

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

1. When do women today physically “cover their heads” (ie. wear hats, veils, special hair-styles, etc)? What ‘statement’ might a woman’s head covering or hairstyle make?
2. “1 Corinthians” is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. Much of the letter is taken up with responding to specific issues in the church. Chapters 8-10 have dealt with the issue of whether Christians should eat food sacrificed to pagan idols – and the principles involved in the exercise of Christian freedom. Chapters 11-14 deal with issues concerning church gatherings. The first issue concerns how men and women differentiate themselves in church. The issue is not so much about what men and women do, but how they do the same things. Although both men and women “pray and prophesy”, Paul insists that gender distinction is important.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. What is your immediate reaction?

3. If after studying this passage you come to the conclusion that women should wear hats in church should we start doing it? Why or why not?
4. What (in a nutshell) are the men and women in Corinth told to do? (See esp. v 4-5, 7 & 10)?
5. What reasons does the apostle give for insisting on maintaining gender distinction in church?
 - v 3-6
 - v 7-9
 - v 10
 - v 13-15
 - v 16
6. To what extent are these reasons tied only to first century culture? To what extent do they apply to all cultures?
7. In what way are verses 11 & 12 a corrective to potential misunderstandings of what the apostle is saying?
8. How does this passage apply to us today? Do you think it requires women to physically cover their heads in church? Why or why not? What challenge does the passage give to men?
9. In our culture what demeanour, dress codes or symbols or might express or suppress the gender role distinctions God has built into creation?
10. Having read this passage, spend time praying for men and for women and for the appropriate expression of gender distinctions in our church.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

1. In what way is celebrating the Lord's Supper meaningful to you? What do you therefore think are the most important aspects of the Supper?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. In what ways does the Corinthian "Lord's Supper" seem similar or different what we call the Lord's Supper today?

3. What evidence does the apostle bring for his claim that the Corinthian church meetings did more harm than good? What is the root problem? (v 17-22)

4. In verses 23-25 Paul recounts the tradition he'd received about Jesus' last supper (he of course was not present)
 - a) What according to Paul is the purpose of our eating and drinking together? (v 26)

 - b) Why do you think Paul introduces the account of the last supper here?

5. Verses 27-32 then draw out the implications...
 - a) What's wrong with eating and drinking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner? (v 27)

 - b) What consequences flow? (v 29-32)

 - c) What are we told to do? What does this mean in practice? (v 28)

6. The practical conclusion to Paul's argument is contained in verses 33-34. Although it is a specific Corinthian situation, what principle(s) must we apply to our own church life?

7. In what ways might we fail to have regard for others when we meet together as the church?

8. How can we avoid the Corinthian mistake?

9. Pray that we would reflect Jesus death in our attitudes towards the rest of the church body. If necessary, ask for forgiveness and for God's help to regard and act differently towards others.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

11. What do people commonly perceive to be the marks of “spiritual” person?
12. It seems that the question of what makes someone “spiritual” was an issue in Corinth. In 12:1 Paul introduces the subject of chapters 12-14 – “Now about “spirituals”.”¹ It seems that the Corinthians placed a high value on certain “spiritual gifts”, particularly speaking in tongues (some kind of ecstatic utterances) as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (12:7). Paul’s response is not to deny the experience, nor to forbid it, but to
- Redefine it as “gift”, rather than the mark of the Holy Spirit
 - 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)

According to verses 1-3, what is the mark of the Holy Spirit?

13. To dig deeper, read 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and list the privileges of “the spiritual man” – the person with the Spirit of God. Is there any Christian who is not truly “spiritual”?
14. Returning to chapter 12, 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?
15. Read verses 7-11. What do we learn here about gifts?
- a. Who gives them?
 - b. Who gets them?
 - c. Why are they given?
 - d. What do you notice about the list of gifts here?
 - e. Does having a gift imply spiritual superiority or progress? Why/Why not?

16. What dangers might flow from focusing upon, or valuing particular gifts over others?

17. What are your personal tendencies and temptations in how you view different spiritual gifts? Which might we be tempted to value above others? Why? How does this passage challenge or encourage you?

18. (*Supplementary - as time & energy permit*) Read these verses and list more privileges and implications of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s life: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:9-11, 6:18-20, & 12:12-13.

19. Pray together about what you have learnt or been reminded of from God’s word.

¹ The 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 12

1. What gifts (ability/talent/strength) has God given the people of our church? Make a list of gifts and think about the ways in which you have benefited from these.

2. Recap - Read verses 1-11 again. Do are the gifts we would regard as being more 'supernatural' indicate a greater degree of spiritual experience or maturity? Why or why not?

3. Read verses 12-31. From this passage...
 - a) Is the local church at Corinth a body, part of a body, or only like a body? Why?

 - b) What should characterize a properly functioning church?

 - c) How will a church become like this?

 - d) To what extent can/should this be applied directly to your small group?

4. It is clear in verses 14-20 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?

5. How/when might we communicate "I don't need you" (v 21-21) to others? How can we avoid this?

6. 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?

7. Can you think of ways everyone in your group could contribute to the life of the group this year?

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. Read 1 John 3:16-18. Love is very practical. How could we make better use of our existing church activities to love one another? What else could we do?
7. Do you think loving someone implies liking them? How can you love someone that you don't really get on with?
8. 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?
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?