

Addis Ababa Bible Training Institute Report

Agape Meals, Potlucks, Unity, and Conscience



A large part of the joy of teaching cross-culturally is what one learns through the teaching. We just finished studying the book of First Corinthians. There is a huge amount of cross-cultural material in that book. It makes for some very productive explorations of not just the Biblical text itself but the ways in which those doing the studying are influenced by culture. (I'll get to the pictures above after some introductory discussion.)

Our 19 students in the current class of the AABTI represent 8 different tribal groups with 8 different “mother” tongues/languages and their associated cultural differences. As we studied 1 Corinthians, we had some very helpful and interesting discussions regarding the challenging topics of sexual immorality, eating meat sacrificed to idols, loving Christian fellowship, and un-loving Christian fellowship, etc. There were no major surprises in these cross-cultural and “conscience” issues areas. But there were some interesting things to me.

One issue was that of different methods of “greetings” and Paul’s bringing up the “holy kiss.” The brothers mentioned a particular tribal group in Southern Ethiopia that greets one another, whether

male or female, by kissing on the lips. They all agreed with me that that practice would be very uncomfortable (conscience) for all of us.

As we discussed the “love feast/agape meal” practices in Corinth, I mentioned the American practice of “potlucks.” I was pleased to hear of a similar practice that is especially common in the Sidamo region where Deborah and I have spent many months (probably more than a year) over the years. Despite all that time there, I had not known that the Sidama churches are more commonly known for something very akin to our “potlucks.” But the word they use for those fellowship meals are best translated “Unity” meals. Isn’t that so appropriate?

The topic of fellowship meals finally brings me to the pictures above. These were taken just two days ago, the night before the students’ final exam for the 1 Corinthians class. The pictures were taken in a newly constructed “cafeteria” attached to the dormitory the students live in. You’ll notice several young people that were present. These are young people that currently live on the compound that houses the deaf school. Our AABTI students have a regular evening devotional (in addition to their 5:30AM and 8:30AM devotionals). They invite the children to attend the evening devotional and encourage them to do Bible memory work.

This meeting time together was partly to honor and award these young people for their efforts. It was a truly encouraging thing to see. Moges, one of our teachers, told me of one 8-year-old male who was particularly studious who tells Moges he intends to be a preacher when he grows up. The church here is very good about using their young men to participate in the assembly.

One final thing, the top left picture shows a large building in the background – that is the Deaf School. But it also houses the classroom the AABTI meets in. The steps you see in the background, going up between the young lady and young man sitting across from me in the picture, are the steps leading up to our classroom. Many blessings to each of you,

Jim Wilson and the students of AABTI