God's Kingdom: A Different World



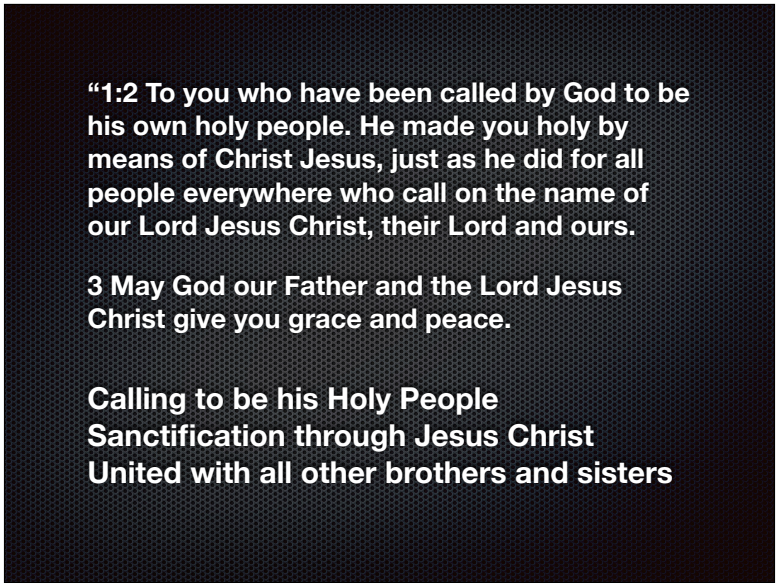
What we're looking at at the time, was how Roman Culture began to seep into the church.

But this isn't about worship styles, or generation gaps… it's something more dangerous.
It was the external class system, making its way into the church. And why is that a problem? Why is that worse than worship styles, or generation gaps? It's because it moved completely against God's desire for his people — and the things that set Christians apart from the surrounding world.

It's the absorption of the social values, particularly, the social order, or the class of the surrounding society. Paul's letter to the Corinthians challenges the growing stratification within the Corinthian church.

We see from the beginning of the letter that Paul, is setting out very clearly the issues he wants to address. And when we look at the Corinthian church, it reminds just how pastoral Paul was. It's very difficult to know how to navigate the broad sense of differences between brothers and sisters in a congregation.

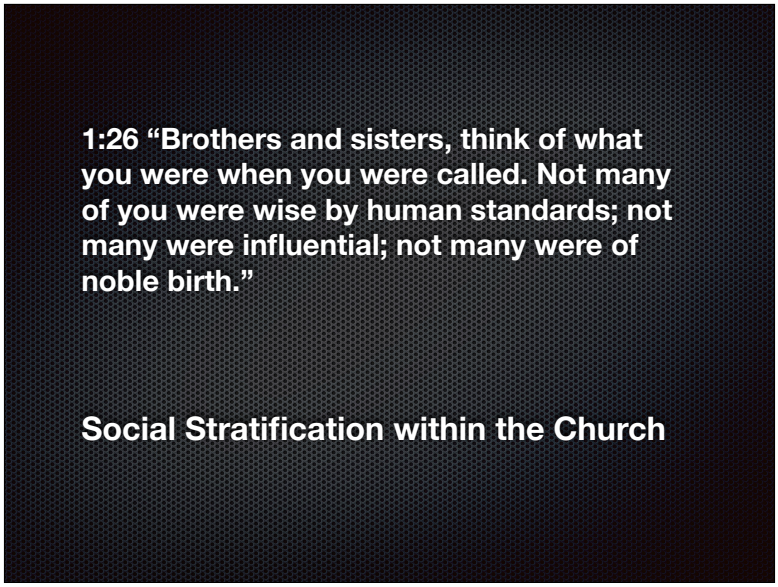
We tend to look back at the early church, with a sense of nostalgia. this idea that there's some beautiful perfection inside that origin. And likewise there's a sense that we should do our best to "return to that perfection." We have that same sense in our modern living — a nostalgic looking back — to when times were better, when times were simpler. And yet, in doing so, we often reject actually how wonderful and beautiful things have progressed. And in Paul's case, he's addressing the challenges of a growing, diversifying church — that at the same time is discovering what it means to be set apart from the culture around it.



If we just start by looking at 1 Corinthian’s, there’s a beauty in the crafting of this letter — Paul, pastorally, understanding the difficulties within the church, starts straight off with this

“2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ —their Lord and ours:”

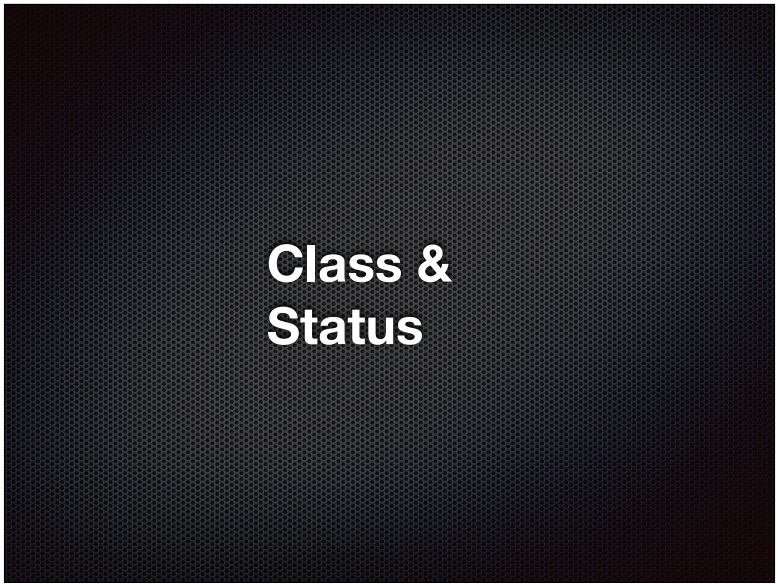
In this one sentences he’s focusing on the things which bind the people together:
Sanctification through Jesus Christ
Calling to be his Holy People
United with all other brothers and sisters



It lets us know that the Corinthian church was a socially stratified environment, and although the majority of the congregation didn’t come from the nobler/wealthier classes, there were still influential members who came from he upper classes.

The “wise” would belong to the educated classes - a good education was a privilege of the well-to-do. The powerful would be influential people. Those differences wasn’t just about power and influence, but also about status and social standing.

And what was happening was, the church was bringing those ideas and attitudes into the church, as opposed to seeing how they were meant to be different.



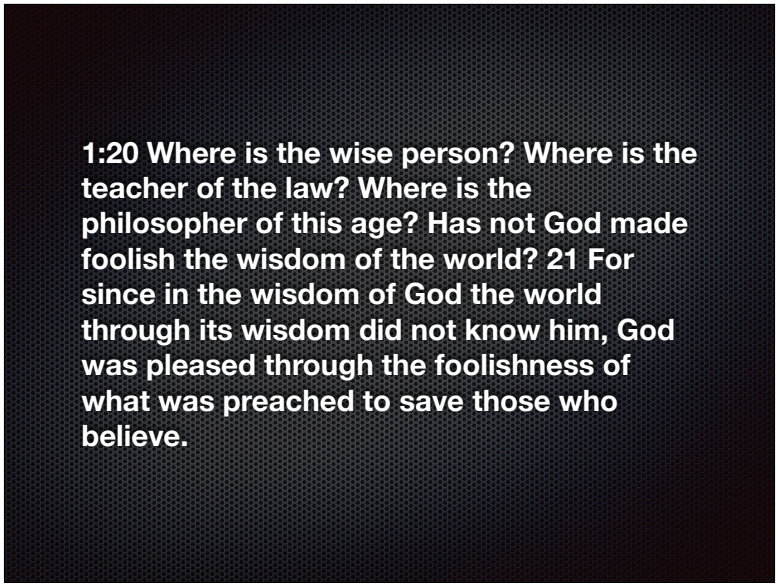
If we just start by looking at 1 Corinthian's, there's a beauty in the crafting of this letter — Paul, pastorally, understanding the difficulties within the church, starts straight off with this

"2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ —their Lord and ours:"

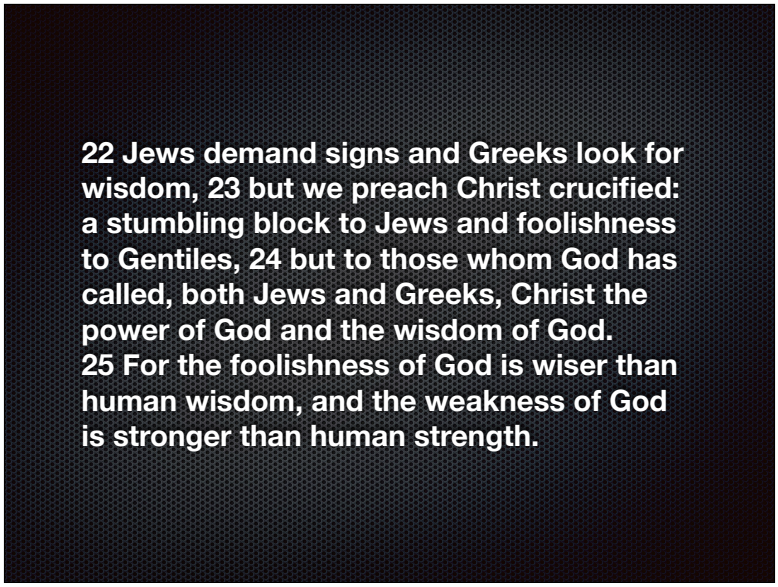
In this one sentences he's focusing on the things which bind the people together:
Sanctification through Jesus Christ
Calling to be his Holy People
United with all other brothers and sisters



I’m smarter than you.
So i’m better than you.



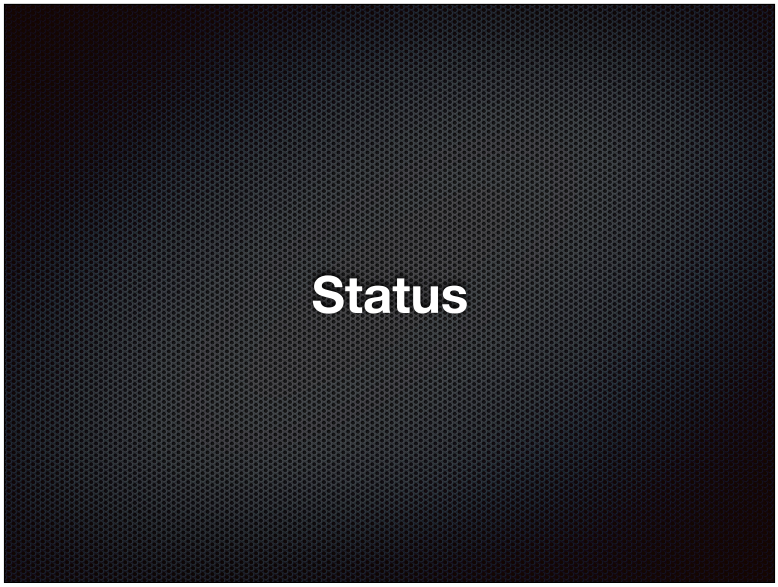
1:20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.



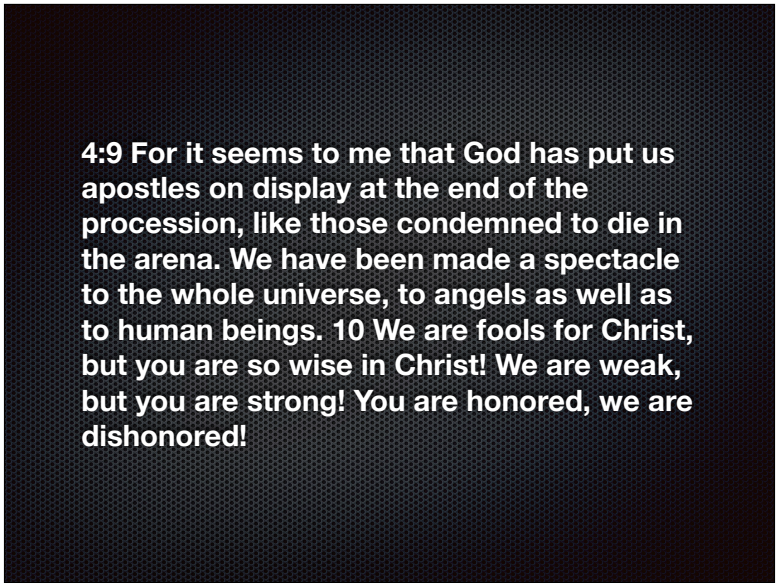
22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

earthly wisdom
earthly knowledge
gaining more
being better
being smarter

But it was making them look down on the people around them. The poorer, the uneducated.

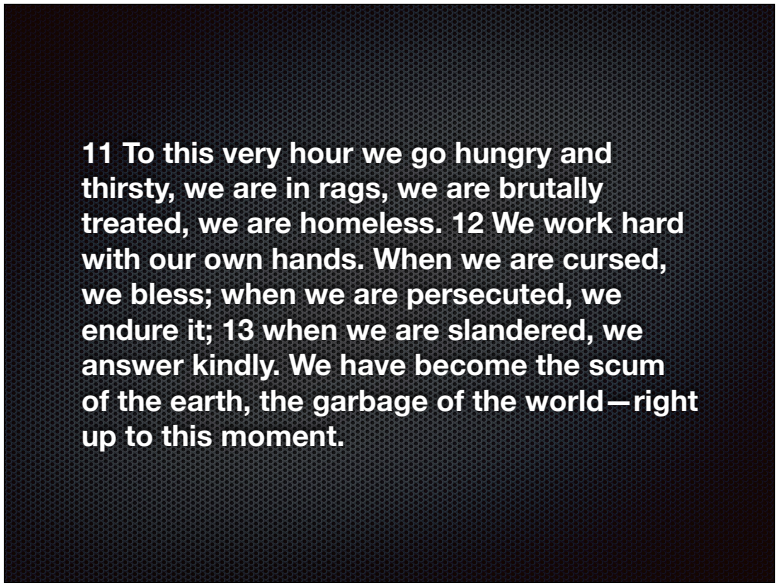


Our comparisons, are doctor, lawyer, engineer.



In fact they started even complaining and questioning Paul's status. Saying, i follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, another leading Christian at that time.

4:9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!

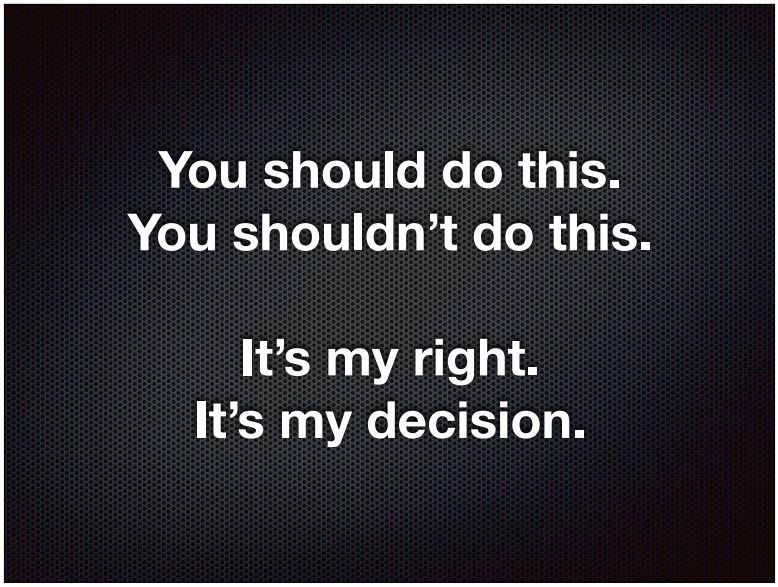


but actually being an apostle is a very different sort of status than the world's. It's a completely different world.

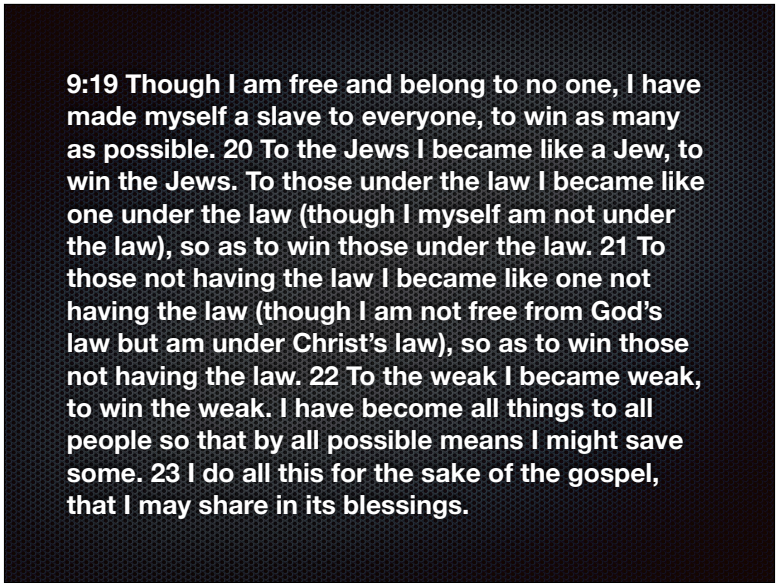
11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.



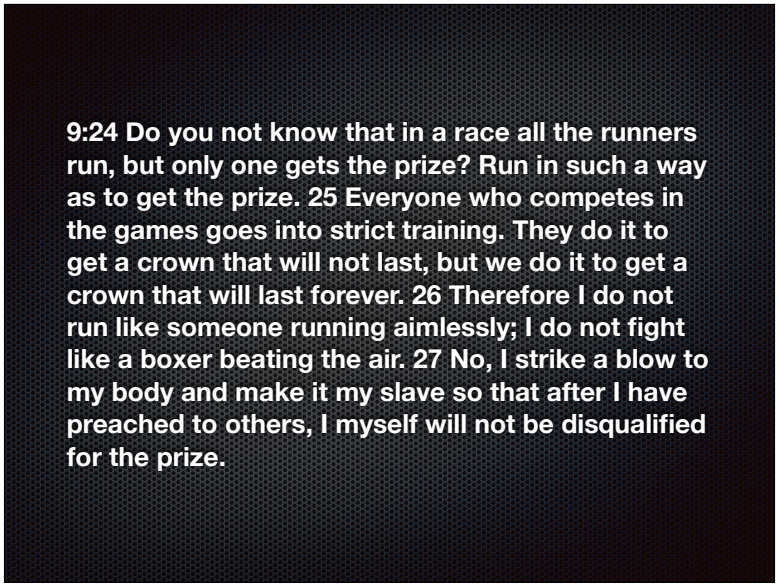
And people were starting to use these to judge one another.
To set up status symbols
To create stratification in being a believer.



And so when status appears, we start hearing these phrases.
And it comes out, sometimes directly, sometimes via gossip.
But it becomes this sort of stirring dissension within the body.



9:19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.



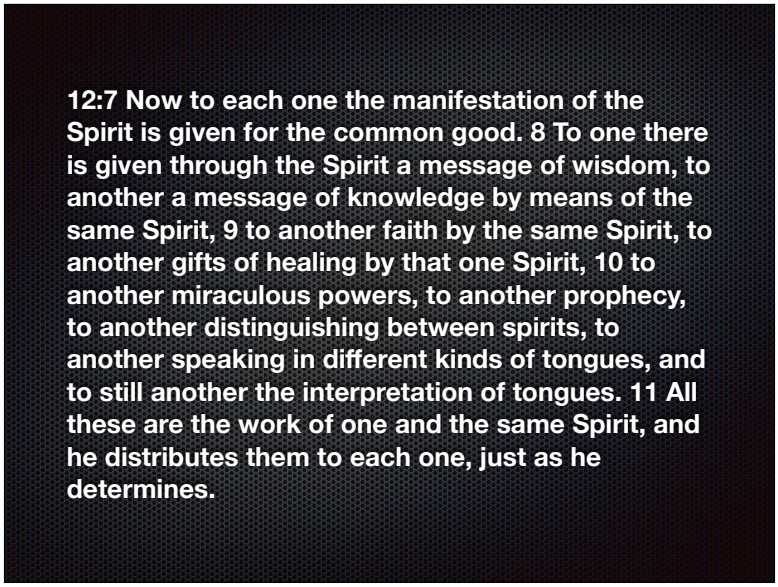
9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.



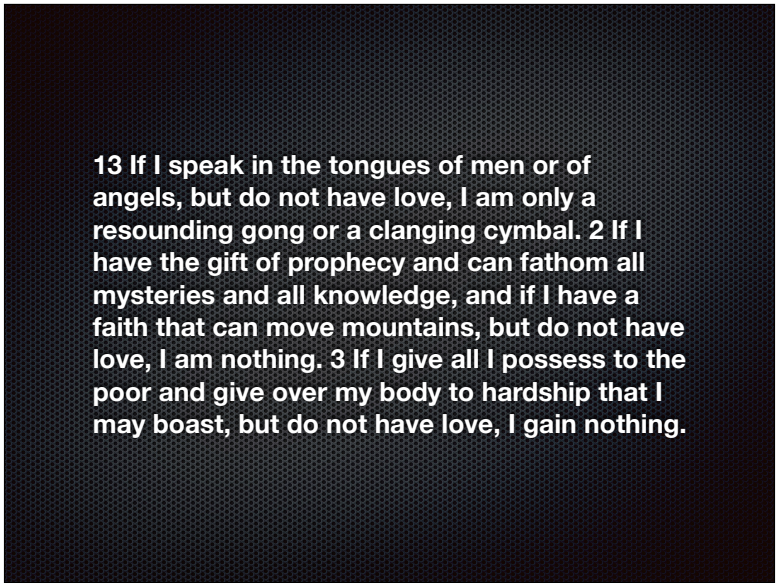
It's not about comparing, or judging, or being jealous, or status, or greatness — it's about Christ.



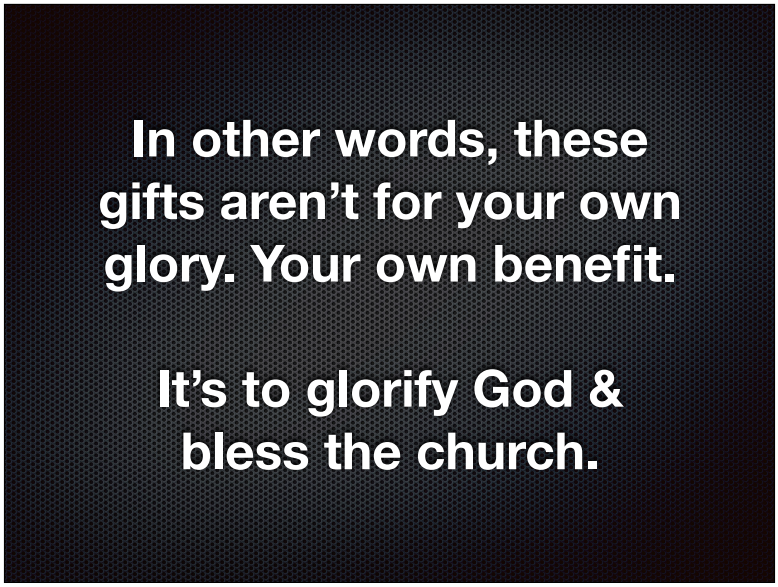
It’s not about comparing, or judging, or being jealous, or status, or greatness — it’s about Christ.



12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.



13 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.



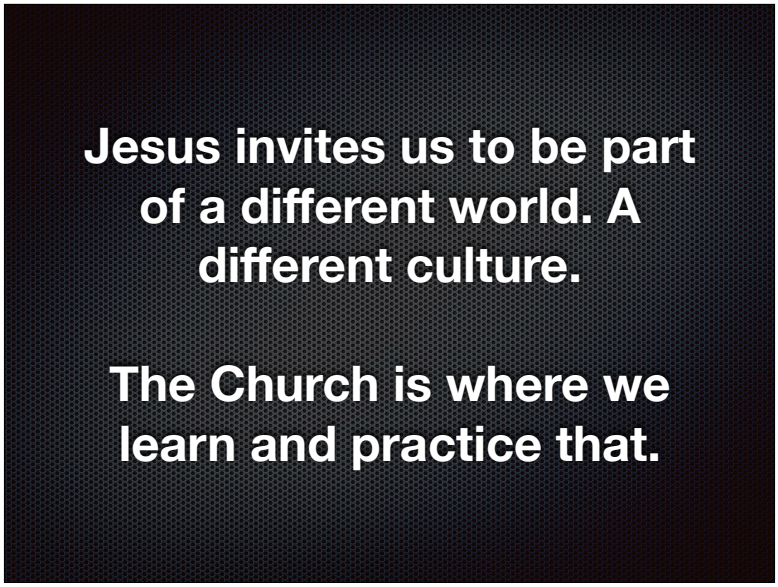
It's not about comparing, or judging, or being jealous, or status, or greatness — it's about Christ.


Love.
Love God.
Love Your Neighbour.

15:3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

15:57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.



Jesus invites us to be part of a different world. A different culture.
The Church is where we learn and practice that.

But we also have the opportunity to bring that outwards to people around us.



It's not about comparing, or judging, or being jealous, or status, or greatness — it's about Christ.