

Bible Study Reflections for Sunday, May 17th, 2020

John 14:15-21 ... (From Raymond E. Brown's translation)

If you love me and keep my commandments, the Father will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot accept since it neither sees nor recognizes him; but you do recognize him since he remains with you and is within you. ... Whoever keeps the commandments that he has from me is the man who loves me; and the man who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and reveal myself to him."

My Note: "Paraclete" is the Greek word for "comforter" and is used by John to define the Spirit ... possibly seen within the early Christian community, grieving Jesus, as one who comforts.

Question: How does John connect "commandments" to God's love?

An Observation: John's Gospel tends to be the most philosophical, and the most introspective, of the four; so what might the word "commandments" mean to this unique Christian philosopher?

1 Peter 3:13-22 (From John H. Elliott's Translation)

Who then shall harm you if you are zealots for what is right? If, however, you should suffer for doing what is right, how honoured ... for it is better to suffer for doing what is right, if this should be God's will, than for doing what is wrong. ... Because Christ also suffered for sins once for all, a righteous one for the unrighteous ones, so that he might bring you to God.

Elliott detects a pattern in the lives of the early Christian community: just as Jesus suffered, though innocent, and was "saved" by God, so early Christians, also innocent, suffer but are "saved" by God.

Question: Is it truly necessary to "suffer" in order to be "saved"? There was a stream within Christianity where its followers allow self-mutilated in order to "be saved". Have we experienced times when other Christians have used the theme of "suffering" as a sign of God's love for us?

Psalm 66:8-20

(From Mitchell Dahood's Translation) *But you tested us, O God, you refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the wilderness, put ulcers on our thighs; you made sickness rule our head; we went through fire and through water, after you had led us out of abundance. ... Had I been conscious of guilt in my heart, my Lord would not have heard me. But God did hear me; he heeded my voice in prayer. Blessed be God! Because he did not dismiss my prayers, his kindness I will retell a hundred times.*

Acts 17:22-31 (from Johannes Munck's Translation)

Paul stood in the middle of the areopagus (a hill in Athens) and said, "Athenians, I find that you are rather given to religious observances, in the worship of your gods. For as I was walking around looking at your shrines, I came upon an altar on which was written: 'To an unknown god.' The one whom you thus honour unwittingly is he whom I am preaching to you. ... Indeed he is not far from any of us, for "By him we live, move, exist,' as some of your poets also have expressed it: 'For we also are his offspring.'

Altars to unknown gods have been found in other cities, but not in Athens. Paul was not introducing "foreign" gods, but God who was both known and unknown.

Questions to Ponder, maybe ...

1. If we were to imagine ourselves in Paul's sandals, how would we go about persuading others that the One we worship is "Unknown" and therefore known!
2. How does this reading from Paul connect with the reading from John, and/or Peter, and/or the Psalmist?