish scruples in this regard. But it also might be that the unbeliever considers the meal in his home to be a continuation of the fellowship in the idol temple. In this case, Paul uses the Greek word meaning, “sacrificial meat,” rather than the word he usually uses, which means “idol meat.” That implies that the unbeliever places a special significance upon this meat.

29-30. It appears possible that the Corinthians, in arguing for being able to eat in an idol’s temple, have pointed out that Paul ate meat from the marketplace that might have been originally sacrificed in a pagan rite. This shows that for Paul the problem isn’t the meat but the fellowship in the idol’s temple. But perhaps this is why Paul said earlier in chapter 8, “Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall” (8:13). He knows that he has the freedom to do so, but he is willing to give that up to help others.

10:31–11:1. This sums up Paul’s long argument that began in chapter 8. He consistently insists that Christians have freedom in Christ yet challenges his readers to give up their freedom to encourage faith in others. The ultimate example is Jesus. As Paul wrote in Philippians 2, having the mind of Christ is to follow his example, that he was willing to give up everything, even going to the cross, that he might be the savior of all.

In our text Paul differentiates between simply eating meat and eating meat in the idol’s temple. One is enjoying the gifts that God has given us, the other is an unholy alliance.

Back to the game of pinball. To some it is an excuse to hang around with low-lives in a bar, to my dad it was a game of skill with his friends. If my dad had been taught that it was offensive, I’m sure that he wouldn’t have done it. But that simply wasn’t the case.

Can each of us examine our motives in disputable matters? Can we say that whatever we do, we do to the glory of God? Can we seek to give offense to no one? Can we be imitators of Christ in all that we do?

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever been surprised that someone disapproved of something that you did? How did you respond?
2. What do we learn about the Lord’s supper from verses 15-22?
3. What do you think of the idea that idol worship is actually demonic?
4. How does Paul illustrate his freedom in Christ in chapters 8-10? What examples does he give of giving up his rights?
5. What distinction does Paul make between eating meat in the idol’s temple and eating meat from the marketplace? What does he have to say about doing so in an unbeliever’s home?
6. How does what Paul teaches about eating meat offered to idols seem different than James’ admonition to the Gentiles in Acts 15?
7. Sum up Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1.
8. How does the story of Eric Liddell relate to our text?
9. How do we do all things to the glory of God?
10. How do we avoid giving offense to anyone? Does this mean that we must give up everything we enjoy if someone objects or are there non-offensive ways to do some things?
11. How can I imitate Christ this week?

Bible Application

The story of Eric Liddell, made famous in the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, illustrates the principles Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Liddell was a very committed Christian who intended to go into the mission field but competed in track in college and had the opportunity to run in the Olympics. In the movie his sister is portrayed as considering track to be a worldly pursuit and challenged Liddell to give up his youthful ways and enter the mission field. Liddell responds: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure."

Liddell qualifies for the 1924 Olympics but learns that the heat for his race, the 100 meters, is scheduled for Sunday. Earlier in the movie he had stopped boys from playing football on Sunday, which his church viewed as the Sabbath. Consistent to his beliefs, he refuses to run. On that Sunday, while the race is being run, he preaches in a church and chose a text from Isaiah 40:

- ²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
- ²⁹ He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
- ³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
- ³¹ but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

But that isn't the end of the story. A teammate gives Liddell his spot in the 400 meters and the Scottish runner wins the gold medal in an upset.

Liddell knew how to honor God. To him that meant to keep Sunday holy. But it also meant to run with all his might.

Life Response

Today's text emphasizes both freedom and responsibility. Paul probably shocked many Jewish sensibilities when he said that he could eat anything offered in the marketplace. But he was willing to use his freedom to help others, rather than to exercise his rights.

produce new plants. Thus, new life springs from a death. Paul is saying that God, who set up this system, gave us a recurring illustration of resurrection in the living things He placed on this planet. And with that Paul dispenses with speaking any more to the first question.

Paul gives more time to their second question, "With what kind of body do they come?", addressing it in the rest of the chapter. He again draws on things God has made, showing that they possess different kinds of bodies for a variety of purposes.

First he points out the unique bodies of living creatures. "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one *flesh* of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish" (v. 39). We could name many differences in the bodies of men, beasts, birds and fish, like the amount of hair, feathers, and scales each has. God made each body and flesh uniquely suited to each animal. Lions' fur keeps them warm on cold nights and shields their skin from the sun during the day. Birds use feathers to help them fly and to repel water. Fish have scaly bodies to help them move swiftly through water.

Next, Paul turns to heavenly bodies to point out how they differ from one another. "There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the *glory* of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory." (v. 40-41). The earth is compared to other heavenly bodies and the brightness of the sun is compared to the moon and stars. God made each to have its own degree of brightness for its own purpose. They are similar in appearance but how brightly they shine distinguishes their useful purpose.

Now Paul is ready to apply these ideas to the difference in nature between our mortal bodies and the resurrection body. "So also is the resurrection of the dead" (v. 42a). The Corinthians were thinking the resurrection body would be the old body brought back to life in whatever condition it had when the person died. The sickly would still be sick. The old would still be old. The deformed would still be deformed. All would still be able to die again. Paul set the record straight. Our body "is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*." (v. 42b-44). Going back to his plant/seed illustration Paul compares the condition of our mortal bodies to the resurrection body. The difference is dramatic. The dead human body disintegrates back into dust. Obviously it has no strength to sustain life. By contrast the resurrection body will be imperishable. It will continue on without any change to its

Lesson 3 September 16, 2012 Christian Women in Corinth: Part One

Life Need

This two-part lesson will propose a way to read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, but first considers other parts of the letter regarding women. With some contexts of our culture it may seem that issues regarding a woman's role have been settled, but in many churches questions remain about what role(s) she may have.

Bible Learning

Even in the more restrictive Old Testament setting it was not forgotten that both man and woman were made in the image of God. And God called both to serve, including the prophetesses Miriam and Huldah, the judge Deborah, and the Queen Esther.

With the emergence of the Church God fulfilled the prophecy of Joel and gave the Spirit to men and women (Acts 2:17-18). Saul sought to jail both men and women who followed Christ, and those who were scattered from Jerusalem preached the word where they went (8:3-4). A few years later Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos (18:26) who then was a great help at Corinth (18:27; 19:1).

Paul's writings show his regard for various men and women. Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3) may be remembered better for having a disagreement, but Paul also says of these women that they "contended at my side". In Romans 16 Paul named some workers, including his "fellow worker" Priscilla (v. 3) and several women who worked "hard" "for you" or "in the Lord" including Mary (v. 6), Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (v. 12). Paul told the Corinthians to submit to those who do the work (1 Cor. 16:15-16; see Matt. 20:25-28). Paul did not dwell on titles or job descriptions, but he did mention two of his relatives who either were seen by the apostles as outstanding, or were outstanding apostles – the man Andronicus and the woman Junia (Rom. 16:7).

First Corinthians reveals to us a city with a badly messed up group of house churches. They had been enriched in all their speaking and all their knowledge (1:5), they had every spiritual gift and eagerly awaited the coming of Christ (1:7) but they were divided. Their division seems to have included some who rejected Paul, the founder of that community. We know this through Chloe's household reporting to Paul some of what was being said (1:11-12). Paul wanted the Corinthians to emphasize following Christ, and to humbly recognize that they all together were sacred to God (3:16-17),

Lesson 12 November 18, 2012 What Kind of Body is Raised?

Golden Text: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;" (1 Corinthians 15:42-43)

Key Thought: The resurrection body has a different nature than the bodies we possess in this life. In the resurrection our bodies are changed to never again be subject to death.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 (NASB)

³⁵ But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; ³⁷ and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. ³⁹ All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one *flesh* of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the *glory* of the earthly is another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*. ⁴⁵ So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

company corrupts good morals.’ Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.” (v. 33-34).

Bible Application

The main point of this lesson is that Paul always taught bodily resurrection as our one hope of deliverance from death. People tend to be repulsed by the sight of a decaying body, or even the thought of one. We would rather speak of a soul that remains alive, actively present before God and friends. Nevertheless, the resurrection of the body is God’s chosen plan for restoring life to the dead. When we fully appreciate the power and majesty God uses to achieve this we see it is beautiful. God gives us the picture of awakening from sleep, an image of slumber out of which God will arouse us, restoring our bodies whole again with a new nature that death can never harm.

Life Response

Death holds the ultimate grip on every person’s life, and is our chief enemy. But death has been vanquished. Paul spoke of the resurrection of Jesus as exhibiting God’s power (2 Cor. 13:4). Scientists who seek to discover the key to immortal life have been and will continue to be unsuccessful. The only remedy for decay, the only means for restoring worn out body parts is the power of God. Only God has the ability to reconstruct what He originally made from the dust of the ground. The sooner we resolve to believe this truth the sooner we discover the calm, comforting assurance that God is able to revive our bodies from our great enemy – death.

whatever teacher they had learned from was of Christ, as they were “of Christ, and Christ is of God” (3:22-23).

Yet some needed to be warned, having elevated themselves so highly above others (4:14). Paul does not say in his letter “Chloe has this right” or “Gaius has this right” – he wants the divisions to be abandoned through love and humility, so *all* can be right. Paul meant to send the loving Timothy to demonstrate what to do (4:17; see Phil. 2:19-24; 1 Tim. 1:2-3). If they did not learn from Timothy they would face Paul (4:18-19).

Chapter 7

Among the reports and questions Paul deals with is one on marriage (7:1). In his reply Paul emphasizes several times that men and women share privilege and duty. A man was said to have “authority” over his wife’s body, and the wife had “authority” over her husband’s body (7:3-5, 32-34). He used a verb form of *eksousia*, the normal word for “authority” in the New Testament (also used in 11:10). And the couples needed “agreement”, described with *symphonou* (adjective form of the verb in Matthew 18:19). First Corinthians 7 reminds us of Ephesians 5:21-22, with husbands and wives called to mutual submission, neither to rule.

Paul also wrote of benefits for non-Christians in marrying a Christian. They applied whether the *Christian* spouse was the husband *or* wife (7:14, 16).

Chapter 11

In this chapter Paul addresses an objection about appearance in worship. It seems not only possible but certain that Paul did not join in the complaint himself. The terms of the objection seem either to involve or overlap with the Nazirite vow, which Paul himself may have been under while at Corinth (Acts 18:18). It is hard to imagine how that fact affected the opinion of Paul among those who were complaining. But Paul still tried to deal with the issue while calling people to unity. Both the nature of the complaint and Paul’s response to it acknowledge women speaking in the church, and the core of the passage notes women’s “authority” (v. 10). The issue was how the women would respond to the complaint, not whether they would serve.

Chapter 14

After chapter 11 Paul discussed spiritual gifts, including how they relate to love in the Church. He wrote “When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (14:26). Paul went on to say people should take turns speaking (v. 27-33). Then we get this:

Paul then takes his argument to its obvious conclusion. “If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.” (v. 16-19). Paul is saying:

Think about what you are saying, Corinthians! If it is not possible to raise the dead then Christ is still in his grave. If that is so then your salvation from sin and death has no basis. Christ died for no good reason. He is not alive to declare to all his triumph over both sin and death. And if God’s chosen one, the sinless Son of God, could not be raised from the dead, then how can we expect we will be raised from death to also triumph over sin and death? And think about what you are saying about those who died believing God would raise them from the dead. Believing there is no resurrection from the dead condemns their bodies to dust forever. Our belief in the resurrection is a total waste.

“If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.” (v. 19).

Note that this is a death blow to the idea that Paul agreed with and taught Plato’s concept of an immortal and immaterial soul. If Paul believed in souls going to heaven at death this would be the perfect place to mention it. He could simply state that our souls, our “real” selves (so-called), can not perish but exist as immortal entities. If he thought this why did Paul not remind the Corinthians, “But of course we all know our soul goes to heaven at death!” Remarkably Paul says no such thing, and clings resolutely to his belief in our bodies being resurrected from the dead.

15:20-39

Paul immediately presses on with the method God has ordained for our salvation from death. He states: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming.” (v. 20-23). We do have hope in a future life, and our hope follows the pattern established by Christ. We have hope of being roused out of the sleep of death when Christ comes back to reign as king over this planet. Again, Paul does not promise we will continue living past the moment we die. The Corinthians knew this idea well, it was assumed by most of the religions in their time and was explained by Greek philosophy. Those in the church who believed it strongly spoke against what Paul taught about the resurrection of the dead,

I cannot prove that Paul was quoting opponents in 14:34-35. Some simply see these lines as inserted in a copy of the letter, and there are Greek texts where they appear at the end of the chapter, not as verses 34 and 35. I get why some people have assumed these verses were an outright addition. Certainly they don’t sound like Paul. The text seems dismissive, not simply of these women but of all women. If this was Paul’s attitude toward Priscilla I think I will need to take up wearing a hat, so that I can eat it.

Bible Application

Paul taught mutuality in marriage and the ministry of men and women together. But his words on these subjects have often been used poorly.

Women’s participation in church life has come in praying, singing, teaching and even asking questions to learn. I find it odd that so many people attempt to apply 14:34-35 in a very narrow way, to argue against women being pastors or elders, but not objecting in general to them speaking. It seems that some people who read this passage as prohibiting women from speaking in church swiftly tie speaking to preaching to leading and assume that with this passage Paul is prohibiting women from certain church leadership roles. But Paul saw things differently. When Paul wrote churches were structured with groups of elders, and operated through the collective ministry of the body to the body. I suspect that in our conversations we often use the word “lead” to stand for a list of things we actually believe *all* believers should do – show self discipline, work hard, encourage, be honest, engage with others’ needs, stand against sin, etc. If so, we might do better to call for those things by name. And I find that women can and should do these things – I would say both in the Church and in the family. And the Church should submit to those who do the work.

Paul’s letters show how he valued the positive contributions of both men and women. He also had deep concern with the harm both men and women could bring to themselves and others.

The church exists by God’s choice, it is empowered by God’s Spirit and is led by Jesus, but how it *functions* is often dependent on *us*. I think that is a lot of the message of 1 Corinthians. We have access to a remarkable spirit of faith and power and worship – and we may or may not always live in and act upon it. But as members of Christ’s church we are gifted to serve in various and differing ways, to always be useful and serve in good order.

³⁴ The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. (NASB)

This would stand in contrast to the teaching of women like Priscilla, and the basic idea that *all* would bring something to edify the church (backed by 11:5, 13). Some try to address the conflict by treating this as a limited command, meant for a situation with uneducated women. We could even say it only involved some of the house churches. But I don't get how that explains mentioning Law.¹

I find it easier to explain these words as Paul quoting opinions from Corinth so he can object to them, which he did numerous times in this letter (see 1:12; 6:12, 13, 18; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 10:23). It would be the longest quote, but it matches the arrogance and conflict in that troubled group. Some there were much more interested in speaking than listening. The plan for shutting out many speakers may come from Gentile misunderstanding of the Law.

The single letter η (“eeta”) that begins verse 36 may support verses 34 and 35 being a quote. Paul sometimes used it when stating his objection to a Corinthian opinion or action (as at 1:13; 6:9, 16, 19; 9:6; 10:22; 11:22). It is not always translated, but the KJV put it as “What?”

³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only? ³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized. ³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner. (NASB)

I read verse 37 as saying “what *I* write to you are the Lord's commands”, as in *not these ideas about women which others have said to you*. You can see how that carries through to verse 38, saying that those who won't treat the Church as a body shouldn't speak to it. Then verse 39 again says *not* to forbid speech – something many have done from how they read verses 34 and 35. But we are not to forbid speech, even speech we don't prefer, rather we are to aim for good order in how people speak (v. 40).

¹ Some tie this to the “Books of the Law,” and Genesis 3:16. I don't read that as instructing women to submit to husbands any more than I read the comment about thorns in verse 18 as blocking the use of herbicide. I see it as *warning* Eve of how men would behave. And we are freed from “the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13), there is no longer “male and female” in Christ Jesus (3:28).

and tried to discredit the very idea of bodily resurrection. But Paul makes it clear that resurrection is God's plan.

God's plan will result in a new form of immortal human at the return of Christ. Then will begin the process of fully establishing the kingdom of God on earth. Christ will rule with his resurrected believers; ultimately unbelievers will be excluded from the kingdom. “Then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.” (v. 24-25). For believers the triumphal words of salvation from death are these: “The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (v. 26). The meaning of this phrase will be explored more in next week's lesson.

In the end Jesus triumphantly lays the subdued world at the feet of his Lord and Master, Almighty Yahweh God. In doing so Jesus humbly submits himself before his God, as well, for he recognizes that Yahweh gave him the power and authority to subdue the world. Paul writes, “For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.” (v. 27-28).

This part of Paul's treatise on the resurrection closes by rebuffing some ridiculous beliefs held by Corinthians who took issue with the resurrection of the dead. First he asks, “what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?” (v. 29). Conversion includes repentance, faith and baptism. Baptism is an outward display of the inward changes taking place in the converted believers' life. To the Romans Paul wrote, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). This symbolism is meaningless if there is no resurrection of the dead. Then Paul points out that the dangers he faces in preaching the good news message of Jesus are also meaningless if his death totally ends his life. “Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.” (v. 30-32). If all life ends at death then we do better to live life full of parties now for there will be no activity once we die. Paul then rebukes such thinking. “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad

Lesson 4

September 23, 2012

Christian Women in Corinth: Part Two

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (Author's own attempt at translation)
[Note: underlines and margin notes involve a chiasm – see *Bible Learning*]

² On the one hand, I praise you for the way you have kept in mind and held fast to the traditions I passed along to you. ³ But on the other hand I desire you to understand that Christ is the head of every believer, and that a man is the head of a woman, and that God is the head of Christ.

A ⁴ [To some,] every man who is praying or prophesying with long hair shames his head [Christ], ⁵ and every wife who is praying or prophesying with unbound hair due to being shaved brings shame on her head [her husband] ⁶ If when a woman does not have long hair and is not using a veil her hair that is short is considered indecorous, then when a woman has her hair cut short or is being shaved she should put a veil on [avoiding offense]. ⁷ [It is said] indeed a man should not use a veil because he is the image and glory of God, yet the woman is [seen as] that man's glory

B ⁸ for man [Adam] is not from woman [Eve], but woman [in general, through Eve] is from man [Adam],

C ⁹ for indeed man's [Adam's] creation was not for the woman [Eve] but all the more the woman [Eve] was created for man.

¹⁰ To handle this situation the woman should have authority on her head, for the sake of the angels.

C' ¹¹ Notwithstanding [issues of creation people have raised], neither is woman separate from man, nor is man separate from woman in the Lord.

B' ¹² For just as the woman [is] from the man [Adam], and the man [husband] with the woman, indeed all things are from God.

A' ¹³ You need to decide what you consider befitting when a woman prays to God with unbound hair. ¹⁴ Is it truly the case that nature teaches you about a man that if he has long hair he brings disgrace on himself? ¹⁵ On the other hand if a woman has long hair you see that as a glory given to her as decoration, and you do not consider she needs to wear a veil.

¹⁶ But if one is inclined to be contentious [not seeking peace, let that person recognize] we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

Introduction

I think many people question how much energy they should use on such confusing verses, and whether this text is relevant for us. I think some of that concern is valid, but I see a message in these verses we can value.

Bible Learning

15:1-11

These verses involve the witnesses who saw Jesus following his resurrection. Paul says there were more than 500, and that most of them were still alive as he wrote. A court of law would have abundant testimony available to declare that Jesus was alive again following his crucifixion. Paul includes himself as a witness, but if the Corinthians can't believe his word they can ask for the accounts of other witnesses.

This resurrection event is important for the Corinthians to remember; it is the basis of their salvation. As Paul put it,

I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (v. 1-3).

This is the message the apostles of Jesus taught, and which Paul preached to the Corinthians. “Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (v. 11). And yet Paul learned that now the Corinthians had come to question and turn away from this message. Paul addressed that directly.

15:12-19

He begins his response with a question: “Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (v. 12). In other words Paul says, *I just taught you that Jesus was raised from the dead. Why are you saying there is no such thing?* He challenges them to listen to what they are saying. “If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.” (v. 13-14). They are basically calling Paul a liar when he told them Jesus was raised from the dead. They need to think very carefully about what they are saying. For if Christ truly has not been raised from the dead then “we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.” (v. 15). These are very serious accusations: Paul is called a liar, a false witness, and one who slanders God by saying He can do something He actually cannot do. Paul recognizes the seriousness of these charges being made against him.

²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. ²¹ For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, ²⁴ then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death. ²⁷ For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

²⁹ Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? ³⁰ Why are we also in danger every hour? ³¹ I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. ³² If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE. ³³ Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." ³⁴ Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.

Introduction

In chapter 15 Paul takes an intellectual journey seeking to persuade the Corinthian church that bodily resurrection is God's plan to save His people from death. The Corinthians had a deep-seated misunderstanding about the nature of the resurrection body. They also had a deep-rooted belief in the theory of an immortal, immaterial soul which Plato had described.

In this long, well organized, chapter (where the NASB has five subheadings) Paul leads the people through his reasoning that bodily resurrection is God's revealed method for bringing salvation from death. He takes us through some of the doubting thoughts of unbelievers, but ultimately we burst into the bright sunrise of glory and hope we will experience on resurrection day. Today's lesson points to the truth of bodily resurrection. Next week the lesson focuses on the nature of the resurrection body.

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this teaching of Paul may cause some to question any of his teachings such as 1 Timothy 2:5, or 2 Timothy 3:16-17, or 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, or 2 Thessalonians 2, all of which seem foundational to our understanding of scripture.

Life Response

Certainly not to allow women full participation in our churches seems patently absurd. In fact it would jeopardize the very existence of the churches today. We are left to try and understand that though Paul insists that this is a command from the Lord, we feel we must find an explanation that fits our modern day and age.

Each church today must spiritually wrestle with this question, and others regarding teachings about gifts we do not understand, but often when confronting Scripture simple solutions do not come. Through grappling with these issues we can grow and learn as we are guided by the Spirit of our God.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why are tongues so disturbing?
2. Have you had the chance to express a teaching you received from your study of the Bible? Has it only been in preparing a lesson, or in another way?
3. How would Paul's teaching regarding more participation work in your church?
4. Why would a church have a paid pastor if everybody was doing a prophecy or teaching?
5. If you are a Christian, have you been able to determine how God spiritually gifted you?
6. The idea of love permeating and undergirding the Church seems absolute. Why then are some churches so filled with anger and disagreements?

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Bible Learning

Overview

Several issues combined to have me provide my own translation for the *Lesson Text*. Bible versions were treating things I thought were questions as statements. They were treating Greek words I thought were about hair length as about "coverings". And they treated the complaints in these verses as from Paul. I don't think he was arguing about women with short hair and men with long hair who prayed and prophesied. Soon after Paul left Corinth he completed a vow and had his head shaved (Acts 18:18). *Paul* had been ministering at Corinth while long-haired (see Num. 6; Acts 21:20-26). That important background information may explain why the conflict in this passage existed: some of Corinth's women used vows, perhaps imitating Paul, but some of the Gentiles did not understand these actions. It is sometimes suggested that the complainers were concerned that the vows were resulting in men and women looking like *each other*.

Chiasm

Verses 4-9 are paired with 11-15 through "chiasm". That style is used by several biblical writers. Matthew 7:6 is a brief example:

Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine,
 or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

A chiasm reverses the order in which subjects are addressed. This text has the pattern ABB'A'. The "dogs" (A) and the "swine" (B) would "tear" (A' – read as "A prime") and "trample" (B'). If we force the verse into an AB pattern it says: "Do not give what is holy to dogs or they will turn and tear you to pieces, and do not throw your pearls before swine or they will trample them under their feet." I see 1 Corinthians 11:4-15 in the pattern ABCDC'B'A', with verse 10 giving a central theme (D). In some chiasms such themes serve like a thesis statement.

11:2. Paul begins the passage by praising the Corinthians for how they "kept in mind and held fast" (v. 2) what he passed along (unlike in verse 17). Apparently the *majority* there knew the significance of long hair, short hair and shaved heads. But the complaints from those who *didn't* understand needed to be addressed.

11:3. Paul wants them to "understand" an earlier teaching in a new way. I think Paul was emphasizing how God supersedes our human concerns.

Paul's use of the Greek word *kephale*, which is normally translated "head" (it has the English cognate *cephalic*), three times in this verse, sets

him, not for Christ, his *kephale* (v. 14, compare v. 4). And a woman's long hair was being seen as *decorative*, rather than as honoring God (v. 15).

Chiasm B-B', on origination of man and woman from God.

11:8, 12. Paul draws on both Genesis creation accounts (chapters 1, 2) in verses 7-9 and 11-12, including references to "man" and "woman" that mean *Adam* and *Eve*. People have drawn arguments for male dominance from Adam being made first (2:7), and Eve second (2:22), and perhaps some people even made such arguments in the first century. But both man and woman were made in God's image (Gen. 1:27) to have the same purpose (1:28-30) and to be together (2:18, 24). Paul's final point here is that *all* is from God.

Chiasm C-C', on relationship – "for" and not "separate from".

11:9, 11. These verses balance as tightly as some paired Proverbs do. They provide wordplay involving whether the man and woman were "for" each other, and say that neither is independent of the other. But the key for Paul is that this relationship holds true "in the Lord".

D 11:10. Authority and Angels. It is clear that women in Corinth could speak in worship; even the complainers of chapter 11 did not object to women speaking in worship, just to how they looked. What Paul dealt with in 14:34-35 seems to have been an aberration. So the woman's authority in verse 10 is not about her speaking, but about her authority to choose what response to offer those who were complaining. Paul's desire for kindness to be shown to the objectors may be reflected in his reference to *angels*. We often think of it as referring to messengers from God, but the word means "messengers". It may be that the complainers were visiting *human messengers*, traveling between Corinthian house churches which did *not* use vows and ones which did. Calling the complainers *angels* could remind everyone of the respect these fellow-believers should receive.

Paul's main concern is not asking complainers to stop. Even more than agreement Paul wanted peace among the believers, which might require women using a veil (v. 6), or even to choose to stop taking vows.

11:16. In this verse Paul mentions that something was common to all the churches. The practice may be that women in their authority decided how to look when they prayed and prophesied. Or perhaps Paul's idea is broader, that in every place women (and men) needed to be attentive to others' concerns in worship, about hair or anything else. With some texts we can

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up vocabulary for what follows. But verse 3 sometimes gets more attention than verses 4-15 because of that one word. We know the metaphor that Christ is “the head of the Church”, it often gets used to say Christ *leads* us. But isn’t that already established by calling Jesus “Lord” (*kurios*)? In Latin, which dominated Christian theology for centuries, the word for “head” (*caput*) can also mean “leader”. But the evidence isn’t good for *kephale* having meant “leader” to people in Paul’s time.

Associating *kephale* with “leader” gets people to read 11:3 as a chain of command. It also leaves people to ask what this means for the wives of non-believers, or for unmarried women. It might be better to wonder, if this were a chain of command, why Paul didn’t call for husbands to have their wives change their actions. Instead Paul offered a case for evaluation.

The most popular alternative to “leadership” as a meaning for *kephale* has been “source” (like “the head of a river”). But I think it may work better to see benefactor-beneficiary relationships in 11:3. The six other places where Paul used *kephale* with this same metaphor suggest to me the *kephale* being involved with the *growth* of a body, not *leadership* over it:

Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10 and 19. Please look at the verses yourselves. With each of the three relationships in 1 Corinthians 11:3 benefits passed from the *kephale*. We may miss thinking about how much political, social and financial power first century husbands had and used for their wives. Seeing this text as about benefactors can also link with the expectation of dishonor coming to a *kephale* based on someone’s hair length, as the behavior of a beneficiary reflected on the benefactor.

Chiasm A-A’, on hair and honor. 11:4-7, 13-15. Each verse mentions hair, and honor / disgrace / glory / what is proper.

Section **A** introduces the complaints about hair length bringing dishonor. In verse 6 Paul suggests what may have been a compromise – that women with an offensive hair length wear a veil while in that situation. The end of section **A** launches into the creation accounts (important in v. 8-9, 11-12). The complaints miss that both man and woman were made in God’s image. The man’s choices are seen as affecting *God’s* glory, while the concerns about women just involved a *man’s* glory. The complainers don’t get that even if a woman’s hair length offended them, it resulted from seeking to glorify *God*. But the women had to see that even if their hair length came from an effort to glorify God, it was *offending* people.

In section **A’** Paul points out puzzling aspects of the situation (we may not get their significance, lacking background) for the people to consider (v. 13). Apparently some people said a man’s long hair was a disgrace for

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seek a self-consistent reading, but can’t arrive at certainty about what was originally meant.

Bible Application

I invite discussion of this text. Its original meaning may mirror parts of chapters 8-10, but it has been given other uses over centuries. Among this lesson’s few certainties is that Paul’s main concern here was a choice women needed to make on their own authority. This was clear for Paul but it now needs to be discussed if it will be taken seriously, and it has not always been taken seriously.

Life Response

Believers at Corinth generally had the core idea about the practice in this passage right, but they missed some of how their actions affected those around them. We need to consider that as well, and how our actions affect ourselves. Being a truth seeker may extend beyond fine points of doctrine. Do we recognize our weaknesses, our need to change, and our need to rely on Jesus? Do we perceive our strengths and our value? We must choose carefully when we will defy expectations and when we will adopt them. Paul wanted to be all things to all people that some might be saved. Paul also got himself arrested, and several times people tried to kill him – he did not simply blend in.

Don’t lose sight of Paul’s desire for ministry to be done, even as believers had to pay attention to the social issues around them, and the needs of the “weaker” within the church. Don’t give up on serving – not for it seeming to be hard, or unappreciated, or opposed, or ineffective. God is the final judge of effectiveness, and desires faithfulness even more – despite obstacles (human or otherwise).

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think the Church is as accessible to unbelievers today as it was meant to be? What might be some barriers?
2. It was the author’s impression that in the six verses where Paul used the word *kephale* the idea was of the *kephale* aiding growth on the part of the body – how do you perceive those verses (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10 and 19)?
3. Do you think 1 Corinthians has been approached in ways that made service in the Church seem less accessible for girls and women? Does the Church have a responsibility to deal with this proactively?

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Is Bodily Resurrection Real?

Golden Text: “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:13-14)

Key Thought: God’s promised means of salvation for us mortals involves raising our dead bodies to life. His design is not about us having immortal, immaterial souls to rise out of our bodies when our bodies die.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 (NASB)

¹ Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. ¹¹ Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

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They can share a hymn. They are encouraged to bring a testimony, but probably not a tongue. What would be the result if this were done in your church?

The idea of more involvement on the part of the entire Body certainly seems to be in keeping with the idea of each part of the Body contributing to the functioning of the Body (chapter 12). In the metaphor of the Body used by Paul, parts that do not function weaken the Body, and make it less able to do the job for which it was designed. This puts us in mind of what Paul also wrote in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (NASB).

Paul’s teaching is difficult for us to assimilate today and to know how we should practice what he has taught. The idea of having tongues in our church might be rejected out of hand, but so might having two or three prophetic utterances in our services be thought unprofitable.

Now when Paul expresses that women are not to speak in churches, we almost universally reject that. We cannot conceive that as applicable to us in this modern time. Paul has very strong, and to us strange, things to say about women in the church. In Acts, Luke has recorded many instances of Paul being involved with women in the church who seemed to play significant roles. Paul also listed one as an apostle (Romans 16:7 – Junia, which is a feminine name). [Editor’s note: in a later century this reference to Junia was changed to Junias in some manuscripts, apparently attempting to make it a male-sounding name, although there is no evidence that there ever has been a male named “Junias.” Unfortunately that change was carried into the King James Version of the Bible.]

But Paul also writes in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 more about women being submissive and not being allowed to teach, which we find distasteful to our modern sensibilities. We remember he also described women as having equality with men, at least in some sense, in Galatians 3:28.

With this seemingly conflicting evidence from Scripture, it is up to the church to determine how this should work in our churches.

Women form more than half of most congregations and make strong and vital contributions to the work and service of the church. Often for a married woman to rely on her husband to answer her spiritual questions, seems in many instances laughable as so many men have to instead rely on their wives for spiritual insights. Furthermore, not addressed are non-married women which are also a part of our congregations.

Our tendency is to say Paul’s teaching was applicable to Corinth, perhaps, but not in modern-day America. We have grown beyond that in modern times, yet we need to be careful and realize that to outright reject

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tongues speaking, especially with no interpretation, had led to services which left people not sure of what they were to have learned.

14:34-35. Now Paul addresses an issue that is especially troubling to people of this day and age when he says that women are to be silent. Some translations of the Bible connect the last phrase of verse 33 with verse 34, the New Revised and the original NIV do so; the King James Version, the 2011 version of the NIV and the New American Standard Bible connect it to verse 33.

It seems inconsistent with what Paul wrote earlier to Corinth in 11:3-16, where Paul appears to accept women speaking in church, but this is plainly the way he put it. This, to us today, seems archaic, and raises the issue of subordination of wives to their husbands, from whom they are to learn. He does not clarify his thinking here.

He seems to strongly disapprove of women speaking up in church, saying it is disgraceful if it is allowed. He makes no allowance here for any other practice.

14:36-38. Now he goes on and states that it is a command from the Lord. He says they cannot argue over this, even sarcastically asking if the word of God originated within them, so that they were to be laying down the rules. He adds that if any of them believe they have been gifted by God, they will acknowledge that what he says is true.

14:39-40. Paul gives a summary statement. 1) Prophecy is to be desired, even eagerly desired, but; 2) don't forbid speaking in tongues. From what he had written, they might have thought he opposed speaking in tongues, but he makes clear that he is not forbidding it.

What he is insisting on is that all be done in an orderly fashion to the end that the Body of Christ, the Church, grows up (this thinking is paralleled in Ephesians 4:11-16).

Bible Application

Tongues have not usually been part of our church's worship. It would be difficult to know how they might fit in if we tried to utilize them as Paul taught. Even the idea of prophecy seems unusual to us. We would be more comfortable thinking of it as a teaching or a sermon. However having multiple "prophecies" also seems unusual.

The early church had the following aspects for us to consider in our church services today. They each were expected to contribute something to the service. Some of our churches have followed this format on occasion, with each bringing something to share.

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

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

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

Introduction

Here we will draw together what Paul has taught on spiritual gifts up to this point:

- 1) God does not want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts;
- 2) Every Christian has one or more gifts to be used in the Church;
- 3) Those gifts are to be used for the common good of the Body;
- 4) By each part using his or her gift(s), the Body of Christ will function effectively, as does the human body, when its parts all work harmoniously.
- 5) But for it all to work, each part must be undergirded with a caring love, not a love of self, but of others.
- 6) This love outranks even faith and hope and is absolutely essential for the Body, Christ's Church, to work together harmoniously, which it must do to effectively proclaim the Kingdom message to the world.
- 7) For the Church to function as the Lord intended it to, we must recognize that some gifts can prove disruptive if they are abused and misunderstood, as evidently tongues were in Corinth.
- 8) What is most important is that the whole Church, not just individuals within it, receive edification and that they are built up as each participates in the functioning of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:15-16).

In today's lesson Paul adds to the practical expressions of this teaching. Some of what he says is quite controversial in our modern ears, but let us listen to what he said to Corinth to understand what those teachings might mean for us today.

Bible Learning

14:20-25. Paul reminds them again that they are no longer to be children. Yes, he wants them to be naïve as far as sin is concerned, staying far away

Not the Lord's Supper

Golden Text: "Do this to remember me" (1 Corinthians 11:24b)

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. ²⁰ Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. ²¹ For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*.

²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

²⁷ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

³³ Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴ But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

Introduction

Over the centuries many views have developed from the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he died. And people have done

them, "let no man glory in men" and "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come" (3:4, 21; 4:5). When they came together this resulted in carnal attitudes and offenses among them rather than the attitude of being a willing servant, as Paul had taught by example. They respected Paul. Now Paul urged the church, "Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (11:1).

Verses 20-22: This is not to eat the Lord's supper. Paul encouraged the church at Corinth to change their selfish attitudes which affected their most intimate spiritual time. That time was when they came together to commune as one in the body of Christ with the purpose of reflecting on their Lord Jesus' willing sacrifice for them. Jesus ate the Passover the night before he was crucified. This time of remembrance was not to eat the Passover. It was not to reenact that meal or have a meal at all. The Corinthians' attempt to do so resulted in feasting by some at the expense of others who came late and found nothing left to eat. That is, "one is hungry and another is drunk." Here Paul used the word *methuo* to describe the people's excessive indulgence. "Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" Paul asks.

Verses 23-25: I received from the Lord . . . proclaim the Lord's death. Paul now sets the record straight. He had been taught directly by Jesus Christ through revelation (Gal. 1:12, 15-18). Paul relates in brief the same events as Matthew and John who were present with Jesus that night: "Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread [Matt. 26:31-35; John 13:18-30]; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said . . . he also took the cup after supper" Jesus used the cup after the meal, what he did took place after they had eaten the Passover feast. Jesus did not ask his disciples to eat the "Lord's supper" (the Passover feast), but to eat of the unleavened bread and drink of the fruit of the vine. After each emblem he said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Matt. 26:26; Luke 22:19; Mark 14:22-26). Paul did not tell the church at Corinth to eat a feast, rather he told them to remember "the Lord's death". They were not to come together for a meal, but to share and experience Jesus' mindset from the evening before he died. John 13-17 is the most detailed account of Jesus' comments after the Passover meal, but review all the Gospel accounts for more understanding.

The bread and the cup then are reminders of Jesus' death. The bread reminds us of his "body which is given for [us]." The cup reminds us of "the new covenant in [his] blood which is shed for [us]" (Luke 22:19-20). The bread remains unleavened bread, but Jesus made it a symbol. The juice of the grape remains juice, but Jesus made it a symbol. Jesus explained these

many things to replicate it. Some speak of a “sacrament”, meaning that they believe it gives grace to those who take it. Some call it the Eucharist, referring to the thanksgiving that accompanied it. Some treat it as a solemn ritual for the Church to observe. It is often referred to as “the Lord’s Supper”, “Holy Communion”, or just “Communion.” Some use bread and wine which they consider to be sacred elements; to some these even miraculously transform into the blood and body of Christ. The apostle Paul’s words about what Jesus did “the night in which he was betrayed” bring into question practices which developed since the first-century church. His examination of the “first” Communion reminds us of Jesus’ purpose, to remember and show the Lord’s death until he comes.

Verse 17: In giving these instructions I do not praise you. The church at Corinth were those called out by God in the city and environs of Corinth, the city still exists in modern Greece (1:2). They were not a single organized congregation but families of believers. Some heard the gospel from Paul with the help of companions like Silas and Timothy. Others learned from Peter and Apollos. Paul only baptized a few: Crispus, Gaius, and the family of Stephanas (1:11-16). Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus with his family, and Justus were early Jewish converts. But there were many in Corinth of other ethnic backgrounds as well. Acts 18 gives the beginning of those whom God called. In 1 Corinthians 11:2 Paul just praised them for remembering him and following through on what he had taught them, except in their developing factions based on who had taught them and been instrumental in their baptism.

Verse 18: When you come together . . . When believers came together it was evident that their spiritual purpose was overshadowed by self-centered, cliquish, organization into groups. Jesus described similar actions in Matthew 11:16, “like children sitting in the markets and calling out unto their fellows and saying, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you and you did not lament.’” Expecting others to conform makes divisions.

Verse 18: Divisions among you . . . factions . . . Paul heard of divisions among the brethren. They had diversities of cultures. Yet they held in common the knowledge of one God and His resurrected son, Jesus, their Lord and the Christ (1:4-8; 8:4-6). They were baptized into one body, “a communion of the body of Christ” (6:15a; 10:16). From the introduction of his letter, Paul identified the kind of factions which separated brothers and sisters in Christ, “I am of . . .” (1:12). This Paul called “carnal” and told

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symbols and gave the application which he intended us to focus on. Hebrews 7-10 is a helpful study of the meaning of the New Covenant which God established by Jesus’ death: “and for this reason, He is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, . . . that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15; compare Dan. 9:24-27).

Verse 26: For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes. Paul’s account concluded with this comment. Jesus’ focus was the same, “You know after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified” (Matt. 26:1). “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come that he should depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). Also that night, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15). The time spent sharing the bread and the cup together is a repeated reminder of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. It is also a time to look forward to Jesus’ coming again, this time not as a sin offering, but to bring us salvation (Heb. 9:28).

Verses 27-31: Therefore, whoever eats . . . unworthily. Paul cautions each believer to examine himself. Paul addressed “when you come together as a church” (11:18), that is, as “the church of God” or those called out of God. He gave no instruction to nonbelievers (“those who are outside God judges,” 5:13). Paul wrote only to those of whom he said “for us there is one God, the Father, . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ,” not to those who worshiped other gods and their idols (8:1-7). Paul addressed this Father/son relationship with a caution to be faithful children; when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord (by God our Father). Like in natural relationships, self-examination deters our Father’s examination. Through wisdom we discern the meaning of Jesus’ sacrifice and understanding the effect it has on our living for God. Paul wrote to the church in the region of Ephesus, “Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Eph. 5:1-2). His following admonitions are what the church must follow to fulfill self-examination to “prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

Verse 34: And the rest I will set in order when I come. In chapter 12 Paul considers another issue, “the things of the Spirit” and its manifestations. He

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from becoming involved, but he always insists they need to grow up into maturity (see 1 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:13-16).

Paul cites Isaiah 28:11-12, about how God’s people Israel, and presumably the Corinthian church, just would not listen. They may be intrigued by what they hear (tongues), but their hearing will not help them understand, as it is unintelligible to them.

It is clear prophetic speaking that is understood and so can be responded to by the Church. Tongues may intrigue the unbeliever (or inquirer), but will not make anything clear for him to understand. It is the prophetic speaking that informs and guides the Church. For unbelievers (or inquirers), prophetic preaching convicts of sin and thus leads to repentance and membership in the Body.

14:26-33. This tells us about their worship together. Paul mentions at least five things that took place in their worship times: 1) The use of psalms, which may or may not have been musical; 2) words of instruction, or teachings (similar to lessons or sermons?); 3) revelations (perhaps a prophesy or a personal insight); 4) tongues; 5) an interpretation (this appears to have sometimes been missing).

Edification, or building up of the believers, was to be the goal of all five. If it wasn’t edifying, it may have been discouraged.

Tongues need to be limited to no more than three. And they need to be done one at a time, not a confusing babble of sound. He adds that there must be an interpreter. That is not optional and if there is not an interpreter the tongues-speaker must be silent and speak only within oneself.

As with tongues speakers, there can be two or three prophetic utterances or teachings, We cannot know how long each teaching, or prophetic utterance, would continue, but they were to be for instruction and encouragement. This is reminiscent of what Paul wrote to Timothy regarding the purpose of God-inspired Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17) being profitable for 1) teaching, 2) reproof, or rebuke, 3) correction, 4) and instruction in righteousness. These, like the prophets’ message, or messages, would be for the building up of people, so that the people of God might be adequately equipped for every good work.

If in the middle of a prophetic message another might have a special insight into that particular message, or a revelation, he was to be allowed to stand and add that insight, or revelation, to the prophetic message.

But all of this, tongues, prophetic messages and revelations, need to be orderly, and done without confusion. Evidently that was a danger in what they had been doing, especially with tongues. God, Paul says, is not a God of disorder, but peace. Evidently the confusion of their practice of multiple

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Lesson 10

November 4, 2012

Instruction for the Church

Golden Text: “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” (1 Corinthians 14:39-40)

Key Thought: Understanding Jesus’ Plan for his Church, we need to understand our gifts, allow them to develop with the guidance of God’s Spirit, and then serve as we’ve been designed.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 14:20-40 (NIV, 2011 version)

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

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

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

²⁶ What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two – or at the most three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

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

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on the use of gifts. He says that each believer should not “think more highly” of himself than he ought to think.

Life Response

We may have misgivings about this passage on spiritual gifts, but Paul makes it clear that we ought not be ignorant about them. That God has given them to individuals in the Church is evident. It is important that we don't remain in ignorance of them. In doing so, we deny what the Lord has recorded for us through his servant Paul. It is how we use them in the church that we need to consider.

They are given for the “common good” of the Body of Christ, and they are for the benefit of the Body. So though they can be misused and abused they should be considered and each one encouraged to use his or her gift.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you define a spiritual gift, as opposed to a natural talent?
2. Do you think tongues could be done in your church in a non-divisive way?
3. Does the fact that Paul spoke in tongues more than all of those in Corinth help you think of tongues speaking more positively?
4. How would speaking in tongues edify oneself?
5. Do the problems this passage addresses with spiritual gifts make you less comfortable with them for your church?
6. Have you ever been involved with others that spoke in tongues? How did being with them make you feel? Did you or another have an interpretation?

had more to say to the church related to the “instructions” he gave them. Paul did not give church “ordinances” as the KJV translated 11:2, nor “traditions” as the NKJV translated. Rather, Paul gave the church his own life as an example to follow (11:1). He began his letter, “I determined not to know any thing among you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). He praised them for remembering him and following his instructions. He relied on this relationship for their hearing when he wrote, “I praise you not” (11:17). What he wrote, however, was not all he needed to address. He planned to visit them again (16:3) and give them more instruction. It may be noted that Paul did not address everything Jesus did the night before he was betrayed. He did not address Jesus' command recorded in John 13:14, “you also ought to wash one another's feet.” But he wrote only, “when you come together to eat [the remembrance], wait for one another.” He did not want the church separated into factions. He wanted them to serve one another in love. He expanded in chapter 13 on Jesus' “new commandment” from John 13:34, “that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” Paul instructed the church that “faith” was of great importance; so also was “hope;” but “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). He gave further instruction concerning when the church came together, “Let all things be done for edification” and “Let all things be done decently and in order” (14:26, 40). Paul concluded, “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (16:24).

Questions for Discussion

1. How do factions affect the Church and its ministry?
2. Are there “Church Ordinances” and if so have they become traditions of men?
3. What did Jesus instruct his disciples the night before he was betrayed?
4. What is the New Covenant and how does it relate to communion?
5. How can the practice of the communion service be made a more spiritual experience?
6. What did Paul instruct the church when he came again in person (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1, 10)?

14:4. Speaking in tongues builds up the individual. That could possibly result in selfishness or even arrogance. Prophecy is more useful for it benefits the entire church.

14:5. He wishes that all spoke in tongues, but he wishes more that they would prophesy for Paul insists prophecy is more valuable than are tongues, for prophecy is beneficial to all of the Church. He comes back again to reiterate that this edifies, or builds the Church, not necessarily numerically, but spiritually.

14:6. The public use of tongues apparently doesn't benefit the church much, but plain, articulate speaking, be it a revelation (a new insight), a bit of new knowledge (perhaps gleaned from reading other Scripture), or prophecy (as to the future based upon study and insight), or teaching (often intended as the application of these others) is of more value.

14:7. In playing an instrument it is the use of various notes in a harmonic sequence that pleases the ear and is understandable as a tune. To simply play many sequential notes with no intended purpose would be noise, not music.

14:8. The use of a bugle without distinct notes would not make clear it was a call to battle or for a retreat, or for some other purpose.

14:9-11. The many languages all have meaning to their sounds. But when speaking to someone who does not understand my language, my speech would be unintelligible to that person.

14:12. He comes back to the theme of what is best for the Church, not just what is special for an individual. Evidently many there were using tongues only for their own blessing and leaving others feeling bereft.

14:13-17. The spiritual gifts given to individuals are for ministering to the Body as a whole, to build it up and make it stronger and more effective. Tongues, specifically, may not accomplish that dependent on how they are used.

14:18-19. Paul wants to make sure they understand he is not saying that tongues are not to be used, for he uses them more than they do. However they must understand that speaking plainly, so all can understand, is more desirable and helpful for the Church. This must be the priority for using our spiritual gifts.

Bible Application

We have not been accustomed to having tongues speaking in our churches, so Paul's teaching on this point is difficult for us to understand. It has happened in our services, and some people speak privately in tongues. So this teaching is helpful for our churches.

Next Sunday's lesson will continue our study in chapter 12 as Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to explain how the church is to function. He likens it to the various parts functioning together.

The third lesson may seem to switch from the topic of spiritual gifts. It is on the thirteenth chapter, famously known as the “love chapter”. There Paul explains the place of love in tempering attitudes about spiritual gifts.

In the fourth lesson Paul returns very specifically to the issue of understanding and not abusing spiritual gifts. In particular strange tongues were being spoken as though raving.

Our final lesson is also taken from 1 Corinthians 14. That part of the text focuses on intelligibility and worship.

So let us begin our study of what could potentially ignite our churches, unleashing them to service.

Bible Learning

12:1. Paul first explains that we must not be unaware of this teaching (or be uninformed / ignorant of it). Evidently the church in Corinth understood this teaching incompletely, and misconceptions were causing problems in the church. The gaps in their understanding are not clearly explained here, but we can discern indications of what they may have been.

12:2. He refers back to when they were pagans. However it happened, Paul says, even mute idols deceived them.

12:3. Now they need to listen carefully as Paul explains to them these truths.

12:4-6. They needed to realize that these gifts are from the Lord. They differ in what they are, and how they are used in our ministries, but they all are from the Lord.

12:7. This verse has three important sub-points:

- 1) Each Christian is gifted. Peter had said as much in Acts 2:38-39: we must “repent and be baptized . . . and we will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Peter said this after the manifestation of the Holy Spirit with tongues of fire. Paul here explains that the gifting of the Spirit of God is manifest in different expressions.
- 2) The way God's Spirit, sent by the Lord, makes itself known in us will be quite different in its expression through us, and its effect on those with whom we come in contact.
- 3) But this will always be for the common good; we're reminded of Paul's admonition about doing good to all in Galatians 3:10, this will be to the good of mankind, and especially the household of faith.

12:8-10. Paul lists nine expressions of God in and among His people. Some suggest there are many more. One writer has said many Christians

God's Gifts to Us

Golden Text: “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Key Thought: Paul explains the source of spiritual gifts.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31a (NIV)

¹ Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

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

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

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

Introduction

We're embarking today on a series of five lessons that are all part of Paul's teaching about how the church should successfully function.

In today's lesson, based on the first part of the twelfth chapter, Paul explains the source of what we often label “spiritual gifts.” Some examples of these, like speaking in tongues, or interpreting those tongues, have caused us not to want to consider the entire scope of this important teaching.

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may have several gifts, but that usually only one or two will be greatly developed in each individual. The nine Paul lists are:

- 1) Word of wisdom (even without formal education, some have deep spiritual wisdom)
- 2) Word of knowledge (there are others that have formalized their education, as did Paul, but some may have education but lack wisdom)
- 3) Faith (though faith is to be part of all of us, this seems to indicate some have it to the nth degree)
- 4) Gifts of healing (they had experience with seeing this)
- 5) Effecting of miracles (they also saw this with Paul and others in the church)
- 6) Prophecy (speaking a word from God, sometimes about the future)
- 7) Distinguishing of spirits (the ability to sense if it is God's Spirit present, or another)
- 8) Tongues (usually presented as other human languages, but with the one other expression of Paul's in 13:1)
- 9) Interpretation of tongues (which Paul requires if tongues are present in public worship).

Sometimes we have difficulty understanding these various expressions of God among us, but clearly they all are from Him. Therefore with the Corinthian church we seek to understand how they should work among us for the common good.

12:27-31a. Paul, after the metaphor of the Body, which is in our next lesson, adds to his teaching by indicating this distinction. While we are all part of the Body of Christ and are all gifted in some way, for the common good of the Body, we will not all have the same gift or gifts. Perhaps it was one of that church's struggles that they all wanted greater (maybe meaning more spectacular) gifts, and it didn't work that way.

It is God who makes those appointments and gives those gifts to men. Their totality is for the common good of Christ's church.

After next week, when we study the metaphor of the Body of Christ, we will come back to this transition in which Paul seems to say, “Let me show you [explain to you] what really is the best way.”

Bible Application

Ignorance

Today our potential for ignorance on this topic may take a different form than it did for the Corinthians. We may avoid it because it frightens us. We may see too much division coming from it and wish to ignore it. But Paul clearly wants Christ's church to be informed, helping it be all it can be.

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It seems that the reports from when it has occurred in our church services have usually been negative, that it disrupted and didn't seem to edify or build up the church.

From what Paul writes here, the Corinthian church was dealing with many of the same things. The use of tongues was being done inappropriately and was causing problems in the church.

But we need to recognize that Paul was not forbidding their use, though he acknowledged difficulties that had arisen in Corinth. Perhaps this was because the church was somewhat new and had many immature Christians in it. If they were the tongues speakers, they seem to have offended others by having a superior attitude..

When I was teaching at Atlanta Bible College, a guest from overseas who spoke in tongues came to dinner at our home. While there he prayed over Anthony Buzzard and me, assuring us that we would surely receive that gift, which he felt was vitally important for all Christians to have. That was over ten years ago, and neither Anthony nor I have received what we were told we would. I understand that my colleague is adept in languages, such as Greek, Hebrew, German and French, but those were learned not received. Such experience is not conclusive, but it is instructive and illustrative.

In another instance we were in the midst of a wonderful time of worship in a church where I pastored. Suddenly one of our regular worshippers stood up and began to speak aloud syllables none could understand. Knowing she was a good and spiritually-minded woman gave me pause for a while as to what was appropriate for me to do. When I interrupted her and asked if she had an interpretation of what she was voicing, or if anyone else there that morning had an interpretation she was taken aback by the question. She had no interpretation, and I asked her then to refrain and sit down. Upset, she left the auditorium, but later returned apologetically.

That is an example of why Paul doesn't want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts, especially about tongues, as they often provoke confusion and upset, though they should not.

C. Peter Wagner, at a seminar I attended, explained that, though he himself spoke in tongues, it had been his experience that God blesses churches with the right attitudes about spiritual gifts whether or not their culture allows them to accept tongues. That was his opinion, that God still blesses a church utilizing what gifts they are willing to accept. That may be true for our churches, if it is correct, for we have not often dealt with tongues-speaking in our churches.

Note that Paul expressly says not all speak in tongues, and not all have the same gifts. Read over his words in 1 Corinthians 12:27-31. It would also be helpful to consider Paul's words in Romans 12:3-8 for more information

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inquirer, say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.

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

Introduction

This fourth lesson in Paul's teaching on spiritual giftedness moves us deeper into an understanding of how Christ's Church was designed to work. It is always to be led and guided by Christ, its head. But it is God, his Father, who had the Plan and, in fact, organizes us who are Christ's Body.

Again we are reminded that:

- 1) God does not want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts;
- 2) Every Christian has one or more gifts to be used in the Church;
- 3) Those gifts are to be used for the common good of the Body;
- 4) By each part using his or her unique gift(s), the Body of Christ will function effectively, as does the human body, when its parts all work harmoniously.
- 5) But for it all to work, each part must be undergirded with a caring love, not a love of self, but of others.
- 6) This love outranks even faith and hope and is absolutely essential for the Body, Christ's Church, to work together effectively and harmoniously, which it must do if it is to proclaim the Kingdom message to the world.

Bible Learning

Intelligible Worship

Paul now returns to the place of tongues, which appears to have been divisive. Some thought exhibiting this gift showed them as superior Christians. Paul is having to straighten out their thinking. Notice:

14:1. Desiring spiritual gifts is good, but it is love that ought to be desired and pursued for it tempers the danger that was evident in their midst

14:2. Tongues are directed to God, a way of communicating with Him, not communicating with the Church. Some would point to Romans 8:25-27, and indicate that these “groanings” refer to speaking to God in a tongue, or language we do not understand.

14:3. While tongues may not be understandable, even to the speaker, prophecy is understood by all. It is good for three things: 1) Edification, or building up people in the Body; 2) Exhortation, to encourage action on the part of the people of the Church; 3) Consolation, which reminds us of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.

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Receiving and Using Wisely

Golden Text: “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” (1 Corinthians 14:39-40)

Key Thought: Understanding Jesus’ plan for his Church, we need to understand our gift(s), allow them to develop, with the guidance of God’s Spirit, and then serve as we’ve been designed.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-19 (NIV)

¹ Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.

³ But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. ⁴ Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? ⁷ Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? ⁸ Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.

¹⁰ Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. ¹¹ If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. ¹² So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

¹³ For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. ¹⁶ Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an

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13:1-3

Paul compares the importance of this love to some of the various gifts. Without this love for one another and for the Lord, our gifts fail.

Paul speaks of two types of tongues, the tongues of men and of angels. This is the only time in the Bible that the phrase, “the tongues of angels” occurs although the words of angels are recorded throughout the scriptures. Do either of these tongues represent the tongues mentioned in the previous chapter? We don’t really know, but the greater point is that no matter what we speak if we have not love the words are worth no more than a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. We will look more at the spiritual gift of tongues in the next two lessons.

Paul also addresses the gift of prophecy, and perhaps wisdom and knowledge, adding a reference to the gift of faith (not faith that all Christians have, but extraordinary faith as a gift). Then he also adds two other spiritual gifts, what has been termed “voluntary poverty” (such as shown by Mother Teresa), and the spiritual gift termed “martyrdom.” Without love even these extraordinary callings are meaningless, and count nothing. You can see what stress Paul is placing on the basic, foundational principle of love for one another.

13:4-7

Paul stays with his contention that Christian love solves the problems that can be created by misunderstanding these gifts from God:

- 1) The gifts we have are determined by God, not by us wanting the more spectacular and seemingly more important gifts;
- 2) As gifts are determined by God, we cannot take pride in having this or that gift;
- 3) When Christians have and express the kind of love described here, the jealousy and competition that may occur is greatly lessened; and
- 4) Each Christian delights in playing her or his part in the service of Christ.

13:8-12

This portion of Scripture has been interpreted in two differing ways. Some see this as evidence that these gifts were to cease to be a part of the Church as it developed. This position is called “Cessationism,” indicating an understanding that these ceased. Usually it is thought that they ceased with the completion of the canon of the New Testament, or with the passing of the last Apostle.

The difficulty with that position is that while some gifts, such as tongues, may seem less evident, other gifts such as faith and possible prophecy are

Understanding the Lord’s teaching for us in our part of the Body and applying it to our part of the Body will bring us his blessing, the blessing he has for us.

To each one is given

If Paul’s statement is so, and it is always unwise to question the testimony of Scripture, then we must accept that to each one is given a gift that is to be used for the common good of the Body.

Nine gifts are named here; there is no indication that idleness or inactivity is given to any of God’s people. Unfortunately, too many Christians are unsure of having received a spiritual gift, or gifts. It isn’t that they don’t want to serve, but have never understood how it is that they have been gifted to function as part of the Body of Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-10 comes to mind. Paul explains how we’re saved by grace and not by works, so none of us can boast regarding being people who have expectations of being in the coming Kingdom of God. Our expectation is due to God and not due to anything we have to offer. Then Paul says: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Obviously he speaks of our new lives in Christ. Notice that the newly created being is God’s workmanship. What He has created us to be may even differ from that which we were. We expect our characters and our characteristics to be different as believers. So, too, may be our gifts.

The variety of spiritual gifts

As was briefly mentioned in our Bible discussion, many Bible teachers suggest there may be many more than the nine gifts Paul identifies here. Suffice it to say that these nine may be specifically what the church in Corinth needs to “succeed.”

And we can consider how these nine may also be needed in our own church. Perhaps not all of them. One well-known leader said, “God only gives to a church those gifts it can accept.” That was his experience, but there is no Scripture to suggest that.

Can you identify people in your church with any of those nine varieties of spiritual gifts?

- 1) Wisdom and Knowledge may be expected in your pastor and perhaps the elders.
- 2) Those gifts of Faith, maybe Healing, possibly Prophecy (if by it is meant forth-telling and fore-telling), and perhaps Miracles.
- 3) Distinguishing of spirits is difficult to understand, but in this author’s personal experience there have been times when, without words being

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By Way of Illustration

Golden Text: “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” (1 Corinthians 12:14, 18)

Key Thought: God’s Plan for the Body of Christ is clear.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NRSV)

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Introduction

This lesson continues Paul’s discussion of how the Church is to work. In the last lesson we became aware of the idea of spiritual gifts in each Christian, sometimes never identified.

used, it became apparent that an individual was not being led by a godly Spirit.

- 4) The gifts of Tongues and the Interpretation of Tongues are not customarily experienced in our churches. If they have been they have sometimes been divisive. Divisive because we don't understand their need today, or those who speak in tongues may have no concept of other biblical teachings, or it may be that the Lord has decided it would not be beneficial to us. But it is difficult to deny it as a possibility, should God give it.

Determining which gift you may have been given by God seems to be something for each church and each Christian to consider. Paul said he spoke in tongues more than all of those in Corinth, and then he adds an imperative "but", which we will study in our fourth lesson in this series.

Life Response

Church is not supposed to just "happen", our Lord planned for how the Church would function, and we need to follow that plan.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do most churches operate by utilizing spiritual gifts? Does yours?
2. Why are some leaders or officers selected who are not a good fit for their office?
3. What basis is used in selecting who should be leaders in your church? Does it often depend on how they may be gifted by God?
4. How might you discover what your gift or gifts might be, since all Christians are gifted?
5. Can a church today actually operate by utilizing gifts?
6. What changes would have to be made in your church to better utilize gifts in ministry?

For believers not to have identified how they have been gifted by God does not invalidate their position with God through Christ. Not at all. A person may have made a valid decision to become a Christian, to have repented of sin, been baptized into Christ, and then risen and walked in newness of life looking forward to the Kingdom. But it may mean that some people have not discovered God's perfect plan for their individual lives.

Some might contend that there is a general purpose for all Christians to fulfill, but not specific purposes for each individual Christian. But in this chapter Paul makes the point that God determines what each one is to have and that each Christian is to have at least one gift to use in some ministry (v. 7-12). To clarify this teaching Paul uses an extended metaphor of the human body.

Look at our text for today, and note how Paul's four points clarify his teaching of how the Church is to work.

Bible Learning

12:12-14

Paul first made a point about the Corinthians' own human bodies. Each body has individual parts, it may have two hands, one tongue, two lungs, one heart, yet it is easily understood that all the individual parts make up one body. Paul adds that he is applying this to Christ, it isn't just about individuals.

Originally they were Greeks or Jews, and may have been slave or free, but they came into Christ through God's Spirit when they were "created" or "re-created" in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). One and the same Spirit of God united them and us (see 4:4-6).

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul used the metaphor of a building to describe the Church, here he uses the metaphor of a body to convey his teaching. While each part has similarities, there are also distinct differences and purposes with each part, those disparate parts are to work together as one body.

12:15-20

The teaching Paul conveys is absurdly simple, as he uses the body to illustrate. We instinctively know that the wrist cannot decide it would rather be a lung. It cannot be a lung. There are some parts that can perhaps "make-do" as the result of an injury, such as one hand learning to write because the other hand can no longer do so. But disparate parts, even if they might be utilized for another role, cannot make that decision. Paul explains that it would be a decision and determination God makes, no body part makes that decision.

still recognizable. To hear preaching on the second coming of Christ certainly is prophetic, as we are called to watch for the signs of the times.

Also, it is clear that knowledge is still with us. It is not "done away." However some think this "knowledge" may be something extraordinary, beyond knowing educationally.

It seems to be Paul's intention to make clear that though gifts may not be fully apparent in each church, the more important and fundamental principle is that Christian love must be pre-eminent in the Church. If a church is filled with love for one another the issues Paul is addressing regarding the abuse of gifts tend to disappear or at least be minimized.

13:13

Paul concludes this part of his teaching by stressing the pre-eminence of Christian love. While "faith" and "hope" remain important it is love that must be the pre-eminent characteristic for the Church, and for each member.

Bible Application

We love the beauty, even the magnificence of this Scripture, and it is one that is often and appropriately used in our wedding ceremonies. But taking it from its context does not allow an appreciation of its importance within the entire teaching of spiritual giftedness in chapters 12-14.

Gifts misused can cause division and confusion in a church. Some Christians would use their gift, which may be apparent to all, to make themselves of more importance than others whose gifts are less evident.

This danger is minimized by realizing that love is what binds together all the parts of the Body to make it work as God intended it to work. Love is essential to the successful functioning of the Body of Christ. We know that, but it must be apparent in how we treat one another.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why might we rate some people's gifts as more worthwhile than others'?
2. Which characteristics of love (v. 4-7) seem hardest for you to exhibit? Which one(s) have been easiest?
3. Paul says "Love never fails". Contrast that to the notion of romantic love that seems to come and go, are we talking about different kinds of love?
4. Paul states that love is the greatest among faith, hope and love – how do we go about helping people around us increase their love for others? How do we do that in ourselves?

2) The Lord decides and gives to each the gift for which He designed us (note Ephesians 2:8-10).

3) When individual parts of the Body do not fully exercise and use their particular gifts, the Body of Christ is ineffective as each of those parts weakens the overall success of the entire Body.

Now Paul feels the need to explain how this is to be avoided.

Bible Learning

Having taught the Corinthians about Spiritual Gifts, not wanting them to remain unlearned (12:1), Paul now moves into the teaching that further clarifies and tempers excesses that apparently disrupted that church.

The way most of our Bibles have been divided into chapters and verses is sometimes confusing. They are not clearly shown in manuscripts; they are an attempt by translators to help us understand. But sometimes they suggested unfortunate transitions. This may be one of those places.

It appears best to see the end of 12:31, about the "excellent way", as continuing into the subject of chapter 13. Misuse of gifts with the church's lack of understanding led to some gifts being rated as more important, and consequently those with these gifts were often thought of as highly favored by the Lord to have received this or that gift.

In chapter 12 Paul explained to the Corinthians that there are different gifts, all from the same source, and that not all Christians are given the same gifts and thus will not be expected to do the same ministries in the church. The Corinthians did not understand this, and some were preening when they thought they had seemingly superior gifts. Paul says such pride is wrong.

It is this matter of love. This is often called "the love chapter," for the superiority of love supersedes and ought to be the guiding principle for use of these Spiritual Gifts. Love for one another must be the first thing between Christian brothers and sisters of the faith.

The gifts are a wondrous blessing from God and He decides which gift we ought to have for the most successful functioning of the Body. Paul affirms the importance of spiritual gifts by saying that we should eagerly desire the "greater gifts", but then goes on to say that there is a more excellent way.

In chapter twelve's metaphorical usage each body part (the arms, the eyes, the lungs, etc.) has its task in the full functioning of the Body, but without this greater way the Body would not function successfully. We might liken what Paul goes on to explain in chapter 13 to the blood in a human body. Each part of the Body could not function without the blood which supplies each part with its strength and life. If the flow of blood to the body parts is disrupted, the entire body is also disrupted.

The Fundamental Principle

Golden Text: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Key Thought: Before determining what our gifts may be, we need first to understand the basic principle of *agape* love.

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13 (NIV)

^{12:31b} And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

^{13:1} If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

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

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

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

Introduction

In our previous lessons, Paul in chapter twelve revealed principles, namely that:

1) Spiritual Gifts are from God and are for our good.

To deny that is to refuse to believe the Bible. Paul, too, insists we ought not be ignorant of these truths.

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An individual worker in a vineyard would expect the owner to assign him to his tasks. He would not inform the owner of the vineyard what tasks he, the worker, would do that day. It is the responsibility of the owner to assign tasks to the workers.

12:21-26

Paul goes on in his explanation of the Body as metaphor. He wanted the Corinthian church to understand that each part in the Body is important to the best functioning of the body. He uses the “eye” and “hand”, and then compares the “head” and the “feet.” They cannot operate independently, as those in the Church there would immediately understand. The “eye” sees, but it cannot pick up something, as can the “hand.” While the “head” can want to move somewhere, that requires the cooperation of the “feet.” So while the “feet” seem independent of the “head”, and the “hand” independent of the “eye,” for the most efficient operation they all need to work together to accomplish the “task” desired by the body.

12:27-31

Of course they could now see what Paul was teaching. Yes, they had many different gifts, it was quite clear that not every one has the same gifts. God has decided which gifts are to reside in which individual parts, with all of them to function together for the Body to fully succeed as designed.

In the third lesson, next Sunday, we see Paul wanting to make sure they understand this teaching clearly.

Bible Application

12:12-14

The issue of the unity of the Body of Christ becomes paramount, for when parts of the Body decide to operate independently factions can and do form. Each group may insist their part should be the most important for the well-being of the Body.

Often among our churches the division may be between some who are considered “family” and others who are not. Or the distinction may be between ages, where the younger generation feels like the older generation is stifling them in their joyful service, whereas the older generation fears the younger members may embrace practices and even doctrines that would weaken the church.

How can the natural divisions be wisely resolved? Even the New Testament church struggled with this sort of issue in Acts 6.

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How can the natural divisions be wisely resolved? Even the New Testament church struggled with this sort of issue in Acts 6.

12:15-20

We could think of this as like when one teacher doesn't want to cooperate with the pastor's leadership, or the youth leader wants to hold a dance for the kids' youth rally and the church elders disagree with that, and the youth and youth leaders begin to murmur.

This issue was present in Acts 6:1, but Paul has also mentioned it in 1 Corinthians 10:10. And it is especially clear in Jude 16. This murmuring is divisive and threatens the full functioning of the church.

In certain instances a body which has experienced the loss of an arm's use makes adjustments to cope with that, though it cannot fully overcome that loss. Even less function is possible when a person is confined to a wheelchair, though the muscles of the arms and chest can make great efforts at compensating for the loss of the legs.

12:21-26

Paul's further comparisons deepen our understanding when he talks about parts of the body that are unseen, yet may be more important to healthy functioning. This can be true for the church as a Body.

Few people think daily about how their liver is working, until some day when it is not, yet probably every day they take care of their hair. Their hair has little to do with the functioning of their body, but if their liver begins to fail, their entire body has weakened functioning, and it can even be fatal. We seldom think about the functioning of our internal organs, but their full functioning is usually far more important than are unshaven whiskers, or an unpowdered nose.

12:27-31

But often today, though we recognize physical disparities among us, it seems more difficult to accept that we have differing spiritual gifts, and that each of us has at least one gift to be used for the full and successful functioning of the Body.

Determining what our particular gift might be takes on more importance when we realize if we do not function and use our gift as God intended, we are responsible for the less-than-stellar functioning of our church, the Body of Christ. Here it is useful to review Ephesians 2:10 again.

Life Response

Paul takes three chapters to address this issue for the church in Corinth. Often the focus is on 1 Corinthians 13, the beautiful love chapter, but taking it away from its context between chapters twelve and fourteen misses Paul's

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primary point of how Christ's people ought to be functioning *together in unity* for the success of Christ's Body, His church.

Next Sunday our lesson will further explain how love brings the entirety of Christ's church to completeness.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is it that churches have so many squabbles within that minimize their effectiveness?
2. Why would operating as Paul suggests minimize differences among "brethren"?
3. Is it difficult to accept having what seems to be a lesser gift? How can we honor the giftedness of each person?
4. If you are utilizing a gift from God, are you satisfied doing so? How have you seen evidence of this being your gift, or area for service?
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