

REIMAGINING
CHURCH
FINAL INSTALMENT

STUDIES IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12-16

The church at Corinth was hardly a model church. It was fractured by arguments and divisions. It suffered from elitism and open hostility. People are bickering about who has the best gifts and who is the most important. Yet despite these and other flaws, Paul still describes them as precious and blessed, for they were no less than the church of God (1:2).

Is this how you view our church?

In this set of studies on 1 Corinthians 12-16, we continue delving into what makes our "togetherness" as a church so special to God.

As with any study, you'll get the most out of them if you're able to read the relevant passage and answer the questions before your group meets. That will also equip you to best encourage the others in your group with what you say. However, if some weeks you don't get to prepare, please don't use that as an excuse to not go along. Just being there is a great way of showing the group that they're important to you. Plus, the studies are designed to be useful even if you're thinking about them for the first time at your group.

Each study firstly works through the verses (section by section) so as to help build an understanding of what the overall passage means. The study then ends with a "Think it over" section in which practical applications are considered for us as individual Christians, as well as for us as a church family.

1 Corinthians 12-13

Skim back over 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1) We looked at this passage on Sunday 16 July. In what ways does the Spirit unite us as followers of Jesus?

2) In what ways does the Spirit make us different?

3) Why does the Spirit give us different gifts?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

4) In what way is the church of God like a body?

5) How does the image of a body help us realise that we are needed? (v14-20)

6) How does the image of a body help us realise that we need others? (v21-26)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3

7) What seems to be Paul's main point in v27-30?

8). What is Paul's "most excellent way"? How important is this "way" to the use of our gifts?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

9) Fill in the following table

LOVE IS....	LOVE IS NOT...

10) Can you think of any instances in the Gospels where Jesus exemplified these characteristics of love?

11) What do you think Paul is referring to in verse 10?

12) Try and summarise in your own words why love is greater than faith or hope. (v13)

Think it over

- In what ways does Paul's illustration of a "body" encourage you?

- In what ways does Paul's illustration of a "body" challenge you?

- Are there any particular aspects of love that you struggle with? How could you seek to grow in that area?

- Why is love the ultimate solution to the divisions in Corinth (remember chapters 1-2) or in any church?

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-19

1) What do you think the "way of love" might involve, based on what we learnt about love in the previous study?

2) Make a list of all the characteristics you can discover from these verses about prophecy and speaking in tongues. From your observations what can you conclude about the purpose of each gift.

	Prophecy	Speaking in tongues
Characteristics		
Purpose		

3) Review your observations in the previous table. Why does Paul prefer prophecy to speaking in tongues (v1)?

4) How does Paul's personal confession in verses 18-19 serve as a helpful interim summary to his argument so far?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:20-25

5) In verse 21 Paul quotes a section from Isaiah which is about Israel being punished by an invading foreign nation. How is this relevant to his discussion about speaking in tongues?

6) Why does Paul say prophecy is more beneficial for visitors? (cf v23-25).

Think it over

- In this section Paul is primarily focussing on the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues however can you identify any principles that apply to all gifts?

- Can you identify any areas in which your group could be better building each other up in? How could you be involved in strengthening that area?

- Do you think there's things we do as a church which would seem confusing to by visitors? How could we improve that?

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-28

1) What central principle does Paul use to determine what happens when the Corinthians come together?
(cf v26)

2) How does Paul apply this principle to the speaking of tongues?

3) What guidelines does Paul give for when someone speaking in tongues should remain silent? How is this consistent with Paul's observations about speaking in tongues in the previous study?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:27-35

4) How does Paul apply the principle of verse 26 to prophecy?

5) What guidelines does Paul give for when someone prophesying should remain silent? How is this consistent with Paul's observations about prophecy in the previous study?

6) What guidelines does Paul give for when a woman should remain silent? How is this consistent with Paul's observations about men and women having different head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-10?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:36-40

7) What seems to be the main lesson from this section?

8) In what ways is the lesson of verse 40 a repetition of the lesson of verse 26?

Think it over

- Are there any lessons you find confusing or confronting in this section? How could you go about resolving that?

- How might the lessons of this section be applied to other aspects of a church gathering? Try and be specific in your applications?

- This is now the fourth chapter about what happens when the Corinthians come together. Why do you think Paul has spend so much time on this topic?

- Skim back through 1 Corinthians 11-14. Are there any particular lessons that have impacted you personally? Why?

- Imagine you're given the task of organising a Sunday church gathering from scratch. Considering what Paul has discussed in 1 Corinthians 11-14, what things would you include? Why?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Below is a reprint of 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (NIV) but with verse numbers and paragraph breaks removed.

Read through the printed passage several times

- 1) Use different coloured pencils to circle any recurring ideas or words.

- 2) Draw arrows to highlight the connections and logical flow of the passage.

- 3) Put a question mark next to any sentences which confuse you.

- 4) Mark the spots where you think a new paragraph should appear. Tip: "You should start a new paragraph when you begin a new idea or point." (purdue.edu)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

5) Try to write a sentence summary for each of your paragraphs.

4) Now try to write a sentence summary for the passage.

Think it over

- You've been asked to give a short explanation of christianity. How does this passage help?

- Are there any essential elements of the gospel which you think Paul has left out?

- In the first sentence Paul says he wants to "remind" the Corinthians of the gospel. Why do you think he want to do that?

- In what ways can we be tempted to forget the gospel?

- What are some different ways we can help remind each other of the gospel? Try to be specific and practical in your ideas.

1 Corinthians 15:12-58

Read 1 Corinthians 5:12-28

- 1) What specific issue does Paul want to address in this section? (cf v12). How does this help explain why Paul wanted to remind them of the gospel in the previous study?

- 2) What evidence does Paul give for the certainty of the resurrection from the dead?

- 3) Why is "fallen asleep" such a good expression for describing the dead in Christ? (v18,20)

- 4) Why is "first fruits" such a good expression for describing Jesus' resurrection? (v20-23)

- 5) What do you think verse 28 means?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

- 6) What additional reasons does Paul give for the certainty of the resurrection from the dead?

- 7) How does a belief or disbelief in the resurrection affect a person's lifestyle?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-56

- 8) What will be the characteristics of the resurrection body?

- 9) Why is "the last Adam" such a good expression for describing Jesus'? (v45)

10) In what sense is sin “the sting of death”?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:57-58

11) What does Paul want the Corinthians to do because of the certainty of the resurrection?

12) What exactly is “labour in the Lord”? (v58)

Think it over

- What other things would you like to know about our resurrection body? Why do you think Paul *doesn't* give more details?

- Do you find Paul's conclusion a challenge or a comfort? Why?

- What are some ways can we help each other “stand firm”? Try to be specific and practical in your ideas.

1 Corinthians 16

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

- 1) What else can you discover about “the collection” from other parts of the Bible? (cf Romans 15:23-29; 2 Corinthians 9.

- 2) Do you think there’s any significance in Paul telling the Corinthians to put aside their giving “on the first day of the week”?

- 3) Do you think there’s any significance in Paul telling the Corinthians to choose “men you approve”?

Read 1 Corinthians 16:5-18

- 4) Why does Paul want to stay on at Ephesus? Is there anything surprising about his reasoning?

- 5) In what ways are Timothy, Apollos and Stephanas good examples of 1 Corinthians 15:58?

- 6) In what context has Paul already mentioned Apollos in the letter? (1:11-12) How might this make sense of Apollos’ unwillingness to visit Corinth?

Read 1 Corinthians 16:19-24

- 7) What role have Priscilla and Aquila had in Paul’s ministry? (Acts 18:1-4,18-26; Romans 16:3).

8) In Study 1, Paul described God's people as a body. How does this chapter serve as a good example of this?

Think it over

- We've made it to the end of 1 Corinthians! Quickly look back over the letter. What lessons have impacted you the most? Why?

- In what ways do you think 1 Corinthians 16 :13 is an effective summary of the whole letter?

- Imagine being part of the Corinthian church and you are given the task of writing a reply to Paul. What sorts of things would you like to tell say?

- What is the most substantial change that studying 1 Corinthians has brought about in your life or group?