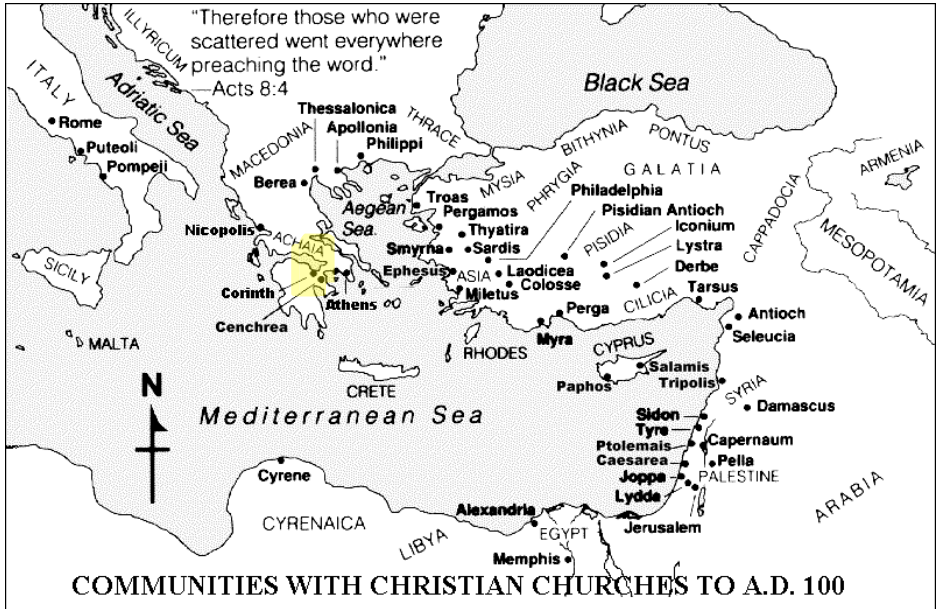




Sermon and Studies on
1 Corinthians 8-16



1

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

49AD – Paul Preaches in Corinth and sets up the church

51AD – Paul leaves Corinth

55AD – Paul sends 1 and then 2 Corinthians

Acknowledgements: the final makeup of these studies has been done by Steve Nation. The questions and leaders notes have heavily relied upon the following:

- Bryson Smith, 1 Corinthians 1-7, Church Matters, Matthias Media (with substantial editing by Ben Ho from St Lucia Evangelical Church)
- Mark Dever, 1 Corinthians 1-9, Challenging Church, Good Book Company
- Alan Stibbs (ed.), Search the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians, IVP

¹ Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts copyright 1996, 1993 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13, 10:23-11:1 – Idols: knowledge, rights and loving service

Paul ends one major section of his letter on sexual issues (chs 5-7) and begins another on the issue of idolatry (8-10) and proper worship (11-14).

The topic of idols and idolatry is a tricky one. On the one hand, idols are derided as being 'non-entities' and it is laughable that people would worship 'objects made of wood' (see Is 40:19-20; 42:17-19; 44:9-20 as examples of this sentiment). On the other hand, they are treated seriously as demonic spirits masquerading as gods (e.g. Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37).

So when it comes to eating food offered to idols, what are Christians to do? Are idols nothing or something? Can food offered to them be eaten?

There were important questions to the Corinthians because they lived in a pagan society and culture and idolatry was all around them. To succeed and advance in their world, socially, politically, economically, they would have to participate in many situations where idol food was being eaten – in events held at pagan religious centres; in the homes of their pagan neighbours, friends and business associates; and even the food that was sold at the meat markets.

This is the presenting issue that Paul is dealing with in chapters 8-10. And he deals with things on two levels – 1) the issue of idolatry and idol foods themselves; and 2) the broader Christian principles that are necessary in deciding what to do with whether to eat or not.

1. 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up' – what do you think this means?

Getting into the Bible: Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1. Paul acknowledges in verse 1 that he and many of the Corinthian Christians possess knowledge about something. What was this knowledge about? (8:1, 4-6)

2. Do all have this knowledge? Why/why not? (8:7)
3. What rights do those with knowledge have? Why?
4. What are they to do with these rights? Why?
5. What are the consequences of someone insisting on their rights or their knowledge in this case?
6. How does Paul conclude this chapter (v13)? Do you think this sounds over-the-top/too extreme?
7. 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up'. Having done the study, how would you explain this saying in your own words?
8. Applying the principle of 'knowledge with love'
 - a. In what other areas of life can you How could you further apply the principles of 'knowledge with love' taught in 1 Cor 8? (Think through: What are some things that you do that you know is your right to do [i.e. not wrong according to the Bible] that others might have a weak conscience about?)

Prayer: Love is about putting the needs of others before our own and building others up. Pray that God will help you be more loving and selfless than you already are.

The issue of eating food offered to idols doesn't end here. We will see when we get to chapter 10 that there are times when it is not acceptable to eat food offered to idols.

1 Corinthians 9:1-23 – Rights & Evangelism

Paul builds on the previous chapter by providing a personal example of giving up one's rights for the loving service of others.

From Paul's example, we can learn some important things about the 'rights' of Christian workers. But the main point of the study is to see what Paul does with these rights for the sake of loving service to others. It is precisely because the 'rights' that Paul had are valid, that we see the power of Paul's example.

1. Think of a time when you...
 - a. Stood on your right

 - b. Gave up your rights

2. Why did you do it?

Getting into the Bible: Read 1 Cor 9:1-23

3. What rights did Paul and the other apostles have? (1-6)

4. What were the bases (i.e. plural of 'basis') for these rights?

5. What did Paul do with his rights? What was his purpose in doing so? (15-19)

6. What was Paul trying to do as he describes in vv20-23?
 - a. What would this have looked like in real terms?

- b. What boundaries were Paul not to cross?

- c. What was his aim in doing this?

Thinking it through

1. What freedoms and rights do you have that you can give up for the sake of reaching out to the people around you (family, friends, colleagues, classmates, strangers)?
(Think of as many things as you can that you do that might 'get in the way' of evangelism – are they things of 'freedom' that don't matter? Would you be willing to give them up for the sake of sharing the gospel?)

2. What are some boundaries that you shouldn't cross?

3. Brainstorm about some things you could do as individuals and as a group that would draw you out of your 'comfort zone' and make you more like the non-believers around you in order that you might be able to more effectively share the gospel with them. Come up with at least THREE practical and realistic things that you could go away and do.

Prayer Points



1 Corinthians 9:24 - 11:1

Paul returns to the issue of idol food.

Although idols are in reality 'nothing', the participation in the worship of idols is absolutely 'something'. And so while Christians have every right and freedom to eat any kind of food, even those offered to idols, Christians are to take extreme care not to be involved in any form of idolatry because we are to be God's holy people who belong solely to God.

1. There is a well-used phrase "if you play with fire, you get burnt". Think of a time when you did something that would warrant someone saying this phrase to you.

Getting into the Bible: Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-11:1

1. What analogy does Paul use in 9:24-27? What is his point?
2. Read 10:1-13 again
 - a. What great things happened to the Israelites? (1-4)
 - b. What happened to them in the end? Why? (5-10)
 - c. Israel is an example for us and what happened to them is meant to instruct us (v11).
 - i. What are we meant to be learning from them?
 - ii. What comfort does vv.12-13 bring?

3. When it comes to idolatry, Paul makes it clear in 10:14 when he says 'Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry'. This suggests that the Corinthians were in danger of committing idolatry. Paul tells them why in 10:15-22.
 - a. What is the principle Paul is teaching in...
 - i. The sharing of the Lord's Supper by Christians in vv16-17?

 - ii. The eating of the sacrifices in the Old Testament in v18?

 - b. How is Paul applying this principle to the eating of food offered to idols?

4. How might 10:31-11:1 be seen as a really good summary of what Paul is saying in these 3 chapters (8-10)?

Further reflection

There is a broader application to this study that has to do with exercising 'self-control' and being aware of anything that might cause you to be 'disqualified from the race'. The lesson from Israel was that they did play with fire and got burnt.

When it comes to the Christian faith, there is much freedom. God does not give us a 20,000 page rule book that covers every aspect of life, giving us specific instructions for how to think and act in all situations. These three questions (the 3 'G' test) helps us apply the main principles of chapters 8-10.

1. How does this affect my spiritual GROWTH?
2. Will this be GOOD for others?
3. Does this GLORIFY God?

Replace 'this' with an aspect of your life (studies, work, gf/bf, family, sports, etc.). Consider how you might engage in this part of life that says 'yes' to the 3 'G' test and how you might engage in this part of life in a way that answers 'no' to the 3 'G' test.

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

Getting Started

1. Imagine and describe how the two 'types' of church would look like
 - a. A church where people came to church for themselves, to do what they want, get what they want out, for their own benefit
 - b. A church where people came to church the sake of others, to serve and bring blessing and benefit to others

Getting into the Bible: read 1 Cor 11:2-34

There are two delivered 'traditions' that Paul deals with in this chapter.

Head coverings (vv.2-14)

2. What is the basis for this tradition? (vv.3, 7-9)

3. Is it still relevant today? (consider both the underlying truth behind the tradition as well as the tradition itself)

It is important to understand that the issue of head covering is a strong 1st century symbol of marriage, just as a wedding ring is a strong symbol of marriage today. However, during the culture of the Corinthian church, more and more women went out in public with their heads uncovered just like men.

4. What were the men and women doing in the church?

5. What statement do you think they were making?

The Lord's Supper (vv17-34)

“When the church was gathered at so-and-so’s house for the Lord’s Supper they had their best friends (other richer families of the church) with them in the triclinium (dining room) where all the food was served (and where some were even getting drunk as in a common drinking party). The rest hung around in the atrium and hardly got to eat or drink anything. It was apparent from where and what each one was served (if anything) how they ranked in terms of their social status.” (Brian Rosner, 1 Corinthians Commentary)

6. What is the basis for this tradition? (23-26)

7. What were some of the Corinthians doing when it came to the Lord’s Supper?

8. What statement do you think they were making? How does it compare to what the Lord’s Supper really is about? (Read 1 Cor 10:16-17; Mark 10:45; Phil 2:5-8)

Think it through

9. What statements are you making when you come to church? Consider the following areas:
 - a. Do you come for your own benefit or for the benefit of others? What attitudes and actions show this?
 - b. Are you a promoter of unity or disunity? How can you tell?

Unity and Diversity in The Body of Christ – 1 Corinthians 12

What comes to mind when you think of the phrase “spiritual gifts”?

Getting into the passage – read 1 Cor 12

Look at verses 1-3.

1. Paul begins chapter 12 by highlighting the issue of spiritual gifts (lit: spiritual people). Why might this be an issue to the Corinthians? (You may want to refer to what we have looked at in 1 Cor 1-4)
2. According to Paul, what is the mark of a truly spiritual person?
3. What’s so special or miraculous about this?

Read verses 4-11.

4. What seems to be Paul’s emphasis as he teaches about gifts? (Hint: what does he keep repeating?)

Read verses 12-30.

5. In v12-13 Paul gives us a picture of the church – it has many parts but one body. However there are some problems that may cause the body of Christ to malfunction. Explain a) the problem, b) give some modern day examples, and c) try to give a solution.

v14-20	
Problem	
Modern examples	
Solution	
V21-26	
Problem	
Modern examples	
Solution	

6. What is the answer to Paul's series of questions in v29-30? Why?

7. In one sentence, summarise 1 Corinthians 12

8. How does this passage challenge you to change the way you relate to or view people at church?

The Most Excellent Way – 1 Cor 13

1. What is love?

Read 1 Corinthians 13. Focus in on v1-3.

2. What's so impressive about the spiritual gifts and achievements in vv.1-3?
3. How might this be particularly relevant to the Corinthian church? (think back to what the Corinthians were like as a church)

Read 13:4-7

4. *“Love is a feeling I have that makes me do crazy things”*
“My love for you consumes me... I feel like I could fly!”
“I have so much love to give!”

Do these statements about love match the kind of love that Paul is talking about?

Read 13:8-13

5. What does Paul say about love? What is the point Paul is trying to make?
6. It might be easy to misunderstand what Paul says about love here. What would you say to someone who says: “This verse shows that loving God and loving people is more important than faith in the gospel. It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are a loving person”. How would you respond to this? (These verses might help: 1 Cor 12:1-3; John 8:42; 1 John 4:9-11)

7. If love is the primary indicator of true spirituality and a Christ-centred church, then:
 - a. How do you measure up?

 - b. How does our church measure up?

 - c. Where can we improve so we are a more loving community?

8. Consider your service and use of gifts in the church in the past.
 - a. What were the motivations that drove you? (Usually we have mixed motivations, so really do think hard about what it is a mix of!)

 - b. Who or what should be our focus if we are to use our gifts rightly?

 - c. How do you need to change your thinking/motivation regarding service/use of gifts as a result of God's word today?

Prayer Ideas:

Thank you God for teaching me...

Forgive me for not...

Please help me to...

Pursuing the Higher Gifts

(1 Corinthians 14)

1. Which of the spiritual gifts are the ones usually prized by Christians? Why do you think these ones are prized?

Paul returns to the discussion between speaking in tongues and prophecy that he started in chapter 12, having paused to consider the central place and most excellent way of love in chapter 13.

Among the different spiritual gifts, it is pretty clear when we read between the lines of chapters 12-14 that prophecy and tongues were the gifts most desired and prized by the Corinthian Christians, with tongues being seen as the highest.

Paul makes it clear in this chapter that prophecy is 'greater' than tongues. The rest of the chapter is written to give reasons why Paul is commanding/encouraging this. It can be roughly broken down into **three** main reasons with some overlap.

2. Before we look at these reasons, it would be good to know exactly what 'tongues' and 'prophecy' are. Spend some time looking through the passage to discover what these gifts are.
 - Tongues:

 - Prophecy:
3. Paul began this chapter with the overarching instruction to 'pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy'
 - a. How does this chapter explain what is loving?

- b. Based on what is more loving, what kinds of spiritual gifts do you think Christians/you should be pursuing and desiring?

- c. Can you think of a situation where you have place priority to use gifts that build up over others? If not, share some ways you can change to prioritize gifts that build up?

- d. What do you think it means to 'pursue/desire spiritual gifts'? I.e. how do you go about doing this?

- e. How should you feel if you don't have these 'greater' gifts? How should you treat others who don't have these 'greater' gifts?

The Resurrection of the Dead

(1 Corinthians 15)

1. What practical difference (if any) does the resurrection of Jesus Christ have for your day to day life?

Getting into the Bible. Read 1 Cor 15:1-11

2. What is the gospel according to Paul? Why is this of first importance?

Read 1 Cor 15:12-19, 30-32

3. For certain reasons, the Corinthians didn't believe that you could be resurrected from the dead. If there is no resurrection from the dead, what would be the consequences?
 - a. For preachers of the gospel?

 - b. For believers of the gospel?
4. What confidence can we have that Jesus rose from the dead? (1 Cor 15:4-8; 29-32)

Read 1 Cor 15:20-28, 33-36a

5. We can be certain that Jesus rose from the dead! What are the sure consequences that will result because of this?

