**1 Corinthians 12 Series Notes**

Hello again from a week where you get a break from my voice!

So this week is two passages that we have all heard a lot in various situations – particularly weddings, and any sermon about the Holy Spirit.

What my notes will try to do is see them in their context in 1 Corinthians to give you some of that as a back up to any discussion on how they apply to us.

**SMALL GROUPS:**

**For my text nerds:**

Obviously you can get out your exegesis questions and have a really good look at the text – it’s a nice one to look at a fresh like that because you know it so well. One of the things I love about doing exegesis/close reading of a text is that it gives me a chance to investigate what I think I already know. It slows me down. So, if you think you know this passage really well then my suggestion is take chapter 12, and focus on it in its Corinthian context.

What language stands out?

What have you never questioned that maybe isn’t as clear as you thought?

Think of the language in light of the rest of the letter – what games is Paul playing here?

**For my discussion lovers:**

I have many little questions so thought id write you a list and you can pick an choose to shape your conversation to something appropriate for you.

* (NB We will talk about prophecy next week a lot, so don’t cover it too much)
* Discuss how you have encountered ‘the gifts of the holy spirit’ in your Christian walk?
* Do you enjoy talking about the ‘gifts’?
* Have you seen evidence of Love the way that Paul talks about it?
* Have you seen evidence of love the way Paul talks about it, in church?
* What seems to be the most important gift in Chapel A?
* Paul is talking to a small local church, does this teaching translate to the church as a whole or should it be kept simple and small?
* Do you believe in ‘works of power’ and ‘different kinds of tongues’?
* What might the ‘unspeakable’ or ‘the weakest’ parts be?
* Do you feel that church does value every part of the body equally – on a local scale? On a national/world scale?

**An interesting little exercise for everyone**

Because these are chapter that are quite well known, it is fun (well ok, biblical scholars think its fun) to get out as many translations of chapter 12 as you can, (including paraphrases like The Message or The Passion bible) and compare them.

I often do this for Hebrew texts as my Hebrew isn’t great.

What you will see is that most of it is very similar but key things are changed – either one word is really varied in translation, or the inflection or emphasis is changed between versions.

This usually means it’s a tricky bit to translate OR that your translators/editors are feeling awkward about what the Greek says and are doing a little bit of tidying up.

It’s a really easy way to start some research and also can be eye opening as a different translation might enlighten something that before was always confusing for you.

Saint Augustine believed that you should see as many translations as possible as the full meaning of the text ‘resides above the text itself’. Greek and Hebrew don’t translate straight to English, the grammar is messed up…its ok to try to find the meaning ‘above the text’.

**NOTES**

A small note before we start in to chapter 12 that are worth pointing out:

This chapter is the culmination of Paul’s body metaphor – but it serves as that, a metaphor to teach them further how to value each other as connected and part of Christ.

There is nothing in this chapter to say that this is an exhaustive list of the gifts of the Spirit – in fact the strange part about the ‘hidden’ parts gives weight to this – so, though you may have taken part in a ‘gfit test’ at some point about which ‘one’ you have, there is nothing here to say that your ability to paint, or cook, or drive, or converse are not gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul has an alternate gift list in Romans which does not exactly match. Those tests can be useful for understanding yourself but I see nothing in the text to imply that Paul is being prescriptive about the gifts, or even fully descriptive – rather he is giving examples of the breadth of the gifts than each person may bring.

**12:1**

 This little verse is actually much debated.

We know again that this is part of the question they have been asking in their letter as it begins ‘Peri de…’ ‘Now concerning…’ But the question is ‘what is it concerning?’

It reads ‘now concerning ‘pneumatikos’’ which is often translated ‘spiritual gifts’ because of the subject matter about to turn up. However the word does not have any relation to gifts. (we will deal with that word in a moment!). In fact the word has been used earlier in chapter 3 for ‘spiritual people’. It can be translated ‘spiritual ones’ or ‘spiritual things’.

I think this makes more sense of the beginning of the chapter, and those following as this is the last ‘heading’ that comes from their letter. As it is the beginning of a long set of instructions about how to deal with one anothers new identities in community practice it seems to me much better to translate if ‘*Now concerning spiritual things/people I do not want you to be uninformed’*.

**2-3**

Paul makes a detour here to inform them about how to understand or maybe identify people who are the ‘spiritual ones’.

Referring back to his dismissive appraisal of idols he puts them in a different class to the Jesus the Corinthians now worship. They are mute, and therefore do not influence the life of someone from the inside. Paul now asserts, as in 1 Cor 6, that worshipping Christ influences someone from the inside. No one speaking by the Spirit of God will say ‘Jesus be cursed’.

However, his claim that ‘no-one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit’ seems a little odd, because obviously they can.

So what is he talking about?

Its important to understand the phrase ‘Jesus is Lord’ for the full dimension of it – it is not only a confession of faith, it is a political position, a declaration of allegiance.

The confession that someone is Lord is usually related to Caesar or your political leader. It is not something used for religious declarations about. Saying that Jesus is Lord places your allegiance, both religiously and politically with Jesus as the primary point of your worship. It was a dangerous statement to make, and set you apart.

It could be therefore that Paul here is using the idea that only those with the Holy Spirit would declare such a thing as to do so otherwise would be foolish. Having the Holy Spirit happens by becoming ‘in christ’, so anyone declaring allegiance to Christ could be seen to be someone who has the Spirit of God.

**4-11**

Now….there are varieties of things but only one source of those things, God.

Pauls point in this passage is not to describe the varieties but to describe the grace of the same God and that God is the source.

Though in English we like to translate things without repetition (because that is good writing convention) Greek loves repeptition, so the verses read

“DIVERSITIES of gifts but the SAME spirit;

 DIVERSITIES of service but the SAME Lord;

 DIVERSITIES of workings but the SAME God

You are given these ‘for the common good’.

The word ‘manifestation’ here relates to the word gift – both have the sense of God imbuing someone with something.

‘Charisma’ ‘Gift’ that we see in the later verses is a particular type of gifting. There are two words for gift, one is used to represent the sort of presents you or I give, the other is this word ‘charisma/charismata’ which relates to the Greek word ‘charis’ or grace. This word means ‘an actualisation of grace’. The gifts we get are of the type given graciously by someone powerful to someone less so. They are undeserved, but given any way. This language of manifestation of Gods grace is used deliberately so as to combat what we saw in chapter 1 – the idea that they have their wisdom etc from their own choices.

No, this whole passage is a further undermining of the notion that they can boast in anyone but God.

In fact, the first 3 ‘gifts’ that Paul mentions are ones that hark back to chapters 1 -4 - wisdom, knowledge and faith.

He states clearly now that if you have these things, they have come from God not from oneself.

The Lists – the lists are here as a polemic device to show that anything you think of that happens within the community when they worship together is from God, and therefore not something that should raise one member above another.

This first section of verses 4-11 sets that tone. The next part should be read with a similar rhetorical point in mind.

Paul is undermining hierarchy within the community as much has he can as that sort of posturing brings division – and the body of Christ must be unified within Christ if it is to function.

As the next section demonstrates – if any one part were more important than another the body would be malformed and unworkable.

**Verses 12-26**

**Diversity within Unity, Equality in Diversity**

Paul now gives his example which proves his point from the previous verses.

If we wrote it in the English way of writing sermons we would say ‘Consider for a moment your body…’

He lays out explicitly in this section what he has been building from chapter 6 – the body of Christ is not merely a nice image, you are meant to work like, and value each other, like a body does its various parts.

He reminds them that they were all baptised into one thing, by one Spirit, so they are part of one thing even if they all have different gifts/manifestations of the spirit.

He warns them about only gathering with those who practice faith the same way as them, or those who have the same gifts. We know from chapters 1-4 that there are those who prize wisdom above other things, or knowledge; we have seen in chapter 8-10 that there are those with different beliefs about eating food and different social standing. Here Paul explains that the whole body cannot be made up of only one type of organ – therefore this applies directly to the body of Christ: it cannot be made up of only one type of gift.

His second section is even more direct – one cannot throw away or devalue those who are different to oneself. In fact, he makes it clear that you not only should value them but you NEED them to be a functioning body.

His main point is made not in the descriptions of different parts, but in the questions of v17-19.

In verse 22 I feel always that he gets himself in an unfortunate knot – he starts well, valuing those that to the world seem ‘weak’ but actually can be the most important. But then he falls into talking about the ‘unpresentable’ parts. I think he has stretched his metaphor a little far, the Greek is confusing and the point of the beginning of the verse get lost.

The overall point seems to be – what you judge as weak could be the most valuable thing you have. This is a statement to combat those in chapters 8-10 who were claiming their rights were more valuable than those of the weaker brothers and sisters.

Paul is not picking issues of the body at random. He is constructing an argument to combat the Corinthians problems and arrogance.

Paul knows that those who speak cleverly, and loudly, often get the most praise and highest position. He also knows that this has to do with worldly status as much as what happens in the community itself.

He is trying to combat a worship practice that values only what is already valued by society, rather than embracing what God has joined together in Christ. This is something that becomes clear in chapter 14 as well.

We need to be careful that we do not value in the way our culture does, but create a culture of the body of Christ that values what the culture thinks is weak or unspeakable as as important as the preacher or the musician. This is Paul’s point – everything you have is only given by the grace of god anyway, all things go back to God, so they are all only as valuable as each other.

He finishes with a clear statement of things only touched on previously – *if one part suffers every part suffers, if one part is honoured, every part rejoices.*

**Verses 27-31**

**27 –** This verses is a restatement of his original thesis: that the body of Chris is them together, and each one is an important part.

**28 –** this is where we need to do a little bit of translation exegesis and be aware again that often the editors of your bibles have a reason to want to walk a fine line of enabling hierarchy into the translation: translators have biases and editors have needs, and churches pay for translations. No translation is pure.

For some reason the NIV and the NRSV use different words in verse 18 ‘God *arranged* the members of his body’ and verse 28 ‘God has *appointed*…’

The verse begins emphatically “and those God has xxxx are”, my preferred way to translate this word is ‘placed’. ‘placed’ makes sense in both 18 and 28, and as both are about how God arranges the body so that it works for everyone it leaves ambiguity within the verse for the discussion you will want to have about the next sentences…first, second, third….etc. I cannot see that the word ‘appointed’ in English fits here unless one has a very specific idea of apostles and prophets and teachers as people who are literally appointed by God, as opposed to those with a function and gifting from god. But that is why people translate it that way.

**First a note on apostles –** apostleship in the Pauline sense is not an ‘identity’ (ie like male/jew) but a function and a role. Paul makes this clear in a number of places, including chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians when he says ‘if I am not an apostle to others at least I am an apostle to you. You are the seal of my apostleship’.

Here he admits that he may not be recognised as ‘an apostle’ everywhere but that he is their apostle as he was the person who sowed the gospel among them. An apostle is ‘an emissary’, one who carries a message from an important dignitary, a trusted servant or employee. When writing to the Romans therefore Paul spends a good amount of time explaining his gospel to them and giving them his credentials so that they might recognise his apostleship.

It is a function, albeit a God given one, and a gift but it is not something that gives him power everywhere, it must be acknowledged by people.

Prophets and teachers also fall into this category – people who have a gifting and function within the community.

You should recognise this model because the Baptist tradition also requires recognition from the assembly before someone is considered their minister. You have no ordination that allows you to carry out ‘priestly’ duties wherever you are, unlike Roman Catholic ordination which confers on to the oridnand the state of Priest wherever he is.

So, as we go forward remember this – in 1 Corinthians at least ‘Apostle is a role and function’ not a ‘state’.

**The list – 28-30**

In all the work I have done I can see nothing that indicates that this list is a hierarchical list of positions within the church. I have come across many claiming it is because of the numbering ‘first…second…third..’ these indicate rank, and so the others are ranked too, but if that is the case then the issue is very woolly as the ranking system disappears.

Ranking also seems to undermine his whole previous argument of the value of all the gifts.

Another word on translation is that in order to ‘clear things up’ the NIV and various others add words that make the gifts attached to persons – people who have the gift of healing, people who work miracles, people who help others.

There are two problems with this: firstly, that those words are not there; secondly, that the personalisation credits the person with holding the gifting and elevates them theologically rather than the gifting being Gods thing which God placed in the assembly.

I would translated this passage thus:

*And in the church God placed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles/works of power, then gifts of healing, helpful deeds, administrations, different kinds of tongues.*

It seems to me that Paul is placing the gifts that found a community first, then he mentions ‘charismata’, the gifts from earlier in the chapter, then two new practical actions, and finally the expression in worship of different tongues.

He reverses the way the forth and fifth items are listed from earlier, he drops rankings entirely after ‘third’, and he removes the personal nature of anything after ‘teachers’. The first three are distinct because they are roles within the community, distinct from being gifts that occur momentarily these gifts require the community to recognise them: one must be received as an apostles, recognised as one who speaks the words of God (prophet) and given the role of a teacher.

Again, due to their placement I would debate whether hierarchy was set in stone here or the mere practicality as Paul saw it of how the community functions.

I think that the lack of personal attachment of anything other than teaching gifts, and the simple list form indicate that this is not an exhaustive list of the gifts of the holy spirit in the church.

*Why is ‘different kinds of tongues’ last?* Tongues is last, even though it more conventionally fits with miracles and healing, because it is the gift that is causing problems for the Corinthians. They seem, as we will see in 13, to have a fascination with the more outward displays of the Holy Spirit and elevate them against others. Paul then uses this list to lead in to his teaching on Love over and above the gifts of the Spirit – especially above the more flashy ones.

Paul walks through the various layers of community formation and community need and once again leads the Corinthians to a set of rhetorical questions that ask whether they all have everything they need if they value only themselves or only one part of it. The answer is always ‘no’ to these questions.

**CHAPTER 13 and 12V31 –**

‘but deseire/ you desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way: (ch 13:1) if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love….’

V 31 we don’t know what the ‘greater’ gifts are – whether this is Paul having ranked them that they would be desiring apostleship, prophecy and teaching or if he is being sarcastic about what they consider to be the ‘greater gifts’ seeing as they seem to be going in for flashy preachers, and what we think of as charismatic gifts (even though we know that all gifts are charismatic now).

But he offers them a most excellent way.

The structure of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is very similar to 8-10

Teaching about an issue = chapter 8 and chapter 12

Example of proper context – chapter 9 and chapter 13

Further teaching about the issue = chapter 10 and chapter 14

Chapter 13 serves not as alternative to gifts of the Holy Spirit but as *the context for* the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Paul cannot go on to talk to them about prophecy without first setting it in the context of Love. He is clear in this first 3 verses that none of the gifts matter if they do not exist within the bounds of Love.

Love here is undoubtedly to be read in the context of the community and its bonds in Christ.

1-4 – lay out the futility of the gifts if they do not sit in the context of Love.

4-8 - lists the qualities of love – all of which are unattainable through gifts,

8-13 – give the reason that Love is most important – because it alone endures.

You know these passages well, I am sure. The only thing for us to do is to make sure that we see them in the context of the community at Corinth as well as our own. Remember how much build up there has been to get to these passages, and that the likelihood is the whole letter was read at once.

After building on the metaphor of family, and using cultural ideas about family ties to bind them together, Paul here give them the true bedrock of their faith and unity – the love of God.

Verses 4-8 undermine some of the key ‘sins’ of the community in the letter and he tells them again that there is no place for them

It does not envy, boast or is proud – chapter 1-3 maybe?

It is not self seeking – chapter 8-10

It keeps no record of wrongs – chapter 5-6 with legal judgements

Does not delight in evil – chapter 5

And his counter are the things he has been trying to promote within them – protection, hope in Christ, perseverance.

Paul writes this whole passage basically as a series of verbs and it is truly transcendent of its place in the letter. It is one of the moments where we see an excellently lyrical hand at work. Which is why it applies out of context as much as in it.

Chapter 13 leaves them no where to go other than toward a more unified and loving community. After all they have listened to Paul has got them with a rhetorical tour du force – if nothing else convinces you to behave like Christ - LOVE is the best way.

Verses 8-13 are Pauls expression of the partial life they have now, and that God’s love is eternal.

He admits again to his own failings in the light of something greater, and he expresses to them that though things might not entirely make sense right now, that is the way it is meant to be.

His example is that of a transition from childhood to manhood – as with that we do not understand everything now but we will do in time.

Verse 13 is a bridging sentence between the discussion on love and that on prophecy and communal worship in 14. It belongs to both and should probably be read out whenever you read chapter 14 which begins ‘follow the way of love.’