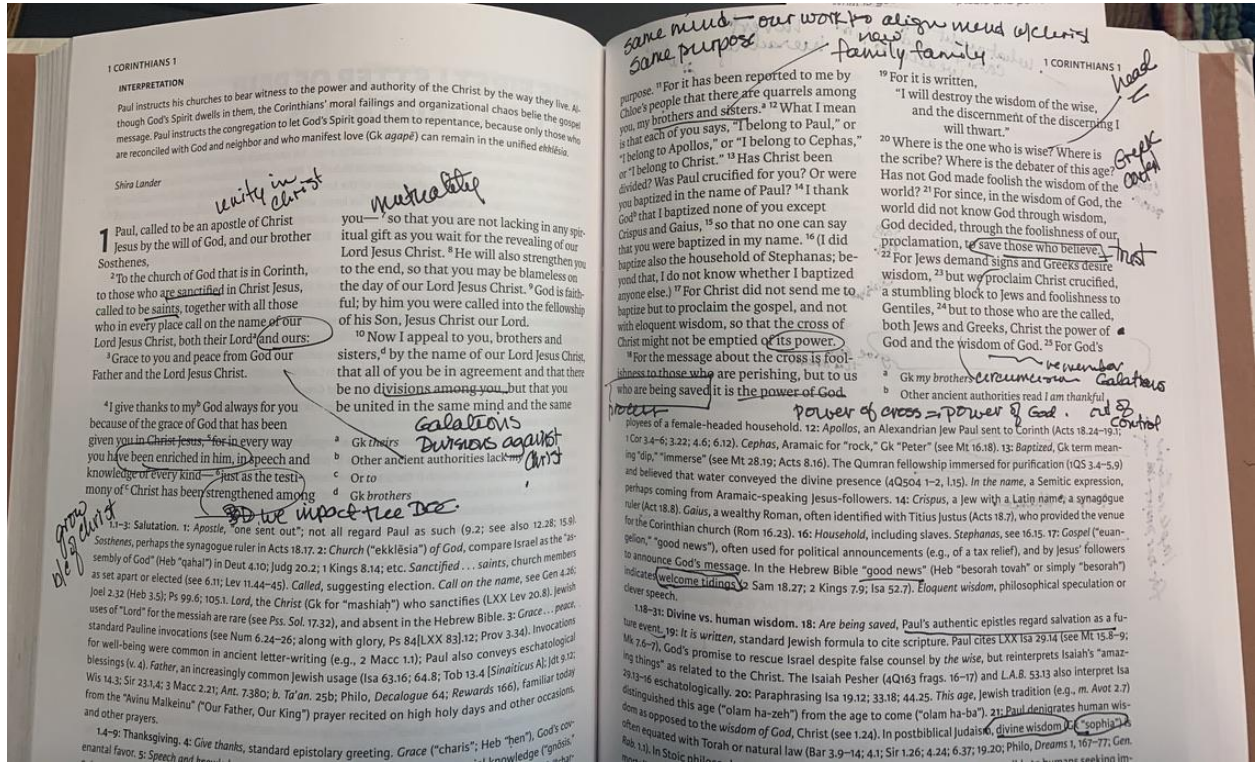


**Adult Scripture Study**  
**Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians**  
 May 20, 2020

**I. Exploration of reading scripture**



- a. Vs 2: “sanctified”, “saints”, both the Lord and ours – no divisions among people are acceptable. Remember reading in Galatians. All divisions are against Christ.
- b. Vs 5: “you have been enriched in him” .... “just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you –
  - i. We grow in Christ – sets up theme of spiritual maturity – we are not to be stagnant – we are to grow up
  - ii. And our maturity is not just for ourselves, but it is to strengthen the Body of Christ. Our maturity, our actions, our love impacts the Body of Christ – mutual responsibility—
  - iii. Our group strengthens the whole parish.
- c. Vs 11: “there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters” –
  - i. We are a new kind of family – siblings, commonality, mutuality, vulnerability
  - ii. Our work is to align ourselves, not to think as others do, but as Christ did – be of the same mind, same purpose
    1. Has Christ been divided? Focus on Christ always.
- d. Important – vs 17 – “for Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

- i. If I were to speak eloquently – how does that take away the power of the cross? What is the main message of the cross? Raises issues around superiority, classism, elitism – wisdom of the world versus wisdom of God?
- e. Vs 18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us, who are being saved it is the power of God.
  - i. Being saved – a process, not completed act
  - ii. Power of the cross is the power of God.
    - 1. Stresses the unity of Jesus and God
    - 2. Same power of love which created, also redeems, etc.
- f. Vs 20 – Where is the one who is wise?
  - i. Think about the spirituality types. Is he referring to those whose motivation is “head” not heart? Or those who rely on earthly matters?
  - ii. Also hear the Greek influence – debates, scholars, poets, etc.
- g. Vs 21 – God decided to save those who believe
  - i. Remember, believe = trust; speaks to me of shared work- God’s initiative, our response—both needed.
- h. Vs. 25 – God’s weakness is stronger than human strength
  - i. Makes me wonder – what I might consider God’s weakness to be? Is it vulnerability, love, free will – how were they used as strengths?
- i. Vs 28 – God chose what is low, and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are –
  - i. Reminds me of Song of Mary
  - ii. Beatitudes
  - iii. Lens through which to read this chapter/book – the overturning of systems that oppressed people.
- j. Vs 31 – Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord
  - i. Great reminder, it is always God, not us, God working through us, us responding, but give glory to God.

## II. Basic context of this letter

- a. Authorship
  - i. Paul
  - ii. Mid 50’s
  - iii. Paul writes as pastor and father of the community (not angry letter like Galatians)
  - iv. Written from Ephesus several years after planting the church community
  - v. Considered authentic except 14:34-35—possibly post-Pauline interpolation (silencing women in Ekklesia – contradicts 11:5)
- b. Corinth
  - i. Prominent trade center, sea ports
  - ii. Heart of Roman imperial culture in Greece (more important than Athens at the time)
    - 1. Worshipping of Greek gods
    - 2. Jewish colony – not called synagogue -met in houses
  - iii. Ekklesia – church in Greek – assemblies of Jesus-followers -not buildings
    - 1. Most congregants were gentile, few Jews, addresses the gentile congregants
    - 2. Made up of urban workers (important later)
    - 3. Some prosperous though to be Paul’s patrons and benefactors

- c. Time of conflict in church community
  - i. Corinthians first to experience what proved to be perennial for all Christian communities – how to live in holiness and freedom found in Christ within the very real structures of a given social world.
  - ii. Important, not how he solved specific problems, but how he thought of it and how he brought faith into the situations (we’re not caring about whether to eat meat or not, etc)
  - iii. Several major divisions among the understanding of the Corinthians:
    - 1. Role/evidence of Holy Spirit (chapter 2)
    - 2. Marital norms (5-7, 11)
    - 3. Relation with Gentile world (6, 8)
    - 4. Division over superiority of some spiritual gifts (12-14)
      - a. Faith, hope, and love – most central gifts of the Spirit – we all have been given these
      - b. Love is the most important one.
      - c. Expressed that when you can live this way (where love is the gift you most offer) – you have grown in spiritual maturity.
        - i. Takes work, intentionality
        - ii. Christian life model: worship, action, study
    - 5. Women’s roles (chapter 14)
    - 6. Resurrection (15)

### III. Paul’s depiction of the Last Supper

- a. In the midst of the conflict that he shares the meaning of the common meal he calls the Lord’s Supper.
- b. Earliest Christian text about the sacramental meal at the center of Christian worship
- c. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the Lord’s Supper was a real meal shared in common with the community, during which bread and wine would be celebrated as the body and blood of Christ.
- d. Probably celebrated weekly, following the rhythm of the Sabbath, although on a different day
- e. Main issue – in Corinth, the meal had ceased to be a common meal. Community/meal itself was divided around wealth and status.
  - i. Wealthy who didn’t have to work, would gather early for the meal.
  - ii. By the time people who worked (most of the community) got to the meal, the wealthy had already eaten, and some were tipsy. May have served the best food and wine to themselves before the others arrived. This was a common practice among the wealthy (story of miracle at Cana)
  - iii. For Paul, this violated the “one body” understanding of “this world” into the body of Christ. There was to be no division in this new creation.
  - iv. Paul saw the wealthy separating themselves, giving themselves the best, as a sign of contempt for the church of God.
  - v. Within this context, Paul shares the Words of Institution “take eat, this is my body ...” (11:23-26)
  - vi. Text concludes: “whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.” For all who eat and drink, without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.
- f. Why did this matter so much to Paul?

- i. Preached the crucified Christ who God raised from the dead.
  - ii. God raising Jesus from the dead vindicates all that Jesus was about and denounces all the world is about.
  - iii. What the world was about was the violence, oppression, use of power, hierarchies, divisions among people that led to Jesus' crucifixion.
  - iv. Divisions cannot be in the BOC.
  - v. This was revolutionary – this is social justice (fighting the systems that oppress or divide people) vs. outreach (providing for the needs of those who are oppressed).
  - vi. When we use our status, or determine who is “out” not “in” with us, when we subscribe to hierarchy as a source of power (not just an organizing structure) – around the Eucharist, we've lost the meaning of it.
- g. Questions:
- i. As the ritual of the Lord's Supper developed, it moved out of the common and real meal eaten in community where the blessing of the wine and bread were a part of the entire gathering and meal – to something set apart from the rhythm of life (on Sunday mornings) – where we have special clothes, special ways to behave, etc.
    - 1. What can you imagine has been lost by this movement to something set apart from regular communal life?
    - 2. What can you imagine has been gained by this movement to Sunday morning worship?
    - 3. Can you imagine it was as a means to exert status or power over those who wanted to participate – or do you think it was a natural evolution as the groups grew in size, etc.
    - 4. Some of you have said that our Wednesday evening gatherings feel like or “are” communion, without the designated bread and wine. There's a sense of sharing and communion with one another, where there are no divisions that make our time gathered important and holy. Do you imagine these evenings to be like the early church gatherings? What would make you think that? What might be different? Would our experience be deeper if we included the blessing of wine and bread in the ritual act of Eucharist?
    - 5. What about the ritual act (our Sunday morning worship) that reminds you of the early church gatherings? How does our pattern of worship resemble or remind you of the structure of the early church gatherings?

#### **IV. Paul's view on the Resurrection**

- a. Earliest extended treatment of the resurrection of Jesus in the NT- chapter 15
- b. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians and Galatians presuppose and affirm it, but don't say anything more about it. This whole chapter is devoted to it.
- c. Paul reports the list of people to whom the Risen Christ appeared – uses the word “appeared” 4 times
- d. Emphasizes the utter centrality of the resurrection “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain
- e. Language cannot be stronger – the resurrection of Jesus is the bedrock of Christianity.

- f. These verses often quoted by those who insist upon the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus as the factual foundation of Christianity. If his physical body wasn't raised, if the tomb wasn't really empty, Christianity is not true.
- g. But in the context of 1 Corinthians 15 as a whole, this is not what the words mean.
  - i. Paul's list – those to whom Christ appeared—we have to ask the question -- did their experiences involve an encounter with the bodily Jesus? Paul's certainly didn't; those traveling with him in the 3 accounts in Acts did not experience what he did.
  - ii. Also clear from the last part of the chapter, (15:35-50) Paul addresses the question of “what kind of body” the resurrected body is-
    - 1. His images affirm continuity even as they emphasize radical discontinuity between the earthly body and the resurrection body.
    - 2. Like a difference between a seed and a full-grown plant
      - a. What is sown is perishable, what is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body (15:42-44)
  - iii. What does Paul mean by Spiritual body? Not completely clear, but it is not a physical body. He explicitly denies that the resurrected body is a flesh and blood body (15:50).
- h. The resurrection of Jesus mattered utterly to Paul. For him it meant “Jesus lives” and “Jesus is Lord” and he lives and is Lord because God vindicated him against the powers that had crucified him.
  - i. To vindicate means to say “yes” to what Jesus was doing and “no” to this world, the world that crucified him. This is the heart of Paul's experience and thought.
- i. Questions – Living Christ crucified
  - i. How do we as a church say “yes” to what Jesus was doing?
  - ii. How do we say “no” to “this world” (of power, domination, oppression, status)?
  - iii. This chapter deals with the shift from the physicality of the body (which also contains the spirituality of a person, like a seed contains the mature oak tree) to the spirituality of a person after death.
    - 1. Someone stated that the relationship with someone who has died can be stronger than the one in life, because the spiritual life is boundless and imperishable.
    - 2. Have you had an experience when you have known something from a spiritual basis, not physical; experiences/ visions of people who have died?
    - 3. Why might we want it to be a physical body in resurrection? What comfort do we find in that belief?
    - 4. Can you imagine your spirits meeting after death? What might that be like? Can you imagine that to be less than or more than the experience of your physical realities meeting after death?