Study notes on The First Paul

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan

The objective of these notes is to provide a terse summary of the contents of the book by Borg and Crossan. I hope that it will help in your own study, and maybe also provide you with a background for leading study sessions and discussions.

Why is The First Paul important to me?

I have found that it helps me to make better sense of the life and work of Paul, fundamentally important for the development of Christianity.

What about the authors? The authors of the book are Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, theologians based in the USA.

Marcus Borg was Canon Theologian at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon, and a retired Professor of Bible studies.

John Dominic Crossan is a theologian, formerly a Catholic priest, later Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, DePaul University, Chicago. Both have spent their lives in Jesus studies.

What is significant to me about this book?

It makes full use of the enormous increase in knowledge about life in New Testament times and the meanings of the words used at that time. We now have available written accounts of some events contemporary with Jesus and we can amplify the meaning of events in the New Testament by relating them to those reports. For example, the meaning of ‘Messiah’ and ‘Son of God’, which we now know, were both applied to the Emperor in Rome during the lifetime of Jesus.

Is this approach the right one?

This is for you to decide. I make no claims for the truth of what is said, I can only offer some views and encourage discussion as you continue on your journey.

Is this sort of thinking a good idea?

I think that we may all tend to retain ideas about Jesus which we first heard when children, and which have never developed. It is naturally disturbing to be presented with new ideas which may be a long way from those we are familiar with. It could be natural to oppose those ideas, and hope that they would go away.

But I will assume that we have an ecumenical outlook, and might call ourselves liberal. It is likely that we are all deeply concerned with Jesus, as are the book’s authors.

Why this particular book?

I use this book The First Paul because I believe that it looks more carefully at what was really happening in Paul’s own time than most other commentaries on the life and work of Paul.

But remember that our book is a product of particular authors with particular backgrounds. You may learn from it, but you should not accept it as the only possible view. Interpret it as you can, which is all that we can do with everything we read. Some will say the Bible does not err. What they usually mean is that their interpretation of what the bible seems to say brooks no discussion.

I have found it stirring to study The First Paul, and hope it will help you to develop your understanding of Jesus and of Paul for yourself.

What is in the book?

The authors follow up all traces of Paul in the New Testament, and associated history of the times in other sources. This includes: all the letters attributed to Paul, though they find that not all show real Pauline thought; and also Acts of the Apostles, attributed traditionally to Luke.

The notes are designed to support discussion sessions based on the original publication, and follow the Chapters and subdivisions of the original book to enable cross referencing. All the blue numbers indicate page numbers in the original book.

However, it is also possible to read these notes on their own, to remind us of the book’s message.

Chapter One Paul: Appealing or appalling? 1-27

Paul is second only to Jesus in the foundation of Christianity. But his reputation is mixed. He can be quoted to support opposing viewpoints. Nevertheless, he is central to the New Testament. 13 out of 20 books are ‘by him’, that is, bear his name. In Acts, more than half the chapters are about him. So half the New Testament is about Paul.

Paul led the move to convert Gentiles to ‘The Way’, a Jewish sect. Over time, the new Christianity became a new religion separate from Judaism. This was never intended by Jesus or Paul. Both were Jews with a passion for the God and people of Israel. And reading Paul led others, like Augustine, in new directions. At the Reformation, reading Paul was decisive for the Protestantism of Luther and Calvin. In 18thC, reading Paul led Wesley to try to reform the CofE, but eventually he ended with a new Church, Wesleyan.

The Catholic and Protestant Paul 5:

The two groups see Paul differently. For Protestants, Paul is the foundation of their theology. In reformation times, the ‘protestant’ Luther saw Paul’s ‘Saved by Grace’ theology as joyful liberation from anxiety at not measuring up, so going to Hell etc.

However, other ‘protestants’ claimed that belief in the words of Paul’s teaching are essential for entry into ‘Heaven’. This is still the case. But for Roman Catholics, Paul is a Saint, his letters are sacred, but not central to their beliefs or teaching.

Our aim here is to get Paul out of the Reformation world and into the historical Roman world where he belongs.
Paul the Spoiler  8
Many people have very negative views of Paul: They say he is too theological and abstract. And since they do not understand Paul’s situation in life, his letters mean little to them.

Passages from some letters said to be from Paul seem to endorse the subordination of women, to castigate homosexuality, and to support oppression by rulers. As a result, some say that Paul systematically distorted the teaching of Jesus, that he converted the message and the actions of Jesus during his life into abstract teaching about the person of Jesus of his own invention.

This book says NO to all that. We admire Paul as the first writer on Jesus, and a creator of radical Christian communities across the Roman world.

Meeting the real Paul again  11
Borg and Crossan’s book is based on their views that some letters ‘by Paul’ are reliable, while some represent the later views of different authors using Paul’s name. Note that none of our studies will suggest that any section of the words of the bible are inerrant, whatever that may mean in practice.

Three Pauls  13
We suggest here that there are three types of ‘Pauline letter’.

Of the authors of the 13 letters:
• Seven are probably by Paul: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 3 long letters;
  1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 4 short letters;
  We say that these seven letters represent the radical Paul.
• Three are certainly NOT by Paul: The Pastorals, 1/2 Timothy and Titus;
  We say that these represent a reactionary ‘Paul’, nothing like the seven.
• Three are questionable, probably NOT by Paul: Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians. We say that they represent a conservative ‘Paul’.

There is also a book mostly about Paul, but without his name on it, viz:
• Acts of the Apostles: This has a different aim, to show the successful spread of Christianity from Judea as far as Rome. Written by a ‘Luke’.

We will use the seven letters of the radical Paul as the basis for his original teaching. We also use Acts where relevant. Note that the other letters ostensibly ‘by Paul’ often oppose the first seven in their teaching.

Problem: where Acts and the Letters overlap and don’t agree, which is righter?

Historical Context  16
We need to ask: What was happening at this time? What was the author relating to? What did the words and allusions mean to people at that time, the historical and literary setting? We see this context as three concentric circles.

The inmost circle: the local community to which Paul wrote.
The next circle: The early Jesus movement within Judaism.
The final (outer) circle, the context within the Roman Empire.

Note: Paul’s letters are not teaching about Jesus and his doings; his readers already knew about that. Except for those in Rome, Paul already knew all the communities he wrote to very well. So his letters are about local problems.

Paul was the original reader’s friend and fellow member in the Jesus movement, known as ‘The Way’; together they looked for Jesus’ meaning for Jews and Gentiles. Paul was totally Jewish, so we also need to know how the Gentiles (non-Jews) came in. All those he wrote to were under the power of the Romans, and Paul was executed by the Romans, like Jesus. Paul directly challenged the usual way of living in ‘this world’, meaning the normal way of living under the Romans; that is, destroy anyone who gets in your way.

A Jewish Christ Mystic  19
We say Paul was one of these. We define Mysticism as a vivid sense of union with God, an illumination, ‘having the mind of God’, an enlightenment. In 2 Cor.12:1-4 he describes a typical mystical experience. Paul’s (mystic) experience on the Damascus road changed his life.

This experience is described three times. He glimpsed reality, but “through a glass, darkly”. His direct experience of the risen Christ led him to oppose Rome’s ideas on how people should live.

Chapter Two. How to read a Pauline Letter  29-58
How can we understand a letter which was not written to us?

Our book uses Paul’s short letter to Philemon as an example. Philemon is the owner of a former runaway slave, Onesimus, who has been doing important work for Paul in Rome. Paul is sending him back to his former owner with a request to treat him as a friend and equal, just as Philemon relates to Paul.

How can we convert a letter from Paul to Philemon into a story which helps us to understand Paul better? We need to:
• Look critically at the letter itself.
• Compare it with what we believe to be Paul’s genuine letters.
• Consider its implications within diaspora Judaism, the environment in which groups of Jews lived as communities outside Israel.
• And finally, consider the environment of such Jewish groups within the Roman Empire.

The focus of the Philemon letter is on the concept of slavery.

Paul is making an emotional appeal to Philemon,
that he should treat Onesimus, his former slave, as an equal. Our book claims that Philemon shows the genuinely radical Paul in action. When we look at the other letters attributed to Paul, we see that he consistently promotes equality for all in those letters we consider to be his own.

In contrast, in letters not now attributed to Paul, conservative letters, e.g. Colossians, Ephesians, seem to accept slavery as normal, while a reactionary letter, Titus, unlikely to be by Paul, seems in direct contradiction to the view of slavery shown in Philemon. We must look harder at what each letter says.

The radical Paul on Slavery 31

- Conventional greetings: “From Paul and Timothy our brother (the scribe)”. This implies that Philemon is their brother and trusted associate.
- The meaning of “In my chains” is illustrated by another prisoner in same period, who is chained to a soldier. The soldier could be bribed to make things easier. Even so, Paul is a prisoner, could be killed at any time.

Paul makes clear the extent of his problems and his suffering, so his request to release Onesimus from slavery places enormous moral pressure on owner Philemon, and is cleverly argued.

The conservative Paul on Slavery 45

To be fair, there were problems in releasing slaves: other slaves might flee, or turn on owners. So Paul’s message was soon tamed, in both Colossians Col. 3:22 - 4:1, and Ephesians (probably copied from Col.). In both, the slave situation is seen as normal. But actually, even those views were liberal; no owner would allow someone even to speak to his slave.

The reactionary Paul on Slavery Titus 2:9

In Titus, there is no advice to slaves, but to the masters only: “Tell slaves... to show complete fidelity...”

But is Philemon on Slavery special just in that specific topic? Is Paul’s radical attitude related only to slavery? Consider patriarchy.

The radical Paul on Patriarchy 48

Paul’s views on equality extend to wife/husband; to female/male in Christian groups, and to the female/male leaders of these groups.

Paul was ascetic and celibate himself, but insists on marriage rights for all others; there is equality of sexes in abstinence, divorce, virginity, and he deliberately balances advice between male and female.

However, we have a problem in 1 Cor 7. Is this a special situation, where married women are going about appearing as if unattached? Paul suggests that wearing the veil shows a marriage commitment, not subjection. It is only a custom, as a ring is today, but may it also be useful to save confusion in local society?

The conservative Paul on Patriarchy 53

Colossians and Ephesians talk of wives as subject to husbands, children subject to fathers, slaves subject to masters: an entirely different view.

The reactionary Paul on Patriarchy 55

The Pastoral Letters, said to be to Timothy and Titus, junior colleagues of Paul, imagine Timothy in charge at Ephesus, and Titus as overseer in Crete. That is, they assume a stable church organisation typical of a much later date than the 60s when Paul himself was active. This implies that these letters were not written by Paul.

The terrible text is 1 Tim. 2:11-15: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission...” And yet, this also implies that some women were not submitting, even at the real later date of these two letters.

Finally, we must consider 1 Cor 7:1-36. This is placed in a radical type of letter, but it seems to be a very reactionary statement. However, there is clear evidence that this is a later insertion, it doesn’t fit into its context, and is treated so in recent detailed textual versions.

Note: Women are clearly equal in apostleship in the earliest times. See Cor 1 16:7 re Junia, called an apostle. When the church later became male-dominated, there were attempts to say Junia was a male name. This was obviously untrue.

The Deradicalisation of Paul 57

So both slavery and patriarchy show Paul’s message being ‘tamed down’ in later writings attributed to Paul, in conflict with his earlier letters.

Chapter Three. The Life of a Long-distance Apostle 59-92

We use Paul’s radical (we say therefore genuine) letters and also ‘Luke’s’ Acts of the Apostles, remembering each authors’ aims and particular historical situation.

Tarsus 59

From Acts, Paul was born in Tarsus, Cilicia, A Roman province, frontier city, in both Greek and Semitic worlds; to the West, Asia minor, to the East, Israel and Egypt. He grew up with a strong work ethic, in a University city and in Jewish synagogues. It is suggested that Paul also contracted malaria “the thorn in the flesh” from local marshes.

There is no sign that Acts, written at end of first century, knows of Paul’s letters from AD 50ish. The Acts writer had different objectives.

Tarsus to Damascus 65

Paul letters and Acts agree that he was a fervent Pharisaic Jew. And he remained so. Forget bad views on Pharisees in the gospels; they were ‘zealous for God’ and observed purity laws. Acts says Paul was taught in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, and was a Roman citizen. Unlikely; Acts is upgrading Paul. Why did he persecute Christians? Maybe because they said the Kingdom has come, that Gentiles can join, and there is no need to be specifically Jewish, while he was a fervent Jew.
Both *Acts* and *Letters* show that this experience was a turning point for Paul, but provide different details of the event.

The *Vision of Christ: Acts* says Paul was commissioned to arrest dissident Jewish Christians in Damascus. This was not possible. Jerusalem Priests had no trans-border power. But *Acts* blames ‘the Jews’ for everything.

*Light from Heaven: Acts* says three times that Paul, on the road to Damascus, saw a light only, and heard the voice of Christ. Re Damascus, the *Letters* say only Paul saw Christ, realised what he had done, went off to Arabia, and then only returned to Damascus (where he had probably been persecuting Christian preachers when he had his vision)

*Paul as Apostle:* In *Acts*, ‘apostles’ means ‘the twelve’. Paul is not one of them. But he is sent out by the Antioch church to help Barnabas on outreach, so an apostle in that sense (Greek apostolos = sent’). Paul claims in the *Letters* that he was directly made an apostle by God, even if “the least of them”.

**The Nabatean mission**

In *Galatians*, Paul says he went immediately into Arabia for three years, but not why. *Acts* does not mention this, but afterwards both tell of his ignominious departure from Damascus (lowered in a basket). *Acts* says he got out because Jews plotted to kill him. *2 Corinthians* tells the fuller story: Aretas (King of Nabateans) took Damascus from Herod Antipas (Jewish) while Paul was ‘in Arabia’; so Paul (Jewish) was soon forced out of Damascus when he returned there. Same facts in both, different interpretations.

He then went into *Syria and Cilicia* (Paul tells the Galatians). Tarsus in Cilicia was Paul’s home, did he go there to recover from failure in Arabia and Damascus? This is supported by *Acts*: “Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for ‘Saul’, and brought him to Antioch(Syria)”. *Acts* says that Paul (Hermes) was junior to Barnabas(Zeus) and provides detail. *Suggestion:* The writer of *Acts* clearly had detailed journey notes on Barnabas, and assumed that Paul operated similarly. Barnabas tried to convert Jews along the way, but had more success with Gentiles. Did Paul get that message quickly?

At Antioch, the big question was whether the eucharistic meal should be kosher (Jewish OK food) for Jews and Gentiles. This was important for Paul later.

Then Barnabas and Paul disagreed. Paul went off on his own, and focussed on major Roman cities. He tells us three times in Galatians that Peter would be the Apostle to the *circumcised*, while Paul would be for the *Gentiles*, as agreed at the council around AD 50. And the Gentile Christians could remain *uncircumcised*. So Paul would never go to synagogues and contact Jews as part of his mission (as told in *Acts*). But he could talk to the 'gentile' god worshippers who also went regularly to the synagogue. Their limited numbers, only in limited places (89) explains how he had by mid-50s ‘done the East’ and could then move to ‘the West’.

Note that all Paul’s readers seem assumed to be familiar with Judaism.

Paul’s communities were small e.g. a total of 2000 people in the Roman Empire, in networks of friends. So a few dozen in a city. Meeting places small, no churches, but workshops. We don’t know how often they met; Paul never told of a community’s regular practice. Was *The Lord’s Supper* commemoration weekly?

We have to reconstruct from the *radical* Paul letters only. The other letters, wrongly attributed to Paul, represent later developments, types of organisation and viewpoints in various Christian local communities.

**Chapter Four. Jesus Christ is Lord**

Before Jesus was born, Caesar Augustus (31CE-14CE) was given all the titles used later for Jesus. eg: Divine, Son of God, God, God from God, Lord, Liberator, Redeemer and Saviour of the World (Not just the Roman Empire), and Atoner.

So all these titles are familiar in official Roman theology.

What is the difference between the claims of Augustus about himself and of Paul on behalf of Jesus?

Our book shows the difference by quoting two inscriptions from 50s AD about Jesus Christ and Nero. Both are claimed to bring *Peace on Earth*.

What does Paul claim by this statement? Many quotes throughout his letters. “Peace comes through justice and goodwill to all.”

What of Nero? Borg and Crossan visited Priene (Turkey) and quote an inscription there, how “Nero saved all and brought Peace by conquest”.

**Our Lord is THE Lord.**

In Acts 25:25-27 Governor Festus writes to Herod Agrippa that he needs to know what Paul has done wrong so that he can write to “The Lord”, Emperor Nero, and explain why he is sending Paul to him.

Paul uses two expressions for Jesus, “The Lord” and “Our Lord”. He oscillates between the two in all his writings. This is on purpose. Calling Jesus “The Lord” implies that “Our Lord” Jesus is “The Lord”, which implies that Emperor Nero is *not*. This is high treason, punishable by death, so Festus certainly has something to write to Rome about.

The Roman vision of Peace is through military conquest, with the Emperor as “The Lord”. So what does calling Jesus “The Lord” imply?

**The Justice of Equality in Christ Jesus**

Paul’s letter to the Galatians explains: “If you were baptised into Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, … slave or free, …male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus”.

All are equal inside the community, but that equality should spill over into all of life.

**God as Householder of the Earth**

Where did Paul’s vision of equality come from? Other Jews had said the same before: e.g. Philo: “Justice is the offspring of equality”. Paul saw a loving God like a Father, a householder responsible for all his children, that is, all people. And caring for them all equally, which was very radical, not like the Greek and other earlier Gods.
Problem: “Be subject to Governing Authorities” 116
Rome has produced peace through violence, conquest. How can peace come through distributive justice? Romans 13:1-7 seems difficult to justify. “Let everyone be subject to the governing authority...pay taxes...” Borg/Crossan suggest Paul has overstepped in his caution to prevent Christians’ violent opposition to tax gathering, which was widespread. It was more important to demonstrate a Christian life than to die just for rioting over taxes.

Alternative visions of Peace 120
The crucial difference between the programme of Caesar and Christ is between peace through violent victory and peace through non-violent justice.

Chapter Five. Christ Crucified 123-154
These two words are the main message of the radical Paul.
Nowadays salvation is all about an afterlife. But Paul meant life before death. Christ died for ALL, not just a few members of a Christian sect.

Two things Misunderstood. 125
1. That there was nothing else in the message except about physical dying.
2. That Jesus died as a substitute for us. This idea was first detailed by Anselm of Canterbury Cur Deus Homo in 11th Century His theory is:
   • All people are disobedient, so all are sinners.
   • Forgiveness requires compensation to be paid to God.
   • But, he argues, the debt to God as infinite being is infinite, so no one finite can pay the price. Only Jesus as infinite and part of God can pay by his death. Then we can be forgiven.
We suggest that this is bad history, bad anthropology, and bad theology.

Paul’s Understandings of the cross 129
For Paul, Crucifixion always went with Resurrection. The Cross on its own would mean nothing for Paul. It is given meaning only by the following Resurrection. Together they are a ‘revelation’ (model) of the nature of God.

The meaning of Atonement.
This is precisely a means of reconciliation. Which presupposes a previous estrangement and a return. Nothing to do with Anselm’s paying a fine.
What is the extra significance of the cross, if not substitutionary sacrifice?
Paul had many ways of explaining atonement:

As a revelation of the character of the Empire. 131
‘Christ crucified’ implies that Jesus was anti-imperialist. But He was not just killed. Crucifying was a form of death reserved for rejectors of the Roman domination: for Plotters against the state, State Terrorists.
But Christians say that God has vindicated Jesus. He has said YES to Jesus, and NO to Roman power.
The ‘wisdom of this world’, is what motivates the world’s (Roman) rulers. Their ‘domination system’ was founded on the new technique of large-scale Agriculture, which made food production not a necessary job for everyone, so that towns could arise, and their inhabitants could be dominated by violent Roman rulers. Jesus offered an alternative way of living for all people in community.

As a revelation of the Way to God; Participatory Atonement 137
For Paul, Jesus’ death and resurrection is a metaphor for the change we can make in our own lives: Galatians 2:19-20 “I have been crucified with Christ; so it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”.
We change our life by following Christ.

As revelation of God’s character 141
Paul talks of Jesus dying for others, and as a ‘sacrifice’. Jesus as a revelation of God’s character, showing God’s passion for this world, being ready to die for all people. Not retributive justice.

The Meaning of Resurrection: God has raised Jesus. 147-154
Borg and Crossan do not believe that it was the purpose of God that Jesus should be born specifically to die on a cross as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of all humans.
He died at the hands of the Romans because they was no way that such a trouble maker who preached a radically different version of the meaning of peace and justice could come to Jerusalem at its busiest time (Passover) and be allowed to continue to present his case in the most public place, the Temple forecourt. And the Jewish elders also wanted Jesus destroyed, because they had been made responsible for maintaining good order in Jerusalem, and they were directly responsible to Pontius Pilate for this job. His death was inevitable only in that he directly attacked those in control, both the ruling Jewish elite and their Roman masters.

Chapter Six. Justification by Grace through Faith 155-183
These words are especially important to Protestants; both Luther and Calvin (original leaders) stressed being saved through grace, not works.

Roman Paul, not reformation Paul 155
Borg/Crossan concentrate on the letter to the Romans, the only letter explaining his views fully. Justification by Grace through Faith forms the first section of Romans.

Common misunderstandings. That it is all about how to get to ‘Heaven’. And many protestants since the Reformation think Faith is about beliefs with a bit of works, compared with traditional ‘works’ (what clergy tell you to do). So they think it is all about faith versus works. Wrong.
Paul always talked of transforming this world. It was about faith in this great task, always with resulting works, against works without faith, eg thoughtless actions and the repetition of stock phrases.
The meaning of ‘Righteousness’ and ‘Righteous’: We talk of ‘Justice’ and ‘Just’ but gloss over the real problem, what sort of Justice? and how achieved? Nowadays justice mainly means retributive punishment. If so, how is it ‘Good News’ (Gospel)? But there is another, distributive, justice: a just distribution of God’s earth to all. To everyone, Jew and Gentile. Paul is really talking about this.

The Jew first but also the Greek 161
Paul says all people have sinned, that is fallen short of the righteousness told to the Jews in their covenant, and to the Gentiles in a good creation. However, righteousness is not achieved by understanding this (from the Law or from the wonder of creation), but by doing what is right. Paul speaks in the terms of his place in time. We may put it differently, but the failure remains.

The Righteousness of God has been disclosed 164
How to bridge the gap between our ideal and what we actually do? Paul says: “The righteousness of God is granted for the justification of humanity through the sacrifice of Christ.” Borg and Crossan say that this has been profoundly misunderstood. It is nothing to do with punishing Jesus for our sins. Let us interpret. The righteousness of God is the distributive justice of a parent for their children. All receive equal portions, The justification is not authorising us to pretend that we are righteous, But it is our transformation “…from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18), following the pattern of Christ.

We participate in the sacrifice, the ‘making sacred’ of Christ’s life and death, as we follow him “day by day”. His life was a revelation of a non-violent God. We die with Christ to the violent normalcy of ‘the world’.

Justified by God’s Grace as a gift 167
Paul says we are “Justified by God’s grace as a free gift” (3:24)
Not given a free gift, but freely offered the gift of grace. Just like the air: it is on offer to all, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, everywhere. We do nothing to merit it, we depend completely on it, we are free to reject it, or accept and use it as a gift. Paul says righteousness is the same. We can collaborate by free acceptance. We accept it through faith in Jesus as a pattern of God. However, ‘faith’ is not assent to a statement, but commitment to an ongoing programme. Faith is lived, not merely agreed with.

Apart from the Law, sin lies dead 169
Remember that in Paul, ‘faith’ means ‘faith with resulting works’. The works inevitably follow from living by the precepts of the ‘faith’. He contrasts this with ‘works’, his shorthand for ‘works without faith’, giving an external impression of doing good works without any commitment to principles. But what does Paul find wrong with ‘Law’ (general Law, not the Jewish Torah)?

There are two problems with ‘Law’ for Paul. 1. Knowing it implies an onerous responsibility to obey it. 2. But knowing the Law doesn’t help us to obey it. Law and Sin. Paul means all types of Law: Jewish, Roman, and the leadings of conscience. Law defines what is wrong, but even the best Law does not empower us to follow it. Paul’s theology was not about resurrection after the bodily death of a particular man Jesus after a ‘normal’ life. Possible bodily death was ever-present from birth for all in Roman times, three quarters were dead by age 26. This was not the type of death being talked about, but the terrible premature death of a good man on a mission by unjust execution, through shameful crucifixion.

Is death at the end of life or is violence the last enemy? And how does Sin come into this? All law can only define what is wrong (sin) when we fail to conform, but it cannot help to achieve the good life.

The groaning of Creation 173
Paul’s vision in Romans chaps. 1–8 is that all people, seen as Jews and Greeks (Gentiles, non-Jews), should share in a global peace reached by non-violent means. In the Hymn to the glory of creation at Rom 8:19-23 redemption is about recovering peace for all in this world, not the individual promotion of the self in some other world (heaven).

Focussing down: The Unity of Jews and Christians 174
Paul now looks at a special subsection of people: The Jews. A few of these, his Jesus followers, see Jesus as Messiah but most do not. Paul, a Jew, is distraught to see that most Jews will not join him. He searches scripture to explain this, and now sees his Gentile converts in the Synagogues as finding Jesus first, with all Jews coming into line in some hoped-for future. So further progress lies with the Gentile ‘God-worshippers’ in the Synagogues, with the Jews hopefully brought into the fold later. But what happened later in history? ‘Christianity’ swallowed the rest of the known world while leaving the Jews separated on their own. But Paul can still praise God for this new method of promoting Jesus Christ.

The focus narrows: The Unity of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians 178
In Rom 12:1-15:21 Paul wants unity in all his groups. What was problem? Weak versus Strong: This was about his Jewish followers observing Kosher food laws. He tells the weaker brethren to observe them, while the strong
Why should we see it this way?
Through getting Paul out of Reformation times and back into Roman times we can better understand his message. His message was for artisans, not scholars, not priests, and needed to be simple. Yet it was also profound.

**To heal a divided World** 158
This is the main subject of Romans: To get rid ALL injustice imposed by violence.

To reunify three divisions of the World’s people:
1. Gentiles and Jews (Rom. 1:16 to 8:39)
2. Jews and Christians (Rom 9:1 to 11:36)

Paul’s words would be shocking to his Roman friends; in prescribing God’s peace on Earth for Rome, against Romans’ belief in divinity incarnated in the Emperor.

Useful to read the Letter to the Romans while reading these notes.

**The Unity of Gentiles and Jews** 159

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**Apart from the Law, sin lies dead** 169
Remember that in Paul, ‘faith’ means ‘faith with resulting works’. The works inevitably follow from living by the precepts of the ‘faith’.

He contrasts this with ‘works’, his shorthand for ‘works without faith’, giving an external impression of doing good works without any commitment to principles.

But what does Paul find wrong with ‘Law’ (general Law, not the Jewish Torah)?

There are two problems with ‘Law’ for Paul.

1. Knowing it implies an onerous responsibility to obey it.
2. But knowing the Law doesn’t help us to obey it. Law and Sin. Paul means all types of Law: Jewish, Roman, and the leadings of conscience. Law defines what is wrong, but even the best Law does not empower us to follow it.

Paul’s theology was not about resurrection after the bodily death of a particular man Jesus after a ‘normal’ life. Possible bodily death was ever-present from birth for all in Roman times, three quarters were dead by age 26. This was not the type of death being talked about, but the terrible premature death of a good man on a mission by unjust execution, through shameful crucifixion.

Is death at the end of life or is violence the last enemy? And how does Sin come into this? All law can only define what is wrong (sin) when we fail to conform, but it cannot help to achieve the good life.

**The groaning of Creation** 173

Paul’s vision in Romans chaps. 1-8 is that all people, seen as Jews and Greeks (Gentiles, non-Jews), should share in a global peace reached by non-violent means. In the Hymn to the glory of creation at Rom 8:19-23 redemption is about recovering peace for all in this world, not the individual promotion of the self in some other world (heaven).

**Focussing down: The Unity of Jews and Christians** 174

Paul now looks at a special subsection of people: The Jews. A few of these, his Jesus followers, see Jesus as Messiah but must do not. Paul, a Jew, is distraught to see that most Jews will not join him. He searches scripture to explain this, and now sees his Gentile converts in the Synagogues as finding Jesus first, with all Jews coming into line in some hoped-for future. So further progress lies with the Gentile ‘God-worshippers’ in the Synagogues, with the Jews hopefully brought into the fold later.
But what happened later in history? ‘Christianity’ swallowed the rest of the known world while leaving the Jews separated on their own. But Paul can still praise God for this new method of promoting Jesus Christ.

**The focus narrows: The Unity of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians 178**

In Rom 12:1-15:21 Paul wants unity in all his groups. What was problem?

**Weak versus Strong**: This was about his Jewish followers observing Kosher food laws. He tells the weaker brethren to observe them, while the strong need not. Paul’s theory: “Nothing is unclean in itself”, so no problem. But we must be sensitive to the feelings of the weak, To the weak he never says don’t be Kosher, just don’t judge others who aren’t.

**With fear and Trembling 181**

Paul’s good news in Romans is that God’s spirit is offered to everyone unconditionally, and that we are free to accept in faith or to reject. So why in Philippians 2:12-13 is “Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling...”? This is not fear of eternal damnation. It is facing the problem of how to live a good life in this world, attuned to ‘peace’ through violence and domination; This is the problem of all people today in the face of religious extremists, who will use violence to achieve their ends.

**Chapter Seven. Life together “in Christ” 185-213**

Paul often uses: “In Christ”, “Spirit of Christ”, “Body of Christ”, “Brothers”. What did it mean for a local community?

Paul believed that a New Era had begun with Jesus. The Christian ‘families’, non-biological, would replace the old family groups destroyed by bad urban living conditions in the Roman Empire.

**Share Communities 188**

We assume early Jesus communities were ‘share groups’, sharing spiritual and some material wealth. But not selling all possessions as in Jerusalem.

Evidence: “Give us this day...”. Income in cities was uncertain; so problems with freeloaders living off the others. Paul says we should assist only those with real needs.

**Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles in Galatia 191**

As evidence of sharing wealth: When Paul was ill, they supported him. But when he moved away, Judaising extremists in the group insisted on circumcision for all. Paul angry because he had said in Christ such practices didn’t matter, he felt betrayed. We suggest that he was for real equality of all, not just group unity.

**Rich and Poor in Corinth 197**

Corinth was the only place with both rich and poor in a group. Paul talks of problems for the rich. eg the need to share food at meetings with those who had none. Also problems with some better than others at, eg ‘tongues’, ecstatic speech. Paul says that only Love matters. Love is the heart of justice, and justice is love in action in society.

**Two Ways of Life: Flesh and Spirit 205**

Paul was not against normal shared living together. By ‘works of the flesh’ he means a material way of life not in the ‘spirit of Christ’. eg. anger, quarrelling... instead of peace, patience...

**Paul’s ‘Farewell’ letter to Philippi 207**

Paul thought Philippians letter could be his last, he was close to them, so he summed up his message in it. The Way of Jesus is a path of personal transformation, opposing the violent normalcy of ‘this world’. And it was costly; he died for it...

**Epilogue: The Death of an Apostle**

To preserve Christian Unity 215

Paul ended Romans with greetings to 27 people known to him, he saw it as last will and testament. He must take contributions from his churches to the poor community under James in Jerusalem. He asks for help against ‘unbelievers in Judea’, the Jewish conservative wing insisting on circumcision (like ‘only male priests’ nowadays). All his writings show great concern for the collection (for poor Jewish Christians). But conservative Jerusalem Jews would attack him when he took uncircumcised Christians (in Paul’s version of Judaism) into the Temple. As feared, Paul was then arrested and started on his final journey to Rome for trial.

**The Martyrdom of Paul 219**

The writer of Acts probably knew how Paul ended. But it was not in his plan to end his story with a martyrdom, so nothing is said. Therefore neither Acts nor the Letters say what happened. We can rely only on conjecture, a mix of existing traditions, and more scholarship.

Two main suggestions.

- Paul was freed and went to Spain for two years, then came back and was killed under the Neronian persecution. As reported in 1 Clement, end of first century.
- Paul was not freed and never went to Spain. Tacitus, Annals, tells the story. There was a terrible fire in Rome in 64. Nero was suspected, so he blamed the Christians in Rome and killed them all.

**Consider:** Paul could have let others go to Jerusalem with the money. But he cared too much about keeping the Jewish(Kosher) and Gentile(non-Kosher) wings of the church together, so he had to go. And he knew it might be to his eventual death. It was.

Notes on The First Paul by Borg and Crossan

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