



THE CHALLENGE OF RADICAL LOVE

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Open your group with a prayer.

Memory Verse: *“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.” – John 3:16-17 (NLT)*

Ice Breaker Game Idea:

Play “2 Truths & a Lie” – Go around to everyone in the group and let each person share 3 things about themselves with the group ... 2 of which are true and one of which is a lie. Then let the rest of the group guess which of the 3 is the lie. It’s a great way to learn some interesting facts about people in the group and it’s fun to try to guess the lie. 😊

Quick Facts about the Book of Romans:

- Paul probably wrote Romans around 58 A.D. from Corinth. He was about to return to Jerusalem with an offering he had raised from the churches he had planted to give to the church in Jerusalem which was suffering from severe persecution.
- Romans is the only letter Paul wrote to a church he had nothing to do with starting and which to this point he had not been in contact with. Thus, note how Romans seems impersonal compared to Paul’s other letters to churches. There are few details of practical problems in Romans because Paul does not personally know the church.
- Romans is the most theological and least practical of Paul’s letters. Another reason (see the first reason above) is that Rome was the center of the known world at this time and a capital of intellect. Romans is laid out more as a theological treatise perhaps in part because Paul wanted to lay out the intellectual validity of the faith to those in Rome.
- Paul desperately wanted to visit Rome (which he would later do in chains and eventually he would die there) ... so this letter introduces himself to the church in Rome. Paul’s passion was spreading the Good News of Jesus as far as he could. Like Los Angeles today, what influenced Rome influenced the world. But besides wanting to share in Rome – Paul also may have wanted to establish a base from which to take missionary journeys further west (maybe as far west as Spain).

THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE. SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

THE CHALLENGE OF RADICAL LOVE

“Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.”

– Ephesians 5:2 (MSG)

FOUR RADICAL CHOICES TO LOVE LIKE JESUS

➤ CHOOSE TO RESPOND PEACEFULLY.

Matthew 5:38-39 (TLB) *“The law of Moses says, ‘If a man gouges out another’s eye, he must pay with his own eye. If a tooth gets knocked out, knock out the tooth of the one who did it.’ But I say: Don’t resist violence! If you are slapped on one cheek, turn the other too.”*

➤ CHOOSE TO FORGIVE FREELY.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT) *“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

Matthew 5:43-48 (TLB) *“There is a saying, ‘Love your friends and hate your enemies.’ But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even scoundrels do that much. If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*

➤ CHOOSE TO VIEW OTHERS GRACIOUSLY.

Matthew 7:1-5 (NLT) *“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.”*

➤ CHOOSE TO LOVE SACRIFICIALLY.

Matthew 7:12 (NLT) *“Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.”*

(See also Matthew 5:42 & Matthew 6:2-4)

Matthew 6:19-21 (NLT) *“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.”*

THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE. SELECT THE QUESTIONS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

Discussion Questions for Matthew 1-2 & Acts 1-3

1. What do you know about your genealogy? What would you like to discover about it? (Matthew 1 – Genealogy)
2. From Joseph’s responsiveness of going to Egypt what do you learn about faith and obedience? How long would it take you to say “yes” if God asked you to relocate? (Matthew 2 – Jesus and family relocating)
3. What have been your best experiences in group prayer? How is praying with others for a common mission different from private prayer about your individual concerns? (Acts 1 – Disciples praying)
4. Have you traveled and you didn’t speak the language? What happened? (Acts 2 – Pentecost)
5. As the cripple, what would you write as a diary entry for a typical day? When Peter grabs your hand? After the healing? (Acts 3 – Healing of the crippled man)

Discussion Questions for Matthew 3-4 & Acts 4-6

1. Who has been a John the Baptist in your life? How did he or she prepare you to meet Jesus? Is there someone who is pointing you to Jesus as you consider Him? (Matt. 3)
2. What persecution have you experienced due to your faith? How did you take it? (Acts 4)
3. Which responsibility at home or work would you gladly give up? Never give up? (Acts 6 – Apostles choose 12 people to carry out ministry of the church ... what does this say about who should do the ministry of the church – the pastors or the members?)

Discussion Questions for Matthew 5-6 & Acts 7-9

1. This past week, did you feel more blessed or stressed? What can you do to be more focused on God’s blessings in your life? (Matthew 5 – Sermon on the Mount)
2. What causes you the most worry in this pandemic? What is God saying to you through this passage about handling your particular worry or disappointment? (Matthew 6 – Sermon on the Mount)
3. How did the Lord first get your attention? Was it in some dramatic event or something more subtle? (Acts 9 – Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus)

Discussion Questions for Matthew 7-8 & Acts 10-12

1. Describe a time when you saw a despised or neglected person receive a surprising amount of love and respect. (Matthew 8)
2. What are some reasons we reject or avoid certain people? How can we show acceptance of those who are different culturally, politically, or racially? (Acts 10 – Peter and Cornelius)

Discussion Questions for Matthew 9-10 & Acts 13-15

1. What is the longest distance you have hiked or hitchhiked?
2. What was one of the biggest misunderstandings about Christianity you had to overcome before you could believe? (Acts 14)
3. What were some of the expected, extra-biblical rules you were supposed to follow in the church where you grew up? When you became a Christian? (Acts 15)

Discussion Questions for Matthew 11-12 & Acts 16-18

1. In what specific way can you be an encourager to someone in church leadership? In your family? Among your friends? (Matthew 11)
2. What is one habit or behavior you do which totally annoys others around you? (Matt 12)
3. Where do you have an “open door” for ministry now: In your home? School? Work? Community? How will you take advantage of it? (Acts 15)

Discussion Questions for Matthew 13-14 & Acts 19-21

1. Can you see and hear Jesus at work in today’s world? If so, how? (Matthew 13)
2. If you fed five thousand people at a picnic, what would you serve? (Matthew 14)
3. What places are you afraid to go to during the pandemic? How can you live out the truth of the gospel in today’s divisive and overly sensitive society?

USE THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK. YOU DO NOT NEED TO WRITE OUT THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS. WE WILL USE SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE OUR GROWTH GROUP DISCUSSION NEXT WEEK. ALSO, READ AND COMPLETE THE DAILY DEVOTIONS.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20)

1. If you had been one of the first hired workers, how would you have felt at pay time?
2. How do you feel about recent converts getting the same benefits as you in the kingdom?
3. Does being gracious to the workers at the eleventh hour equate to being unfair to the workers who were hired early in the morning?

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25)

1. What were the master's expectations of his servants while he was away?
2. Why do you think the master became angry with the servant with one talent?
3. What are some talents either material or immaterial in your life that Jesus expects you to steward well and multiply?

Paul Sails for Rome (Acts 27)

1. How is God challenging you through the storm of this pandemic and contentious society on your way to a destination that you know He wants you to go?
2. What is the danger of equating comfort with God's will for your life?
3. What does it say about God that He would chose to take Paul to Rome as a prisoner on a ship that wrecked?

All Things Working for the Good of Those Who Love Him (Romans 8:28)

1. How are you seeing things work out for your good through this difficult time even though it doesn't make sense right now?
2. What situation could this verse be applied to in your life presently?
3. Why is it important that the verse ends with the phrase "who have been called according to his purpose?"

Being a Living Sacrifice (Romans 12)

1. What do you hear when Paul says do not conform to the world? How do we stay engaged with our culture and those around us while remaining faithful to this command?
2. What does it mean to offer your body as a living sacrifice?
3. What are some ways that you have been able to practice the renewing of your mind?

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

Week #2: Week of September 21

- Day #8** – Monday, September 21 – Read Matthew 15-16, Acts 22-24
- Day #9** – Tuesday, September 22 – Read Matthew 17-18, Acts 25-27
- Day #10** – Wednesday, September 23 – Read Matthew 19-20, Acts 28
- Day #11** – Thursday, September 24 – Read Matthew 21-22, Romans 1-3
- Day #12** – Friday, September 25 – Read Matthew 23-24, Romans 4-6
- Day #13** – Saturday, September 26 – Read Matthew 25-26, Romans 7-9
- Day #14** – Sunday, September 27 – Read Matthew 27-28, Romans 10-12

ICAN: The New Testament (63 sessions/days)

The ICAN New Testament packet was written by Randolph Romero, Jr. It is incorporated into this study packet for the Fall Campaign series “The Radical Challenge of the New Testament.” It will assist you in offering you the specific opportunity to read through the New Testament in as little as nine weeks. Successfully completing this packet may involve adjustments and some sacrifice. Engaging with the New Testament, however, will be extremely valuable. Be excited about the opportunity to take the next sixty-three sessions/days to seriously engage with God’s Word.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” – 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

The ICAN: The New Testament packet also has a daily devotion for you to read that somehow ties into that day’s Scripture reading. The Scriptures used in the devotional are from the 1984 edition of the New International Version. May the intensity of the challenge ahead be utilized by God as He continues to mold you into His likeness.

Investigating God’s Word (Passage): Starting in Matthew and Acts, you will be reading from two different New Testament books for the first fifty-four sessions of this packet. The final nine sessions are arranged so as to ensure that you complete all the books from the New Testament.

Connecting with God (Prayer): A written prayer influenced by that day’s Scripture and/or devotional reading appears for each session. Nevertheless, you are encouraged to follow the Spirit’s prompting, including letting your understanding of that day’s reading guide the direction your prayer will take.

Acting on my faith (Practical Application): A standard question prompting you to explore how you will apply that day’s Scripture will appear for each day’s reading. Each session will also have two suggested action steps to make sure your relationship with God is active and practical, or prompting you to do further study/research on your own.

Noticing God’s activity in my life (Personal Journal): The first journal question will be the same each day. This question deals with what God has revealed to you through that day’s Scripture reading and that day’s devotional. A second journal question tying into the day’s Scripture and/or devotional reading also appears for each session. Remember to continue to use your journal as a place to reflect on how you see God at work in and around your life and to express specific reasons you are thankful to God.

There will be plenty for God’s Spirit to reveal to you as you engage with both familiar and unfamiliar passages from God’s Word. Be open to what God will teach you as you discipline yourself to read the New Testament.

ICAN DAY #8 DEVOTIONAL

God is most definitely concerned that His people distinguish between right and wrong. Much of the Old Testament book of Leviticus pertains to God's people distinguishing between clean and unclean. Thus, in some ways we cannot be too critical of the concern the religious leaders of Jesus' day had for being ceremonially clean.

Nevertheless, by Jesus' time, many Jews wound up only being concerned for outward religious ritual, including religious leaders enforcing legalistic adherence to man-made customs. While a significant collection of woes levied against the hypocrisy of the teachers of the law and Pharisees appears in Matthew 23, Jesus has some sobering words in Matthew 15 regarding this issue of cleanness.

"But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

– **Matthew 15:18-20 (NIV)**

My friends, Jesus is concerned with who we are. He is concerned about our character, not merely outward adherence to rules. Nevertheless, we also must recognize that what denotes our hearts will come out in our conduct, particularly so in our words. Let us obediently forsake dwelling on that which taints our hearts and mouths.

In addition to increased time in the Word of God, what are some of the things God may be prompting you to do so as to avoid having an unclean heart? As a child of God who has been bought at a price, in what ways are you obediently striving to allow your heart/conscience to be clean/clear before God?

If need be, at this very moment devote time to an open examination of yourself before the Lord and engage in earnest confession.

"So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."

– **Acts 24:16 (NIV)**

ICAN DAY #9 DEVOTIONAL

Whether from a movie, a television show, a politician, a celebrity, or even a good book, I am sure you have at least one. It comes to memory from time to time. Each time it comes to mind or you encounter it again, you cannot keep from once again laughing to yourself, or find yourself inspired all over again. I am referring to witty quotes or clever catch phrases. For whatever reason, the right words at the right moment delivered by the right person simply resonate well with us.

For me, Paul's response to King Agrippa in Acts 26:29 is one such saying that I find compelling. A weakness that occasionally denotes me when I read is an inability to put myself in the action of the text. But here, I can just imagine the response of all who heard Paul's words. My imagination posits an audience that is amazed and even slightly uncomfortable at Paul's beautiful rhetoric, which, more importantly, reveals a genuine concern for people.

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?' Paul replied, 'Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.'"

– Acts 26:28-29 (NIV)

In a recent conversation I had, I was prompted to share these two verses with a sister in Christ. In that conversation, inclusion of these verses was part of the continued encouragement directed her way as she earnestly prays for her spouse to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Here you are being reminded to continue to express a loving concern for those who have not yet been persuaded to be a Christian.

Whether the investment involves a short or long period of time, be the man or woman of God who positively invests in the lives of those in your sphere of influence including those you are already consistently praying will come to salvation.

ICAN DAY #10 DEVOTIONAL

As humans, we have burning desires to be successful. We desire to be great. Even if we get to the point of being content with simply surviving or maintaining the status quo, each of us can likely recall a desire at some point in our lives to be number one.

Generally, we desire to exert influence, authority, and power over others. Thus we often associate with those who already wield such authority or can help us achieve such authority.

John and James were apparently not much different than most humans in regard to their desires to exert authority. In Matthew 20, we find their mother requesting of Jesus on their behalf that one have the honor of sitting at Jesus' right and the other His left in the kingdom. When the other disciples learn of this request, they express indignation towards John and James. Jesus takes advantage of another teaching moment.

“Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

– **Matthew 20:25-28 (NIV)**

Interestingly enough, Jesus does not exactly criticize their desire to be great. Jesus does reveal that greatness in His kingdom is defined quite differently than the way the world defines it. Greatness comes from being a servant. Power is not to be utilized as a means of dominating others. Rather, similar to Jesus, we are to utilize whatever power we are allowed to serve, help, liberate, and empower others.

How do you define greatness? How do you utilize the power and influence granted to you?

Consider if Jesus' words reveal that you need a change of heart regarding what denotes a life of greatness.

ICAN DAY #11 DEVOTIONAL

“There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.”

– **Romans 2:9-11 (NIV)**

There are those on whom God’s favor rests in the form of saving grace. There are those on whom God’s wrath remains. Thus this issue of God not showing favoritism can be hard for some to grasp. Yet, the truth remains: Those who reject the truth and follow evil will receive wrath and anger. Those who accept truth, righteousness from God accessed by faith in Jesus, will receive eternal life.

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

– **Romans 3:21-24 (NIV)**

No one is righteous and all have indeed sinned. However, we can thank God that a righteousness from Him comes to all those who believe in Jesus Christ whatever their background.

There may be aspects of God’s nature you and I cannot fully grasp. There may be questions levied against you by skeptics that you found yourself ill-equipped to answer. You may have your own set of questions that persist as you interact with the Bible.

Nevertheless, do not forget the power of God and His gospel message. There is no need to be ashamed of God’s saving grace accessed by faith in Christ Jesus.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

– **Romans 1:16 (NIV)**

ICAN DAY #12 DEVOTIONAL

Readiness and remaining alert are key qualities that God expects in His followers. It is very easy to get distracted or lack motivation, which adversely affects our readiness. We are to be ready for anything God has for us, including Jesus' second coming.

While end time concerns and speculation will receive more attention from certain Christians than they will others, the issue of Jesus' return is a crucial one. God's church waits expectantly for Jesus to return. The expression of such a hope contributes to mobilizing Christians for faithful service now as part of maintaining readiness for His return.

The prospect of Christ's imminent return inspires the church to remain focused. Whether you are one who would be surprised if Christ does not return before you die, or one who would be surprised if less than two more millennia pass before He returns, do take seriously the fact He will return at any time.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

– Matthew 24:42-44 (NIV)

Consider to what extent you are remaining alert, wise, and faithful in the way you are living your life. Are you allowing excuses, laziness, and divided attention to severely hinder your readiness and quality of witness? Whether it is more of a friendly reminder or a harsh wake up call, hear Christ telling you to keep watch.

What adjustments may you need to make in your attitude or life as part of keeping watch and maintaining readiness for Christ's return?

ICAN DAY #13 DEVOTIONAL

Watch. Pray. Suffer faithfully. Hope.

Matthew 26:41 and Romans 8:18 are verses that I memorized relatively early in my walk with Christ. Matthew 26:41, with an emphasis on watching and praying, is a verse the Holy Spirit often brings to mind to keep me sharp and alert, and also so as to not succumb to temptation. Romans 8:18 reminds us that the glory to come, for which we hope, far exceeds any present sufferings that denote our lives.

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

– **Romans 8:18 (KJV)**

The context of Romans 8:18 emphasizes that those led by the Spirit are children of God as the Holy Spirit Himself testifies with our spirits that we are God’s children. Being a child of God means being a co-heir with Christ who shares in the sufferings of Christ in order to share in His glory. While suffering is quite real and can be intense, it does nothing to ameliorate the hope of the glorious future with God to come.

As Jesus was quickly progressing towards His crucifixion, Jesus went to Gethsemane to spend time in prayer. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him. Jesus then went a little farther on his own entering into prayer with an overwhelmed soul that was still ready to submit to the Father. While Jesus was going through the agony involved in God’s will requiring his crucifixion, the disciples Jesus asked to keep watch with him kept falling asleep. Matthew 26:41 contains the words Jesus said the first time he returned and found them asleep.

“Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For the Spirit is indeed willing, but how weak the body is!”

– **Matthew 26:41 (TLB)**

Continue to watch. Continue to pray. Continue to suffer faithfully. Continue to hope.

ICAN DAY #14 DEVOTIONAL

In each of my first three years in ministry as a youth director, near the end of September (early in the school year) I delivered a version of the same message to the youth. Matthew 28:16-20 and Romans 10:14-15 were key texts from which this message, which I called “Beautiful Feet or Crusty Toes”, emerged.

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

– **Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)**

What we find in the final verses of Matthew is what we call the Great Commission. Jesus emphasizes the authority that is His. He then commissions His followers to make disciples, baptize, and teach as we are going. We also have the assurance that He will be with us to the very end of the age. God has commissioned you.

Therefore, go.

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

– **Romans 10:14-15 (NIV)**

Those who recognize they are sent to spread the gospel and obediently go are beautiful indeed. Even if you do have crusty toes, you can be one who has beautiful feet as one who brings good news. Whether across your street, in your workplace, in your school, or in another state, another country, or another continent, there are people who need to hear the gospel message.

Therefore, go.

How beautiful are your feet?

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

PREVIOUS WEEK ...

Week #1: Week of September 14

- Day #1 – Monday, September 14 – Read Matthew 1-2, Acts 1-3
- Day #2 – Tuesday, September 15 – Read Matthew 3-4, Acts 4-6
- Day #3 – Wednesday, September 16 – Read Matthew 5-6, Acts 7-9
- Day #4 – Thursday, September 17 – Read Matthew 7-8, Acts 10-12
- Day #5 – Friday, September 18 – Read Matthew 9-10, Acts 13-15
- Day #6 – Saturday, September 19 – Read Matthew 11-12, Acts 16-18
- Day #7 – Sunday, September 20 – Read Matthew 13-14, Acts 19-21

CURRENT WEEK ...

Week #2: Week of September 21

- Day #8 – Monday, September 21 – Read Matthew 15-16, Acts 22-24
- Day #9 – Tuesday, September 22 – Read Matthew 17-18, Acts 25-27
- Day #10 – Wednesday, September 23 – Read Matthew 19-20, Acts 28
- Day #11 – Thursday, September 24 – Read Matthew 21-22, Romans 1-3
- Day #12 – Friday, September 25 – Read Matthew 23-24, Romans 4-6
- Day #13 – Saturday, September 26 – Read Matthew 25-26, Romans 7-9
- Day #14 – Sunday, September 27 – Read Matthew 27-28, Romans 10-12

NEXT WEEK ...

Week #3: Week of September 28

- Day #15 – Monday, September 28 – Read Mark 1-2, Romans 13-15
- Day #16 – Tuesday, September 29 – Read Mark 3-4, Romans 16
- Day #17 – Wednesday, September 30 – Read Mark 5-6, 1 Corinthians 1-2
- Day #18 – Thursday, October 1 – Read Mark 7-8, 1 Corinthians 3-4
- Day #19 – Friday, October 2 – Read Mark 9-10, 1 Corinthians 5-7
- Day #20 – Saturday, October 3 – Read Mark 11-12, 1 Corinthians 8-10
- Day #21 – Sunday, October 4 – Read Mark 13-14, 1 Corinthians 11-13