

1 Corinthians 1: 1-7
Session 1 – Study Notes
Rev. Jan Cook

- 1. Five major themes are informing and shaping this letter to the Corinthians**
 - **Christology** – Paul interprets every issue in light of “the testimony of Christ.”
 - **Apocalyptic Eschatology** – The cross has ended the old age, and the power of the Spirit in the community is a sign of God’s new order.
 - **Embodied Existence** - For Paul, our bodies are created by God, sanctified in the present union with Christ, and destined for ultimate redemption through resurrection.
 - **The Primacy of Love** - Paul affirms that love must rule over all other values and virtues.
 - **The Transformation of Power and Status Through the Cross** - Old status distinctions no longer count “in the Lord,” and power relations must be reinterpreted in light of the cross.
- 2. The opening sentence of the letter declares not only that Paul is a special agent of Jesus Christ but also that the Corinthians are a community specially summoned by God for service:**
 - This doesn’t mean that the Corinthians have some special vocation that sets them apart from other Christians; Instead, they – along with all other Christians – are set apart from a confused and perishing world,
- 3. From Paul’s other letters, we know that he understands his calling to be especially focused on preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.**
- 4. The greeting, “Grace to you and peace, ” which occurs in virtually every Pauline epistle, comes not from the letter writers Paul and Sosthenes but from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 5. The letter’s thanksgiving (4-9) telegraph to readers at the outset Paul’s basic concerns.** Which are several related issues pertaining to the welfare of the house churches in Corinth.
 - Their charismatic giftedness
 - Their wealth – particularly but not only in terms of speech and knowledge
 - The revelation of Christ in glory on the day of the Lord
 - And the faithfulness of the God who has called them.
- 6. When Paul says elsewhere, “Give thanks in all circumstances (1Thess. 5:18), he commends *thanks giving* as a spiritual practice.**
 - Paul offers thanks for the Corinthians because the promises of God have not been abandoned.

7. The fundamental theme of the letter is found in 1:10

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose.

Everything that follows, especially in 1 Corinthians 1:11-4:21, must be understood as an elaboration of this appeal.

8. Paul had left the Corinthian community in a relatively harmonious condition; now he has learned, to his dismay, that quarrels are splitting the church.

- The divisions don't appear to be clearly organized parties, but budding dissensions and arguments brewing.
- In this ripe situation, the Corinthian Christians are rallying around the names of various preachers and leaders.

9. Paul sees that when “I belong to Christ” becomes the rallying cry of one contentious faction; Christ is de facto reduced to the status of one more leader hustling for adherents within the community’s local politics.

- The one body image Paul is famous for has been fragmented into interest groups.

10. The community’s life before God depends entirely on Jesus’ death on the cross, and the Lord into whose dominion the community has been transferred in baptism is Jesus Christ alone. The church is saved and sustained only in the name of Jesus.

REFLECTION

- 1. Of the five major themes, which one do you think speaks most directly to our human situation today?**
- 2. Paul sees “giving thanks” as a spiritual practice. How might you develop this practice in your every day life?**
- 3. Paul sees the tendency of some to claim exclusive rights to Christ as scandalous.**
 - What is the scandal?
 - What does this look like in the modern world of religious identity?
 - In what ways have you participated in this exclusivity?
 - How can we address this issue in today’s church?
- 4. Allegiance and loyalty to any spiritual leader above all others and as a replacement for Christ is idolatry. Who are your idols? How can you recenter Christ as Lord and return loyalty to other spiritual leaders to a proper scale?**

1. First Corinthians, Interpretation, Richard B. Hays
2. First Corinthians, New Covenant Commentary, B. J. Oropeza
3. First Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner
4. Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor Editors