

1 Corinthians 12

1. What gifts (ability/talent/strength) has God given the people of our church? Make a list. Are there any of these gifts some might regard as being more 'spiritual' than others?

It seems that the question of what makes someone "spiritual" was an issue in Corinth. It seems that the church placed a high value on certain "spiritual" people/things,¹ particularly speaking in tongues (some kind of ecstatic utterance) as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (12:7). Paul's response is not to deny the experience, nor to forbid it, but to

- Relativise it as one gift among many (chapter 12)
- Subordinate it (along with all gifts) to love (chapter 13)
- Clarify its place and use in church meetings – especially in relation to prophesy (chapter 14)

Read 1 Corinthians 12.

2. According to verses 1-3, what is the mark of the Holy Spirit?
3. Verses 4, 5 and 6 are clearly closely connected. What is similar and different in each of these statements? What is the main point these verses make?
4. What do we learn from verses 7-10 about gifts - Who gives them? Who gets them? Why are they given? Does having a gift imply spiritual superiority or progress? Why/Why not?
5. The understanding of our unity and diversity is illustrated from verse 12 with the image of a human body. In what ways is the local church like a body?
6. It is clear that every member belongs to the church and has something to contribute, but in practice people sometimes feel like they don't. Why do you think this happens? What do we learn from this passage about how to avoid this?
7. What needs are not being met (or opportunities not being taken) around our church? Are there ways that you could contribute? What would help you to do this?
8. Pray together that our church (and your group) would function well as the body, where each member is valued and contributes as they are able.

¹ The CSB (also NIV) translates the Greek word (pneumatikon) "spiritual gifts". However this is different word to that used in verse 4 (charismaton) – "gifts". The word pneumatikonis has a more general sense of "spiritual people" or "spiritual things". (eg. See 3:1, 15:44)

1 Corinthians 13

1. Who would say is the most loving person you know? What is it about them that makes them "loving"?
2. In some ways 1 Corinthians 13 seems out of place between chapters 12 and 14. Why do you think Paul thought it necessary to include this chapter at this point? (See esp. 12:31 and 14:1)
3. In verses 1-3, why is the person who does spectacular things worth nothing without love? (See verses 8ff, and 1 John 4:7-8)
4. For each characteristic of love in verses 4-7 try and describe what is meant in your own words, or with an illustration. (You might also like to think about how each characteristic describes God).

Which of these do you find most difficult to do?

Stop and pray. Ask God to change you in the ways you have identified.

5. What point is Paul making in verses 8-13? Why do you think he wants to make this point (ie. what is he saying to the Corinthians?)
6. What motivations, apart from love, might drive us to serve others in the church? What might this end up looking like?
7. What would you say to someone who felt that they can't serve, because love is not the only motivation for their serving?
8. Do you think loving someone implies liking them? How can you love someone that you don't really get on with?
9. How can we help ourselves and each other to pursue love (14:1)? (ie. to be people whose love reflects the description given in verses 4-7).

1 Corinthians 14

1. What different ideas do people around us have about the purpose of a church meeting, and therefore what we should do in church?

Read 1 Corinthians 14.

2. From verses 1-5, what are the differences between prophecy and speaking in tongues, and why is prophecy preferred over tongues? How does this connect with the passage about love in chapter 13?
3. According to verses 6-19, why should a tongue speaker pray for "the power to interpret" (v 13)? How does this relate to your answer in question 2?
4. Why else is prophecy to be preferred (v 20-25)?
5. In verses 26-33a, what guidelines does Paul give for prophecy and tongues when the church "comes together"? What principles does he seek to apply?
6. What does it actually mean for the church to be strengthened/encouraged/built, and why is this so important?
7. From the evidence within this passage, what can you deduce about the nature of prophecy as practiced at Corinth? Do you think we have prophecy in our church life? What might it mean for us to "be eager to prophesy" (v 39)?
8. If time permits (or interest demands) - Verses 33b-35 stand out as difficult, especially in light of what Paul has already said in 11:4-5. Is there any way of reconciling what seem to be contrary expectations for women in church? (Hint - Look at the context of each passage).
9. How effective are our public and small group meetings for building up the church? Should we spend our time differently? If so how?