



Suggestions for discussion and then group work after reading both scripts and comments:

Bible Study Script 1

Concentrating on the excitement and obligations that go with becoming a Christian, oneness and bearing with each other in love, here is a Q&A script. This brings in some background of Paul and the early church; something on the current situation; and something on the relevance of all this to our own lives.

Q. So who does this Paul think he is? He spent the first part of his career trying to do for new Christians and next minute he's telling new Christians what to do! Why should they - or anyone else - take any notice of him?

A. Some people didn't. Paul can come across as opinionated and arrogant and this made some first century Christians irritated. But Paul never tried to hide the person he *had* been. So in a way he lived out the idea of repentance and forgiveness. And he was so motivated and excited by his mission! Motivated and excited people are motivating and exciting.

Q. So we get crowds of motivated, excited people flying off in all directions

A. Which is exactly why there was a need to hold them together. If they did fly off in all directions they'd have been just another crazy cult. And they'd have burnt out. That was a real danger: no social media in those days to organize people and get them to meetings: just word of mouth and long distance walking. It could so easily have become a mass of splinter groups, like some political movements. Disunity doesn't work!

Q So what kept them together God?

A. Jesus prayed to God for it!

*I'm praying not only for them
But also for those who will believe in me
Because of them and their witness about me.
The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—
Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
So they might be one heart and mind with us.*

Q I see the *need* for unity, for oneness. How loving a unity do you think it really was though? And even if it was a loving unity back in the first century, how loving can Christians be when they're living with injustice? Christian women in Israel meet systematic intolerance and injustice just because of who they are. Does being a Christian mean they have to put up with it.

A. It depends. Jesus taught us not to resort to violence and to retaliate with aggression but with forgiveness, sacrifice and love.

Q. That wouldn't make him popular then or now

A. But he always called out injustice

Q. That wouldn't make him popular then or now either

A. It didn't and it doesn't. Back then some were disappointed he didn't lead a rebellion against the Romans. The great and the good of Israel didn't like his criticism. Many saw his crucifixion as a failure.

A. But his teaching: his parables like the good Samaritan and the prodigal son, showed the power of bearing with one another in love. And his own courage - standing up for the woman caught in adultery, facing down scribes, Pharisees, Herod, Pilate and the power of the Roman Empire show that he wouldn't turn a blind eye to injustice, or back down in the face of worldly power.

Q. So whose power was behind him? God's?

A. Jesus showed us what God was like: what God *is*, like. Look at the end of Matthew's gospel and the parable of the sheep and the goats: we find God in each other, in *all* others

*I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'*

37-40 "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the

solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'

Q. Too difficult!!

A. Until we think of Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa. They're not universally popular but they caught a mood. They could see another way. And it changed the world.

Q. But it only works if there's a powerful movement behind them to tip the balance.

A. Exactly. That's where we come in...

Bible Study Script 2

The 4 people represent how the early church members might have reacted.

A: (Irritated) This is asking too much. Has Paul any idea what it means for us to be Christians in our context? He is asking us, in our busy, complicated lives to *do* things – extra things - when we are already run off our feet just surviving! When we're surrounded by people arguing about more or less everything, all we can do is not to say anything that seems to contradict them - which will make them worse - or agree with them - and that could offend someone else! It's easier to keep our mouths shut...

B: How can we feel a one-ness when there are so many differences between us? People drift into our Christian company from all sorts of backgrounds and what do they find but people who are different from them? Jews find Gentiles; those who are free, or even have Roman citizenship, find slaves; the educated find the totally ignorant; people from respectable homes find runaway criminals and street children. Maybe Paul is asking us not to look at one another and see the differences but to think of Jesus and how HE related to people – not putting them down or making them feel inferior and unwanted but each person feeling respected and valued. Don't we have to see people as he saw them? Even if their being and background makes us shrink from them, or laugh at them, or turn away from them.

C. But that *really is* a whole new way of relating to people – that *is* asking too much, isn't it? I mean, we will have to learn to be quite, quite different – not getting into groups and having a giggle or being shocked at how someone behaves. We are being asked to become quite, quite different – gentle even, and much, *much* kinder.

D. But I guess that is exactly what he is asking. Gosh! That means I cannot say what I think of my mother-in-law any longer or that awful boy from a posh family who has turned up and looks down his nose at more or less everyone in church! I guess we all

have to think not of ourselves and how WE feel but try to think what Jesus thought of each person who turned up which is very demanding, isn't it? We have to learn what it means to put up with each person who turns up – not reacting out of our natural selves but the selves we are IN JESUS. Help! Paul is asking a lot, isn't he? Let us think about some of these things that WE have to put up with and discuss how we have to change in order to become like Jesus.

Leader: As we think of what God is asking us to pray for in OUR day and age, let us think of the sort of people we need to become to be like that. What do we need in order to come up to the standards we are expected to have? Divide into groups and make up a prayer and then ask each group to share their prayer with everyone saying 'Amen'.