

Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time
Sunday Forum – April 17, 2016

Conflict in the Early Christian Communities
Controversies about Gender, Money and Work, Sex and Sexuality,
and Culture



modern icon – origin unknown

Conflicts about Gender – Women and Leadership

Romans 16:1-16

I Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33b-36

I Timothy 2:8-15

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

What was Paul's attitude towards women in the early Christian communities?

What do we know about women's leadership in the early Church?

Why conflicting New Testament texts about women and their role in the Church?

Resistance to Greco-Roman cultural norms

Assimilation to Greco-Roman culture

Textual complexities – Which texts are original to Paul? Which not?

Conflicts about Money and Work

I Thessalonians 4:9-12, 5:12-22

II Thessalonians 3:6-15

I Corinthians 11:17-34

James 2:1-13 (not a Pauline letter)

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ²For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

⁸You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Work and The Second Coming of Christ

Eschatological expectation and behavior

Paul's attitude towards the Second Coming

Paul's attitude towards work and Christ's coming

Money and Poverty: Rich and Poor in the Early Churches

Jesus' welcome of rich and poor alike

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ²as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. ~ Luke 8:3

³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ~ Matthew 25:34-36

Letter of James admonition about treating rich and poor with equal love and honor

Conflicts about Sex and Sexuality – Judgment and Forgiveness

Romans 1:18-2:11

I Corinthians 5:1-3; 6:7-12

Paul's "Natural Theology"

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ~ Romans 3:23

Paul and homosexuality

Did Paul have a concept of homosexuality at all?

Natural vs. unnatural

Sexuality and idol worship – Temple prostitution

Paul and heterosexuality

Paul on Judgment and Forgiveness

All are fallen

All are shown mercy

All need to repent

Judgment belongs to God, the merciful and righteous One

To judge is to despise the kindness, patience, and forbearance of God

Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ²You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." ³Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ~ Romans 2:1-5

Conflicts about Culture and Religion

Galatians 3:28

Romans 11:1-32

Jews and Jesus' Followers in the days of the early Churches

Paul's attitudes towards Jews and Judaism

Israel as olive tree – beloved of God

Gentiles as wild olive branch grafted on

God's power to cut off branches, graft branches, and graft in again the ones cut off

Mystery of God's ways

¹¹So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹²Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! ¹³Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry ¹⁴in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! ¹⁶If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. ¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. ²²Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. ²⁵So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, "Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob." ²⁷"And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." ²⁸As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

³³O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵“Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?” ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. ~ Romans 11:11-32

Implications for Life at Trinity and in the Wider Church

Normality of controversy-conflict

Don't panic

Controversy as part of how God shapes, prunes, grafts

Awareness of matters of conflict

Opportunities for wonder and mercy – instead of judgment

Awareness of our sinfulness

Our tendency to judge can keep us aware of danger and opportunity

Chinese character for conflict = danger+opportunity