

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 19

1 Corinthians 11-15

This week's reflector is

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General Questions for Reflection

You might pick one part of each chapter and think about these questions.

- What does this tell me about God (including Jesus and the Holy Spirit)?
- What does this tell me about our world?
- What does it tell me about me?
- What does it say about following Jesus?
- Is there something here I'd like to learn more about?

Why not use these thoughts to shape your prayer today.

Monday

1 Corinthians 11

The Apostle Paul is often criticized for being sexist because of verses 2-16. Certainly he is a product of his time.

Clearly, we don't follow Paul's instructions about women covering their heads today. But chapter 11 is concerned with appropriate worship. Corinthian worship was individualistic which created divisions in the church.

This is really clear in his teaching about the Lord's Supper which is rooted in Jesus' giving of himself on the cross. Too many Corinthians came to church to "have their own needs met" rather than to meet Christ. They showed "contempt for the church" and failed to "discern the body."

I wonder how we do that today?

Tuesday

1 Corinthians 12

The Corinthian church was "Spirit-filled" and placed high value on spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues. Problem was, they used these gifts to assert the superiority of some over others.

Paul famously describes the church body, not as a collection of isolated individuals. The Christian community has many different members, all of which are needed for the body to function, and none of which can get along independently of the others. The members of the body are interconnected; they experience each other's joys and feel each other's pain.

God distributes gifts throughout the church for the building up of the whole. But gifts are not necessarily the same as talents or natural aptitudes. Sometimes God empowers someone to do something they're not naturally gifted to do. However, every member of the body has gifts. And, the church has all the gifts among its members that it needs to live as the Body of Christ.

Wednesday

1 Corinthians 13

Spiritual gifts in the Corinthians church created factions and dissension. Just having gifts is not enough, Paul said. Christians need to follow a more “excellent way,” the way of Christ-like love as they seek to use their gifts.

This “hymn to love” is probably Paul’s most famous passage, often read at weddings. But there is nothing romantic about Paul’s understanding of love, which is most perfectly expressed by Jesus on the cross.

Note also that love (*agape*) is an “eschatological” reality. It will not be fully realized until the final completion of the Kingdom. We are given partial glimpses of God’s love and we can experience it imperfectly. Here and now, we walk by faith and live in hope of God’s future. When God brings about that future, all that will remain is love.

Thursday

1 Corinthians 14

The Corinthians placed high value on the ability to speak in “the language of angels.” During worship, people would stand up and utter words of prophecy in a strange tongue. But this was seen as a sign of spiritual superiority.

Tongues, like everything else, Paul wrote, are to be used to build up the community, not to exalt individuals. It was another example of narcissistic and self-serving worship. If a message spoken in a tongue is authentic, God will provide someone else who can interpret the message. Those who speak in tongues have been gifted to build the body, not promote themselves.

We might not speak in tongues in our churches. But do we use language to manipulate or dominate others, or that lead to spiritual pride? Does our talk lead to spiritual elitism?

Friday

1 Corinthians 15

Paul deals with the most difficult topic of the resurrection. Some said the resurrection had already happened – that Christians were already delivered from physical death and sharing in the life of angels. Others believed in an immortal soul that would be liberated from the prison of the body.

Paul taught that Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God’s Spirit, defeating the power of death introduced by Adam’s disobedience. Christ is the “first fruits,” showing us what our destiny will be if our life is in him.

Paul’s most challenging teaching is that there will be a “resurrection of the body.” It’s really hard to get our minds around the idea of a “spiritual body,” a body raised to new life. However, this concept points to God’s continuing faithfulness to us as uniquely created individuals, body and soul, not in this world only but beyond death.

The focus of this chapter is the affirmation that “Death is swallowed up in victory.”