

1 Corinthians

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Author The letter is from *Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes*. 1:1. (Sosthenes may have been the synagogue ruler during the time that Paul was in Corinth, Acts 18:17. Sosthenes may have also been known as Crispus. Acts 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:14).

Written to 1 Corinthians was written to *the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours*. 1:2.



Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, (part of modern day Greece). It stands on a narrow isthmus between the Ionian and Aegean seas and in Paul's time was a commercial and industrial center with a population of around 700,000.

The Greek city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and rebuilt in 46 BC by Julius Caesar. The city was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. Corinth was a very corrupt and immoral place so its people desperately needed to hear the gospel.

Background Paul visited Corinth during his second missionary journey between AD 50-52. He stayed with Priscilla and Aquila and made his living as a tentmaker. Paul preached the gospel every Sabbath in the synagogue but his work was strongly opposed by the Jews, even to the point of taking him to court. Paul decided to concentrate on bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. A thriving church was soon established, which was remarkable as Corinth was a highly pagan Roman city. Paul stayed on in Corinth for 18 months teaching the new Christians, before returning to Jerusalem. See Acts Chapter 18. The Corinthian church soon developed a number of serious troubles so Paul wrote the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians to address specific issues which had arisen in the church.

Date 1 Corinthians was probably written in Ephesus around AD 56 and 2 Corinthians in AD 57. At the time Paul was coming towards the end of his third missionary journey. He had written an earlier letter to the church at Corinth, but it has been lost. See 1 Corinthians 5:9-11. Paul revisited Corinth later in AD 57 to follow up these letters.

Type Letter to a church. The introduction shows that the letter is not just for the Corinthian church, but for all Christians of all times. The issues the letter addresses are timeless, so its message is just as relevant today as it was in the first century.

Theme Most of the people in the Corinthian church had been pagan before they came to Christ. They were now trying to live as Christians but were being influenced by their past attitudes and behaviours and by the emerging gnostic culture of the day. Paul wrote to show how they could live for Christ as a pure and united body of believers regardless of the hostile pagan culture in which they lived. They could do this if they kept their focus on Jesus, the risen and exalted Lord. The main theme of the letter is thus "right Christian living". Jesus' work on the cross is supposed to transform us and make us different, so we should always act in ways that honour the Lord.

Purpose

Paul deals with the following serious issues that had arisen in the Corinthian church:

- Divisions in the church. (Chapters 1-4)
- Immorality within the church (Chapter 5)
- Lawsuits among believers (Chapter 6)
- Sexual immorality (Chapter 6)
- Marriage (Chapter 7)
- Exercise of our freedom in Christ
 - Offerings made to idols (Chapters 8-10)
 - Worship (Chapter 11)
 - The Lord's supper (Chapter 11)
- Order in Church meetings (Chapters 12-14)
- The resurrection of the dead (Chapter 15)
- The collection for the saints in Jerusalem (Chapter 16).

Key verses

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. 6:19,20.

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

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love. 16:13.

Outline

Greeting. 1:1-9

Paul greets *the church of God in Corinth* and explains that his letter is to them and to *all those everywhere who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

As in most of his letters, Paul begins with a blessing: *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*, and then thanks God for the Corinthians. They had *been enriched in every way* and didn't lack any spiritual gift as they *eagerly await* the return of Christ. Paul prays that God would keep them *strong to the end* and *blameless on the day of Jesus Christ*. (This shows that the early church was expecting Jesus to return any day and mirrors the eschatological focus in most of Paul's letters).

Divisions in the church. 1:10 - 4:21

Paul begins with an appeal to the Corinthians that they all *agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought*. Different factions had formed in the church around Paul (possibly stressing our freedom in Christ); Peter (possibly stressing the need to follow Jewish laws); and Apollos (possible stressing the value of philosophical understanding and oratory). Paul wanted the believers to be *perfectly united* as they had all been *saved by the power of God* and had all been baptized into the same Christ. He had preached Christ to them, and Christ was *the power of God and the wisdom of God*, regardless of whether they were Jews, Greeks or any other grouping.

Some of the Christians in the different factions may have thought they were better than those in other groups so Paul tells them to remember what they were when they were called by God. Some were weak; some were wise, and most were lowly, but now they all had equal status in Christ. Paul himself had come to them *in weakness with great fear and trembling* and his message had been only about *Jesus Christ and him crucified*. He did not use *wise and persuasive words*, so that their *faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power*. God's Spirit, not human reasoning had brought them to the Lord so it was foolish to continue thinking in human ways. *The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God* and by the Spirit *we can understand what God has freely given us*. Unless they became fools with respect to the world's ways of reasoning, they would never be able to understand life in the Spirit, who gives insight into *the mind of Christ* and thus true wisdom.

The Corinthian factions were being *worldly* when they followed their human party leaders. Paul and the other leaders were just *servants* the Lord was using to bring about His purposes. *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow*. Paul had laid the foundation of *Jesus Christ* and the result was *God's temple*, (i.e. all of the believers, regardless of which faction they belonged to). Anything not built on the foundation of Christ would be burnt up on the day of the Lord, because *God's temple is sacred, and you are*

that temple. Anyone opposing this is at great risk because if *anyone destroys God's temple God will destroy them.* The human wisdom that the Corinthians were displaying was *foolishness in God's sight.* They needed to *stop boasting about men* because in Christ they already had everything: *All things are yours and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.*

Paul states that they should regard him as a *servant of Christ* even though he was *entrusted with the secret things of God.* His work will be *judged by God* and he will receive *praise from God* if he is faithful in it, so they *should not take pride in one man over another.* They thought they had it all but he considered himself as a *fool for Christ.* *When we are cursed we bless; when we are persecuted we endure it; when we are slandered we answer kindly.* Rather than shame them through what he had written, Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate him, so would send Timothy to them to support them in this. Some were arrogant and would not receive his message but Paul would be coming to Corinth soon and would expose these people by showing whether their talking was backed up with power. *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

Factions in today's church.

The church today is still divided into factions! This is in stark contrast to Jesus' final prayer that we would *all be one* as He and the Father are one. (John 17:11). The church is split into eastern and western; catholic and protestant; pro and anti – Pentecostal There are myriads of denominations and types of local churches..... Megachurches and traditional churches meet in specially designed buildings while house churches meet in homes..... Each church has its own 'flavour'; constitution, and defining doctrines..... The leaders of the different churches are focused on their particular group and may or may not work together with other local leaders.....

And the world looks on and sees Christians divided against each and sometimes even attacking each other!

Not much different to the church in Corinth!

Paul's message is vitally relevant for us today. He says that there should be *no divisions among us, but that we be perfectly united in mind and thought.* That's because together *we are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in us.*

Paul now deals with three issues raised by reports he had heard about the church in Corinth.

Immorality within the church. 5:1-13.

The first issue was that sexual immorality was being condoned within the Corinthian church. A man was committing incest and the church was proud of their tolerance towards this, rather than passing judgment on the man. They should have handed him over to satan *so that his sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.* They needed to get rid of their attitude or the evil would infect all in the church. *Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed* to deal with sin, so they needed to face up to the issue with *sincerity and truth,* and not go back to their old ways of *malice and wickedness.* Their goal should be the repentance and restoration of the man but they also needed to protect the church from *immoral people and those who are greedy, swindlers or idolaters.* This would mean not associating with such people if they were part of the church. (Obviously this didn't apply to those outside the church as they were still naturally sinful. God judges those outside the church; but they were to *expel the wicked man among you*).

Lawsuits among believers. 6:1-11.

The second issue is that of lawsuits between Christians (6:1-11). Lawsuits were common in Roman society and Paul had heard that the Corinthians were bringing lawsuits against each other. He says that the *saints will judge the world,* so surely they can sort out their differences in a Christian way, rather than bringing shame on the church by doing it in public. Even better, Why not rather be wronged or cheated? Which is just what Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount. (Matthew 5:21-48, 7:1-6). Much better to be defrauded, than to defraud your fellow Christians. After all, *the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.* They had all been in that category but had been *washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.* They needed to interact with each other in ways that reflected their new status in Christ.

Sexual immorality. 6:12-18.

The third issue in this section is that of personal sexual purity. In the Roman world virginity was important if a woman wanted to get married so Aphrodite's temple prostitutes were commonly used for casual sex. Some of the Corinthian Christians were justifying this as part of the freedom they had in Christ by quoting *"everything is permissible for me,* and *"food is for the stomach and the stomach for food".* Paul refutes this saying that everything may be permissible *but not everything is beneficial,* and that *the body is not meant for sexual*

immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Our bodies have been raised to be *members of Christ Himself* so should never be united with a prostitute. Rather, *those who unite themselves with the Lord are one with Him in spirit.* We should *flee immorality* because our bodies are *temples of the Holy Spirit.* We are *not our own* and were *bought at a price.* Therefore *honour God with your body.*

Paul now answers a number of questions that the Corinthians had written to him about.

Marriage. 7:1-40.

A group in the church believed that *"It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman"*. (Some versions translate this as *touch a woman or marry a woman*).

Paul answers this by making three points.

- Total abstinence from sexual relations is unrealistic and just leads to more and more immorality. *Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.*
- When people get married their bodies are no longer their own and they should fulfil their marital duties.
- If married couples want to abstain they should do so only for limited periods by *mutual consent* so they can devote themselves to prayer.

Paul himself was not married. This allowed him greater freedom in his ministry *but each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.* He thought it was better for the unmarried and widows not to marry *but if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.* Married people who are having problems in their marriage should not separate or divorce but should try to reconcile with each other. If someone is married to an unbeliever they should not divorce because the unbelieving partner *has been sanctified* through the believing partner, which means their children are holy and not unclean. (In Judaism the children of unbelievers were considered to be unclean).

Paul message to the Corinthians was that *each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them,* and that *keeping God's commands is what counts.* The believers were all now free in Christ even though some were still slaves. Paul didn't want them to go back into the bondage of the law because now they had all been *bought at a price;* so should not *become slaves of human beings.* They didn't need to change their situation in life to serve the Lord!

Regarding the unmarried Paul says that they may marry - it is not wrong. He advises them to remain single so they can avoid *many troubles in this life* that come through being married. Married people are concerned for their partners, while single people can be more focused on the Lord's work. All of us should live in a *right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.* If a single person is considering marriage they should do what they think is right, but once married *a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.*

Paul shows here that he is comfortable in his unmarried state because it enables him to serve the Lord more freely than if he had been married. He does not forbid or downgrade marriage; rather he reminds married couples and single people alike that sexual immorality is highly destructive, and that our goal as Christians is to be effective in serving the Lord.

Freedom in Christ. 8:1-11:1.

Paul now explains how the freedom we have in Christ must be exercised with great responsibility towards others. To illustrate this he uses the issue of food that has been offered to idols.

Most of the meat that was available for the Corinthians to eat came from animals that had been used as sacrifices in the Roman temple. The Christians wanted to know whether it was acceptable to eat this meat (and by implication whether it was acceptable for Christians to make use of anything that came from pagan sources). Paul begins by saying that *knowledge puffs up but love builds up,* so our guiding principle is to always act in love. We know that *an idol is nothing at all in the world* and even though others had *so-called*

An important note about interpreting this passage (and others like it).

Paul is addressing specific issues relating to the Corinthian church in their particular cultural situation. His writings therefore need to be read in that context. Paul is not saying *"It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman"*. 7:1. (A group in the church was saying that!). Rather he is applying his wisdom to the particular situation and mindset that was prevailing at the time. He is certainly not laying down commands that apply to all believers today because that would just bring us under a set of "Paul's laws". The best way to interpret passages like this is to understand the situation, context and purpose for which they were written, and then look for the general principles that Paul was using as he gave his advice. It's these general principles that we will find most useful as we seek to serve the Lord in the totally different cultural environment of today.

gods for Christians *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.* So if idols don't actually exist (even if others think they do) there can be no harm to us if we eat food offered to idols. God is much more concerned about the effect our eating or not eating might have on others who are observing us. Even though we have freedom to eat such food we must be careful that the exercise of our freedom *does not become a stumbling block to the weak.* Therefore the guiding principle is *that if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.*

Paul now gives a further example of how we should exercise the freedom we have in Christ by describing his apostleship. He has *seen Jesus* and his apostleship has been fully validated in the Corinthians, but he still chooses *not to take a wife*, and to *work for a living*. He has a right to expect something from them, but he chooses not to exercise this right because he is *compelled to preach the gospel*. His reward is that he may *offer his gospel free of charge! I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.* To the Jews under the law he became *like under the Law*; to those not under the law he became *like one not having the Law*; to the weak he *became weak* so he could win the weak. He *became all things to all people so that by all possible means* he might save some.

Paul's example to us all is to freely lay down our personal rights so that we may serve others by bringing them to Christ. Would that this attitude was rife in today's churches!

Paul gives a further example of this principle by relating how the Jewish forefathers had received God's blessings but quickly became idolaters when given the freedom to choose for themselves. They indulged in revelry and immorality and ultimately paid the price for their choices. *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.* Even though we may be tempted to abuse the freedom we have in Christ *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.*

Exercise of the freedom we have in Christ with responsibility towards others even applies to the Lord's supper. We are to *flee from idolatry*. When we participate in the Lord's supper it is a *participation in the blood of Christ* and in *the body of Christ*. We should not *have a part in the Lord's table* and the *table of demons* as well.

Paul summarises his argument relating to our freedom in Christ as follows: *"I have the right to do anything," you say - but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything" - but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.* With respect to food offered to idols we *can eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."* (By implication, this also includes engaging in whatever activities we feel the Lord is allowing us to engage in).

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.

Freedom and responsibility

This passage highlights a very important principle that can help us as we seek to live as Christians in an anti-Christian society. We all have great freedom in Christ that enables us to do things without being bound by religious or cultural "laws". Every choice we make and action we take can affect others so we must be aware of the example others might take from our choices, and whether our actions will be interpreted in such a way as to bring honour to the Lord. Sometimes this will mean that we don't do something that is quite acceptable for us to do, because we know our actions might harm others. For example – drinking of alcohol. But it will also mean that we don't get bogged down by fear when choosing what we get involved in, and can enjoy the freedom that Jesus has won for us at the cross. For example, if you knew that chairs and carpets were invented by pagans (which they were!) would that prevent you from using them? No! *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* Galatian 5:1 Love for others will always help us be responsible in the way we exercise our freedom in Christ.

Order in church meetings. 11:2 - 14:40.

The church in Corinth (and in all of the early church) was not institutionalized as churches are today. Believers met in houses and shared their Christian experiences in informal ways, often based around a shared meal. There was no "worship leader" at these meetings and everyone shared as they felt led by the Holy Spirit. The meetings were lively, inclusive, unstructured and unpredictable. Unfortunately some of those involved got a little out of hand, perhaps due to enthusiasm, but more likely due to self-interest or a desire to influence or control others. Paul heard that the meetings were sometimes disorderly and wrote this section to provide

guidelines so that *everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*. (14:40). He didn't want to change what the Corinthians were doing; he just wanted to change how they did it.

The first issue in the meetings was the **behaviour of married women**. (11:2-16).

Paul explains the order of headship: God is head of Christ; Christ is head of a husband, and the husband is head of the wife. The sign of this in the marriage culture of the day was for a wife to wear a head covering (just as today it is the wearing of wedding rings). Paul has no problem with married women praying or prophesying but some of the women had demeaned their husbands, by discarding their head coverings as they did this. *In the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of women* so discarding of the head covering was not an appropriate cultural practice because it brought dishonour to the husband and thus to the Lord. Paul is not creating a binding law that all woman today should wear a head covering as they pray and prophesy (as some have interpreted these verses!). He is showing that the marriage relationship is vital in God's order, and that we should never deliberately put that relationship under threat.

The next issue was to do with the **celebration of the Lord's Supper**.(11:17-34).

Once again, this was long before the Lord's Supper had been institutionalized into the "Mass", "Eucharist" or "Communion" as we have it in today's churches. In the early church the death and resurrection of the Lord was remembered as part of a normal meal with eating and drinking - just as Jesus had said to do at His last meal with the disciples: *Do this in remembrance of Me*. Some were starting to eat before others and some *went hungry*, Some had even *got drunk*. (This probably reflected the custom of the day where richer people ate first and got more, while poorer people had to make do with eating whatever was left over). Paul explains that in taking the Lord's Supper they were all to remember the body of Jesus *broken for you*, and the blood of Jesus *shed for you*. Each time they did this they were to remember the *new covenant* Jesus had brought in through His blood and they were to continue doing this *till He comes* again. To eat and drink *in an unworthy manner* was to *sin against the body and blood of the Lord*. Everyone needed to *judge themselves* so that they didn't *come under judgment* from the Lord.



The third issue in their meetings was the **use of spiritual gifts**. (12:1–14:40).

Most of the Christians in the Corinthian church had come from pagan backgrounds so the Gnostic idea that the spiritual is good and the material evil may have lingered in their thinking. Some had obviously said *Jesus be cursed* referring to the human, physical body of Jesus, Paul tells them that *no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit*.

Others in the church were pushing their particular gifts, especially the gift of tongues, and shouting down others or refusing to give them a turn. In response to this, Paul now gives extensive guidelines for how spiritual gifts should be used in the church meetings. The essence of his teaching is that spiritual gifts should be used by everyone and should always be exercised in love.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us by God so that we can serve the Lord, and do His will powerfully and effectively. The Greek word for gift here is *charisma*, which means a *gift given by grace*. God in His grace gives us gifts, by the Holy Spirit, so we can serve others effectively.

- There are *different kinds of gifts*, different ways of serving with them, and different ways they work, but it is the *same Spirit* who gives the spiritual gifts. *There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work*.
- *To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good*. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to every Christian, but they are then to be used for the good of others, not selfishly. We are given gifts so we can give them to others!
- The gifts are given: one gift *to one*,.... a different gift *to another* ... The gifts are given to different Christians at different times for different purposes, to meet specific needs. The distribution of the gifts is fully decided by the giver: the Holy Spirit. *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines*.

- All Christians receive the Holy Spirit at salvation. At this time we are baptised by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ. *For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body - whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.* (This is quite different to the “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”, where we are baptised by Jesus in the Holy Spirit). Baptism into Christ means we become part of the Body of Christ, the Church, and we can take our part as members of that Body.
- We all have different parts to play in the Body of Christ, and no member is more or less important than any other member. *God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.* The Body of Christ will only be healthy and effective when each member plays their part, and exercises their gifts and ministries. *Now you are the Body of Christ, and each part is a member of it.*
- God has appointed people with special ministries within the Body of Christ: *apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles*, those with *gifts of healing*, those *speaking in tongues*, etc. Everybody doesn't have the same gifts, but we are all to *eagerly desire* the greater gifts.
- The gifts are to be exercised in love, otherwise they are pretty much useless. *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*
- The gifts are imperfect (because they are exercised through imperfect people). When Jesus returns i.e. *when perfection comes*) the gifts will no longer be needed and will disappear. *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.*
- It isn't the demonstration of a particular gift that shows someone's spirituality, but how the gift is exercised. A gift exercised with selfish motives may still be genuine but it will not bring forth the fruit that the Holy Spirit desired in giving the gift. The best way to exercise spiritual gifts is with *faith, hope and love*. And the most important of these is love!



1 Corinthians 13 is a wonderful chapter. It is commonly used at weddings because it describes the qualities of love in such a clear way. In context, though, this chapter is just a continuation of chapter 12 and a lead in to chapter 14. Paul is showing how the spiritual gifts should be exercised – and that is, in love.

LOVE

- Exercising spiritual gifts in love is the *excellent way*.
- Without love what we share is *nothing*.
- Exercising of spiritual gifts in love will have the qualities of love itself. It will be *patient, kind, does not boast, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, rejoices in truth, protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres. It never fails!*
- Our exercising of spiritual gifts will always be imperfect.
- Maturity in ministry comes as we know more of God and share more of Him, in love.

Spiritual gifts are also mentioned at Romans 12:3-8. The gifts listed there are: *prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, giving, leadership, and showing mercy*.

Gifts are also mentioned in Ephesians 4:7-16. The Greek word used here for *gift* is different to that used in other places. It is the gift of a person (rather than *charisma* – a gift of grace). That means that *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers* are not spiritual gifts; they are people given as gifts to a Church to *prepare God's people for service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. Ephesians 4:12,13.

The table on the next page gives a brief explanation of the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

1. The word of wisdom

A supernatural impartation of wisdom so you know what to do in a particular situation.

e.g. 1 Kings 3:16-18 where Solomon was given wisdom to know who was the right mother of a baby.

2. The word of knowledge

A supernatural impartation of information about a person or situation needed for ministry in the situation.

e.g. Acts 5:1-11. The deception by Ananias and Sapphira was revealed to the Church leaders.

e.g. John 4:16-18. Jesus knew that the woman at the well had 5 husbands.

3. The gift of faith

A supernatural impartation of faith so you can speak the Word of God into a situation.

"Have faith in God" (or "Have the faith of God"), Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:22-24. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word (rhema) of Christ. Romans 10:17. When you receive a gift of faith you hear God's word for a situation and speak that word into the situation. God's word then comes to pass.

e.g. Acts 3:6-8. Peter said to the crippled man *Rise up and walk*".

4. Gifts of healing

A supernatural impartation of healing so illness is cured immediately or quickly.

e.g. Jesus' healing of the woman with the flow of blood. Matthew 9:20-22. People being healed by touching the hem of Jesus garment Matthew 14:36, or Paul's handkerchief Acts 19:11,12. Prayer by elders James 5:15.

5. Working of miracles

A supernatural impartation enabling actions which defy the 'laws of nature'.

e.g. Peter walking on the water. Matthew 14:22-32. Peter raising Tabitha from the dead. Acts 9:40.

6. Prophecy

A supernatural impartation so you can speak God's word. We are to *eagerly desire* to prophesy. 1

Corinthians 14:1. *He who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.*

1 Corinthians 14:3. Prophecy is not so much about foretelling the future as it is about speaking God's word into peoples' lives and situations.

e.g. Peter speaking God's word to Simon. Acts 8:20-24; setting apart of Barnabas and Paul. Acts 13:1-3.

7. Distinguishing between spirits

The supernatural ability to distinguish whether a spirit is of God or not.

e.g. Paul and Silas identified that a slave girl had a spirit of divination. Acts 16:16-18. This gift is very important in the deliverance ministry when people are set free from demonic spirits.

8. Speaking in Tongues

The supernatural ability to speak a message from God in a language that has not been learnt. When a message in tongues is given it should be interpreted so that everyone understands its meaning. *When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two -or at the most three -should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. 1 Corinthians 14:26-28. (This applies to the gift of tongues given during a church meeting, not to individual speaking in tongues which is for personal edification. (1 Corinthians 14:4).*

9. Interpretation of Tongues

The supernatural ability to interpret a message in tongues into the language understood by the people.

Note that this gift is an *interpretation* of the tongue, not a translation, so it may differ in length from the original message in tongues.

Paul now gives a series of guidelines (14:1-25) for how the spiritual gifts should be used, focusing particularly on speaking in tongues and prophecy.

- We are to *eagerly desire the spiritual gifts* (including tongues), *especially the gift of prophecy*.
- When we speak in tongues we *speak to God*, not to other people, because we are uttering *mysteries in (or with) the spirit*.
- When we speak in tongues we *edify* ourselves, and that is why Paul would like *every one of you to speak in tongues*.
- Because tongues are unknown languages they are not helpful for building up others in the Church, unless they are interpreted into the language everyone knows. This is where the gift of interpretation of tongues comes in.
- When we speak in tongues our *spirit prays*, but our *mind is unfruitful*. That's why we should pray (and sing) in tongues (so that our spirit is worshipping the Lord), and in English, (so that in praying with our minds we are understanding what we are praying).
- Speaking in tongues (praying with our spirits) is further explained in Romans 8:26-27: *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.* When you pray in tongues your spirit prays. You are able to express your deepest feelings, without 'censorship' or interference from your mind. In praying with your spirit you are also exercising your spirit, so you become more spiritually aware. This is really helpful when you are seeking to discern God's will e.g. when praying for someone. That's why speaking in tongues is so valuable in ministry situations.
- Paul thanks God that he speaks in tongues *more than all of you* but in a church meeting he would rather *speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue*.

Speaking in tongues

The Greek word for tongues is *glossa* which means a *tongue* or *language*. On the day of Pentecost when the disciples first spoke in tongues the crowd was bewildered because *each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?"* Acts 2:6-8. This shows that tongues are actual languages.

Speaking in tongues is thus "the supernatural gift of speaking in another language without its having been learnt". (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words).

Paul brings his guidelines about order in the church meetings to a close by highlighting the same theme of freedom and responsibility that has been central throughout the letter:

- All are to participate. *When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*
- When someone speaks in tongues *someone must interpret*.
- Two or three prophets should speak, *and the others should weigh carefully what is said*.
- Women should ask their husbands afterwards if they have questions.
- Everyone should be *eager to prophesy*, and speaking in tongues should not be forbidden.

Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way because God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.

Perhaps these days we have become so ordered in our church meetings that we have lost sight of the responsibility that all members of the Body of Christ have: to share what God has given them so that all can grow in Christ?

The resurrection of the dead. 15:1-58.

Apparently some of the Corinthians didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. For Jewish believers this may have been a hangover of Sadducee beliefs, and for Gentile converts it may have reflected their pagan past. Not believing in the resurrection of the dead may also have contributed to some of the other issues Paul has dealt with in this letter: immorality, selfishness and asceticism.

- Paul begins by reemphasizing that the resurrection of Christ is central to his gospel. *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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.*

- The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is of *first importance*. Jesus died, was buried and rose from the dead. That He rose from the dead was clearly verified by many different people, including Paul.
- Some were saying that Jesus didn't rise from the dead. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead preaching is useless, and everybody is lost and without hope. The whole Christian message is *futile* – in fact we who have put our faith in Christ are to be *greatly pitied*.
- *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!* Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and as He has risen so will we. In Adam all people have inherited death (through Adam's sin), but *in Christ all shall be made alive*. Jesus has destroyed the enemy - death. He rose from the dead and we will too.

Some of the Corinthians were wondering what it will be like to be resurrected. (Many Christians wonder this too!). What will we be like in heaven? What sort of body will we have? Will we know others and be able to communicate with others as we do now? Will we be aware of what is happening? We will still be ourselves? What will we do in heaven? Paul now gives a detailed explanation of what resurrection from the dead will be like.

- At present we have a natural body: *soma psuchicon* – literally a soulish body; or a body that houses our soul. This body is *perishable, without honour, weak* and can only live for a limited time. When we are resurrected we will have a spiritual body: *soma pneumaticon*. Our new body will be *spiritual, imperishable, glorious and powerful*. We will be made in the likeness of Jesus!
- When Jesus returns the dead will be *raised imperishable and we will be changed*. *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. Death will be swallowed up in victory*. And then we will spend eternity with Jesus in heaven!
- Knowing that we will be resurrected should help us *stand firm* in the Lord. We must *give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord*, because we know that *our labour in the Lord is not in vain*.



Resurrection of the body.

The Greek word for resurrect is *egeirontai*. It means “to waken, raise up, arouse”. The word for resurrection is *anastasis*. It means “a raising up, a causing to be made alive from a state of death”.

- **For Christians.** When Jesus returns we will be resurrected and will have a new body in heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Philippians 3:20,21. Our resurrection body will not be a natural body with all of its limitations. It will be heavenly, immortal and incorruptible. 1 Corinthians 15:44-50. We will be able to stand before the Lord complete and whole in every way! When Christians die we go to Heaven awaiting the resurrection of our bodies. 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23; Hebrews 12:22-24. The moment at the Second Coming when we receive our new bodies is called the **First Resurrection**. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 11:24; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Luke 14:14; Revelation 20:4-6. This has been the great hope for God's people throughout history! Philippians 3:11.
- **For those who died before Christ.** When people died their body went into the grave (Hebrew *qeber*) and their soul and spirit went down to *sheol* (Greek *Hades*) – the abode of the dead. Genesis 3:19; Psalm 55:15; Proverbs 15:24. Sheol was apparently in two parts: paradise (a place of comfort for the righteous), and the pit (a place of torment for the wicked). Luke 16:19-31; Psalm 116:3. When Jesus died on the cross He descended into Hades and raised the righteous souls up to heaven to live with Him forever. Luke 23:43; Acts 2:27; Ephesians 4:8-10.
- **For those who have died outside of Christ.** Those who have rejected Christ will be raised from the dead at the **Second Resurrection** and will face God's judgment before the Great White Throne. Their judgment will be to spend eternity in hell. Revelation 20:11-15.

Only Christians can look forward to this *great hope*: the resurrection of our bodies and eternity in heaven! Philippians 3:10,11. *Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!* 1 Cor 15:57

The collection for the Jerusalem Church. 16:1-4.

The final issue Paul deals with is the collection for *God's people* in Jerusalem (who had experienced a famine during the 40s). Each week the Corinthians are *to set aside a sum of money* for the collection *in keeping with their income*. Paul will provide letters of introduction to accompany the gift when it is sent to Jerusalem. Paul says he may or may not accompany the gift himself (perhaps to allay fears some may have had that he would somehow profit from the gift himself). See 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9 for more about Christian giving.

Final requests and greetings. 6:5-24.

Paul finishes his letter by explaining how he hopes to visit Corinth after he has passed through Macedonia. Meanwhile he will stay in Ephesus because *a great door for effective ministry had opened up* for him there, even though many opposed him.

He gives final instructions regarding Timothy (who should be welcomed); Apollos (who Paul encouraged to visit Corinth even though he was unwilling); and the household of Stephanus (who should be recognized and respected because they *devoted themselves to the service of the saints*, and *refreshed Paul's spirit*).

Paul writes his final greetings in his own hand and sends greetings from churches in Asia, Priscilla and Aquila and all the Christian brothers and sisters who meet in their house. He finishes with a benediction and a warning:

If anyone does not love the Lord – let that person be cursed! Come, Lord (Greek marana tha). The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Discussion questions

Why did Paul write 1 Corinthians?

How was the situation of the church in Corinth similar to and different from the situation facing the church today? How is the message of 1 Corinthians relevant for the church today?

What happens when Christians die? What happens when Jesus returns? How does the teaching on these matters in 2 Thessalonians fit in with teaching on the Second Coming in other parts of the Bible?

Identify all the places in 1 Corinthians where Paul highlights the freedom we have in Christ and balances this with the responsibility we have to love others. Give examples where you have freedom in Christ but must exercise this freedom with responsibility and love.

How should passages like 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 6:1-11; 6:12-20; 7:1-40; 8:1-13; 11:1-16 etc. be interpreted, given that they are Paul's advice regarding cultural practices of the 1st Century?

How are spiritual gifts exercised in your life and /or church? Does this meet the way that Paul says spiritual gifts should be exercised in 1 Corinthians Chapters 12-14?

What kind of body will you have when you die? How is this different to the body you have now?

What have you learned from your study of 1 Corinthians? How will you apply this in the future?