

Nov 26-Dec 2

Week 48

Continuing in Act 3, scene 4 of the Bible's story this week, we will complete 1 Corinthians and then read 2 Corinthians. This is not only some of the richest material in all of Paul's writings but also some of the most difficult material to interpret. Use good reference tools to help, including a study Bible and a good commentary. Some of the concepts here might seem foreign to you, but read carefully to understand the nuances of Paul's arguments.

As you read 1 Corinthians 15, watch for the analogies Paul used to describe the nature of the resurrection body.

Second Corinthians was written during a very difficult time of ministry for Paul, when he was traveling from Ephesus back to Corinth in about AD 56. Tune in to his description of authentic Christian ministry.

Day 1

Read 1 Corinthians 9-11

Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 18

Paul's letters to the Corinthians indicate that Paul had a rocky relationship with this congregation, and 1 Corinthians 9 reflects that tension. As you read, can you pick up on the criticisms some were leveling against Paul?

In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul reintroduced the topic of idolatry and the balance between Christian freedom, based on right theology, and Christian responsibility for the way our actions affect others.

Chapter 11 begins a section in which Paul dealt with several issues surrounding worship. The apostle discussed head coverings and the Lord's Supper. Scholars disagree about what head covering means, whether it was a veil or the woman's hairstyle. But from a cultural standpoint a woman's wearing her hair down or shaving her head sent clear signals. Married women wore their hair up, and single women wore their hair loose and flowing. In a Jewish context free-flowing hair could be a sign that the woman was suspected of adultery. Short hair could indicate that a woman had been convicted of adultery. So Paul seemed concerned about signals sent.

The Lord's Supper was often taken in the context of home meals. Some people were treating the Lord's Supper and other believers insensitively. Read with an eye to that issue.

What are some modern equivalents of the head-covering issue you read about today? Are there areas of worship that Christians might treat with insensitivity?

Day 2

Read 1 Corinthians 12-14

Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 19

Today we continue with issues related to worship services. Some of the Corinthians were suggesting that everyone should exercise the gift of languages. Paul said this reflects a misunderstanding of the body of Christ, which has variously gifted parts. The supernatural ability to speak in other languages is a gift, but it is of lesser importance and must be kept in perspective and under control. The use of the gifts must be done in love (see 1 Corinthians 13), which is the key characteristic of authentic Christianity. In addition, gifts should be exercised in light of their effect on others. Thus, gifts that edify others in the church are more important than other gifts. Paul was especially concerned that worship services be orderly to build up others in the faith.

What is your spiritual gift or gifts?

How are you exercising the abilities God has given you to build up others in the body of Christ?

Day 3

Read 1 Corinthians 15-16

Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 20

As Paul wrapped up 1 Corinthians, he gave us our richest, most extensive theological reflection on the topic of resurrection. As you read, notice several things.

1. Paul appealed to Jesus's resurrection as the basis for his teaching. Broader Judaism in the first century had no explanations of the nature of the resurrection body. But Paul provided that, for the first witnesses had seen Jesus in his resurrection body and had talked to him.
2. Paul appealed to the historical reality of the resurrection, suggesting that the historicity of Jesus's resurrection was vital to the Christian movement.
3. Notice the hope reflected in this passage. Believers have much to look forward to. This hope gives us a basis for enduring now (see 1 Corinthians 15:58).
4. In chapter 16 look for clues about Paul's ministry and dynamics in the early church.

Think about the reality of Jesus's resurrection. In what ways does it give you hope?

Day 4

Read 2 Corinthians 1-4

Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 21

None of Paul's letters express the apostle's heart more openly than 2 Corinthians, which the apostle wrote during a very difficult time of ministry. In this letter, written in about AD 56 while Paul was traveling from Ephesus back to Corinth, he vied for the affections of this congregation. False teachers had come in and distracted the believers from the true gospel. Paul seemed emotionally and spiritually bruised, but from his struggle we have a profound reflection on the nature of authentic Christian ministry.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 as the opening of the letter, looking for clues about the situation behind the letter and criticisms that had been leveled at the apostle.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 introduces the great central section of the book on authentic ministry.

How do Paul's reflections affect your understanding of your ministry as a Christian?

Day 5**Read 2 Corinthians 5-9****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 22**

Continue to reflect today on the nature of authentic Christian ministry. Notice how Paul appealed to the Corinthians to separate from those who would hurt them spiritually. Also notice that authentic Christian ministry involves suffering. This is normal for the Christian life that is lived for the advancement of the gospel.

In 2 Corinthians 7:5 Paul picked up where he left off at 2:13 in describing his travels.

2 Corinthians 8–9 offers rich, deep reflections on the nature of Christian giving.

What are some expressions of sacrificial generosity in your life?

Day 6

Read 2 Corinthians 10-13

Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 23

Paul concluded the book by writing about the false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church. His words were harsh because much was at stake. Although many in this church had responded well to the exhortations of a previous letter—one that has not come down to us—in which the apostle had rebuked them (see 2 Corinthians 2:4), a strong pocket of resistance still existed.

Notice the various dynamics to which the apostle appealed as he set himself against these false teachers. Watch especially for what Paul understood to be the role of weakness in a powerful ministry.

Do you know true and false ministers today? How do you distinguish between them?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 48

This week's readings in the Corinthian correspondence show Paul at his pastoral best. He continued to tackle the mess these believers had created for themselves. In the middle of his discussion on using spiritual gifts properly and other concerns about worship, he inserted his famed meditation on love. In 2 Corinthians, he spoke to the believers who had reconciled with him, encouraging them to give generously. He also scolded those who were still unrepentant.

Prayer/Meditation

Lord Jesus, thank you for your grace to the Corinthians, first in sending Paul to share the good news with them, and second in Paul's writing them so patiently when they developed so many problems. Lord, this gives me hope for myself, for it is so easy for me to get off track in my spiritual life. Thank you for not giving up on your churches. Help me to live in the way of love that Paul described, for "love never ends" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Amen.
