

BIBLE CHALLENGE

A 7 day study of the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians

The story so far: We read last week of how Paul, during his second missionary journey, had stopped in Corinth (Acts 18). After returning to Antioch, he begins his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23). While on the third journey, Paul receives messages from the church in Corinth bringing word to him of the issues and divisions developing in the Corinthian church. Paul responds with a letter, 1 Corinthians.

Monday:

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:1-2:5

What to look for:

- The issue is that the community of believers is dividing over their allegiance to a favorite personality, whether it be Apollos, or Cephas, or Paul. They are lining up behind their respective champions. But Paul's response is to guide them back what really matters. What really matters is not who can preach the best, or who is the best counselor, or which person is the nicest or the most dynamic, what really matters is the message of Christ crucified. The messengers serve the message, not the other way around.
- That message of the cross (vs 18) is foolishness to the world which values power, prestige, and authority, none of which is contained in the cross. Only losers ended up on the cross, not winners, not heroes. Yet it is that same cross that is the power of God for salvation, and thus it does not matter who preaches it. It's the message of the cross that counts.

Tuesday:

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, 8:1-13, 9:19-23

What to look for:

- Note the quotation marks in 6:12 – Paul is quoting the arguments that he has heard the Corinthians make.
- The issue here is freedom. The Corinthians seem to think that freedom in Christ means license to live in any way they wish. Their misunderstanding of freedom is leading them into a new bondage to their own desires and their own excesses. Paul argues that :
 - Since God claims the body and not just the soul, what you do with your body matters (6:15);
 - When you've entered into a relationship with Jesus, that relationship has a governing effect on all other relationships. Your relationship with Christ should show in your relationships with other people, particularly those who

would be harmed by your indiscriminate exercise of your own freedom. (8:9, 9:19)

Wednesday:

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31a

What to look for:

- For the Corinthians, who struggled with spiritual pride, Paul holds up the good of the community of believers as being the appropriate test of a person's actions. In vs. 7 he points out that spiritual gifts, even the most fantastic or mysterious of them, are given, not for the benefit of the individual, but for the benefit of the community.
- Paul's use of the body as an analogy is one of his favorite ways of describing the church. He refers to the church as the Body of Christ over 30 times in his various letters, this being his most developed use of the image.

Thursday:

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

What to look for:

- Though the name of Jesus is never mentioned in these verses, note how Paul's description of love is not just about the way we are to be but is also about the way Jesus' love is.

Friday:

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-26, 35-36, 42, 50-58

What to look for:

- Note how Paul summarizes his whole gospel message in a matter of two verses, vs. 3 – 4.
- Paul's emphasis on the resurrection of Christ is crucial; without the cross we miss the central message of the gospel, but without the resurrection we have in the cross only a tragedy.
- Paul's argument is that what happened to Jesus in his resurrection is a precursor to what will happen to us. The power of Jesus' resurrection is that presages our own.
- Paul stresses the transformation of the body in the resurrection. Paul rejects a simply "spiritual" resurrection of the soul because he sees us as a whole being, both body and spirit. He does not buy into the idea that "body/flesh" is bad and "spirit" is good. Therefore, the body is not something that is gotten rid of, the body is transformed at the resurrection from mortality to immortality. In the resurrection we "put on" immortality.

2 Corinthians was written in the midst of a very difficult, personal struggle for Paul in his relationship with the church there (see 2 Corinthians 2:1-4)

Monday:

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

What to look for:

- Once again, as he did in last week's reading, Paul makes it clear that the message is what counts, not the messenger (4:5)
- In Paul's day a clay jar had all the value of, and was about as common as, a cardboard box. When we own something valuable we tend to put it in the most secure place we can find, even making sure that the container is ornate enough to justify holding the treasure it contains. God operates differently, placing his gospel message in the most visible, ordinary place of all: In us. That is the reason for Paul's continued hope in the face of conflict and pain.

Tuesday:

Read: 2 Corinthians 11:21b-33, 12:7-10

- Paul, as he recalls the suffering and hardship he has gone through for the sake of the gospel message of Christ, takes pains to show that it has not been by his own power or strength that Christ has been proclaimed, but through his weakness. It is only as we give up our own claims to power and strength that we become usable vessels for God's power and strength.
- Clearly we should not expect, based on this passage, that a life of discipleship means a ticket to hassle-free living. On the contrary, the one thing Paul most wanted God to do for him, God did not do. But God offered, instead, a promise (12:9). And God keeps his promise: Faith grows and takes root out of the very weakness of Paul's preaching.
- In what way is Paul's message in this passage utterly opposed to the values of our culture?