

Session 8 –Corinthians and Romans

This session has a 2 part study guide, one section just for Corinthians and one for Romans. A course facilitator will need to decide whether to use all or parts of these guides. One option would be to use Session 8 as two sessions instead of one.

Study Guide for Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians

Approaching Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians and Romans: Initial Reflections

Assigned Reading: 1 & 2 Corinthians; Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, chapters 14, 15.

After you have listened to the lecture, and have done the reading in Powell, the study guide has a twofold purpose:

- 1) To facilitate continued reflection and integration of the material by appropriating in the reading of select themes and passages in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.
- 2) To provide focus questions for group discussion of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians in the light of the lecture and the reading.

Before you work through the study guide, please do the following:

- Make a brief list of the ideas and insights you encountered in the lecture and the textbook that challenged your working assumptions about Paul and his letters to the Corinthians.
- Make a list of questions you would like to investigate further or discuss with others engaged in the class.

In interpreting the letters to the Corinthians, one important goal is to get a sense of the content and argument of each letter as a whole. Read through 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 10-13, and 2 Corinthians 1-9 again in one sitting and do the following:

- Summarize in your own words the issues Paul is addressing in each of the letters to the Corinthians and how he relates the gospel to the situations among the Corinthians he is addressing.
- Make a list of important themes in the letters and some of the ways your own understanding of these two letters is different from what you heard in the lecture and read in Powell. Identify important questions the lecture and reading raised for you, and select key ideas and passages you would like to revisit.

Deeper Engagement with 1 and 2 Corinthians

In the introduction to Paul’s gospel and mission, Paul’s apostolic mission involved establishing a transnational network of communities throughout the Roman Empire. Paul was guided in his work as an apostle to the nations by the conviction that in raising from the dead a Galilean Jew who had been executed as an enemy of the Roman order, the God of Israel had acted definitively to initiate the transformation of the cosmos. The

resurrection of Christ inaugurated a new age inasmuch as those who were baptized into Christ embraced a new identity and new way of living in community empowered by the Spirit and patterned after the self-giving love of Christ. The assemblies which he founded in various locales were mixed in terms of economic and social status, gender, religious background, etc. The members of these assemblies shared in a participatory partnership (*koinōnia*) with Jesus Christ and with each other. In Paul's letters to the Corinthians, he is seeking to address a host of implications which our participatory partnership with Jesus Christ and with each other has. He is introducing and explaining these implications precisely because the Corinthians have either ignored or misunderstand what being a member of the body of Christ involves in terms of Christian identity, community, and conduct.

Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul is challenging attitudes of theological and communal elitism which are fracturing communal unity and harmony. Paul continually holds up the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the divine ways, means, and standard which establishes Christian identity, conduct, perspectives, and fellowship bonds. In 2 Corinthians 10-13, Paul is challenging the understanding and patterns of leadership exemplified by the so-called Super-Apostles (see Paul's term in 2 Cor. 11:5). The true power, and hence focus, for leadership and its ministry is not on the leader but on the cross of Christ. Indeed, Paul claims that when we are weak we are actually the most strong because we do not rely on ourselves but on the power of the cross. In 2 Corinthians 1-9, Paul seeks to explain the ministry of reconciliation vis-à-vis the manner in which God reconciles the world to God's own self through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

An Exercise in the Practice of Interpretation

Part of Paul's genius is that he is a pastoral theologian who is always interpreting the different contexts in which believers lived out their faith so that he can relate the gospel of Christ (particularly the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection) to the particular circumstances and issues with which they were dealing. In the following exercise, you will read selected passages from Paul's Corinthian Correspondence to discover distinctive ways Paul interrelates the death and resurrection of Christ to the lives of the Christians in the situations he was addressing. Do this on your own in preparation for group discussion.

1 Corinthians

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-2:8. Write a brief paragraph describing God's revealing activity in Jesus' death and resurrection and how that establishes the content and manner of Paul's ministry as well as the manner God has been at work in the lives of the Corinthians.
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-28,50-58. Write a brief paragraph describing how Jesus' resurrection establishes the pattern for God's final work at Jesus' future coming and our hope for eternal life.

2 Corinthians 10-13

- Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-12:10. Write a brief paragraph or two detailing the manner of ministry Paul displays in contrast to the Super-Apostles and how Paul's manner of ministry relies on and reflects the cross of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 1-9

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13. Write a brief paragraph detailing how God's activity in Jesus' death and resurrection establishes both the manner and goal of ministry for Paul and the Corinthians.

Discussion Questions

In both 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul is addressing issues of Christian partnership and power vis-à-vis the cross of Jesus Christ.

- How does the theology of the cross inform and shape ministry in your congregation?
- How does Paul's theology of the cross oppose a prosperity gospel which claims that God's goal is to make people prosper in terms of their economic well-being and social status?
- What might be examples of elitist attitudes and actions which could fracture Christian fellowship today?

Study Guide for Paul's Letters to the Romans

Approaching Paul's Letter to the Romans: Initial Reflections

Assigned Reading: Romans; Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, chapter 15.

After you have listened to the lecture, and have done the reading in Powell, the study guide has a twofold purpose:

- 3) To facilitate continued reflection and integration of the material by appropriating in the reading of select themes and passages in Romans.
- 4) To provide focus questions for group discussion of Romans in the light of the lecture and the reading.

Before you work through the study guide do the following:

- Make a brief list of the ideas and insights you encountered in the lecture and the textbook that challenged your working assumptions about Paul and his letter to the Romans.
- Make a list of questions you would like to investigate further or discuss with others engaged in the class.

In interpreting Romans, one important goal is to get a sense of the content and argument of the letter as a whole. Browse through Romans especially noting the difference in topic and tone in 1:16-17; 1:18-3:20; 3:21-5:11; 5:12-8:39; 9:1-11:36; 12:1-15:13; 15:14-16:27.

- Summarize in your own words the issues Paul is addressing in Romans and how he relates the gospel to the situations among the Roman Christians he is addressing.
- Make a list of important themes in the letters and some of the ways your own understanding this letter could be different from what you heard in the lecture and read in Powell. Identify important questions the lecture and reading raised for you, and select key ideas and passages you would like to revisit.

Deeper Engagement with Romans

In the introduction to Paul's gospel and mission, you discovered that Paul's apostolic mission involved establishing a transnational network of communities throughout the Roman Empire. Paul was guided in his work as an apostle to the nations by the conviction that in raising from the dead a Galilean Jew who had been executed as an enemy of the Roman order, the God of Israel had acted definitively to initiate the transformation of the cosmos. The resurrection of Christ inaugurated a new age inasmuch as those who were baptized into Christ embraced a new identity and new way of living in community empowered by the Spirit and patterned after the self-giving love of Christ. The assemblies which he founded in various locales were mixed in terms of economic and social status, gender, religious background, etc. The members of these assemblies shared in a participatory partnership (*koinōnia*) with Jesus Christ and with each other.

Paul's letter to the Romans is unique among the undisputed Pauline letters (i.e., letters whose Pauline authorship scholars generally do not dispute) in that he is writing to groups of Christians whose churches and faith did not originate with his own apostolic ministry. Paul had not yet been to Rome. Though he knows some of the Christians who have migrated there (see the extended list of greetings in Romans 16:3-15), the vast majority of Christians in Rome has only heard of Paul from the report of others (probably both positive and negative reports). Hence he has to go out of his way to establish an authoritative rapport with the audience whom he will be addressing in this letter.

As was noted in the lecture, issues related to the unity which Christians having a Jewish background and Christians coming from a Gentile background share (or do not share) are very much at the forefront of Paul's own life and thought as he writes Romans. Much of the argument in Romans relates to the interrelated dynamics of divine impartiality and human unity. On the one hand, God condemns human sinfulness impartially so that all humanity, both Jew and Gentile, are inclusively united in their sinfulness and inability to establish and maintain right relationships with God and each through works of the law (much of the thrust of his argument in 1:18-3:20 and 7:7-25). On the other hand, God works impartially and inclusively to establish right relationships with both Jews and Gentiles through Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel (much of the thrust of his argument in 1:16-17; 3:21-5:11; 5:12-7:6; 8:1-39). Thus Abraham is the paradigmatic forebearer for both Jews and Gentiles for Abraham's right relationship with God was grounded not in works of the law but faith that God would do what God promised to do (4:1-25). Even though many of Abraham's descendants within Israel have not responded favorably to the gospel pronouncement of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ (while many Gentiles have), this does not mean that God is now partial toward Gentiles and has rejected Israel. Hence in Romans 9-11, Paul seeks to maintain the irrevocability of God's covenantal promises to Israel (9:1-5; 11:26-29) while also staving off attitudes of arrogant superiority or insider-status on the part of Gentile Christians (11:13-25). Ultimately divine impartiality means that God consigned all humanity to disobedience in order that God would have mercy on all humanity (11:30-32). In Romans 12:1-15:13 Paul applies themes of divine impartiality and human unity to the ministry and fellowship of Christian communities themselves. While each Christian is given different gifts for ministry, such gifts are for the unified functioning of the one body we share in Christ (12:3-8). Likewise, Christians are to have an impartial ministry of love toward all including governing officials (12:9-13:14). Finally, within the fellowship of faith one group of Christians is not to pass God's judgment over other Christians because they have differing practices of piety and devotion. Instead, diverse Christians pursue the peace and building up of the whole body, welcoming each other as Christ has impartially and inclusively welcomed us (14:1-15:13).

An Exercise in the Practice of Interpretation

The following is an exercise for you to do on your own in which you will apply what you are learning about Romans by investigating in a little more depth.

- Read Romans 1:24-2:5; 3:9-20. Write a brief paragraph describing how Paul holds together the tension between God's impartial judgment against human

sinfulness, the inclusive reality of human sinfulness, and the condemnation of humans assuming God's role of condemner.

- Read Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-11. Write a brief paragraph describing how God has acted to solve the inclusive plight of all humans being in bondage to sin and being unable to free themselves.
- Read Romans 14:1-12; 15:1-3. Write a brief paragraph describing how Christ's actions and attitudes establish our proper relational actions and attitudes.

Discussion Questions

For Paul, right relationships with God are established by God's work in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Not only does God bring us into a right relationship with God through Christ, God brings us into right relationships with other Christians. Hence while our faith is personal it is never private. It inclusively and impartially involves Christ, us, and others.

- How does our God-established unity express itself within the fellowship and ministry of your congregation? How is this expressed in right relationships with other Christians and even with non-Christians?
- What are ways we wrongly ignore or even violate the unity of faith relationships God has established among us through Jesus Christ?

We have discovered that throughout Romans Paul is presenting God's plan to save not just a select handful of Christians but to enact cosmic salvation that includes all of creation as well as all of Israel.

- "In what ways do we minimize or limit the inclusive and cosmic scope of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ?"
- What ongoing responsibilities do we have toward creation since God's plan includes the saving liberation of all creation?
- What ongoing responsibilities do we have toward members of the Jewish faith since God's plan includes the salvation of all Israel?
- How does God's mercy toward each of us make us inclusive, impartial instruments of God's mercy for others?