**1 Corinthians Series Notes Ch 15-16**

**Hey!**

**We made it to the end of the letter.**

Thank you for sticking with me. I hope these small group notes have been useful, and even if you haven’t used them, hopefully they might be useful as reference material in the future.

We set out to help some of you build confidence in leading a small group, but lock down had to change the way that would be done and we’ve all had to learn new ways.

So for this last week of 1 Corinthians, though I will give you some notes at the end about bits of chapter 15 and 16 that I think are interesting, I thought it might be better to have some time reflecting on this type of study and also the letter as a whole.

But obviously you can have a big ol’ chat about the end times if that is what interests your group!

**Bible study**

The whole of chapter 15 is a focus on the end times and the resurrection of the dead.

But read from 35 to the end of the chapter.

* What is surprising about this passage to you?
* What ideas are the most important in the passage?
* Is this how you imagine the end of the world (if you do at all)?
  + Is the end of the world something that you think is important to understand?
  + Has anything helped you understand it?
  + Does Pauls vision here make sense of what you believe?

How does this relate to the rest of the letter?

What is the context that helps us understand what Paul is trying to explain here about resurrection?

Think back to the letter as a whole – Does this fit with the rest of the letter?

**Discussion**

* Have you enjoyed Corinthians?
* What has been good about studying one book in this way?
  + What has been bad/awful/annoying?
* Did one part of the letter stand out to you particularly?
  + Discuss what that was and why it was important?
  + Was it shocking/ new information?
  + Did it change the way you thought about anything?
* What has been good/bad about doing this in lockdown/via zoom?
* Did studying the book this way make it feel more relevant or less relevant to the church’s life together?

**Chapter 15 notes**

**1-12** The gospel that is introduced here in verse 3 reads like a formula that has been passed down, maybe part of a creed.

Paul has a few of these moments where he steps into traditions – like in chapter 11 when he recalls the communion tradition.

We work out these things by the structure of the language.

For example:

1. Christ dies for our sins

In accordance with the scriptures

1. And that He was buried
2. And that He was raised on the third day
3. And that He was seen by Cephas

Paul adds the witnesses and the defence of his own apostleship to give a wider context to his surety that the resurrection of the dead is real and coming soon.

**12-34**

He argues for the resurrection in three slightly opposing ways. This as we have seen is very Pauline. The arguments stand on their own, and he layers them rather that build a body of evidence rather than being continuous arguments.

So 12-29 – If the resurrection is not real……

20-28 – But as he is…….

29 -34 – because what would be the point of x otherwise?

First Paul argues that if the resurrection of the dead is not real then Christ himself could not be raised. But they know Christ was raised, to say that he wasn’t would go against everything that they know.

But as Christ is raise Paul asserts that two things have now been put into motion: the resurrection of all people has been confirmed; and the final destruction of all death has begun.

Then he asks what would be the point of these things they are all going through. They are offered as evidence for, if not reality, at least the firm belief in the resurrection that all the churches have.

And one of those things is

**‘what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead?’**

This verse is so misunderstood that Fee’s commentary says that there are upwards of 45 different options given and scholars do not really understand these verses.

He groups the reasons into 4 main ways that people try to reason around these verses:

1. Understanding baptise as a metaphor, after Mk 10:38, Luke 12:50, as in ‘being baptised into the ranks of the dead’
2. Thinking of baptism as a Christian baptism but reconstructing the preposition ‘for’ as meaning ‘with a view toward’ or ‘concerning’ or ‘with reference to’ death. As though Paul is referring to some baptismal formula that we don’t have access to.
3. A few try to make it fit with a classic Pauline theology so either
   1. Baptism as we understand it but ‘dead’ refers to their ‘soon to be dead bodies’
   2. That ‘dead’ is a reference to Christ being named within the ranks of the dead (but I think this is really pushing it)
4. Alternative punctuation: ‘What are the baptised to do? [baptism] is for the dead if there is no resurrection….’

Inside this plethora of options none is particularly convincing, and what scholars tend to say is that if you can’t find a suitable option without twisting too much, the hardest reading is probably the real one.

In this case it is that the natural reading is the most realistic and we just don’t know what this practice is. They were baptising people ‘on behalf of the dead’.

The main idea then is that they were baptising people as a proxy for those who had died, those who had made confession of faith but died before being baptised or were persecuted.

It is not that they are baptising the dead who had not confessed faith in Christ, and thus conferring salvation on to them posthumously (which is the beginning of the Mormon idea) as there is no other New Testament tradition that comes anywhere close to such an idea.

We just don’t know what they were doing. Sorry.

**35-58**

We enter into the discussion about what the resurrection of the dead will be like.

Paul describes a long list of different types of bodies that things have and ‘glory’ that things have.

As with the glory of men and women in chapter 11, this is a woolly concept.

The bodies are not bad or good for Paul, they simply are things we have – the ‘soma’ (body) is the place where decision is acted out, but it is not bad in itself.

*[Side note: Paul has three things – flesh – body – spiritual(ness)*

*The body is a neutral thing.*

*You can choose to act in a fleshy way or a spirit-y way in your body, but the body itself is not a bad thing.*

*The idea of ‘the flesh’ being synonymous with body and making bodily things bad comes from Augustine who translates both terms into one – Carne – from which we get the term ‘carnal’ and all the bad things that go with it. It really messes up Christian theology on the body for about 1500 years.]*

42 – Paul moves on to positioning Adam and Christ together in the history of salvation.

Adam is a *type* of Christ -a model for what Christ will be, but Christ will supercede Adams position.

Adam represents the world as it has been, and us within it – Christ represents the new world.

Christs resurrection is a cosmic pivot, everything is now heading toward the end times.

And then in 50 onwards he addresses the ‘mystery’ of the very end of things – how the resurrection will happen.

This is a moment of encouragement and delight in the prospect of the future.

It is to reassure them that those they know who have already died will have a place in the resurrection