1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: 1 Corinthians, Part 2
Theme: The Powerful Church

Overview: If the living church had problems (which was last month's emphasis), then the powerful church had answers. Even churches with brokenness, like the Corinthian congregation, can provide knowledge and insight. Powerful churches learn to stress the right things (i.e., the big things of the book, the Bible). Powerful churches stress God's wisdom over the foolishness of this world. Powerful churches stress spiritual gifts that edify others over pandering to the pride of the user. Powerful churches stress love over self-centeredness. Powerful churches stress the resurrection over the hopelessness of the world.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, together with "our brother Sosthenes" (1 Corinthians 1:1). Paul founded the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey, staying in the city for a year and a half while he worked as a tentmaker alongside Priscilla and Aquila and taught the Word of God (Acts 18:1-11). Later, the eloquent teacher Apollos also ministered there (Acts 18:24–19:1; 1 Corinthians 3:6).

Audience

Paul wrote to "the church of God in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2)—a congregation made up mostly of Gentiles along with some Jewish believers. Many had come out of pagan backgrounds (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 12:2). Paul had heard reports of divisions from Chloe's household (1:11), and the church had also written to him asking about marriage, food offered to idols, spiritual gifts, and other matters (7:1).

Date

Paul likely wrote 1 Corinthians around AD 53–55, from Ephesus during his third missionary journey (1 Corinthians 16:8, 19; Acts 19).

Setting

Corinth was a wealthy, cosmopolitan port city in southern Greece, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. It sat on a narrow isthmus between two seas, which made it a hub of trade and travel. The city was known for its many pagan temples and its reputation for immorality, and that culture had a way of creeping into the church.

Theme

The church in Corinth was broken, but Paul showed it where real power is found: in the message of the cross, which is the power of God for those being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18). Powerful churches stress God's wisdom over the world's, use their spiritual gifts to build others up, practice love above everything, and live in the hope of the resurrection.

Why Study 1 Corinthians?

This second part of the study turns from the Corinthians' problems to God's answers. It helps believers trust God's wisdom even when the world calls it foolish, serve with whatever gifts God has given, let love be the motive for everything, and give themselves fully to the work of the Lord, knowing that because of the resurrection their labor is not in vain.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:7

WEEK 2: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31

WEEK 3: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

WEEK 4: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 16-27, 50-58

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Pursue godly wisdom, and don't be discouraged if the world thinks you're foolish.**

STUDY: 1 Corinthians, Part 2

THEME: The Powerful Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:7

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Kings 3; Proverbs 1:1-7; Romans 11:33-34; 1 Corinthians 3:18-23; James 1:5; 3:13-18

GOD'S WISDOM

BY MARK SCOTT

Wisdom can show up in the strangest places. Books like Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, Philip Gulley's *Front Porch Tales*, and the too-numerous-to-count *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books are not deep in content but all were bestsellers. Maybe it indicates that for all our knowledge, we do not recognize true wisdom.

The supplemental texts for today's lesson help us focus on God's wisdom. Solomon prayed for God's wisdom, and it showed up in his decision about the prostitutes' babies (1 Kings 3). Solomon also wrote that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:1-7). Paul reminded us that no one knows the depths of God's wisdom (Romans 11:33-34) and that the wisdom of the world is folly with God (1 Corinthians 3:18-23). Finally, James said the pure wisdom from above has to be prayed down (James 1:5; 3:13-18).

The Corinthians were in danger of becoming enamored with the wisdom of the world. Wisdom can look shiny, and we might wrongly assess the cross of Christ as comparatively dim. The Corinthians could not put their fractured fellowship (1:10) back together without wisdom from God. Paul reminded them that what seemed profound in the world had no power to unite them.

God's Wisdom Shows Up in the Gospel

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-7

There is a mind-boggling profundity in the message of the cross. What seems to be a picture of weakness actually is the only true power to get us home to God. The *message of the cross* (1:18) and the *testimony about God* (2:1) are synonymous. They refer to the gospel message (i.e., the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus). Some translations use the phrase "the foolishness of preaching." While there has been plenty of that through the ages, Paul was not referring to the activity of preaching but rather the content of the message preached. In fact, Paul had little respect for *eloquence or human wisdom* (2:1). Paul was pushing back against the long-winded Corinthian rhetoricians who said nothing.

The contrast between the seeming wisdom of the world and the message of the cross was strong. To many, the message of the cross seemed *foolish* (i.e., moronic). But to those being saved it was the *power of God*. Paul reinforced his argument by reciting Isaiah 29:14, where God seemed to take delight in frustrating the worldly wise with his superior wisdom.

Paul called out the *wise person*, the *teacher of the law*, and the *philosopher of this age*. No one was going to learn the wisdom of God by just visiting the library. God's wisdom was learned by revelation. The preached message of the cross would reveal God's wisdom. And this wisdom was greater than miraculous signs (which the Jews desired) or the wisdom of the world (which the Greeks sought). In fact, the Jews looked at the cross as a *stumbling block* (a scandal, in Greek), and the Greeks looked at the cross as *foolishness* (that is, moronic). Paul spoke of the *foolishness of God*. How could God be called foolish? Paul also spoke of the *weakness of God*. How could God be called weak? God's seeming foolishness began at the apex of human wisdom, and God's seeming weakness began at the end of human strength.

All of this is why Paul put no confidence in the rhetoric of this world. He desired to make Jesus and his crucifixion central in his *message* (*Logos*). Paul could hold his own with the rhetoricians, and he did have a message for the mature. But he chose a posture of fear and trembling for his message was a *demonstration of the Spirit's power*.

God's Wisdom Shows Up in Less-than-Stunning People

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

The Corinthians needed only to look in the mirror to embrace what Paul was saying. The Corinthians were "nothing to write home about" (as the saying goes). They were not exceptionally wise or influential. They did not come from a royal bloodline (*noble birth*). In comparison to the people of this world, the Corinthians were foolish, weak, lowly, and despised. But God's power was revealed in that he took foolish, weak, lowly, and despised people and shamed the wise and powerful.

The reason for this was so that people would know whom should get the praise. Fallen creatures have nothing to boast about. Boasting in God is the only thing that makes sense. Paul put Jesus forward as the epitome of God's *wisdom*, *righteousness*, *holiness*, and *redemption*. God deserved the praise because he is really smart and strong.

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SWIM UPSTREAM

BY DAVID FAUST

Comedian Steven Wright is known for his offbeat, witty observations. For example:

> *"I think it's wrong that only one company makes the game Monopoly."*
> *"I bought some instant water one time, but I didn't know what to add to it."*
> *"For my birthday I got a humidifier and a de-humidifier. I put them in the same room and let them fight it out."*
> *"My neighbor has a circular driveway. He can't get out."*
> *"I went to a general store, and they wouldn't let me buy anything specific."*

Here's another Wrightism: "Hermits have no peer pressure." Wouldn't life be easier if we didn't feel pressured to go along with the crowd?

Competing Worldviews

Peer pressure isn't new. First-century believers swam against the current of competing worldviews. The apostle Paul summarized two of them by saying, "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:22). Modern versions of those perspectives remain with us today.

Secular humanists seek wisdom but reject divine revelation. They idolize science, dismiss the Bible as myth, view ethics as situational and relative, and see life as a product of what Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer called "the impersonal plus time plus chance." Others rely on their feelings and experiences. They demand miracles and say, "Show me a sign from God, or I won't believe."

The apostle Paul varied his presentation methods, but he preached the same gospel message to all. He wrote, "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). The cross offended first-century Jews who expected the Messiah to be a ruling king, not a suffering servant. Even the manner of Jesus' death offended the Jews; Deuteronomy 21:23 said, "Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse." Greek philosophers considered crucifixion abhorrent and miracles impossible. At the mention of Jesus' resurrection, "Some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject'" (Acts 17:32).

The apostles used different starting points in their sermons. To Jews who already believed in God, they quoted Scripture and cited messianic prophecies. When talking to Gentiles, however, whether unsophisticated idolaters in Lystra (Acts 14) or sophisticated philosophers in Athens (Acts 17), Paul began with an introductory lesson in monotheism and taught his hearers about the true God. Although the starting points varied depending on the audience, New Testament preaching invariably led to the cross and the empty tomb, for even if some considered it foolish, the gospel of Christ expressed God's highest wisdom.

Go Against the Grain

It is reasonable to believe in God, trust the inspired Scriptures, and hold a gospel-centered worldview; but unless you are a hermit, you must contend with cultural currents that flow against biblical truth. Are you willing to be a nonconformist and swim upstream? Instead of conforming "to the pattern of this world," will you "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2)?

Charles Colson wrote,

> *Genuine Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus, as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study, and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing a system of doctrines about God. Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending all reality. It is a worldview.*

It takes courage to hold, defend, and publicly declare a biblical worldview many consider foolish. If you dare to go against the grain, don't be surprised when you get splinters.

Personal Challenge:

Expand your understanding of worldview issues by exploring resources like the Colson Center (colsoncenter.org) and Room for Doubt (roomfordoubt.com).

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Talk about a time you received advice that at first seemed foolish to you, only to discover later that it contained a great deal of wisdom.

   Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:7**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. In what ways can we rely on God's wisdom (especially when it seems strange or foolish to us) rather than our own?
   - Share about a situation in your life where you need to trust in God's wisdom and understanding instead of your own.

3. Why do you think some people regard the preaching of the gospel as foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-21)?
   - What adjustments might we make in presenting the gospel to others that would be less likely to come across to them as foolish?

4. Why particularly would Christ's resurrection be seen as a "stumbling block" or "foolishness" to some people (v. 23)?

5. How does understanding that God chose those considered foolish and weak by the world affect how we view ourselves and our own achievements (vv. 26-29)?
   - What is one area of your life where you can give credit to God for any accomplishments you've made, reminding yourself of the humility he desires?

6. In what way does Jesus Christ "become for us wisdom from God" (v. 30)?
   - What does this say about the part Christ plays and the part we play in living wisely?

7. Paul wrote, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). How can we live by this principle today?

8. In what ways do you think Paul taught and preached "with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (v. 4)?
   - How can our lives demonstrate the power of the Spirit today?

9. How would you explain the difference between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom of God?
   - In what ways can we seek God's wisdom instead of relying on the world's wisdom?

10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Use whatever abilities and opportunities you have to serve the Lord and his kingdom, building up the body of Christ.**

STUDY: 1 Corinthians, Part 2

THEME: The Powerful Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 12:3-16; Ephesians 4:7-13

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

BY MARK SCOTT

Every Christian is a charismatic. But that does not mean that every Christian speaks in tongues. That does not mean that every Christian displays outward evidence of miraculous signs or gifts. And that does not mean that every Christian is a member of a certain denomination. Instead, it means that every Christian has received grace (*charis*) and therefore has been given gifts (or *charisma*) from the Holy Spirit to be used in ministry in the body of Christ.

First, consider the context of this letter, 1 Corinthians. Paul was addressing issues about which the Corinthians had written (7:1). He addressed issues related to marriage, singleness, and calling (chapter 7). He addressed issues about eating meat offered to idols and handling Christian freedoms (chapters 8–10). He addressed issues about gender in worship and how to rightly participate in the Lord's Supper (chapter 11). In chapters 12–14 Paul addressed the subject of "spiritual things." The Greek text just says "spiritual." Translators have to supply a noun following "spiritual." In light of the context and the argument, it is best understood as "spiritual gifts."

Now, some context about the Corinthian people. As Richard Oster shared in his College Press commentary on 1 Corinthians, any effort to read pro- or anti-Pentecostal thinking back into these chapters would cause one to misread the text. Clearly these chapters were corrective to wrongheaded practices going on in the church of that time. But the background is different from what we see in "charismatic" churches today. The background then was the pagan influences of Delphi (north of Corinth). Prophetic oracles and ecstatic utterances were not uncommon in southern Greece in Paul's day.

Spiritual Gifts Were Products of the Triune God

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

In Greek paganism, it was believed different gods gave different gifts. Therefore, to have a full quiver of gifts one needed to pander to different gods. Paul called that *uninformed*. He acknowledged that in their former "pagan" state they were led astray to mute idols. In contrast to the God of Scripture who spoke clearly, the pagan idols were *mute* (unable to give voice).

All three members of the Triune God are mentioned in this passage, which has caused some scholars to suggest that there is some kind of Triune formula that Paul might be quoting. Whether Paul was quoting or creating matters little. Paul asserted that the Triune God was the originator of spiritual gifts. They are united—unlike the pagan gods and idols. The Holy Spirit would never say through someone that, "Jesus be cursed." Rather Jesus' lordship would be affirmed by the Holy Spirit speaking through a believer. Theological solidarity exists with regard to spiritual gifts.

Spiritual Gifts Were Given for Ministry

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

In contrast to how the Corinthians were using their spiritual gifts (i.e., some were using their gifts with great superiority and pride), Paul reminded the church that ministry was God's real goal in giving spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts were for service, not for show.

Gifts differ in nature and kind. Service for God can be accomplished in a plethora of ways. Workings of the Spirit are as varied as the colors in the rainbow. But the Lord is the giver and the "first cause" of all of them. These verses indicate that not all spiritual gifts are listed in the verses that follow. Not only do other passages list other gifts (Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11), but the ones mentioned in this chapter show that these were the talking points in Corinth (i.e., these gifts were the ones around which controversy swirled).

Spiritual Gifts Were Distributed for the Common Good

1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 27-31

God is the giver of the gifts, ministry is the purpose of the gifts, and edification is the goal of the gifts. Each believer was given a gift (or gifts) for the *common good* so that the church can be built up. A good parallel text for verse 7 is Ephesians 4:7—they are almost identical.

Paul listed nine gifts in verses 8-10 and then listed eight gifts in verse 28. Some gifts are actually leaders (apostles, prophets, and teachers), some gifts seem miraculous, and some gifts seem rather plain (e.g., *helping*, which means something along the lines of remuneration). Paul insisted, by how he asked the questions, that all Christians do not have the same gifts (and therefore believers should not be made to feel inferior) and that these gifts should be used to help the church. Certain gifts seem best used in certain settings, but all gifts must be used in love.

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DON'T CELL OUT

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you realize that you own factories, warehouses, transport systems, and power plants? It's true! In fact, although you probably haven't given them a single thought before today, you would literally die without these valuable possessions.

I'm talking about the cells in your body. An adult human body contains as many as 100 trillion cells—microscopic building blocks that vary widely in size and function. *Medical News Today* describes cells as "tiny packages that contain minute factories, warehouses, transport systems, and power plants." Cells connect and communicate with each other, forming vital tissues and organs that keep our bodies alive.

The Wondrous Physical Body

I believe our bodies are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) because God designed them that way. So, I'm not surprised when a scientist observes, "In terms of compressed complexity, cells are without peer in the material world. . . . And there is likely far more complexity still to uncover."

Those words appear in *The Miracle of the Cell*, a book by Dr. Michael Denton, a medical doctor who also holds a PhD in biochemistry. He writes, "Where the cosmos feels infinitely large and the atomic realm infinitely small, the cell feels infinitely complex." The extraordinary complexity of a living cell supports the concept of intelligent design. In biblical terms, "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:20).

The Wonder of the Body of Christ

The same powerful, purposeful God who created the universe joins individual believers together in his church. The physical bodies we inhabit, and the spiritual body of Christ (his church) are both marvels of design and blessings to be appreciated. Both are vulnerable to injury and disease. Both need exercise and nourishment.

Just as cells in the physical body perform a variety of functions, individuals in Christ's church have a variety of roles to play and gifts to use.

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Spiritual gifts are God's to bestow and ours to deploy.

Every part of the body of Christ—even the smallest and least noticeable cell—has a valuable role to play. Yet, healthy cells don't exist for their own sake; their job is to contribute to the overall health of the body. In the church, it's tempting to "cell out" in one of two ways: (1) either we undervalue our gifts and wrongly assume they don't matter, or (2) we overvalue our gifts and act like they are all-important. The fact is, other Christians are our teammates, not our competitors. Their gifts are neither inferior nor superior to ours.

Robert Hooke, the scientist who used a microscope to discover cells in the 1600s, called them cells because he thought they resembled *cella*, the "small rooms" where monks lived in monasteries. God doesn't give us gifts so we can hide in our own small rooms, but so we can all do our parts to build up the body. Let's not "cell out" and act like our gifts are insignificant—or like they are the only thing that matters.

Personal Challenge:

How will you use your spiritual gift(s) this week to build up the body of Christ?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been part of a work or church group that made every member feel important and needed? Name a result or achievement that came from that group.

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

2. Paul reminded the Corinthians about their former way of life, having been "influenced and led astray to mute idols" (1 Corinthians 12:2). How do you think reminding them of their past would help them appreciate their new life in the Spirit?
    - How might your past help you appreciate what you have today in Christ?

3. How do different spiritual gifts in the church work together to create unity?
    - What can you do to appreciate and support the different spiritual gifts of the people around you?

4. Why is it important for each member of a church to recognize their own role within the body of Christ?
    - How can you better understand and embrace your personal role in your church community?

5. What is the significance of Paul's reference to the Trinity (Spirit, Lord, and God) as he wrote about the distribution of spiritual gifts in the church (vv. 4-6)?
    - What implications does this have for unity in the church?

6. Paul indicated that each believer's spiritual gift ("the manifestation of the Spirit") has been "given for the common good" (v. 7). What does that tell you about the gift you have been given?

7. Can you identify the spiritual gift you have been given to build up the body of Christ?
    - If so, share it with your group to seek confirmation.
    - If not, ask your group to suggest a gift they perceive you may have.

8. In this week's lesson, Mark Scott wrote, "God is the giver of the gifts, ministry is the purpose of the gifts, and edification is the goal of the gifts." What has been most edifying for you in coming to Christ or in your life as a Christian?

9. Paul concluded this section by encouraging believers to "eagerly desire the greater gifts" (v. 31). This will be the focus of next week's study, but for now, what gifts do you think are greater than the gifts Paul has listed in chapter 12?

10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Let love always be your motivation for serving the Lord.**

STUDY: 1 Corinthians, Part 2

THEME: The Powerful Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 13:34-35; 21:15-17; Romans 12:9-21; Colossians 1:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

LOVE

BY MARK SCOTT

Who would deny that love is one of the largest (if not the largest) themes of Scripture? It is the most descriptive characteristic of God himself (1 John 4:8). It drove God to send Jesus (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). It caused God not to give up on his people (Hosea 11:8-9). Scripture suggests three nuances. Some passages tell of God's love for us (Jeremiah 31:3). Some passages tell of our love for God (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). Still other passages tell of our love for others (James 2:8).

The love chapter of the Bible is in the middle of Paul's argument about spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. All the spiritual gifts of the church must be employed with love (12:1-11, 27-31). All body life in the church is expressed in love (12:12-26). Preferring prophecy over speaking in tongues for the sake of edifying the church takes love (chapter 14). The use of spiritual gifts in love is the "more excellent way" (12:31b). Love is the greatest fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Love is the distinguishing mark of the disciple (John 13:34-35). Love is evident in taking care of God's people (John 21:15-17).

The Importance of Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Knowing of love's importance puts it in proper perspective in the Christian life. Love trumps speaking in tongues, other inspired speech (prophecy), and specially revealed knowledge (mysteries). Love trumps faith (the kind that would be responsible for miracles—the metaphor of moving mountains gets at this). Love trumps the grace of giving to the point of poverty. And finally, love trumps martyrdom (*hardship*).

Paul indicated that failing to love as we apply our spiritual gifts means our efforts amount to nothing. The verses essentially say, "I do nothing," "I am nothing," and "I gain nothing." Few things are as annoying as a *resounding gong* or a *clanging cymbal* (think of a car horn going off in the driveway of your next-door neighbor's house at 2 a.m.). That is what a Christian who does not use their spiritual gifts in love sounds like.

The Description of Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Some say this paragraph defines the word *love* because it uses the word *is* (i.e., "Love is . . ."). But *is* can be definitive or descriptive. This cannot be the definitive *is* because Paul does not describe the lexical meaning of *agape*.

Instead, love acts (or does not act) in these ways. Of the 15 ways that love acts (and which are described), eight of them are negative. We often know what something is or is not by how it is described. Antonyms help to define a word.

Among the positive descriptions: love is *patient* (long-suffering), and love is *kind* (willing to help). Love also rejoices with the truth, always *protects* (covers over things), always *trusts* (believes), always *hopes* (expects with great desire), and always *perseveres* (remains under).

And as for what love is not: love does not envy, it does not boast, and it is not proud. Love does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs, and does not delight in evil.

The Eternality of Love

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Love never fails because love lasts forever; and God is love, and he lasts forever. Other things (speaking in tongues, prophecy, and revealed knowledge in particular) will *cease* or *be stilled*. This is an important paragraph as to the permanence or temporary nature of what, at times, are called the "sign" (miraculous) gifts.

No position on "sign" gifts is without problems, but there are basically three: (1) Sign gifts will continue until the return of Christ. Arguing for this position fits the "knowing partially now and knowing fully then." Also, if *completeness* refers to the complete person (or perfect one), would that not be Jesus? (2) Sign gifts will cease when the New Testament is complete. Arguing for this position fits the mirror metaphor (used of the Word of God in James 1:22-25) and some evidence from church history (e.g., John Chrysostom said that the sign gifts had ceased). (3) Sign gifts will cease as the church matures. Arguing for this position fits the child illustration in the text. Does the church outgrow the need for sign gifts? There is not unanimity about these positions, but everyone should be united on using whatever gifts they have in love.

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UNSELFIES

BY DAVID FAUST

Mother Teresa said, "People are unrealistic, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway."

"In the past," a friend pointed out recently, "when people were outside enjoying nature, they photographed the scenery and took pictures of beaches, mountains, and forests. Now, we turn the camera the other direction and take pictures of ourselves."

Industry experts estimate that today's average smartphone user takes more than 450 self-portrait photographs (selfies) per year—more than one per day. According to the *Guinness World Records* website, an actor from India, Akshay Kumar, set a record by taking 184 selfies in three minutes. Kumar is faster than most, but we're all tempted to put ourselves in the center of the picture.

Unhealthy Selfitis

Tragically, hundreds of selfie-related deaths have occurred over the last decade, mostly because individuals fell from heights or drowned while attempting to photograph themselves in precarious positions. Evidence suggests that selfies have a negative effect on emotional health.

A 2018 study in *Psychology Today* identified three categories of a disorder the researchers dubbed "selfitis" (the compulsive urge to take selfies). In borderline cases, phone users take selfies up to three times per day, but do not post them on social media. In acute cases, phone users take selfies at least three times a day and post them on social media. Phone users with chronic selfitis feel a steady urge to take selfies and post them on social media at least six times a day.

The Bible presents a realistic and healthy view of the human self. God created us in his image, provided moral boundaries to guide our interpersonal relationships, and gave us the capacity to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We are fallen sinners, but we aren't nothing. We become our best selves when our minds, bodies, and emotions glorify the creator who designed us.

The biblical instruction to love your neighbor "as yourself" obviously means to love others as much as you love yourself and "do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). Loving your neighbor "as yourself" also suggests the need to "be yourself" and put your whole "self" into the effort. You can't love God and love your neighbor as someone else; you must love them as yourself, using your own unique God-given personality and gifts to promote the well-being of others.

What the New Testament calls *agape* (the Greek word for unselfish, committed, covenant-keeping love) requires self-sacrifice. Author/preacher Tony Evans explains, "The biblical concept of agape love involves giving of yourself for the benefit of another, even at your own expense. Biblical love is defined by passionately and righteously seeking the well-being of another. [It] is an act of the will and not just a fuzzy feeling in the stomach."

Unselfish Love

Excessive preoccupation with self poisons hearts and ruins relationships. The list of sins that characterize "terrible times in the last days" begins by saying, "people will be lovers of themselves" (2 Timothy 3:2). By contrast, the Bible's "Love Chapter" pointedly reminds us that agape "is not self-seeking" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Agape requires a lot of "unselfies." Even when people are illogical and self-centered, we should love them anyway. Our marriages, families, churches, workplaces, and neighborhoods will improve if we turn the camera around and focus on the Lord and others instead of focusing on ourselves.

Personal Challenge:

Write a prayer of confession to God listing specific marks of selfishness in your own heart and actions. Ask the Lord to fill you with agape love and teach you to be less "self-seeking."

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When in your life have you felt most loved?

   Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Paul introduced his teaching about love by referring to it as "the most excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). Why do you think love is elevated the way it is in Scripture?

3. Lesson writer Mark Scott states, "Knowing of love's importance puts it in proper perspective in the Christian life." How is our life perspective affected by what we understand about love —God's love for us and our love for him?

4. Review Paul's description of godly love in verses 4-8. In what aspect of godly love are you most in need of growth?
   - What can you do to grow more intentionally in this aspect?
   - What is one practical way you can show this aspect of love to someone in your life this week?

5. Half of the descriptions Paul used to describe love are negatives, defining godly love by what it doesn't do. How do the negative descriptions motivate you to pursue love positively?

6. In writing about what love does and doesn't do, why do you think Paul chose a different term, "always," to describe how love protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres?

7. What does it mean to see "face to face" and to "know fully" in terms of our relationship with God?
   - How can striving to know God more fully help you grow in your understanding and practice of love?

8. Why do you think love never fails and is considered the greatest gift?
   - How can holding onto love as the greatest gift impact your daily choices and actions?

9. Take a few moments to share how you see God's love in action in the lives of the members of your group.

10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 16-27, 50-58**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **“Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).**

STUDY: 1 Corinthians, Part 2

THEME: The Powerful Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 16-27, 50-58

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:5-15, 28-49; 1 Peter 1:3-9

RESURRECTION

BY MARK SCOTT

Mockery and ridiculing are not very becoming for a Christian. Professional football players can even be penalized and fined for taunting. But mocking, ridiculing, and taunting are totally acceptable for the Christian when it comes to the subject of death. The resurrection (both Jesus' and ours) makes a mockery of death. It is the ultimate joke on the devil.

Many of the problems in the Corinthian church can be traced back to a faulty view of the resurrection and eschatology. Some had an over-realized eschatology (i.e., believing that Christians already exist in an exalted state like heaven and therefore they can do anything they want in the here and now). Some had an under-realized eschatology (i.e., believing the resurrection is so far removed from believers that even if it did take place it wouldn't matter). This may explain why Paul devoted 58 hefty verses to the resurrection. Paul based his mockery of death because of the resurrection on the following arguments.

The Historical Argument of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Other religions spoke about resurrections (and more likely, reincarnation), but Christianity is unique in that the earliest believers claimed that a resurrection—Jesus' resurrection—had actually happened. The collaborative eyewitness accounts are overwhelming. No judge who sits on the bench could deny the multiple attestations for the resurrection of Jesus (see Judge Herbert Casteel's book *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* and consider the debate between Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew). The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of fact. He came forth from the grave. Acceptance of this fact is a matter of faith. Resurrection is at the heart of the gospel. The gospel that Paul preached and that the Corinthians accepted and stood upon and by which they were saved centered on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul declared this historic event and the gospel message that flows from it as *of first importance*. Additionally, the Scriptures testified to the fact. Several resurrection appearances were cited in verses 5-11. Could over 500 people be wrong about seeing Jesus? Considering the number of people who saw the resurrected Jesus, that 3,000 were baptized on the Day of Pentecost (not much later) is not surprising.

The Logical Argument of Faith

1 Corinthians 15:16-27

Paul used impeccable logic to argue for the resurrection. First, he laid out what was at stake if there were no resurrection. His argument had nine points. If there were no resurrection, he argued, then Christ would not be raised, preaching was vain, people were still in their sins, and those who died in the Lord before Jesus returned simply perished. James S. Stewart's famous sermon on this text was entitled, "If Christ Be Not Raised, What Then?"

Second, Paul laid out what was at stake if there was a resurrection. His argument again had nine points. If there was a resurrection, he argued, then Jesus was the *firstfruits* of the resurrection and he was the second Adam, God's enemies are destroyed, death is forever gone, and God would be vindicated. Here is the logic: If resurrection is possible, then Jesus could well have been raised from the dead. And if Jesus was raised from the dead, then the resurrection of believers follows.

Paul continued his logical argument in verses 28-34. If resurrection does not happen, then baptism is ridiculous (v. 29), enduring things in life would be silly (vv. 30-32a), and moral behavior does not matter at all (vv. 33b-34). But if resurrection does happen, then those very things come into clear focus.

The Eschatological Argument of Victory

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

A seeming objection to resurrection by some in the Corinthian church had to do with the nature and state of the resurrection body. Paul argued in verses 35-49 that in the future the resurrected body would be totally different—just like Jesus' resurrected body was different following that famous first day of the week. Paul illustrated his involved argument with farming (seeds being sown and having to die in the soil to produce), animals, birds, fish, sun, moon, and stars. He argued there was an essential difference between the natural world on earth and the supernatural world in heaven.

In the ultimate future, the human body would not endure. Therefore, the body must undergo a complete change. This will happen in the eschaton. It will happen quickly when Jesus returns. The old world will be swallowed up in the new world. Death itself will be swallowed up and forever mocked. Paul used Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 to garner his biblical support (see vv. 54-55). Death is gone, and Jesus has fulfilled the law. God is to be praised for this eschatological victory. Therefore, the resurrection becomes the motivation for being happy in the service of the king (v. 58).

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OF FIRST IMPORTANCE

BY DAVID FAUST

Jesus Christ is risen indeed! Aren't you glad? The miracle of Jesus' resurrection is the turning point of history, the backbone of biblical theology, and the foundation of the Christian faith.

Resurrection Consequences

If Christ didn't rise from the dead, the New Testament wouldn't have been written, the gospel wouldn't have spread around the world, and the apostles wouldn't have given their lives as martyrs. Without the resurrection, Christians wouldn't gather and worship on the first day of the week, baptism would be an empty ritual, and the Lord's Supper wouldn't involve communing with the living Lord. If the resurrection didn't happen, we would be fools for believing and perpetuating a colossal hoax. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

But the reality of the resurrection changes everything. Jesus himself stressed its significance. He taught plainly "that he must be killed and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). The apostle Paul's driving passion was "to know the power of [Jesus'] resurrection and participation in his sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). What did Paul consider "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" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The resurrection is "of first importance" because it validates Jesus' truth claims, fulfills his messianic mission, and gives his followers purpose in life and hope when we die.

"The resurrection is the supreme vindication of Jesus' divine identity and his inspired teaching," writes former unbeliever Lee Strobel in *The Case for Christ*. "It's the proof of his triumph over sin and death. It's the foreshadowing of the resurrection of his followers. It's the basis of Christian hope. It's the miracle of all miracles."

Do We Give It the Attention It Deserves?

Do we make it clear that Christ's resurrection is "of first importance" in our preaching, teaching, and worship services—not just something we sing about and think about at Easter? The fact of the resurrection profoundly impacts the way we deal with death, grief, and loss. What we believe determines how we grieve.

Recently I wrote a book to encourage adults to keep serving God as we grow older. I interviewed Bill Gaither, who was in his thirties when he and his wife, Gloria, cowrote their well-known song, "Because He Lives." I asked Bill, "What do those lyrics mean to you now, in this later season of your life?" (He is in his late eighties.) Here is his response:

> *"A great old hymn called 'He Lives' talks about the fact of Jesus' resurrection. But we added the adverb because, which answers the question, 'OK, this happened, but why does it make a difference to me on Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday? How is it going to make any difference to me tomorrow when I go back to the house and 'she's gone' or 'he's gone' and they are not coming back? In our song, the lyrics say, 'Because he lives, I can face tomorrow . . . all fear is gone . . . and life is worth the living.'"*

Because Jesus is "the resurrection and the life," we can live in peace and security after we die (John 11:25). What could be more important than that?

Personal Challenge:

Do you know the song, "Because He Lives"? Sing it out loud and thank the Lord that you can say, "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow."

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When and how did the reality of Jesus' resurrection first impact your life?

   Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 16-27, 50-58**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

2. What did Paul mean when he wrote, "By this gospel you are saved" (v. 2)?
   - In what way are the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ foundational to the Christian faith and hope?

3. What is the point of baptism if Jesus' resurrection did not occur?

4. What does it mean to have believed "in vain"?
   - Acknowledging that salvation comes to us by the grace of God, what can we do personally to make sure we do not believe in vain?

5. Paul said that Christians are to be pitied if our hope ends with this present life.
   - Why would that be so?
   - What difference does hope in Christ make as you look toward eternity?

6. In what way is Jesus "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"?

7. Application writer David Faust notes, "The reality of the resurrection changes everything." Share some of the things in your life that have been changed because of the resurrection.

8. In Scripture, the word *mystery* often refers to something that has been hidden but is now revealed. How does the resurrection of Christ fit this understanding?

9. How does the hope of the resurrection and Christ's return motivate you in your Christian walk, and what can you do to encourage others with this hope?

10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.