

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:27

Welcome to New'Brew, the Project Zion series that takes us through the New Testament by explaining, exploring and experiencing the text. Our guides, as always through Scripture through the New Testament are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. And I'm your host, Karin Peter. Now, before we begin, I want to remind listeners so you can view the new episodes and the He'Brew episodes and She'Brew episodes, and see Tony and Charmaine slides and the spiritual practices, our experience the text pieces on the Latter-day Seeker Ministries YouTube channel, so check those out. So in today's episode, we are going to start into the letters of Paul, and just upfront personal feelings out there so that I don't have to keep dredging this up as we go on. (I'm sure when we revisit it) I'm sure you'll push the buttons. Yes, Paul can feel very unfriendly towards women, as his letters are oft quoted as ways to keep women in their place. And in the same vein can feel very unfriendly to LGBTQ plus people. They feel marginalized by from some of the pieces of Scripture that are ripped out and thrown at them out of Paul's letters. So I'm interested to see where we go with this. And so I just want to start with this question. Why do people hate Paul? And maybe we can just say, Why do I hate Paul? Why do people hate but Why is Paul so controversial? What's the problem here?

Karin Peter 00:37

Thank you for personalizing that why why do those generic people out there hate Paul? No, that's not the question. Why?

Karin Peter 02:15

Exactly.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:16

There's really lots of reasons that have been monopolized upon some is a misuse of of passages. But then there's the question we have to ask is, did Paul write it? You know, for some of the things that are most often used, especially against women, we have to look at it and say, what do we know about this text? Do we do we think Paul wrote it? And the other the, one of the other reasons people love to hate Paul is because we don't understand the cultural setting, and sometimes the relationship that he has with the people that he's writing to, so we're gonna talk about that some today, because the ancient world was different than the world today. And so sometimes when it sounds like he's raising himself up above other people, he's actually doing the role of a of a leader of helping people who've never heard of this religion before, and are just getting their feet wet. And so there's some cultural pieces that might be helpful to understand. And we'll look at some of those passages that get abused, misused, or abused that

are used to abuse people and say, you know, take a look at them and say, well, why is he saying what he's saying? And maybe we'll like it, maybe we won't. And that's okay. We're not going to try and defend Paul. But we will try and help you understand, Paul. So that's, that's some of the things Why else do people hate Paul?

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:55

Well, I mean, when certain texts are ripped out and used as battering rams all the time, it tends to taint the text for lots of people. And that's one way and another reason or just a variation on what what Charmaine has said. I think with Paul, unlike, say, with the Gospels, we don't have narrative, but we have our letters. And in the letters, there's this authoritative person teaching. And so if you have an allergy to authoritative persons teaching,

Karin Peter 04:31

What are you trying to say?

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:34

You know, and, and depending on how severe your allergic reaction is to that, you know, you have this person who's in your face, telling you things. Once again, understanding Paul in his first century Greco Roman context can be a great help to limiting the effects of our own our own bad experiences with authoritative figures telling us stuff so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:59

Watch your emails, people.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:59

And one other things I think just we can't say often enough is that these writings, they were intended to be pastoral care and teaching and correction for ad hoc, you know, this is there's problems in this congregation, Paul writes a letter to help them deal with it. This was not intended to be scripture. Paul didn't know these things would end up being scripture. So he's, he's not pretending that everything that he's saying is from God. But people have this tendency to assume that if it comes from scripture, then it must be God's speaking. There's a few times when he says, you know, this might be me. And this I've thought about and prayed about, and I think this is what he's pretty, he's actually pretty humble about acknowledging there's a few times it's like, just do what I say it's like a parent, you know, but he doesn't know this is going to be used as scripture. I think that's really helpful to say, you know, a frustrated letter to your children. Oh, well, what happens if that became scripture, sometime in the future? How would you look? You know,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:16

or those texts, you know.

Karin Peter 06:18

Right. And you there's something in that, that he's writing letters, because there's problems. So he's heard there's problems. So there's a two way conversation going on, we don't have the other half.

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:28

Exactly. And and have to remember letters, by definition are occasion based. Right? And this is why, when you when you read across Paul's letters, sometimes he says different things that that run counter to each other, but it's based on circumstance. And so he's, there's, there's a sense in which he's having to make things up as he go goes, because, look, there's no New Testament. Yeah, that's right. For Paul, the scriptures of the Jewish Scriptures, Paul himself as a Jew. And we would find out from a letter to the Philippians, That he was trained as a Pharisee. So he's a highly literate, well trained Jewish thinker. But his his Bible is the Hebrew Bible, in most likely in Greek form. There's no New Testament, there are no written gospels yet when he's writing.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:16

And there's not going to be a formal New Testament for about 300 years. So I think, put all of that into perspective. That helps.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:25

So part part of the authority thing is that Paul is doing all this because he has been authorized by the risen Christ to do it. That's his, that's his underlying experience, the risen Christ appeared to him to that's in First Corinthians, our letter for today. Last of all, as to one untimely born, the Greek word is the word for a miscarriage. "Last of all, as to one untimely born, untimely born, he appeared also to me. Though I am least of least of those called apostles, I'm unfit to be called an apostle, because I have persecuted the community." And so he, he struggles with his own amazement that he would be called into this role. But you know, what, if there's no New Testament, if there's no Gospels, if what you're, if who you're writing to mostly is his Gentiles who have no experience with Judaism, and they're brand new to monotheism, sometimes he's going to come across as authoritative. He's the, he's the, he's the only one they've got.

Karin Peter 08:32

So right, okay.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:34

And this is very near Paul's writings are the earliest writings we have. And so there isn't a set theology They are having to, they're thinking on their feet, they're, they're creating theology as they go. And as and as the Spirit becomes evident in their meetings, and then then they're saying, Okay, what is what is this that just happened? Or, you know, why does this person who is in baptized all of a sudden be doing things with the Spirit? So there's all of this ongoing growth in their understandings and, and the questions. And so with Paul, it's really interesting, because part of the theology is developing, as in Oh,

not that, you know, it's like, we don't know all of the parameters of what this theology is going to be. But we're pretty good at recognizing what isn't. And Paul's going to be pointing that out.

Karin Peter 09:32

Sure, sure. Sure. No, definitely not.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:36

Not sure about this, but definitely not that. So. Yeah,

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:40

Yes. Parents do have to make up rules as they go along. Because it's like, yes, these things arise. And it's like, oh, I never thought of that before. Here's the new rule.

Karin Peter 09:47

Yes, exactly. Exactly. Okay. So that gives us at least a starting point. Oh, I'll try to wipe off my animosity towards Paul.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:58

Maybe one of the things that can happen as we're going through these different writings that we do know come from Paul, is that you might meet somebody new, you might meet Paul in a new way, and see how, how vulnerable and transparent he is willing to be with people talking about his own weaknesses and his own shortcomings and, and his reliance on Christ and the hard task of letting go of his own self reliance. So I think that is maybe a humanizing part, we'll see what we can do.

Karin Peter 10:32

Well, for all of us that have felt marginalized by some of Paul's writings, I think we can try to commit to this with an open mind. So let's begin with 1st Corinthians Oh, see what we've got today.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:44

Oh, yeah. So I mean, basically, what we're doing here is we're just jumping into a letter and we picked 1st Corinthians to go first not because it's the first of the Pauline letters. If we'd gone that way, we would have picked first Thessalonians but we pick 1st Corinthians because it sets a marvelous window into earliest Christianity that is being taught and spread in these highly sophisticated Hellenic cities of the Eastern Roman Empire, Corinth. Corinth is one of these cities. Corinth was the the combination of New Orleans and Las Vegas in the ancient world.

Karin Peter 11:27

Oh, excellent. No wonder Paul went there!

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:30

What happened Corinth stays in Corinth, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:33

It was also a seaport, which meant there were always people coming through and so it's, it's a very ethnically diverse place, and consequently, also religiously diverse place. So lots, it's a it's a busy place, kind of a crazy place, this Corinth.

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:54

The Romans had made it into the capital of the province of achaia, Greece, and not Athens, but Corinth and that's where the Roman Proconsul sat and then of the Roman governor sat there. And according to Acts, Paul had to appear before that Governor once and First Corinthians, or Paul stay in Corinth is one of the very certain dates we have for things in the New Testament. We because Paul because x mentions Galio, the Roman Proconsul Galio, we we know exactly when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia. And he was in Corinth between, say, 50 and 52. And Paul appeared before him. And so that means that that when Paul was creating this Christian community, he was there sometime between 50 and 52. And the letter, most scholars will put it in the middle of the 50s, sometime between 54 and 56. When you read the letter carefully, this letter first Corinthians when you read this letter, you can see that there was a previous piece of correspondence between him and the Corinthians, it's mentioned in chapter five, we did not possess that piece of correspondence. Some scholars think that his earlier letter to them, a fragment of it might have been inserted into Second Corinthians. But that's, that would be a story for another time, we just we otherwise don't know. So that's where we are. We're in the 50s. We're in the 50s, not the 1950s. But we're, we're, we're in the 50s of the first century in the Eastern Roman Empire, in a very, a very sophisticated and interesting and fascinating large city that had a reputation. In Rome, the Roman Empire of Corinth had a reputation as a party town.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:40

Excellent. So much so as so that the word Corinthianize was kind of like that's a good analogy. It's like

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:53

it had sexual overtones to Corinthianize was was to sleep with everybody in sight is kind of what it meant. And and so

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:01

yeah, that's you're getting you're saying it better than I would.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:04

Welcome to Corinth right? So and, and also we know that Corinth, the patron deity of Corinth was Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and there was a massive temple on a high a high point above the city that could be seen from the city. And the Aphrodite temple, though not named, does figure into the letter

as as the Gentile converts to this new religious movement. We're still, shall we say, the males were still attracted to the Aphrodite temple for reasons we will get to later.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:38

Their still keeping their membership.

Karin Peter 14:43

We're not quite sure what to do. We kind of like this new religion, but wait a minute.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:48

Well, and yeah, and I think something else that's important to understand is that there would have been particular seasons, festivals that were related to Aphrodite and to the worship, I mean, it would be part of the character of the city. And so it's cultural. It's not just religious, it's also, this is what everybody does. And if you're in a trade guild, like the silver workers, then you're expected to be at public outings, you know, at these public settings. And so for Christians, it's like, well, yeah, I can believe in Jesus, but, hey, this is the really, this is the once a year festival of, you know, sex and, you know, rock and roll of drugs, you know.

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:37

It's my civic duty!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:41

And then had these particular expectations that people would do a certain kind of sacrifice or make a certain kind of offering or, you know, maybe even, like, have sex with the priestesses at the Aphrodite temple that was cultural, it was an expectation. And it was part of being Roman, a good Roman citizen that's upholding the Gods of the nation. And if we don't uphold those Gods, we're going to become weak, and we're going to be overthrown by somebody else. So if you're not doing your part here, and visiting those priestesses, Aphrodite temples, and you you know, this is a kind of nationalism, this is, you know, you're you're not, you're not saying the Pledge of Allegiance, you're not voting, right, you're your suspect, because then the needs of the nation are not your primary need if you stopped doing these things. And so that's a that's quite a learning curve. Because, oh, yeah, here's this great idea, this Jesus person. Sounds amazing. And I've maybe had some spiritual experiences. But you're what you're saying, I have to cut myself off from all of these other parts of my life. Maybe my family, my business, you know, some of my business connections. My good name in the community, what what are you asking? Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:07

And in the letter, Paul, refutes that. So I'm not saying you have to cut yourself off from the world, that would be ridiculous. But, you know, you now have a new allegiance. And let me let me explain what this new legions means to you and what it what it shouldn't mean? Right. So that's, so he has to he has to

do a lot of teaching. And, you know, I think that's, I think Charmaine's quite right. So like, we get a we get a picture here of how complicated culturally and internally the shift from centuries of Greco Roman religion to a new monotheistic religion, that is it Judaism, is it not? We're not sure. But it's got it's connected to this figure Jesus? And how do you make the internal and cultural shift, and yet stay in your society as a functioning member of it? That's the problem Paul is dealing with, and by the way, that makes this letter extremely perennially relevant. How do we, how do we, in the 21st century, say in the United States, how do we show our allegiance, our full allegiance to the Jesus of Nazareth, stay engaged in our culture, but not be but not be misled, trapped, or coerced?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:25

Or worship the nation or worship something else that we're told is more important or most important.

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:31

So Paul writes this letter, how does he write this letter? Well, he's somewhere else he's in Ephesus, more than likely. And he he finds out from a couple of sources that this community he'd spent some 18 months forming back in Corinth has become our shall we say, the the the flagship of dysfunctional churches.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:56

Which is another reason why this is such an interesting book. And we wanted to start with it is because if you've ever been in a congregation that you think of as dysfunctional, just read first Corinthians and you'll feel much better about your congregation. There's just so much going on and many things that we could still kind of identify as congregational problems today.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:20

You could say I feel so much better at least in our congregation there's no member sleeping with his stepmother which in chapter five First Corinthians, we can feel better about our dysfunctional congregation.

Karin Peter 19:34

We just fight over the color of the carpet.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:37

Okay, so let's go and write the letter to them right and the letter letters in the ancient world were a big deal a large percentage of the population are illiterate but to receive a letter in a census to receive the person in person write the letter in the letter carried a an almost kind of sacramental significance that that they may or may not today. Email is sort of ruined that but you know what? We can have an analogy for us to be, you know, if you are, we have kept an old written letter from somebody, beloved, who's who's passed away, it's still kind of an emblem of the person. And in the ancient world receiving a

letter, even if it had to be read to you, that was an emblem of the person. So he's he sends this fairly lengthy letter.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:19

And I'm just going to insert one little piece, because I'm afraid we'll, we'll forget it later. And one of the ways he knows what's happening is that he has had some kinds of conversation in person with some of who are named as Chloe's people. And Chloe apparently is the head of a household. This is a woman's name. And her people have let Paul know that there's quarreling going on.

Karin Peter 20:47

Chloe's people narked on the congregation?!

Tony Chvala-Smith 20:50

They probably sent them.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:53

Chloe maybe helping to help oversee this congregation and and be concerned about, she may be a pastoral care person. But I this is one of those places where for those who have, you know, think about Paul's misogynistic, I think you just have to keep noticing the places where Paul is seeing women as co-workers, and here is Chloe's people, but she's the voice. And he's, he's hearing it and respecting it. And so I think, and you'll see that throughout, in different of the books, some that we'll be covering in some that we won't, but Romans is a really good place to see how much policies women as co-workers, names them as apostles, and those who have been in the work before him. And so I think it's, that's, it's so natural to him, that he doesn't necessarily bring attention to it. But check for that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:51

So he writes a letter, how does he write a letter? Well, in the ancient world, you had a couple of options for writing a letter, if you weren't literate yourself, you could hire a scribe to do it for you. Commonly, the scribe would make two copies, one for you to keep, and one that was rolled up tied and had the address on the outside and sent. And the other way would be to have to have your literate, you could also hire a scribe to do the writing for you. Because writing in the ancient world was hard. It was a difficult task on the on papyrus with the kind of like quills. And and, and we know from the letter to the Romans that that Paul actually did use scribes to do some of the writing, and might might put his own signature on it. So this letter is written, Paul, perhaps Dix dictates it to a scribe, it's written, signed, and carried back to Corinth. And then read, when these little Christian communities meet, meet together for worship, which would have included a meal that became the Lord's Supper, during the meal it was it became the Lord's Supper. So that's, that's how the letter gets back. And, and Paul, in the letter, Paul tackles the issues one by one, and there's a lot of them, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:06

But if you look at the first chapter, you'll get a sense of what he sees as the primary issue. So it's a little bit of an overview. And then throughout the letter that gets unpacked into some of these other issues. So the first chapter he, there's the, and I'm looking just at the first I don't know, even the first 20, 24, 25 verses, you get a good sense of what's happened, what's going to happen in the book. So there's, in the first nine verses, this is amazing. One of the one of the things that you will keep finding, if you're if you're looking for it is that Paul is not about himself. He's about Jesus Christ. And he sees that as the solution to almost all of the problems is stay focused on Jesus keep focused on Jesus. So in that first nine verses, Christ, Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus is mentioned nine times in those nine verses. And only once as a pronoun, only one hymn all the others are either Christ, Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ. So he's he keeps drawing them back to this is what it's about. And I think we also then get a sense of what's his motivating force, and it's that experience with the risen Christ that he had, that still informs him on what this is all about. He talks he uses the word God in those first nine verses six times and makes one reference to the Spirit and in reference to spiritual gifts. But in those nine verses, there's a lot of reminders Jesus God have, you know, this is what is what it's about? And so it's one of the if you look at that first chapter, one of the things he's saying is, this is not about you. This is about Jesus and what Jesus has done what God is doing through through Jesus. This whole movement is about Christ. Is not about me. And it's necessarily not about you. And he'll, he'll come back to that. So in verse 10, in that first chapter, he's talking about division. And in tois, in verse 11, Chloe's people talking about this quarreling, he's, he's wants him to be of the same mind and purpose. I mean, I mean, this is congregational life, right? When all these little things keep popping up, and all these dis, it's like, if we could all get focused on one thing, and then we had the same purpose. We just know, we could move forward. But our energies are getting dispersed in all these conflicts. It's the same is what's happening here. So he finds out about quarreling, and it's about things like, well who baptized you? Well, you have better status, if so and so baptize you rather than so and so. So there's this, this division of who's better in the congregation.

Karin Peter 26:15

So those verses I think it starts at 12. is what one of my favorite parts of this early part of the of the piece because Paul gets really snarky. I mean, obviously, Chloe's people have ratted pretty carefully, because he puts it in, you know, quotes. So he's quoting what he's heard from people I belong to Apollos I belong to stuff isn't that kind of thing. But where he gets snarky is 14, verse 14, "I thank God that I baptized none of you." I mean, if when I first read that, and I've read it a million times, and just skip over it, but when I was looking for things before this episode, I was like, Oh, yes, I remember now he can get really snarky.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:04

Well, and he's, you know, it's it's a little bit of hyperbole because he has to back that up a bit. And it's like, oh, yeah, I I baptized,

Karin Peter 27:13

Except for those two, but they didn't get named.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:17

From this household, but it doesn't matter. You know, and it's, and I think it's again, it's like, you can see a letter being composed here. And, and he wants so strongly to say it doesn't matter. And he kind of over speaks himself. And then it has to say, Well, yeah, I suppose you know, they might be offended that I didn't remember their baptism,

Karin Peter 27:38

Like the whole family over here. But yeah,

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:40

So, a little cultural piece here. What's going on is there in Roman imperial culture, people are highly status conscious, right? This this culture is very rigidly stratified. And so what's happening here is based on the cultural cultural lenses, people in the congregation are saying, Who is baptized by the most important person? Right? I was baptized by Apollo, who, who came in and he's a wonderworker, and an amazing preacher. So So I was, I was baptized by him. And others say I was baptized by Scifest. Meaning Peter, what's Peter doing in Corinth, he's out of his territory. But anyway, I was baptized by one of the dudes who is actually with Jesus. And and so they fallen into the cultural trap of, of Roman Roman patronage. Patron-client. And so, Paul is actually their patron, he's he formed the congregation, he's, but inside the congregation and they're saying, Well, I was baptized by somebody even more important than Paul. So. So what I say is going to have more weight in the congregation. And Paul's like, it's about Jesus, what she said, it's about, it's about Jesus. It's not about patronage, clientage.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:42

Or baptism even. Yeah, I mean, he says, You know, I did not come to baptize. I came to talk to share the gospel. Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. That's what I came for. And yeah, yeah, he's, he's hitting, he's hitting close to home. We were might be so used to hearing this, that we don't realize this is a very real problem. And he probably has specific people in mind, as he's saying this.

Karin Peter 29:26

As we all do.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:30

And as we'll find out later, in the text that follows, he's going to say, let me let me tell you, actually about you guys. So, so, but you know, this is this is real, real life stuff. And so he's, this is where he's, he has to deal with a with a battle in the congregation. The battle having been created by cultural norms that people have not been able to break free from yet.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:57

Or maybe haven't even seen as being part problematic since it's such, especially for those who are in the higher echelons, those who have privilege, they, you know how you know how we can't see that for ourselves, and so, this is natural for them. And it really does have to be pointed out. And then the second thing in this first chapter at the beginning, it is about wisdom. And people are vying for recognition. And you know, so and so is wiser than so and so and, and, you know, here you can imagine, there are some people who are educated, those who are in those higher strata of the societal classes. And you can imagine some of these, probably guys sitting around and philosophizing and impressing each other with, you know, well, if this is, you know, with this new religion, that they're all a part of, and, and they see it as a plaything, rather than as something that may be meant to change who they are. And so, wisdom, Paul does a real twist on what wisdom is, and he talks about the foolishness of God in sending Christ, and which basically, then dismantles all of their basis upon which they think they're wise, or those those who do think that they're wise. So he's, and that will come up. Throughout, that there's this division, this conflict within the congregation about what real wisdom is, and about who has it. And you'll see it kind of tied to spiritual gifts later on. And, and he just, he did does take some potshots at the whole wisdom thing, later on as well. So these are the two main topics that come up division over a whole bunch of things we'll find out later, but also this idea of wisdom, which is misplaced than what the gospel is about.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:06

And so those two those two main themes, and they get subdivided into particular behaviors within the congregation that Paul has to correct. One of one of the behaviors. The scholar Richard Horsley, refers to as spiritual elitism. And there are people in the Corinthian congregation. And when we say congregation, we mean house churches in the city of Corinth, there are people in those house churches who think because of their, they've had amazing personal spiritual insights. And they, they believe that they have already been ushered into the age of the resurrection, it's they already now have have gone to the other side, and therefore they are elite. And they have they have elite status because of their special spiritual gifts

Karin Peter 32:55

Or legroom!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:58

And special lounges!

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:00

And in a sense, they think that all that stuff, Paul preached about the coming Kingdom of God and the resurrection and all that stuff. Hey, it's already happened in us this time. And Paul, Paul, Paul's can be very sarcastic about that. And he said in chapter four, he says, To be singling these people out, and I've already you reign, Oh, I'm so glad you reign. I wish that we could reign with you, he really pushes back back hard on them. Because they have not yet picked up that no, we're in the in between time. And in

between time is marked by the cross of Jesus, not just the resurrection. And so we'll say a little bit more about that later. But so spiritual elitism. There's, there's issues of people within the Christian community, taking each other to civil law courts to solve resolve disputes instead of as Paul says, gosh, if you if your your, your cleaning, be really wise, and you can't even solve little, little issues yourself, gee, you know, and then there's, there's a variety of questions of issues related to sexuality. Right, I mentioned the man sleeping with the stepmother.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:11

Also mentioned the good you know, up to this point, good law abiding citizens who go in and have sex with the priestess at the Aphrodite temple as part of their, you know, their, their duty to the city.

Tony Chvala-Smith 34:30

So that and you know, he, he mentions, he mentions a variety of things in chapter six related to what in his worldview is sexual immorality, by the way in chapter six. If your Bible says uses the word homosexuality, it's not really translating very well. It's overlaying a modern concept on the on the ancient world. He refers to in chapter six he refers to the NRSV translates it male prostitutes and sodomites. This we have a real problem you're trying to translate these words, we understand a lot about what was going on. Basically, these, what's being described here are not anything like what we would call consensual, mutual, same sex relationships. It's not that at all, what we have here is high status people sexually using lower status people of the same gender, which was common in the ancient world. And, and so the words in Greek refer to those two different dynamics of of the power over right now. It's, it's basically, people have the same gender sexually dominating one over the other. Right? And so it has nothing to do with the concept of homosexuality doesn't even exist in the ancient world. The ancient world thinks of sexuality, the Roman world thinks of sexuality, if it thinks about it at all in terms of the dominator in the dominated, or hyper gender, right. Or if I can be more, more straightforward. The penetrator in the penetrated. And, and to be the penetrated is to be lower status, regardless of your social class. And so what's been described here is is abusive stuff connect, often connected to the slave trade. And, and so it has nothing to do with with our concepts. So when people say, First Corinthians six is against homosexuality, it's like no, they really don't understand the text at all. They don't understand what's going on here. And we're, we're just That's a complete misconstrue, of this ancient form of sexual abuse that Paul saying, No, that's not sexual abuse is not part of the Kingdom of God is what he's saying there. So. So there's, there's, there's, there's all that.

Karin Peter 36:42

All that more? I don't know. I think there's...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:47

such an interesting,

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:49

there's a quite a big question in chapter seven about marriage. Some of the Corinthians are saying, well, I mean, they've got is their model, Paul, Paul is single. And some of them are saying, well, maybe, maybe we shouldn't be married, maybe it's wrong.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:04

Or if we are married, maybe that means we need to abstain from sex. And Paul's

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:08

like, no, no, no, if you're married, have sex.

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:11

With each other, that

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:16

if you're if you're if you're, if you're engaged, make a decision.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:21

If you're on fire, go ahead and get married, it's gonna distract you. I love that

Karin Peter 37:27

aflame with passion.

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:32

But chapter seven, he's trying to work, he's trying to work out their misunderstanding of me, some of the some of the community are, they're highly ascetic, right? Meaning, meaning that they are, they want, they don't want to do anything at all, they're afraid of doing anything at all in public. It's not that it's Christianity is not, it's not about this, this Christian thing I'm preaching is not about a whole new giant list of rules. Now, I'm having to make a few rules with you, because you guys are knuckleheads. But, but no, it's okay to be married, you're married, it's okay to have sex. If you're engaged, it's okay to go ahead and get married. If you're if you're engaged in you want to stop being engaged, you can do that. And then he even has a kind of positive statement about divorce in the ancient world, right. And so, so there's that issue going on, there's a big issue about whether you can, whether you should eat, eat meat that's been bought in the marketplace,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:31

If that meat has previously come from one of the temples, to Roman Gods.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:39

And so typically, in the Greco Roman world, the average person didn't eat what we would call red meat a lot. But when they did, it was almost always connected with sacrifices and, and had a set of sacral meaning connected to different Gods.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:54

So what would happen would be like, the Aphrodite Temple, there would be certain sacrifices that would be done, and then, you know, an animal would be would be slaughtered, or the blood would be used. And then what do you do with that meat? Well, you there's, it gets taken down to the meat shop on the corner that has connections with Aphrodite Temple, and they, it's used meat.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:19

It's on, it's on sale, basically.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:23

That's where people would go to to buy meat. Often, again, because it was it was such a unusual part of their diet. It would be this would be the place where you could get it at a reasonable price. And so some are saying well, but that's, that's associated with the worship of those Gods and, and won't, you know, that'll weaken my faith. If I know that I'm eating meat that that was first, you know, sacrifice to this God, and other people are saying it's just meat, the Gods aren't real, don't don't get your, you know, panties in a knot. They're just, you know,

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:07

...or whatever they wore. Everything would get knotted

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:13

There's these these two people, these two kinds of groups of people, some who feel like, you know, we want to do what's right here. And we don't want to let other people be confused about our loyalties here. You know, are we really following Jesus? Or are we still straddling the line here and another people saying, Ah, don't make such you don't be so whiny. Don't make such a big deal about this. And, and they're, they're doing the superiority thing.

Karin Peter 40:44

And for God's sake, don't tell Chloe!

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:50

Right, yeah, dude. Yeah, totally. Don't do that. So once again. The Paul uses the term weak and strong, meaning basically have weak conscience and strong conscience. He doesn't mean it. He doesn't mean it pejoratively. He means that some people are going to have more scruples about this. Very possibly those might have been people who, who had a Jewish background. And so the idea of eating meat sacrifice of their Gods is simply abhorrent to them. But then, but then Gentile converts, we're used to this. It's like,

it's meat, right? And so but But what if the Gentile, what if the Gentile converts are doing this spiritual elitism thing, which they apparently are, and they're telling the weak people, you guys are so stupid, right? In other words, they're destroying community over food. And and so Paul's, Paul's response, Paul is trying to say, on one hand, you're right, there are no gods but one, and we can eat the meat with thanksgiving. On the other hand, this is this Christian community is a different thing. And we have to watch out for each other.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:57

They're responsible for each other and, and caring for those whose whose feelings are tender, or who are trying to figure out what's happening inside of them and we're and making sure that they're good.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:10

Right? So love, love is to be practiced here, right? And love. Love means making room for each other, and being careful towards each other. Right? And so. So Paul is Paul is kind of saying, I think you'd say, in theory, I agree with the strong, however, because of Christ. Remember, this is all this is about Jesus, Jesus, not about not about us get back because of what Jesus Christ has done. You strong, need to be very careful about how you treat the weak and you weak need to not be looking around for things to find to be offended by if you are invited to a pagans house, eat what they set in front of you. If however, they say, I got the best deal at the Demeter Temple on on this on this lamb, and we had a wonderful worship service there, blah, blah, blah, then you probably would want to refrain so that it doesn't get out. But that you know, in other words, the sacral associations would still be there. So So Paul's trying to Paul's trying to practice community. It's really hard. It's it's really, really complicated. But it's quite interesting that he tries to keep Christ as the focus in that so so and wait Karin, there's even more issues. Wait, a bunch of problems connected with worship, that that when they gather for worship, which would be in people's homes, the worship turns into a time of division, once again. So when they go to celebrate that meal, that becomes the Lord's Supper, which is part it's what's

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:45

right at this time, it's it starts with a meal.

Karin Peter 43:49

Like it's built in at the end of the meal. Yep.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:52

Think potluck. And then then the the last part of this of it is, is that having the bread and the juice and, and, but what's happening is the rich, who have leisure, and are not working out in the fields 8, 10, 12 hours a day, they get there early, or the group is probably meeting in the home of someone who is rich, who has a big enough home that people can come to. And so, you know, they're, they're eating. And then they're, they're having the bread and the juice, and they're getting drunk on it. And on the on the not on the juice on the wine. And so when the day laborers who are part of the congregation to arrive after

dark, there's nothing left for them. There's no food, and there are the things that represent Christ are gone, have intoxicated as a group who've been there, kind of, you know, John having a good time. And so this is the this is the place where we we talk about eat, eating and drinking unworthily. That's what this that phrase, if you've heard it before, it's talking about this about excluding part of the, or not waiting, not being patient so that you can be a community together. And so they're eating and drinking, without consideration for the body.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:23

And then it accentuates once again, that differently just strata, the wealthy and the poor.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:27

So then within the church, they're recreating that same structure that Christ eliminated.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:34

Imagine Karin, we invited you to our house for dinner. And you got here. And we were laying on the couch really full and there was a chicken carcass on our table. It's like, that's, like, very not hospitable, and

Karin Peter 45:45

That is not hospitable.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:47

No. So so so Paul's trying to draw them back. The the supper we celebrate, this is about Jesus Christ, who is the bridge the unifier, the one who breaks down these social strata, right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 46:02

Not about our appetite or our privilege.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:05

And then of course, there's there's great disorder in their worship built around all kinds of flamboyant spiritual gifts, prophecy, tongues and so on. And Paul says, Yeah, I do all that too, but worship is about love. It's about care for each other and and about decorum. And so this is not meant to be free for all that shuts certain people down and tells people well, if you can't, if you don't have this gift in this gift, you must be less notice the Corinthians keep wanting to do this. And Paul through Christ wants to keep bringing them back to this. And that makes this letter ever relevant to us, I think. So and then one final big issue is resurrection. "I have heard that some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead", Paul says, and it's quite imaginable here that in this highly Hellenized environment they have said resurrection of the bodies? That's stupid. We believe that, that the you know, as as good Hellenized weeks would think this immortal inner part of you is released at death. The Corinthians are saying, well, some of them are saying we have to give to the Spirit, which releases it now. We already living the

resurrection existence. We don't have to talk about resurrection of the bodies. And Paul's like, Excuse me, I saw a resurrection body. And that's what I preached to you. And the resurrection body is the source of the Spirit you have. So don't be telling me there's no such thing as resurrection of the dead. If there isn't, then then you're still pagans. Going around teaching lies. So yeah, so that's, that's chapter 15. And so it's interesting that the letter is kind of bookended cross resurrection, Cross chapter one resurrection chapter 15. And so in some respects, those are the interpretive keys for the letter, that Paul keeps bringing them back to the thing he knows and teaches that Jesus Christ was publicly crucified, a real human being was, who is the Messiah was crucified, really died, really died, we celebrate a meal that remembers that he really died. And also in our life together through the Spirit, we know that he is alive and powerfully present right in right here. And now starting a whole new thing, whole new creation. So those are the bookends of, of the letter.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:26

And in between, love is laced through and, and I think one of this is one of those places where the English language is deficient in its understanding of the word love. Because often when Paul is using it, there's this sense that it's respect. It's, it's not just love, a nice feeling. But it's about equality. It's about equity. It's about respect for each other, acknowledging, accepting each other as we are.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:55

Yeah. So that's kind of a quick walkthrough of the letter and the contents. Any any single piece of this we could spend a lot of time on, but we won't. But but that's,

Karin Peter 49:06

Definitely, but it really comes down to people coming from a culture where hierarchy status, power, are everything, it's how you know, your place in the world, based on that, and coming into a situation where that is all attempted to be flattened. Everybody's everybody's equal around the table and, and the, the issues as people try to wrap their heads around that. I mean, it would be really difficult to have this all through your culture, your whole, your whole existence, then all of a sudden, you you walk into this bubble where now everybody's equal.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:41

And and think about that if you're a person who has had status and all the privileges of it, and you're expected in this other space, to treat your servant or somebody else's servant as though they're a brother or sister in Christ, or to treat women as though they deserve to be heard and that their space at the table is as important as yours, you can begin to get a sense of the struggle inside. And you know, a really good little snapshot of that is the book Philemon, where, you know, a runaway slave slave comes to Paul, and he writes a letter back to the slaves master, and, you know, very carefully says, well, he's, he's your brother in Christ now. What are you going to do about that? Here's what I suggest, but you know, you, you, you have to do what you can't will do. But, you know, just you get the sense of, of how, how, out of their own patterns, people had to be both those who are from the lower echelons, and those who are

from the higher, because those at the bottom, we're being told in the Good News of the Gospel is that God knows you and loves you equally to everyone else. Christ does as much for you as for anybody else. And, you know, there's a, there's a point and in between 110-112 CE, there's this correspondence between a governor and so it's Trajan, the emperor, Roman Emperor Trajan, and plenty, and they're describing these Christian groups. And one of the ways they describe that they're described is, as this group is made up, mostly of women and slaves. And so that you get a sense of who welcomed this message wholeheartedly. Because it told them who they were. It allowed them to know their worth, in a culture where they were so far down the the ladder of importance to be almost invisible at times. So, so this is, this is a pretty radical change that's being asked of these people who want to follow Christ, and for whom Paul is their teacher.

Tony Chvala-Smith 52:20

And I think this is one one place where we can actually maybe learn to, if not love, like Paul, Paul's really is, Paul really is quite an egalitarian about this. And he understands that this new event of a crucified and risen Messiah, this completely reshuffles, the board, it's now not even the same game, it's a new game. And that those who are nobodies, have now been made somebodies. And those who thought they were everybody, have now been made somebodies and the somebodies are now siblings, and are, are in the what's what, what is the body of Christ, they share equally in the body of Christ. It's quite radical. In its way, we're just we're just over kind of overused to the language. And we don't we don't catch how radical this this this kind of thing is in the first first century of, of our era. It's like, oh, my gosh, this is very unusual. And so and also, we all belong to churches that have had a very hard time maintaining egalitarianism, right? And, in fact, some that even argue against it. And so that would be Paul, Paul would look at that and say, you don't get that you don't get it really do you kind of like he says to the Corinthians. So anyway, so maybe we should move on to explore next Charmaine? (Sure.) So explore this is Karin, where you can jump in and, you know, those burning questions that we haven't gotten to yet that that you've had, and we've got a few other things to add here that kind of some larger picture items to to help us understand Paul better.

Karin Peter 53:57

So I only have only have one question that I made a note of as you were talking about the culture and and the social and religious structures of Corinth, and that is Christianity, its history has borrowed from the surrounding culture. We see it a lot. We talked about it a lot when we talked about Christianity going into the British Isles, and what happened when it encountered the native or what we would call pagan religions there, that they borrowed a lot of the symbols and signs and traditions and then view them with new meaning to help people transition. So I'm wondering if that if we see any of that in Corinth that happening? One that comes to mind from this time period is that I think it was the temple for philanthropy and I, I forget the actual name of the God that flaunt the word that philanthropy comes from. But the symbol the statue that you would seen would have been a shepherd carrying a lamb. Well, we're all familiar with that symbol as Christians, we see that as Jesus the Good Shepherd and and so that

was an attempt to take an existing symbol and, and put new meaning with it that worked for Christian. So do we see any of that happening here? Does Paul use any of that kind of technique?

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:17

Well, you could, I mean, you could see the the meal that has the Lord's Supper attached to it as having lots of cultural connections, because, because in a city like Corinth, where there are all these trade guilds, silversmiths, Charmaine mentioned, leather workers, all these different trade guilds, one of the things that you did was, this will sound kind of familiar, you pay dues. And once or twice a year, you went to a festival for your guild, that was a large lavish banquet that you would help pay for. This was how you made business connections and found out where you could get more business. That's the kind of stuff that you still see. And then it involves eating a meal that somehow connected you to the God or Goddess, that was your patron deity. And so I mean, Christianity starts with a meal Jesus celebrating a meal, actually, Jesus, a lot of meals with people, you know, but in the Lord's Supper is part of if it's Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it's part of a Passover meal, but but I think it's very likely that there's some borrowing going on from the Hellenistic world in terms of these these meals, only giving them new associations. That's one way I think.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:31

I think this really helps illustrate though, this kind of this balance, you know, it's like the whole eating meat offered.

Karin Peter 56:39

Yeah, yeah. That that brings a different layer of complexity. Now to the problem of do we eat the meat? Exactly what if this meal symbolizes our allegiance to this Goddess?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:49

Right? So there's this Yes, God, one hand having to distinguish this group from the other religions in in the city? Yeah, and at the same time, making it more of a natural thing that they will do. So you know, I think that's that whole distinguishing themselves from we're not this, and we're not this, and we're more like this, you know, so tying into some of the Jewishness would be one one way that they would help to distinguish how they're different because lots of people would have some, some familiarity with Judaism. It's a legal religion,

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:34

which spread all over the empire to so and so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:37

You know, there'd be that would be a way to identify who you are and who you aren't. But yeah, it's, it's a it's always tricky. How do you not lose the main message? And what's what's incidental and what's what's at the core?

Karin Peter 57:55

Well, and what can you absorb? What is it okay to absorb into the Christian tradition from surrounding culture?

Tony Chvala-Smith 58:01

So yeah, so you know, the the dying and rising God motif is present in various ancient religions and mystery religions. The difference though, is that, in those ancient mystery religions, the dying and rising, the goddess is a cyclical thing, it repeats. And it's not connected to a historical person. The death and resurrection of Christ are connected to a first century Jew who was actually executed in Palestine, in Roman occupied territory, by the Roman Empire, which, which makes it kind of dicey to pursue, and the the, the images of the resurrection of his body, not just a kind of a spiritual kind of turn and return and return sort of thing. It's quite different, it's more linear and more, it kind of moves that way rather than cyclically. It's quite different. So I don't I don't know that there's any connections there. Some people have tried to make connections to Mithraism is kind of popular Roman religion, but Mithraism is later. It's, it's celebrations. And it's, it's being drenched in bulls blood, and so on. And that's it's later than where we are here in the first century. So. So, Paul, Paul makes use I mean, Paul speaks Greek. That's his first language. And he makes use of all kinds of images from his culture like, like the like the Olympic Games, political uses political imagery. The, even the very word reconciliation comes from political life, his political life so so he's, he's not above just using stuff from his culture, but he gives he tries to tries to give it a new twist.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 59:46

And on the other side of things, another one of those places where is they're trying to make a distinction and this is one of those controversial pieces in First Corinthians is about women and keeping their heads covered. Yeah. And that's in the 11. Right? (That's it, yeah, in 11. Keep your head covered) yes, keeping your head covered. And this is partly probably having to do with the mystery religions. So there's all kinds of religions going on there, the the recognized Roman Gods, and then there's the secret little mystery religions going on. And, and Paul is wanting the Christians to distinguish themselves from from both. And so that's probably why people are all hot and bothered about women having their hair down in worship, because that's something that happens in the mystery religions, which are often quite sexualized. And so it's like, no, no, no, we don't want to be confused with them, you know. So that's probably part of what's happening there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:52

Yeah, and as one scholar, Jerome Murphy O'Connor has pointed out, architectural styles in Corinth, people's houses in the Greco Roman world were quite open, you kind of knew what was going on pretty much in every room from the outside. So if you have if you have a gathering of men and women, and the women's hair is down and not covered in Roman fashion, and there's a whole bunch of

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:14

spiritual gifts happening,

Karin Peter 1:01:16

We know what's going on in there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:18

Right people who didn't know what spiritual gifts were, or there's prophesying and things like that people walking by would go, ah-ha! There that's pretty strange.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:29

Tongues will wag. So, so part of part of Paul's concern about about women keeping their you get, you can render keeping their hair up in Roman fashion, and not just hanging loose, like you might find in certain temples, right, for certain reasons. To hair up, or head or head veiled Roman women typically wore something over their heads in public. The reason he's concerned about that, is because people can see into the houses, (and can understand what's happening.) And he doesn't want to,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:01

Yeah, so that's one of the ways of understanding what's happening there. And, and, you know, he gets quite frustrated, because there's times when he this is one of those places, like, just stick with convention, what's what's, you know, what's publicly appropriate? Let's just do that. And let's not make this a big deal. or kind of like the well do it, because I say, so you know, the thing.

Karin Peter 1:02:27

But it's easy to see how this gets, this gets literalized (Yes, yeah.) And so then people start pulling these separate pieces out, and all of a sudden, women have to wear a hat in church, because they point back to Paul, Paul said, because it's not in context, right? We haven't understood context.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:47

Exactly. That's it, you know, we have this silly idea, idea that we can open up a book that was written, you know, 2000 years ago and just read it for face value and assume that in our time, it means the same thing as it meant and their time. And and what else, what other books would we do that with? And so it's, it's that literalism that is kind of inherent in the culture. You know, just the Bibles are easily accessible to everyone. Well, no, it's easily abused by everyone. And there's a big difference between the two. Yeah.

Karin Peter 1:03:29

Okay. Well, that covered my questions up to this point.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:34

Something we'll mention briefly now, but in our next podcast, we'll put up a diagram on is that Paulean scholarship for almost 200 years has recognized that, though there are 13 letters in the New Testament that have Paul's name on them. Only seven of them can be really connected to the historical figure, Paul, and that six of them come from his disciples or students one or more generations after him, writing in imitation of him writing to try and reinterpret his legacy later. So the the seven, the seven, we call them undisputed letters, meaning of undisputed authorship, that, you know, they're they're First Thessalonians First and Second Corinthians, Romans Galatians, Philippians and Philemon. Those, those have the same style, very characteristic Greek style. You can place them all inside what we know of Paul's ministry.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:04:35

They use the same language, his his language styles and vocabulary.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:04:39

Theologically, they all cohere.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:04:42

So his understanding of what Apostle is and what the gospel is. It's all consistent through those, the other six, there's a yeah, there's things in some of them that Paul would never say. And it's like, what do we do with that? And some of those books are the ones where the especially abusive scriptures are, are used for women for its members,

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:05

First Timothy is one of the great problems, of course First Timothy two is one of the great problems. But we you know so so the other six, Second Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and First and Second Timothy and Titus their sixth and we will we will do us a diagram next time that will help people see them in relation to each other. Definitely First and Second Timothy and Titus are from at least two or more generations after Paul, they they clearly come from around the year 100 Or after. So what we have done is we have in the early Christian church is a Paulean tradition. And once the main figure Paul dies, probably by execution enrollments, everybody's best guess,)somewhere between 60 and 65.) Sixty somewhere in there, so some some sometime after that, his team, his disciples, his students, and then their successors are trying to figure out how to deal with new new issues that come up in a Paul-like way. And the Paul-like way to be, let's write letters. And let's write them for Paul. Something we would we have great trouble with today imagining but it's not troublesome in the ancient world is it's common, at least in Jewish circles in some non Jewish circles. So we'll see more about that later. But First Corinthians is definitely an authentic, undisputed Pauline letter. This is This is Paul figuring things out as he goes

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:06:36

With all the attitude and humor that he has.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:06:42

So one of the things that's I think important in this is this is based on Gary Wills, wrote a nice little book a few years ago called What Paul meant. He's a journalist, he's not a New Testament scholar, but he was trained as a classicist, so you can read the original languages, but but it's sometimes helpful to realize that words that are so much a part of our Christian vocabulary have have assumed meanings that might not have been there. So, for example, Paul uses the term apostle littering Greek it means somebody who sent like an emissary or an ambassador. And for Paul, there are more than 12 of them. He just he, he distinguishes the 12, and then all the apostles. So there wasn't a quorum of 12. In Paul's mind, there were 12 original ones, but then, then the term apostle meant something bigger to him not so that's different.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:07:37

And the woman that he named as an apostle, he would have seen as in that bigger category that he fit into as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:07:45

So the term church, this is a hard one for us. In the New Testament, church is never a building, right? The Greek word Ecclesia refers to people not not a place. And so Ecclesia means literally to be summoned or called out. And so when Paul uses the term church, he's not thinking of an institution with structures and offices. He's thinking of a community.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:08:10

And he's not even thinking of a building, right? Because the first Christian churches, evidence of there being such a thing is not until the second or third, late in the second century, early third, where there's an identifiable building just for Christian worship.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:08:28

He does use the term overseers and servers, bishops and deacons. But these are not offices, per se, these are functions within Christian community. And so there's not there's not the sense I mean, Paul is the patron as apostle, but he only he pulls rank only when he has to, it's, it's, it's meant to be a much more equalized experience. And then the term gospel he when Paul uses drum gospel, he means the message he is preaching about the crucified and risen and present Jesus. He's not talking about the biography of Jesus, there aren't gospels yet.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:09:11

And definitely not talking about the church.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:09:14

Right? And he has, he knows some sayings of Jesus, but and he knows what happened on Jesus last night. And he has seen Jesus, he knows Jesus was crucified, he has been encountered by the risen Jesus, but he doesn't have a full biography or anything like that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:09:30

And again, to just to remember that there won't be one for you know, the first gospel will be written after after Paul's death. And so there's not there may be some beginnings of coordinating stories and organizing them into things that can be read. But yeah, there's no gospels written yet.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:09:54

The term Christian doesn't exist yet. Paul refers to members of the Church as being "In Christ", those who are in Christ doesn't have an adjective Christian. So he will refer to them as saints. But saint of the term here means those who have been set apart, or set apart for a task, kind of like in the Hebrew Bible, you know, the the holy the bread that is holy is bread that has been separated for a particular task. It, it doesn't have, it doesn't have new properties, its its properties are connected to the task has been set apart for. And so that's what saint means here. It doesn't mean people who are more holy than others, because he calls the Corinthians saints.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:10:46

All of them!

Karin Peter 1:10:47

Not just the wise ones. Yes, absolutely.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:10:51

And so I think, finally, something that's really important is that in ancient world, imitation, imitation of the teacher, was the most important way to learn stuff. And so one of the ways reasons Paul comes off as highly authoritative at times is because, look, he's got no gospels, he's got no New Testament. He's got oral traditions. And he's got himself in his experience that has been okayed by other apostles, but that's it. And so how do you teach people to be Christian to be in Christ? Follow my example. That's all he's got. And so that's going to, that creates this kind of authoritative feel, sometimes that is off putting, but

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:11:37

But this is the cultural way in which people learn, you know, is they follow their, their instructor, their tutor. And so he's saying this is, this is one of those places where he's, he's tapping into the norms of the day, you know, just like you would follow, you know, an esteemed teacher, do what I do, follow, and then will be become more natural than, then you'll begin to see how this affects what you do daily, rather than like, wait, can I do this? And I, but I can't do this? You know, instead of trying to figure out what the rules are, how do you live into this? And so he's saying, Well, I've been doing this longer than you have. Try this, do what I do.

Karin Peter 1:12:20

Here's some tips.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:12:22

So these communities obviously copied the letters and kept, kept these letters alive, this became their one connection to their, their teacher. And thus, over time, then, the as when they gathered for worship, if they, if they had readings, if they had readings from the Jewish Bible, in Greek form, like the Septuagint. And then then then they were reading segments of this, this letter that they copied and say from Paul, that's one of the ways that the letter started to have different associations is that they were connected with Jewish Scriptures. And thus, that's, you know, that's one way there's, there's, there's more to canonization in that, but it's certainly one one feature of it, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:12:58

Okay, all right. So we're gonna take a look at the passage a passage and see how we might connect with it. And just as, as we always do, we'll remind people about how we approach scripture. And we approach it as human writings that are trying to communicate their experience with God with Christ with the Spirit, in their own time, and in their own context, and with the language and abilities and and abilities that they may have. We believe that in listening to their journey with God, that we can learn some things for our own. So scripture becomes a meeting place with God, rather than words dictated by God, or laws that are created by God that we all have to live by somehow. So it's scripture is a place where we meet other people who are on the same journey and meet something of a god for them. And maybe for us, too. So when we read Paul's letters, we get glimpses into the lives and the congregations of Christians in the first century CE II, and we see how they are trying to figure out this new religion. It's pretty new. This is you know, when Paul's in Corinth. This is still a 20 year old religion, 2025 year old religion, and it's still in Judaism, it's still under kind of the bigger umbrella of Judaism. And so this is brand new, and for, especially for Gentiles, who don't have perhaps any Jewish background or any familiarity or very little familiarity. So what is this following Jesus all about? And especially if we're trying to translate into our everyday life? So, it was a challenge then, and it is a challenge now, and so, we our hope is that there may be some things in this Stories, in this case of Paul and and this early congregation that may have hints for us in our journey. So so we can tell a little bit about the makeup of the congregation in Corinth. We know that the troublemakers, for the most part are the privileged ones, the ones who think they've already arrived or think they're superior, what they have to say or think, of course, should be heard, you know. And it's almost like, perhaps for them that this new religion is a kind of a place where they can flaunt their intellectual superiority or, or their spiritual gifts or their wisdom, as we were talking about earlier. It's another place where they can be the experts, and they can impress one another. And Paul is not impressed. They mostly in his mind, they're mostly don't get it. In First Corinthians, Paul is correcting them. But he's also speaking to the quiet majority of the congregation. And we know that a good number of the congregation are day laborers. We know that poverty is the norm for many, that with day laborers, you work all day, you get enough money at the end of the day, to feed yourself and your family. And you do it again tomorrow. And we knew, we know that this congregation is made up of men and women, free and enslaved people, children, there's people all across the social all up and down the social ladder, which is a challenge. And so we get a bit of a sense that

who Paulus is talking to. So yes, Paul needs to reteach the privileged that this is not their clubhouse, where they are the main feature and has to keep reminding them this is about God. And more specifically, this is about Christ Jesus. But his words of correction to the one group are also meant to be words of encouragement to the, to the humble members who do get what this is about. So Paul, as their founder, and you'll hear this in the passage we're going to look at here in a minute, is quite vulnerable. And and these, he does this frequently to great effect, I think, is he he names his own weaknesses. He just puts it out there, he's vulnerable about his own insecurities in his fears. And he compares his weakness then to the confidence he has in Christ, rather than confidence in himself. So let's take a look at this passage.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:18:00

And it's at the end of the first chapter of First Corinthians, and the beginning of the second. And I'll just go ahead and read it. Consider your own call, brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world, to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world, to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world. Things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are so that no one can boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that as it is written, like the one who boasts boast in the Lord. So if you can imagine yourself being in that the lower rungs of the of the social ladder of this time, Paul's just been talking to you, and telling you who you are, and how that's different from what the culture tells you. And then we'll go on into the beginning of the second chapter. When I came to you brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you and lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible word Words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit, and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom, but on the power of God. And that's the New Revised Standard translation. So we're gonna let, so we get a sense here, that he's really pointing out these conflicts between what is confront conventional status building, and, and cultural practices that tell people who they are, and this completely different thing that Jesus makes possible in their midst. So my first question for us to consider is if you were a woman, a male slave, a female slave, or a child, how might you hear Paul's words? What might they say to you, about you? And just think about that for a minute? What would those words say to you about you?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:21:07

You can really begin to see how unsettling this would be for the norm of social norms. So now, what I want you to do is I want you to consider two or three people that you go to church with, or who are followers of Christ in another setting. And if you want to really challenge yourself, these can be people that are annoying to you. Or people you may disagree with on some in some arena. So I want you to take a few minutes. Now if you can, if you want to stop the recording and, or sometime today, I want you to quietly consider what gifts from the Spirit at are at work in their life? Be open and be willing to be

surprised, because one of the things that Paul keeps coming back to over and over in First Corinthians is that the Spirit is poured out on all and gifts of the Spirit are come from all, not just the wise, not just those who are comfortable speaking in public, it comes from all, but it's also for the benefit of all, it's not for you to raise yourself up and say, Oh, look at me, I have this gift of the Spirit. But it's, it's for the benefit of the community. And so take a couple minutes to think about those people and see if in just some quiet, and maybe openness to the Spirit, you can start to name and identify how the Spirit is using them and their gifts for the benefit of your congregation or their congregation if it's not somebody who's in yours. So Paul also does this other thing that makes us very uncomfortable. And he's kind of honest about our inner workings as people. He knows that human beings have this tendency to be egocentric. I know it's a surprise, where we want to be focused on ourselves. And you get the sense in many of his writings that he has struggled with that and maybe still does. And so when he recognizes it, and when he sees it in his congregations, he recognizes it right away, and he calls it out pretty pretty quickly. So part of for Paul, the spiritual journey, or the journey with Christ is to recognize to be honest with ourselves about our own, sometimes mixed motives in church life. So this is one I think, if we let ourselves we might recognize ourselves, where do I find myself wanting my needs, my ideas, or my spirituality to be the main focus. And sometimes we might find that in our resentment that other people are the focus or feeling like I don't get to do enough, there's visible upfront things. But for yourself, Where do I find myself wanting my needs, my ideas or my spirituality, to be the main focus? And then from there, how can I redirect my focus to Christ and the good of the community instead? So this is for Paul. This is conscious choosing to follow Christ is not just a reflex, it is a choice. And so how can I redirect my focus away from me to Christ and for the good of the community? So some challenges from Paul's writings.

Karin Peter 1:25:18

Thank you, Charmaine, those are really helpful, not just the questions, but the thinking about people that tick us off and trying to think about how Paul might respond to our whining about them. So, the diverse, dysfunctional multicultural setting of the church in Corinth was a great one to start with. So we'll see where we go from here with Paul. But I did find a quote that I think wraps up our episode pretty well. So I'll share that as kind of our closing going in and it's from Namsoon Kang, who's a professor of theology and religion at Bright Divinity School at Texas Christian University. And she says "Theologians, (and I put in parentheses disciples, because we are both as we go through these scripture classes) are to look to the beyond community, beyond nationality, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, religious affiliation, because God the divine, who is the primary frame of reference for theologians, and disciples, is for better or is with in among those individual human beings. It is to reaffirm the sheer truth that no one is better or worse, superior or inferior than any other. And Ich bin du, wenn Ich Ich bin," I think is the pronunciation on that. "I am you when I am I" is the end of her quote. So we'll thank Naamsoon Kang for that, quote from *Cosmopolitan Theology: Reconstituting Planetary Hospitality, Neighbor Love and Solidarity In An Uneven World*. I think that's the perfect letter to send the Corinthians today. So with that, I hope you join us for our next episode of new brew. We're going to see the flip side of Corinthians by checking out the Galatians and until then, I've Karin Peter with New'Brew, this has been

fun, which surprised me. So thank you, Tony and Charmaine are scripture guides and thank you to our listeners.

Karin Peter 1:25:54

Thank you.

Josh Mangelson 1:28:02

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