



## Class Notes

# 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1-16

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Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthians to a specific group of people with unique challenges in their community. The letter touches on self-image, identity, pride, insecurity, sex, marriage, singleness, leadership, church gatherings, and theologies of man and woman. Explore the historical context, sociological background, and the key themes in Paul's letter to the Corinthians and its applicability to followers of Jesus today.

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# Table of Contents

## **Module 1: Introduction to 1 Corinthians**

[Session 1: Background and Summary of the Letter](#)

[Session 2: Themes and Foundations of 1 Corinthians](#)

## **Module 2: The Spirit and the Mature Christian**

[Session 3: Christ and the Spirit](#)

[Session 4: A Mature Body](#)

## **Module 3: Sexuality, Singleness, and Marriage**

[Session 5: Sexual Immorality Inside the Church](#)

[Session 6: The Importance of the Body](#)

[Session 7: Marriage, Singleness, and Slavery](#)

## **Module 4: Food Sacrifices, Freedom, and the Lord's Supper**

[Session 8: Food Sacrificed to Idols](#)

[Session 9: Remembrance as Participation](#)

[Session 10: The Lord's Supper](#)

## **Module 5: Spiritual Gifts and Love**

[Session 11: Spiritual Gifts and the Body of Christ](#)

[Session 12: The Greatest of These Is Love](#)

## **Module 6: Tongues and Prophecy**

[Session 13: The Higher Gifts](#)

[Session 14: A Challenging Passage on Tongues](#)

[Session 15: The Order of Public Worship](#)

## **Module 7: The Puzzle of Head Coverings**

[Session 16: Questioning the Text](#)

[Session 17: Possible Solutions](#)

[Session 18: Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#)

## **Module 8: The Resurrection and Christian Faith**

[Session 19: The Things of First Importance](#)

[Session 20: The Resurrection of the Dead](#)

[Session 21: The Triumph of Christ](#)

[Session 22: The Resurrected Body](#)

[Session 23: Reflecting on 1 Corinthians](#)



# Module 1: Introduction to 1 Corinthians

## SESSIONS 1-2

Dive into the setting, historical context, and cultural background of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

# Session 1: Background and Summary of the Letter

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## Key Takeaways

- The New Testament epistle writers address churches in specific cities or geographical regions, all of which have their own characters, problems, cultural issues, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Paul's aim in the letter is to bring the Corinthian church to maturity in its thinking and practices.
- Honor-shame cultures, like that of the Corinthian church, place particular stress on tradition, relationships, and hierarchy.
- The church at Corinth has reverted to cultural norms of tradition, relationship, and hierarchy, which also means segregation and division.

## Background and Summary of the Letter

All Scripture was written in a particular place at a particular time by particular people. And all of Scripture is revelatory for us to understand the nature of God and his purposes for his people. So what we read in the Bible is both particular to its time and has universal import.

But God's revelation comes to us in and through the particular, presented through an existing cultural lens. This is true of 1 Corinthians, and perhaps even more so than with other texts.

Epistles are written to specific churches in specific cities or geographical regions, all of which have their own characters, problems, cultural issues, strengths, and weaknesses. Attempting to understand some of these is a challenge for us as we piece together clues from the text.

## Approaching the Text: Reading a Letter

In order to understand what this very specific letter written to a group of people 2,000 years ago might say to us, we need to locate the letter in its own context. This is true of all Scripture, but it is quite challenging with the letters because they are correspondence.

This means that the letters are even more specifically located than some of the other literature in the Bible that assumes a more universal audience, such as Proverbs, Psalms, or the history books. Also, we only have half of the correspondence or "conversation," so we don't know what was written in response or even written first.

The process of reading a particular text that was written 2,000 years ago in a language that none of us speak to people who didn't live like us and applying that text to today in our cultural settings requires quite a lot of work!

We must situate the text in its context and try to work out what it meant to its original hearers and how they would have interpreted it. We must think through what the author might have meant back then and how it might have been received by the recipients. Based on that, we need to ask ourselves what does and doesn't apply directly to us. Then, if we believe something does apply, we need to think through what that looks like in our own world and what we should do about it.

## **The Hermeneutical Process**

*Translation, interpretation, reception, and application*

The hermeneutical process happens on two levels—how this process was undergone in the ancient world (i.e., how Paul wrote and the Corinthians received and applied this letter) and the modern world (i.e., how we interpret, receive, and apply this letter) and how the two intersect.

We might intuitively feel that we know a lot about how the people in the first churches lived, but in fact, we know very little of their day-to-day lives. So we piece things together like a puzzle.

And in order to piece the puzzle together, we use scholarship and our imaginations. We construct a background from historical and archaeological discoveries as well as cross-referencing to other texts, which helps make sense of this text to us.

However, we can't escape making connections through what we already know. We read texts through our prior knowledge and experience, so we never come to them unencumbered. That's why we talk about "baggage."

First of all, we all need to admit that there are things we're going to bring to the text. We need to say, "Here's me with my background, my baggage, my expectations, and my preconceived ideas or prior assumptions."

What am I likely to hear if it's me listening to the text? And what might I miss?

## **The Setting: Ancient Corinth**

Paul found himself in a significant city in Greece in the middle of the Roman Empire. Corinth still exists today, although new Corinth is a few miles northeast of old Corinth.



EcoChap (2011). Isthmus of Corinth. [Wikipedia](#).

Corinth was the political capital of the province of Achaia in the Roman Empire. It was destroyed in 146 B.C.E. as a result of a rebellion by the Greeks and rebuilt by Julius Caesar 100 years later, around 44 B.C.E., when it was founded as a Roman colony.

The Romans imposed new city plans, architecture, political organization, and ethos. These changes made it a very different city from when it had been Greek. Corinth was geographically in Greece but culturally Roman in terms of its religion and values, and it became a strategic and thriving third city after Rome and Alexandria.

As you can see on the map, it was very strategically placed, located between the Peloponnese and mainland Greece. Corinth controlled the overland movement between Italy and Asia, and ships used to go through on rollers rather than taking the long water route around. As a port and a trade center, there was great wealth and also great poverty. In addition to this, there was also a thriving trade in prostitution as well as just general sexual license. It was known to be a place of sexual immorality.

Corinth was a thriving, multiethnic, multicultural port, and as a trade route, it was a wealthy city from tariffs and commerce. By the first century, Corinth had become the foremost commercial center in southern Greece. It was also the site of the Isthmian Games—a biennial athletic competition second only to the Olympic games.

Who did they worship? Corinth was influenced by the imperial cult (the emperor) and pagan worship (Roman and Greek gods and the Egyptian Isis cult).

Corinth was populated by Roman freedmen, indigenous Greeks, immigrants, and Jews, but it was a predominantly Roman city. People came to Corinth to settle and make money. They were not the aristocracy of the ancient world, but more “new money,” people who had made their wealth and who were moving up the social ladder.

## Historical Context of the Letter

Three important questions to locate the text.

1. When was this written?
2. To whom was it written?

### 3. Why was it written?

It was definitely written by Paul. It is one of his earliest letters, and it was definitely written to the church in Corinth. Acts 18 gives us some historical background which helps us locate the letter.

- Gallio was the proconsul of Achaia, so that helps us to date the letter.
- Paul spent 18 months there on his second missionary journey in 49-51 C.E.
- The church was probably established in February or March 50 C.E. by Paul, but Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy also accompanied him (cf. [1 Thess. 1:1](#); [2 Cor. 1:19](#)).

## The Corinth Congregation

We think it was a congregation of about 50-100 people, and they would have met in homes.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he went first to the Jews. He stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, who were also tentmakers like him and they worked together. As a port city, there would have been a need for tents, awnings, sails, and repairs. When Paul was rejected by the Jews, he moved on to stay with a Roman citizen, Titius Justus, who was a worshiper of God and whose house was next door to the synagogue ([Acts 18:7](#)).

Paul was in the middle of a thriving, ancient metropolis full of hustle and bustle. As he preached the Gospel to the Jews in the synagogue, he aggravated some of the Jews and they wanted him to be punished by Gallio, but Gallio refused. Paul escaped, and they beat Sosthenes instead. Then the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision one night and encouraged him to keep speaking and not stay silent. He promised Paul that he would be protected while he was in Corinth because the Lord had many people in the city ([Acts 18:9-10](#)). From this it seems that others evangelized Corinth before Paul—probably Priscilla and Aquila?

Paul planted a multicultural church in a multicultural city.

- Jews: Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus
- Romans: Fortunatus, Quartus, Justus
- Greeks: Stephanus, Achaica/us, Erastus

After 18 months, Paul left Corinth and set sail for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila. They landed in Ephesus where he stayed for a short time and then left but promised to return to them if God willed. Priscilla and Aquila stayed in Ephesus, and Paul went on to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Antioch ([Acts 18:18-22](#)).

After ministering to the churches in Asia Minor, Paul then returned to Ephesus, where he stayed for two years. While he was there, he began to hear reports about the Corinthian church that caused him some concern. These reports from “Chloe’s people” inform him of divisions, jealousy, strife, and immorality within the church.

Paul has already written to them (we don’t know how many times), and they have written back at least once ([1 Cor. 5:9-11](#)). Paul probably wrote back to the Corinthians from Ephesus somewhere between 51-55 C.E. (scholars are not sure about the exact year). So the letter we call First Corinthians is actually second Corinthians or maybe even third. We don’t really know.

Paul is writing this letter primarily to correct them on both their thinking and their practices. This letter would have been read aloud in public to the whole church, maybe even multiple times.

# Summary of the Letter

Paul's aim is to bring the Corinthian church to maturity in their thinking and practices.

The tone of his letter is a harsh admonishment for their departure from Paul's original teaching and practices, as well as a response to their reply to his original letter. Paul is writing to them regarding certain practices that have become acceptable or normative in his absence that he passionately disagrees with and wants to correct them on.

For the most part, Paul's corrections are not mild suggestions but forthright and authoritative directives.

"The whole first epistle was written ... not with ink but with gall. It is passionate, indignant, scornful, threatening, harsh; and with respect to each of its various charges, it is directed against certain individuals as chief offenders."

Tertullian (1959). [\*Treatises on Penance. Ancient Christian Writers\*](#) 28. Paulist. 90-91.

Gordon Fee also argues that 1 Corinthians is more than a mild corrective.

"[T]he language and style of 1 Corinthians are especially rhetorical and combative. Paul is taking them on at every turn. There is little to suggest that he is either informing or merely correcting; instead, he is attacking and challenging with all the weapons in his literary arsenal."

Fee, Gordon E. (1991). [\*The First Epistle to the Corinthians\*](#). Eerdmans. 5-6.

It is forceful, but not unkind.

## **1 Corinthians 4:14-15 NRSV**

<sup>14</sup> I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup> For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

So the purpose is to warn them, to save them, and to bring them to a mature, Christ-like path where they can be true witnesses to Jesus. And Paul touches on multiple issues.

1. Division among the leaders and the congregation and squabbles between them
2. Their understanding of the cross and the Spirit
3. Their understanding of apostleship and leadership, authority and power
4. Their view of themselves as the spiritual ones, or the "top dogs" in spiritual terms, and what that looked like
5. Their understanding of sex, marriage, and singleness
6. Food sacrificed to idols and visiting temples
7. Their understanding and practice of spiritual gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit among them
8. Legal disputes among believers, which they took to secular courts for arbitration
9. Their treatment of the poor and women
10. Their understanding of the resurrection, eternity, and what that means for life and the cosmos in the here and now

11. The relationship of Jesus to the Father, although the language in 1 Corinthians refers mostly to Christ and God

He addresses theological, ecclesiological, doctrinal, and pastoral issues. It's an extraordinary letter and an amazing window into the early church and into Paul. It's full of wisdom, correction, insights, and revelation about the nature of God, pastoral care, and even includes personal testimony from Paul.

The book is gritty, real, and honest, and, at times, we see Paul pouring out his heart. Paul is addressing friends—people he converted, lived with for 18 months, disciplined, raised up into leadership—who now in his absence have gone off the rails in particular ways. He wants to call them back to truth and sanity and to a healthy, functional, Christ-centered, and Spirit-filled community.

The book is also amazingly contemporary. 1 Corinthians touches on issues of self-image; identity; pride and insecurity; sex, marriage, and singleness; leadership; church gatherings; and theologies of man and woman.

It addresses practices in church such as how we handle the Lord's Supper and charismatic gifts. It explores what it means to love one another, as well as issues of inequality and injustice. It covers major doctrinal questions about the nature of God, the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the cross and the resurrection, and the work of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians speaks to us today. It speaks into our situations, our lives together, the way we run our churches, and the way we treat each other. It has a whole theology of the church and how Christians should or could engage with the world.

And the letter concludes with powerful statements about the centrality and non-negotiability of the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith and the foundation of the Christian life. 1 Corinthians gives us a totally uncompromising vision of what it means to declare that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and that he alone is Lord.

Now we turn to an important backdrop.

## Before We Begin: We Can't Know Everything

"[New Testament scholars] assume that the basic beliefs and practices of the first-century world within which the church members lived are relatively easy to establish and describe, and that consequently one can discover with a significant degree of certainty such things as the causes of conflict over the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11 or the origins of the disagreement over the nature and necessity of the resurrection body in 1 Cor. 15."

Meggitt, Justin J. (2004). "Sources: Use, Abuse and Neglect: The Importance of Ancient Popular Culture." [\*Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church\*](#). Ed. D. Horrell and E. Adams. Westminster John Knox Press. 242.

He also makes the point that we rely on elite sources.

“It is important to remember that for all the claims some scholars make, we still have no idea of some of the most basic features of Greek and Roman life in the first century as it would affect the Corinthians. If we do not even know what a slave in Corinth wore should we really be so confident in assuming we can know what they thought or how they may have been expected to behave in different social contexts?”

Meggitt, Justin J. (2004). “Sources: Use, Abuse and Neglect: The Importance of Ancient Popular Culture.” [Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church](#). Ed. D. Horrell and E. Adams. Westminster John Knox Press. 252.

In addition to this, Paul evokes very strong reactions in people! He can command either great love and loyalty or great loathing. Very few people are indifferent to Paul. Some ignore him, some hate him, and some people think that he endorses everything they already think.

We are also capable of projecting onto him things we wish were true about him. We should come with some caution about what we don't know, but there are some things we do know.

## Honor-Shame in an Honor-Shame Society

For material on honor-shame in general and particularly in Romans, see *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission* by Brad Vaughn (formerly Jackson Wu).

What does it mean to be in an honor-shame society?

When you're in an honor-shame society, the one thing you want to possess is honor, and the last thing you want to have is shame. Honor is a prized possession, and you will do anything to gain it and keep it.

Vaughn writes that when a whole culture is governed by the honor-shame paradigm, it is one where people have a “heightened sensitivity to honor-shame dynamics” and that these cultures are ones that have a particular stress on tradition, relationship, and hierarchy. “These three factors shape a person's social status or ‘face’” (Vaughn, 2019).

In the ancient world, wealth and freedom were signs of honor. Giving publicly was something people aspired to.

The inscription to Junia Theodora at Corinth in 43 C.E. is a good example.

“The people of Patara (in Lycia) have decreed: Whereas Junia Theodora, a Roman resident in Corinth, a woman held in highest honour ... who copiously supplied from her own means many of our citizens with generosity, and received them in her home and in particular never ceased acting on behalf of our citizens in regard to any favour asked—the majority of citizens have gathered in assembly to offer testimony on her behalf. They agree to vote to commend her and urge her to increase her generosity towards the city in the knowledge that our people also would not cease in their good will and gratitude to her and would do everything for the excellence and the glory that she deserved.”

Pleket 8, excerpts. Lefkowitz, Mary R. and Fant, Maureen B. (2016). [Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation](#). Bloomsbury Academic. 192.

This public giving linked to honor puts Jesus' commands about giving in private in context ([Matt. 6:3](#); [Luke 11:42-43](#)).

## Greek, Roman, and Jewish Honor-Shame Codes

Greeks, Romans, and Jews had slightly different honor-shame codes. For example, in all three groups it was dishonorable to eat with certain people. The Romans and Greeks would not mix rich and poor, slave and free, sometimes men and women. The Jews would not mix with the Gentiles. However, Romans ate together with their wives, Greeks did not, and the Greeks and Romans had quite different standards with regard to sexual morality, homosexuality, and marriage which were altogether different from the Jews.

Jesus, of course, broke all the honor-shame codes and taboos spectacularly, which was why he was so deeply offensive. He had no regard for the honor-shame culture into which he was born when it came to who would eat with whom. He deliberately used the table and the people he shared meals with to make his point: women, prostitutes, tax collectors, the unclean. He redefined relationships, tradition, and hierarchies to spend time with the shameful and shamed himself in doing so.

In an honor-shame society, you could earn honor through:

- Patronage (giving large amounts of money to the upkeep of the city or a statue or a building)
- Marriage, wealth, what your household looked like
- Cultivation of connections
- Oratory (impressive public speaking)

## Oratory Honor

The Romans and the Greeks both valued skillful oratory and rhetoricians (people who were clever with words). They both valued the "wise," the philosophers. They also had a practice of following a great orator and becoming one of their disciples.

Stephen Pogoloff suggests that the division within the church at Corinth was related to rhetoric or cultural wisdom.

"In Hellenistic culture, perceptions of one's rhetorical, cultural wisdom are an important determinate of status. Thus, the divisions were rivalries for the status of having the wisest teacher. ... We can make best sense of the text if we imagine the problems to have arisen not among the highest or lowest levels of society, but among those with social pretensions who were most concerned with gaining a greater share of honor and most sensitive to insults which brought shame."

Pogoloff, Stephen (1992). [Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians](#). Society of Biblical Literature. 237, 255.

Being a Christian would bring you into direct conflict with your cultural values in the ancient world. Paul thought it should! But the Corinthians were living with one foot, sometimes both feet, firmly planted in their own world. Jewish, Roman, and Greek cultures were all highly stratified, hierarchical, and bounded cultures, and so was the church at Corinth.

# The Corinthian Personalities

What were the people in the church like from what we can gather from the letter? They were gifted and spiritual, and Paul calls them the *pneumatikoi* (the “Spirit-people”), and we think they were also calling themselves that. They were not lacking in any spiritual gift and were clearly also arrogant, egotistical, divisive, hierarchical, and competitive. They were boastful, superior, and thought they were at the top of the spiritual mountain, even perhaps having reached angelic status.

And they were still deeply affected by their own honor-shame culture. The churches at Corinth had reverted to cultural norms of tradition, relationship, and hierarchy, which also meant segregation and division.

## The Corinthian Church and Syncretism

In this letter, scholars see shades of influence from these thought worlds:

- Jewish wisdom theology
- Stoicism
- Cynicism
- Perhaps the beginnings of something like Gnosticism (proto-Gnosticism), but we’re not really sure

“Paul was responding to problems which were created by the influence of secular ethics or social conventions on this nascent Christian community. They may have crept into the church imperceptibly and grown with the passage of time.”

Winter, Bruce W. (2001). [\*After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change\*](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source (Illustrated edition). 4.

“Some or perhaps many Christians in Corinth still carried over into their Christian existence many of the cultural traits that characterized their pre-Christian culture, including attitudes of competitiveness, self-promotion, self-congratulation, and an over-valuing of ‘success.’”

Thiselton, Anthony (2006). “The Significance of Recent Research on 1 Corinthians.” *Neotestamentica* 40 (2). 327.

“The church is not a cohesive community but a club, whose meetings provide important moments of spiritual insight and exaltation, but do not have global implications of moral or social change. The Corinthians could gladly participate in this church as one segment of their lives. But the segment, however important, is not the whole and not the centre. Their perception of their church and of the significance of their faith could correlate well with a life-style which remained fully integrated in Corinthian society. ... Their religious ethos permits an involvement in the church which does not entail significant social and moral realignment.”

Barclay, John (1992). “Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 95.

But this was a matter of pride to them. “Their spirit-filled lives are not an early experience of the future; they simply consider themselves to have reached the heights of human potential” (Barclay, 1992).

But for Paul, what they are doing and how they are doing it is anathema. He says in 1 Corinthians 11:17, “Your meetings do more harm than good!”

## Nevertheless, “To the Saints ...”

But given all this and the background in Corinth, he says this at the beginning of the letter.

### **1 Corinthians 1:2-3 NRSV**

<sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **1 Corinthians 1:2 The Message**

I send this letter to you in God’s church at Corinth, believers cleaned up by Jesus and set apart for a God-filled life.

## Reflection Question

We read texts through our prior knowledge and experience, so we never come to any text unencumbered or without “baggage.” What are some of your expectations, preconceived ideas, or prior assumptions about 1 Corinthians? What impressions of Paul as a man, apostle, or pastor are you bringing into this class?

# Session 2: Themes and Foundations of 1 Corinthians

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## Key Takeaways

- Paul addresses the Corinthian leaders' harmful immaturity and misguided behavior.
- Paul uses a Greek rhetorical structure in 1 Corinthians to make his case and persuade his readers.
- As a letter, 1 Corinthians is only half the conversation, and we must recognize that we can't know everything about the other half.

## Themes in 1 Corinthians

There are a number of themes that are woven throughout the letter and keep emerging. Recognizing them first will help us to understand the whole letter.

### Holiness

Paul begins his letter by calling the Corinthians holy or sanctified.

#### 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 NRSV\*

<sup>1</sup> Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,  
<sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified (Greek: *ἡγιασμένοις* / having been sanctified) in Christ Jesus, called to be saints (Greek: *κλητοῖς ἁγίοις* / called holy), together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The phrase “having been sanctified” from the Greek word *ἡγιασμένοις* (*hēgiasmenois*), is a perfect participle middle/passive:

- Perfect: an action that is completed in the past with ongoing significance
- Passive: it has been done for them

Holiness is not something we earn or merit. It is given to us. Notice how many times Paul mentions Jesus Christ (four). He's centering the whole letter on Jesus. Holiness is “in Christ Jesus.”

### Gifted: The Corinthians Are Gifted

#### 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 NRSV\*

<sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched (Greek: *ἐπλουτίσθητε* / aorist indicative passive) in him, in

speech and knowledge of every kind—<sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you —<sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless (Greek: ἀνεγκλήτους) on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

## Division, Factions, and Unity

The process of reading a particular text that was written 2,000 years ago in a language that none of us speak to people who didn't live like us and applying that text to today in our cultural settings requires quite a lot of work!

### 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 NRSV\*

<sup>10</sup> Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.<sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels (Greek: ἔριδες) among you, my brothers and sisters.<sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."<sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptised in the name of Paul?

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Quarrelling and division are extremely serious in Paul's eyes (cf. [Phil. 4:2](#) Euodia and Syntyche whom Paul pleads with to be "of the same mind").

### Titus 3:9-11 NIV\*

<sup>9</sup> But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments (Greek: ἔρεις) and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.<sup>10</sup> Warn a divisive (Greek: αἰρετικὸν) person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.<sup>11</sup> You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

## Reversal

### Wisdom and Foolishness Reversed

#### 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 NIV\*

<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.<sup>19</sup> For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?<sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom

did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

See [Isaiah 29:14](#)

- The wisdom of the world equals foolishness.
- The wisdom of God appears as foolishness, but it is wiser than anything in the world.
- The “folly” of God is a higher wisdom than the wisdom of the world.
- The weakness of God is a greater power.

### Christ Crucified Is the Key

The wisdom and the power of God center on Christ crucified; Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Wisdom here refers to the Greek view of wisdom and not the Jewish wisdom tradition. Remember the philosophers, rhetoricians, and orators.

“We should rather suppose, on the contrary, that the acceptance of the Gospel led the Corinthians to feel rich and wise in the possession of new life and spiritual gifts. That feeling was expressed in their calling Christianity a kind of wisdom, its leaders teachers of wisdom, and themselves—this was the most important thing for them—wise men who had drawn on that wisdom through the Christian leaders. The poor, insignificant Corinthians, with neither distinguished ancestry nor pagan wisdom to support them, had become so rich through the new proclamation that they seized on the Greek terminology that was there for them, and used it to express their new glory. They did not realize that by the very use of that wisdom terminology they were betraying the message that was their wealth, and that the feeling of being up on the pinnacle and pitying the others was a betrayal of Christ and his apostles.”

Munck, Johannes (2004). “The Church without Factions: Studies in 1 Corinthians 1–4.” [Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church](#). Edited by Edward Adams and David G. Horrell. Westminster John Knox. 70.

They were using their Christian experience of the Spirit and their spiritual gifts as signs that they were “wise” and that they knew all mysteries.

### Further Themes

- The nature of apostleship and those who follow Jesus, mature versus childish behavior, servants of Christ and stewards of the mystery of God ([1 Cor. 4:1](#))
- Father and mother/child relationship ([1 Cor. 4:14-16](#); [3:2-3a](#))
- All things come from God and will return to him and the God/Christ relation ([1 Cor. 1:30](#); [3:21-23](#))

- The body: what we do with our bodies, our own and others (Food, idols, sexual relations)
- Maturity and *koinonia* (Greek: *κοινωνία* / fellowship/participation)
- Mission and money: freedom and becoming all things to all people
- Spiritual gifts and how we use them
- The centrality of love
- The resurrection: the things of first importance

## The Structure as a Conversation

- “Now concerning” (Greek: Περὶ δὲ) occurs in 1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1, 16:1, 12.
- “Do you not know” (Greek: οὐκ οἶδατε) occurs 10 times.
- “If anyone thinks” (Greek: εἴ τις δοκεῖ) occurs 3 times.
- “Judge for yourselves” (Greek: Ἐν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς κρίνατε) is used as a rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 11:13.

## Corinthian “Slogans”

Paul also repeats some of their phrases, but we’re unsure how many there are and where they are.

- “I have the right to do anything.” (1 Cor. 6:12)
- “Food for the stomach and stomach for the food.” (1 Cor. 6:13)
- “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” or not to have sexual relations with a woman. (1 Cor. 7:1)
- “We all possess knowledge.” (1 Cor. 8:1)
- “I have the right to do anything.” (1 Cor. 10:23)

There might be more!

## Organization of the Letter

There is a rhetorical structure to 1 Corinthians in that Paul uses Greek rhetoric (a way of organizing his material) in order to make his case and persuade the Corinthians. We’re not going to study this together, but Ben Witherington demonstrates this really well in his book *Conflict and Community in Corinth*.

We will look at 1 Corinthians from the point of view of what E. Randolph Richards calls “half a conversation,” (Richards, 2004) recognizing that we can’t know everything about the other half.

Richards also talks about preformed material or the use of quoting other material inserted into the letter. Sometimes that’s easily identifiable, like a quote from the Hebrew Bible, for example. Other times, because Paul’s recipients would know what he was talking about and we don’t, we don’t know exactly where he might be using preformed material. “Paul and his coauthors did not always say when they were quoting material. Then, like now, they knew their readers would recognize it.” (Richards, 2004).

“Sometimes Paul told when he was quoting some material, such as ‘for it is written’ ([Gal. 3:10](#)) or ‘I handed on to you what I in turn had received’ ([1 Cor. 15:3](#)) or ‘the saying is sure’ ([1 Tim. 3:1](#)). Paul evidently did not choose to indicate always when he was citing preformed pieces. We are left with the task of distilling them from his letters. So Paul’s use of preformed material falls on a spectrum. On one extreme there are snippets of quoted material that are too elusive to be certain the material was quoted or already integrated into the team’s theology. On the other extreme there are places where the quoted material was introduced by a phrase that clearly identified it as preformed. The challenge is identifying the material between these extremes.”

Richards, E. Randolph (2004). [Paul and First-Century Letter Writing](#). InterVarsity. 96.

We can use the criteria of content and form when we make the decision about when Paul is citing others.

1. Content: Does the content of the writing tell us?
2. Form: Does the form of the writing tell us?

## Interpolation = Insertion

There are also places where scholars think that someone else has inserted something into Paul’s letters.

“Interpolation is like pushing a shovel in the ground, separating two portions of soil, inserting something, and removing the shovel; evidence is left, but the breaks are reasonably clean and contained. Redaction, on the other hand, much more closely resembles a plant which has grown in the ground; in pulling it up, the roots come too, and it is unclear where the redaction ends.”

Walker Jr., William O. (2001). [Interpolations in the Pauline Letters](#). Sheffield Academic Press. 23.

So sometimes we can identify where ideas that are drawn from another source are woven into a text and sometimes we can’t.

## Paul Was a Skilled Letter Writer

Michael Gorman highlights the skill with which Paul wrote. In his book, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, he brings out Paul’s great rhetorical skill.

“Paul’s letters reveal a thorough acquaintance with the substance and the tricks of the rhetor’s trade, even though he formally distances himself from rhetoric, or at least rhetorical showmanship ([1 Cor. 2:1-5](#)). ... Paul can either adopt, adapt, or refute certain Stoic notions, depending on his understanding of their correspondence to the Scriptures or to his gospel.”

Gorman, Michael J. (2004). [Apostle of the Crucified Lord](#). Eerdmans. 7.

“[This is] a bit ironic, since Paul himself has suspicions about rhetoric as antithetical to the power of the gospel, though he is primarily critical of the flashy rhetoric that had become popular in his day and with which certain Corinthian believers were enamored ([1 Cor. 1:18-25](#); [2:1-5](#)).”

Gorman, Michael J. (2004). [Apostle of the Crucified Lord](#). Eerdmans. 12.

## Diatribes

“One particular rhetorical form that occasionally appears in Paul’s letters is the diatribe. Often used by ancient teachers (such as the first-century Stoic Epictetus, in his Discourses), the diatribe did not consist primarily of a lengthy rebuke, as it often does today, but of a creative dialogical mode of instruction and exhortation. It employs such rhetorical devices as imaginary conversation partners, rhetorical questions, exaggeration, hypothetical objections, and erroneous conclusions. The real speaker refutes the interlocutor’s errors (sometimes beginning with the famous phrase, ‘May it never be!’), using them as a springboard for teaching.”

Gorman, Michael J. (2004). [Apostle of the Crucified Lord](#). Eerdmans. 84.

## Acknowledging Our Subjectivity

### The Power of Imagination

Everyone brings an imagined scenario to the study! When you read commentaries on the Bible note how many times people say, “I can just imagine ...”

### Personal Preference/Bias

My personal preference: There is a Stoicizing influence on the Corinthians but not necessarily on Paul, although Paul is familiar with their thought and language.

## Stoicism and Paul

“The question I wish to raise is not whether or not Paul thought in Stoic manner; rather, could it be that he is writing to people who themselves use such language, think in a Stoicizing manner, or are impressed with Stoic ideas? Otherwise why does he so frequently use language that appears Stoic, though he operates with different assumptions? After all, the manner of Paul’s expression is not shaped solely by his Jewish background and Christian confession, but surely to some extent by the needs of his audience as well? Do their problems, vocabulary, and level of understanding influence the manner of the apostle’s communication with them?”

Paige, Terence (2004). “Stoicism, ἐλευθερία and Community at Corinth.” [Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church](#). Westminster John Knox. 209.

### Stoic Ideas in 1 Corinthians

- Pursuit of a spirituality that was elitist and devoid of community-oriented dimension
- The idea of themselves as kings and rich
- The assertion of absolute freedom for the Christian who is *sofos*
- The creed that all things are lawful for me
- The fact that the idol is nothing
- The highly individualistic approach to moral problems (Paige, 2004)

## Wisdom and the Stoa

The use of wisdom (Greek: *σοφός*) is a key figure for the Stoa.

“For the Stoa there was a vast gulf between the ‘wise man’ (*ὁ σοφός*) and the common people (*οἱ πολλοί*). The *σοφός* (who is also described as *σπουδαῖος*, ‘good,’ and *φρόνιμος*, ‘wise/prudent’) is one who has made the goal of his existence the ‘life in accord with nature’ (*κατά φύσιν ζῆν*). This is intended to aid the pursuit of virtue, which is the only absolute ‘good’ recognized by the Stoa. Only virtue is necessary to be happy (*εὐδαίμων*) and wise; all else is *ἀδιάφορον* (‘indifferent’).”

Paige, Terence (2004). “Stoicism, *ἐλευθερία* and Community at Corinth.” [Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church](#). Westminster John Knox. 210-211.

The student must choose that which is according to nature. He needs to intuitively understand “both his own nature and that of the cosmos, and these are in harmony” (Paige, 2004). Paige also makes the point that “the Stoic understanding of virtue is closely tied to knowledge” (Paige, 2004).

## The Independent Mindset and the Stoic

“Freedom is one of the most cherished and exalted of attributes of the Stoic wise man: freedom from irrational passions; freedom to choose or reject those things which are in his power; freedom to live the life according to nature and to pursue virtue. But Paul overturns this self-centred perspective by his very life, which in its *imitatio Christi* makes a new definition of freedom.”

Paige, Terence (2004). “Stoicism, *ἐλευθερία* and Community at Corinth.” [Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church](#). Westminster John Knox. 217.

Paige suggests that the Corinthians think they are being strong by participating in food sacrificed to idols as if they are almost proving their invulnerability. So Paige calls them an “elite group of self-styled sophoi within the church who held a highly individualistic, self-centred ethics” (Paige, 2004).

But to wrap up this section, we have entered a conversation. We’re trying to untangle different thoughts and words used in different ways by both the Corinthians and Paul and then trying to discern what Paul means by them.

And to complicate things even further, we may be encountering something that Paul taught them in the first place that they have corrupted and twisted to become something else, like wisdom, mystery, glory—all words used in different ways by Paul and the Corinthians.

“Some premises that Paul agrees with—and which he may have asserted himself in his preaching at Corinth—were being made to serve a conclusion at variance with Paul’s theology and, further, at odds with the new existence in Christ.”

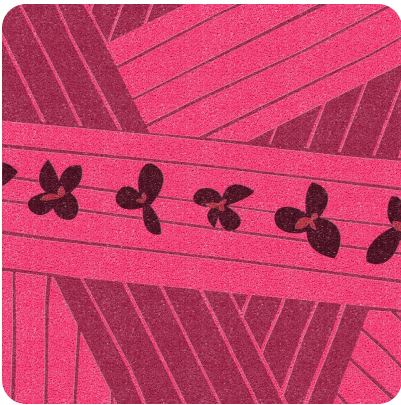
Paige, Terence (2004). “Stoicism, *ἐλευθερία* and Community at Corinth.” [Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church](#). Westminster John Knox. 215.

“We can make best sense of the text if we imagine the problems to have arisen not among the highest or lowest levels of society, but among those with social pretensions who were most concerned with gaining a greater share of honor and most sensitive to insults which brought shame.”

Pogoloff, Stephen (1992). [Logos and Sophia](#). Scholars Press. 255.

## Reflection Question

What are the criteria for determining whether or not Paul is citing others in the text?



# Module 2: The Spirit and the Mature Christian

## SESSIONS 3-4

How does Paul talk about conflict, the role of the Spirit, and maturity in the Christian life? Study the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians and see.

# Session 3: Christ and the Spirit

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## Key Takeaways

- For Paul, apostleship includes his calling to the Gentiles (all non-Jews) with the message of Christ crucified.
- Apostleship includes suffering.
- Paul refers to the Gospel as the “mystery of God.”
- The Gospel of Jesus is a revelation that comes only from the Spirit and not from the world, and the Spirit within is not a spirit from the world but God himself.
- The Spirit is associated with wisdom and power, as is Jesus Christ.
- The Greek words *psychikos* (ψυχικός) and *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός) are two terms Paul uses to contrast attitude and behavior. A *psychikos* is something unspiritual or natural—the natural person—and *pneumatikos* is literally “spiritually”—that which can only be spiritually discerned.

## Summary Verses

Within the first two chapters, Paul lays out a summary of the entire letter.

### **1 Corinthians 1:1** NIV

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God ...

### **1 Corinthians 1:23a** NIV

We preach Christ crucified ...

### **1 Corinthians 1:24b** NIV

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

### **1 Corinthians 2:7** NIV

No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

### **1 Corinthians 2:12** NIV

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

## Paul the Apostle

What does apostleship mean to Paul?

1. A statement of authority
2. A servant/slave of Jesus Christ
3. Not based on natural gifting but chosen and called by God according to his will
4. A steward of the mystery of God
5. Sacrifice and suffering

In 1 Corinthians 4:1, he talks about himself, the other apostles, and Apollos as servants (not slaves here) and as “stewards” of the mystery of God (Greek: *oikonomos/οἰκονόμος*—the manager of a household).

More specifically, for Paul this meant being called to the Gentiles and the non-Jews with this message. It also meant to suffer.

#### **Acts 9:15-16 NIV**

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

#### **Philippians 3:8 NIV**

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.

## **We Preach Christ Crucified**

What is the significance of Paul saying here that “We preach Christ crucified”? Paul could have said Christ risen and exalted or Christ the healer and Lord of the universe. Why is it a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to pagans?

### **“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24b)**

In what way does Paul see the crucified Messiah as wiser than human wisdom and stronger than human strength?

#### **1 Corinthians 2:7 NIV**

No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

## **The Mystery of God**

Mystery here means something that is being revealed and that comes to us by revelation. This phrase also occurs in 1 Corinthians 2:7, 4:1, 13:2, 14:2, 15:51 (also see Eph. 1:9; 3:3; 3:9; 5:32; 6:19 and Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3).

What does it mean for God’s wisdom through the cross of Christ to have been hidden “before time began”? How is this linked to God’s destiny for human beings as “our glory”?

These things are revealed to us by the Spirit.

# Glory and the Work of the Spirit

## 1 Corinthians 2:10b-12 NIV

<sup>10</sup> The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup> For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

<sup>12</sup> **What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.**

Pay attention to how Paul frames the role of the Spirit in this passage.

- Revelation only comes by the Spirit and not from the world, and the Spirit within is not a spirit from the world but is God himself
- Not the spirit of the world (Greek: τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου)
- The Spirit who is from God, and the Spirit of God (Greek: τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ)
- The Spirit is associated both with wisdom and with power, as is Jesus Christ
- Received freely (also see [1 Cor. 4:7](#))
- Paul cites [Isaiah 64:4](#) in [verse 9](#) and [Isaiah 40:13](#) in [verse 16](#)

In [1 Corinthians 2:14](#), ψυχικός (Greek: *psychikos*) and πνευματικῶς (Greek: *pneumatikos*) are two terms by which Paul contrasts attitudes and behavior.

- *Psychikos* is "unspiritual" or "natural" (the natural person)
- *Pneumatikos* is literally "spiritually" (spiritually discerned)

This takes us back to [1 Corinthians 1:26-31](#) where Paul sets up a contrast between the foolish and the wise of the world.

## Reflection Question

In the [first chapter of 1 Corinthians](#), Paul refers to himself as an apostle. According to Paul, what does it mean to be an apostle?

# Session 4: A Mature Body

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## Key Takeaways

- The divisions among the Corinthian churches are evidence to Paul that the community is still immature and unwilling to embrace life in the Spirit.
- God is building his temple through the people of God; he causes the growth, but the community of Jesus' followers participates with God in that work.
- God calls us to be childlike in our acceptance of and need for him but mature in our emotions and relationships so that we mirror Christ to one another.
- Mature followers of Jesus are willing to answer God's call, surrender to his will, and exercise faith, believing and acting with trust that God will do what he said he would do.

## 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

How does Paul address their bad behavior?

Paul makes a reference to himself as one who gives “milk” and not solid food. This would have conjured up images for them of breastfeeding and mothers or wet nurses. There are other letters in which Paul refers to himself in female terms.

In [Galatians 4:19](#), he says he is in the pain or pangs of childbirth (Greek: *odino/ὠδίνω*).

In [1 Thessalonians 2:6-7](#), he uses the word *θάλλω* (Greek: *thalpo*), which means to cherish, nurture, comfort, warm up. Paul says to the Thessalonians that he could have thrown around his weight as an apostle, but he was gentle among them as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.

In [Ephesians 5:29](#), he uses this word with the word *ἐκτρέφω* (Greek: *ektrepho*—nourish, feed) with reference to how a husband should look after his wife and how Christ looks after the church.

In [chapter 4](#), he talks about being a father to them which is also language he frequently uses. Paul casts himself as a parent of his churches.

## The Servant of God

What does it mean to be a servant of God? To Paul, a *συνεργός* (Greek: *sunergos*), or co-worker, is one who works together with other workers and a co-worker with God. He and Apollos are friends who work together; they have a “common purpose” i.e., they are not divided, but of one mind.

Though it is God's own work, being co-workers means that we work! Paul and the other apostles plant and water, but it is God who gives growth.

# The Temple of God

Note all the different metaphors Paul uses that all pile up on each other: parenting, weaning children, agriculture, temple pictures, and judgment.

God is building his temple through the people of God. This is God's work and he is building it, but what we contribute matters. Our contribution lies in the motives of our hearts. In [1 Corinthians 4:5](#), Paul talks about being judged on the motives of our hearts which will be brought into the light by God.

## 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 NRSV

<sup>14</sup> If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Paul addresses them as a group.

## 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NRSV\*

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you [plural] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you [plural]? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple [singular], God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you [plural] are that temple.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Then he switches to the first person in [1 Corinthians 3:18-23](#): "Let no one deceive himself/herself."

Here the verb is singular, and there is a reflexive element to this of allowing oneself to be deceived. It's not clear who he is addressing here, but he seems to be warning them to take responsibility for themselves.

## 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 NRSV

<sup>21</sup> So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, <sup>23</sup> and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

What do you think he means by "all things are yours"?

## 1 Corinthians 4: Who's Judging Whom?

"Judgement and praise were significant issues in Roman culture. Certain innate attributes were generally considered honourable or praiseworthy—ancestry, gender, ethnicity; but these could be enhanced, destroyed, or bypassed by public actions that attracted praise or blame—such as benefaction or oratory. ... The wise person's disregard of human judgments is a theme of Stoicism. ... However, Paul will not allow his apparent indifference to be interpreted in a Stoic manner; his reasoning is explicitly theological and eschatological."

Malcolm, Matthew R. (2012). [The World of 1 Corinthians: An Exegetical Source Book of Literary and Visual Backgrounds](#). 1368.

### **1 Corinthians 5:12-13 NIV**

<sup>12</sup> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”

### **1 Corinthians 4:6 NIV**

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.

“Do not go beyond what is written” in 4:6 is unclear. There is no real consensus on this.

Paul contrasts the Corinthians—rich, kings, wise, strong, and honored—with the apostles—last of all, sentenced to death, a spectacle to the world, fools, weak, held in disrepute, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, and weary from work.

### **1 Corinthians 4:12b-13 NRSV**

<sup>12</sup> ... When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.

## **Loving, Gentle, Fatherly Admonition**

God calls us to be childlike in our acceptance of him and our need for him but mature in our emotions and our relationships so that we mirror Christ to one another.

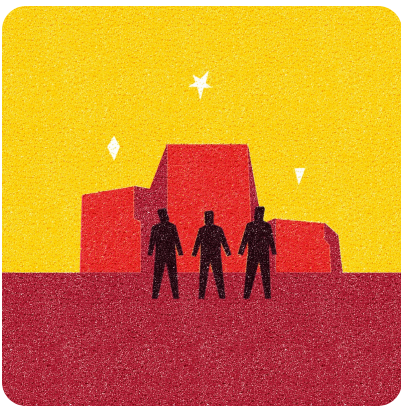
### **1 Corinthians 4:12b-13 NRSV**

<sup>14</sup> I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup> For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup> For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup> But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. <sup>19</sup> But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. <sup>21</sup> What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Paul admonishes the Corinthians that they might become mature followers of Jesus who demonstrate a willingness to answer God’s call, who surrender to his will, and who have faith—believing that God is going to do what he said he would do and acting accordingly.

## **Reflection Question**

What are a few of the key signs of Christlike maturity according to Paul?



# Module 3: Sexuality, Singleness, and Marriage

## SESSIONS 5-7

Explore how Paul's view of the Church as a body relates to his ideas about sexuality, marriage, and singleness.

# Session 5: Sexual Immorality Inside the Church

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## Key Takeaways

- The Christian sexual ethic is not based solely on individual choice and consent. Rather, it's grounded in the belief that our actions have full-community impact, whether they are done privately or not.
- Paul distinguishes between those who belong to the body of believers and those outside the body.
- Paul does not instruct people to correct the sexual behaviors common in the world or even to pass judgment on them. Instead, he is addressing church members specifically.

## Paul's Teaching on Sexual Relationships

This section as a whole deals with how Paul frames sexual relations and sexual immorality, how he views the body and what we do with it, but it isn't only about that. It's also about other behaviors that destroy the body.

His teaching follows two main threads:

1. What Paul wants to impress upon them about their bodies in relation to Jesus Christ and to one another. This forms the foundation of his sexual ethic in these chapters.
2. The distinction he makes between the body of believers and those outside the body. He is very strict at judging the former and not the latter.

What this section very specifically does not address is any sense of the Church needing to correct the world or even to pass judgment on the world in relation to sexual ethics. This is all about internal church relations, and it is a window into how Paul dealt with sexual disorder, marriage, singleness, and virginity.

## Summary Verses: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

### 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NRSV

<sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

## Immorality at Corinth

1 Corinthians 5 begins with Paul addressing a report about sexual immorality (Greek: *porneia/πορνεία*—fornication, from which we get the term pornography). He has heard that a man in the church is having sex with his father's wife.

Although this is not his birth mother, it's his stepmother, this relationship is classed as incest in Roman law, hence Paul's comment that not even pagans tolerate this behavior. It was punishable by law.

We don't know the exact circumstances. What might it mean that they are proud about it? Was he powerful or rich? Was he a patron or a leader?

Paul's views here are very strong! "To deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." What might Paul mean by that?

## Those in the "World" and Those in the Body

### 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 NRSV

<sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons— <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you."

Note the behaviors Paul identifies.

The people in the world that we have to associate with in our everyday lives include:

- τοῖς πλεονέκταις (Greek: *tois pleonektais*—the covetous, you want more of what others have)
- ἄρπαξ (Greek: *harpax*—swindler, robber, extortioner)
- εἰδωλολάτραις (Greek: *idololatrais*—idolaters)

The people in the body who Paul thinks we shouldn't mix with (not even eat with!) are all those above plus:

- λοιδόρος (Greek: *loidoros*—verbal abuser)
- μέθυσος (Greek: *methusos*—drunkard)

## Reflection Question

What is the significance of Paul addressing followers of Jesus and not the "world" (i.e., those who do not claim to follow Jesus)? How does this inform the way followers of Jesus can understand sexual ethics today?

# Session 6: The Importance of the Body

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## Key Takeaways

- The first agreed-upon Corinthian slogan appears in [1 Corinthians 6:12](#) and gives insight into Corinthian thought about the physical body: “All things are lawful for me.”
- Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are “in Christ” and, therefore, ought to be participating in Jesus’ resurrected life.
- The Corinthians’ belief that the things of this world will be destroyed in the future motivated them to think that what they did with their bodies was of little to no consequence.
- According to Paul, if someone is a Christian, sexual integrity is one of the primary, non-negotiable ways to respond to Jesus’ love and grace.

## Who Judges the Body?

Corinthian believers were taking one another to a secular court for judgment. This was probably more like vexatious litigation, making winning the case a matter of honor. Courts were notoriously corrupt and would favor the powerful.

This reminds us of Jesus’ teachings in Matthew.

### Matthew 5:25-26 NIV

<sup>25</sup> Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Paul sarcastically says, “Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?” ([1 Cor. 6:5b](#))

Paul is really upset here and is having a dialogue with them. A number of commentators now see this as diatribal—an argument to persuade an opponent. This is signalled by the number of times he says “Do you not know?” (Greek: *ouk oidate/οὐκ οἶδατε*) in [1 Corinthians 6](#).

“Do you not know (*οὐκ οἶδατε*)?”

- “the saints will judge the world” ([v. 2](#))
- “that we will judge angels” ([v. 3](#))
- “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God” ([v. 9](#))
- “that your bodies are members of Christ” ([v. 15](#))
- “that one joined to a prostitute is one body with them” ([v. 16](#))
- “that the body of you all is a temple of the Holy Spirit” ([v. 19](#))

# Corinthian Slogans

The first agreed upon slogan comes in this chapter. This gives us some insight into Corinthian thought. However, there is some debate over where the slogans start and stop.

## 1 Corinthians 6:12-13 NRSV

<sup>12</sup> “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. <sup>13</sup> “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other.

NIV inserts “you say,” which is not in the text.

## 1 Corinthians 6:12-13 NIV

<sup>12</sup> “I have the right to do anything,” **you say**—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. <sup>13</sup> **You say**, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.”

Another proposed Corinthian slogan comes in [verse 18b](#). The Corinthians: “Every sin which a man may commit is outside the body.” Paul: “On the contrary, the immoral man sins against his own body.”

## The Debate over 1 Corinthians 6:9

In [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#), Paul reiterates the vice list from [chapter 5](#) as those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. He repeats sexually immoral, idolaters, coveters, drunkards, verbal abusers, and swindlers. He adds adulterers, men who have sex with men, and thieves.

There is much debate about the terms that Paul uses here in [1 Corinthians 6:9](#).

- *μαλακοὶ* (Greek: *malakoi*)
- *ἀρσενικοῖται* (Greek: *arsenokoitai*—lying with a man)

*Malakoi* is not a term that is used exclusively for homosexual. It’s a pejorative term meaning “softies, effeminate.” So some see this as a reference to a male prostitute or a passive partner in a male sexual relationship.

*Arsenokoitai* is a compound word and literally means “male-bedders.” It is also used in [1 Timothy 1:10-11](#) right after a reference to slave traders, so it might be referring to coercive homosexual relations, but we don’t really know.

Wesley Hill notes that *arsenokoites* has a “strong verbal connection to the Septuagint renderings of both [Leviticus 18:22](#) and [20:13](#), where both halves of the compound are used” (Hill, 2016). Paul may have coined the term himself.

## Some Translation Options

- NIV: men who have sex with men

- NASB: homosexuals, probably submissive and dominant partners
- NRSV: male prostitutes and sodomites
- The Message: focuses on abuse

### 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 The Message

Don't you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don't care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom. A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. Since then, you've been cleaned up and given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master, our Messiah, and by our God present in us, the Spirit.

## Diverging Views

The ancient world was not like our world and lines fall in very different places. Jews, Greeks, and Romans had different views of homosexual relations between men.

"For Jews, including those who formed the Christian movement, same-sex relations were indications of the depravity of non-Jewish society."

Loader, William (2016). "Homosexuality and the Bible." [\*Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church\*](#). Zondervan. 32.

Greeks approved of same-sex male relations under 30. They were seen to strengthen bonds between males and could be part of a mentoring relationship.

"Roman law treated same-sex relations between citizens as a criminal offence, but tolerated it between a Roman citizen and someone inferior, like a slave or a foreigner. Romans sometimes deplored same-sex relations as a Greek disease and typically self-indulgent, to which Greeks responded by deploring the fact that Romans usually did not expect such relations to cease when a young man turned thirty."

Loader, William (2016). "Homosexuality and the Bible." [\*Two Views on Homosexuality, The Bible, and the Church\*](#). Zondervan. 31.

Today there are many divergent views.

1. Those who think that there is an unqualified ban on same-sex sexual relations then and now. Nothing has changed.
2. Those who think there was an unqualified ban on some same-sex relations and those rules do not apply now.
3. Those who think there was and still is an unqualified ban in Scripture in all same-sex relations but it's archaic to apply that now, so we should choose not to.
4. Those who think that Scripture bans abusive same-sex sexual relations and would not rule the same for loving, monogamous same-sex marriage.
5. Those who think that Scripture does not condemn same-sex loving relations.

It seems as though, in general, the Corinthians were working on the basis that the things of this world would be destroyed. Whereas what Paul is trying to impress upon them is that what we do in the body will stay with

us because we're going to be raised from the dead ([1 Cor. 6:14](#)) and our bodies belong to Christ ([1 Cor. 6:15](#)).

### **Recommended Resource**

[Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church](#). Preston Sprinkle (ed.). Zondervan, 2016.

### **Reflection Question**

According to Paul, why do our physical bodies matter? And what is one implication of this for daily life?

# Session 7: Marriage, Singleness, and Slavery

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## Key Takeaways

- Paul's teaching on marriage is revolutionary in his culture—he teaches complete and radical equality between men and women within marriage.
- According to Paul, marriage is an option, not an expectation.
- Being married to an unbeliever is not grounds for divorce.
- It seems Paul thought enslaved people's spiritual freedom was tantamount. However, there is evidence that he would have also encouraged people to seek freedom from slavery if at all possible.

## Misguided Abstinence

Here Paul is addressing something they've talked to him about in their letter: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman, not to have sexual relations with a woman."

This is a bit confusing because on the one hand there are men who are visiting prostitutes and now this. We're not entirely sure what the scenario is here. Are there those who are abstaining from sex within marriage?

## Paul's Directives Regarding Marriage

From Paul's teaching in this chapter, we can discern several principles about marriage.

1. Paul emphasizes the complete and radical equality of marriage. Paul speaks of "authority" in marriage only here and it is entirely equal and mutual.
2. Marriage is monogamous.
3. Marriage is an option, not an expectation. Paul values singleness and virginity, but not if it's going to be impossible to live with.
4. Being married to an unbeliever is not grounds for divorce. Somehow, and we're not sure what Paul has in mind here, the unbelievers are incorporated into the covenant through their spouse and the same goes for children ([v. 14](#)).

## Debate about Position of Slaves

Verse 21 on the position of slaves is highly contested.

### 1 Corinthians 7:21 NIV

Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.

There are those who see Paul advocating that a person should seek their freedom and those who believe Paul was telling slaves to remain as they are.

It seems Paul thought their spiritual freedom was tantamount, but there is evidence that he would have encouraged people to seek material freedom as well.

We don't know what "the present crisis" is in [verse 26](#).

## Recommended Resource

Bowens, Lisa M. (2020). [African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation](#). Eerdmans.

## Singleness

In many contexts this perspective is overlooked or even inverted, but Paul does not elevate the status of married people or trivialize single people. On the contrary, Paul privileges the single life.

We are not sure why Paul uses the term "virgin" except he seems to be making a point here—the unmarried and the virgin, she should remain as she is.

## Reflection Question

How has Paul's teaching on marriage and singleness in [1 Corinthians 7](#) been applied or understood in your personal experience?



# Module 4: Food Sacrifices, Freedom, and the Lord's Supper

## SESSIONS 8-10

Examine the different practices followers of Jesus engage in and the impact these practices have on the people around them.

# Session 8: Food Sacrificed to Idols

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## Key Takeaways

- Paul addresses two different situations of “strong” and “weak” followers of Jesus in Rome and Corinth. In Rome, the debate is over keeping Jewish festivals and food laws. In Corinth, the question is regarding meat sacrificed to another god.
- Social, civic, and religious gatherings are intertwined in Corinthian culture.
- Paul teaches that followers of Jesus are free to follow their conscience in debatable matters. However, love for our siblings should guide our decision.

## Participation in the Body

[1 Corinthians 8](#), [10](#), and [11:17-24](#) are all connected by the theme of what we’re participating in and why and the effect that has on those around us. *Koinonia* (Greek: *κοινωνία*—fellowship or participation) is the key concept.

Chapter 8 begins with “Now concerning ...”, so we know this is something they have raised with Paul in their letter: What do Christians do about food sacrificed to idols?

## Background: Hellenistic, not Jewish

This is a different situation from the one in Rome regarding the “weak” and the “strong,” which related to people who kept food laws and observed Jewish festivals and special days and people who didn’t. The “strong” believed that those who thought they needed to observe the food laws etc. were “weak.”

Paul addresses this question in his letter to the Romans. The situation in Rome is related to the freedom that Christians have from food laws and religious customs (cf. [Acts 10:9-16](#); [Col. 2:16, 20-23](#); [1 Tim. 4:1-4](#)).

In 1 Corinthians, we are dealing with the question of meat that has been sacrificed as an offering to a god in a ceremony to honor the god (Greek: *thusia/θύσια*). In these ceremonies, the animal would be killed, and some would be burned, some eaten, some put on a table for the god themselves, or some sold at the meat market.

These ceremonies happened at parties and feasts to which sometimes people would be invited by the god themselves! Sarapis and Isis were two gods who would have been worshiped in Corinth.

## Gatherings

It’s also important for us to note that the social, civic, and religious gatherings were all intertwined. Business, networking, religious, and political agendas were all rolled into one, and you couldn’t tease them apart.

The important feasts or parties were where you wanted to be seen, where you would make business deals and friends, gain patrons, or honor patrons. It would be a huge loss of face and of opportunity for Christians not to be there. However, to go along meant participating in a pagan ceremony, and on occasions there would be flagrant sexual immorality.

What did people themselves think they were doing when they went to these ceremonies in relation to the god? We are not sure, but here are some options.

- Sacramental: taking part in the deity
- Communal: sharing a meal with the deity
- Social: eating a meal before the deity (See Willis, [Idol Meat in Corinth](#), 18-20)

These are about different levels of participation.

## Paul at Odds With the Corinthians

Paul appears to take a sacramental view in chapter 10 but not in chapter 8. Does Paul think that idols are nothing or that they have some kind of demonic significance? ([Isa. 44:9](#) says, "All who make idols are nothing." There are many references in the Hebrew Bible about the uselessness of idols.) Or do we simply hold two views in tension with one another here?

### 1 Corinthians 8:1-8 NIV

<sup>1</sup> We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. <sup>2</sup> Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But whoever loves God is known by God.

<sup>4</sup> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

<sup>7</sup> But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

### 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 NIV

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

<sup>18</sup> Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? <sup>19</sup> Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup> You

cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.<sup>22</sup> Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

## More Slogans?

What if the quotation was extended here? Wendell Lee Willis thinks that the whole of verses 4-7 might be a quotation. If this is the case, it would justify their eating the food.

### 1 Corinthians 8:7-8 NIV

<sup>7</sup> But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

## Who are “the Weak” and Why?

“While it is not provable, it is likely that the term ἀσθενής [weak] was applied to some Christians who were troubled by eating εἰδωλοθύτων [things sacrificed to idols] by those who made much of so doing. Those who wrote to Paul probably raised the use of συνείδησις [conscience] and also probably originated the designation of some as ἀσθενής [weak]. The idea of ἡ συνείδησις ἀσθενής [a weak conscience] was a slur at those who refused to eat idol sacrifices, or who did so with troubled consciences. This means the real definition of the ‘weak’ in Corinth is ‘those not having knowledge.’”

Willis, Wendell Lee (1985). [Idol Meat in Corinth](#). Wipf and Stock. 94.

“Food will not commend us to God; we are no worse off if we do not eat it and no better off if we do’ ( [1 Cor. 8:8](#)). This seems to place food in the category of ‘indifferent things’, like the Stoic notion of *adiaphora*, things that might be preferable in certain circumstances but fundamentally do not matter either way.”

Barclay, John M.G. (2010). “Food, Christian Identity and Global Warming.” *The Expository Times*, 121 (12). 587.

## Paul’s Views or the Corinthian Views or Both?

It could be that the Corinthian leaders were mocking the “weak” whose consciences wouldn’t allow them to eat the food sacrificed to idols. Did they think that *gnosis* (knowledge) had the power to liberate them and protect them? Was it their freedom and guarantee that they would not be affected by the idol meat?

Whatever we decide about the quotations, Paul’s final position is that love trumps knowledge. Paul contrasts knowledge and love, and he is clear with them that sinning against a “weak” brother or sister is, in fact, sinning against Christ.

## Reflection Question

How would you describe Paul's response to the sacrificial meat controversy? What matters most to him throughout his instruction?

# Session 9: Remembrance as Participation

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## Key Takeaways

- Paul has both freedom and rights as an apostle, but his goal is not to express his personal freedom in a way that thwarts or harms others.
- The Corinthians are free to follow their consciences in these matters, with love as the qualifying principle guiding their actions in difficult situations.
- Understood in context, [1 Corinthians 10:13](#) describes the temptation of idolatry.

## Freedom and Rights

[1 Corinthians 9](#) comes in between the discussion on idols in [chapters 8](#) and [10](#). Paul makes the point that he has both freedom and rights as an apostle, but he doesn't use any of them. This is in contrast to the Corinthians who think they are free to do what they want and are entitled.

### **1 Corinthians 9:12b NIV**

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

Paul does everything "for the sake of the gospel." He keeps himself free from the Corinthians having any hold over him through their patronage.

## The Story of Israel: A Type

In [1 Corinthians 10](#), Paul connects idolatry, sexual immorality, and forsaking God. He also connects the Corinthians back to the Israelites through the themes of baptism, spiritual food and drink, and Christ. They are not merely examples, but "types" (Greek: *τύποι*)—more like forerunners. They are people who have come before to whom the Christians in Corinth are connected by being in Christ.

These things are written down as "warnings" for us.

Mary Patton Baker builds on Frances Young's reading of the reference to Israel as a type to make the point that the Israelites act as a parable or pattern that we remember in order to copy. It has a "mimetic quality" (Young, 1997).

“In light of Young’s explanation of typological mimesis, a typological pattern for worship emerges from the Israelites’ sacrificial worship: repentance, self-offering, remembrance, and thanksgiving for atonement, resulting in communion. One can begin to see how the celebration of the Eucharist fulfills Israel’s multiple modes of sacrificial worship.”

Patton Baker, Mary (2014). “Participating in the Body and Blood of Christ.” [“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation](#). Eerdmans. 518.

Paul sees remembrance as participatory.

“The Jewish people understood remembrance as a way of appropriating stories of God’s salvific acts into the present to affirm his presence and power in their lives.”

Patton Baker, Mary (2014). “Participating in the Body and Blood of Christ.” [“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation](#). Eerdmans. 520.

## Parallel Between the Israelites and the Corinthians

In this context, Paul writes [1 Corinthians 10:3](#).

### 1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Then, in [1 Corinthians 10:14-22](#), Paul turns to the idea of what they, the Corinthians “participate” in. He uses two terms, the verb *μετέχω* (Greek: *metechó*—to partake of, share in) and the noun *κοινωνία* (participants, fellow partakers).

- The cup of blessing is a participation in the blood of Christ, and the bread a participation in his body ( [v. 16](#)).
- We “partake” (Greek: *μετέχω*) of one loaf ( [v. 17](#)).
- Those who eat the sacrifices are “fellow partakers” (Greek: *κοινωνοὶ*) in the altar ( [v. 18](#)).
- Paul does not want them to be “fellow partakers” with demons ( [v. 20](#)).
- You are not able to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, nor “partake” in the table of the Lord and the table of demons ( [v. 21](#)).

## Another Quotation?

Michael Gorman thinks there may be another quotation in [1 Corinthians 10:29b](#).

“On the other hand, 10:29b may be the beginning of Paul’s (final) summary, and he may again be quoting the libertine Corinthian position, only finally to refute it with the string of maxims in [10:31-33](#).”

Gorman, Michael (2004). [Apostle of the Crucified Lord](#). Eerdmans. 40.

## Reflection Question

1 Corinthians 10:13 is often lifted from its context and read as a comment on temptation in general. How does the context of Paul's argument add nuance to this verse? How do you understand the verse in light of its context?

# Session 10: The Lord's Supper

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## Key Takeaways

- The communion practices of the Corinthian Christians became rooted in the average culture, not Christ's love, creating injustice and abusive treatment toward the poor.
- "Do this in remembrance of me" (Jesus' instruction in the Gospels) is an invitation to remembrance by participation. We could paraphrase the idea as, "Do this, remembering that you are in me."
- The Spirit-filled and Jesus-centered community participates in God's presence, and the mark of this participation is love and care for the other.

## Why Study the Early Eucharist?

In [this video](#), Professor Thomas O'Loughlin brings out the reality that Greco-Roman meals were highly stratified and a place for a rich man to demonstrate his largesse. So the table becomes a place where all social boundaries can be broken. It's a symbol of welcome and honor for those who are not normally honored in this way. The communion table is also a place of reconciliation.

Mary Patton Baker brings the themes of [chapter 10](#) and [chapter 11](#) together through the theme of participatory fellowship. Paul does not focus on the elements of the Eucharist, "Rather, he focuses on the nature and quality of Christian *κοινωνία* that is experienced in eucharistic celebration while contrasting it with being participants (*κοινωνός*) with demons in a pagan sacrifice ([1 Cor. 10:20](#))" (Patton Baker, 2014).

## Koinonia as Participation

Paul is speaking to them about who is doing the sharing, what is being shared, and how it is being shared (Patton Baker, 2014). These themes run through the whole letter.

1. A sharing "in the Spirit," constituted primarily as communion with the triune God, and a sharing of the Spirit among those who are found in Christ
2. A sharing in the personal history of Jesus Christ through self-denial and identification with the sufferings of other Christians
3. This self-denial and identification is demonstrated when Christian share their material goods with those in need (Patton Baker, 2014)

[1 Corinthians 1:9](#) says, "God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship (Greek: *κοινωνία*) with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Patton Baker makes the point that the sharing or fellowship of the Spirit is the fellowship of the triune God and therefore, a person. "In simpler terms, sharing the fellowship of the Spirit means that believers are not sharing

in some thing, but with a divine someone.” (Patton Baker, 2014). And if we are sharing in the person of God, then we are sharing in the life of Christ, so the *κοινωνία* of Christians “must reflect the love of Christ” (Patton Baker, 2014).

In other words, this is not a ritual; it’s a lifestyle.

## A Change in Lifestyle

The Corinthians were continuing to share in worldly relationships and pursuits. This was evident primarily in their division and their sexual immorality. They also wanted to avoid suffering at all costs. Perhaps because being seen to suffer was shameful?

In Romans 8:17, Paul declares that we will be co-sharers (Greek: *συγκληρονόμος*) in the inheritance of Christ “if, indeed, we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” But the Corinthians were avoiding self-denial and self-sacrifice where Paul was embracing these things “for the sake of the gospel.”

Patton Baker makes the point that this is also why Paul wants them to join in with the collection for the Jerusalem churches because those churches are suffering. Paul cites the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians as an example of those who give generously in extreme suffering. They considered being able to give even in their extremity as a privilege and a sign of God’s favor (2 Cor. 8:4) (Patton Baker, 2014).

Paul tries to explain to them that what we cling to or unite with in our bodies and through our bodies will affect how we behave. This will expose the motives of our hearts.

Paul uses the verb *κολλάω* (Greek: *kollao*—to cling to, or unite with). It’s the verb used in 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 about being “joined” or clinging to a prostitute or the Lord. The person you cling to is the one you are united with in spirit.

Baker picks up on a point made by Douglas Campbell that union describes something static, and participation describes something active.

## Transformed Worship

The difference in Christian worship is that we are participating in the presence of God. We are not just bringing a sacrifice or an offering of something external to us; we are bringing ourselves, uniting with the persons of Christ and the Spirit, which has a transformational effect on the person.

As Baker points out, Paul says in Romans 12:1 to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

The Corinthians were proud and arrogant and excluded the poor and hungry from their meals. Patton Baker’s understanding of the phrase “discern the body of Christ,” is to see what is going on around us and the needs of others. “Those that considered themselves worthy were in fact unworthy because they did not ‘discern the body of Christ,’ i.e., the needs of those present (1 Cor. 11:29)” (Patton Baker, 2014).

The Spirit-filled and Christ-centred community participates in God’s presence and in the presence of one another, and the mark of this participation is love and care of the other. We wait for one another.

There is a looking back in order to learn from others, a looking around at those present, and a looking forward until the Lord comes ([1 Cor. 11:26](#)).

“The dual identification of the body as both Christ’s sacrificial presence and those who partake of his body is stunning. By partaking of the one loaf together, Christ’s body, worshippers celebrate and make manifest their *κοινωνία* of shared fellowship as Christ’s body. ... Participation in the body and blood of Christ is experienced through a community who loves and cares for each other, and at the same time this love and care for each other is strengthened by the Lord who presents himself to his church in his meal.”

Patton Baker, Mary (2014). “Participating in the Body and Blood of Christ.” [“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation](#). Eerdmans. 523 and 525.

## Reflection Question

In what ways can the Lord’s Supper/Eucharist/Communion become an enactment of justice?



# Module 5: Spiritual Gifts and Love

## SESSIONS 11-12

How does Paul frame spiritual gifts and their purpose? What are the implications for the contemporary Church? Explore 1 Corinthians 12-13 to find out!

# Session 11: Spiritual Gifts and the Body of Christ

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## Key Takeaways

- The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to people and works those gifts within and through them.
- Paul denounces the idea that tongues is the “best” gift by teaching that the Spirit works equally through all the gifts—no gift receives a lesser working from the Spirit.
- Paul uses the metaphor of a body to describe the nature and function of Jesus’ Church. While a body is a single, unified whole, it consists of different parts working uniquely toward a common goal.
- In his body, Jesus brings together a variety of gifts, and the Spirit unifies them all.

## Spiritual Gifts

Chapters 12 and 13 should be read together, but often chapter 13 is taken out of context as a superlative passage on the nature of love.

Paul begins the section with “Concerning spiritual gifts ....” This signals for us that he’s talking about something they’ve talked about first or maybe in response to his first letter.

### **Anathema Jesus**

He begins with a reference to idols and then makes this point about Jesus.

#### **1 Corinthians 12:3 Instructor's Translation**

No one can say ‘Anathema Jesus’ (Greek: *anathema Iesous* / Ἄνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς—Jesus [is] cursed) if they are speaking in the Spirit. No one can say Jesus [is] Lord except by the Spirit.

We’re unsure of what Paul is referring to here. Are they saying that Jesus is cursed or are they cursing others in the “name of Jesus”? Dr. Peppiatt’s opinion is that the latter makes more sense because then he turns to spiritual gifts, so it appears that what he’s addressing is what it looks like to function “in the Spirit.”

### **Work of the Spirit**

Here Paul uses the word *διαίρεσεις* (Greek: *diareseis*—varieties plural) three times in relation to gifts, service/ministries, and “workings.”

The Spirit gives a variety of different things, but it is the same Spirit who “works” them all.

The criteria for knowing whether it is the Spirit at work or not is the proclamation that Jesus is Lord.

*ἐνεργημάτων* means “many workings” (Greek: *energmaton*—operations). The one God or same God is working them all in everyone, but later we’ll see that Paul references the same Lord and the same Spirit. God the Spirit

does this for the common good.

In Trinitarian theology, we have a maxim called the “principle of inseparable operations.” This means that the actions of one member of the Trinity are the actions of all three members—the Son’s actions are not separate from the actions of the Father or the Spirit. This unity exists while the three persons of the Trinity remain distinct.

## What Are All These Gifts?

### 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 NIV

<sup>8</sup> To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

In verse 12 Paul says, “in this way also Christ.” He brings together in his body a diversity of things, and the Spirit is the unifying feature between us all.

## The Body Metaphor

In 1 Corinthians 10:2-4, Paul mentions the Israelites being baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and drinking from the spiritual rock that is Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says we’re all baptized into one body by the Spirit, and given one Spirit to drink. This is very similar to Galatians 3:26-28, which also mentions baptism and the equality of Jew and Gentile and slave and free. Here we don’t read male and female.

What is the significance of the body parts he chooses?

- The seemingly weaker members are indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22).
- The dishonorable parts are those that we treat with special honor (1 Cor. 12:23).
- Parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty.

There is a priority of gifts (1 Cor. 12:27-30). The greater gifts are apostles, prophets, teachers, in that order. Yet Paul connects this to the larger theme of unity as he transitions to the next chapter.

### 1 Corinthians 12:31 NIV

Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

## Reflection Question

What have you already heard or learned about spiritual gifts before starting this course? How do those things align or misalign with what Paul is teaching the Corinthians in this passage?

# The Greatest of These Is Love

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## Key Takeaways

- 1 Corinthians 13 is the centerpiece of Paul's teaching on the gifts of the Spirit in chapters 12 through 14.
- Paul emphasizes the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues because various groups were mistakenly valuing some of these gifts over others.
- Rather than making disconnected judgments from the sidelines, Paul writes in the first person, humbly including himself with the Corinthians as a participating member of their group who both celebrates and suffers with them.

## The Centrality of Love

Paul begins chapter 13 by switching into the first person. What does it do to us as hearers and readers that Paul uses the first person here? Paul does not stand at a distance from the truth he shares with the Corinthians because he, too, would be nothing without love.

Note which gifts Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. This chapter is not a side topic; it is central to his teaching on the issues the Corinthian church is struggling with—speaking in tongues, prophecy, and knowledge.

## What Love Is

In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul begins to express what love is with two affirmations of what love does do. He talks about love *μακροθυμεῖ* (Greek: *makrothymeō*—to persevere, be patient, long-suffering, forbearing), and love *χρηστεύεται* (Greek: *chresteuomai*—to be kind, gentle).

## What Love Is Not

Apophatic theology describes the nature of God by expressing what he is not. Paul takes this approach, describing what love does not do.

### 1 Corinthians 13:4b-6 NIV\*

<sup>4b</sup> It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud (Greek: *phusioō* / *φυσιώω*—puffed up, arrogant). <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Paul uses *φυσιώω* a number of times in the letter to describe the Corinthians.

## All Things

In [13:7](#), Paul repeats “all things” four times.

- Love covers/endures (Greek: *panta stegēi* / πάντα στέγει)
- Love believes/trusts (Greek: *panta pisteuei* / πάντα πιστεύει)
- Hopes (Greek: *panta elpizei* / πάντα ἐλπίζει)
- Endures, remains, waits upon (Greek: *panta hypomenei* / πάντα ὑπομένει)

## Love Endures

Paul concludes the description of love in [1 Corinthians 13:8](#), stating that “love never fails/falls (Greek: *piptei* / πίπτει).” He then contrasts the enduring nature of love with the temporary nature of the spiritual gifts he started the chapter with—prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. Ultimately, all that is only partial will be abolished to give way to that which is perfect and complete ([1 Cor. 13:10](#)).

They all cease (Greek: *katargeo* / καταργέω—to render inoperative, abolish) in order to give way to a new order. Tongues will cease and will give way to our heavenly worship. Prophecies will no longer be needed as we have a full revelation of the divine nature. Completeness, wholeness, and fullness will come.

### 1 Corinthians 13:11 NIV\*

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 nullified (Greek: *katergeka* / κατήργηκα) the ways of childhood.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

## Now and Then

Note the pairs of contrast between what we experience “now” and what we look forward to “then.”

### 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 NIV

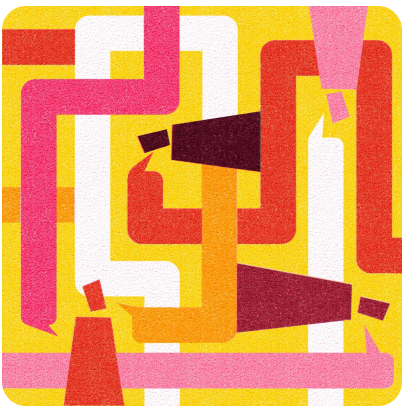
<sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The reflection is seen “dimly” (Greek: *ainigmati* / αἰνίγματι—linked to enigma).

When we get to [1 Corinthians 15](#), we’ll see that some things endure (the body) and some things are abolished.

## Reflection Question

Paul designed 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 to be read and understood together. How does [chapter 12](#) help us understand [chapter 13](#)?



# Module 6: Tongues and Prophecy

## SESSIONS 13-15

What is Paul's perspective on tongues and prophecy, and why does he single them out in this chapter? Jump in and find out!

# Session 13: The Higher Gifts

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## Key Takeaways

- The characteristics of speaking in tongues as a spiritual gift is that they are not spoken to people but to God, and they are spoken in the Spirit. This gift both edifies the person speaking and allows them to utter mysteries.
- The spiritual gift of prophesy is spoken to people for edification, encouragement, consolation, and building up the Church.
- Paul encourages speaking in tongues, but, even more, he wants the Corinthians to prophesy, imploring people to use intelligible words for the sake of helping others.

## Desiring Spiritual Gifts

Paul is enthusiastic about love and spiritual gifts, but he uses different verbs for each. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, “Earnestly pursue love” is διώκω (Greek: *dioko*) which has connotations of to pursue or to hunt down. “Earnestly desire spiritual gifts” is ζηλώω (Greek: *zeloo*) which is more like “be eager to possess” or “jealously seek.”

So they are to earnestly pursue love and jealously desire spiritual gifts, especially that they might prophesy.

## Tongues Versus Prophecy

Note the contrast Paul draws between the gifts of tongues and prophecy. Tongues are spoken not to people but to God, spoken in the Spirit, uttering mysteries, and edifying the speaker. Prophecy is spoken to people for the edification, encouragement, and consolation of the Church.

## What Paul Wants for the Church

Paul expresses his desire that the Corinthians speak in tongues, but he desires more that they would prophesy.

What reason does he give for the one prophesying as “greater” than the one speaking in tongues? Tongues is profitable if it is only one of a group of gifts. In addition to the gift of tongues, the church needs revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching.

## Chaos at Corinth

In Chapter 13, Paul has used the image of instruments (of a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal) and he uses it again here. If an instrument isn’t clear and the notes distinct, it’s pointless listening. Paul is telling them

they need to use intelligible words more than tongues.

### **1 Corinthians 14:11-12 NIV\***

<sup>11</sup> If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner (Greek: *barbaros* / *βάρβαρος*) to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

*Barbaros* is someone who doesn't speak Greek.

From the context of [1 Corinthians 14:13-19](#), we can infer that the Corinthians were speaking in tongues in a chaotic manner in their gatherings. Likely, multiple people spoke at once in public gatherings with no interpretation.

Paul continues his contrast noting that tongues needs interpreting and, while the spirit is active in prayer, the mind remains unfruitful, whereas intelligible words in prayer or praise engage the mind.

## **Edification and Inclusion**

Paul wants worship at Corinth to be intelligible and orderly for the sake of the “uninstructed.” [Verse 16](#) says the “uninstructed” (Greek: *idiotes* / *ιδιώτης*), which means “amateur,” “unskilled person,” or “outsider.” We do this so someone who is not knowledgeable of the group will be included, edified, and able to say “amen” to the thanksgiving offered. Five intelligible words is better than ten thousand words in a tongue according to Paul.

## **Reflection Question**

Why does Paul refer to the one prophesying as “greater” than the one speaking in tongues in a Corinthian corporate gathering?

# Session 14: A Challenging Passage on Tongues

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## Key Takeaways

- [1 Corinthians 14:20-26](#) presents unique interpretive challenges.
- Paul quotes from [Isaiah 28:11-12](#), but the phrasing does not match any known manuscripts.
- It's possible [1 Corinthians 14:21-22](#) is another place where Paul quotes the Corinthians.

## The Gift of Tongues

In [1 Corinthians 14:20](#), Paul revisits the theme of children and growing up. Don't be childish in your minds (grow up), only be infants in evil. In thinking, be fully grown or complete (Greek: *τέλειοι*). Then he cites the Law.

## Paul References Isaiah 28:11-12

This is a notoriously difficult section. J.B. Phillips rewrote [1 Corinthians 14:22](#), changing Paul's words to the opposite because he thought it was "a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist's error." (Phillips, 1960).

There is a huge amount of disagreement here as to what Paul might be saying to the Corinthians through citing this verse. The question we are faced with is how might it make sense that tongues are a "sign" for unbelievers given what we have already heard?

### **1 Corinthians 14:22 NIV**

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers.

Verse 22 begins with *ὥστε* (Greek: *hoste*—therefore) linking this verse to the previous one, the quote from Isaiah. Here we read a contrast between just believing and unbelieving people.

## Understanding the Quotation From Isaiah

One really complicating factor is that the Hebrew text, the Masoretic Text (MT), is different from the Greek text, the Septuagint (LXX), and the quote in [1 Corinthians 14](#) is different from them both. (The Masoretic Text is the authoritative form of the Hebrew Bible for Rabbinic Judaism and the Septuagint in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.E.).

Debate centers on:

1. Paul's use of the Isaiah text
2. The meaning of σημεῖον (sign)
3. The meaning of ἀπίστοις (unbelievers) as used in the a) assertions and b) the illustrations.

## The Use of the Isaiah Text

"Most commentators point out that the Isaiah quote diverges substantially from the MT and the LXX. Either it is quoted loosely or else from a Greek translation other than the LXX."

Johanson, Bruce (1979). "Tongues, A Sign for Unbelievers?" *New Testament Studies*, 25. 181.

Origen claimed to have found the text in a different Greek version of the Bible apart from the LXX, but this has not been verified (See *Philocalia*, IX. 2).

### 1 Corinthians 14:21 RSV

By men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners  
will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.

### Isaiah 28:11-12 Masoretic Text

<sup>11</sup> Nay, but by men of strange lips and with an alien tongue  
the Lord will speak to this people, <sup>12</sup> to whom he has said, "This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose"; yet they would not hear.

### Isaiah 28:11-12 LXX

<sup>11</sup> through the contemptuous speech of lips, through another tongue  
for they will speak to this people,  
<sup>12</sup> saying to them  
"This is rest for the hungry; and this is the calamity";  
but they would not hear.

The changes we read in 1 Corinthians include:

1. 1 Corinthians has "I will speak" in the place of "the Lord will speak" (MT) and "they will speak" (LXX).
2. 1 Corinthians omits the intelligible message spoken by the "Lord" (MT) and "they" (LXX) to which "this people" refuse to listen in both cases.
3. 1 Corinthians adds the authoritative phrase λέγει κύριος (says the Lord) found neither in the MT nor in the LXX.

## Is Paul Quoting Loosely From Memory Or Deliberately Adapting?

"The texts of the MT, LXX, and NT differ so much that definite signs of literary dependence are difficult to find. ... He deviates from all known Hebrew and Greek texts ..."

Lanier, D.E. (1991). "With Stammering Lips and Another Tongue." *Criswell Theological Review*, 5. 269-270.

There is a proposed exception from an unknown text that we don't have access to, but that's an argument from silence. What is the effect of the changes? The thrust of what we read here is closer to the MT, that God is speaking, is not being heard, and this brings judgement.

Lanier writes that Paul adapts the text to make it a much more forceful rendition of the idea that God is speaking (I instead of "he" in the MT and "they" in the LXX) so that "even though YHWH himself made the appeal, they would not hearken to me, says the Lord." (Lanier, 1991).

"We should ... note that the omission of the intelligible message has the effect of making the object of the hearer's refusal to listen, not the intelligible message as in the MT and LXX, but the unintelligible speech of 'foreigners' through whom God will speak. The addition of οὕτως [thus] and the use of the compound εἰσακούειν [to really listen] in place of the simple ἀκούειν [to listen] makes the fact that the people will not listen even more emphatic."

Johanson, Bruce (1979). "Tongues, A Sign for Unbelievers?" *New Testament Studies*, 25. 182.

## Tongues as a "Sign"

If we think that Paul is making a point about tongues being a "sign" for unbelievers based on this text that we have, what kind of sign might that be? A negative or a positive sign or something else?

### Tongues as a Negative Sign

Lanier argues that we can make sense of it if we study the background to Isaiah 28. "[Isaiah 28:1-6](#) constitutes one oracle versus the northern kingdom, Ephraim, and leads to an indictment of Judah itself" (Lanier, 1991).

The people will not listen to the prophets of God, therefore, they will be subject to having to "endure a different lesson from God, mediated through babbling masters." They are going to go into exile to the Assyrians (Lanier, 1991).

"[Isaiah 28:11-12](#) illustrates 'from the Law' this exact phenomenon: untranslated tongues harden unbelievers in their unbelief, whereas clear prophecy has always been intended to build up those who will believe and apply it."

Lanier, D.E. (1991). "With Stammering Lips and Another Tongue." *Criswell Theological Review*, 5. 269-270.

Thus, Lanier understands tongues functioning as a sign of judgement on unbelievers with a parallel of a negative sign in the Hebrew Bible. Lanier recognizes that the uninterpreted Assyrian language of [Isaiah 28](#) was a form of punishment for unbelief (Lanier, 1991). However, he proposes that we see "sign" in 1 Corinthians as a neutral term, "connoting evidence of divine activity whether for judgement or blessing" (Lanier, 1991).

He argues that uninterpreted tongues will put them under judgement because they won't be able to understand, but interpreted tongues will be a positive sign.

Johanson argues that this is the Corinthian view, and Paul rebukes them for their childishness in the use of tongues.

What if the quote is a misquote by the Corinthians to justify their speaking in tongues and people not understanding? They are justifying all speaking in tongues all at once even if those on the outside and unbelievers will have no idea what they're saying.

### **Reflection Question**

Do your best to summarize the different interpretations of this passage. Which of the interpretations do you find the most convincing?

# Session 15: The Order of Public Worship

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## Key Takeaways

- We can infer that, in public gatherings, the Corinthians were all speaking in tongues at once because we see Paul instructing them to speak one at a time and limit the overall number of speakers.
- Four common approaches to interpreting [1 Corinthians 14:34-35](#) are: a subordinationist reading, a cultural reading, reading it as an interpolation, or reading it as a disagreement with the Corinthians.

## 1 Corinthians 14:29-36

How does Paul frame the bringing of prophetic words in [1 Corinthians 14:29-33](#)? The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets—not ecstatic experiences. There is a sense of control here.

Note that the transition from [verses 33-34](#) is interpreted differently in different versions of the Bible. The NIV keeps the phrase, “as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people” as the end of the section on tongues and prophecy and not as the beginning of the section on women in verse 34.

This is not the case in all translations. NRSV begins the section on women with 33b and the phrase “as in all the churches of the saints” but places the whole women section ending at [verse 36](#) in parentheses, presumably indicating an interpolation. ESV simply begins the section on women with [33b](#).

## Differing Interpretations

There are various readings of these verses on women, and as with the passage in [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#), we see a similar pattern.

1. A subordinationist reading
2. A cultural reading
3. An interpolation
4. A disagreement with the Corinthians

## Subordination or Cultural Command?

In the past, these verses have been used to argue literally for the silencing of women in the congregation, and it would have been common in the past to find commentators interpreting this as a straightforwardly subordinationist text.

Others argue that this is a contextual command about some talkative married women and doesn’t apply to all the women in Paul’s churches. In other words, they were being rude. They argue that married women would

have been sectioned off in the assembly, but instead of listening are chatting during the service, so they should be quiet and ask their husbands at home.

Paul uses the term “to learn” in verse 35, *μανθάνω* (Greek: *manthanó*), which some people see in a positive light. Paul wants them to learn.

However, the language is strong here. In verse 34, Paul uses the word *sigao* (Greek: *σιγάω*—to keep silent, not permitted to speak as the Law says) and, in 35, *aischros* (Greek: *αἰσχρός*—it is shameful, disgraceful; this is the same word we find in 1 Corinthians 11:6 about cutting her hair).

## Interpolation

Many people think this little section is an interpolation, partly because it doesn't fit very well with what we read before and after. Philip Payne argues for this and then makes the points that this is something Paul would disagree with (Payne, 2009).

## A Disagreement With the Corinthians

Kirk MacGregor argues that it is an example of a quotation-refutation device. Philip Payne argues against him. The debate can be found here.

- MacGregor, Kirk (2018). [“1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 as a Pauline Quotation-Refutation Device.”](#) Priscilla Papers.
- Payne, Philip B. (2019). [“Is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 a Marginal Comment or a Quotation? A Response to Kirk MacGregor.”](#) Priscilla Papers.

MacGregor argues “that 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 is best understood as Paul’s quotation and subsequent refutation of the Corinthian men’s position that women ought to be silent in the assemblies, which originated in the Judaizing faction of the church” (MacGregor, 2018).

He argues that the text is authentic based on the early manuscripts.

Debate centers on a little symbol in an ancient manuscript called the Codex Vaticanus. This symbol is called the distigme-obelos and can be seen in the text—two dots and a bar. It can signify that this text is a variant and so there are those that claim the scribe knew that this was an interpolation. For this argument see Philip Payne (2017), “Vaticanus Distigme-obelos Symbols Marked Added Text.”

MacGregor disagrees with the interpolation theory. His proposal is that the quotation-refutation device begins in 33b. He describes it as follows:

“33 For God is not of disorder but of peace. As (*Hōs*) in all the assemblies of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the assemblies; for they (*autais*, fem. pl.) are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, just as the Law says. 35 But if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in an assembly. 36 Or (*ē*) did the word of God originate with you (*hymas*, pl.), or (*ēhymas monous*, masc. pl.) has it come? 37 If anyone seems to be a prophet or spiritual, let that one recognize that what I write to you (pl.) is a commandment of the Lord; 38 but if anyone disregards this, let that one be disregarded.”

MacGregor, Kirk (2018). [“1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 as a Pauline Quotation-Refutation Device.”](#) Priscilla Papers.

Verse 36 begins with *ē* (‘eh’), which has caused quite a bit of controversy. It means “or/than/either” or “hey/now!” It can function as a marker of an alternative, or a disjunctive particle signalling a change of tack.

It introduces a rhetorical question. What is it? What is Paul rebuking them for exactly?

“Paul introduces both rhetorical questions in v. 36 with *ē*, which he did six times elsewhere in 1 Corinthians to argue against the Corinthians’ position (1:13; 6:16; 9:6, 8, 10; 11:22) and five times to argue against a Corinthian deed (6:2; 9, 19; 10:22; 11:13).”

MacGregor, Kirk (2018). [“1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 as a Pauline Quotation-Refutation Device.”](#) Priscilla Papers.

Paul is rebuking the men in verse 36, not the women. If he had been rebuking the women only it would have taken a feminine form, *monas*.

“Far from attempting to silence women, therefore, Paul was rebuking the Corinthian men for prohibiting women from speaking in the assemblies, as he regarded such a restriction as tantamount to alleging that the Word of God belonged properly to the men and merely derivatively to any woman who was married to one of them. Paul summarily exposed the absurdity of this allegation with each part of the rhetorical question, whose form (not to mention the context) required a negative answer to each part. Obviously the Word of God neither originated with men nor has come only to men; hence it is ridiculous, and contrary to the character of the Gospel, to act as though the Word belonged properly to men by disallowing women from discoursing about it or asking questions about it in church. For these reasons, the preceding thought-unit is shown not to belong to Paul, but is rather Paul’s quotation of the Corinthians’ position from the letter they had previously sent him, his response to which letter constituted in large part the purpose of 1 Corinthians. This conclusion explains perfectly the paragraph breaks in our translation (*hōs* and *ē*), as Paul would clearly compose two shifts in thought when alternating from his own counsel to the position of the Corinthians back to his own counsel again. Hence Payne’s complaint that ‘[n]one of the other Corinthian quotations Paul refutes are nearly this long’ has no purchase; the paragraph breaks make clear that vv. 33b-35 are a separate thought-unit. Likewise, the shift of vv. 33b-35 is apparent by its interrupting the chiasm spanning vv. 26-40: A (v. 26), B (vv. 27-28), C (vv. 28-30), D (v. 33a), vv. 33b-35 (not part of the chiasm), C’ (vv. 36-38), B’ (v. 39), A’ (v. 40). Through this interruption, Paul makes it quite clear that vv. 33b-35 do not represent his thoughts, as opposed to his thoughts throughout the chiasm. Contrary to Payne’s objection that nothing in vv. 36-38 requires that it refutes vv. 34-35 if these verses were authentic, the *ē*, the *hymas monous* and its implications, and the two-part rhetorical question cumulatively require that v. 36 begins a thought-unit refuting vv. 33b-35.”

MacGregor, Kirk (2018). [“1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 as a Pauline Quotation-Refutation Device.”](#) Priscilla Papers.

## Reflection Question

Which of the four interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 have you heard before? Which interpretation do you find the most plausible and why?



# Module 7: The Puzzle of Head Coverings

## SESSIONS 16-18

Examine the complexities and obscurities of Paul's text on women and head coverings.

# Session 16: Questioning the Text

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## Key Takeaways

- 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is a complex and controversial text with a variety of readings and interpretations from New Testament scholars.



This session has no notes

## Reflection Question

If Paul were standing before you, what would you like to ask him about this passage?

# Session 17: Possible Solutions

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## Key Takeaways

- Interpretations of this passage could be categorized by whether it is dealing with head coverings or hairstyles and by whether it is teaching a hierarchy or not.
- Most scholars agree that [1 Corinthians 11:6](#) is a *reductio ad absurdum* argument.

## Interpreting 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

A good place to start with interpreting a difficult passage is to simply map the possible solutions to the problems that are currently offered by scholars. This material won't go through each point in detail, but all the different positions can be found summarized in *Women and Worship at Corinth* (Peppiatt, 2015).

“[T]his passage is probably the most complex, controversial, and opaque of any text of comparable length in the New Testament. A survey of the history of interpretation reveals how many different exegetical options there are for a myriad of questions and should inspire a fair measure of tentativeness on the part of the interpreter.”

Blomberg, Craig (1994). [1 Corinthians: NIV Application Commentary](#). Zondervan. 214.

“Along with these larger contextual questions, this passage is full of notorious exegetical difficulties, including (1) the ‘logic’ of the argument as a whole, which in turn is related to (2) our uncertainty about the meaning of some absolutely crucial terms and (3) our uncertainty about prevailing customs, both in the culture(s) in general and in the church(es) in particular (including the whole complex question of early Christian worship). Thus the two crucial contextual questions, what was going on and why, are especially difficult to reconstruct.”

Fee, Gordon D. (1991). [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#). Eerdmans. 492.

Readings of [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#) could be categorized in four ways.

1. Head coverings/hierarchical
2. Head coverings/non-hierarchical
3. Hairstyle/hierarchical
4. Hairstyle/non-hierarchical

## Points of Contention

1. Head coverings or hairstyles?
2. One narrative/theology or two?

3. A unified narrative/theology or a tensive narrative/theology?
4. Creation or culture?
5. *Kephale* as ruler or source?
6. Authority as imposed upon or conferred upon women?
7. Does this apply to all men and all women or only to married men and married women?

## Four Main Interpretive Strategies

1. A subordinationist reading: Paul is a subordinationist in relation to men and women and believes that women need a sign of authorization on their heads to pray and prophesy in public.
2. A tensive reading: Paul believes in some kind of subordination of women to men and also in their equality as reflected in the two sections of 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 and 1 Corinthians 11:11-16.
3. A rhetorical reading: Paul is engaging with the Corinthian men who are putting women in head coverings on the basis of a misunderstanding over headship, and Paul is rebuking them.
4. A cultural reading: Paul believes that women and men should dress or arrange their hair in certain ways to protect one another from shame in the prevailing culture.

A fifth option is to admit we don't understand the passage and to leave it as obscure, but evangelicals generally do not relate to Scripture in this way.

## Reflection Question

Do your best to summarize Lucy's reading/interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

# Session 18: Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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## Key Takeaways

- It is important to consider how our interpretations of Scripture impact our way of life and the experiences of others in the Christian community.
- Facing difficult parts of Scripture with the guidance of the Spirit and a diverse, loving community of Jesus followers can bring new hope and understanding.
- For the sake of unity within the larger Church, it is best to be open-handed in the interpretation and application of highly contested passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.



This session has no notes

## Reflection Question

In your own experience, how has this text affected relationships between men and women in church, school, marriage, or other parts of life?



# Module 8: The Resurrection and Christian Faith

## SESSIONS 19-23

What is the essence of the Gospel? And why is the resurrection important for the Christian faith? See what Paul has to teach us in 1 Corinthians 15.

# Session 19: The Things of First Importance

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## Key Takeaways

- Paul purposefully structures the letter of 1 Corinthians in a way that makes chapter 15 the pinnacle of his argument.
- Paul uses God/Christ language in 1 Corinthians, not Father/Son.
- Paul sums up a fundamental part of the Gospel in verses 3-4, "... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

## 1 Corinthians 15

Chapter 15 marks a crescendo in Paul's thought and brings all the themes together.

"[This chapter] forms not only the close and crown of the whole epistle, but also provides the key to its meaning from which light is shed onto the whole, and it becomes intelligible ... as a unity."

Barth, Karl (1933). *The Resurrection of the Dead*. Hodder & Stoughton. Cited in Thiselton, Anthony (2013). [\*The First Epistle to the Corinthians\*](#). Eerdmans. 1169.

Many commentators note the rhetorical structure of 1 Corinthians 15.

- 1-11: The resurrection of Christ (Narratio)
- 12-19: The denial of the resurrection (First Refutatio)
- 20-28: The consequences of Christ's resurrection (First Confirmatio)
- 29-34: Arguments from Christian experience (First Confirmatio)
- 35-39: The resurrection body (Second Refutatio)
- 50-57: Victory over death (Second Confirmatio)
- 58: Conclusion for the Corinthians (Peroratio) (Malcolm, 2012)

In the rhetorical structure, Thiselton points out that the linchpin of the argument is verse 34: "Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame." They think they know God, but they have no knowledge of God (Thiselton, 2006).

## God/Christ Language

Paul uses God/Christ language in 1 Corinthians and not Father/Son. He also emphasizes the all-encompassing nature of God. Why does he do this?

Thiselton cites James Moffatt on 1 Corinthians 15:28, who believed that Paul is attacking a "form of Christ-mysticism which loosened the nexus between God and Christ" (Moffatt, 1938).

“[Moffatt] explains the so-called subordinationism of the God-Christ relationship in this epistle in different terms. He proposes that, surrounded by cozy cult deities of the mystery cults and Graeco-Roman religion, the church at Corinth too readily appropriated a ‘Lord Jesus’ cult mind-set without sufficiently ‘serious reverence for a supreme deity over the universe,’ viewing ‘God’ as a shadowing figure in contrast to the passionate, intimate, devotion offered by others to Serapis or Asclepius or by Christians to Jesus as Lord.”

Moffatt, James (1938). [First Epistle](#). 250-51. Cited in Thiselton, Anthony (2013). [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#). Eerdmans. 68.

Fee also refers to Moffatt as identifying a Greco-Roman tendency to gather around a heroic or divine figure without the inclusion of any serious reverence “for a supreme, central deity” (Fee, 1991).

Paul’s emphasis on “God” in this case would be specifically to correct this imbalance. Whether this was the case or not is not verifiable. However, the emphasis that Paul places on the supremacy of God and on the all-encompassing nature of God even in relation to Christ in this epistle is undeniable.

Thiselton notes in [1:2](#), at the very beginning, that  $\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  is possessive, serving Paul’s point that the church belongs solely to God, and therefore, not to any factions or domineering leaders. He writes, “[t]he church, Paul insists, belongs not to the wealthy, or to ‘patrons,’ or to some self-styled inner circle of ‘spiritual people who manifest gifts,’ but to God” (Thiselton, 2006).

## Everything Comes Back to God

Paul says to them, “I make known now the gospel that I proclaimed to you, which you received and in which you stand, by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain” ([1 Cor. 15:1-2](#)).

They are standing in the Gospel and they are being saved, but there is a condition in there—to hold firmly to Paul’s word that he preached. If they don’t do this, then they have believed without a reason.

Thiselton prefers to translate  $\epsilon\iota\kappa\eta$  (Greek: *eike*) as “incoherent” rather than “in vain” (2006). The point is that it is senseless belief if it is not belief in Paul’s Gospel that he preached.

And then Paul clarifies what he taught them and delivers to them the foremost or principal aspects of what he had received. The Gospel is handed on from one generation to another. He sums this up: “That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”

## Atonement Theology

This is the essence of the atonement and is a phrase that is taken up in the creeds in the 4th century C.E. as the central statement of our belief in relation to the atonement.

The writers of the New Testament and the creeds don’t give us one particular metaphor or model of the atonement as more important than the others. This is the most important principle—that Christ died for our sins. Second, that he was buried (i.e., that he fully died in his body). Third, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

(This is seen to be a bit problematic because there is no explicit statement about Christ rising on the third day in the Hebrew Bible, so “on the third day according to the Scriptures” is quite difficult to pin down precisely. Scholars imagine that the Scriptures have a narrative of vindication or salvation on the third day and that this was what Paul was alluding to.)

Paul then cites some, not all, of the resurrection appearances: He appeared to Cephas (this is Paul’s name for Peter), then the twelve, the 500, James (not recorded as a resurrection appearance), then the apostles, and last of all as the miscarriage or abortion he appeared to me.

It’s strange that he doesn’t mention the women here. We don’t know why. Maybe he’s appealing to the men and so he cites the men?

He uses the term *ἐκτρώματι* (Greek: *ektromati*), which means abnormal birth or abortion. It could be that this is an insult that he’s using about himself, the least of the apostles, not fit to be an apostle, but then he turns this into a positive thing and a lesson about grace.

### **1 Corinthians 15:9-11 NIV**

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

It also reinforces the idea that God brings abundant life and redemption out of what has come to nothing or died and sets him up for the next section.

## **Reflection Question**

How does your understanding of the Gospel compare to what Paul writes about in this chapter?

# Session 20: The Resurrection of the Dead

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## Key Takeaways

- It appears the Corinthians believe in Jesus' resurrection, but some of them don't believe in the resurrection of everyone.
- Paul says the Corinthians' faith is futile without the resurrection and they are still in their sins. A rejection of the resurrection is an unwillingness to trust the Gospel.
- The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead is also at work in us. Far from bypassing our bodies, this work is about our bodies being taken up into Christ.

## The Resurrection of the Dead

Inferring from [1 Corinthians 15:12](#), it looks like the Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Jesus, but "some" of them didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. These were probably the leaders.

In line with everything we've been looking at, Fee writes, "The problem is that the Corinthians believed that they had already assumed the heavenly existence that was to be, an existence in the Spirit that discounted earthly existence both in its physical and its behavioral expressions" (Fee, 1991).

There is the possibility they thought the body was irrelevant and were effectively dualists. We're not entirely sure where they would have got these ideas from. Craig Keener writes that most Palestinian Jews would have believed in the bodily resurrection of the dead according to [Daniel 12:2](#), but the Greeks would believe in the immortality of the soul. Some Jews would have been influenced by Greek thought and some, like the Sadducees, denied the resurrection (Keener, 2005).

"The key issue has to do with being *pneumatikos*. The Corinthians are convinced that by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they have already entered into the spiritual, 'heavenly' existence that is to be. Only the body, to be sloughed off at death, lies between them and their ultimate spirituality. Thus they have denied the body in the present, and have no use for it in the future. ... At stake is the biblical doctrine of creation."

Fee, Gordon D. (1991). [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#). Eerdmans. 492.

The greatest affirmation to us is that creation is good and that we are made good. This is why humanity is worth saving. We are not going to be thrown away, dumped, or destroyed only to come back as something or someone different. Who we are now, the very stuff we are made of, is so precious to God that he will take it and rebirth it, clean and whole. We will be reborn the same person in a Christlike mold.

Look at the number of "ifs" that Paul uses to persuade them of their wrong thinking. In [verse 13](#), he also uses a *reductio ad absurdum* that even Christ hasn't been raised if there's no resurrection of the dead.

## The Resurrection of Jesus is Key

The main thrust of Paul's argument is that without the resurrection, faith is futile and we are still in our sins. Denial of the resurrection is a complete denial of the Gospel.

Verse 19 says, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." It's probable this refers to what the Corinthians are thinking.

Paul responds in verse 20, preaching that Christ's resurrection is the "firstfruits" (Greek: *aparche* / ἀπαρχή). The firstfruits are the beginning of the harvest and something like the first installment. Christ's death and resurrection are first, and it is in him that we are raised. (*Aparche* turns up in Romans 8:23, where Paul talks about "we" as the firstfruits, and in his discussion of Israel in Romans 11:16.)

## People Being Baptized for the Dead?

Nobody knows what "baptism for the dead" means, but for a really comprehensive list of possible options, see Gordon Fee's commentary [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#), 765-766.

Fee concludes that there are "a plethora of options, none of which is compelling as a natural reading of the text" (Fee, 1991). We don't have any evidence for vicarious baptism, and people find it distasteful, so commentators tend to rule that out, but maybe the Corinthians were doing that? Keener writes, "Probably Paul's theological shorthand here made clearer sense to the Corinthians than it does to us" (Keener, 2005).

## In Adam, In Christ

In verse 22, Paul turns to the Adam-Christ typology, which also appears in Romans 5:12-19, where he compares the two men who stand for all humanity.

Here Paul uses the language of being connected first to one and then to another. The connection of one to another gives humanity both an identity and a state—of being a sinner destined to die and of being made righteous and destined for new life.

Christ becomes the new head of all humanity. Irenaeus uses the term recapitulation, where Christ re-heads the whole of humanity.

Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead, and the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, which is why the resurrection of Christ is the firstfruits.

### **Romans 8:11 NIV**

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

### **Ephesians 1:19-20 NLT**

<sup>19</sup> I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power <sup>20</sup> that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's

right hand in the heavenly realms.

There's no good news for us as embodied human beings without Christ's resurrection from the dead. (In verses 23-24, some see an intermediate kingdom with the use of "then ... then ..." but there's no warrant for that [like Rev. 20:4-6]. The end is a one-off event.)

## **Reflection Question**

How would you summarize Paul's argument for why the resurrection matters for followers of Jesus?

# Session 21: The Triumph of Christ

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## Key Takeaways

- Jesus shares all authority in Heaven and Earth with God the Father and confers that authority to his disciples for them to advance his Kingdom on Earth.
- The early Church fathers rejected any sense of subordination of Jesus to God the Father, stating their co-equality (e.g., co-divine, co-eternal, etc.).
- The belief that Jesus is both fully God and fully human remains crucial to the Christian faith.
- The resurrection is Jesus' victory over death and evil and is a source of life and power for us, promising hope for the entire world.

## The Triumph of Christ

To describe Christ's victory over the powers, Paul again uses the verb *katargeó* (annul, abolish, destroy).

### 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 NIV\*

<sup>24</sup> Then the end will come, when Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed (Greek: *καταργήση* / *katargēsē*) all dominion, authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. <sup>28</sup> When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

\*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 8 says everything is put under humanity's feet. Psalm 8 and Psalm 110 (footstool imagery) are brought together here. These two psalms are also combined in Ephesians 1:20-22 and Hebrews 2:5-8.

Christ will be established as Lord of all creation, and he will bring about the renewal of all things. What we do in our bodies in this life matters because this body will be resurrected.

## Reflection Question

What questions do you have about the Trinity or the relationship between God the Father and God the Son?

# Session 22: The Resurrected Body

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## Key Takeaways

- The life-giving Spirit transforms human life, spiritual and physical, to make it fit for the future world when Heaven and Earth fully unite.
- Paul links Jesus' resurrection to the future Day of the Lord, when the final enemy of humanity, death, will be destroyed.

## The Resurrected Body

Paul addresses the Corinthians' attitude toward the resurrection.

### 1 Corinthians 15:32 NIV

If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

In response, Paul quotes [Isaiah 22:13](#).

### 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 NIV

<sup>33</sup> Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." <sup>34</sup> Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.

## Continuing the Theme of Shame

Here it is: ἐντροπή (Greek: *entropē*). This also occurs in [1 Corinthians 4:14](#) and [1 Corinthians 6:5](#): "I am not saying this to shame you," and "I say this to shame you" respectively.

This word is different from "disgrace" or "baseness," which is αἰσχρός (Greek: *aischos*). ([Eph. 5:12](#), shameful to speak of the things done in secret; [Titus 1:11](#), false teachers teaching things for the sake of shameful/base gain.) With αἰσχρός, there's a sense of moral disgrace here.

ἀτιμία (Greek: *atimia*) is a state of dishonor, disrespect (e.g., long hair for a man [1 Cor. 11:14](#)), and καταισχύνω (Greek: *kataischuno*) means dishonor, disgrace, put to shame ([1 Cor. 1:27](#), [11:4-5](#), [22](#)).

## The Seed Metaphor and Resurrection

### 1 Corinthians 15:35-41 NIV

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” <sup>36</sup> How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. <sup>39</sup> Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. <sup>40</sup> There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. <sup>41</sup> The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

Verse 36 contains common rhetoric of “You fool!” Paul is blunt here.

He talks about bodies sown in one way and raised in another, but I want you to notice two things: first, the seed metaphor and the continuity of identity, and second, the contrast of the body that is sown and the body that is raised.

The body/seed is:

- Sown in decay and raised in immortality
- Sown in dishonor (*atimia*) and raised in glory
- Sown in weakness and raised in power
- Sown in a natural body and raised in a spiritual body

The last Adam is a life-giving spirit, but not only a spirit. The Spirit transforms what is flesh and blood to make it fit for Heaven.

As far as Paul is aware, this happens in a twinkling of an eye! It is a small movement.

## The Trumpet Will Sound!

A trumpet sound was associated with battle, with gathering ([1 Thess. 4:16](#)), and with manifestations of God ([Exod. 19:16](#); [Zech. 9:14](#)). It signals triumph and rouses the army. The theme of the Day of the Lord beginning with a blast of a trumpet appears in [Isaiah 27:13](#), [Joel 2:1](#), and [Zephaniah 1:16](#).

### 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 NIV

<sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup> “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

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

## Paul Adapts the Prophets

The quote in [1 Corinthians 15:55](#) is from [Isaiah 25:8](#), although it is different from the Septuagint and slightly adapted to give a different meaning. “Where, O death, is your victory” is an adapted quote from [Hosea 13:14](#).

## 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 NIV

<sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup> “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

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

## Hosea 13:14 NIV

I will deliver this people from the power of the grave;

I will redeem them from death.

Where, O death, are your plagues?

Where, O grave, is your destruction?

## Isaiah 25:8 NIV

He will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears  
from all faces;

he will remove his people’s disgrace  
from all the earth.

The LORD has spoken.

“He will swallow death forever” becomes “death is swallowed in victory.”

## Hosea 13:14b LXX

Where, O Death, is your judgment or penalty? Where, O Hades, is your sting?

Paul changes it to: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Death and victory are linked here in [1 Corinthians 15](#). Death is the last enemy; there is nothing left after it has been completely destroyed, swallowed up, and devoured.

There is a debate about whether “we shall wear” is a future indicative or an aorist subjunctive. “We shall wear” or “let us wear”—a promise or a precept (φορέσομεν from *phoreo*).

We have to “put on” (Greek: *enduo*) in order to inherit the Kingdom, so I think that tells us something.

In [verse 58](#), Paul reiterates to the congregation that they are to stand firm—be steadfast and immovable.

This takes us right back to the beginning where Paul tells them that the Lord Jesus Christ will sustain them to the end, blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. “In him is all our life” ([1 Cor. 1:8](#)).

## Supplementary Notes: 1 Corinthians 16

Paul wraps up the letter in chapter 16. There is no standard closure for Greek letters, so Paul just closes his letter how he wishes.

The final chapter is split into sections.

1. Collection for Jerusalem (1-4)
2. Travel plans (5-12)
3. Concluding exhortations and greetings (13-24)

Paul's desire for them to give to the churches in Jerusalem shows his concerns for "mutuality, reciprocity, and solidarity" (Thiselton, 2006).

Here we see Paul's emphasis on practical concerns, exhorting them to take responsibility for others and to make sacrifices. We see the importance of giving and the theme of abundance (see also 2 Cor.).

The previous chapter ends (1 Cor. 15:58) with Paul calling the Corinthians to abound in the work of the Lord (Greek: *perisseuó* / *περισσεύω*). This chapter begins (1 Cor. 16:1-4) talking about the abundance of God's provision. (Note that "Galatia" in verse 1 probably means all the churches planted in the province.)

## **On the Collection**

Paul begins the chapter with the familiar phrase *peri de* (now concerning), signaling he's dealing with something they have raised.

We see the story of this collection playing out throughout Paul's letters. Sharing with the Jewish church is a theme in Romans 15:27, for example. The collection is finally delivered in 2 Corinthians 2:1.

This is not a tithe as such. Each is to give as they are able.

## **Conclusion**

Paul mentions travel plans, but there is more to it than that. There are a number of people mentioned in this final chapter whom Paul is asking the Corinthian church to honor and not to treat with contempt. It seems that the Apollos visit was their request.

## **Reflection Question**

How is the resurrection connected to creation?

# Session 23: Reflecting on 1 Corinthians

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## Key Takeaways

- Considering interpretive perspectives from different traditions than our own can help us see the text in new ways.
- 1 Corinthians introduces us to Paul the person and gives us a glimpse into Paul's heart for the people he ministered to.
- Wrestling with the text on its own terms can illuminate ways that its message applies to our lives today.



This session has no notes

## Reflection Question

What is one takeaway or reflection you have from taking this class? How do you see the message of 1 Corinthians as relevant in your context?