

THE WALK 5

Some practical questions ...

How do you normally think about church?
As a place to go? A series of meetings and events? A loving community?
What do you want from a church?
What do you expect a church to want from you?
How do you judge whether a church is 'good' or not?

Do you genuinely feel united with others at church?
What would it look like to be united?

Give a definition of 'spiritual gifts'.
List as many gifts as you can.
Which gifts do you think are the most important?
Which gifts are the least important to you?

Do you feel very gifted? Why or why not?
What gifts has God given you?
Do you have gifts, abilities or talents which you aren't using? If so why not?
What are you good at which others might struggle with? (When you've answered this, now you know what you should do for them!)
What motivates you to use your gifts?
Are you thinking more about God, others or yourselves when you serve?

Are you envious of other people's gifts and talents? Which ones? Why?
How should you view your own gifts in light of this?
How should you view those you envy?

Do you look down on other people or certain gifts? Which ones? Why?
How should you view your own gifts in light of this?
How should you view those you look down on? How should you treat them?

As a church/homegroup are there gifts we look up to or look down on?
Are we all very similar? Are we all very different?
How might we rectify this?

In 1 Corinthians 13 terms, who do we need to be more patient with? More kind to? Less envious of? Less boastful towards? Less arrogant to? Less rude to? Where do we need to stop insisting on our own way? Where could we be less irritable? What do we resent? Which bad things do we need to stop rejoicing in? How could we rejoice in the truth more? What situations and people do we need to bear with? Who are we distrustful of that we need to believe? What people or situations at church have we lost hope with? What are we flagging in which we need to endure?

In short, how could we practically be more loving? (And by 'we' that means you and me, not just generally as a whole!)

THE WALK 5

Being Church

1 Corinthians 12-13

The theme of this study

What comes into our minds when we think of the church? For some it is the institution. For others it's their own particular church, like Emmanuel. Some will think of hypocrisy and judgmentalism. Others, The Vicar of Dibley. For some it's a cold, boring and half-empty little building. Others think of a vibrant community of worship.

The Bible speaks about the Church in wonderful ways. The Church is God's own people. They are the elect, the chosen, the redeemed, the saved. The Church is where we see God's wisdom at work, proclaiming to the universe that Christ will win and every knee will bow to Him. The Church is Christ's bride, whom He loves and cherishes and died to win. We should love the Church because God loves the Church.

But how should churches behave? What should these communities look like? What type of people should churches attract and cultivate? All these issues and more are dealt with in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth.

NB

Chaos in Corinth

It seems that the church is very 'gifted' but somewhat immature. It is a very divided church with people suing one another (1 Cor 6), arguing about which teachers they follow (1 Cor 3) and there's even a man sleeping with his mother-in-law! It's a messed up place.

The context of our section follows a rebuke from Paul in chapter 11:17-34. When they meet for the Lord's Supper, some people don't get any of the bread whilst other people have so much of the wine they are getting drunk! Paul's main problem with this is that it doesn't demonstrate the unity they share because of Jesus' death which they are meant to be celebrating.

Following on from this, Paul speaks about the topic of spiritual gifts. It would appear that the Corinthians were blessed with lots of what might be called supernatural gifts, such as healings and speaking in tongues. However, they didn't use the gifts in a God-honouring way, again because of selfishness and pride. Chapter 14 shows that their services were too chaotic and didn't build others up. The issues in chapter 12 are not so much about what the different gifts are or whether they are still operating today, but *how to use* those gifts.

The over-riding principle is that those who love Jesus are given the Holy Spirit. But that each of us is given different gifts and abilities. We should neither look down on others nor feel hard-done-by ourselves. Rather we should use whatever gifts we have for the good of the whole church. The main thing is LOVE!

Group study outline

Introduction (pick the one most applicable to your group!)

A young Christian tells you that they don't feel very gifted. They aren't like everyone else at church and might leave. What would you tell them?

or

An older Christian tells you that they don't need to go to church to be a Christian. After all they have the Holy Spirit and can do it by themselves. What would you tell them?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12

In v4-11 what are there lots of and what is there only one of?

What difference should it make that all the gifts come from the same Lord?

Is there anyone who doesn't have spiritual gifts?

Why are we given gifts? (v7)

How does this challenge how we might be tempted to think of our gifts?

What is the picture in v12?

How is this diverse group brought together into one body?

What kind of people is Paul talking to in v14-20?

Why do they feel like they don't belong in the body?

Do we ever feel like this? How do we behave when this happens?

What does Paul tell people in that situation?

What difference should that make?

What kind of people is Paul talking to in v21-26?

Why do they feel they don't need certain other body parts?

Do we ever feel like this? (Be honest!) How do we act towards others when we're like this?

What does Paul tell these people about the 'weaker' parts?

How might you illustrate the truth of v26 from your own body? From your church experience?

What kind of body are we?

What does it mean that we are Christ's body?

How would you answer Paul's questions in v29-30? What should this tell us?

Why might we 'desire the higher gifts'? Why *should* we?

If you have time...

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13

What does this chapter tell us about spiritual gifts?

What will happen to our gifts in the end? What will happen to love?

How do our church relationships match up to v4-7? In this homegroup?

In what areas do we need to grow?

Thinking it through

From this passage, what has encouraged you to use your gifts for the church?

What has challenged you about how you do (or don't!) use your gifts?

Commentary

1-3 Paul introduces the topic of spiritual gifts. But he's still on the same topic of unity in the church. The key thing is that we confess Jesus to be Lord. Don't judge whether someone is in by whether they have this gift or that; do they honour Jesus as Lord?

4-11 The one God gives many gifts. Notice in v4-6 how the phrases "varieties of gifts... service... activities..." seem to be synonymous. Gifts are not just private abilities but things which are actively used in service. Why are we given gifts? v7 says it is "for the common good." So in a sense it isn't *our* gift! It's the church's gift. If I give you a present to pass on to somebody else, you can't just sit and play with it on your own, nor can you throw it away and never use it. You've been given a gift in order to pass it on for someone else's benefit. Also note in v11 that it is the Spirit who decides who gets which gifts. It isn't random or unfair. And all Christians have some gift ("to each" v7).

12-13 Paul introduces the main image in the passage; a body. Bodies are united but there are lots of different bits. The Church is like that with all kinds of people involved. The world says that unity comes from being the same and seeks to press us into the same mould and stamp out difference. But God delights in unity with diversity. Even God Himself, although One, is Three! The Church should be a united but diverse group.

14-20 Here Paul deals with those who don't feel gifted, or at least not 'in the right way'. The picture is of a foot saying it doesn't belong because it isn't a hand. Paul instructs us that thinking like this doesn't stop us being part of the body. And that if everyone were the same, where would that leave us? A gigantic eyeball without legs or a mouth is a monster! No use to anyone.

21-26 This bit is for another group; those who are very happy with their gifts and think everyone should be like them. With people like this, no wonder some of the feet feel unwelcome! These people are told that the weaker parts of the body are shown more honour and it should be the same in the Church. In v23 Paul is probably talking about 'private parts' – that phrase itself telling us that we treat those parts with greater modesty and care. v26 shows the whole body is united – try hitting your funny bone and then saying that it makes no difference to the rest of your body!

27-31 This isn't just any body we're dealing with here – we are Christ's body. God is in charge and has given various gifts. In our experience of church, is everyone the same? No! We should seek 'higher' gifts but not out of pride or a desire to fit in, but out of love because we want to serve the whole body better. (Did you spot helping and doing admin thrown in there amongst healing & miracles?! The gifts are very varied! Gifts are any ability used for others.)

ch13 This chapter is a favourite at weddings. But it's actually more about churches! Instead of parts of the body fighting each other, there is a "more excellent way" – love. See how v1-3 is about spiritual gifts. It's not enough to be gifted. We must love each other. And this shows what love looks like.