

The Heart of Paul's Theology

LESSON
FOUR

Paul and the Corinthians
Discussion Forum



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The Heart of Paul's Theology

Lesson Four: Paul and the Corinthians

Discussion Forum

With
Dr. Reggie M. Kidd

Students
Graham Buck
Rob Griffith

Question 1:

How well did Paul really know his readers?

Student: Reggie, Paul spent a lot of time traveling during his ministry and we base a lot of our interpretation of his letters on the fact that we think he really knew his readers intimately so that he could kind of custom craft his letters to their particular circumstances. Did he really have a chance to get to know the people that well or were his relationships more just superficial?

Dr. Kidd: Well that's a good question to ask, Graham, and it's worth wondering about because if he doesn't, in fact, have the relationships that he seems to have or aspired to, well then it is hard to take this pastoral side of him quite as seriously. But it really does look like he worked hard to develop relationships within the cities that he ministered into. In fact, I think that was one of the lessons that he learned from the first missionary journey, was that these relationships are really important. In the first missionary journey he gets bounced from town to town largely because he is not able to establish the deep, lasting relationships in the cities. And in the second missionary journey, that does look like it's a change in philosophy, and so you have him staying in Lydia's home in Philippi, for instance, and in Corinth he works with his hands. And he winds up working with Priscilla and Aquila, and, you know, the workshop back then was not like, you know, going to a factory, punching your clock, you know, and the union boss making sure you get your work done and not talk. This would have been a family shop, and people would have been coming in and they would have been talking a lot.

Corinth, the book of Acts says he lived there for 18 months and he had plenty of time to develop relationships there. Later on he'll stay in Ephesus for what, three years, and while he is ministering there then people go out from him. So he does stay where he can for as long as he can, to not just get individuals saved but to get a church really grounded and founded. And even in the places where, in the first missionary journey he didn't get a long chance to stay, he saw, he went back to those cities after he got to Derby because he feel like it was important for them to get a church structure in place. And in the second missionary journey, he goes back to one of those cities where Timothy was from, and he felt like he had gotten to know this young man well

enough in the first missionary journey to grab him and incorporate him into his ministry.

All the way through his ministry, he is not traveling by himself. He is traveling with other people. He constantly lives his theology in relationship, and people are going out from him and coming to churches. And people who are leaders of these churches are coming back to him. And one of the ways that you can tell that he really aspires to relationship, and to minister out of relationship, is the two letters that he writes to churches that he'd never been to: [these] are Colossians — well it's three letters because he writes two letters to the church of Colossae, Colossians and Philemon, and the third letter to the church at Rome. The two letters that he writes to the churches — Philemon he writes to Philemon himself — but when he writes to the church at Colossae precisely because he's never been there, he mentions every person that he knows that's in that church. Same thing with the letter to the Romans, he is looking to help them come together as a church, and he has this whole chapter of greetings to people at in the church at Rome. So he is keenly interested in relationships. He lives them as much as he can and he will, even in letter writing itself, he will try to establish relationships that he doesn't yet have.

Student: So, Paul is not like just some sort of itinerant preacher who goes there for like a couple days. He really puts down roots?

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, again because he is looking to build a church. He is not looking for people to just sign a pledge card and then him just go on. The whole process of traveling would have been slow — walking, going on ship — and his world was just a very much more social world than what we might think about today of missionaries just kind of flying in, you know, getting a big crowd together and then going onto the next one, very different pace and a very different relational network that he is working out of.

Question 2:

Why did the Corinthians have so many problems?

Student: So Reggie, considering how much time that he spent in Corinth, you know, you look through his letters and they are pretty messed up. I mean, what is it about Corinth specifically that caused them to have so much difficulty or are basically all churches just like that?

Dr. Kidd: That's a good question. Probably if we could know all the churches we would find a pretty deep pile of stuff as well. But Corinth does seem to be particularly exotic when it comes to the sin scale and I don't know exactly all that goes into that. Corinth had a reputation. I mean to "Corinthiate" was to act out sexually as far as other Greeks were concerned. It was a port city. It was a very wealthy city. You had to go through Corinth. You didn't have to but it was a path of choice to go through

Corinth whether going from East to West as opposed to sailing around the Southern Isthmus. And so there was plenty of opportunity for misbehaving in Corinth and because it was a wealthy city and it looks like there were a significant number of wealthy Christians. There were ways for that wealth to work its way into the church's sense of self-importance.

Student: It's almost like you've got to watch out when you have too much money or too much time because you will find yourself getting into trouble.

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, it could be. Well and it was the center of power too because it was a Roman colony and had a Roman governor in place and it wasn't just wealthy but it was new wealth. You know, the city had been destroyed by the Romans and then rebuilt and it was within a hundred years of Paul's having been there and there were still lots of...it was a city on the way up. So yeah, whenever you have a prosperous bustling metropolis...

Student: So really we are just talking about a lot of cultural influences that they weren't able just to shelter themselves from or have. Would you say that their theology of their understanding just wasn't strong enough for them to keep their heads on straight?

Dr. Kidd: Well, and part of the theology problem was a basic misunderstanding about how much God's promises had been fulfilled and a confusion about the spiritual nature of the promises and the physical prosperity and power that the Corinthians enjoyed. So there was some crossing of signals between sort of cultural success and equating that with spiritual success. And then, you know, what happens often is you baptize your sins and it goes downhill from there.

Student: So, Corinth is really kind of a warning to a lot of us who find ourselves in prosperous and wealthy nations?

Dr. Kidd: Yes, it really is and I mean there are those of us who live in prosperous Western cities, we read the letter to the Corinthians and we go, "Oh my goodness, he is writing to us."

Question 3:

Are there similarities between the divisions in Corinth and modern denominations?

Student: You know Reggie, in Corinth there seemed to be a lot of partisan divisions going on. You've got people saying, "I'm of Cephus", "I'm of Paul", "I'm of Apollo," and some other people are like, "Oh, I'm of Jesus." Well, how would you compare what is going on in Corinth with say like modern denominationalism or is there even a connection?

Dr. Kidd: Well, there probably is a connection. You know when we were talking about Galatians we were talking about a group of people who had what we called an under-realized eschatology and part of that meant for those folks, you know, they didn't have a sense of the security of their salvation. They weren't sure that the work of Christ on the cross had done enough. But one of the things that was really apparent to Paul was that their sense of belonging was threatened as well. There is the question of which Jerusalem should you have loyalty to, and are you really in the family of God? And part of what Paul did with them to bring them into a more realized sense of eschatology is, "You know what guys, you are part of the family don't worry about it. The Israel of God, you are already there. There's a place for you at the table."

Now, the situation is really different in Corinth because these people think that they are king's kids. They think that they have arrived, they think that the portals of Heaven have been opened up and all of the spiritual blessings have been poured out on them and so they, you know, they've got the tongues, they've got the word of knowledge, they've got the prophecy, they've got the power of stuff going on. And what has happened is that they in the Aggregate in Corinth think that like, "We are it. We have got this special revelation from God. We've got it going." And because they are still sinful and in their flesh, they are going like, "But you know you and I got a little bit more than like Rob over here." So their sense of having arrived, of being king's kids, of being like rich spiritually at everybody else's expense winds up being not just about what we Corinthians are so special but we have these little sub groups in Corinth that are very special. And part of what Paul is doing in this whole letter is reminding them that you Corinthians are no more special than everybody else in the church. So, he writes makes a point of uniting them with all the saints outside of Corinth. And that's a great lesson for us because what has happened over time in the history of the church is denominations have formed. Often it's political. Often it's people just not being able to get along. Often it's over substantive matters of interpretation about what's really important in Christian doctrine. And often those denominational divides are very important to preserve particular doctrines that need to be argued for and articulated well. But what can happen is the same over-realized sense of we are the special people who see things that other people don't.

And I think what Paul would invite us to, as he invites the Corinthians, is to not say, "Well, I'm of..." — whatever our denomination equivalent would be — "...I'm of Paul" and you know, some denominations do ironically get more of their bearings out of Paul's writings. Or "I'm of Peter." Well, it so happens there are some denominations that pay kind of more attention to Peter and the gospel tradition and the gospels that we think were written by Peter or at his behest. Then you know, other groups are kind of like, "Well, I'm of John" and you know, and have kind of a more mystical sense of Christianity. And what is really interesting is that each of those corporate expressions does have a certain embodiment of Christian truth that's really kind of very special. But when they become these little cliques that aren't aware of the rest of the body of Christ much less appreciative of how dependent we all our on each other it gets to be really quite ugly. So yeah, I think there is a lot that we can

learn about how to be faithful to the denominational heritage that has shaped us and how to preserve the good that's in it but also how to be charitable towards other Christian expressions where other doctrines or other practices are more elevated over our own. And to realize that we are all part of a large house, the body of Christ, the church worldwide.

Question 4:

Should modern denominations work toward reunification with each other?

Student: And it seems though as we look at what he is writing about the body of Christ and how he talks about equipping saints in specific ways with a specific purpose but that purpose is not for individual gratification. It's for mutual edification and it's for building up others who aren't equipped in that way. And it seems to me that if we apply that to what we've done with denominations that maybe I mean there is a role for a greater ecumenism, there's a role where denominations need to be working together more. Would you agree with that or should we stay on our street corners and not have potlucks together or whatever?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I do think that for Paul the idea of there being really one church in God's eyes is an important one. That comes to fullest expression in Ephesians 4, "One Lord, one faith, and one baptism." And I think what we will see in the letter to the Ephesians is for Paul it's very important that there is a living house that God is indwelling made up of Jews and Gentile, made into one new man in Christ and together presented to the Father. And Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free all living together, striving together for the unity and bond of peace that the spirit gives us is for Paul a sign to the principalities and powers, as he says in Ephesians 3:10 that their day is done, that together people who belong to Jesus are a sign of the great reconciliation between heaven and earth that God has effected.

So I think it does make it incumbent upon us as believers to find ways to cross the "t's" and dot the "i's" and be as careful as we can theologically and yet also respect the fact that in the providence of God, in the course of history, churches have not crossed their "t's" and dotted their "i's" all the same. And sometimes we have to look across those confessional boundaries with some charity and we can't do everything together. But we can pray together, we can work together. We can work together to find places where we can make a common cause. For instance, with some churches, because I know that they have enough of common loyalty to Scripture and to the narrative of biblical history, we could work together in evangelistic enterprises. Other churches that I think are a lot softer on doctrinal distinctives, even biblical authority, the necessity of regeneration, and matters like that. Well, in terms of spiritual ventures, well we really don't have much in common at all. But we can work together for matters of mercy and social justice and contribution to the broader general good in our community.

Question 5: Is denominationalism a sin?

Student: So, what would you say to the individual that would say denominationalism is a sin? I mean, on these grounds? 'Cause it seems what we have done is we have created these like homogenous subgroups. And you and I don't get along so instead of us hammering out together or learning to live in love despite the fact that you and I have a disagreement, whatever topic, what we do is agree to disagree and we go our own ways. Then we go find other people who agree with us and so our churches then end up being homogenous subgroups of Christianity and so somebody might pipe up and say, "Because of this, you know, I think denominationalism is a sin." How would you respond to that?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I think that C.S. Lewis gives us some very good perspective at the beginning of his book *Mere Christianity*. He talks about God's house being this great hall and there being a common life that we can all share living in the great hall. But then he goes, you know, real intimacy, the real ability to be comfortable lies in what goes on in the off rooms where there are, you know, there are places that you can sit and you can have these long and extended conversations. I think it's helpful to have that sort of paradigm in mind where the church at large is a great house with a great hall. And at the same time there are necessary rooms off to the side where subgroups of the larger church live together and work together more closely because we speak the same language and because again over the history of the church really important doctrinal disagreements have emerged. And we have just not found a way to have perfect ecclesiastical harmony over those doctrines and it has seemed better in the providence of God for these denominations to exist as separate entities but when it can work well when they recognize that there are other expressions that they may really, really disagree with and there may be real problems with. And yet when the confession is, "Jesus is Lord and his word is truth. And I'm a sinner; you are a sinner," there is a possibility for relationships to exist and for us to find a common cause. Again, some of it very deeply spiritual and some of it, just you know, I don't know why you see things that way.

Student: So for Paul it really does all boil down to charity?

Dr. Kidd: Well, what he says is — I like what he says — in Ephesians, "Speaking the truth in love." And sometimes there is some burn on one side of that or the other. It's not a love at the expense of truth. But it's also not a commitment to truth, just an "I'm going to blow you off because we don't agree on everything."

Question 6: Should congregations seek outside counsel to solve problems?

Student: So Reggie, we learn from Paul that he actually found out about the problems in Corinth not directly from the people in Corinth but actually from the

House of Chloe. She sent a letter or somebody from the house sent a letter. And my question is, when is it appropriate for a congregation to seek outside help for their own internal struggles and how valuable is it for us to be connected with outside churches?

Dr. Kidd: You know Rob, that's great stuff. That's really important. It looks like the church sent a letter and in chapter 7 is where you start to get the things. It's where Paul starts to deal with the questions that the church has asked. Chloe and Chloe's people seem to be the ones that have brought the letter and all the stuff that Paul deals with up to chapter 7 are Paul dealing with, "Okay now here's what I understand and from Chloe's explanation of what has been going on; so let me take those up first." So there are kind of two questions here. When does the church need to say we need help? And then when can individuals in the church speak on their own behalf about what is going on to people who can help? I think what is really helpful to note here is like, Chloe's people didn't just go off and go whining to Paul and tattling on everybody else. There was enough mutual submission in the church in Corinth where they came together and said, "We can't figure this out, and we need help."

Student: So, it was a sign of humility?

Dr. Kidd: There was a step towards humility. So, you know, I don't know if there is a hard and fast answer when a church comes to that point. But what really is helpful to note here is that as messed up as this church was, as arrogant and selfish as its corporate ethos does seem to be, they did understand that there was somebody up the line that they could talk with. And I think it's incumbent upon every church to be somehow somehow connected to the rest of the body of Christ so that we don't become our own little personality cult and not have any way out of, you know, serious controversy other than just splitting.

Student: For some churches, I mean, that's easy 'cause they're already existing within a more hierarchical structure. But what about churches who are more independent like, you know, some denominations are more like associations of autonomous churches? What are they supposed to do?

Dr. Kidd: Well, it's funny. My own persuasion is that there are different ways that churches have organized themselves, each one of those ways more hierarchical like Episcopalian, Lutheran, Catholic churches, more Presbyterian which are more... Well, I'll go to the other end where they are more congregational and they have really loose associations with other churches. And then in the middle is a more Presbyterian system where you have local elders but then those churches are officially in submission to other churches of that same denomination and you've got a checks and balances. Now, each one of those is trying to honor certain genuine scriptural values, the oneness of the whole body of Christ in the more hierarchical the importance of the local church and the congregational. And in the middle the Presbyterian system, this recognition that given sin, there needs to be checks and balances. But also part of my own persuasion is the Holy Spirit can be locked out of any of those and the Holy

Spirit can force his way in all of them. So you can go to churches of the different kinds of ecclesiologies, and you can see, you know, it's working here because Jesus is in the house and the Holy Spirit is working or no matter how good it looks on paper, it's not happening.

Student: Well, thinking of churches that are more congregational or independent and there are some that I have been to that are fiercely individual that would say that to go outside of the local congregation is to go against the Word of God.

Dr. Kidd: One of the ways that churches that are more on that congregational end find of compensating for the fact that they don't have formal ties elsewhere, happens lie in the hearts and the minds and persuasions of the pastors and the leaders who recognize that we need outside counsel. And what often happens in those churches is that there are informal lines of connection, whether it's with old seminary buddies, or whether it's with people that pastors have gotten to know over times from other denominations that can be a council of counselors. And there are kind of an infinity of associational connections and web kind of relationships that can bring some sort of moderation to all that.

Student: So, what you are saying is that there definitely is a necessity that before that interconnectedness outside of the congregation could get. You are not saying that all you need is the Holy Spirit and you can get it right?

Dr. Kidd: No, the Holy Spirit uses these relationships to bring about, to keep the worst possible scenario from happening of just this disillusion and this disengagement, and just falling off the face of the earth.

Student: So, then in Paul's response to both Chloe's household and to the letter that the Corinthians sent, we sort of have kind of on the other side a model for us for how we should respond to people of other churches or other denominations when they come to us for help.

Dr. Kidd: Like, what's that model look like?

Student: Like you know, on the one end if we are the ones having the problems we need to be humble enough to look outside of ourselves. And if somebody else comes to us asking for our help, there is humility as well that says, "Yes, I will help you. Whether or not we have full agreement on doctrinal issues or what have you that I love you enough in the Lord to desire your good and I will help you no matter what."

Dr. Kidd: Yeah and one of the things I'd be looking for, and it happens, is people come to you with a complaint or a story about what's going on in their church. And one of the things that I find myself wondering is, okay, is the person, are they just a lone ranger with a line that really needs to be talked about with folks in the body first? I mean, that's the pattern here is there was enough of the consensus that we

have a problem. And then Chloe and Chloe's people are delegated. And what I want to see is what I would...sometimes people are just wounded and hurt and they need somebody outside and they are not looking to gossip or slam. They are just looking for perspective on how to deal with a very difficult situation in the church. But what I am looking for is not just pulling people out and disabling them from being able to make a contribution positively to the church that they are coming from.

Question 7:

How should Christians respond to those who are weaker in faith?

Student: Reggie, one of the things that Paul kind of talks about in the letter is dealing with the issue of the “weaker brother”, somebody who kind of stumbles over the liberty that other believers have. How should we respond to the weaker brother? In what ways should we love on them and in what ways might we need to push them?

Dr. Kidd: Graham, when it comes to the weaker brother in the matter of liberty and the weaker brother's problem with your exercising certain kind of liberty, we need to distinguish some things. It's not a question of whether the weaker brother is offended. Paul's concern is when the stronger brother could lead the weaker brother by the stronger brother's example to do something before the weaker brother's conscience is itself free to do that thing. So the stronger brother, the person who feels freedom, has an even greater responsibility. It's not will my behavior offend. My question is...beyond the question of whether what I do might bother somebody, that's just really not the question. Now, there are questions of whether my behavior offends people and that's just a matter of consideration and love. But that's kind of a different. That's really kind of a different question. But when my behavior takes somebody into a place where they could wind up doing what I'm doing only their conscience the whole time is saying, I shouldn't be doing this. I should be doing this. Then I have a responsibility to gauge or to pull back. Now, one of the things that can happen is the weaker brother can come up and say basically, “You are going to offend me, so you just can't do it,” or “I just couldn't handle your doing that because then I just might do it and therefore you can't do it.” It's kind of playing this victim role and there I really need to listen.

I have a good friend who says, “Whenever you come under attack, you need to listen for the Lord.” And sometimes there is a direct correlation with what the attacker is saying and sometimes it has nothing to do with what the attacker is saying. But when that person comes to me, sometimes I really do need to heed. I need to hear this immature cry that would call upon me to say, “Okay.” Sometimes, I need to say, “You know what your problem is that you don't understand what this issue is. Now let's talk about what the Scripture says we really are free to do.” Here's one of the areas where I think it get really important to be in fellowship and especially in leadership of a church and I've seen situations where church leader boards have

found themselves having to respond to people who say, "Well, we shouldn't be doing 'X' because I am offended or I have a weaker conscience. And even though it might be okay for everybody to do it, the church shouldn't be doing it because I can't do it." The church leadership, I think, is called upon to pray, really look at Scripture and see if there is some other deeper principle involved that's not readily on the surface. And if the church leadership together, in prayer, in consultation with each other, in submission to the Word feel like, you know, we can't be held back by this person saying, "The church can't do 'X' because I can't do 'X'." Sometimes they just have to go to him, try to reeducate their conscience but at some point just say, "I'm sorry but the church just can't be held hostage to that." So, community is really important here.

Question 8:

Why is the collection for the church in Jerusalem so important to Paul?

Student: Reggie, throughout Paul's letters it seems that one of the things he is very concerned about is taking a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. And why is this so important to him? What's significant about this collection and is there a modern parallel?

Dr. Kidd: Rob, I think it goes back to what we were taking about before. Paul has this understanding that what Christ has done is to reconcile Heaven and earth. And Paul is so excited about this picture of what was destroyed in the fall now being remade and those who were separated being brought back together again. In Ephesians 2, he is going to articulate the theology that had under girded the collection that he had taken up before he wrote the letter to the Ephesians. And in Ephesians, he talked about how a Jew and Gentile had been brought together and made one new man and then presented to God together by Christ. And those who were far off being brought near and the collection is about showing to the church in Jerusalem that those who were far off had been brought near.

To go back to the whole narrative stream of Scripture, God made it beautiful, set Adam and Eve at the center of it to be ones who were his priests, his glory reflectors onto the earth and they walked away. And God said, "No, I'm not going to let you walk away and I'm not going to let my beautiful creation just go into destruction." So, he started making promises about how he was going to redeem it all again, make it new, transfigure it so that it bears his glory again. And he chooses the line of Abraham. And the promise to Abraham is that he would have a seed and that in his seed all the nations of world would bless themselves. In other words, Israel was chosen so that she could be the means by which God would fix Adam's mess. And then the story line unfolds until Christ comes and it's in Christ that that work is done to bring Heaven and earth back together again. To begin, if you will, the human race all over again in this Israel that's come into her own through Christ.

Student: So, you are saying there is an eschatological factor going on here with the monies being collected and brought it. It's not just taking care of those who can't put food on the table?

Dr. Kidd: It's not just. It is but it's not just. And to go back to the Old Testament narrative line there is this note that keeps getting sounded over and over and over again about the on-looking Gentiles who will eventually be invited to the table. In Psalm 72, Solomon writes about the nations bringing their tribute to Jerusalem and he's looking ahead to the day of Messiah's rule in Jerusalem. And what Paul is doing at the very same time that he is responding in love to the acute physical needs of Jerusalem Christians who are going through famine, he is also painting a picture of this new age that has come when Israel is being the means of the light going to the nations and the nations blessing themselves.

Question 9:

Should Christians send money to churches in modern Jerusalem?

Student: Should we now ourselves be sending money over to say Jerusalem or say the Jews living in Israel since this seems to be kind of this sort of end goal? Is that what we are supposed to be doing right now?

Dr. Kidd: I think Paul, to go back to Galatians, Paul pits the earthly Jerusalem against the heavenly Jerusalem and for Paul the Jerusalem is in Heaven now. And its earthly manifestation is in what he calls the Israel of God, the church. All those who by faith in Christ now are sons and daughters of God are members of this Israel. And so, the investment in the Jerusalem that would be important to Paul is the investment in his worldwide church, the temple where God now lives. Now, it so happens that many of his children are Christian Jews living in Jerusalem. It also so happens that many of his children that are spiritually part of the Israel of God are Arab Christians living elsewhere in the historic promised land. And part of investing in the heavenly Jerusalem is to invest in the church, Jew and non-Jew, in Palestine. But the larger picture is, as we bring our tribute to building the house that is the place where God dwells, we, like Old Testament Israel, do take this similar place of being a light to the rest of the world. Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests and that means it was Israel who was supposed to be doing sacrifices that symbolized their own but also the rest of the world's redemption. They were to be in the temple offering up incense that were a picture of prayers going up to God to bring redemption, not just for themselves but for the whole world as well.

And we are in that same sort of position now where our work, our prayers, our proclamation has in view God's interest in the whole of the human race. So, anything we do to care for, not just our poor but also the world's poor, is a matter of being this kingdom of priests, of being the ones who are the go-between God and his broken world and saying, "Oh Lord, how long? Lord, have mercy." And we offer those

prayers but then we also offer those works or acts. And the writer to the Hebrews does it really kind of nicely when he talks about worship that is the fruit of lips that praise God and the works of good that we do for people. So, that's kind of Hebrews way of saying something that Paul would be very much for.

Student: So, any time that we were involved in caring for ourselves, caring for other believers and especially other believers all the way around the world, we're kind of wrapped up in this mission to bring the wealth of the nations to God's house.

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, and proclaiming that the day of those who were far off have now been brought near and the light has gone to the nations.

Question 10:

How is faith as intellectual content related to faith as personal trust?

Student: Reggie, at the end of the lesson you talk about faith more in terms of theological content it sounds like. But then as we start reading faith, hope, and love it's really more about personal faith or personal involvement. How do you relate those two and how are they connected?

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, the beauty of Christianity, Rob, is that those are not opposite concepts. There is faith that is my believing, my personally leaning into Christ. And it's really interesting the way Paul and John and Jesus coined this is idiom of belief not just with the object of belief but with this prepositional phrase "into" and we are called to place our whole life into the hands of Christ. And yet that's not... Christ isn't just this nebulous person that we can refashion after our own likeness. But he is the culmination of Israel's story and we know him because of the whole biblical narrative that becomes ours. And what we get laid down in Scripture are truths about who he is and what he has done and what he will do that we have to believe in in order to believe in him. So, it's good to get a chance to clarify, it's not just believing in... it's not placing our faith in a set of doctrines that save. It's placing our trust in a person but it's a person we can't know apart from the truths that are articulated about him in Scripture.

Student: So, it's this real, it's kind of a "both/and", give and take, that there is the faith which has been handed down to us and then our own personal faith that kind of come together?

Dr. Kidd: Yes and part of the linkage is — you have to go to John for it — he is the *logos*, the word of God. And we were given *logoi*, words of God, in order to know this one who is the Word of God. And it's part of the great thing about being made in the image of God that he communicates and we can receive communication and communicate as well. And we relate, you know, by touch but we also relate through word. And the great thing that church does when we come together is we relate

through touch, baptismal waters, and the wine and the bread remind us that God comes to touch our whole beings. And we relate through word as the Word of Christ dwells among us richly. So, it's a full relationship with a living being person but who becomes present to us through the words that he left behind and that he enlivens through his Holy Spirit.

Question 11:

According to Paul, what is the great hope for Christians?

Student: Reggie, Paul kind of talks a lot about our hope for our salvation. Like we were talking before about faith, hope and love, what exactly is this final hope in exactly?

Dr. Kidd: Well, Paul talks about a commonwealth being stored up for us and he doesn't really talk much about what that is going to look like. The book of Revelation talks about the Jerusalem coming down and the New Heavens and the New Earth and the book of Revelation gives us some description. But Paul really doesn't, does he? He talks about resurrection but he kind of leaves it at that. He even is fairly reticent about talking about the believer's existence after physical death and before resurrection, what we call heaven or theologians often sometimes call it the "intermediate state". For Paul that is simply a matter of being with the Lord and some sort of continuation of fellowship but Paul doesn't really describe what the New Heavens and the New Earth are going to look like. Sometimes I wish he did but I think for him... and it's very interesting that he would do that because we know from 2 Corinthians that he was given visions. He was you know taken up into the third heaven and just shown the glory of God. But he was even told there only so much. His task is to give us what we need to know to get from here to glory and then all I can assume is that glory itself is going to be so beyond our possibility even of imaging now that his reserve is an expression of, "Just wait."

Student: So, kind of what a lot of us tend to sort of think about is this pie in the sky, if you will, kind of just sitting around.

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, a Gary Larson sort of guy with wings.

Student; That sort of disembodied state that we kind of think about, that's not Paul's hope at all.

Dr. Kidd: No, his hope is for a re-embodiment. He talks about a spiritual body but by that he doesn't mean a ghostly body. He means a body that has been made vibrantly alive and reconstituted by the Holy Spirit. And if anything those bodies will have greater density. He talks about bearing the weight of glory and I think he means that quite literally in terms of its weightiness, its density, its reality and the glory is also an

image of brightness. So, I think there are just limits to what he feels it's appropriate to say in this age.

Student: And so, Christ's resurrection is not just important to him to prove who Christ is. I mean, it's important to us for our own hope.

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, for Paul his resurrection is the first fruit of our resurrection. It's the bringing of the great resurrection.

Question 12:

Why does Paul connect spiritual gifts so strongly to love?

Student: Okay Reggie, so we have talked about faith, we have talked about hope, so we have got to talk about love. And what's interesting is he connects love with spiritual gifts. And why is that so important to him? Wouldn't just be the same to say, "I have a spiritual gift and that's great. It's a great benefit." Why is love so important to him when it comes to spiritual gifts?

Dr. Kidd: Well, it seems like gifts can be exercised quite apart from whatever motive I have and for Paul the motive behind the use of the gift is important. Gifts can be used to serve myself instead of others, or gifts can be used to edify and to benefit other people. For Paul, it's important to explain to people that your gift was given to you not for you. Your gift was given to you for other people. And what was happening in Corinth was people were using their gifts to just put themselves on display to show their status and power. And so, Paul has to bring the correction of those gifts are for other people. So that's why you get in the middle of this whole discussion of spiritual gifts, chapter 12 thru chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, this discussion of love. You guys need to understand that your motivation has to be not about you but about the people that you are called to serve. So like he says, "If I do all these things if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing." You might benefit, you know, by my display of my great spiritual prowess. But because my goal is really self-service I am really just kind of beefing up my resume by doing it. What I really have to be focused on is your good and when I'm really focused on your good, you get the good but then I also receive the benefit as well. So it's kind of ironic. People seek their own benefit by their display of their power but really all they get is the glory of the moment and they kind of come under Jesus sanction, "Well, you have your reward." But for Paul there is a greater reward of the Lord's, "Well done, my good and faithful servants," when the service that I offer is really offered because I love you as opposed to loving you in my image.

Question 13:
Why is love greater than faith and hope?

Student: At the end of that chapter he says, you know, “And these three remain: faith, hope, and love.” Why does he say the greatest of them is love?

Dr. Kidd: Well I think, when we get to glory we won't need faith. When we get to glory we won't need hope. We won't need faith because Jesus will be right there. We won't need hope because we won't have to be leaning into it saying, “Oh Lord, how long?” We will be there. What will keep going on and on and on is love. The most profound thing about Christianity and what sets it apart from everything else is that it is based on a theology that says, “Before there was anything, there was love.” There was always love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. There was always communion. There was always an enjoyment of relationship. And if anything was destroyed at the fall...I mean, he made the creation to be a means of expressing the overflow of the intra-trinitarian relationship. He wanted that to be expressed outside of himself and so he said, “I'll make me a world, and I'll make me a man and I'll make me a woman, and I'll make them to be like me,” just creating this ever increasing dance of love and communication and communion. And what was broken at the fall was that. And the whole program of redemption has been about recreating that and making it even richer, even deeper for us knowing not just a created love but a love that has been perfected through redemption. So, love is greatest cause it's always been there and it always will be.

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