

Paul's letters to the early church (and us)

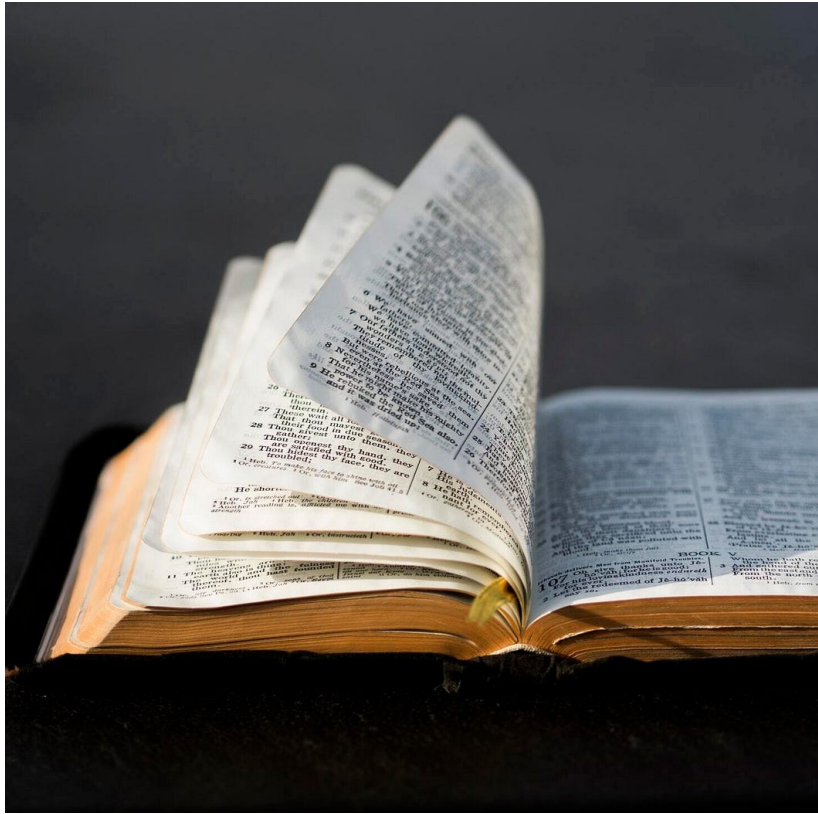


What are we to make of them?

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Saint Mark's Cathedral
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Opening Prayer: Spiritual Blessings

- Ephesians 1: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:
- Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved...I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

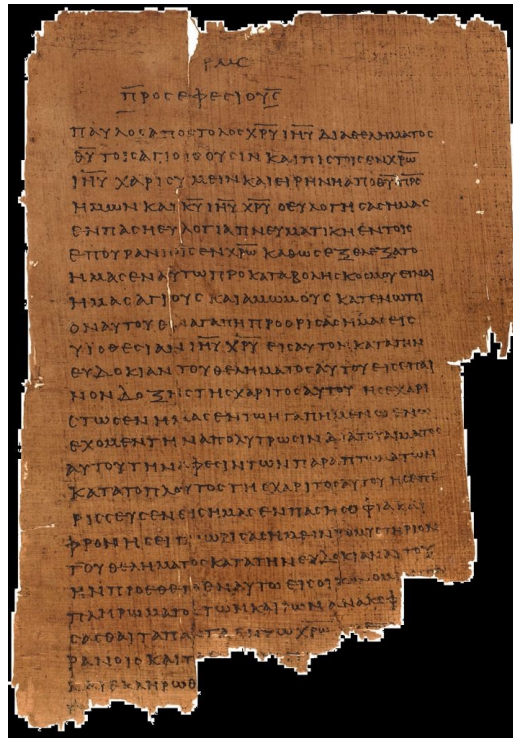


Paul's Letters are...

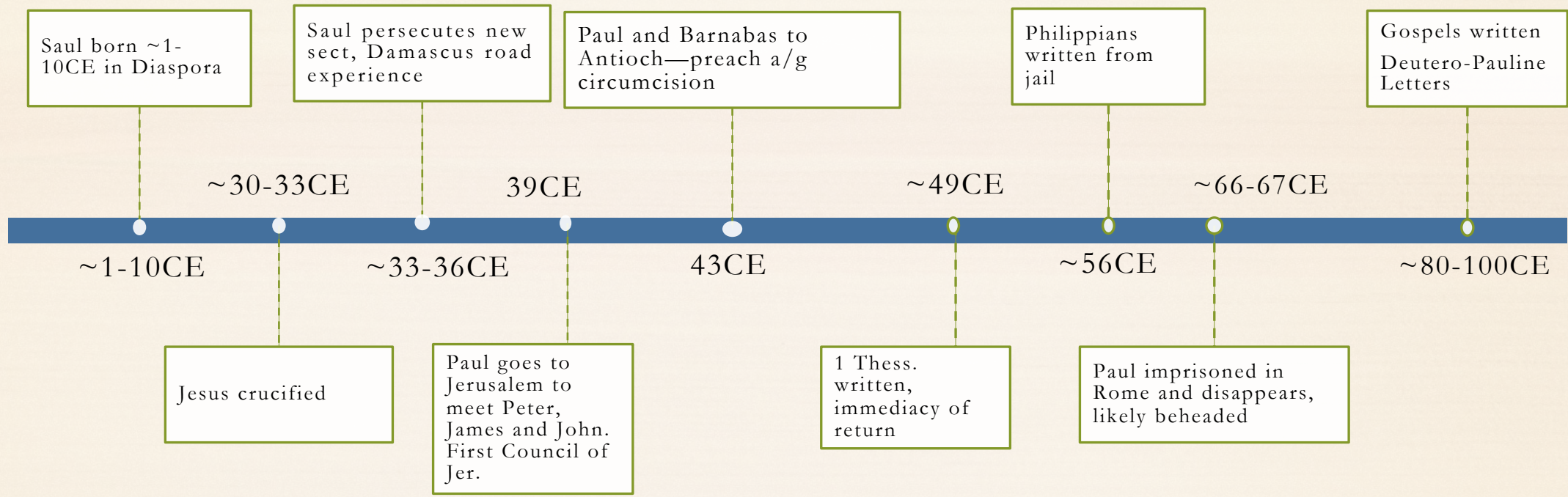
- *Often misunderstood*
- *The source of much consternation and distress*
- *Culturally situated and problematic*
- *Ancient personal letters not intended to be read as snippets in liturgy...*

Historical-critical approach to the texts

Letters—Pauline and Deutero-Pauline



- 1 Thes. (47-52 CE)—Jesus coming back now, be ready)
- Time passes, letters become more eucharistic
 - Philippians—hymn of joy written while in jail
 - Corinthian letters
 - Galatians—anti-law manifesto
 - Romans—theol. Letter
 - Philemon—personal letter
 - Colossians—cosmic vision of Christ
 - Ephesians—manifesto of faith
 - 2 Timothy—very personal, father/son relationship
- Did not write 1 Tim, 2 Thes, Titus, Hebrews



Timeline

Paul's Conversion is Key



- Everything changed from that moment on
- Mystical and experiential authority (not ordained)
- No longer look at reality, but from new reality in Christ (ontological change)
- Participatory in God's plan (chosen, used by God)
- Life in Christ became central (transformation to New Creation)

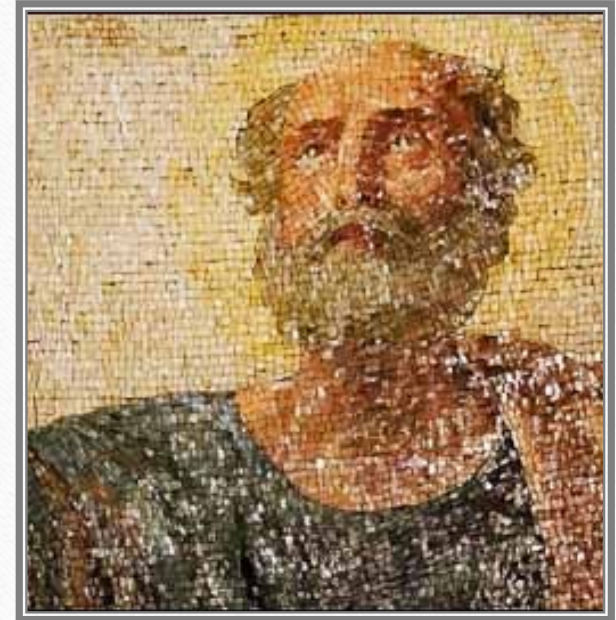
Sacrifice as Soteriological Development

- Literally just means “to make sacred, to make holy”
- Ritually within tradition always intends connection with God, renewal of covenant, fulfillment of true self
- Paul knew his Jewish rituals, applied them to Jesus (Christologies) and to his actions (soteriologies)
 - Divinization: “God became human so that humans might become divine.”
 - Christus Victor (cosmic victory)
 - Satisfaction (atonement for our sins)
 - Moral example—epitome of love inviting us into that Love



We are all Saints and Sinners

- Held paradox as portal into mystery (dialectic) of new life in Christ
- “It is not we ourselves that we proclaim, but Christ Jesus...” (2 Cor 4:5)
- Catechetical “sin” is performative, legalistic, stifling
- Pauline “sin” is weakness of the unfulfilled self
- Three force-fields in play:
 - Weakness (can’t correct it by ourselves)
 - Crucified identify (participate in Paschal Mystery)
 - New Creation (in Christ)
- Paul understands all this within context of corporate Body (participatory)



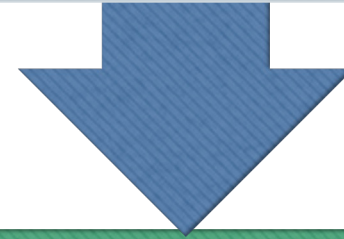
New
Creation
(in Christ)

Rom 8: “there is therefore no
condemnation *in Christ*”

No self hatred, no
shame

Trust opens up so that
flesh is fulfilled by
spirit

The whole person
bears fruit



The Spirit of God has made a home in
YOU (temple)

Indwelling of the spirit
enables us to pray, to
give thanks, to see
good, to be grateful

Fruits of the spirit
emanate from life in
Christ

The Body of Christ
dignifies, is able to bear
the “weight of glory”

Several
Points of
Controversy

Flesh/Spirit

Sexuality

Gender

Slavery/Obedience to
Authority

Gender, Household Codes, and Paul

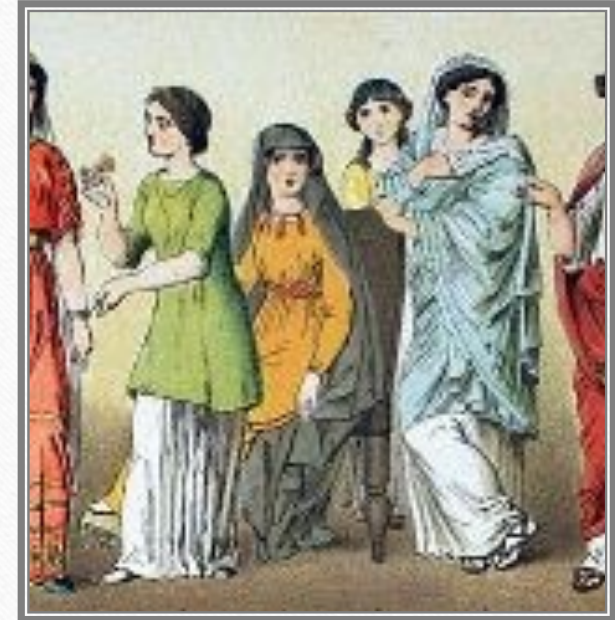
- 1 Cor. 14:34: Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.
- Col. 3:18-19: Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.
- Eph. 5:22-23: Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

Rachel
Held
Evans:
“Jesus
remix” of
Roman
patriarchy

- Ephesian Household Code becomes a critique (resistance) on the oppressive elements of the Roman world. (sets them free, sets them apart)
- Beth Allison Barr and other feminist theologians actually propose that Ephesians Household Code is offering women equality, dignity, honor.
- Chapter 5 flows:
 - 1-2: be imitators of God, as beloved children...
 - 3-20: renounce pagan ways (live carefully and wisely)
 - 21-30: the nature of the Christian household

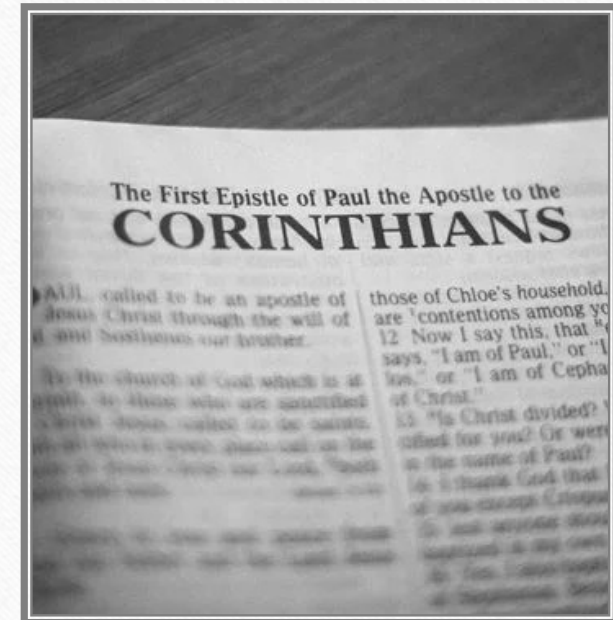
Roman Oppian Law, Livy, and Latent

- 215 BCE—Hannibal defeats Roman army, Oppian Law passed
- 195 BCE—women resisting the oppressive law, male leaders wanted to keep it (Cato's History of Rome speech was recorded by Livy—famous and found its way into New Testament
- 1 Cor 14:34-35: [“as in all the churches of saints] women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”



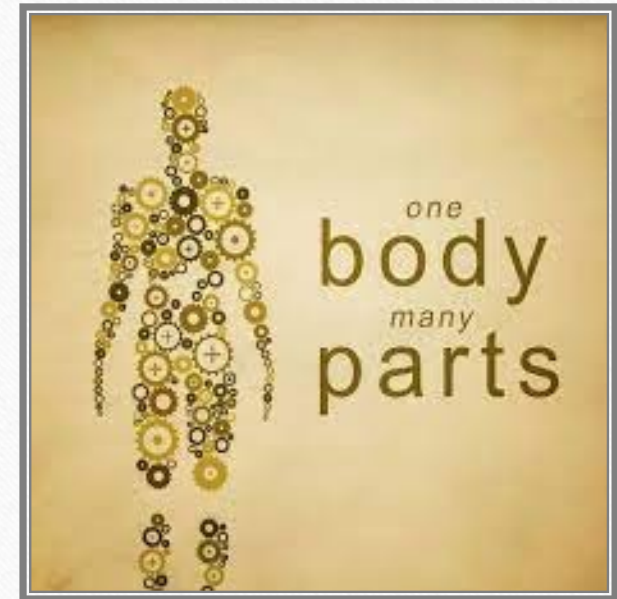
Paul's First Letter to the Church in Corinth

- Written in ~54CE to address:
 - 1) questions in a letter sent to him seeking his opinion on matters of dispute (1 Cor 7.1)
 - 2) reports he received about serious disorders in the congregation (1.11, 5.1, 11.18)
 - 3) groups vying for control (1.10-17)
 - 4) Indifference to flagrant immorality (5.1-13)
 - 5) disregard for some in community (8.1-11.1)
 - 6) marginalization of the congregation's disadvantaged members (11.17-34, 12.20-26)



Chapter 12-14

- Ch. 12: Spiritual gifts are complementary; one Body with many members (includes women)
- Ch. 13: Love is the greatest virtue we have to share
- Ch. 14: Take care with gifts of prophecy and tongues; orderly worship
 - “What should be done then, my friends? When you come together...let all things be done for building up...”
 - Insertion of 34-35 or citation of the question presented to Paul to which he answers:
 - “What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?...”



Romans 16

Listen and write down every female
name you hear



Breakout Groups



Plenary Conversation

Sexuality

- **Romans 1:26–27** For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, ²⁷and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men *who abuse themselves with men* (ἀρσενοκοίτης) and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.
- **1 Corinthians 6:9–10** Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes (μαλακός), *those who abuse themselves with men* (ἀρσενοκοίτης), ¹⁰thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.
- **1 Timothy 1:9–10** This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, ¹⁰fornicators, *those who abuse themselves with men*, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching
- Two Greek terms used: *arsenokoitēs* (ἀρσενοκοίτης), *malakos* (μαλακός) (*porneia* (πορνεία) used twice in the gospels)
- Not prevalent themes in NT, may have been referential back to Levitical law, but more likely commentary on common Roman practices (prostitution and slave rape)

Unpacking the terms

- *arsenokoitēs* (ἀρσενοκοίτης): form of male homoerotic sexual activity in which a master or patron exploits young male slaves sexually (rape, pederasty).
- *malakos* (μαλακός): soft, passive, effeminate—likely referring to male prostitutes in the temples or urban culture
- *porneia* (πορνεία)—Once in Mt and once in Mark—general term for sexual impurity

Acceding to Authority

- Rom. 13:1: Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
- Philemon: Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house...I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become...So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

Questions, Conversation

What do you do with this now?

Resources to Consider

- Richard Rohr. *Great Themes of Paul: Life as Participation*
- Beth Allison Barr. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth.*
- Richard Rohr. *In the Footsteps of St. Paul (Audible series)*
- NT Wright. *Paul: A Biography*
- Charles Cousar. *The Letters of Paul: Interpreting Biblical Text Series*

Closing Prayer

Philippians 4: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you...The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.