



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

INVERTED

INVERTED

SEGMENT II



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

INVERTED

A COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY MADE, WRITTEN
AND
DESIGNED FOR UNION POINT CHURCH.

BY: AARON GOLDEN

COPYRIGHT 2018
UNION POINT PUBLISHING

Table of Contents

Part 3 INVERTED RELATIONSHIP

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

INTRODUCTION

INVERTED: *put upside down or in the opposite position, order, or arrangement.*

Imagine for a moment a world view and context where fortune and wealth are not determined nor segmented by line of class or family, but are made open to every persons pursuit and awarded to those who run after it with abandon. A place where, one's dreams can become reality and all things permissible to pursue regardless their taboo nature as listed elsewhere in society. A people of which pride themselves in overlooking others religious persuasion and deem all things relative. Where no one religious order should be proclaimed as the only way or truth, but all seen as equal and acceptable means to finding fullness and happiness of life.

A day where sexual conduct carries no bounds and all restraint is seen as an obstacle to obtaining full human expression and satisfaction. A time when men have all they could ever want yet are driven by the need for more. Sound familiar? It may be easy to see ourselves in this descriptive, and rightfully so. However, we share great commonality in this contextual perspective of the ancient city Corinth.

In the time of Paul's visit and stay in this city, Corinth was a monolith of cosmopolitan projection. Everything about this city exuded wealth, welcome, the pursuit of religious expression and the acceptance of all things, even those of great repudiation and debauchery. What made Corinth such a

booming city, filled with industry, manufacturing and a heaping welcome of religious multiculturalism, was its significance to the ancient world.

Although known as a port city, Corinth was unlike any other port around. Built on an "Isthmus" (known as a land bridge) which connected the greater Macedonian region with the Peloponnese and the area of Achaia, Corinth was the less risky option in the trade routes passing from the Aegean into the Ionian sea. Rather than making the treacherous sail around the Capes of Matapan and Maleas of the Aegean, where many sailors would meet their demise, Corinth became the viable option of providing inland trade transport. Shipping and war vessels alike would port at Corinth unload all their cargo onto transports including their ships and make the 5 mile on-land journey across the Isthmus. Let that sink in. Full blown ships and their cargo transported across a 5 mile trek all made possible by paved roads and plenty of moving business' to furnish the manpower.

These heavily trafficked conditions made Corinth a hot bed for a melting pot of peoples. As a major trade stop, this city became the sought destination for traders of goods, ideas and religions alike. With this vast networking opportunity it is understandable why Paul would find himself in the mix of such an impressionable city. Through the use of his blue collar skills in tent mending, Paul would have the means and resources necessary to see the gospel mission of both proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and working at calling both Jewish and gentile believer alike, together into a family and visual

representation of the kingdom INVERSION that the true King Jesus makes possible on earth.

After establishing the church in Corinth, Paul moves on to return to Jerusalem. Evident for us, in his letter back to the church, is that the way of Corinth has slipped into and become apart of the church. Rather than living in the kingdom of Jesus, these believers are being drawn away by leaders seeking their own desires and benefits, the trappings of past sins, and an erosion of the full gospel that Paul so proclaimed.

The entire letter of 1 Corinthians is Paul's passionate plea and call for the Corinthians to step into the INVERTED kingdom of God. The INVERTING power of the gospel was to permeate every facet of their lives. How they functioned both in the world and even more importantly, within the body of Christ; the Church. Upon their receiving the Gospel, these people were to see their lives drastically rearranged by the overwhelming reality of Jesus' grace. To live in the kingdom of the world meant that one was living in opposition to the kingdom of God. To live in the kingdom of the world meant that one had resisted and inhibited the continual work of the Holy Spirit in His INVERSION efforts at overturning what once was.

We can imagine that this letter was piercing to those who were apart of the Corinthian church. Certainly Paul's words and challenges cut to the core of their hearts. Surely some were angered and enraged while others convicted. Yet the revelation of their actions in contrast of the INVERTING truth of

God's kingdom was an effort on Paul's part to draw them back into a grace filled and propelled existence.

Thinking back to the initial description of the city, it is easy to see great similarities in our day and time. In many ways nothing has changed. We still live in the tension of the already and not yet of God's work in our lives. Yet Paul's words and pleas are still as relevant, true and piercing for us today as they were then. His call for us to press forward in the INVERTED kingdom living of Jesus is as ever poignant for our current reality as it was for those in the days of Corinth.

The hope for this study is that our eyes would be ever opened and our hearts ever turned by the revelation of how Jesus' INVERTED kingdom should reign in our lives. Quite possibly like save applied to a deeply planted splinter, Paul's words will draw out the places of our hearts and lives we have yet surrendered to the reign of King Jesus. The areas we continue to live as the world and areas that Jesus yet desires to completely INVERT with His kingdom reign of grace. Like Jesus' words applied to teaching His disciples how to pray, by the end of the study just maybe we will find ourselves joining in saying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Over the next 16 weeks lets open ourselves up to and seek the truths of God's INVERTED kingdom. Let's turn loose of our illusion of control in favor of seeing what Jesus will do in and through us as He INVERTS us for His kingdoms purpose and mission. Lets faithfully submit ourselves to His kingdom reign and see His INVERTED kingdom not only make us

different than the world around us, but call the world around us into His life giving grace. His INVERTED reign is meant to INVERT our lives so that our INVERTED lives will proclaim His INVERTED kingdom to a world that so desperately needs His INVERTED reign.



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

PART III

INVERTED RELATIONSHIPS



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 8

IN LOVE

CHAPTER 8

IN LOVE

PASSAGE

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. 2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. 12 Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13 ESV

KNOWLEDGE

In the days of Corinth, the various pagan temples demanded blood sacrifice as offerings to a vast and many gods. This practice would result in an extreme amount of animals being killed and their flesh available for consumption. As a means and way to make use of this copious amount of meat, the sacrifices would be cooked and shared among the priest and those who had attended the ceremonies. At times there would be such a volume that others outside would be

invited to join the feast and often beyond that there would be enough to take and sell at the market for profit. If you were a Jew, this provided great problems. You most certainly would not go to a pagan temple and share in the eating of sacrifices offered to other gods. Second to this, buying meat at the market could as well be sketchy because of its unknown origins. This made way for many Jews to become vegan, as they would not risk becoming unclean in unknowingly taking part of eating these meats.

In this great kingdom *INVERSION*, the church was the tapestry of Jew and gentile. Both were being called together *IN LOVE* according to the ways of Jesus. One could imagine the great tension that existed in the mixing of very diverse and often contrary people groups. It is clear within Paul's address here that some in the church had purchased and eaten the food sacrificed to other gods. This, we imagine, caused a ruckus with those that were both Jew and gentile. One would be offended because their call to be set apart, and the other would find confusion as to why these believers would eat of that which had been used in pagan ritual. Was this condoning the sacrifice to other gods?

Pointing us to truth, Paul reveals for us that we have been provided a *KNOWLEDGE* through the grand *INVERSION* of our lives. If we beat the drum of this knowledge we crush those who are yet of its understanding. In many ways we may not understand the context of this struggle, but we do understand the struggle of certain cultural things that are highly debated in our day. What is ok for a believer to engage in? Where does the line of freedom and sin exist?

When we are transformed by the *INVERTING* power of Jesus and His Holy Spirit, we are opened to a greater *KNOWLEDGE* of the things that move and control a people. In many ways we are given freedom of relationship, yet how we use this *KNOWLEDGE* is important. If we walk in the light that everything exists for His glory, we should be moved *IN LOVE* by all that we do. Those who were taking offense at the eating of these items were being seen as weaker

because those who were more mature were belittling them with their KNOWLEDGE and freedom, rather than building them UP in LOVE.

Have you ever been in a church environment or culture where "KNOWLEDGE" was more guided by shame and guilt than it was in love? If we are not moved IN LOVE in the ever increasing KNOWLEDGE of the INVERTED, we will puff ourselves up, crush the hearts of others and fail to move IN LOVE.

REFLECTION

In church culture today we have seen many pound the nail of legalism. Because of this, many of us have been crushed by its weight and seen little LOVE. Does Relationship with Jesus mean we have no rules? Does not doing something always change the motives of your heart?

As we grow in understanding and KNOWLEDGE of God's inversion, allowing Him to define what is right and good, how do we use this KNOWLEDGE to LOVE others better?

How do we reflect an attitude of LOVE that points people to the truth of the INVERTED reign of Jesus for their lives?

CONSCIENCE

We are all likely familiar with the Jimmy Cricket song "Let your conscience be your guide," presented to Pinocchio as he seeks to become a real boy. That may be your reality and motto in life. But who is guiding the conscience? Whose standards are driving your moral compass? When we first place our hope and trust in Jesus and set out on this INVERTED journey for our lives, we are continually adjusting and finding revelation of things we may have done in the past that impact how we should continue in the future. As Jesus begins to shape and mold our hearts, our CONSCIENCE is becoming transformed and aligned with what He says is right and good for our lives.

From the perspective of raising a child, we know that as kids we are provided a different set of guides that are administrated in our lives to call us towards life change, forming and direction. We lay out ground rules for our kids to help guide them into the people we hope they become. However, as they grow older and begin to see their CONSCIENCE greater established, we begin to lift some those former boundaries and replace them with freedom and responsibility. Maybe at one point they were not allowed to touch a stove, not because its existence is purposed to harm them, but its misuse could cause grave danger. Our rule and guide is there to protect them IN LOVE from what they have no KNOWLEDGE of yet. So we say "don't touch". This doesn't mean they may never touch, and some even later don't need to touch, but for the moment, the best for their life is to find restraint lest they stumble.

In like manner, when Jesus INVERTS our lives we begin to experience a new way of doing things. In this we may find restrictions on things we once did, because Jesus needs to redefine how we use them and what is their good purpose. This is what Paul was addressing in this segment and pointing us to the conscience. Those who were further mature had found freedom in things that Jesus had INVERTED

in their lives. Eating the temple meat had no significance to them because they saw it as filling a need for their body. It carried no significance to them. However, what Paul was calling them to do was to see their freedoms used to help build IN LOVE these young believers. Although they may find no harm in this activity, some may stumble because of their exercise of its act.

When we hold our freedom IN LOVE we find that the kingdom INVERTS how we respond in them. When we are moved IN LOVE we become more concerned about those around us than we do ourselves. In like manner, when we live in the INVERTED we will resemble Jesus in how we lay aside all that is ours for the greater LOVE of another.

REFLECTION

What are some things you struggle with finding freedom in? What are some freedoms you exercise in your life and never give thought of other's perception while doing?

If others around you may stumble by your use of freedom, does that mean you have to eliminate using it all the time?

In other situations, could your exercise of your freedom in Christ help break the chains that bind others? (*ex. past legalistic entrapments, not to be confused with those who have struggles with addictions*)

In a world moved by self how does our restraint in love help others to grow and penetrate the hearts of those around us not in the iNVERTED?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 9

IMPERISHABLE

CHAPTER 9

IMPERISHABLE

PASSAGE

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?

7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

8 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same?

9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. 16 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by

all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. **1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-27 ESV**

THE RIGHT

As a two fold means and way to address the accusations held against him, Paul uses his own apostolic life as an example of living in Christ like freedom. Men that have become leaders in the church of Corinth, after Paul's departure, have exalted themselves and made demands of the people for their services. They have engaged in acts with little thought of the people and with little regard for what is IMPERISHABLE. The greater revelation here is that they have traded the IMPERISHABLE for what is PERISHABLE. This is not an INVERTED view of freedoms, but a way to abuse the grace of Jesus and others that walk in its light.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that because of his sacrifice and service to the kingdom, and ultimately them, as well the preaching of the gospel, they had every right to request help and provision for their service. Pointing them back to the Old Testament, he establishes that those who were in priestly service to Israel were provided for through the means of the people's offerings in the temple. They, in like manner, had been called to share their full lives with the people, and in doing so had stewarded the Gospel they had received. Unlike those who later lead the people astray, Paul reveals that he had forgone THE RIGHT to make this request, all for the sake of the people. They had leveraged his gifting and work to provide for himself in an effort to deny the PERISHABLE in favor of what was being made manifest in the IMPERISHABLE of their lives.

In the INVERTED we will find many freedoms in Jesus. Over time we will continually see this relationship lead to places we once saw as boundaries. Yet, with the gospel leading our hearts and the way of the INVERTED reigning our lives, our refusal of THE RIGHT to certain freedoms may be the very thing we are called to do. When we live moved by the IMPERISHABLE love and grace of Jesus, we will find ourselves valuing people more and the PERISHABLE things of this world much less.

REFLECTION

What are some PERISHABLE things you have been challenged to lay aside partaking in for the benefit of another?

If we have trouble laying aside something that is PERISHABLE to see the IMPERISHABLE protected and encouraged, what does that say about our connection to the PERISHABLE if we cannot lay it down?

What does it say about our maturity if we are able to lay down a RIGHT for the benefit of another?

When can using THE RIGHTS we have help others to let go of legalism?

ALL THINGS

Further building on the idea of the gospel freeing us from many things, Paul begins to draw us into how the surrender of these rights, back to Jesus and in favor of others, as living in the INVERTED with our eyes fixed on what is IMPERISHABLE. Paul says that he has become ALL THINGS to all people that he may win some for the Gospel. He goes on to say that all he has done has been for the sake of the Gospel.

One thing we must make clear here is that in saying ALL THINGS, as in referring to becoming ALL THINGS, Paul is not advocating for living sin to win others to Jesus. This would be a gross mistake on the reader's part. Paul is not leaving the reality of God's call to holiness, but rather, he is pointing us to the truth that becoming influences to others around us means we take effort to understand what makes them tick. Here in Corinth you have a multiplicity of peoples. With this comes a vast array of cultural differences. From Paul's position, proper exegesis of the culture through the INVERTED lens of the kingdom is to understand a people better so that you can find an avenue through the perishable parts of life as a means to penetrate what is IMPERISHABLE.

For many of us, our experience in the church has been viewed as hostile or inhospitable. This assessment is made because of their lack of performing proper exegesis. For the most part we focus on calling people to reshape and conform the PERISHABLES of their lives by a means of moral code and restrictions. We make a big fuss, like some Corinthians, of ensuring the external be clean. Yet like the Pharisees, we miss out on the reality that the cup may be clean outside, but the inside is filthy. When we do not seek to understand those around us, we force a way on them that does not seed the Gospel. A call to the Gospel is to hear good news about how Jesus' INVERTED kingdom will rescue our lives and transform them. This is why Paul sought to eliminate certain obstacles of exercising certain freedoms so

that others may see the *INVERTED* reign of JESUS and the goodness of His gospel clearer.

To become ALL THINGS to all people is to place ourselves among the world in an effort to, not be made like the world, but to be light among those who are in darkness. In Paul's case, he saw being leveraged to become known by others was a means to being invited into their lives. To shine light in other's house you first have to receive an invitation in. Our refusal to do some things will lead us into further becoming ALL THINGS for the INVERTED and thereby see ALL PEOPLE drawn to Jesus' love and reign.

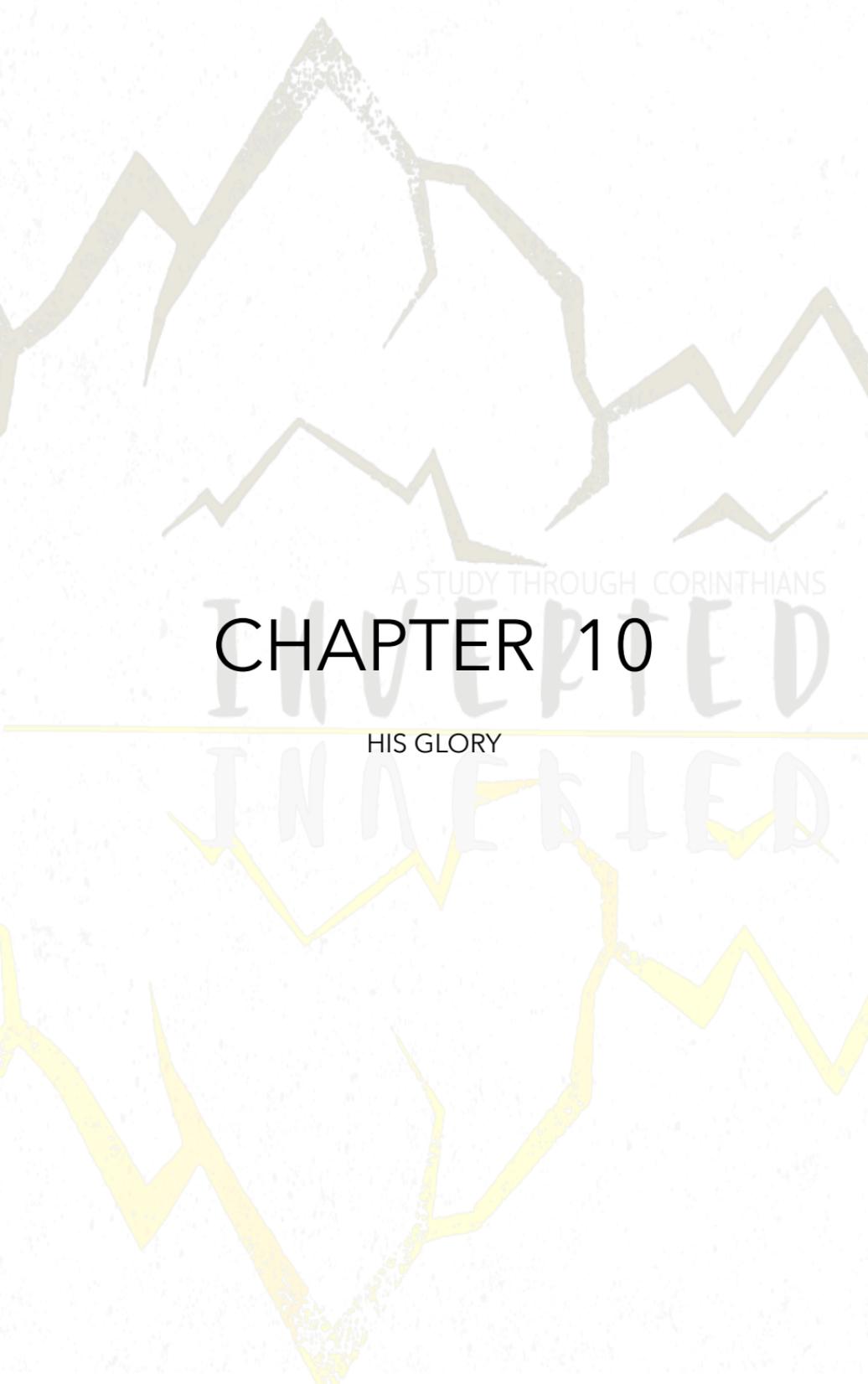
REFLECTION

What has been your experience either reaching others with the gospel or being reached with the Gospel? What was the focus? PERISHABLE or IMPERISHABLE?

Do we expect those who are not believers in Jesus to conform to the culture of our community first? Or do we exegete their lives and find ways to point them further to the *INVERSION* of Jesus' reign?

What are some ways we can do as Paul did and become ALL THINGS to all people in an effort to win some?

What are some freedoms you enjoy that saying no to them would lead you to saying yes to becoming ALL THINGS?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 10

HIS GLORY

CHAPTER 10

HIS GLORY

PASSAGE

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? 19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22 Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

23 "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on

the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. **1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-33 ESV**

REPEAT

Have you ever heard of the saying, "history REPEATS itself?" In many cases your life may prove a great example of this. One of the greatest concerns that encompasses this whole debate over eating food sacrificed to idols is the slipping of the people back into their old ways of doing things. Paul wraps up this concern by pointing out the past of the Israelites and how they swapped the way of the INVERTED for the pursuit of the worldly kingdom around them.

As a Jewish believer, Paul saw and presented the greater narrative of redemption presented through the entire scriptures, all culminating in Jesus. All of this was for HIS GLORY. These new additions into this grand story, those young believers at Corinth, if not careful, could easily find themselves pressing the repeat button on the history of their forefathers. Like them, the Israelites had been called out of exile, escaping enslavement and death through the provision of passing into new life through the Red Sea. Even though God had revealed HIS GLORY to them, even though they drank of spiritual drink, they continually fell back into pursuing their own kingdoms and not that of the INVERTED. Paul's word of warning was to ensure that they did not REPEAT the same. But that they would begin to move in strength of this new knowledge of the INVERTED and respond in Jesus' provided strength .

Living in the INVERTED means that we are constantly surrendering all things to Jesus' lead and direction. If we are

continually allowing access and openness in responding to His lead, then we will find His strength to resist temptations and to find ourselves shining HIS GLORY in the face of our trials. Not eating meat sacrificed to idols wouldn't ensure that they would never REPEAT their past. The only way to ensure we don't hit REPEAT on our lives is to see the direction of our heart completely shaped and defined by the INVERTED reign of Jesus. Curbing our habits as a guard against slippage is not the solid proof way to never REPEAT past mistakes. Rather, in the INVERTED we find the transformational power of Jesus that overturns, not only the way we live, but the why behind it. To live in the great INVERSION is to live out all things for HIS GLORY as we live in what He has deemed good from the beginning.

REFLECTION

Do you struggle with REPEATing the past? What are some ways you have tried to buffer yourself from this happening again?

What are the ways I have misused the things God has intended for good? Who's glory am I ultimately living for in these misuses?

Where should we look so that we will find rescue in the midst of temptation? Paul is clear temptation is real in the already and not yet, so how do we war against it?

THANKS

Like a cure for the common cold, Paul points us to one way of INVERTING how others may perceive what we do. When we sit at the table and give thanks, many of us use it as a flippant way to express a cultural ideal. In the South, you give thanks. But why? Who started this in the first place? Right here we find the why and who. THANKS is a means of shifting what others have used for evil and pointing it back to the ONE who made it for good. For these early believers, Paul understands that there will come times when they are invited to tables that may contain meats sacrificed to idols. Paul's prescription is to enter the premise and partake. We can partake because the sacrifice has been a misuse of what God had originally intended for good, for HIS GLORY. In blessing the food, one was revealing this INVERTED truth and in a sense, removing it's looming impingement upon their personal past.

Pointing to the table, the place where we encounter the power of Jesus' life poured out on our behalf, Paul directs focus to why we can give THANKS. This has brought us into union with Jesus and into the INVERTED and therefore we should not partake in the things of the demonic. Because of this, many of us do not need to return to old wells and think because we have this power we can now engage without consequence. To think this is to miss Paul's point. Clearly Paul is pointing us to the truth that when misused and made as idol worship, we give power to the demonic over these items. Look at the way the Corinthians, and as well ourselves, we're using their money and sex in manners to please themselves and not God. As believers we see all things as a means and way to glorify God. We are continually challenged by the INVERTED in how we use all things in our lives as we live in RELATIONSHIP with others..

For Paul, this is the matter at hand. To debate whether one should eat of the food laid before them because of its questionable past intent was to draw people's attention to something other than the INVERTED. It did little to elevate the gospel. We should not shy away

from calling sin, sin. But to set hurdles ahead of those that may be leaning into Jesus' grace does little to bring light to HIS GLORY. The way of the INVERTED is to continually give THANKS to God for all He has given and to serve the interest of our neighbor ultimately for them to see HIS GLORY in all that we do.

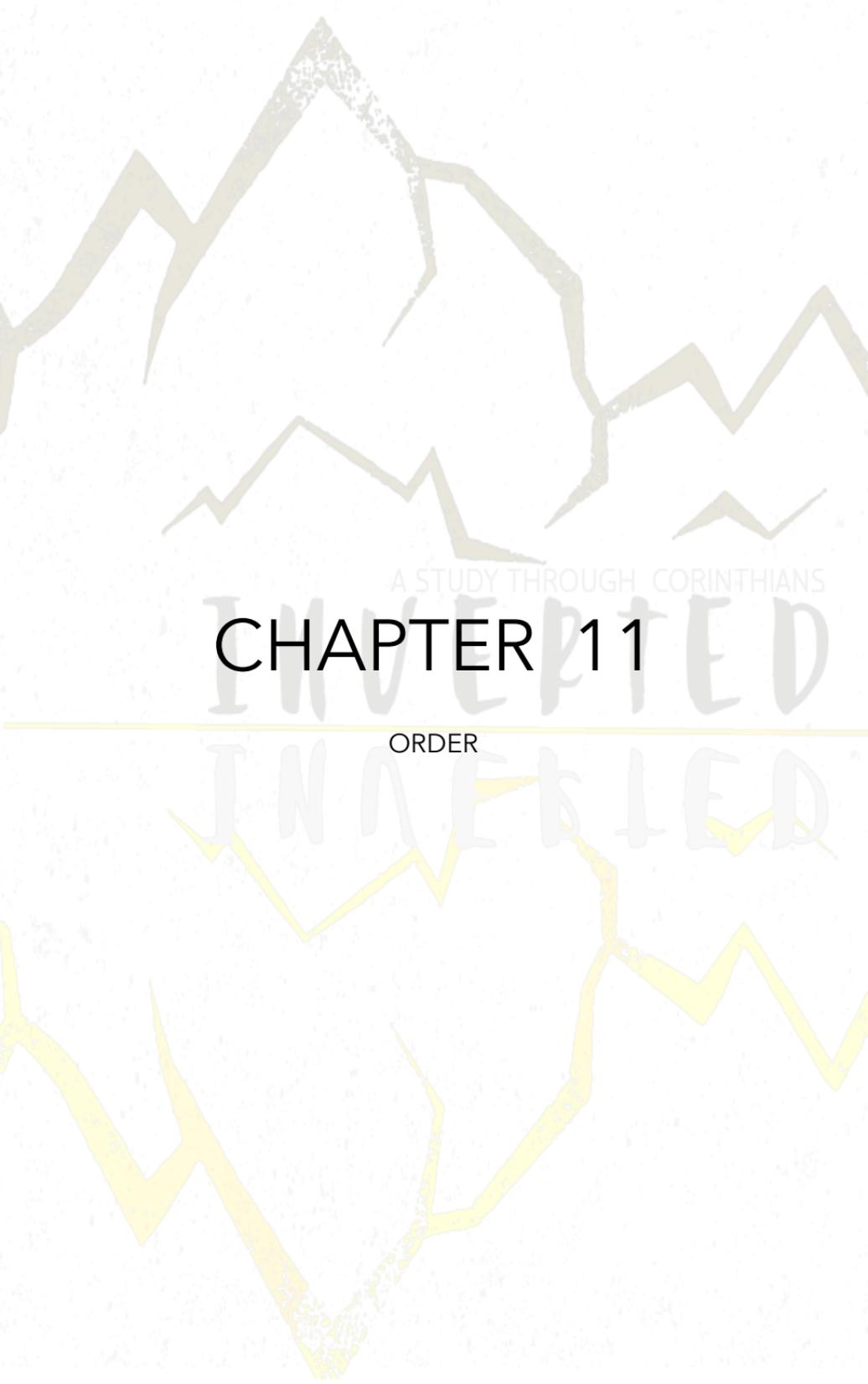
REFLECTION

Have there been times where you have been more concerned with what someone is putting in their body than you have been what has their heart?

To see giving THANKS as a means and way to bring both release of and realignment with God's initial Glory, how are you moved to see THANKS happen more often in your life?

Most certainly there will be things we do that others will not always agree with (short of sin). However, ultimately who's GLORY are we living for? How does THANKS reorder how we may use certain things for His glory?

Whatever you do, Paul says, do all for the glory of God. Ultimately what is whatever? What is the end game? What should the whatever be seeking to see happen? What does Paul say at the end of verse 33?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 11

ORDER

CHAPTER 11

ORDER

PASSAGE

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. 3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 5 but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. 6 For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. 7 For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; 12 for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in

remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—

34 if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come. **1 CORINTHIANS 11:1-34 ESV**

BLURRED LINES

During the days of Corinth, there arose an issue with how women and men were carrying out the gathering of the church. One thing is for certain, neither was doing a good job at seeing divine order carry through their meetings. Culturally in Corinth, we have now established the great deal of licentiousness and sexual prowess at work within the city. With the temple prostitutes carrying on in their business outside of the temple, it brought great concern with how women and men relate together rearranged in the *INVERTED*.

Within the church we see that Paul has made a case that gender is no hindrance to entering the kingdom. And within this stance, some manipulated this teaching and began to use their freedom and equality in Christ as a means of disorder and division. Therein, they caused *BLURRED LINES* for those looking at the church gathering from the outside. Within the culture, women wore coverings at all times to protect their dignity. To remove this in the public gathering of individuals would be known to "let one's hair down." Which means an entirely different thing than we associate with it today.

However, some ladies, because of their experience of freedom in Jesus were removing their covering while praying and prophesying. This caused a big stir and issue for those from the outside looking in because it would have seemed to indicate openness to fornication.

Every other temple had its prostitutes, yet here in the *INVERTED* body of Christ there was no room for this type of act. Running contrary to that of pagan roots, Christians were to operate with great care for one another. They held others at higher value and were called to sexual purity through the great *INVERSION* of the gospel. This was to present them as set apart, while drawing in others closer to Jesus. What these women were doing was bringing *BLURRED LINES* for the city. The assumption was being made that they were just like any other religion. It was inoculating the effectiveness of their witness.

Amazing enough was the reality that women, unlike any where else, had opportunity to participate in the gathering. They were valued and provided a means to demonstrate their gifts, yet with the actions of a few this was not being witnessed with the purity of the *INVERTED*. What Paul establishes is presenting the complementary way we reveal this freedom, as both genders coming together in *ORDER* under King Jesus and living out His *INVERTED* reign. *INVERTED RELATIONSHIPS* look different from the rest of the world, and the church gathering is the place that should bring visual demonstration to it. If we *BLUR LINES* and misrepresent the kingdom, we will be no different from the rest of the world.

REFLECTION

Since women were provided equal participation in the body, how does this express the value of women before the world?

What are some ways that we can BLUR LINES with our culture today and seem to worship a similar god, rather than the REIGN of the INVERTED kingdom of the ONE TRUE GOD?

What are some of the ways you have heard this passage interpreted in the past? Did they do much to bring complimentary order to the church? Or did they diminish the role women may play within the church?

SOCIAL PARTITION

While seeing BLURRED LINES when it came to gender, one area the Corinthians did not mind separating was that of social status and wealth. Paul writes with almost a sense of dismay. How could you be so flippant with gender yet miss the whole point of reconciliation in the INVERTED according to wealth? This SOCIAL PARTITION had become most instituted at the reception of the table. Here where the church was to come together in unison with celebration for what Jesus had done and the grace that had been poured out, and they were making separation in what Jesus had unified through the shedding of His blood. Those that were rich and high of social rank dared not partake of the same table with those deemed "lesser." These believers were a far cry away from experiencing the INVERTED community that Acts 2 presents, where those who had much, sold goods and gave to those who were without.

In many ways we can gasp at such disdain, yet are we today ordered any different? In some bodies there is clear and certain favoritism provided for those who are deemed to have greater wealth and social status. More money gets more power. Or how about a little closer to home? Many of us come every week and feel good about all

we have done, yet there are brothers and sisters among us that go without and we care not to lift a finger. We live in many SOCIAL PARTITIONS in our day.

In one of the most ill-interpreted passages, I think, in all of scripture, we see Paul talk about checking one's heart prior to receiving of the table. What we typically understand here is that if there is sin in one's life and they drink of the cup, they drink of judgement and wrath... Really now? Contextually, following through the passage, we see this is not the intent. Paul is bringing to light that if we carry forward in broken relationships, not living in the INVERTED reign with others and carry on these SOCIAL PARTITIONS that are more like the world than like Jesus, the table does nothing. In the way we carry on in injustice we demonstrate no active grace in our lives, and all the table we can get our hands on will never cover this up.

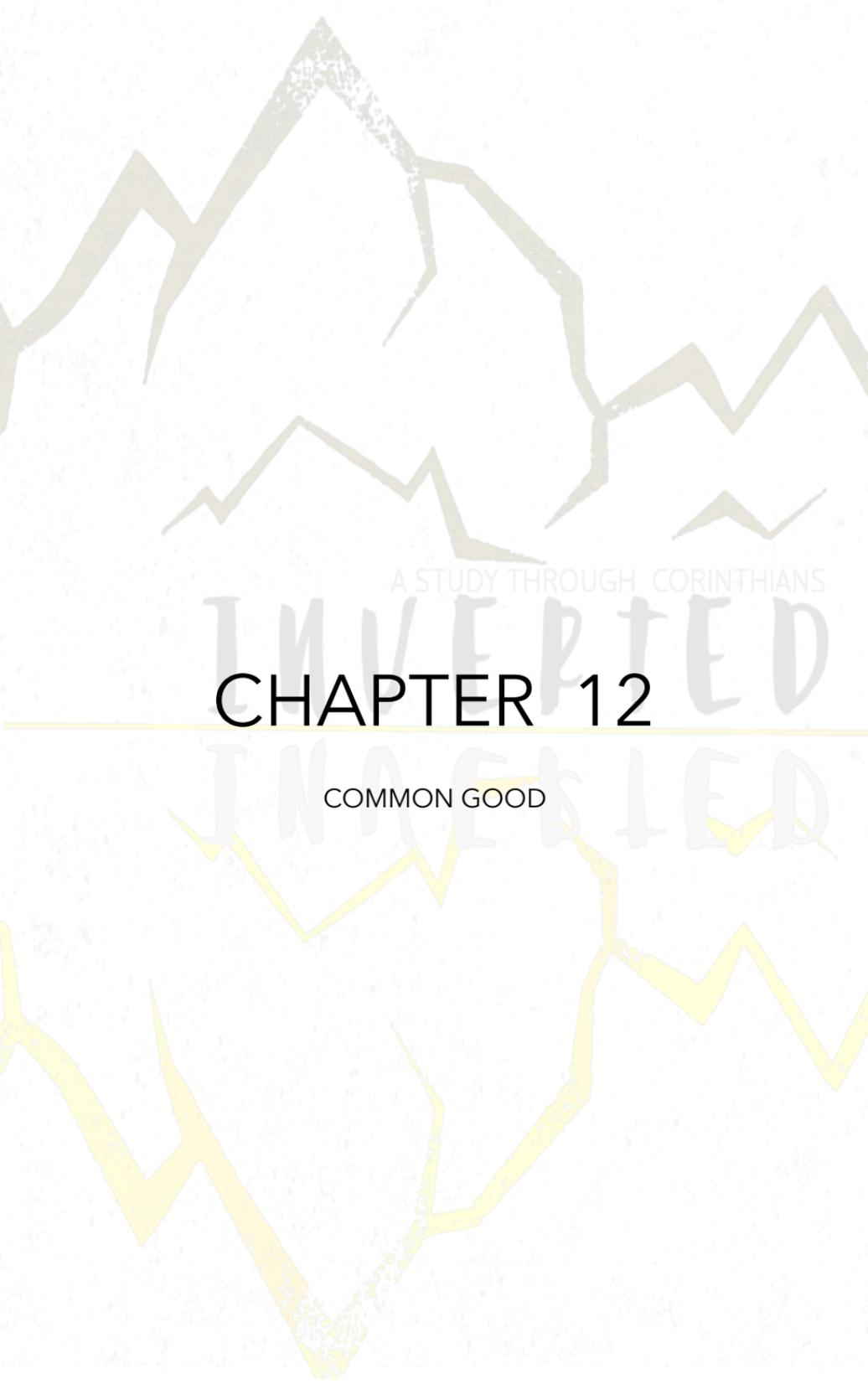
The proper ORDER of the gathering in the INVERTED is to see the least come first. It is to put our brother and sisters needs ahead of our own, and to make no SOCIAL PARTITIONS among us. INVERTED relationships present the world with actions of humility, not actions of hostility.

REFLECTION

In what ways have you experienced the body of Christ divided by social partitions?

What were some of those partitions and how did this feeling of separation discourage the body rather than edify it?

What are some ways we can live out this INVERTED way to see social partitions broken down and unity encouraged?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 12

COMMON GOOD

CHAPTER 12

COMMON GOOD

PASSAGE

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?

18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our

unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way. **1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31 ESV**

SAME SPIRIT

Within the move of the Church at Corinth, the people were experiencing life transformation and a call into Jesus' INVERTED kingdom. One of the things that was being experienced was the working of the Spirit, seeing people equipped with a multitude of gifting's. Wisdom, knowledge, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, miracles and prophecy were all apart of the great gifting's being exercised. Could you imagine the testimony and witness that was happening through these people as they had once been rebel pagans, now turned into equipped and empowered vessels? What a picture of what could be today in our gatherings.

Amidst this amazing outpouring of the Spirit came, as well, those zealous to see such acts and gifting happen in their own lives. In many ways, people were coming seeking the gifts and not the Giver of those gifts. In this part of the letter, we see Paul battling this idea as he directs the Corinthians back to where these gifts originated and for what reason. It has been the SAME SPIRIT, that of the Christ, that has changed and empowered their lives. And it is solely for His glory and the COMMON GOOD of the body that these gifts have been given.

Among the freedom of Jesus there will follow counterfeit expressions trying to devalue and deface the INVERTED kingdom. No matter the church, the purity of those individuals and the overall focus, as in Jesus' words we will always find sprouts of weeds among the true growth of the kingdom. Paul understood this, and in so sought to describe why these gifts are given. They are meant for the edifying of the church. The building up of the kingdom. Interestingly enough, and familiar still to this day, some in Corinth were found placing their own desires for fame and power over that of Jesus.

The gifts of the Spirit did not die with the Apostles. Some in later traditions sought to eradicate abuses by making these claims, and therein depleting and even in some places eradicate even the thought of a possibility. This was not the call of Paul. The gifts are real, they are available and should be only sought as a means for the COMMON GOOD of the church. If these things bring unity, and a deepening for the awe of God, then Paul was clear, be open to the SAME SPIRIT that raised Jesus from the dead.

No matter the gift, cause or endeavor, if the church is not seeking the INVERTED kingdom first, we will find ourselves giving way to those tendencies of abuse. We may see some abuses happen and in this it is our call to speak truth amidst the errors. However, may we be careful at not dismissing what God wills and desires to do through the pouring out of His SPIRIT on all people.

REFLECTION

What has been your experience with the gifts of the Spirit?

Have you been in streams where either the Spirit has been devoid any open arena to move? Or have you been in streams where the gifts are sought more than the kingdom?

If Paul is saying that the SAME SPIRIT provides all these gifts then how can we verify that it is of God?

What should be our greatest pursuit as the body of Christ?

ONE BODY

Within the religious culture that swelled the bustling streets of Corinth, there were many businesses built on the sale of particular sacrificial gifts needed for presentation at a host of different temples and gods. Those on their religious pilgrimage to their particular temple setting, would find everything they would need to make proper offerings to a multitude of god's per their prescriptive request. Each individual need would require a specific offering as directed by those who were the temple priest. Certain god's only accepted certain

offerings and this was at the core of many small business opportunities among the economic portfolio of Corinth

An oddity to many today, one of the common means for sacrificial offerings was terra cotta clay constructed limbs or body parts. These replicas would be used as a means of offering for a specific illness, need or dismemberment. The intent of these offerings would be to see the body made whole or complete. Just as we know today, the body when stricken with disease, injury, and lacking full functionality of all appendages isn't operating in the fullness it was intended to. This understanding was likely a heavy influence in Paul's presentation as the church in the form of the "body of Christ."

Could you imagine the influence this would carry in the minds of many within the Corinthian church? Many would possibly have purchased such offerings to present to their former gods. Many would have had deep hurts and needs in the form of physical provision. They would have fully engaged with the idea of no member being more important than another, and that quality of life and effectiveness was equally empowered by each member. Quite a call to unity through the means of cultural contextualization, pretty incredible examples really.

Like those in Corinth, we today know and understand the value and importance of being whole in ONE BODY. When the body is whole and functioning properly we see complicated procedures happen with ease and skill. The church, when unified in and by the SAME SPIRIT as ONE BODY works together with certain finesse that pursues the COMMON GOOD together. A people who internalize the importance of each piece of the body of Christ, knows and cares for the value of each member. There is a certain humility and grace demonstrated that the world is unfamiliar with. This wholeness expressed within the church points us to the INVERTED reality of the Kingdom fo God, where there are no "least of these" in its citizenry. Only a people equally valued and seen in the life of Jesus.

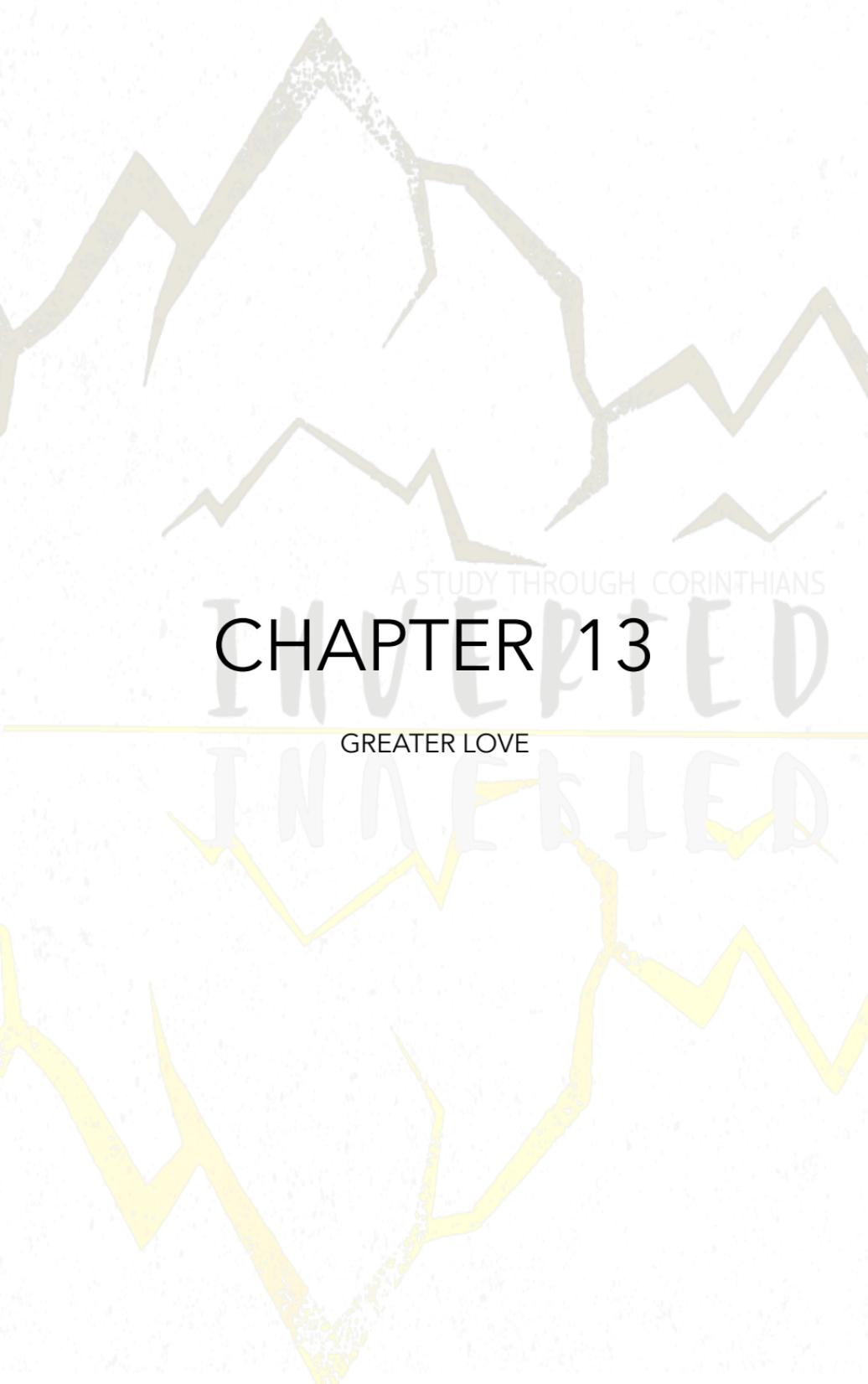
REFLECTION

Seeing the backdrop behind the "Body" reference that Paul makes to the Corinthians, how does it change your perspective on the church?

Examining the importance, of even the smallest of members on your body, how much should we value each member of the body of Christ?

As ONE BODY in the INVERTED Kingdom of God, how should we handle one another? How should we approach each issue within the church and one another?

Acting as ONE BODY carried by the SAME SPIRIT, how do we reflect the INVERTED kingdom to the world around us? How does our local Body do at this call?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 13

GREATER LOVE

CHAPTER 13

GREATER LOVE

PASSAGE

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

*13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. **1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 ESV***

LOVE IS

This INVERTED RELATIONSHIP, the one that binds us and calls us into one body, as we previously talked about, Paul makes clear is empowered and equipped to serve in a multitude of ways. He affirms the way the church of Corinth has experienced the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues, gifts of prophecy, stretching faith, all of these were being experienced in and through the church. People were being moved in ways they had never experienced before and many were reveling in them. Here is where the problem arose.

Many within the body had been used in mighty ways. This is clear as earlier we saw many drawn to different persons as they developed followings. Through cliques and drawing hearts to themselves, Paul calls those out as he dwarfs the importance of any gift in the light of LOVE. LOVE IS, in Paul's address, that which does not divide but brings unity and connection through the likeness of Jesus. To separate the body based on the perceived greater importance of any gifting is to miss out on what those gifts were given for.

Paul uses in comparison the sound of a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Both of these used apart from the greater symphony are only jarring and draw attention away from the unified work that is being conducted. Without LOVE, these things are merely distractions and do more destruction than good.

Paul doesn't leave the Corinthians to determine for themselves what the definition of LOVE looks like, but devotes several sentences to presenting us with what LOVE IS. "4 LOVE IS patient and kind; LOVE does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 LOVE bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

What we can take away from this is that we hold a GREATER LOVE than any good gift. This LOVE IS the way of the kingdom; it is the currency and glue that binds the church together. No gift, even that of the Spirit is GREATER than LOVE. No one person, exercising the gifts of the Spirit is to be what differentiates the body of Christ from the world. Rather, it is to be the love of Jesus expressed through the members of the body one to another.

REFLECTION

In your perspective of the body of Christ, the church, do you seek to see manifest power and miss out on seeking to see love manifest?

Seeing what LOVE IS, how it looks when Jesus is made manifest in our lives, how do you see your current way of life? Do you really love, and love well?

If you belonged to a people that truly lived out what Paul describes as LOVE IS, how would you grow in your faith? Would you be drawn deeper into relationship with Jesus or driven further away?

Endures all things. This is one of the descriptives Paul uses for Love. What do you think endure means? Endure means to "suffer through." Think on that. What are some ways we "Endure in love?"

NEVER ENDS

Beyond the clear presentation of what LOVE IS, Paul moves the church of Corinth, and as well ourselves today, towards the reality that Love NEVER ENDS. As the true currency of the kingdom, Paul assures us that of all other gifts used to encourage the church and equip her, Love will be the only one to proceed into eternity.

Faith and hope, accompanied by the other host of gifts, are set aside as means to point us further into trust of the ultimate provision of king Jesus. Paul uses the descriptive of our current state as looking at the King and His Kingdom through a dim mirror. You can, in part, partially make out what is there, but the details are somewhat fuzzy. Faith and hope point us to the reality that lies behind the mirror. They fix us on the hope of that day when we will see face to face the glory of the One who has created and loved us first.

Any gift elevated above love will only end with this world. Knowing this and holding onto the truth that LOVE NEVER ENDS, anchors us in the gospel. It takes focus away from what we think we can do and the works we can provide. It redirects us away from becoming self centered and into becoming more Christ centered. Any church that gives up on love, engages in a dying venture of seeking to build a kingdom of man wrapped in a counterfeit image of Jesus.

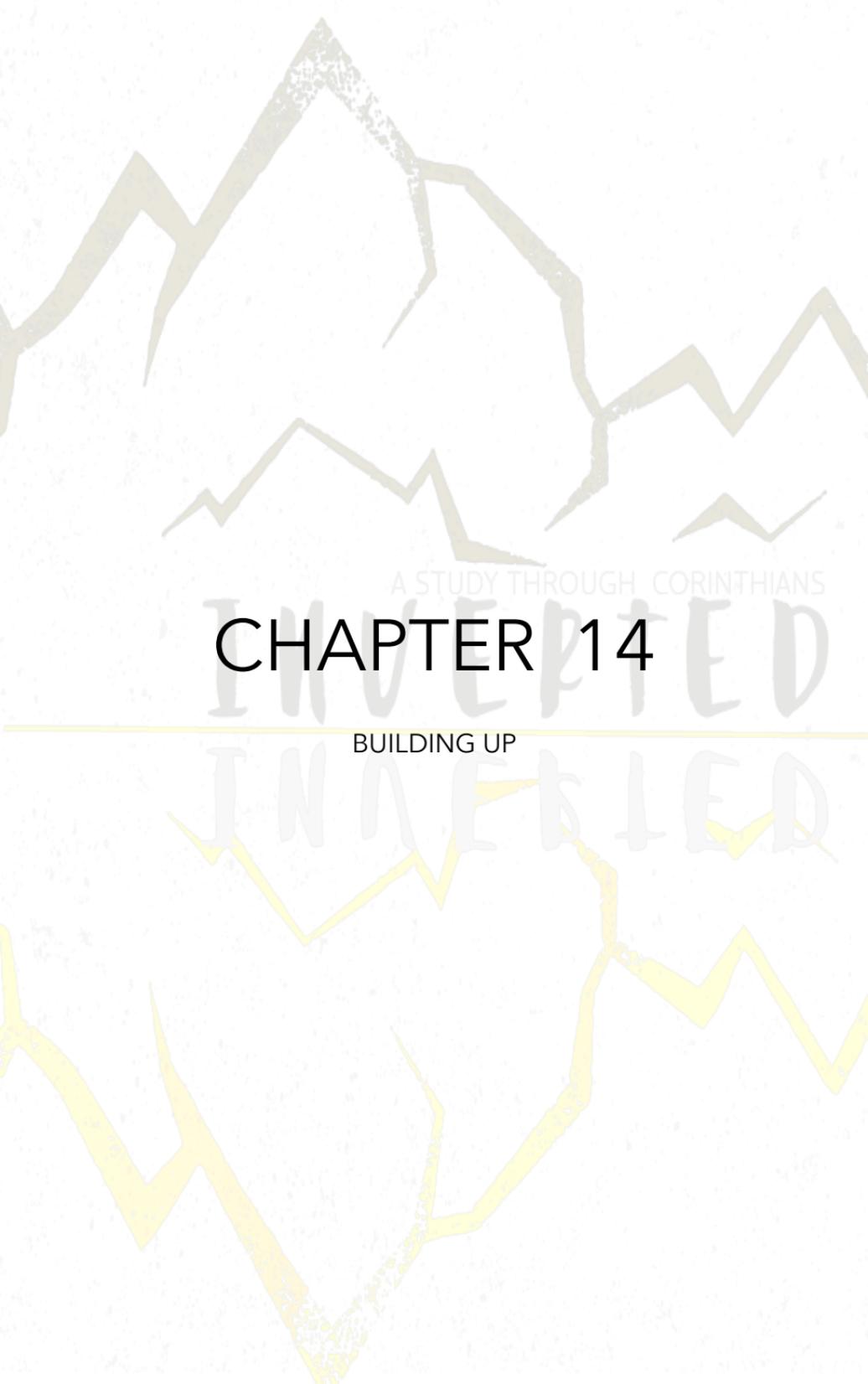
Intentionally loving one another as Christ loved the church, is to choose the mission of the Kingdom. It is to engage as ambassadors in the work of the gospel and will only produce life eternal within and through our lives as individuals and the greater church. Living in the INVERTED kingdom is to see and value what is only eternal. It is moving to store treasures where no moth or man can steal. It is to chose transformation of Jesus over the conformation of man. LOVE NEVER ENDS. Let that sink in.

REFLECTION

Stepping back and honestly seeing that love NEVER ENDS, how do you view it in light of the other gifts found within the church?

How is an eternal love reflected in your life?

How can the church point to the eternal kingdom in the way they LOVE?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 14

BUILDING UP

CHAPTER 14

BUILDING UP

PASSAGE

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

6 Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? 7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? 8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? 9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, 11 but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.

14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?

17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. 21 In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." 22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but

for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-40 ESV

STRIVE TO EXCEL

Let's just admit together that chapter fourteen is quite a daunting one within the entire first letter to the Corinthians. Along with helping us peer deeper within what the INVERTED Kingdom looks like, Paul is at the same time tackling the overall direction of the church and her charge within this kingdom. She is to BUILD UP in a multitude of ways. The key component, as we have now been made aware of, is in

LOVE. It is evident that *INVERTED RELATIONSHIPS* within the body, have everything to do with seeking the good of others over one's self.

Within the church of Corinth people were experiencing individual freedom in Christ. Some were engaging in speaking in tongues. Many engaged in an overflow of "prayer language." For some of us today, we shirk at the thought because of the over abundance of abuses that we have seen within the church. We are not alone in this, as Paul's primary concern is to address similar issues happening in Corinth.

Moving from individual connection with God, people within the greater gathering were moving in ways that brought attention to themselves, and repulsion to anyone outside of the church looking in. With many pagan "worship experiences," abounding in Corinth, the church in their manner of expression without consideration was running the risk of just looking like another "expression" or "experience" to outsiders. Paul makes it clear that exercising these gifts is not bad, but putting them above others is. The body and its gathering is solely meant for the *BUILDING UP* of the church. Anything outside of this only brings disunity within the body, and disdain from those who are not yet believers.

As the church, Paul says we are to *STRIVE TO EXCEL* in love. The order of our gatherings and the way we handle one another should always be conducted in a means of order and care for one another. No one, with whatever gifting they may operate in, should bulldoze another for their own ends. If anything, Paul demonstrates that tongues without interpretation only breed confusion and are not *STRIVING TO EXCEL* in love. Tongues are not bad and interpretation should be sought. However, Paul is clear that a body *STRIVING TO EXCEL* in love and being bearers of truth (Prophecies) will *BUILD UP* the body and only draw outsiders, non-believers, to *JESUS*.

Paul says it all in the way he ends verse 19, "Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue." Anything we

STRIVE TO EXCEL in other than love, will only weaken the very thing that sets us apart. We will be moved from a radical display of LOVE only seen and found in JESUS and demoted to yet just another "worship experience" by those outside seeking something far beyond themselves.

REFLECTION

Have you ever experienced a time within a church gathering where it pushed you away rather than drawing you in?

For Paul to call us to STRIVE TO EXCEL in love, how does this change your priorities when thinking about what Jesus would have you to do?

ENCOURAGEMENT

Throughout this entire chapter, we are listening in as Paul reminds the church of her objective when gathered together. As we lean into the plethora of situations Paul addresses we cannot help but see the common theme he seeks to establish as the upmost importance. First the body is to be orderly. Second she is to involve each person during worship. Whether prophesying truth, speaking in tongues or providing interpretation, the church is to be on of great encouragement.

As believers gather, the main focus of the gathering is to be the place of redirection. Re-centering our minds hearts and lives back

in line with the call of the Gospel, we as a people are to be moved more by the Spirit of Christ than we are by the appeals of the flesh. Seeking to edify the body, to encourage the body, is to release focus on ourselves to properly glorify Jesus and minister to one another. Whatever is spoken, sung and prayed is to solely seen and done through the lens of unity. ENCOURAGING our hearts to draw closer to Jesus's grace, mercy and love. These things are meant for the BUILDING UP of the church and not for one or two individuals egos.

One thing we cannot go without addressing are verses 32-35. These verses seem to conflict with Paul's statements about women in the church found in chapter 11. Looking back to chapter 11 we see Paul establishing that women are permitted to engage in prophesy and tongues while ensuring the cultural embrace of the head covering. Interesting enough, some theologians and scholars have presented these verses as being a side bar addition in later texts. From Galatians on into the "pastoral letters," of Titus and Timothy, it would seem that Paul was taking a more male centered approach to the church. Many to this day miss the point completely by taking the passage outside of its context.

As we have earlier established many of the pagan religions place higher priority on the worship of goddesses and over emphasized the importance of women over men. What the early church did was to re-present us with the idea that all are equal of value within the kingdom. Some women found themselves within the gatherings and were intentionally causing problems based on their former beliefs. This only brought further distraction and disunity. Hence, Pauls continual concern with the function of women within the church.

The main thrust and focus of Paul's writings in this chapter is to yet again call the church to forsake their ways for the ways of Jesus. To see to the BUILDING UP of the body and to ENCOURAGE one another to pursue Jesus further and to continue pressing forward the

INVERTED kingdom. The gathering of the saints is not about our preferences but about His presence.

REFLECTION

What are some of the ways you have seen the church built up in encouragement?

According to Paul, how do we ensure that we maintain focus on encouraging and building up one another?

Have you ever seen people in the church concerned more with themselves than with others? Is this drawing to others or repelling?

How do you view the roles of women and men in the church? What has shaped this thinking?

