

# New Testament Survey #3

## I Corinthians: Apostolic Counsel For A Troubled Church

### 1. Authorship

- Paul identifies himself as the author and the personal details included in the letter bear witness to what we know to be the truth of the apostle Paul.

**The evidence for the authenticity of Corinthians is so strong that these writings have become a benchmark by which other would-be Pauline epistles can be measured.**

- Paul wrote to the Corinthians from Ephesus sometime between Passover and Pentecost in 54 AD.

### 2. Background

- The ancient city of Corinth was one of the wealthiest and most profligate in the entire Roman Empire. It had an estimated population of 250,000. Its location on the isthmus between the Aegean and Ionian seas made it a center for commerce and trade. As a result, it had all the problems of a large port city.

**Tourist attraction: Temple to Aphrodite atop 1,900 foot high Acrocorinthus with 1,000 cult prostitutes. Aristophanes: used “to corinthianize,” as a slang term for fornication. Plato: referred to a prostitute, “Corinthian girl.”**

- Paul came to Corinth in 50 AD during his second missionary journey. He soon befriended Aquila and Priscilla and began to work with them in their tent-making business. (Acts 18:1-5)
- Paul preached in the synagogue for a number of weeks, but finally amidst resistance from the Jews, began a ministry to the Gentiles.
- After eighteen months in Corinth, Paul left in 52 AD. He paid a short visit to Jerusalem and then stopped briefly at his home base in Antioch.
- Paul left on his third missionary journey—visiting the churches in Galatia, and finally stopping in Ephesus for two to three years.

- Chloe's people visited Paul in Ephesus with news of factions in the church. Around the same time, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus visited him with financial support and a list of questions.

**Ephesus: Was only 250 miles from Corinth. Travelers continually passed between the two cities.**

- Paul responded to the Corinthians addressing the problems he had been informed of by Chloe's people, answering the questions the leaders had asked, and letting them know he would soon visit them.

### 3. Structure and Themes

I Corinthians is an occasional letter written in response to the situation that had developed in the Corinthian church during the three years between the time Paul left the city and the time he wrote this letter. The structure and themes of I Corinthians center on two things: problems *in* the church, and questions *from* the church.

#### 1. Moral and Ethical Problems in the church.

- The first problem is division.

I Corinthians 1:12: *Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."*

The divisiveness had to do with loyalty to a personality, a wrong perception of the role of the messengers. To correct that problem (and the other ones he is about to address), Paul points the Corinthians to the cross of Christ.

I Corinthians 2:2: *"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."*

- The second problem is lawsuits among believers.

The Corinthians failed to solve their personal disputes among themselves and instead went to secular courts. This was due to their faulty perception of wisdom, for they assumed that pagan judges were wiser than they in solving their disputes (6:1-5).

I Corinthians 6:1: *Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?*

- The third problem is immorality.

The Corinthians failed to discipline a man who was committing adultery with his father's wife. They allowed this because of their misunderstanding of grace (5:1-13; 6:12-21).

I Corinthians 5:1: *It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.*

I Corinthians 6:18-20: *Flee immorality... Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

## 2. Theological and Practical Questions

The church leaders had written a letter asking Paul some questions. Every time Paul is about to address one of them, he starts with the phrase, "now concerning..." or in some cases just "now".

- Questions about marriage.

I Corinthians 7:1: *Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

- Questions about Christian liberty.

I Corinthians 8:1: *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.*

- Questions about traditions

This question concerns women and public worship (11:3), and the Lord's supper (11:26).

- Questions about spiritual gifts.

*I Corinthians 12:1: Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.*

- Questions about the resurrection.

*I Corinthians 15:1: Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand.*

- Questions about the collection for Jerusalem and Paul's plans.

*I Corinthians 16:1: Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.*

## **II Corinthians: Paul's Apostolic Defense**

### **1. Authorship**

Paul wrote II Corinthians from Macedonia sometime toward the end of his third missionary journey, probably in 55 or 56 AD.

### **2. Background**

- After the silversmiths' riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-20:1), Paul left for Troas to meet Titus. When he could not find him there, he went to Macedonia, concerned about Titus's safety.

*"Now when I came to Troas...I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave I went on to Macedonia." II Corinthians. 2:12-13*

- A word finally arrived from Corinth that gave Paul great encouragement (II Cor. 7:6-7). From Macedonia Paul wrote II Corinthians and followed it up with a visit (Acts 20:1-4).

*"But, God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more." II Corinthians 7:6-7*

- Although the majority of the church received Paul's letter, a faction still opposed his authority.

**Paul confronts the challenge in chapters 10-13. Paul was not comfortable with defending himself. But, he knew these accusations could hinder his ministry for God in Corinth and reaching to other places.**

Paul lists his apostolic credentials and they are not what might be expected from someone with such authority. (11:23-28)

*I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

### **3. Style**

- II Corinthians is the most autobiographical, personal and emotional of Paul's letters.

*"For... our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within." II Corinthians. 7:5*

*"No letter of Paul's is more personal and intimate in nature than II Corinthians. In it he bared his soul and professed his abiding love for the Corinthians despite the apparent fickleness of their affection for him." David K. Lowery*

- II Corinthians is the most rambling of Paul's letters.

**This tendency is so evident especially chapters 10-13.**

### **4. Purpose and Themes**

At the time of the writing of II Corinthians, Paul had faced deep tribulations of many kinds. This letter reveals the true character of the Christian ministry. No letter says so much about Christian giving, suffering, or spiritual triumph.

- Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians to encourage the church to share in the offering for the Jerusalem saints (8:7, 10, 11).
- Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians to urge the church to personal holiness (7:1).

*"It was clearly no easy matter even for regenerate Christians to break free from the besetting sin of their city, especially when "enlightened" members of their community kept assuring them it was really not a sin at all."* F.F. Bruce

- Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians to answer those in the church who were questioning his apostolic authority.

## **ROMANS: The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

Romans is Paul's most systematic presentation of the Gospel he received and preached.

### **1. Authorship and Date**

Paul wrote Romans in 56 or early 57 AD during a three-month visit to Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey. (Acts 20:2, 3)

### **2. Background and Destinations**

- Paul had traveled, planting churches in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia, for ten years (approx. 47-57). As he was preparing to visit the church in Jerusalem to give them an offering that had been collected, Paul was planning his next mission journey. He wanted to preach the gospel in Spain and visit Rome on the way there.

*"But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain."* (Romans 15:23)

- We don't know exactly how the church in Rome was started. Paul didn't plant that church, nor did any of the Apostles. Considering the prominence of Rome and the high population of Jewish living in Rome at the time, we may speculate that some of the first converts in Judea may have gone to Rome and started gathering.

The long list of greetings in chapter 16 also indicates that many of Paul's converts had later come to Rome.

- Rather than one large church, the Romans seem to have been made up of several household churches (Romans 16:3-15). Paul does not address the letter to the "Church" at, but to "all who are in Rome... called to be saints" (1:7).
- The church in Rome consisted of Jews and Gentiles. At the start of the church, it may have been formed predominantly by Jews; the membership shifted to become predominantly Gentile when the Jews were evicted from Rome. At the time Paul wrote this letter Jews had started to return to Rome in great numbers.

**Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome in 49 because, according to Roman historian Suetonius, "they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus."<sup>1</sup> The Jews were allowed to return to Rome five years later at the beginning of Emperor Nero's reign in 54 AD.**

- Upon their return to Rome, Jewish Christians had to assimilate into groups that felt foreign to them. On the other hand, the gentile Christians that had been in charge for all those years, had to deal with how to relate to all Jewish matters. Paul's letter arrived during the time when this process of changing the dynamics of the church was taking place.

### 3. Purpose

- Paul's stated that the purpose for his letter is to prepare the church for his planned visit (15:28).
- His second purpose is to give a clear, thorough presentation of the gospel he preached.

**The "Gospel" is the announcement of Jesus the Son of God, as a crucified and risen Messiah (1:3-4), in whom the covenant plan of God with Israel is finally fulfilled (1:2). In this Gospel lies the power of the Creator God by which all humans, from whatever racial background, can be saved (1:16).**

- To prevent conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Romans is rather preventative than corrective. There is not a reported error or misconduct that Paul is trying to correct, but a

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<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, Catharine Edwards. *Lives of the Caesars* (2001) pp. 184, 203.

potential threat that he is trying to prevent. The rather unique mixture of Jews and gentile Christians combined with the lack of an apostolic presence in the church made the potential for ethnical and theological conflicts high. As we read Romans, we can see Paul addressing both groups back and forth and helping them understand their place in God's ultimate plan. (An interesting element of this epistle is that even the thesis of Romans is very similar to the one in Galatians, in the latest Paul is combating legalism, while in the former he seems to try to prevent anti-Semitism.)

*Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things... Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? ...Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another...*

#### 4. Style

One of the main characteristics that can be highlighted in the book of Romans is Paul's use of rhetorical questions to move his argument forward. The apostle employs about 80 questions to facilitate answering the very questions that the believers of Rome were asking.

- 3:1 What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?
- 3:9 What then? Are we better than they?
- 3:29 Or, is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also?
- 4:9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also?
- 6:15 Are we to sin because we are not under law, but under grace?
- 7:13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?
- 9:30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith?
- 11:1 I ask then, has God rejected God's people?
- 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?

#### 5. Theme and Structure

The primary theme in Romans is **the Gospel of Jesus Christ**.



*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16*

- From the opening statement of his letter, Paul identifies himself in relationship to the Gospel:  
...a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God.
- He makes a case for his thesis affirming that the Gospel is the power of God that can save Jews and Gentiles alike.
- He describes his mandate to preach the Gospel.
  - I am under **obligation** to Greeks and to barbarians. I am **eager** to preach the Gospel. I am **not ashamed** of the Gospel (1:14-16).
- The Gospel message is presented in a logical progression: Man is a sinner; Christ paid the price for man's sin; Christ's gift is received by faith alone; Salvation is complete identification with Christ.

SECTION	TEXT	COMMENTS
Introduction	1:1-15	Paul introduces himself, his mission, his message and his plans.
Thesis	1:16, 17	The gospel of Christ justifies AND transforms everyone who believes.
Human Dilemma:	1:18-3:20	The Guilt of the Gentiles (1:18-32) The Guilt of the Jews (2:1-29) The Guilt of the Whole World (3:1-20)
God's Provision in Christ	3:21-5:21	God's solution for the sin of mankind, and how is it worked out through faith in Christ's completed work.
Freedom in Christ	6:1-8:39	Freedom from the Power of Sin (6:1-23) Freedom from the Curse of the Law (7:1-25) Life in The Spirit (8:1-39)
Relationship between the Gospel and Israel	9:1-11:36	God has not invalidated His covenant with Israel by instituting a new covenant based on faith, but he has confirmed it.

Practical Application	12:1-15:13	The heart of the matter: total transformation. The effects of the Gospel in daily life and relationships.
Conclusion & Postscript	15:14-16:27	Paul's plans for the future, and his final thoughts for the Romans

## EPHESIANS

### 1. Background

- Ephesians was written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, as a circular letter sent first to the capital city of Ephesus and then distributed to the churches of Asia Minor.
- Ephesus was a huge metropolis, the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. It was the Asian center for the worship of Diana/Artemis, and its temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

**The temple of Diana drew thousands to city. The priesthood used wealth to become bankers of the East, making vast loans to individuals and even nations. It was an occult center / used sorcery to manipulate hostile spiritual powers to their advantage.**

### 2. Purpose

Paul wrote Ephesians to deal with the challenges the churches in Ephesus were facing. The Ephesians' struggle included confusion on how to deal with the "old self," the sinful nature that fights against the "new self"; the racial tensions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians; and demonic forces. Ephesians addresses these divergent problems by relating them all to a common theme: the believer's union with Christ the King.

Ephesians underlines the believer's union with Christ. It's that union with Christ that allows the believer to put off the old self. That union with Christ constitutes the church, which is formed by all believers, Jews and Gentiles together. The church is in a cosmic battle with the kingdom of darkness, but believers are seated with Christ in positions of authority over all creation,

### 3. Themes

There are several themes that can be identified in the epistle to the Ephesians. Two of them stand out: The exalted Christ and the glorious church.

- In Ephesians, Paul celebrates the person and work of Jesus Christ.

*These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:19-23*

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. (1:7)*

*But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (2:13)*

- Ephesians tells us more about Jesus's glorious Church than any other letter.
  - Paul describes the Church as God's Temple / Father: architect / Jesus: builder / Holy Spirit: divine presence that dwells in it / not constructed of stone but of living people in reconciled relationships / treasury is stocked with spiritual blessings in heavenly places.
  - God's church is described as a vital, loving family. God's temple is not an ancient edifice but a growing fellowship, which keeps on building itself up in love.

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (2:19-22)*

#### **4. Structure:**

Ephesians, following a pattern that is normal with Paul, is divided into two main parts: first doctrine then application.

- The first three chapters lay the theological foundations. Intertwined with prayer and praise, this first part lists the believer's individual and collective heavenly position and possessions in Christ Jesus.
- The last three chapters explain how the doctrine translates into the conduct of the believers. They are divided into six subsections. The first five of them start with the imperative to walk, and the last one is a charge to stand against the evil powers.

Paul is not content to discuss doctrine without it leading to practical application, nor is he content to give moral imperatives without first grounding them in what God has done in Christ.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. I Corinthians addresses several problems in the church. Some of the problems were moral, others were theological, and yet others were a matter of tradition. Read 1:1-9, what principles for problem solving can you learn from Paul's introduction to this letter?
2. II Corinthians is the most personal of all the Corinthian letters. In II Corinthians Paul opens his heart and shares his experiences and struggles, his highs and his lows. What is the value of sharing one's personal struggles with the people you minister to? How much should we share? When would such sharing be appropriate?
3. Throughout the whole epistle of Romans Paul presents the Gospel in a way that aims to bring ethnical reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. How can the epistle to the Romans help bring ethnical reconciliation within your own cultural context?

### **Homework:**

1. Choose three of the rhetorical questions that Paul formulates in Romans whether from the ones listed in your notes or others that you find in the epistle and paraphrase the answer Paul gives to those questions.