

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: March 14: 2 Corinthians 5: 1-15: Some Notes

Helpful to remember, looking at all the references to the body as a tent, that Paul was a tent maker, and probably had experience of living in a tent on his travels. (Air B & B not always available.) The body debate prompts a bit of reflection (again) on the human bodies in Paul's world. On the whole, the Jews didn't buy into either the Classical world's liking for the body beautiful (though the Song of Solomon....., and disability was seen as a bit of an impediment in Temple worship); or into the Classical philosophy which saw the body mainly as an undesirable prison for the soul (though you get the odd hint of that). Jews tended to see the whole person as being God-given, and the body as the means by which to do God service. This is better balanced than seeing the body as the means of sinning – as Jesus noted, bad things can go on in your head, and not just through your body. We are on a journey, using our bodies as best we may and within the limitations imposed by age, disability, etc. At the end of the earthly journey, we shall be clothed in a new body that doesn't wear out. Tom Wright makes the point that we use clothes in this life to keep warm and for modesty; but also to express ourselves. To a greater or lesser extent (women more than men?), our clothes make statements about who we are.

If you get weary with the theological debate, maybe focus on "A little bit of heaven in our hearts", and the main thing is cheerfully pleasing God now. Then there is "His Love has the first and last word in everything we do"; and "One man died for everyone".

The Corinth Judgement Seat was a platform 8 feet above the ground where justice was handed out very publically. Not least at a time when many people have entirely understandable feelings about what ought to happen to Vladimir Putin, it is very difficult to talk sense about the Final Judgement....and to reconcile judgement for things done or not done with "justification by faith" and "salvation by free grace, God's grace". We have some Old Testament narratives suggesting a vengeful God, quite keen to take it out on sinners. We have human justice systems ranging from the one-sided, through the corrupt and the ill-informed and the democratic but biased, to the fair but still sometimes imperfect. It isn't always easy for such justice systems to establish the facts. It is always hard for them to deal with the context and the motivation. (If I had that person's background and circumstances, would I also be "going down" for a term?) And then there is punishment. We might be a bit questioning about meeting X in "heaven"; but are we serious about wanting X to "burn in Hell for ever"?

The poem in the March magazine illustrates beautifully the dangers of simplistic thinking.

Maybe the best we can do is hang on to Paul's assertion that Christ died for ALL. His intention was inclusion, not exclusion. The Christian belief is NOT that only declared Christians "inherit heaven". Nor is it that if your declaration of faith in Christ is in no way reflected in how you live, your "faith" will compensate for your lack of action. Incidentally it seems very unlikely that you will be "marked down" for doubts being mixed up with your

faith. “Never for one moment doubted” sounds more like a dodgy boast than a simple statement of truth. If the notion of a Final Judgement is valid (as opposed to an on-going process), maybe think appraisal interview with your best friend, who really does know it all, good and bad; rather than a public trial with 144,000+ witnesses.

One other re-assurance in this text: We are urged to be courageous. As the commentaries say, that doesn't mean being fearless/ without fear. Courage, as Ukrainians have been saying recently, is facing up to fear, not being exempt from fear. The demands on our courage might not be in the life-threatening category. But speaking up for an unpopular cause or standing up for a currently unpopular person may demand courage.