

**UNIT 3 NEW TESTAMENT****LESSON 6****FIRST CORINTHIANS****Paul in Corinth**

Paul stayed longer in Corinth than in any other city, with the single exception of Ephesus. During his second missionary journey he left Macedonia with his life in peril and crossed over to Athens. There he had little success and he had gone to Corinth and remained there for 18 months. The story of his stay there is compressed into 17 verses - Acts 18:1-17. It is small wonder, after his experience in Macedonia and Athens, that when Paul came to busy, proud, intellectual Corinth, he came in 'weakness and fear, and in much trembling' (1 Cor. 2:3). His companions on this missionary journey, Silas and Timothy, were occupied to the north in Macedonia, so that Paul was probably alone, which would not have made things any easier.

Following his arrival in Corinth, Paul lodged with Aquila and Priscilla, Jews who had been expelled from Rome by a decree of the Emperor Claudius, and, like Paul, tentmakers by trade.

Paul was soon speaking at the local synagogue regularly every Sabbath. Converts were won but this led to a riot. He announced he would turn to the Gentiles, which he did, starting a church in the house of Titius Justus, presumably a Roman. For 18 months Paul ministered in the city, finally setting off for Jerusalem and Antioch.

**Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians**

We have spoken above of Paul's founding visit to Corinth in 50-51 AD (approximately). We have knowledge of two other visits: the so-called 'painful visit' and a visit after 2 Corinthians had been written and despatched. (See 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1 'the third time' and 2 Cor. 13:2 'the second time'.) Closely related to these visits is the Apostle's correspondence with the church he founded. We have knowledge, it seems, of at least four letters Paul wrote to the Church:

1. The 'Previous Letter'
2. 1 Corinthians
3. The 'Severe Letter'
4. 2 Corinthians

It was when he was in Ephesus in AD 55 that Paul learned that things were not all well in Corinth and wrote to the Corinthian Church. There is every possibility that the Corinthian correspondence, as we have it, is out of order.



The most widely held theory on the apostle's relationship to the Corinthian Church by way of correspondence and personal visits is as follows:

1. Paul's initial visit to Corinth on his second missionary journey.
2. The 'previous letter' in which he warned the Corinthians not to associate with immoral persons (1 Cor. 5:9). This letter is apparently lost.
3. The arrival of Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:11, 16:17) and others and of a letter from the Corinthian Church (see 1 Cor. 7:1).
4. Paul writes 1 Corinthians and apparently dispatches it with Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17).
5. Upon hearing adverse reports, Paul pays a personal visit to Corinth: 'the painful visit' (see above). His personal confrontation is so complete a failure that it almost breaks his heart.
6. Upon his return to Ephesus, Paul writes the 'severe letter' (2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8) in an attempt to rectify the situation. Some say that this letter has become part of 2 Corinthians (chapters 10-13) - note the change in tone at the beginning of chapter 10. However, this is conjecture, and probably this letter is also lost. The letter was sent off with Titus (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13).
7. Unable to wait for an answer, Paul sets out to meet Titus. He meets him in Macedonia, learns that all is now well at Corinth and probably from Philippi, writes 2 Corinthians (cf. chapters 1-9), the 'letter of reconciliation'.
8. He later spent the winter at Corinth (where he probably wrote 'Romans') prior to proceeding by way of Macedonia to Jerusalem with the collection for the poverty-stricken Christians.

### **Purpose**

The immediate occasion of the epistle was the letter which Paul had received from the Corinthian church (see 3 above), and to which a reply was necessary. Accordingly he wrote, answering the questions that had been put to him (chapters 7-15) about marriage and celibacy, food offered to idols, public worship etc. Paul wrote to resolve these difficulties.

But what mattered much more to Paul was clearly the news that had come to him independently of the letter. Paul was troubled about the divisions and party-strife within the church, immorality and taking legal action against one another (chapters 1-6).

Barrett said of Paul's purpose: "It is a practical letter addressed to a single though complex situation, aimed at telling its readers not so much what they ought to think as what they ought to do - or ought not to do".



## Plan

A study of any analysis of 1 Corinthians will enable the student to see what practical issues Paul grapples with. The following is given by D. Guthrie:

1. Greeting and Thanksgivings 1:1-9
2. Disorders reported to Paul 1:10-6:20
  - a. The spirit of divisiveness 1:10-4:21
  - b. The problem of moral lapses 5:1-13
  - c. Appeals to heathen law-courts 6:1-11
3. Problems raised by the Corinthians 7:1-15:58
  - a. Marriage 7:1-40
  - b. Meats sacrificed to idols 7:1-11:1
  - c. Disorders in public worship 11:2-34
  - d. Spiritual Gifts 12:1-14:40
  - e. Resurrection 15:1-58
4. Conclusion 16:1-24

## SECOND CORINTHIANS

"Of all the Epistles", says W.R. Inge, "the second to the Corinthians is the one which contains the most intimate self-revelations, and few can read it without loving as well as honouring the author."

Writers are agreed that there is more autobiography in this letter of Paul's than any other; the kind of autobiography that lets you into the writer's mind. Of all Paul's letters, this one is the most intimate, unreserved and frank. Paul's weaker points come out here along with his strong ones.

"Surely the most difficult book in the New Testament" says C.K. Barrett. The difficulty principally arises from the fact that 2 Corinthians is a 'real letter'. A letter is dashed off without any outline in mind. The writer just says what comes to mind, without trying to balance his sentences or weigh all his words. He will allude to people and happenings known to himself and his reader(s), but not known to all who may be reading over his shoulder. For example, Paul speaks twice in this letter of a possible 'third' visit to Corinth. When was the second? The Corinthians knew, of course. Again, Paul speaks of a 'thorn in the flesh' which caused him suffering. Very likely the Corinthians knew all about this, and needed no further explanation.

## Unity of the Letter

Many feel that all thirteen chapters as we now have them came from the pen of the apostle in a single letter. There is a complete lack of any manuscript evidence to suggest that more than one letter is contained in 2 Corinthians.



On the other hand, many feel just as strongly that the change of tone and atmosphere of 10:1 is so great that it could not possibly be a continuation of the same letter. Chapter 9 ends with the words, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!" expressing Paul's joy at the generosity both of the Corinthians and of other churches, and the fellowship in God which has resulted from it. But with chapter 10 an entirely different manner of writing and mood in the writer begin. We find jarring sarcasm, violent self-defence, fierce accusation of others. Was this the 'severe letter' or part of it (see above in 1 Corinthians)? Or did Paul receive news while he was writing which caused the change of tone?

Whatever the student concludes about the way this 'letter' was written, and whether it is a letter or letters, finally makes no difference to the value of the letter for us.

### **Purpose**

Our view of the apostle's purpose in writing this letter will be partly determined by our view of the question of unity (see above). However, there do appear to be several motives behind the writing. Chief among them are:

- a. A desire for reconciliation. Upon learning from Titus that the worst is now over, the Apostle is conscious of little but gratitude to God for the outcome of Titus' visit, and he pours forth his thankfulness in glowing words in the early chapters (see 7:7, 9, 14-16).
- b. To prepare the readers for Paul's third visit. He urges them to go forward along the way that Titus had told him they had already begun to tread. There is also the matter of the collection.

### **Plan**

Of all Paul's letters, this is the least systematic. The broad outline is:

1. Greetings and thanksgiving  
The Apostle's Ministry 1:12-7:16
  - a. His plan 12-2:17
  - b. The character of the ministry 3:1-7:16
3. The Collection Scheme 8:1-9:15
4. Paul's Vindication of His Apostleship 10:1-13:10
5. Conclusion 13:11-14



## GALATIANS

Galatians was owned by Martin Luther as 'my Epistle'. "I have betrothed myself to it. It is my wife." By reading this book a light burst upon the soul of Luther, and he nailed his theses to the cathedral door at Wittenberg.

### **Readers, Date and Place of Writing**

We cannot be certain, precisely, to which churches Paul addressed himself, there being two main theories - the Roman province of Galatia in the south of Asia Minor, including the Churches of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra (Acts 13:14-14:23; 16:1-6; 18:23) or Galatia proper in the north.

We may, however, be certain of this much; that the churches of Galatia (1:2) were churches which Paul himself had founded (1:8, 9; 4:19). The apostle speaks of the considerable effort which his labour with them had cost him (4:11). And the first time he preached the Gospel to them he did so while suffering from, or in consequence of, a physical infirmity or ailment (4:13).

### **Occasion and Purpose**

The occasion for the writing of this letter is in no doubt and was something which had come up in the Churches of Galatia since Paul's last visit there. Within a short time (they had allowed themselves to be brought around to another doctrine than that which Paul had again and again preached to them. True, he had previously warned against the danger to which they had now fallen victim (cf. 1:9). At that time, however, he had not yet noticed any signs of the change which was now materialising. Hence the surprise to which he gives expression in 1:6.

The heretical teachers who were responsible for this change (1:7; 5:10, 12; 6:12, 13) taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation (5:2; 6:12ff.) and they demanded the keeping of special days and months and seasons and years (4:10; cf.4:21).

The basic issue involved was the basis of man's acceptance by God.

A related issue was the question of Paul's validity as an apostle and therefore the authority of Paul's Gospel. The Judaisers (heretical teachers) cast suspicion upon Paul's qualifications as an Apostle - he was a compromiser or, at best, a second-hand apostle who had learned everything from Peter and James.

Paul wrote at once a white-hot letter which was so urgent that it lacks the customary greetings, prayer and thanksgiving. His purpose was to counteract this Judaising propaganda, to assert his complete apostolic independence and to explain the deepest principles of the Gospel.



## Plan and Theme

It will be borne in mind that in a writer like Paul, any systematic arrangement of his letters must be more or less artificial especially where, as in this letter, he is stirred by deep feelings and writes under the pressure of an urgent necessity. The letter can however, be divided broadly into three main sections:

Introduction and 'I am astonished' 1:1-9

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|----|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Paul defends his Apostleship          | 1:10-2:21 |
| 2. | Paul defends his Gospel               | 1:10-2:21 |
| 3. | Paul desires the Gospel to be applied | 5:13-6:18 |

After expressing his surprise that the Galatians should so hastily have embraced another 'gospel' which Paul denies is a gospel at all, Paul approaches the problem from three different directions:

1. 1:10-2:21

This part is mainly concerned with Paul's apostolic qualifications. Paul points to his direct calling by God; to his defence of the Gospel of grace at Jerusalem, and to the recognition accorded him by the leaders of the church there.

2. 3:1-5:21

This constitutes the letter proper, so to speak. Paul has, in the previous section, established his authority as an apostle, that he might establish the authority of the Gospel - the Gospel of grace. Paul jealously guards the primacy and all-sufficiency of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. No person could ever earn his acceptance with God; he believed that all a person could do was to accept the love God offered him to make one tremendous act of faith and fling himself, helpless, on the love of God.

In denying the teaching of the heretics, Paul here indicates that, if one is to be called a child of Abraham and to share in his promises, he must seek salvation not in the works of the law but in faith. Abraham's true children and heirs to the promises are all (Jew or Gentile - slave or free - male or female) who've followed Abraham's example in believing; to put it another way, all who are 'in Christ'.

The basic arguments are presented in a more systematic form in the Epistle to the Romans, probably written eight or nine years later.

3. 5:13-16:18

In this last part, Paul shows that the believer's 'freedom from the law' may not become an occasion for licence - presuming upon the grace of God. Thereupon the life of freedom in the Spirit is discussed in detail, and is set in contrast to the works of the flesh. A saved person is a changed person.



**Question 1**

Briefly summarise what happened when Paul first went to Corinth (Acts 18:1-17).

**Question 2**

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul answered many of their questions. What did he have to say to married people (1 Cor. 7:1-5)?

**Question 3**

For what is Paul so thankful in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians? (see especially 2 Cor. 7:7, 9, 14-16)

**Question 4**

What was the false teaching of the heretical teachers to the Galatians? Why was Paul against this? (see Gal. 1:7; 4:10 cf. 21; 5:2, 10, 12; 6:12, 13)

**Question 5**

Read Galatians 1:10 - 2:21 and summarise Paul's defence of his Apostleship.

**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY**

Read Galatians 5:16-25. List the products of human nature. List the products of the Spirit. What does the fruit of the Spirit mean to you in practice?