

When I talked about 1 Corinthians 13 last week, I mentioned how Paul was attempting to address particular issues in the Corinthian church:

- Hospitality, worship and food
- sexuality and bodily integrity
- theological and personal divisions
- break down in the church community.

Paul's approach to this fledgling community was to filter every response through his belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Paul was a major actor and apologist for bodily resurrection during a time of exploring the church's core mission when there were dramatically different competing narratives.

### **The culture**

Paul did not act alone in his missionary work and was accountable to leaders both in Jerusalem and Antioch. He was not pleased by this dog collar of accountability. He fought authority regularly and really seemed to dislike Peter. There were two instrumental figures that supported the mission field

1. Paul, the energizer bunny missionary
2. Peter, the everyman pastor
3. James, the pious and influential leader in Jerusalem

Paul "won" out. Rabbi's, modern and ancient, say that Paul was a chief architect for gutting Jewish flavored Christianity in favor of low-bar-of-entry Christianity. Modern Rabbinic Judaism developed partly in response to Paul's contribution to the conversation.

Paul elevated resurrection as the filter for everything. This is apparent in his responses to the Corinthian church and pretty much anytime he shows up in scripture we have today.

### **Small break in the hostilities - Acts 15**

It's easy to miss the sharp cultural earthquake that Paul was part of in the decades after Jesus. One author (not Christian) does a really good job describing this world -- Reza Aslan, author of *Zealot*. No Paul apologist, Aslan clearly describes the missionary corridor of Jerusalem-Antioch-Turkey that Paul moved through.

### ***A tip of the 'fight-berg' Acts 15.***

*1 Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.*

Paul unflaggingly opposed "Jewish" Christianity. For him, circumcision, dietary practice and social segregation were completely unacceptable.

*7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.*

Peter would land on Paul's side, but loathed Paul's strident and uncompromising approach to him and anyone who might question Paul's methods. I imagine Peter rolled his eyes when Paul would attack James' leadership. Peter seemed to really enjoy people. I suspect Peter was especially flummoxed by Paul's apparent joy in humiliating him in public (see Galatians 2:11).

*12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.*

James was clearly the adult in the room and his word held incredible weight. I know this is dated to my early childhood, but James was like EF Hutton. "When James speaks, people listen." Further, Reza Aslan points out how much Paul resented having to answer to the Jerusalem council.

Personally I don't like it at all, but God seems to prefer working through the complicated squabbles of human beings. Further, God worked through three very different men to uniquely proclaim Jesus during this founding period.

*22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. 23 With them they sent the following letter:*

*The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. 24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell*

Paul won that round. The missionaries would distribute this authoritative letter to the whole mission field. Don't let the clarity and simplicity of the letter make you think it was easy. Paul was never easy. Paul for all his faults desperately wanted the church to thrive and be a witness of the power of Jesus in the world.

**Conclusion** Paul's drive and conviction of the resurrection shaped much of the NT canon. Part of the reason he endures is because he cut off conversations with neither cantankerous churches, nor disagreeable leaders. He just kept going. In 2019, we don't have to see eye to eye - ever, but let's stay in the game, love each other and keep on keeping on. **Todd**