

Passion



“So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.”

– 2 Peter 3.15-16

1st break:

Describe some of the characteristics of Paul’s message and its similarity to the “alternative wisdom” taught by Jesus.

Flunder points out that Paul was a man in transition. Explain.

2nd break:

According to Cobb, what is so crucial about Paul’s message?

What are the seven authentic letters of Paul?

3rd break:

What are some of the benefits Levine describes Paul using in promoting his message to the people of his day and age?

The role of women is just one example of a teaching that is confused by later authors claiming Paul's authority. Explain

4th break:

Describe the attributes and purpose of what Crossan calls the "three different Pauls."

Elaborate on how the concept of "*pistis*" being mistranslated as "faith *in* Jesus" (as opposed to the "faithfulness *of* Jesus") has shaped Christianity as a whole.

General Reflection:

What do you find most helpful or interesting from the material so far?

What are the implications for your personal spiritual journey? For Christianity as a whole?

Words of Wisdom

What most people *think* we know about his life actually comes from Luke's *Acts of the Apostles*. *Acts* conflicts in chronology and theological content in so many ways with the authentic writings of Paul as to be profoundly suspect in offering an accurate account of his life. The language and theology of Paul's speeches

portrayed by Luke are so different in vocabulary and theology from the Paul of the authentic letters that it seems much of Luke's Paul can be chalked up to "dramatic license." Although the authentic Paul's emphasis is on Justification and Reconciliation, Luke's "Paul" preaches on Righteousness and Forgiveness. In other words, Luke's Paul preaches in the theological language of Luke, not Paul.

Analysis of the vocabulary, style, and theological focus of the letters attributed to Paul has led scholars to agree on seven letters as genuine "Paul." All probably written in the 50s of the first century, they are: 1 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philemon, Philippians, and Romans. 1 Thessalonians is probably the earliest and Romans the latest, most mature statement of Paul's theological views.

***Read one of Paul's authentic letters straight through
(Philemon is the shortest!)***

In the grammatically confusing context of Romans 3, *pistis* can be interpreted in two very different ways. Overall, Paul was interested in the "faithfulness (or faithing) of Jesus" and his obedience to death. However, instead of being translated as the faith "of" Jesus, Romans 3:22 is translated as faith "in" Jesus, essentially suggesting "right belief" as the priority. Believing "in" Jesus and faithing the way Jesus did are amazingly different translations of the same passage. Such choices in translation can and have contributed to Christianity's emphasizing an aspect of discipleship Paul may never have intended.

Read Romans 3

Spirit Practice

One of the most beautiful, helpful and challenging metaphors for understanding the family of God is the body.

Read Romans 12.1-18 and I Corinthians 12.4-31.

In the list below, note the name of a person or group who would fit each category for you. Upon completing your list, consider ways in which you feel called to take action or offer support.

A person or group

Who speaks their mind: _____

With whom you disagree: _____

Who is in need: _____

Who lives peacefully: _____

Who brings great joy: _____

Who is an encourager: _____

Who needs encouragement: _____

Who gives sacrificially: _____

Who is unwelcome someplace: _____

Who is the bearer of hope: _____

Who is a leader in your faith community: _____

Whose life is a sermon: _____

Yourself: _____

Try it

All the authentic letters of Paul were “occasional,” having been written in response to a particular situation. The content of the letters were generated by the circumstances and actions of a particular set of folks in each community. In many cases it is clear that someone like “Chloe’s people” (1 Corinthians 1:11) have snitched or written a letter to Paul, the contents of which compel him to respond in writing. Romans, the only letter written to a church Paul didn’t start, was a letter of introduction to a church he intended to visit and wanted to “butter up” before he arrived. As such, Romans stands out as the most comprehensive statement of Paul’s theology, independent of particular crises.

- 1) Covenant with another person in your group to each write a letter and a response.
- 2) Evaluate your faith community or other group to which you belong in order to identify a situation or person’s behavior (real or hypothetical) that is not what you judge to be optimal.
- 3) Write a letter to Paul expressing your concern and suggested solutions.
- 4) Exchange letters.
- 5) In the voice of Paul, write a response to the other person’s complaint (using references to Paul’s authentic letters when at all possible).
- 6) Discuss how this exercise has helped you to understand Paul and the early church.