

Sixth Summary of the New Testament on 1st and 2nd Corinthians

It is crucial to mark the "book-ends" of 1st Corinthians, it begins with the crucifixion and ends with the resurrection. We cannot overestimate the importance of these aspects of the work of Jesus Christ. Note what St. Paul says are the things of "first importance" at 1st Cor. 15:3f.: 1) Christ died for our sins; 2) Christ was buried; 3) Christ was raised; 4) Christ appeared! It is also important, however, to note that 1st Corinthians gives us tremendously important teachings on the life of the Church. Through such works we see that the Church is not a man-made institution, it is not man's idea! It is God's creation, it is most definitely God's idea; and we are not allowed (as Christians) to treat our belonging to the Church as an optional or incidental thing. 1st Corinthians 11-14 is a tour de force on "The body of Christ." What is fascinating here is that the body of Christ (the Church) is given by the Lord Himself "His Body (and His Blood)" in Holy Communion. That is, the body of Christ receives the Body of Christ! God is teaching us about how He feeds and nourishes His people, His Church, His body! This is a tremendously important article of the faith that is so often swept aside in the modern church! God intends to nourish and strengthen His people. The question is whether we will be strengthened according to His Word and will, or through our own "private" opinions and preferences? In addition, having been fed, Christians are to realize that they are not "islands unto themselves," they are in fact "members" of the body of Christ (chapter 12). In addition, God teaches that each Christian is given a spiritual gift through which to serve the rest of the body; this is an exceptional gift that makes you unique and frankly, needed in the body of Christ (in fact St. Paul uses the word, "indispensable" to describe your value to the body in the 12th chapter). Do you know your spiritual gift? If you don't, you should pray daily and ask God to reveal it to you; and then when you know it, use it! Use it to be a blessing to others and use it to help in the saving work of the Kingdom! The final thing about 1st Corinthians is Prof. Middendorff's point about context and culture. In that time and culture, the "headship" of husbands was manifest in head coverings for their wives. This helps us to appreciate that some things in the Bible are culturally qualified. However, the "principle" behind such customs endure throughout all generations. For example, Ephesians 5 describes the basic roles between husbands and wives that show that the unique nature of each role continues through all times and all places. The culture of course in criticizing Christianity makes a mockery of "headship," and proves that it is not understood. In fact in Ephesians, St. Paul teaches that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the Church. To what extent did Christ love the Church? He gave His life for her! This is how husbands handle their leadership...in the humility and sacrificial spirit of Jesus Christ! When the culture understands that, then they will be in a position to properly analyze our faith! 2nd Corinthians is a jewel! I would like for you to consider these verses in chapter 5: verse 15, verse 17 and verse 21. Verse 15 teaches us -- quite frankly -- about what life is "all about" for the believer! It answers the question, "What are we living for?" Verse 17 answers the question, "What are we?" (now that we are in Christ); and verse 21 describes the "Wonderful/Blessed Exchange" that perhaps explains what the Gospel is better than any other single verse in Holy Scripture. Look, its this simple: Christ took your sin; and you took Christ's righteousness. Think of that transaction! Christ said to you: "Here, you take my righteousness and I'll take your sin." As a result, He suffered God's judgment and punishment; and we were set free as the righteousness of God. That's the Gospel/Good News! It has been said that if you do not

believe that Jesus took your sin, then it is impossible to be a Christian. The Christian is someone who KNOWS that their sin was given to Jesus and that Jesus willingly accepted it and died with it in order to pay for it! // I also do not want you to miss 2nd Corinthians 12. It is profound and it is an insight that describes maturity in the Christian life. Look, we don't go around asking for suffering. We are not capitulating to psychological pathology (like sadomasochism). But when we come to understand that suffering serves a PURPOSE in the life of the Christian, then we understand that the whole of our lives have been sanctified (and not just the "good times"). Through the days of trial, we seek the ultimate source of help: the Lord! In this seeking, we experience what faith does: it trusts and leans on the Living God. St. Paul got to the point in His spiritual journey that He said, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2nd Corinthians 12:10b) Those trials drove him to be closer to the Lord! In addition, soak this in: the greatest suffering the world has ever known (i.e. the sinless Savior who took upon Himself the sins of the world) accomplished the greatest benefit that the world has ever known (i.e. the binding of the devil and the payment for the sins of the world)! No, we don't go around looking for suffering; but when it comes, there is always meaning in it and God works through it in mysterious ways. This doesn't mean that we should like the suffering (that would be a sick thing to suggest), but we also believe that God works through it and often when we least expect it, in ways that lead to our greater blessing.

In Christ, Dr. Espinosa