



THE FIRST E-LETTERS

A Study of 21 Evangelical Letters
(From Romans to Jude)

by

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Covenant Bible Studies

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PICTURES ON THE COVER

Top Row from Left to Right:

Jerusalem: Mount of Olives from the Temple Site

Jerusalem: The Upper Room Chapel

Antioch: The Church of St. Peter

Middle Row from Left to Right:

Rome: St. Paul Outside the Wall Church

Corinth: Church Ruins and a Modern Church

Ephesus: Church of St. John and His Tomb

Bottom Row from Left to Right:

Philippi: Ruins of a Church

Colossae: Tell of the City

Thessalonica: Church of St. Demetrius

Photos on the Cover by Barb and Jim Reuteler

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COVENANT BIBLE STUDY

Background

Having majored in the Humanities in College (which had a good dose of Religion and Bible Courses), Systematic Theology and New Testament in Seminary, and Social Ethics and Missiology in Graduate School, I expected to emerge Biblically literate. I was wrong.

One day in my office, I came to the realization that I was Biblically illiterate, after I had earned a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Divinity, and a Ph.D. The first step to becoming Biblically literate is to confess that you are Biblically illiterate. That is precisely what I did in the summer of 1979. My first step out of illiteracy was to read the Bible for an hour each morning before I began my workday, but I found that lonely and unsatisfying.

This led me to a second step that changed me, and my ministry forever. It also enabled me to see how little the Church knows about the Book it claims as its source for faith and morality. The tragic thing is that most people do not recognize that they are Biblically illiterate, and so they go on quoting Scripture as though they know what they are talking about. In my second step I invited members of my congregation to join me in the study of Scripture on Sunday evenings. I was not sure what I was going to do, but I knew that I had to do something. About a dozen parishioners were willing to confess that they were also Biblically illiterate, and so we entered into a Covenant to study the Bible every Sunday evening at 6:00 p.m. It took us six years to study from Genesis through Revelation, taking a major section each year. Below is a list of the way in which we proceeded:

- The Books of Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy)
- The Books of History (Joshua through Esther)
- The Books of Wisdom (Job through the Song of Solomon)
- The Books of Prophecy (Isaiah through Malachi)
- The Gospels and Acts
- The Letters and Revelation
- The Apocrypha

The most difficult part was not working through all those laws, but through one hundred and fifty Psalms. By the time we finished there were two groups meeting with me. The second group met on Thursday mornings at 9:30 a.m. As both groups reflected on our ordeal through the Psalms, we decided not to do that again. There had to be a better way.

Not yet realizing what that better way might be, I moved to another congregation, where I started four groups, the two new ones meeting on Sunday night at 7:30 p.m., following the 6:00 p.m. group, and another one on Wednesday afternoon at 1:00 p.m. As we began our journey through the Bible, some of the participants suggested studying the Apocrypha as well. That gave me an idea. I included the Apocrypha with the Wisdom Books, and began using a Psalm as a meditation prior to beginning each session. Occasionally, I

selected a Psalm to fit what we were studying; but at other times, I just used the Psalm for the week.

In spite of our difficulty with the Psalms, I still believe in studying the Bible just the way it is written. After we have done that, we may begin to explore its themes and topics, but not before. We must first do our homework. This holds for youth as well as for adults. The following reason was given in the October, 1985 issue of *The Christian Herald*:

For teens, studies of Bible books are preferable to studies of topics. Teenagers accustomed to only thematic Bible Studies may find themselves and their friends in a vulnerable and dangerous spot when they get to college. Cults that focus on reaching college students use topical-style Bible studies that select verses throughout the Bible to “prove” their false doctrines. A solid foundation in Bible-book studies will help young people not to be taken in by cultic teachings. Studies on topics are helpful after a group has done a number of Bible-book studies.

The difficulty with Bible Study in the manner that I am proposing is the tendency to get bogged down, or to spend too much time on a few passages. I would like to suggest that you keep moving. That is why I have broken each book into a number of lessons. You should move on, even if you have not finished your discussion. All this assumes, of course, that you are studying with other people, which I believe to be an absolute necessity. Very few people continue studying the Bible on a regular basis without the discipline of meeting with others. This is necessary because others contribute to your understanding and they keep you honest about your conclusions.

Methodology

At first I called what I was doing *In-depth Bible Study*, but after proceeding through the Bible three times, I decided to change the name to *Covenant Bible Study*. My goal had been to take six to twelve chapters in an hour or hour and one-half session. I liked the longer sessions better, but I am aware of the contemporary expectation to finish everything within an hour. Covering that much material in such a short time can hardly be called dealing with it in depth. My goal was however to get the stories or passages on the table, answer questions about them, and apply them to modern life. This required a Covenant between pastor and people. We covered each major section in nine months, meeting around thirty times in the course of that time. I am not worried that we did not spend enough time on a section, for I have found many themes coming up again and again. Our purpose was to study the whole Bible in Covenant together, trying to understand how the various components relate to one another.

One thing I insisted upon from the beginning—everyone has a right to their own opinion without having to fear criticism from anyone in the group. I have also advertised what we were doing in the newspaper, and have managed to pick up people from all kinds of traditions. Their contributions have greatly enriched the Bible Study Groups, keeping us honest about their traditions. Without their presence, we would not have treated their traditions fairly. One tradition that was never represented, although I wish it were, was

modern Judaism. Covenant Bible Study is best done in an Ecumenical context, but that of course, raises some other questions. Does it mean that we are trying to win or convert people of other traditions to our own? My answer has always been, "No!" Their traditions need to be treated with respect, and they are encouraged to stay within their own traditions. The purpose of Covenant Bible Study is to expand our understanding of the whole Bible, and the only way we can do this is to include people of other traditions, without trying to convert them.

Dr. Harrell Beck, from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University suggested some principles I have used. He was addressing a group of pastors at a School for Christian Ministry, and he stressed how important it was to teach the Old Testament to children, believing that it could be done. His methodology was very simple, tell them a story, give them an opportunity to ask questions about the story, and work together on the practical application of that story. This gave me the idea for working with adults.

Summarizing the Material

In a typical session, I make assignments to those who will accept them. Not everyone is willing to accept an assignment, and that is okay. I try to encourage those who are too shy to take on an assignment, that it is okay just to sit there. I keep assignments to one or two chapters. The breakdown of assignments is listed right below the title to every session, and I generally pass a sheet of paper with the breakdown around the table, asking those who would take an assignment to simply write their name down next to the assignment they would like to choose. Their task is to read those one or two chapters more carefully than the rest of the assigned material for a session. When we begin our session, I ask those who have accepted assignments to simply summarize their chapters to the group. They may refer to a few scriptures now and then, but they are not to read everything in class. They are to highlight the story, or if there is no story, the essence of what they have read. They are to recognize that someone else might handle it differently, but that is okay. Their assignment is to get the story or the essence of the material on the table.

There are always some people who, though they are unwilling to take an assignment, are willing to read in class. In the assignments I handle myself, I try to find a verse or two in each section, which summarizes things. I then ask persons, who do not take assignments, to read those verses. In the charts that accompany the Bible Studies, you will *sometimes* find these brief references, which point to the essence of things. These are the portions I ask people to read in class. The first third of our session is dedicated to the above task. We may run over, but our intention is to get the content on the table for further discussion.

Questions and Answers

In the second third, our purpose is to ask questions. This does not mean that I answer all the questions. Sometimes, while I am thinking, someone else answers the question, having discovered it in a Study Bible, or commentary. While I do not encourage everyone to use commentaries, I do encourage the use of a good Study Bible. I have also written

my own commentary, which I pass out in advance to all participants. I did not do this the first year, but I found people wanting to know where I was getting some of my information, and so I decided to pass the material out. Those who accepted assignments seemed to feel more comfortable when they knew what I knew ahead of time. Some people had a tendency to read only my commentary, but I have always told them, "If you do not have enough time to prepare, read the Bible rather than my commentary." Most people have done that.

Practical Application

The final third of the session has to do with making a practical application of the material that we have studied together. To help people along, I prepare two things: a one page chart of all the material so that they can see it in its entirety, and no more than two pages of my own thoughts on the practical application of what we have studied. These two things seem to be enough to get the discussion moving. All of my materials are made available prior to our meeting. Everyone has them while they are doing their own studying. It is difficult to give enough attention to this final third when you meet for only one hour. This is why I prefer an hour and one-half. As the discussion moves along, it is difficult to stop and there is a tendency to move beyond the allotted time. The group should stop on time. There will always be some people with other commitments. The issues will come up again, and so they should not force you to extend the time of a session.

Leadership

I have found the above method of studying the Bible with groups very rewarding. This method does not need a clergy person. The problem lies in the willingness of other laity to accept a layperson as their leader. Many of the participants in my Bible Studies were competent people, fully able to lead sessions. You do not need an expert to lead you. All you need is a good Study Bible, a couple of good commentaries, and four or five other people willing to enter into a Covenant to study the Bible. It will be helpful to set up some questions for discussion. *The Serendipity Study Bible*, which contains 20,000 questions, will help you; but even without it, you can assign different persons to think up questions on chapters or sections to be studied. You do not have to aim at becoming Bible Scholars. The purpose of Bible Study is not knowledge, but reverence for God and discipleship. Do not be too worried if you cannot remember everything. "Its authors," wrote Frederick Herzog, "never expected to provide literalistic guidelines for the 20th century. But they did want to communicate the power of God (cf. I Cor. 4:20)."

Among some groups I have found resistance to taking assignments. When I have felt this resistance, I have used a different approach. Instead of asking people to summarize chapters, I have asked them to mark their Bibles in a certain way. The following scheme has been used, and it always inspires much more discussion than time permits:



Mark those verses with a heart that offer special insight into religious experience.



Mark those verses with a lamp or light bulb, which offer special insight or illumination.



Mark those verses with a star, which might be used to give guidance or application to daily living.



Mark those verses with a cross, which are difficult to follow or obey.



Mark those verses with a check, which are important to you, but do not fall under any other categories.



Mark those verses with a question mark that you do not fully understand.

When I ask people to mark their Bibles as discussed above, I begin each session with an introduction and a brief video segment. We then attempt to answer questions, share insights, talk about applications, and discuss how to deal with the difficult passages.

Final Comments

The Use of Videos and DVDs

Two final comments need to be made. The first has to do with the use of video, which can add much to a Bible Study session. I have found a number of videos helpful, but I always limit the amount of video that I might use to less than fifteen minutes. This requires previewing video sources, which is very time consuming; but I think that it is very important to limit the use of video to illustrating relevant points. I am reluctant to list the most helpful videos because new ones are being introduced all the time.

The Need for Balance

My second comment has to do with balance. John Wesley called for that balance when he said, “Let us now unite the two so long divided, knowledge and vital piety.” This is my purpose in Covenant Bible Study. Some will think that I give too much attention to the academic side of things, while others will say that I do not give it enough attention. The attempt to apply what we learn is aimed at vital piety. I think that the two must be held together, but I do not view the Bible as a book of rules. For me, “The Bible,” to quote Luther, “is the manger in which we find Christ, the swaddling clothes in which he is wrapped.” Covenant Bible Study helps us sort through all that straw in the manger to discover the Christ, who reveals God and his Will to us. For those who only want to use the Bible devotionally, I say, “You must first study it, hear what its characters are really saying, and then learn the lessons of history, in which God really is present.” These are the tasks of Covenant Bible Study.

The Purpose of Bible Study

One participant, overwhelmed by the pessimism of the prophets, asked, “Is there anything that we can do to break the vicious cycle of the rise and fall of nations (and individuals)?” I firmly believe that there is something we can do. Our first obligation is to study the Scriptures to find out what they are really saying. We have spent enough time manipulating them to say what we want them to say, New and Old Testaments alike; it is now time to enter into Covenant with one another to study them completely, allowing them to speak to us. That is a task that will take us the rest of our lives, but we can begin the journey now. The second step in this journey is to begin applying the truths we learn from our study. Jesus, in Matthew 7:24-25, told us that we should be building our houses (nations and lives) on solid rock, on foundations that will stand. Not to do this, says Psalm 73:18, would be to set our feet “in slippery places.” The purpose of Covenant Bible Study is to help us find our way back to the God of the Bible and build our lives and nation on the solid rock. In the Scriptures we can discover the steppingstones of history, which will enable us to walk on the waters of faith.

Discovering the Main Points

As I wrote my commentary on the Bible, I wrote a short article, which can be found at the end of each lesson. My purpose in doing this was to focus on what I thought was the main point in each of the lessons. Obviously, there is more than one point; but I thought it might be helpful for someone to look for a theme. That is what I have attempted to do.

Studying the Bible is like looking at the many sides of a diamond. Light comes from unexpected places. I would recommend that everyone in a Bible Study Group look for that which sparkles most and attempt to describe what they see. That is what I am attempting to do here. It is only one person’s opinion, but it is worth doing, even if only for that one person.

Not everyone will feel capable of doing what I have done, but everyone should be able to raise a couple of questions about the section to be studied. If that is all you can do, go with it. You will be surprised at how much you will learn, even by asking questions. Remember how, according to Luke 2:46-47, Mary and Joseph found Jesus, “...sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” As you grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, people will be amazed at your questions and answers as well.

My only advice is that my commentary and these articles are not to be studied in place of the Bible. Your textbook should be *the Bible*. If this commentary and these articles can help you understand and apply what you read there, then they will have contributed to their purpose. Just keep in mind that they do not represent the last word on the subject. They are but descriptions of the light shining from the diamond, which is God’s Word as it has been communicated through human authors.

The Purpose of Bible Study

When we read the Bible, we are really asking two questions:

1. Do I expect to meet God?
2. Am I willing to obey God?

Applying the Bible

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a sin for me to avoid?
3. Is there a command for me to obey?
4. Is there a promise for me to claim?
5. What does this passage teach me about God or Jesus Christ?
6. Is there a difficulty for me to explore?
7. Is there something in this passage I should pray about today?

A Covenant for Studying Together

Entering into Covenant to Study the Bible together is one of the most important decisions we can make in our lives, and it requires a special Covenant, which will not be easy to follow. Of all the Covenants I have read concerning studying together, I like the one proposed by Augustine:

Let us, you and I lay aside all arrogance.
Let neither of us pretend to have found the truth.
Let us seek it as something unknown to both of us.
Then we may seek it with love and sincerity
when neither of us has the rashness nor
presumption to believe that he (she) already
possesses it.
And if I am asking too much of you,
allow me to listen to you at least,
to talk with you as I do with beings whom,
for my part,
I do not pretend to understand.

INTRODUCTION

The Letters are not in chronological order, nor do I intend to place them chronologically. I will attempt to place each letter in its context.

I'm calling these letters or epistles the first e-letters because most of them, like the Gospels, have an evangelical or missionary purpose. They are evangelical letters, or e-letters.

The twenty-one letters can be grouped into four groups. First, there are the thirteen Pauline letters. Not all of them were written by Paul, but they have to do with Paul. These letters are as follows:

Pauline Letters	
Romans	1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians
2 Corinthians	1 Timothy
Galatians	2 Timothy
Ephesians	Titus
Philippians	Philemon
Colossians	

Within the Pauline Letters, there are two subgroups. The following three Letters are known as the Pastoral Epistles:

Pastoral Epistles
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus

The second subgroup within the Pauline Letters consists of the Prison Epistles, which are:

Prison Epistles
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
Philemon

The last group of letters has been called the General or Catholic Letters. The early church named seven letters in this group, which are as follows:

General Letters
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude

When these letters were written, there was no public postal system. Caesar Augustus did institute a postal service for official dispatches, and since non-officials were only rarely permitted to use this system, private letters were delivered by messengers or friendly travelers. In this way Paul sent his evangelical letters to the churches. Had the internet been invented at this time, I suspect he would have used e-mail.

1

THE WORLD'S NEED AND GOD'S GIFT

Romans 1:1-4:25

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ,
called to be an apostle,
set apart for the gospel of God...
To all God's beloved in Rome,
who are called to be saints...*

Romans 1:1 and 7

The First E-Letters

1. THE WORLD'S NEED AND GOD'S GIFT (1:1 – 4:25)		
INTRODUCTION AND THEME (1:1-17)		
Salutation (1:1-7)	Thanksgiving (1:8-15)	The Theme (1:16-17)
THE WORLD'S NEED FOR SALVATION (1:18 – 3:20)		
Paganism (1:18-32)	Judaism (2:1 – 3:8) The Jews under Judgment The Rule of Judgment The Sign of Obedience The Advantage of the Jews	Conscience and Law (3:9-20)
GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION (3:21 – 4:25)		
The Gift of Grace (3:21-26)	All Boasting is Excluded (3:27-31)	The Example of Abraham (4:1-25)

1. THE WORLD'S NEED AND GOD'S GIFT

Romans 1:1—4:25

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Theme and Paganism (1:1-32)	The Advantage of Judaism (2:1—3:8)	Conscience, Law, and Grace (3:9-31)	The Example of Abraham (4:1-25)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The author is clearly the Apostle Paul.

The Date and Context

Paul wrote this letter on his third missionary journey. The date has been set somewhere between 54 to 58 C.E., with 57 C.E. being the best estimate.

While Paul might have wanted to visit Rome at the time that he wrote this letter, he felt an obligation to deliver a special offering of the mission churches to the Christians in Jerusalem, who were suffering from a famine.

The Place

Because of some of the names that appear, Paul seems to have written this letter from Corinth. Another possibility would be Phoebe's hometown of nearby Cenchreae. Phoebe was the courier.

The Recipient and Purpose

The intended recipient of the letter was the church in Rome, where Jewish Christians were in the minority. Three purposes are given for its writing. First, Paul introduces himself to the Church in Rome in light of his intended visit; secondly, he proceeds to explain the essence of the Gospel; and thirdly, he explains the relationship between Jew and Gentile.

The theme of the entire book is given in Romans 1:17, where Paul declares that faith in Christ is the ground of our salvation. God's grace is for all, both Jew and Gentile alike; hence, Paul's purpose is missionary in nature. His dream is to spread the Gospel throughout the known world, and he sees Rome as the key to such a missionary enterprise. From Rome he intends to go on to Spain. The Book of Romans has inspired some of the greatest minds in Christianity: Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Bunyan, and Wesley.

In conclusion one must say that the Book of Romans is more like a theological essay than a personal letter. The first part is theological (1:18—11:36) and the second part is practical (12:1—15:13). The letter begins with a salutation and ends with a personal greeting.

Outline

- A. Introduction and Theme (1:1-17)
- B. The World's Need for Salvation (1:18—3:20)
- C. God's Gift of Salvation (3:21—4:25)
- D. The New Life in Christ (5:1—8:39)
- E. Israel in the Plan of God (9:1—11:36)
- F. Christian Moral Conduct (12:1—15:13)
- G. Conclusion and Personal Greetings (15:14—16:27)

INTRODUCTION AND THEME (1:1-17)

Salutation (1:1-7)

Ancient Greek letters generally began with the name of the sender, the name of the recipient, and a brief greeting. Paul expanded this usual form to include an expression of his Christian Faith as well. This salutation of Paul's letter is different from that found in his other letters. In his other letters he was writing to a Church which he helped to found and which had been visited by him, but in the case of Rome, Paul neither founded the Church nor had he ever visited it. For this reason he felt it necessary to introduce himself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Today we may think of "Apostle" as a special address used only of the 12 disciples, but in Paul's time this term was much more inclusive than that, not being limited to the 12. The word means, "one sent out," that is, a "missionary." *Apostle* does not refer so much to geography as it does to one's responsibility to testify to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this responsibility Paul perceives a universal mission for which he is responsible. He writes to the "saints" at Rome and reminds them that they share this responsibility with him. "Saints," for Paul is not a special class of Christians; rather, it is an inclusive term referring to all those who belong to God and have consecrated themselves to his service.

Thanksgiving (1:8-15)

After the Salutation in ancient letters there usually came a short prayer of thanksgiving. This element of the letter was also expanded by Paul to give thanks for the Christians already in Rome. Paul's purpose in going to Rome was not to make converts—they already existed—but to deepen their spiritual experience and to encourage them in their mission. Most of the Christians in Rome seem to be Gentiles, although the percentage of Gentiles in comparison to Jews is not known. Paul clearly sees his own mission in terms of Gentiles and he not only wants to visit them in Rome, but also in Spain (Romans 15:23-24). He feels under obligation to both the Greeks and the Barbarians, both of who are non-Jews or Gentiles. Barbarians are those Gentiles who lack Greek culture and language. This does not matter to Paul. The Gospel is for everyone and he thanks God that the Church in Rome is proclaiming it as such.

The Theme (1:16-17)

In Christ God has acted powerfully to save all humanity, offering righteousness and new life, to be received by faith. While this is offered to all, it was offered first to the Jew and then to the Gentiles (Greeks). The two most important words used here are “righteousness” and “faith.” The classic Protestant formulation of “justification by faith” is drawn from these verses. It means that the righteousness one needs for salvation cannot be earned; rather, it is a gift given by God to those who receive it in faith. The person put right with God by faith will find life. This idea is supported by Paul's reference to the Old Testament Prophet, Habakkuk (Habakkuk. 2:4b). This reference would supposedly strengthen Paul's argument to the Jewish reader. (See also Galatians 3:11; Philippians 3:9; and Hebrews 10:38.)

THE WORLD'S NEED FOR SALVATION (1:18—3:20)

Why do we need to be put right with God? Paul begins by analyzing pagans, Jews, and even Christians. None of us can save ourselves, and none of us has a legitimate excuse for rebelling against God. In the end all of us are dependent upon his grace and mercy.

Paganism (1:18-32)

Pagans, who have never heard of Christ, are without excuse. God has made himself known through creation. Behind the visible world lies the invisible creator. Reason or common sense should teach us this. Evidence lies all around us; indeed, it even lies within us. Wrong-thinking leads to wrong-actions, and this is the reason for human sinfulness. The heart of it lies in the sin of idolatry, which naturally results in sexual license and sexual perversion and all other forms of human sinfulness. While Jesus does not even mention homosexuality, Paul identifies it as a perversion at the beginning of his most systematic, theological and moral epistle.

Out of sheer frustration for the way in which pagans misused their freedom, Paul continues, “God gave them over” (1:24 & 28) to the consequences of their choices—

death. All who violate their true nature will discover that death is the inevitable consequence, even though it may take time to work itself out. God will not interfere if that is the choice we freely make.

Judaism (2:1—3:8)

The Jews under Judgment (2:1-11)

Just as the moral pagan was not excused for failing to live up to the highest of standards, the Jew is expected to keep the Mosaic Law. The *privilege* granted to God's Covenant People increases their *responsibility*. If that responsibility is not accepted, they stand under the same judgment as pagans who failed to live up to the natural law written in their hearts.

The Rule of Judgment (2:12-24)

Those who sin without knowledge of the Law will perish without reference to the Law and those who obey the Law written within them will also discover salvation. While Pagans are obliged to follow the Natural Law written in their consciences, Jews are obliged to follow the Law of Moses written in stone. Because neither of them is able to obey the Law they know, both are sinners and subjected to the same standard of divine judgment.

The Sign of Obedience (2:25-29)

Circumcision was the sign of obedience for the Jew, but it meant nothing without obedience to the Law. Gentiles, who obeyed the Natural Law, were spiritually circumcised. This was a kind of circumcision of the heart, which the Jewish rabbis found difficult to understand and accept. For them the outward mark was essential, for it guaranteed divine favor and entry into the future age. Circumcision to them was a command of God's and could not be thought of in symbolic terms. Paul's spiritualization of circumcision became a scandal for Jews, who saw the rite in itself as being important.

The Advantage of the Jews (3:1-8)

What is the Jewish advantage? According to Romans 3:2 it is that they have been entrusted with the "oracles" of God. The "oracles" refer both to the utterances of God on Mount Sinai and the promises of God in the prophets. God has revealed himself through Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and now Jesus. Even the present sinfulness of the Jews cannot negate the advantage given to them. Their backsliding does not cancel the past. It only serves to emphasize God's grace and patience. This does not give the Jew the right to continue in sin that God's grace might abound. God forbid. This would be a misunderstanding of his grace. Jewish rebellion only serves the faithfulness (3:3), justice [righteousness] (3:5), and truthfulness (3:7) of God.

The Function of the Conscience and the Law (3:9-20)

Paul's purpose up to now has been to establish the universal sinfulness of all humanity—pagan and Jew. The power of sin reigns over all (3:9), and both the internal conscience and the external law point to that human sinfulness, which is our inability to carry out the will of God. Conscience and law, but particularly, law brings nothing but futility because it creates a universal consciousness of human sinfulness. This then is the main function of the Law. It cannot save us because it always condemns us.

GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION (3:21—4:25)

The Gift of Grace (3:21-26)

The Law and the Prophets point to the futility of salvation by works. The universality of human sin (3:23) is followed by God's gift of grace (3:24), which is received by faith (3:25). This did not come cheap. It took the death of Jesus Christ to reveal God's grace. Humanity is not made righteous through this act, but pronounced righteous. We are acquitted. This means that we are free to leave the courtroom and will not have to suffer a prison sentence. Jesus fulfilled the demands for justice, setting us free; so we have nothing to boast about.

All Boasting is Excluded (3:27-31)

Our proper response to God's gift of grace is not works, but faith. This does not cause us to reject the Law, but to become more interested in it than ever. We no longer worry about how we might obey the letter of the Law; rather, we are now interested in obeying the spirit of the Law. In neither case are we trying to save ourselves. Works no longer become a method of self-justification, but a response of sheer gratitude to God for his marvelous gift of grace. Works are now the fruit of faith; that is the only way in which the Law can be fulfilled.

The Example of Abraham (4:1-25)

Paul goes against traditional Judaism as he focuses on the Promise to Abraham. For Judaism the most important events would have been the Exodus and the giving of the Law. In the way Paul sees things, Abraham is not only the prime example, but he also becomes the Father of both Jew and Gentile. Once his premise is accepted, then it is easy to follow his argument. Abraham was not made righteous (justified) by works, circumcision, or the Law. He believed God's Promise to him, and because of that, God counted him as righteous (4:3 & Genesis 15:6). What might be strange is why Paul does not use the example of the testing of that faith in the sacrifice of Isaac. Perhaps it was just another example of Abraham's faith and Paul did not feel that it was necessary to illustrate his point.

Even Circumcision did not precede faith. Circumcision, like Baptism, is to be considered a seal, which confirms what has been effected by divine grace. The Law could not have

had anything to do with Abraham's faith, for it would not be formally given for another 400 years. What really mattered was Abraham's receptivity to God's Promise in a time when it seemed like hope against hope. He was 100 years old. How could he have an heir? The same kind of hopelessness appeared with the crucifixion and death of Jesus, but God lifted those who believed to a new height by raising Jesus up from the grave. Where there is faith, there is justification, both for the Jew and for the Gentile. Abraham is the example for all of us.

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

Habakkuk and Paul affirm one of the central ideas of Jewish and Christian faith: "the righteous live by their faith." (Habakkuk 2:4 and Romans 1:17) This is not an easy concept to understand. In the case of Habakkuk he had to believe that Judah's defeat at the hands of the Babylonians had some kind of purpose. Babylon was not as righteous as Judah. How could God let the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem? The answer lies in the gift of faith, granted to those who are willing to believe in God's wisdom. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, Jerusalem had to fall, for too many of its people had turned away from God. While God permitted Babylon to be the instrument of Jerusalem's fall, Babylon's own day of reckoning would come, as it did when the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E. The righteous people believe that God knows what He is doing and they trust in Him. Their faith makes them righteous.

For Paul faith is the beginning of one's spiritual journey. It is a gift from God that produces fruit that become works of righteousness. First comes faith; then comes works. One believes that God knows what He is doing and that He has shown us the way to proceed, even if the end goal is not perfectly clear to us. Martin Luther defined the kind of faith that Habakkuk and Paul were talking about in his *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*.

Faith is a living and unshakable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that a man would die a thousand deaths for its sake. This kind of confidence in God's grace, this sort of knowledge of it, makes us joyful, high-spirited, and eager in our relations with God and with all mankind. That is what the Holy Spirit effects through faith. Hence, the man of faith, without being driven, willingly and gladly seeks to do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of hardships, for the sake of the love and glory of the God who has shown him such grace. It is impossible, indeed, to separate works from faith, just as it is impossible to separate heat and light from fire.¹

Faith is a gift from God, which produces the fruit of good works. For this reason no one can boast about their faith or their good works. "Good works do not make a man good,"

¹ Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, *Methodist Evangelistic Materials*, Nashville, Tennessee, p. 7.

insisted Luther in the book, *Here I Stand*, “but a good man does good works.”² This was a very important insight for John Wesley, who tried to justify himself through good works. It was Luther’s Preface to the Book of Romans that helped him to see that faith is the starting point. In that prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street, where he heard one reading Luther’s Preface, he said:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.³

The gift of faith did not make Wesley more lax in his good works. Faith motivated him to do more works, as it always does. Where good works are lacking, faith is lacking. Good works can never produce faith. Good works are always the fruit of faith. Faith can be active in people, such as Abraham and Moses, who have never heard of Jesus Christ, but faith is more powerful in those who have heard of him, such as Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Wesley. For Christians, Jesus is always the object of faith. This means that those who have never heard of Jesus have no excuse, for the world is filled with evidence of God’s existence, but those who have heard of Jesus have the greatest responsibility of all, for they have encountered God himself.

² Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 178.

³ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (Providence House Publishers: Franklin, TN), p. 103.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM ROMANS

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

Romans 1:16-17

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse...

Romans 1:20

For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Romans 3:28

2

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Romans 5:1—8:39

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present,
nor things to come, nor powers, nor height,
nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:38-39

The First E-Letters

2. NEW LIFE IN CHRIST (5:1—8:39)		
THE SOURCE OF JUSTIFICATION (5:1-21)		
<i>The Presence of the Spirit</i>		<i>The Example of Christ</i>
The Benefits of Justification (5:1-11) Peace, Hope, Love Friendship and Eternal Life		The New Humanity (5:12-21) Adam: Sin and Death Jesus: Grace and Peace
THE IMPLICATION OF JUSTIFICATION (5:1-23)		
<i>We are Given New Life</i>		<i>We change Masters</i>
Rising with Christ (6:1-14)		Slavery that Frees (6:15-23)
THE LAW AND JUSTIFICATION (7:1-25)		
Dying to the Law (7:1-6)	The Law and Sin (7:7-12)	The Inner Conflict (7:13-25)
<i>We now aim at the Spirit or Intent of the Law</i>		
THE GOAL OF JUSTIFICATION (8:1-39)		
<i>Eternal Life</i>		<i>Life with Christ</i>
Life in the Spirit (8:1-17)		The Future Glory (8:18-39)

2. THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Romans 5:1—8:39

ASSIGNMENTS			
Justification and the New Humanity (5:1-21)	Resurrection with and Slavery to Christ (6:1-23)	The Law and the Inner Conflict (7:1-25)	Life in the Spirit and the Future Glory (8:1-39)

THE BENEFITS OF JUSTIFICATION (5:1-11)

One can of course attempt to make a list of the benefits of justification. My list would include such things as peace, hope, love, and friendship; but topping off any such list would have to be life, including life eternal. These are rich verses, which express the depth of God's love for us, even while we were yet sinners, and the manner in which God's Spirit fills us with grace and love. How can this but help to give us peace and hope.

The greatest benefit in this world is the ability to rejoice in the midst of suffering because we know of God's love, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. While we may not be spared suffering, we can endure and grow as a result of it. The peace of God sustains us through suffering and persecution, enabling us to keep our eyes fixed on our eternal hope, revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE NEW HUMANITY (5:12-21)

Adam led the old humanity, the results of which are sin and death. Jesus led the new humanity, the results of which are grace and life. In this passage and in 1 Corinthians 15:45-57, Christ is described as the second Adam or the new humanity. The main question that concerns us is the way in which sin and grace are transmitted. Is it physical or spiritual, biological or sociological? While it is not easy to divide humanity into parts, my conclusion is that the transmission is spiritual and sociological. This makes it impossible for us to blame everything on Adam or to take all the credit away from Christ. Sin and death were aspects of Satan's Kingdom, which Christ overturned in establishing God's Kingdom (Mark 3:23-27).

The Law was never able to deal with the problem and power of sin. All the Law could do was to reveal the depth of human sinfulness. In making us aware of sin, the Law only increased our futility, for we then recognized that we were unable to overcome sin's

power. Locating the transmission of sin in sociological relationships does not make it any easier to halt. We are powerless over the social pressures that surround us and just as dependent upon Christ to offer us grace.

RISING WITH CHRIST (6:1-14)

Chapter 6 opens by struggling with how “Justification by Faith” might work out in practice. Is it compatible with morality? Paul insists that it is. Our baptism symbolizes the death of the old and the birth of the new humanity (6:4). The Grace of God does not lead to license, but to new life. The “thou shalt nots of the Law” give way to the “power of the Spirit.” Righteousness, which was imputed (justification), is now imparted (sanctification).

SLAVERY THAT FREES (6:15-23)

Everyone is a slave of something or someone. Two alternatives confront us: slavery to sin or slavery to God. It is unthinkable that a Christian would revert to the kind of slavery that results in shame and death. Christians gladly submit to God, who sanctifies and offers eternal life. The wage of sin is death, but God’s free gift is eternal life.

DYING TO THE LAW (7:1-6)

Using an analogy from marriage, Paul compares our freedom from the Law to a person’s freedom from a deceased spouse. This passage is not given as a commandment not to marry again, but to illustrate how one has been set free from the Law through the death of Christ. The point has to do with our being set free from the “Letter of the Law” to live by the “Spirit of the Law.” We are set free of the Law to be united to our Risen Lord. This is a theological statement affirming “salvation by Grace through Faith,” which would have been next to blasphemy for the Jew, who came close to worshipping the Law. Paul insists that Faith replaces the Law. This does not mean that the Christian is free to do less than the Law requires. Those who live by the “Spirit of the Law” will do more, not less, than the Law requires. Christians move from slavery to the Law to slavery to Christ.

THE LAW AND SIN (7:7-12)

The Law should not be confused with sin. Sin is revealed through the Law (7:7-8), which is the Law’s primary purpose. In revealing sin to us, however, it also tends to stimulate sin within us (7:9-12). Although it originally promised life, all it can deliver is death. The idea that apart from law sin lies dead (7:8) is questionable. About all one can say is that apart from the Law sin lies unrecognized, but it still delivers its destructive power. The Law should not be considered as evil. It is Holy because it forces us to see our true condition, which is inner conflict and turmoil.

THE INNER CONFLICT (7:13-25)

Sin, not the Law, is the alien intruder, which sets up the inner conflict. We find two desires within: (1) the desire to serve the Law with our mind, and (2) the desire to serve the flesh with our sinful nature. This inner conflict is tearing us apart. It is comparable to a civil war raging within us, in desperation we cry out for help. Only in the Grace and Mercy of Christ can we find freedom from the guilt and power of sin. The last word lies with God, who reveals his mercy and imputes righteousness.

Two things might be noted in this passage on the inner conflict. Why is nothing said about the role of Satan in creating this civil war within, and does this describe the *before* or *after* of Christian conversion?

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT (8:1-17)

Without a doubt chapter 8 is the high point of the entire book of Romans. It begins with a description of life in the Spirit. The Spirit sets us free from sin and death. There is no longer any condemnation as a result of sin. What the Law could not do, the Spirit has accomplished. All the Law could do was to make us despair. In doing this it made us aware of our tendency towards sin, which was leading us towards death. Only the Spirit of God could transform our hostility to God and grant life and peace to us. The Law could only reveal our inability to save ourselves.

The Spirit makes us aware of God's grace and his acceptance of us as his children. When we cry out "Abba" (Daddy or Papa) we know that the Spirit moves us. In the original Aramaic language, Abba was an intimate address to God, which Paul treated as a foreign word and connected with the more formal Greek term for Father. To be a child of God does not insulate us from suffering. While suffering is not to be sought, it is an option, which the Christian can never totally reject. If Christ suffered, we too might have to suffer.

THE FUTURE GLORY (8:18-39)

Any suffering we have to endure is nothing compared to the glory that lies ahead. The Fall of Adam and Eve affected creation itself, and God is active in redeeming both humanity and nature. There will be a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). This means that God's creation (both the animate and the inanimate aspects of it) is not what God intended it to be. Human sin affected all of creation. It brought pain and death into the whole created world. All this has been overturned in Jesus Christ, in whom we have encountered the Spirit of God himself. This Spirit teaches us how to pray and affirms us as God's children.

Everything works out for those who love God and live according to his purpose. They are "predestined" to be transformed into his image. This does not mean that God chooses those who will be saved, but that those who let the Spirit into their lives *will* be transformed into what God intended them to be. Nothing can separate us from Christ, and

nothing can defeat God’s ultimate purpose for His children. God holds our destiny in His hands and we can depend upon Him.

HAPPY SLAVES

Both Jesus and Paul talk about disciples being slaves. This does not set well with us and so we talk in terms of volunteers. Michael Slaughter suggests, “Volunteer is the language of the club. Slave is the language of the kingdom of God.”¹ The Church is called into the Kingdom of God, which means that we are slaves, not volunteers. Our first reaction to this is negative. How can Christianity even suggest the idea of slavery? Paul deals with the issue of slavery in Romans 6:16, where he asks the question: “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” The choice of masters is twofold—Satan or Christ. Satan represents sin and death. Christ represents obedience and life.

This new slavery is not to be feared. It does not enslave. It liberates. In his famous hymn, “Make Me a Captive, Lord,” George Matheson writes:

Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life’s alarms when by myself I stand;
imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand.

My heart is weak and poor until it master find;
it has no spring of action sure, it varies with the wind.
It cannot freely move till thou hast wrought its chain;
enslave it with thy matchless love, and deathless it shall reign.²

We will be a slave to someone or something. In Romans, Paul leads us to slavery in Christ, which yields fullness of life on earth and eternal life in heaven. We become slaves by dying and rising with Christ, which is symbolized in baptism. This experience is described for us in Romans 6:4: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” We die to the old slavery, which can only yield death and we enter into a new kind of slavery that can only yield life. It is a privilege to be a slave in the Kingdom of God. This was known even in Old Testament times. “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God,” said the Psalmist, “than live in the tents of wickedness.” (Psalm 84:10)

¹ Michael Slaughter, *6 Principles for Risking Renewal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 40.

² George Matheson, “Make Me a Captive, Lord,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), Hymn Number 421.

Once we submit to slavery in Christ, we become citizens of the Kingdom of God, where all things work together for good for those who love the Lord (8:28) and where nothing can separate us from the love and presence of God, which we have discovered in our Master, Jesus Christ (8:39). What seems like slavery becomes perfect freedom. We become happy slaves.



THE ROMAN ROAD TO SALVATION

1. All have sinned.

There is no one who is righteous, not even one.... Romans 3:10

...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.... Romans 3:23

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned....

Romans 5:12

2. Salvation has been provided for all.

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

3. All may be saved by profession of faith.

...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Romans 10:9-13

4. Express your salvation!

Salvation is expressed by baptism:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-4

Salvation is expressed through repentance and a transformed life:

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? Romans 6:14-16

3
ISRAEL
IN THE PLAN OF GOD
Romans 9:1—11:36

*And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,
“Out of Zion will come the Deliverer;
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.”
“And this is my covenant with them,
when I take away their sins.”*

Romans 11:26-27

The First E-Letters

3. ISRAEL IN THE PLAN OF GOD (9:1 – 11:36)		
THE PROBLEM OF ISRAEL (9:1-13)		
Paul's Love for Israel (9:1-5)	God's Choice of Israel (9:6-13)	
GOD'S INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES (9:14-29)		
HOW SALVATION WORKS (9:30 – 10:21)		
The Proper Response of Faith (9:30 – 10:13)	The Need for Preaching (10:14-21)	
GOD'S MERCY FOR ALL (11:1-36)		
GOD's Mercy for Israel (11:1-12)	God's Mercy for the Gentiles (11:13-24)	God's Mercy for All (11:25-36)

3. ISRAEL IN THE PLAN OF GOD

Romans 9:1 — 11:36

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Problem of Israel (9:1-13)	God's Inclusion of the Gentiles (9:14-29)	How Salvation Works (9:30—10:21)	God's Mercy for All (11:1-36)

THE PROBLEM OF ISRAEL (9:1-13)

Paul's Love For Israel (9:1-5)

One cannot help comparing Paul's love for his own people to Moses' love for the Israelites (Exodus 32:31-32). Both Moses and Paul were willing to be rejected from God's Kingdom for the sake of their own people. This is "intercessory" prayer at its finest.

God's Choice of Israel (9:6-13)

Although God chose Israel to be his people, this does not mean that they are assured of a place in the future Kingdom. People are God's children not on the basis of *flesh and blood* but on the basis of the *promise*. Those who respond to God are chosen. No one can claim God as their Father simply because they belong to a certain race. Even in the case of Jacob and Esau, Jacob was chosen because he responded to God. Esau was the firstborn, but this did not assure him of anything. Israel was chosen because some Israelites were responsive to God, but that does not mean that all Israelites will be saved. That some might not be chosen is the source of Paul's concern in these three chapters.

GOD'S INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES (9:14-29)

What might seem like bad news to God's chosen people is good news to the Gentiles. It means that they too can find divine acceptance. God *elects* all who respond to him, including Gentiles. When the Bible talks about hardening the Pharaoh's heart, it does not mean that God takes the Pharaoh's freedom away. God never hardens anyone's heart against his or her will. He allows people to harden their own hearts. While God desires the salvation of Jew and Gentile alike, we are reminded that salvation is not automatic (9:27). Remember Sodom and Gomorrah? Those who respond will be saved. It is the same for both Jews and Gentiles. This forces us to reconsider just how salvation operates.

HOW SALVATION WORKS (9:30—10:21)

The Proper Response of Faith (9:30—10:13)

God's children are made up of all who respond to his Grace by Faith. Paul makes a distinction between "faith-righteousness" and "legal-righteousness." The *accent* in "legal-righteousness" is on human activity; but in the case of "faith-righteousness" the *accent* is on trust in divine activity. There is no distinction. Jew and Gentile stand on the same ground. Both must respond in faith. The key baptismal confession is given in Romans 10:9, which excludes faith in or worship of all other gods. Calling Jesus Christ Lord is the irreducible essence of what it means to become a Christian, and this was the minimum required by those submitting themselves for baptism.

The discussion about bringing Christ down from heaven or up from the abyss is taken from Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where the point is made that God's commandment is written in the heart and only requires the appropriate response. The same is true for Christ. One does not have to climb into heaven or descend into the abyss to reach him. He is in our heart and on our lips, and all we need to do is to respond by trusting him. For Christians the supreme gift of God is not the Law, but Jesus Christ. This gift is given to Jew and Gentile alike. No distinction is made and all who call upon the Lord will be saved.

The Need for Preaching (10:14-21)

Preaching is necessary to proclaim the Gospel, even if those who hear it fail to understand it. It is not because it is difficult to understand that the Jews rejected it. The message is so simple that even the Gentiles comprehend it; in fact, God will use them to make his own people jealous. This is in line with the thought of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:21).

GOD'S MERCY FOR ALL (11:1-36)

God's Mercy for Israel (11:1-12)

Paul compares his own situation with that of Elijah (1 Kings 19:18), who thought he was the only one who was faithful to God. Paul, like Elijah, discovered that there were many others who had experienced the mercy of God. In every time and situation a remnant has remained faithful to God. The difficulty Paul experienced with his own people resulted in his turning to the Gentiles. If Jewish rejection of the Gospel brought about Gentile inclusion, what will Jewish acceptance mean for the world?

God's Mercy for The Gentiles (11:13-24)

The inclusion of the Gentiles is described in the imagery of an olive tree. The patriarchs of Israel make up the roots and branches. The broken branches are made up of those who have rejected the Gospel and the grafted branches are made up of Gentile believers.

Because God's mercy is received through faith, there is no reason for arrogance. Salvation is a gift that cannot be earned. Gentile Christians should realize that their salvation came through Jewish Scripture and Tradition. Grafted branches can be broken off, and broken branches can be grafted in again. God has not rejected the Jews. His mercy extends to all.

God's Mercy for All (11:25-36)

The place that the Gentiles have in God's favor will finally make the Jews realize what they are missing. When the "full number of Gentiles" believe, then "all Israel" will be saved (11:25-26). What does this mean? It does not refer to a particular number of Gentiles, nor does it imply that every individual Israelite will be saved. It means that Israel as a whole will be influenced by the conversion of the Gentiles for their election by God is irrevocable (11:29). Paul has not turned to the Gentiles out of contempt for unbelieving Jews, for he cannot imagine the end of history without the salvation of the Jews. God's mercy is for all, Jew and Gentile alike. This does not mean that all will be saved; only that God's mercy extends to all. God still waits for Jew and Gentile alike to make a free response to his mercy.

JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Jesus, all of his disciples, and Paul were Jews. No attempt was made by any of the disciples to create a new religion outside of Judaism. Peter and Paul were the first to preach the Good News of Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) to Gentiles. While Jews resisted Paul's preaching about Jesus, an increasing number of Gentiles were receptive. The inclusion of so many Gentiles raised the question in Acts 15 as to whether or not Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become disciples of the Jewish Messiah. The conclusion of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was that they could become followers of Jesus without first becoming Jewish. While they were not subjected to Jewish dietary laws, they were not allowed to drink blood. The moral laws of Judaism were still in effect for the Gentile followers of Jesus. Eventually Judaism and Christianity became separate religions, but this was not the desire of those first disciples.

Since Judaism and Christianity are separate religions today, we must ask a similar question concerning the contemporary relationship between Judaism and Christianity. The new question, however, is this: Can a Jew find salvation without professing Jesus as the Messiah (Christ)? It is clear that Paul desires all of Judaism in his time to profess Jesus as the Messiah and hopes that Gentiles professing Him will attract Jews to professing Jesus as well. Paul does not want to give up hope for a Jewish acceptance of their own Messiah and that is why he says in Romans 9:3-5:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them,

according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever.
Amen.

The issue between Judaism and Christianity is Jesus and whether or not he is the Messiah and what being the Messiah means. There is also the question of what it means to call Jesus Lord. For Judaism the expectation of a Messiah was the expectation of an anointed King, like David, who would rule on earth. They found it difficult to profess faith in someone who did not fulfill their expectations and talked only of reigning in some kind of heavenly Kingdom. *Lord* was a term they substituted for Yahweh, the name of God, which was too sacred to say aloud. For Gentiles *Lord* was a term used to demonstrate loyalty to the Roman emperor, who sometimes had illusions of deity. The word *Lord* signified deity for Jew and Gentile alike. It was not a word to be taken lightly.

The claim in Christianity is that Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) is also Lord. Paul believed this and wrote in Romans 10:9-10: "...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved." Calling Jesus the Messiah is acknowledging him as the anointed King of the universe and professing that in him we encounter God himself, who is indeed King of the universe. While this is quite a bold claim to be making, it is the claim that early Christianity made. It is also believed by most contemporary Christians and has become the primary profession every person makes upon entering the Church, which Christians consider to be the Body of Christ.

Professing Jesus as Lord does promise salvation, but does salvation only come through such a profession? While many Christians may believe that, no one can prove it. Only God makes the final decision, and none of us is God. Jesus did make statements that sound very exclusive, such as the one he made in John 14:6-7: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Knowing God, however, does not mean that we know who will be saved and who will not be saved. Jesus' parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25:32-46 makes very clear that none of us knows who will be the sheep (the saved) and who will be the goats (the condemned). What is clear in Jesus' parable of the last judgment is that we profess Jesus as Lord by doing what he commands. What he commands is the heart and spirit of what Judaism, as interpreted through the prophets, has taught since the days of Moses.

There is no question that Judaism has been the foundation out of which Christianity has grown. Jews could profess Jesus as their Messiah and Lord without leaving Judaism. If God truly did encounter us in Jesus of Nazareth, then it would be an appropriate response and Christians, like Paul, should pray for it to happen. Christians should also engage in meaningful dialogue with Jews without rejecting the heart and soul of Christianity. The one thing we cannot do is to determine who will and who will not be saved. That does not lie within our power or even within our understanding. Our task is to interpret what it means to profess Jesus as Lord and then to live out our discipleship to him.

4

CHRISTIAN MORAL CONDUCT

Romans 12:1—16:16

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,
by the mercies of God, to present your bodies
as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship.*

*Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God—
what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Romans 12:1-2

The First E-Letters

4. CHRISTIAN MORAL CONDUCT (12:1 – 16:27)				
THE TRANSFORMED PERSON				
True Worship (12:1-2)	The Gifts of the Spirit (12:3-8)		The Law of Love (12:9-21)	
DUTIES TOWARDS CIVIL GOVERNMENT (13:1-7)				
DUTIES TOWARD ONE ANOTHER (13:8-14)				
The Supremacy of Love (13:8-10)		The Coming of Christ (13:11-14)		
FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY (14:1-23)				
THE EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBIITY (15:1-13)				
PERSONAL NOTES (15:14-33)				
GREETINGS TO FRIENDS AND CHURCHES (16:1-23)				
Prisca and Aquila (16:3-5)	Family of Aristobulus (16:10)	Family of Narcissus (16:11)	5 Male Leaders (16:14)	2 Female and 3 Male leaders (16:15)
THE FINAL BENEDICTION (16:25-27)				

4. CHRISTIAN MORAL CONDUCT

Romans 12:1–16:16

ASSIGNMENTS				
The Transformed Person (12:1-21)	Political and Personal Duties (13:1-14)	Freedom and Responsibility (14:1-23)	Christian Responsibility and Mission (15:1-33)	Greetings to Friends and Churches (16:1-27)

THE TRANSFORMED PERSON (12:1-21)

The Christian is to live as a citizen of the coming Kingdom.

True Worship (12:1-2)

True worship consists of expressing our faith in service. Our focus is not the sanctuary, but everyday life. God's standards, and not the world's, determine what we do. These two verses form a foundation for Christian worship and ethics.

The Gifts of the Spirit (12:3-8)

Everyone has been blessed with at least one of the spiritual gifts. The transformation of our minds makes us eager to share our gift. We do not possess all the gifts of the Spirit, but we share what we have been given. They range from prophetic preaching and teaching to giving and helping. No attempt should be made to rank these gifts. All are of equal importance.

The Law of Love (12:9-21)

What follows in these verses is a loose interpretation of Leviticus 19:18. Instead of quoting Jesus' teaching on love from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-48), Paul follows the traditional rabbinical teaching methodology and quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 (on revenge) and Proverbs 25:21-22 (on loving the enemy). While the Gospel of Matthew would not yet have been available to Paul, he certainly must have been aware of some of the teachings of Jesus which were being passed around orally. Why does he not appeal to them? Being a Pharisee he prefers to quote Scripture, and Jesus' teachings had not yet been elevated to Scripture. They do however conform to Scripture, and so Paul is quite

consistent in stating that the Law of Love should control the followers of Jesus. We love both our friends and our enemies and we recognize that vengeance belongs to God.

Our purpose in loving our enemies by encountering their evil with good is not simply to embarrass them, but to win them over as friends. This is the only way in which our love can be sincere and that we can be aglow in the Spirit.

DUTIES TOWARD CIVIL GOVERNMENT (13:1-7)

Having stated that Christians have no right to exercise revenge, Paul turns our attention to the authorities having the responsibility for punishing wrongdoers. Christians have a duty to support civil government, which could not exist without God's permission. I Peter 2:13-17 agrees with Paul on this point, but the Book of Revelation takes a different viewpoint. When the Revelation was written, Rome was persecuting Christians; so the author of the Revelation portrays the Roman Empire as being under the control of Satan. The whole political-religious context has changed. Paul assumes that the Roman State is *just*; therefore, Christians have a duty to submit to it and pay their taxes. Jesus made a similar assumption in Matthew 17:24-27; 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; and Luke 20:19-26. This does not require blind obedience. Paul is aware of the need to obey God whenever there is a conflict. This example was set by the early Apostles (Acts 5:29). Civil government is subordinate to God and has no divine authority to silence the proclamation of the Gospel.

These verses do not support one form of government over another, nor do they obligate Christians to supporting corrupt governments. Christians ought not to participate in movements to overthrow properly constituted and functioning governments, but neither should they support them without asking questions. Civil government is to be supported by taxes, but it also has a responsibility to punish evildoers and establish justice for all. Justice has a positive side as well as a negative side.

DUTIES TOWARD ONE ANOTHER (13:8-14)

Although we might be tempted to make a distinction between social and personal ethics, we should resist every temptation to do this. Every form of morality is social. Our duties toward one another are fulfilled in love, and our expectation of the coming Kingdom makes it urgent that we be about our Father's business of loving.

The Supremacy of Love (13:8-10)

The Christian has but one debt and that is to love. "It is our duty," said Origen, "always to pay and always to owe this debt of love." Paul is consistent with Jesus' teaching in Mark 12:28-34, but he omits Jesus' reference to loving God. Why does Paul only talk about loving the neighbor? Perhaps he thinks that the loving response to God is *faith* and the faithful response to one another is *love*. Augustine suggested, "Love [God] and do as you please." This only works if we properly understand what it means to love. Jesus has not

only told us to love but has illustrated it with his life. Paul defined love for us in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, specifically in verses 4-7.

The Coming of Christ (13:11-14)

Knowing that the risen Christ is coming soon makes this whole issue of loving one another more urgent. It cannot be put off. We must put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that we must enter fully into a new order of existence, which Jesus referred to as the Kingdom of God. These are the verses that were read by a child when Augustine experienced his conversion, causing him to abandon his old morality and to take on a new form of morality. He could now love God and do as he pleased, for what he pleased was to please God; and what pleased God was a new order in which love was supreme.

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY (14:1-23)

In these verses Paul refers to those who have difficulty with the practice of others in (1) eating, (2) observing special days, and (3) drinking wine as being *weak* in their faith. The reference to *eating* has to do with the Gentile fear of eating meat sacrificed to idols and the Jewish fear of eating ritually unclean animals. The “observance” of special days has to do with the Gentile neglect of the Sabbath and the other Jewish feasts and fasts commanded in the Old Testament. This does not mean that the Gentiles did not observe the Lord’s Day, but that they were not becoming *Jewish* Christians. Paul’s advice is given in Romans 14:13, where he suggests that one exercise responsibility in the presence of “weaker” persons so that their faith is not completely destroyed. We must not open our selves to criticism, but work together in love. Love is more important than food or drink or special days, and its expression in righteousness, peace, and joy is what matters most (14:17). Although Christians are free of the law, they are responsible in love for one another.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY (15:1-13)

Christians are not to demand their rights. They are to exercise responsibility. Christ has given us an example we should follow. Gaining a good relationship with another person is more important than demanding our rights.

In a series of Old Testament quotations Paul points out the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation. God wants Jews and Gentiles to unite in Christ.

PERSONAL NOTES (15:14-33)

In these verses Paul outlines his immediate intentions. First, he intends to go to Jerusalem with aid given by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia. Although he does not mention Galatia in Romans, he does in 1 Corinthians 16:1. Nothing is ever said about how this money was used or even if it was accepted. Jewish Christians would have had difficulty accepting Gentile money, even if they did need it. Even if Jewish Christians could have

accepted it, they lived within the context of a society that hated Rome. There would have been pressure on them from Zealous Jews to reject anything from Gentiles.

Although Paul expected difficulty in Jerusalem, he did not expect to be arrested and sent to Rome. He anticipated making the trip as a free man. Since he believed that time was of the essence, he saw no reason to retrace his steps to places where he had already preached, such as Jerusalem and Illyricum. No record has ever been made of a journey to Illyricum (modern Albania). Perhaps Paul proclaimed the Gospel there through some of his companions.

Paul's purpose was to spread the Gospel throughout the known world as quickly as possible. There was no time to spare. If the end was coming soon, Rome, the center of western civilization, was an important priority; but then, so was Spain, since the Gospel had not yet been preached there. Spain, however, represented a new kind of challenge. There were very few Jews in Spain and there was a language barrier. The old methods used by Paul would not work in Spain; hence, he would need financial support for any missionary journey into Spain. The hope was to unite the various factions of the Church in order to gain moral and financial support for a missionary journey to Spain.

GREETINGS TO FRIENDS AND CHURCHES (16:1-23)

Most of the friends listed are unknown, but they raise an interesting question. How did Paul know so many people in a Church he never visited? Various answers have been given to this question. One of the most common is that these people moved to Rome, and this is a very reasonable possibility. Two of his friends were Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, who moved from Rome to Corinth to Ephesus, and back to Rome. These are the most familiar of his friends, and we encountered them in Acts 18:2-3 and 18-28. Another answer frequently given is that Romans 16 represents a separate letter, or at least a fragment of such a letter, which was added to Romans. The most likely recipient of Romans 16 would have been the Church in Ephesus.

Another theory is that most of the people mentioned are leaders of five house churches in Rome. The five house churches were led by Prisca and Aquila (16:3-5), the family of Aristobulus (16:10), the family of Narcissus (16:11), five leaders (16:14), and two women and three men (16:15). In addition to the above leaders, there seem to be leaders disconnected from the house churches. Perhaps they were leaders who fled Rome under the Edict of Claudius in 49 C.E. With that Edict lifted, they returned to house churches with new leadership in place. As we look at the names of Paul's list of leaders, we find a significant number of women among them. This would have been unusual in the Greco-Roman world. The women's names are usually mentioned first, indicating either their higher social status or their dominant leadership role.

Paul's purpose in writing to all these Christian leaders was not to promote correct theology and ethics, but to unify them so that they can together fulfill the great commission. Without that unity, they would be distracted from their true mission, which

was to take the Good News of the Risen Christ to the ends of the earth. Spain was the next mission field.

Some of the most familiar names mentioned are Phoebe, Rufus, Timothy, and Tertius. Phoebe, a deaconess (helper), was a woman of high social standing who was very useful in Paul's missionary travels. She may have funded them, and intended to help him in his mission to Spain. Rufus has been frequently identified as the son of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21), the man who helped Jesus carry his cross. Timothy, of course, was a faithful companion of Paul's, who accompanied him on his missionary travels and was like a son to him. On some occasions Paul wrote with his own hand (Colossians 4:18), but Romans was written through Tertius, his secretary.

From this section we learn a great deal about the early Church. First, we discover that Christians depended upon one another when they traveled. The inns and hotels in the Roman world were filled with prostitutes and robbers, and Christians seemed to avoid staying in them. They preferred to stay with one another. Another thing we learn is that they greeted one another with a holy kiss (16:16). This was a symbol of affection, which gradually worked its way into the liturgy of the Lord's Supper by the second century. Finally we find that the early church also had to deal with dissension and false teachings, and Paul warns his friends not to allow these things to undermine their mission in the world.

THE FINAL BENEDICTION (16:25-27)

Although Paul refers to the mystery or secret of the Old Testament, which was revealed in Jesus Christ, he also affirms the Old Testament as Scripture. The Old Testament is not something to be discarded, but understood in the light of Christ. This was not what Marcion (140 C.E.) was trying to do when he made his initial list of accepted sacred books. He affirmed certain Pauline writings, but he rejected the whole Old Testament. Paul would never have done that.

RESPECT FOR OTHERS

As Christians we have many responsibilities. It is difficult to carry them all out without conflicting with the faith and morals of others, including other Christians. Some Christians abstain from eating meat or drinking alcoholic beverages. If we find nothing objectionable about eating meat or drinking alcoholic beverages, what are we to do when in their company? Paul addresses this issue in Romans 14:17 and 21, where he says:

For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)

Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. (Romans 14:20-21)

One has to discern who is weak and who is strong. To abstain from meat or alcoholic beverages in the company of the weak and then to eat or drink in the company of the strong may look like hypocrisy. Paul intends for it to be respect. We all have to make our own moral decisions, but we need to be aware of the fact that our behavior may indeed cause others to stumble.

Eating and drinking are not the only issues. There is also the issue of how we observe holy days, or whether we observe them at all. Some of us may decide not to observe a holy day that seems very important to another, such as Christmas or Easter. Our reason might be that every day is sacred and should be observed as holy. Paul has also spoken to this issue:

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. (Romans 14:5-6)

What shall we then do when in the company of those who refrain from eating meat, abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages, or do not observe special Holy Days. We do the same as they do, or as the old saying goes, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” This does not mean that we are free to be immoral. It has to do with respecting the morality of another, which might be different from our own. As Paul says in Romans 14:7, “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.” Whatever we do, it must glorify God. If it does not do that, then we are not free to do it. “The same love which restrains from all evil,” said John Wesley, “incites us to all good.” As Christians our aim is always to do good. This means that we are normally law-abiding citizens and that we respect the morality of others. We are not however, free to be immoral. Others must also respect our moral conscience. It is dangerous to go against our moral conscience.

It is all too easy to get so involved in morality that we forget about our real calling, which is to share the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The gift of eternal life is not offered to us because we have somehow succeeded in becoming moral; rather, it is a gift, which we could never earn. All of our moral behavior emerges as gratitude to the giver of life. It is our offering of thanksgiving.

5
FACTIONS
IN THE CHURCH
1 Corinthians 1:1—4:21

*Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus
by the will of God,
and our brother Sosthenes,
To the church of God that is in Corinth,
to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus,
called to be saints....*

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

The First E-Letters

5. FACTIONS IN THE CHURCH (1:1—4:21)			
THE INTRODUCTION (1:1-9)			
Greetings (1:1-3)		Thanksgiving (1:4-9)	
DISSENSIONS (1:10-17)			
THE PRIMACY OF CHRIST (1:18—2:5)			
THE WISDOM OF GOD (2:6-16)			
THE SERVANTS OF GOD (3:1—4:5)			
THE APOSTLES OF CHRIST (4:6-21)			
City of Corinth 400 to 600,000 in Population	Paul founded the Church around 51-53 C.E.	There were 50 to 100 Converts	There were 5 to 10 House Churches

5. FACTIONS IN THE CHURCH

I Corinthians 1:1—4:21

ASSIGNMENTS				
Introduction and Dissensions (1:1-17)	The Primacy of Christ (1:18—2:5)	The Wisdom of Christ (2:6-16)	The Servants of God (3:1—4:5)	The Apostles of Christ (4:6-21)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The author is clearly the Apostle Paul.

The Date

This letter was obviously written two or three years prior to Paul's letter to Rome and so an approximate date might be 54-55 C.E.

The Place

Paul was in Ephesus from 53 to 56 C.E. This helps us to know his location for the writing of 1 Corinthians, but it has also helped us to make decisions on the dating of the letter.

The Purpose

The letter was written on the basis of *reports* from Corinth about divisions and immorality in the Church (1:11 & 5:1). Paul replied to the splits by telling the members of the Corinthian church that they ought not to have loyalty to a preacher or leader (1:12ff), but to Christ (3:11), who is the only foundation on which the Church can be built. The name of Christ appears more in this letter than in any other in the entire New Testament. Thus Paul believed that Christ was the answer to their disunity. Although he taught that Christians do not live under the law, he allowed no room for sinful and immoral living. Christians make up the very Temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19-20) and so they are to glorify God through their bodies. Those who refuse to do this are not to be allowed in fellowship with the Church. This is for their

benefit. In response to questions posed by the Church, Paul deals with such issues as marriage (7), meat offered to idols (8), worship and the Lord's Supper (11), spiritual gifts (12-14), doubts about the resurrection (15), and a special offering (16). His answers are still helpful to the Church today.

Corinth

Destroyed in 146 C.E., Corinth was rebuilt a century later under orders from Julius Caesar. It quickly grew to be an important Roman colony with a population somewhere between 400,000 to 600,000. Strategically located, it controlled trade across the narrow neck of land between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. Seamen preferred to drag their vessels on rollers across the four mile Isthmus north of Corinth to taking chances in the very dangerous seas to the South of Corinth; so Corinth became an important center of commerce. This made the city very cosmopolitan where Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians, and Jews rubbed shoulders. To establish a Church in Corinth meant that it would quickly spread. Perhaps this is why Paul stayed here longer than anywhere else except for Ephesus. The Church was established on Paul's second missionary journey (4:15 and Acts 18). Since the city was dominated by the famous Temple dedicated to Aphrodite (goddess of love), which, stood 1,800 feet above the city streets, the Church had a very difficult time dealing with immorality and sexual license. Connected to this temple were thousands of temple prostitutes. *Corinthianize* was a term which symbolized the Corinthian style of immorality. It is interesting that Paul, in spite of all the difficulties in the Corinthian Church, refers to the Corinthian Christians as "Saints." He felt a deep affection for this Church.

Other Letters

The number of letters written to the Corinthian Church has been the subject of much debate. Some of the Letters may have been lost, with others mixed up in 1 and 2 Corinthians. A fragment of a previous Letter, for example, might just be 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1; and a fragment of the severe Letter might be 2 Corinthians 10-13. Scholars see *breaks* in 2 Corinthians and suggest that it may contain various letters. Other scholars suggest that writing a long letter took some time, and that such *breaks* would be natural as the author resumed the task of writing. Finally, there is the question of the Corinthian letter or letters to Paul. In 1 Corinthians 7:1, there is evidence that Paul is replying to a letter he has received. It would be helpful to have a copy of that letter, or letters.

Outline

- A. Introduction. (1:1-9)
- B. Factions in the Church. (1:10—4:21)
- C. Sexual Morality and Family Life. (5:1—7:40)
- D. Christians and Pagans. (8:1—11:1)
- E. Church Life and Worship. (11:2—14:40)

- F. The Resurrection. (15:1-58)
- G. The Offering for Judea. (16:1-4)
- H. Personal Matters and the Conclusion. (16:5-24)

1-4	5-6	7-16
Split in the Congregation	Frequent Sins	Questions

THE INTRODUCTION (1:1-9)

Greetings (1:1-3)

The letter begins with Paul’s greetings to those who are “called to be saints” in Corinth. This may seem like a contradiction as their problems begin to emerge, but it makes very clear to us that the term “saint” is not to be reserved for those who are perfect. Sosthenes, Paul’s secretary, might be the Synagogue leader described in Acts 18:17, who was the cause of the first wave of persecution against the Christians in Corinth. If he is the same man, he must have experienced a similar conversion to that of Paul’s. His name is used here because he would have been known.

Thanksgiving (1:4-9)

One might wonder how Paul could be thankful for a congregation with so many problems. As he expresses his thanks, he also alludes to “spiritual gifts,” which he will deal with later. The problems in Corinth give Paul an opportunity to exercise his leadership abilities and to produce some of the greatest Christian literature in history.

DISSENSIONS (1:10-17)

Chloe’s people reported the dissension in Corinth to Paul. These would be members of her household, who could be slaves or servants, who wrote and visited Paul in Ephesus. The problem had to do with personal loyalties, which were developing into cliques. Nothing is mentioned about theological heresies or ethical causes, which divide us today. Three, possibly four, personality cults were evolving around Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (Peter). A fourth personality cult might have had to do with those who tried to identify with Christ as if the others were not truly Christian. We have such people today. According to Paul no clique can *own* Christ.

It is easy to see how these personality cults developed. Paul was the founder of the Corinthian Church. Apollos, a hellenized Jew from Alexandria (Egypt), worked with Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, and then went to Corinth, where he became a very eloquent and powerful preacher. He was there, while Paul was absent. There is no

evidence that Peter ever went to Corinth, but he would have been popular among Jewish Christians. Much of the dissension seems to emerge out of the sacrament of baptism. Paul simply states that he is glad that he only baptized a few, mainly Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanas and his family. He did not see himself called to develop a personality cult among those whom he baptized, but to preach the Gospel of Christ to all people.

THE PRIMACY OF CHRIST (1:18—2:5)

The Crucified Christ is to be the rallying point for every group. Paul acknowledges that this will not be popular among the Jews, who demand signs, nor will it be popular among the Greeks, who desire wisdom. It will be a stumbling block to the former and folly to the latter; but to the simple and humble, it will be the power of God to transform life. For those who believe, Christ becomes their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1:30)

Paul came not to demonstrate his eloquence as a speaker, but to proclaim the message of the cross and its transforming power on all who believe. Knowing that his message about the cross would conflict with the more polished Jewish and Greek leaders, he came with fear and trembling; nevertheless, he came pointing to the primacy of the cross of Christ. What is somewhat puzzling in this passage is the lack of any reference to the resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrection, the cross loses its power.

THE WISDOM OF GOD (2:6-16)

The *unspiritual* cannot discern the “wisdom of God” because they are dominated only by their physical impulses and needs. They are insensitive to spiritual realities and do not possess spiritual gifts. On the other hand, the *spiritual* possess spiritual gifts and comprehend the “wisdom of God,” which is properly understood as “Christ Crucified.” The *spiritual* investigate all dimensions of human life, probing even into the depths of God. As a result they possess the very mind of Christ and, through him, can see into the heart of God.

THE SERVANTS OF GOD (3:1—4:5)

The Corinthians, like all of us, had to begin with the simple Gospel (milk), but like all children, they must learn how to move on to maturity (solid food). This requires moving away from dependence upon human leaders and recognizing that the only solid foundation is Jesus Christ (3:11). We do not belong to human leaders. They belong to us. We belong to Christ, and through him, to God.

The section on judgment (3:12-15) is an indication that Paul did not feel like he did a very good job of teaching the Corinthians. He concludes by comparing the Church to the Temple of the Holy Spirit (3:16-17). Those who divide and destroy it are guilty of a terrible desecration. Leaders are not to take the place of Christ; rather, they are *servants of Christ*. They are entrusted with the *mysteries of Christ* and must be trustworthy. All this means that leaders must not compete with one another for followers; rather, they are

to work together leading everyone to focus on Christ, the only foundation that will hold the Church together.

THE APOSTLES OF CHRIST (4:6-21)

Not arrogance, but humility is the characteristic of a Christian. Those responsible for the factions in Corinth have become arrogant and have missed the point of their discipleship. Paul does not chide the leadership, but he does chide those who have rallied around different leaders and led others in their mistaken development of personality cults. The *guardians* mentioned in 4:15 are not Peter or Apollos, but lesser leaders who have not matured in their faith. *Guardians* were slaves who cared for their master's children, but they were not real leaders. Paul appeals as the Father or Founder of the Corinthian Church that they imitate him. He is not trying to get them to develop a personality cult around himself, but to imitate him as he imitates Christ (11:1). Mature Christians and leaders imitate Christ, who became a servant to all. Timothy, Paul's faithful companion, had been sent to teach them. If he could not succeed, then Paul would have to come himself. He hoped that he could come not to chastise, but to love.

THE INEVITABILITY OF SPLITS

We do not want to see the Body of Christ split any more than did Paul, but we are not any more capable of preventing splits, whether they be over the subtleties of theology or the moral decision-making that we cannot avoid. Paul struggled with loyalties to various leaders and called upon the Church to build on the foundation of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, he wrote, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." Even when our focus is on Jesus Christ, however, we must be careful not to conclude that we are the only ones who know who Jesus Christ is. The focus must be on Jesus Christ, not our conception or image of him.

In every community I have served, I have attended both the mainline clergy associations and the evangelical clergy fellowships. The two groups have been as different as night is from day; yet, both groups claim to believe in Jesus Christ. Their conceptions of him are vastly different. If the clergy have trouble making him the foundation, we can expect even more differences among the laity. What does it mean to make Jesus Christ the foundation?

The first thing it means is to accept what Jesus Christ claims for himself. He claimed to be the Jewish Messiah and to be one with God. At least that is the interpretation of his claim in the New Testament, which we must admit, was written and defined by leaders in the early Church. To accept Jesus' claims does not make us arrogant; rather, it makes us humble. Like Moses, Jesus was meek, which means that he was humble. Those of us who decide to follow him must also exhibit humility.

The second implication of considering Jesus Christ the foundation has to do with the way we organize as churches. "Do you not know," writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" This is as true for congregations

as it is for individuals. Jesus Christ is the foundation and the head of his Body, the Church. The Spirit of God gives life to the Body and lives within every congregation and individual. Moral decisions are made from the guidance of God's living Spirit.

Can splits be avoided? Those who accept Jesus' claims and become sensitive to the Spirit's presence will recognize one another, regardless of their denominational affiliations. There will be a unity that crosses the diversity of denominational traditions. Those who do not accept Jesus' claims and are insensitive to the Spirit's presence will cause division within and outside of the churches to which they belong. Every congregation bears the responsibility of making clear to its members what it means to believe in Jesus Christ and to live accordingly. It is an awesome responsibility but splits are inevitable even if they are undesirable. When they happen, we should be careful neither to idolize a revered leader nor to stray from the moral standards Jesus Christ has set out for us.

6
CHRISTIANS
AND PAGANS
1 Corinthians 5:1—11:1

*But take care that this liberty of yours
does not somehow become a stumbling block
to the weak.*

1 Corinthians 8:9

The First E-Letters

6. CHRISTIANS AND PAGANS (5:1 – 11:1)

EXCOMMUNICATION (5:1-13)

PAGAN COURTS (6:1-8)

FREEDOM OR LICENCE? (6:9-20)

QUESTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE (7:1-40)

The Single Life

Divorce

Circumcision

Sex within Marriage

Remarriage

Slavery

FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS (8:1-13)

A PREACHER'S WIFE AND SALARY (9:1-27)

LESSONS FROM HISTORY (10:1-13)

SHUN THE WORSHIP OF IDOLS (10:14 – 11:1)

6. CHRISTIANS AND PAGANS

1 Corinthians 5:1—11:1

ASSIGNMENTS				
Excommunication and Pagan Courts (5:1—6:20)	Questions about Marriage (7:1-40)	Food offered to Idols (8:1-13)	Preacher's Wife and Salary (9:1-27)	Lessons from History and Idolatry (10:1—11:1)

EXCOMMUNICATION (5:1-13)

A member of the Church has moved in with his stepmother, something that both Jewish (Leviticus 18:7-8) and Roman Law forbids. Since he is not accused of adultery, one can only assume that his father has either divorced her or died. What troubles Paul is that the congregation does nothing about the situation. While he supported the idea that Gentile Christians are not subject to Jewish Law, he believes that Christians ought to live lives more exemplary than that defined by the Law. The man ought to be delivered to Satan (temporary discipline) so that he might be saved (long term good). (5:5) The member must be excommunicated from the Church. A lax attitude towards him would be like “leaven” corrupting the rest of the congregation. The Church leaders must act getting rid of the “old yeast” or the evil will spread.

Other sins are listed as well. Some of them, like greed, are quite general; others, like drunkenness and theft, are quite specific. Most of them are against other people, but idolatry is an affront on God. Christians are not even to eat with such people. Paul is not calling for isolation from such persons, but “self-discipline” in the Church. Obviously the Church must relate to such people in the world, but the Church must never allow such persons to flaunt their sins. The Church must become a disciplined community.

PAGAN COURTS (6:1-8)

The Corinthian Christians were going to pagan courts to settle their disputes. Even the Jews did not do this. It was not because they believed the courts corrupt, but because it was an admission that they could not handle their own problems. Paul was making the same objection. Christians, according to Jesus (Matthew 19:28), will participate with Jesus in the Messianic judgment at the end of the age. It is therefore a scandal for them to stand before unbelievers (pagans) in this world. Jesus suffered injustice and so can we. It is better to suffer injustice than to parade our problems before unbelievers.

FREEDOM OR LICENSE? (6:9-20)

Although the Christian is free, there are some things that destroy freedom. Paul lists those things in 6:9-10. Our freedom does not permit us to live like pagans. Sexual perversion includes homosexuality. Paul certainly opposed it (Romans 1:26-27). For some Corinthian Christians sexual relations with prostitutes was just satisfying bodily needs in the same way that eating food satisfied hunger. Not so for Paul. Having sexual intercourse with a prostitute was becoming one with her. It also meant entering into communion with her god. Most prostitutes were related to a pagan temple and so having sex with them was no simple matter of satisfying the sexual urge.

The body is important for Paul. It is an extension of Christ in the world. No one can sin with the body and keep one's personality untainted. Our body is also the extension of our own personality. To involve the body in sin is to involve Christ, for our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Both the body and the personality belong to the Lord. He purchased them with his own blood on the cross.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE (7:1-40)

A number of moral questions are raised in this chapter, most of which have to do with sex and marriage. It must be remembered that in Corinth sacred prostitution was legal and commonly practiced at the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

The Single Life

Paul's advice is to remain single (7:8-9), but if that is too difficult, it is not a sin to marry (7:28 & 36). He gives three reasons for the single life. They are: (1) the present world is passing away (7:31), (2) one would be free of anxiety (7:32), and (3) it enables one to give undivided devotion to the Lord (7:35).

Sex within Marriage

Husband and wife should not deny sexual intercourse to one another (7:2-5). When we take our vows in marriage, we commit ourselves to one another. We no longer belong to ourselves, but to one another. We become one flesh.

Divorce

Paul's conclusions concerning divorce are identical to Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:2-9. There ought to be no divorce between Christians. If a Christian is married to an unbeliever, that presents another problem. They are to remain married if possible (7:12), but should the unbeliever desire release from the marriage, the Christian is to let him or her go (7:15). Although Paul admits that he has no direct word from the Lord, he states that partners are bound to each other until death. Taken literally this would indicate no marriage after divorce. Is this the "spirit" of Jesus' teachings? I think not, but at the same time, divorce is a very serious matter; and it ought not to be done without serious thought.

Remarriage

Widows are given freedom to remarry (7:39). They are, however, only to marry “in the Lord.” This means that they are to marry those with whom they can share their faith. What is clear is that Paul’s teaching on marriage and divorce is for Christians. He is not writing a morality for society in general.

Circumcision

Not all of Paul’s advice is on marriage. Those who bear the mark of Judaism, should not try to hide it; on the other hand, those who have not been circumcised, do not need to have it done. Circumcision is no longer the symbol of faith for God’s people; therefore, it is unnecessary (7:19-20). Obeying the commandments is what matters.

Slavery

Slaves should not seek their freedom, but should remain obedient to their masters (7:21-24). Paul realizes that there is no room within Christianity for master-slave relationships (Galatians 3:28), but he expects the sudden return of Jesus. In the light of Jesus’ coming, there is no reason to revolutionize the whole structure of society. While Paul did not call for a rebellion against slavery, he did sow the seeds for a rebellion that had to come as soon as the Church realized that Jesus’ coming was not imminent.

FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS (8:1-13)

The issue was whether or not Christians were free to eat food, which had been offered to an idol. This was a real problem for Christians in Corinth, where trade groups and clubs held their social functions in pagan temples. Meat that had been offered to pagan gods was sold in the market. How was the Christian to respond? Some of them believed that since the idols did not exist, they were free to eat any of this food or meat; others, thinking of the witness they were making, insisted that Christians should abstain from all food offered to idols. Paul’s suggestion is that pagan gods do not really exist; therefore, Christians are free to eat food and meat offered to idols, but there is another matter to consider. Christian brothers and sisters with weak consciences do exist, and we are responsible for them. Love takes priority over freedom. The advice given here might easily be applied to some of our social problems, such as the drinking of alcoholic beverages. While we might be free to drink, perhaps abstinence is a more loving approach.

A PREACHER’S WIFE AND SALARY (9:1-27)

Paul voluntarily gave up two rights. The first was the right to be paid a salary, the second was the right to have a wife accompany him. Peter, some of Jesus’ brothers, and some of the other Apostles (9:4) did have wives. Paul defends payment of a salary to preachers in four ways: (1) from custom (9:7), (2) from scripture (9:8-12), (3) from cultic practice (9:13), and (4) from a commandment given by Jesus (9:14 and Luke 10:7).

Why does Paul forego these two rights? His primary reason is that he has been called by God to preach (9:16). It is not simply a vocation, but a calling from God. Paul resists becoming a pastor and taking a salary because he wants to encourage the Church to do as much as it can; nevertheless, he encourages congregations to support their own pastors and ministry. Paul stands ready to do everything he can to help them succeed; hence, he becomes all things to all persons. This is not to be conceived of in moral terms, but as a strategy to win all persons to Christ. He identifies with slaves in order to win slaves. He identifies with Jews in order to win Jews. He identifies with Gentiles in order to win Gentiles. He identifies with the weak in order to win the weak.

The task of winning people to Christ is urgent. Paul compares it to the Isthmian Games held in Corinth every three years, which were second only to the Olympic Games. Although he mixes racing and boxing imagery, his point is that there is an eternal prize to be won and this prize is far more important than the perishable wreath given in the Games. Every effort must be made to succeed in taking the Gospel to all persons and giving up a few rights is a small price to pay. Paul willingly gives them up for the sake of the Gospel.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY (10:1-13)

Paul uses an unfamiliar literary form. It is called a typology. This means that he reads Old Testament events as “foreshadowings” of contemporary experiences. The crossing of the sea and the developing cloud become symbols for Christian baptism and the miraculous food and drink become symbols for the Lord’s Supper. The rock from which the water sprang symbolizes Christ.

The conclusion Paul draws is that being baptized and participating in the Lord’s Supper does not guarantee any more security for us than participating in the Old Testament symbols did for them. People who accompanied Moses were still lost and people baptized and participating in the Lord’s Supper can still be lost today. Nevertheless, we are no more tempted than they, and God does not tempt us beyond our abilities (10:13).

SHUN THE WORSHIP OF IDOLS (10:14—11:1)

The cup of blessing (10:16) was the name given to the third cup of the Passover Feast. It was a prayer of thanksgiving, which Jesus used to describe what was about to happen to him. To participate in this ritual meant that one was entering into a partnership with the Lord. Likewise to participate with pagans in their sacrifices meant that one got involved in a partnership with demons. While Paul did not believe in the existence of pagan gods, he did believe in the existence of demons. For Paul idolatry existed because of these malign (angelic) powers. None of this prohibits Christians from eating with pagans, but Christians are not to participate in pagan sacrifices. If one of their pagan friends gives the meat this interpretation, the Christian is not to eat. This is for the benefit of a faithful witness. Paul has moved away from the Jewish idea, which prohibited dining with pagans, to allowing it as long as it was only a question of sharing a meal together. Paul is not calling for a new legalism, but for an imitation of Christ (11:1), who ate with sinners.

IN BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Christians must live in the world, but they are not to be of the world. We cannot avoid the world, but we can control our own behavior and actions. Everything we do is either a positive witness for our faith or it negates the authenticity of our faith. We cannot avoid relating to the pagans and the paganism of the world, but we do not have to become pagans in the process.

When we become Christians, faith becomes the central focus of our lives and our greatest desire is to be faithful to the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. The place where this should have its greatest impact is in marriage. Christians ought to choose Christians for this most intimate of relationships; yet, in our society, faith is frequently the last thing considered in choosing a spouse. Couples seem to think that only *love* matters, but they operate with a pagan definition of love rather than a Biblical one. Love cannot be separated from faith.

What happens if we find ourselves in a marriage with someone who does not share our faith? Paul's answer is clear. Stay in the marriage as long as your partner gives you freedom to express and exercise your faith, but if your faith begins to bother your partner and he or she wants out of the marriage, divorce is an option. But is remarriage an option? Paul says, "NO," but then Paul expected the end of history at any moment. If one does choose to remarry, a shared faith had better become the central focus the second time around. Christian faith cannot baptize the *Hollywood* approach to sex and marriage.

More difficult than marriage is the Christian's approach to the legal system, which in Paul's time was in the hands of paganism. That is why Paul does not want Christians to settle their difficulties within the state legal system. It would be a terrible and negative witness. Christians, who should be living by an entirely different code of ethics, have no business asking those who live under a conflicting code of ethics, to settle their differences.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM 1 CORINTHIANS

For do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.

1 Corinthians 10:23-24

7

CHURCH LIFE AND WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 11:2—14:40

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and angels,
but do not have love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.*

1 Corinthians 13:1

The First E-Letters

7. CHURCH LIFE AND WORSHIP (11:2—14:33b-40)

CONDUCT IN WORSHIP (11:1-34)

Men and Women
(11:2-16)

The Lord's Supper
(11:17-30)

THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS (12:1-11 AND 28-31)

1. Wisdom
2. Knowledge
3. Faith
4. Healing
5. Miracles
6. Prophecy
7. Discernment
8. Tongues
9. Interpretation of Tongues

1. Apostles
2. Prophets
3. Teachers
4. Miracle Workers
5. Healers
6. Helpers (Deacons)
7. Administrators (Bishops)
8. Speakers in Tongues

THE CHURCH (12:1-11 AND 28-31)

THE GREATEST GIFT (13:1-13)

Love is...

Patient, kind, unselfish,
truthful, hopeful, enduring
(13:4-7)

Not envious, proud,
boastful, arrogant, rude
selfish, irritable, or
resentful
(13:4-5)

Without Love...

Tongues are mere noise
(13:1)

Prophecy, mysteries,
knowledge, and faith
amount to nothing
(13:2)

Stewardship and Sacrifice
amount to nothing
(13:3)

Love is Greater Than...

Prophecies, which will
end
(13:8)

Tongues, which will cease
(13:8)

Knowledge, which will
end
(13:8)

TONGUES AND PROPHECY (4:1-33a and 37-40)

WOMEN IN WORSHIP (14:33b-36)

7. CHURCH LIFE AND WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 11:2—14:40

ASSIGNMENTS				
Church Life and Worship (11:2-34 and 14:33b-36)	The Spiritual Gifts (12:1-11 and 28-31)	The Church (12:12-27)	The Greatest Gift (13:1-13)	Tongues and Prophecy (14:1-33a and 37-40)

CONDUCT IN WORSHIP (11:2-34)

Men and Women (11:2-16)

As Christianity spread into Greece, problems with Jewish tradition arose. In Jewish tradition both men and women covered their heads in worship. The same was true in Roman culture. Why then does Paul suggest that only women cover their heads? His argument seems to go back to creation. Christ rules man and man rules woman. In Greek culture one accepted authority by not wearing anything, but one demonstrated a respect for authority by wearing something. At one point Paul admitted that a woman's long hair was like a veil, but he still insists that she must wear a veil in worship. His point is that she ought not to come before God in a manner that would be considered indecent in Greek society. Only prostitutes unveiled themselves.

Paul's theology of the relationship between male and female is given more clearly in Galatians 3:28, where he insists that in Christ there is neither male nor female. All are one. Although Paul does not make a ruling on hair, he does mention that in his time men wore short hair and women long hair. In this whole passage, Paul is not making a commandment for all time, but dealing with a specific problem in Corinth.

The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)

This is the oldest account of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. It was written a good ten years before the Gospel of Mark. While it was written to counteract abuses, it still defines the meaning of the Lord's Supper. The eating of bread and drinking of wine make up a living sermon in which the death of Jesus is "memorialized" and in which his return in glory is "anticipated." (11:23-26) Participation in this living sermon is open to

everyone, but Paul warns that there ought not to be any “gluttony” or “drunkenness.” This would be an inappropriate way of celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

Paul’s warnings have nothing to do with being good enough, but have to do with how the congregation shares food and drinks wine. The context of the Lord’s Supper was a common meal called a love (agape) feast. (Jude 12) If Christians could not act appropriately in this meal, it might be better if they did not participate at all. If they were so hungry that they could not wait for others, they should eat before coming to worship.

Abuses in the observation of the Lord’s Supper contributed to dropping the common meal in favor of the way in which we celebrate the Lord’s Supper today. The Church has impoverished itself by allowing abuses such as these to determine how it will worship.

THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS (12:1-11 and 28-31)

In the pagan religions around Corinth *trances* and *ecstatic speech* were common. These were carried into Christianity and those who possessed them claimed to be more spiritual than those who did not exercise them. Paul insists that these practices do not guarantee the presence of the Spirit. Confession of Jesus as Lord (12:3) is what determines the presence of the Spirit and that is expressed primarily through love (12:31). This confession however does not eliminate all the problems experienced in the Corinthian Church. It must be assumed that everyone within the Church confessed Jesus as Lord, but still there was dissension over *ecstatic speech*. In response to this problem Paul listed nine spiritual gifts. The list begins with those gifts in short supply and ends with those gifts emphasized by some of the members. Wisdom and knowledge were nearly absent, but many stressed speaking in tongues. Paul stressed three things about all gifts: (1) their source, “from God,” (2) their variety, “distributed to different people,” and (3) their common purpose, “to benefit the community.”

Two lists of spiritual gifts are given (12:8-10 and 28). The second list begins with apostles, prophets, and teachers. These three gifts should not be thought of as a fixed pattern for the church’s ministry. No such pattern exists in the New Testament. For the sake of comparison, the spiritual gifts in these two lists are as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Wisdom | 1. Apostles |
| 2. Knowledge | 2. Prophets |
| 3. Faith | 3. Teachers |
| 4. Healing | 4. Miracle Workers |
| 5. Miracles | 5. Healers |
| 6. Prophecy | 6. Helpers (Deacons) |
| 7. Discernment | 7. Leaders (Bishops) |
| 8. Tongues | 8. Speakers in Tongues |
| 9. Interpretation of Tongues | |

One of the main differences in these lists has to do with one list focusing on the gifts, and the other on persons with gifts. What should be recognized is that Paul is in no way trying to make up an exhaustive list. There are other gifts not mentioned.

THE CHURCH (12:12-27)

When Paul compares the Church to the human body, he still has the spiritual gifts in mind. Although there are many organs, there is one body. Although there are many members (and spiritual gifts), there is one Church. As a living organism depends on all of its parts (hand, foot, ear, eye, etc.) so does the Church depend on all of its members. This analogy should not be pressed too far, for we all recognize the presence of some organs that do not play a vital role. The plea being made is to recognize the value of every gift, even the seemingly insignificant ones, and to desire the highest gift of which one is capable. While no one will possess all the gifts, there is one gift that everyone should seek—LOVE. This gift will tie everything together (See Colossians 3:12-15). So important is this gift, that it must be described and defined all by itself.

THE GREATEST GIFT (13:1-13)

Love is not contrasted with all the other spiritual gifts. We are not talking about *ordinary* or *romantic* love, but about *divine* (agape) love. Such love is a spiritual gift (Romans 5:5b). Paul proceeds to describe its (1) superiority, (2) nature, and (3) permanence.

This spiritual gift called love is superior to every other gift, including preaching (tongues of men), prophecy (tongues of angels), (intense) faith, and (financial or life-giving) sacrifices. Without love, all these gifts are useless. They are like the gongs and cymbals, which accompany pagan worship. They may sound good, but they serve no purpose at all. (13:1-3)

The nature of love is described with two fruit of the Spirit (patience and kindness) and with a series of negatives and positives (13:4-7). For a more comprehensive list of the fruit of the Spirit, see Galatians 5:22. The negatives are important in order to help us understand what love does not do. Too many things have been done in the name of Christianity that should never have been done; hence, faith needs to be motivated and informed by love.

The More Excellent Way		
Love is...	Without Love...	Love is Greater Than...
Patient, kind, unselfish, truthful, hopeful, enduring (13:4-7)	Tongues are mere noise (13:1)	Prophecies, which will end (13:8)
Not envious, proud, boastful, arrogant, rude, selfish, irritable, or resentful (13:4-5)	Prophecy, mysteries, knowledge, and faith amount to nothing (13:2)	Tongues, which will cease (13:8)
	Stewardship and Sacrifice amount to nothing (13:3)	Knowledge, which will End (13:8)

Contrasted with the other gifts, love alone is permanent (13:8-13). Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will pass away. What we see now is like looking at a reflection in a mirror. We need to look at the object itself, which is better than, and more real than, the image. Love is like that object. It will still be present after our faith is replaced by sight and our hope has been consummated. Love is the greatest gift because it is God’s gift to us (Romans 5:5b). Faith and hope make up our response to what God has done (1 John 4:19). Love is the spiritual gift to be most prized and used in our daily relationships with one another and with the whole nonChristian world. According to the Apostle of love, Jesus calls us to practice this kind of love in our relationships with one another. In John 13:34-35, the Apostle quotes the Master: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” According to John Wesley this is a call to “holiness of heart and life.”

TONGUES AND PROPHECY (14:1-33a & 37-40)

Tongues can be defined as “inspired speech used to praise God” and prophecy can be defined as “inspired speech used to convey God’s message to believers (and according to 1 Corinthians 14:22, unbelievers).” Love should always be the aim of Christians. Unbelievers would have difficulty coming into a service filled with the unrestrained expression of tongues; hence, Paul suggests that believers should consciously control their speaking in tongues. If they can restrain tongues, can they also initiate them? Perhaps. What is certain is that while Paul himself speaks in tongues, he places this gift in subordination to prophecy. He would prefer to say five words of prophecy to 10,000 words in tongues. This does not mean that he forbids the use of tongues in public worship. He applies the same rules to tongues as he does to prophecy. Let two or three persons speak (in tongues or prophecy) and let it all be done with decency and in order. In regard to tongues there must be interpretation. Such would not be necessary for prophecy, for even unbelievers can comprehend prophetic utterances.

WOMEN IN WORSHIP (14:33b-36)

Women were not forbidden to speak in tongues or to prophesy in public. Paul acknowledges the fact that they did prophesy in public, but tells them to cover their heads, as was the tradition in Corinth (11:5). What Paul is addressing here is their practice of talking to one another in public worship. Men and women sat separately, and the women tended to carry on conversations with one another. Sometimes they used their newfound freedom to ask questions or make comments in the middle of the worship service. Paul rejected this practice, and told them to wait until they got home. They could then ask their husbands to clarify things they could not understand.

Some Scholars believe that these three verses were not written by Paul, but were added to the text later. They do, however, seem to be consistent with Greek culture and tradition. Paul broke with that tradition as he treated men and women equally. See Galatians 3:28 for Paul's statement on equality. In Romans 16:1-4 and Philippians 4:2-3, Paul names women as colleagues.

AUTHENTICATING THE GIFTS

The Church is made up of many kinds of people with many kinds of gifts. We sometimes assume that everyone should have the same gifts that we have and so we treat those who lack our gifts as inferior Christians or accuse them of not being Christian at all. There is only one gift that all Christians ought to have and that is *love*.

John Wesley, the human founder of Methodism, once said, "The greatest gift the people called Methodists possess is that of Christian perfection." He called this gift by different names from time to time, including the terms "entire sanctification" and "Christian perfection." When he was pushed to define these terms, he said, "Perfect love is... 'loving God with all our heart and serving Him with all our strength. Nor did I ever say or mean any more by perfection than thus loving and serving God.'" "Entire sanctification, or Christian Perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love—love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God." This gift of course is not only for Methodists. It is for all Christians. Although it cannot be limited to Christians, Christians alone have it illustrated in the life of Jesus and defined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. This does not mean that we practice it perfectly, but the gift is intended for us. What is given, must then be expressed, or the gift has been rejected.

Assuming that we have accepted the gift, the next step is to discover what other gift or gifts we have been given. This is much more difficult, because the gifts are so many. In these chapters we have only a few of the gifts. Some of them, like the gift of tongues, have been controversial in the Church. We do not find tongues expressed in every congregation. Could it possibly be that congregations, like individuals, have special gifts? If the answer is, "Yes," then we must recognize that not all the gifts will be expressed in every congregation. There is nothing wrong with one congregation emphasizing the gift of tongues and another congregation lacking this gift altogether. We call congregations in which the gift of tongues is expressed *Pentecostal*, because this gift was initially

expressed at Pentecost. It was also expressed in various forms in the Corinthian congregation. In the Bible we do find various forms of this gift. Sometimes it is expressed as a foreign language, like it was expressed at Pentecost in Jerusalem; at other times, it is expressed as ecstatic speech, like it was expressed in Corinth. We should not call one form of expression authentic and the other a fake; rather, we should simply accept these different gifts given in different places to different congregations. The authenticity of any and every gift is *love*. That and nothing else authenticates every spiritual gift. Where love is absent, tongues are mere noise, prophecy becomes false, and stewardship amounts to nothing.

Spiritual gifts are intended to make the Church, as the Body of Christ, whole and unified. Both Individuals and congregations are to contribute their gift or gifts for the benefit of the whole. Christian love ties all these gifts together, enabling individuals and congregations to bear witness to the unbelieving world.

8

RESURRECTION AND FINAL MESSAGES

1 Corinthians 15:1—16:24

For I handed on to you as of first importance
what I in turn had received:
that Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the scriptures,
and that he was buried, and that he was raised
on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

The First E-Letters

8. RESURRECTION AND FINAL MESSAGES (15:1 – 16:24)			
THE RESURRECTION (15:1-58)			
The Tradition (15:1-11)	The Centrality and Fact of the Resurrection (15:12-34)	The Nature of the Resurrection (15:51-58)	The Final Trumpet (15:51-58)
FINAL MESSAGES (16:1-24)			
The Offering (16:1-4)	Travel Plans (16:5-9)	Comments about Colleagues (16:10-18)	Closing Greetings (16:19-24)

8. RESURRECTION AND FINAL MESSAGES

1 Corinthians 15:1—16:24

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Centrality of the Resurrection (15:1-34)	The Nature of the Resurrection (15:35-50)	The Final Trumpet (15:51-58)	Paul's Final Messages (16:1-24)

THE RESURRECTION (15:1-58)

The Tradition (15:1-11)

In Greece, including Corinth, the resurrection of the dead seemed utterly ridiculous (Acts 17:32); hence, Paul saves his discussion of this very important Christian belief for last. For some reason, he does not mention the empty tomb of the Gospels, but focuses on the appearances of Jesus to Cephas (Peter), the 12, the 500, James (Jesus' brother), and finally to himself as one born late. This list cannot be harmonized with the Gospel appearances. No mention is made here of the women who saw him prior to Peter and no mention is made in the Gospels of the 500. Was this a Galilean appearance, or could this be a reference to the gathering in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2)?

The Centrality and Fact of the Resurrection (15:12-34)

Although the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central, it stands as part of his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. These other three doctrines contribute to and are dependent on Jesus' resurrection. Christian faith stands or falls on belief in the resurrection. This is not optional. Without this belief, we might as well eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die (15:32). The resurrection alone gives us hope, meaning, and a reason to live. Belief in it cannot be laid aside.

Being baptized on behalf of the dead was and is a questionable practice, and one wonders whether Paul is giving tacit approval here. It was done to assure that one's loved ones would share in the resurrected life. Paul does not say one way or the other what he believes, but makes reference to it in support of his own argument for belief in the resurrection.

While this teaching of the Church is absolutely central, there is room for disagreement on the nature of that resurrection.

The Nature of the Resurrection (15:35-50)

The real difficulty for some people is the *physical* resurrection. Is the new body the same as the one we currently experience? Paul's answer to that is, "NO!" To make his point he uses imagery from the *miracle of creation* in which seeds grow into wheat and the *variety of bodies* we experience in our present world. As the full-grown plant outshines the shriveled seed, so will our new body outshine our old one. There are many kinds of bodies in this world. Why is it so difficult for us to conceive of bodies we have not yet experienced? The *terrestrial* will become the *celestial*. While there is *real* continuity between bodies, there will also be *radical* discontinuity. The same is true for the seed and the wheat, or to use another image, which Paul does not use, the caterpillar and the butterfly. At the end of this section Paul assures us that he is not talking about a *reviving* of the old body, but a complete transformation. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, but God is capable of creating new *celestial* bodies for us.

The Final Trumpet (15:51-58)

When the last trumpet blows (at the end of history), both the living and the dead will experience that new creation in which God's people will have *celestial* bodies. Does this mean that we will all be raised at the same time? In my opinion, Paul seems to imply this; but at the same time, the question is not important. What is important is the promise of resurrection. We believe in the resurrection of the body, and leave the timing of it up to God. This belief does not move us towards inactivity, but motivates and empowers us towards a life of activity; for we know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

FINAL MESSAGES (16:1-24)

The Offering (16:1-4)

The Church in Jerusalem is struggling with poverty and so Paul attempts to demonstrate love and unity within the Church by asking the Corinthians to prepare an offering. The suggestion to set something aside on the first day of the week is not a general principle to be followed by all churches to deal with their own finances, but it is not a bad idea and one which took root and is still with us.

Travel Plans (16:5-9)

Paul intends to make another trip to Corinth, but the timing is not yet right. He seems to have too much to do in Ephesus. While the doors are wide open for his mission in Ephesus, such opportunities are accompanied with great hostility. Is this always the case?

Comments about Colleagues (16:10-18)

Apparently Timothy is on the way and Paul hopes that the Corinthians will receive him warmly. Apollos will come later, but he is not ready to go now. Could it be that he fears the disunity expressed in 1 Corinthians 3:4 and that he and Paul are working on overcoming some of the problems? Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus may have brought a letter from Corinth to Paul and are now returning with Paul's reply to the Church.

Closing Greetings (16:19-24)

The churches of Asia send their greetings. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia. As it is used here, Asia refers neither to Asia Minor nor the Continent, but to one Province within Asia Minor. Aquila and Prisca helped Paul to establish the Corinthian Church and are working with him in Ephesus. Greeting one another with a "Holy Kiss" was a spontaneous custom that fell into disfavor with changing social attitudes.

Paul finally closes this letter by adding his personal signature. The letter has been dictated through Sosthenes (1:1), which has been Paul's method of writing. Adding these closing comments gave his letter authenticity. The use of the "Maranatha" prayer (Our Lord Come) became common in the early Church and was placed after the Lord's Supper prayers. For Paul it is another example of his expectation of an early return of the Lord.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

One of the most significant passages in the entire New Testament is 1 Corinthians 15:13-19

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ — whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The above passage is significant because it suggests that Christianity stands or falls on the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul believed in the Resurrection and even proclaimed it to Greeks who believed not in a Resurrection, but in the Immortality of the Soul. After listing all those persons who saw the Risen Christ, including 500 brothers and sisters at one time (15:6), Paul moves on to affirm the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

No one had anything to gain by stealing or hiding Jesus' body and pretending there was a Resurrection. In his book, *Theology of Hope*, Jürgen Moltmann says, "The resurrection of Christ is without parallel in the history known to us. But it can for that very reason be regarded as a 'history-making event' in the light of which all other history is illumined, called in question and transformed."¹ Without the Resurrection the cross becomes nothing more than a tragedy. Moltmann continues:

The symbol of resurrection from the dead allows us to take Jesus' death seriously. It excludes every notion that Jesus revived after death, or that his soul went on living. ... The symbol of raising, of being wakened, allows the Easter appearance and seeing of Jesus to stand in its full dignity and significance; for it excludes all notions of a projection.²

The most difficult thing about the Resurrection to explain is the nature of it. Paul tries to explain its nature by comparing it to planting a seed, which must die for the wheat or some other kind of grain to grow (15:35-37) Others have tried to compare Resurrection to the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. None of our comparisons will fully satisfy the skeptic. Paul knew that and so he simply pointed to Jesus' glorified body.

In Oscar Cullman's book, *The Immortality of the Soul or the Resurrection of the Body*, he deals with the fact and nature of the Resurrection. "Death," concludes Cullmann, "cannot put an end to the great fact that there is one risen body."³ This single fact gives us the hope that Charles Wesley placed in his famous Easter hymn:

Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted Head;
Made like Him, like Him we rise;
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.⁴

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the only thing in the New Testament that gives us any reason for following Him. If there were no Resurrection, then all that he

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, Translated by James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), p. 180.

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), pp. 85-86.

³ Oscar Cullmann, *The Immortality of the Soul or the Resurrection of the Body* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 41.

⁴ Charles Wesley, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House), #302.

stood for was crucified on the cross and evil stands victorious. That is not, however, what happened. The early Church Father, Athanasius, summed up what every Christian's attitude should be in light of Jesus' Resurrection. "The risen Christ," said Athanasius, "makes life a continual festival, a festival without end."¹

Those who choose not to believe and those who choose to continue in sin negate this hope and festivity in their lives. John Scheffler, the 17th century mystic describes what they do to themselves.

Christ rose not from the dead,
Christ still is in the grave
If thou for whom he died
Art still of sin the slave.

Our response to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ determines whether we will live in hope or hopelessness. That is why this single event in the New Testament is so significant.

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1981), p. 31.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM 1 CORINTHIANS

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:13-14

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:58

9
PAUL'S MINISTRY
IN CORINTH
2 Corinthians 1:1—7:16

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!*

1 Corinthians 5:17

The First E-Letters

9. PAUL'S MINISTRY IN CORINTH (1:1—7:16)				
INTRODUCTION (1:11)				
Salutation (1:1-2)		Thanksgiving (1:3-7)		The Affliction (1:8-11)
PAUL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CORINTHIANS (1:12—2:17)				
Security in Word and Deed (1:12-14)	A Defense for a Change in Travel Plans (1:15—2:4)	A Plea to Forgive (2:5-11)	Anxiety in Troas (2:12-13)	Triumph in Christ (2:14-17)
PAUL'S MINISTRY OF A NEW COVENANT (3:1-18)				
A Letter of Recommendation (3:1-3)			The New Covenant (3:4-18)	
PAUL'S MINISTRY OF RENEWAL (4:1-18)				
PAUL'S MESSAGE OF HOPE (5:1-10)				
PAUL'S MESSAGE OF TRANSFORMATION (5:11—6:13)				
RELATIONS WITH PAGANS (6:14—7:1) [SEPARATE LETTER]				
THE JOY OF PAUL AND TITUS (7:2-16)				

9. PAUL'S MINISTRY IN CORINTH

2 Corinthians 1:1—7:16

ASSIGNMENTS			
Introduction and Anxiety (1:1—2:17)	Covenant and Renewal (3:1—4:18)	Hope and Transformation (5:1—6:13)	Relations with Pagans (6:14—7:16)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The author is clearly the Apostle Paul.

The Date

No more than one year passed between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians. This letter was written around 56 C.E.

The Place

Two crises occurred prior to the writing of this letter, and they determined the place where it was written. They are: (1) an unpleasant visit to Corinth, and (2) a severe letter written to Corinth. Titus delivered the severe letter, and since Paul had not yet heard from the congregation, he started on another trip to Corinth. Upon arriving in Troas, he was disappointed because Titus had not yet arrived with a letter from the Corinthians; so he moved on to Macedonia, where Titus met him with Good News. The Corinthians had a change of heart and accepted his leadership. Paul was delighted, and so he wrote this letter to them, which he followed up with a visit.

The Purpose

The purpose of this letter was to deal with his leadership role in the Corinthian Church and to help them get their offering ready for the poor in Jerusalem. Apparently they had pledged a specific amount, but were not doing a very good job at raising the funds.

Several times Paul mentions his own personal ailment, which he never identifies. He calls it his “thorn in the flesh.” (12:7) Why does he bring it up? His reasons can be reduced to two: (1) to comfort others who are suffering, and (2) to defend his own authority as an apostle.

The question of how many letters Paul actually wrote was raised in the introduction to 1 Corinthians. All we need to do now is review the location of those letters in the text, recognizing that they might only be fragments of letters. Paul mentions writing other letters in 2 Corinthians 2:14 and 7:1. Natural breaks are found to separate out 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and 2 Corinthians 10-13. Not everyone believes that these breaks represent separate letters. 2 Corinthians, writes C.K. Barrett, is “surely the most difficult book in the New Testament.”

The Outline

- A. Introduction (1:1-11)
- B. Paul and the Church in Corinth (1:12—7:16)
- C. The Offering for Jerusalem (8:1—9:15)
- D. Paul's Defense of his Authority (10:1—13:10)
- E. Conclusion (13:11-14)

1-7	8-9	10-13
Paul's Ministry	Christian Stewardship	Defense of His Apostleship

INTRODUCTION (1:1-11)

Salutation (1:1-2)

The letter is addressed both to Corinth and members of the Christian Church in the whole province of Achaia (Southern Greece). Although Timothy is named as a companion, he does not have any part in writing this letter.

Thanksgiving (1:3-7)

Paul is obviously grateful for the news brought to him concerning the Corinthian Church, but he does not dwell on that gratitude; instead, he draws a comparison between affliction and comfort and how they relate to one another. The afflictions have not all been Paul's. The Corinthian Church has also suffered some afflictions. If together they suffer afflictions, together they will be comforted.

The Affliction (1:8-11)

While Paul refers to a terrible affliction that brought him close to death, he gives no details. He assumes that the Corinthians know of the affliction. To what experience is he referring? We cannot be sure, but there are two possibilities. The first has to do with the riots caused by his preaching in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41) and the second has to do with fighting beasts in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 15:32). While we have considerable detail concerning the riots, Paul's life was never seriously threatened. On the other hand, the beasts may have threatened him, but we have no account of that experience. He could be referring to one of these experiences or another one not even mentioned in the New Testament.

PAUL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CORINTHIANS (1:12—2:17)

Sincerity in Word and Deed (1:12-14)

Paul claims to have been consistent in his dealings with the Corinthians. That he begins this paragraph with "boast" is not to be misunderstood. He uses the word "boast" (and its equivalents) 29 times in 2 Corinthians; but when he does, he usually apologizes and says that his only cause for boasting is "the Lord." In spite of all the differences he has had with the Corinthians, there is mutual respect and both he and they have communicated with one another in *plain* language.

A Defense for Changing Travel Plans (1:15—2:4)

The Corinthians expected Paul to make two trips, one prior to his going to Macedonia and one on his return from Macedonia. Paul apparently promised this but did not fulfill it. Why? It had to do with a previous, but painful visit he made to Corinth, which was not recorded in the Book of Acts. This painful visit caused him to write his *severe* letter, a fragment of which might be 2 Corinthians 10-13. The visit was so painful, and Paul felt so much anguish over it, that he decided to change his travel plans and go to Macedonia first. He hoped to settle the difficulties by letter prior to making his visit. His change was out of concern for the Corinthians, and had nothing to do with being unreliable. The mention of Timothy and Silvanus (Silas) helps to confirm his sincerity to the Corinthians.

A Plea to Forgive (2:5-11)

Apparently someone within the congregation had defied Paul's authority in public, causing much dissension within the congregation. This may have happened while Paul was present. Paul called for the congregation to reprimand him. The person under discussion is not the man who was guilty of incest (1 Corinthians 5:1), but simply someone who flaunted Paul's authority. Now that the congregation has stood up to him, it was time to forgive; and Paul promises to forgive whomever the congregation forgives. That person now needs to feel God's love.

Anxiety in Troas (2:12-13)

Paul expected to hear about the resolution of the above problem from Titus. They agreed upon a specific route to take so that they would meet one another. Not finding Titus in Troas, even though the doors were wide open for preaching, Paul moved on to Macedonia (Philippi), where the two met.

Triumph In Christ (2:14-17)

As Paul continues on his journey to Corinth, he compares his arrival to that of a victory march of a returning general or king. The victory however does not belong to Paul, but to Christ. Victory for Christ leaves a sweet aroma or fragrance in the air, for Satan and death have been defeated; therefore, the Corinthian Church has a great future.

PAUL'S MINISTRY OF A NEW COVENANT (3:1-18)

A Letter of Recommendation (3:1-3)

Letters of recommendation were common. Any leader working with a congregation was expected to have such a letter from some legitimate authority, such as one of the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem. Paul claims that he does not need any such letter. Did he not start the Corinthian Church? His letter of recommendation is not written on tablets of stone, but in the tablets of human hearts.

The New Covenant (3:4-18)

Some of those leaders who were dividing the Corinthian Church were *Judaizers*. They would have been Jewish Christians calling for loyalty to the Mosaic Law. Paul sees Christianity as the fulfillment, not the continuation, of the Law; so he compares the fading splendor of the old with the transforming splendor of the new. While he may misinterpret the reason for Moses wearing the veil, he calls for a removal of the veil in the New Covenant. Moses hid God's glory with the veil, but in Christ the veil is removed and we behold the full splendor of God. "The Lord is the Spirit" (3:17) and has a powerful transforming effect on us.

2 Corinthians 3:14 is the source of the name for the *Old Testament*. The more proper name is the *Hebrew Scriptures*. Testament and Covenant can be exchanged freely, for they come from the same Greek word. Testament came to us by means of the influence of Latin in the early Church. The preferred word is Covenant.

PAUL'S MINISTRY OF RENEWAL (4:1-18)

The primary message of Paul is given in verse 5, where he proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus' resurrection (4:14) gives hope to us and renews us in our afflictions (4:16). Paul's special ministry is to bear the pain of perplexity and persecution in order to communicate this renewal to those who have no hope. Their hope comes not from Paul

and his companions, but from God. They are only “clay jars” through which this treasure is displayed (4:7). In the light of eternity, all afflictions can be endured; in fact, renewal comes in spite of them.

PAUL’S MESSAGE OF HOPE (5:1-10)

Our present existence is compared to living in an earthly tent (a temporary structure), but our hope is to live in a building from God (a permanent structure). Paul hopes that he can move in prior to death, but even if that did happen, he too would have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, where rewards or punishments would be given out.

There are two strange ideas given in this passage, which appear to be inconsistent with the teachings of Paul. The first is the absence of the Lord in this life (5:6), and the second is the effect of works in judgment (5:10). Paul usually emphasizes the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit and salvation by grace through faith alone.

PAUL’S MESSAGE OF TRANSFORMATION (5:11—6:13)

This section begins and ends with a defense of Paul’s ministry, but in the middle of it is a most beautiful message about reconciliation, transformation, and friendship with God. The love of God compels us (5:14) and the presence of Christ transforms us (5:17). This message of God’s friendship is open to everyone, and now is the time to respond to it (6:2).

RELATIONS WITH PAGANS (6:14—7:1)

This advice on relations with pagans seems like an intrusion. It is frequently suggested that these verses make up a fragment of another letter and were placed here by accident. *Belial* is another term for Satan. I do not think Paul is advising Christians to have nothing to do with pagans, only that such things as intermarriage would be unthinkable.

THE JOY OF PAUL AND TITUS (7:2-16)

The joy described here has to do with the restoration of good relations between the Corinthian Church and Paul and Titus. Titus delivered Paul’s stern letter, and he did it not knowing what to expect. He may not have shared Paul’s pride and faith in the Corinthians; therefore, he too was surprised by joy. He was surprised to be received by them with fear and trembling (7:15). This was also the experience of Paul himself when he first went to Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). He probably experienced similar emotions as he sent his stern letter to them, but the results have been positive and so he is overjoyed. His pride and faith in the Corinthians have been vindicated. The letter resulted in “godly grief” which led to repentance and salvation. “Worldly grief” would have led to despair and death; hence, there is reason to rejoice.

TRANSFORMATION

Of all the verses in chapters 1 through 7, 2 Corinthians 5:17 stands out: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” In Paul’s conflict with the Corinthians he was trying to help them comprehend the powerful change that takes place in the lives of those who recognize Jesus as Lord. One can never be the same again. One can look to the changes that took place in the lives of Augustine, Wesley, and a host of others; the most important changes however, take place in common ordinary people. The readers of this letter in Corinth were common ordinary people who faced all kinds of social pressures to conform to pagan ways. Those who profess Jesus as Lord will no longer give in to those pressures; instead, they will help one another to resist them.

None of the above means that things are perfect in the Christian community, which we call the Church. There will always be conflicts as we struggle together to discern what it means to live out the Christian life. Although Jesus is the model, whom we try to imitate, Jesus was not legalistic; therefore, no one can set up rules or even principles for the Christian life. We have to capture the Spirit of what it means to be Christian. This comes about when we confess or profess Jesus as Savior, Messiah, and Lord. To all who would do this, Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we receive that gift, we receive its fruit as well as specific spiritual gifts. We are to reflect all of the fruit of the Holy Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-25, but we are all given different spiritual gifts. There are nine fruit of the Spirit, but no one can agree on the number of spiritual gifts. Each person must find his or her own spiritual gift or gifts. Everyone has at least one, but many people have three or four, or even more.

Transformation does not take place when we follow someone else’s set of rules. This is not to say that rules and principles are unimportant. We all need them to guide our lives, but they do not lead to transformation. Nicodemus was already following the Law of Moses when he went to Jesus and was told, “You must be born again.” (John 3:7) The rich young ruler had followed the Ten Commandments from his youth but he knew that he lacked something. In Matthew 19:20, Jesus told him what it was: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” His spiritual gift was giving, but he was unwilling to use it. According to Matthew 19:22, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

There is nothing complicated about the new birth or the transformed life. It takes place when we profess Jesus as Savior, Anointed King, and Lord. When we are serious about such a profession, we are also open to receive the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to all believers. The moment we receive the Holy Spirit we begin to bear the nine fruit of the Spirit. That may not be easy because we also face the pressures of a pagan world pushing to bear its fruit. Transformation is also resisted when we refuse to use the spiritual gift or gifts God has given us. When we are open to the above, then our lives will be forever changed.

10
AN OFFERING
AND DEFENSE
2 Corinthians 8:1—13:13/14

*Each of you must give
as you have made up your mind
not reluctantly or under compulsion,
for God loves a cheerful giver.*

2 Corinthians 9:7

The First E-Letters

10. AN OFFERING AND DEFENSE (8:1 – 13:13[14])			
THE JERUSALEM OFFERING (8:1 – 9:15) [A Fragment of a Letter?]			
Excelling in Generosity (8:1-15)	Introducing the Emissaries (8:16 – 9:5)	Benefits of Generosity (9:6-15)	
(1) with eagerness (2) out of proportion (3) to meet need	Titus and Two others	Those who sow bountifully will also reap bountifully	
PAUL'S SELF DEFENSE (10:1 – 12:13) [The Painful Letter from Ephesus?]			
Paul's Counter Attack (10:1-18)	Paul founded the Church (11:1-15)	Paul has reason to Boast (11:16-33)	Paul's Vision and Affliction (12:1-13)
THE INTENDED THIRD VISIT (12:14 – 13:10)			
THE CLOSING (13:1-13 [14])			
The Holy Kiss		The Pauline Benediction	

10. AN OFFERING AND DEFENSE

2 Corinthians 8:1—13:13 [14]

ASSIGNMENTS		
The Jerusalem Offering (8:1—9:15)	Paul's Self-Defense (10:1—12:13)	The Intended Third Visit (12:14—13:13 [14])

THE JERUSALEM OFFERING (8:1—9:15)

With this abrupt change of subject, many believe that chapters 8 and 9 are a fragment of another letter, but it could also be due to a lapse of time in finishing the letter.

Excelling in Generosity (8:1-15)

Paul brags about the generosity of Macedonia in order to encourage the Corinthians, who are more affluent, to gather together what they had pledged. The Macedonian Churches would have been Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. These communities had been harshly treated by the Romans and had experienced a succession of civil wars. These wars impoverished them as a whole, but Christians were affected more than others. Paul tells the Corinthians how these impoverished churches excelled in generosity for the poor in Jerusalem. It was not due to any Macedonian virtue, but to the grace of God who motivates us to be generous. They did not, insists Paul, give as a virtue; rather “they gave themselves first to the Lord.” That explains why they excelled in generosity (8:5). If the Macedonians could do it, certainly the Corinthians should be leading the way. That is Paul’s primary point.

Three stewardship principles can be gleaned from these verses. They are that one should give with eagerness, out of proportion, and to supply another’s need (8:12-15) These principles still apply to the Church today.

Introducing the Emissaries (8:16—9:5)

Titus is the only emissary named. The two unnamed persons cannot be identified. What is clear is that Paul does not want to arrive before the Corinthians have reached their goal, so he sends these three persons on ahead to help them. He will follow later to celebrate their achievement. He wants their gift to come out of generosity, not out of obligation.

Benefits of Generosity (9:6-15)

Although Paul calls for giving with the right motive, he also talks about the benefits of giving. True generosity emerges from a free heart, which forgets about calculation, but it always reaps a harvest anyway, even if it is not financial. The point is that those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully, and God loves a cheerful giver. Paul takes the phrase “cheerful giver” from Proverbs 11:25 or 22:9, but this phrase will not be read in the Old Testament. It comes out of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and was not part of the Hebrew translation. Our Old Testament comes from the Hebrew, and that is why we do not read “cheerful giver” anywhere in our version of the Old Testament.

PAUL’S SELF-DEFENSE (10:1—12:13)

There is general disagreement over chapters 10 to 13. Do these chapters make up Paul’s severe and painful letter referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:3-9 and 7:8-12, written prior to 2 Corinthians 1-9, or are they part of this letter. If the former is true, then they were written from Ephesus; if the latter is true, they were written in Macedonia. Although some of their content may resemble that earlier letter, most scholars doubt that they make up the severe letter.

Paul’s Counterattack (10:1-18)

Paul begins by turning his attention towards that hostile minority in Corinth who challenged his authority and criticized his behavior. They made fun of his puny physique and his less than elegant speech (10:10), but he reminds them that he too belongs to Christ and was responsible for establishing the Church in Corinth. All this conflict may be a continuation of the rival cliques mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; in which case, the main groups he might be attacking would be the pro-Jewish or Christ parties (10:7). Paul acknowledges that he was bolder in writing than in person, but then he does not cherish having to defend himself. He prefers to get on with the mission, which must move beyond Corinth to Rome, Spain, and to the ends of the earth.

Paul Founded the Church (11:1-15)

Paul’s defense continues as he reminds the Corinthians with the image of betrothal and marriage that he united them to Christ. With biting sarcasm and moving tenderness he reminds them that he has had their best interests at heart. His true interest comes out in his self-support. It is ironic that they read into this that he does not care for them. Perhaps it is because they see him not following the command of Jesus, that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living from it (1 Corinthians 9:14). Not doing this may indicate to them that he is not obeying Jesus and is an inferior apostle. Help for his mission in Corinth came from Macedonia (8:2) and mainly, if not only, from Philippi (Philippians 4:14-18). In spite of their difficulty with his determination to support himself, he intends to continue the practice, for Paul feels that it proves his love for them. They can move towards self-support faster if they do not have to help support him. At the same time, however, he calls them to make their contribution to the church in Jerusalem.

Paul has Reason to Boast (11:16-33)

Paul proceeds to boast of his own self-sacrifice, but he does so with sarcasm. He knows that it would be arrogant to boast of his accomplishments. He is doing this to demonstrate to the Corinthians how foolish they are to reject his authority simply because he is not an eloquent preacher. Eloquence has nothing to do with knowledge. Many of the incidents mentioned here are recorded in the Book of Acts; but many are not and this makes us keenly aware of the gaps in the Acts account of the early Church. Although the incident of his escape in a basket is recorded in Acts 9:22-25, the details of Aretas, the Nabataean King (9 B.C.E. - 40 C.E.) are omitted. Aretas ruled from the Euphrates to the Red Sea from his capital in Petra, and this means that he exercised authority in Damascus as well. Although his governor in Damascus attempted to seize Paul, the local Jews put him up to it. Paul mentions all these things only to remind the Corinthians that he has paid the price for authentic apostolic leadership, and that is more important than eloquence of speech.

Paul's Vision and Affliction (12:1-13)

Although Paul refers to his *visions* and *revelations*, he only proceeds to talk about one. Before dealing with that one, we might suggest where the others took place. One might be his conversion on the Damascus Road and another his experience in the House of Judas in Damascus (Acts 9). A third might be the experience he had in the Temple in Jerusalem (22:17ff). The one mentioned here in 2 Corinthians is very different from the others. It has nothing to do with his ministry. It is purely devotional in nature. To be taken up into the third heaven was a Jewish expression, which referred to being in the very presence of God. Why does Paul speak of it as if it happened to someone else? Since it happened 14 years ago, it did happen to someone else. While such experiences are important, they only make up part of our past. Paul knew that he could use it to confirm his apostleship, but he also knew that would be foolish.

In contrast to this highly emotional spiritual experience, Paul also had a serious *affliction*, which he referred to as his “thorn in the flesh.” He does not name his problem, and so we are left to guessing. On the basis of what he says in Galatians 4:13, most have guessed that he had some kind of physical ailment, such as: malaria, stammering, eye disease, or even epilepsy. Some have suggested that it might have been a spiritual affliction, such as never quite feeling completely delivered from Satan’s work and power (Romans 7:21-25). Still others have seen in this phrase the opposition that came at him from the Jews. Whatever the affliction was, Paul prayed for its deliverance only three times, and then he learned how to live with it. He realized that God’s power perfects itself in human weakness (12:8-9). This keeps us all from boasting about our strengths and makes us content with our afflictions and weaknesses.

THE INTENDED THIRD VISIT (12:14—13:10)

The Book of Acts records two visits (Acts 18:1-17 and 20:2-3). Is there one visit in between these two, which has not been recorded, or is this intended third visit to take place after the latter one mentioned in the Book of Acts? We know that the Book of Acts

has gaps in it and is not a complete account of Paul's travels. Nothing can be said with certainty about this visit. As Paul expresses his intention to come, he suggests that any charges against him be backed up with two or three witnesses. This would be in accordance with both the Jewish Law (Deuteronomy 19:15) and the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 18:16). Paul directs the Corinthians to examine themselves. He desires their love, not their possessions; hence, Paul's own affection for them shines through the sternness of his rebuke of their sins.

THE CLOSING (13:11-13 [14])

Does this closing belong to Chapters 1-9 or 10-13? It depends upon whether these two sections are seen as separate letters or one letter. If they are viewed separately, then this closing probably belongs to Chapters 1-9.

Two things of significance are present in Paul's concluding remarks. The first is the traditional liturgical kiss, which became a customary greeting, expressing the nature of the Christian family relationship. It was common for the early Christians to greet one another with a kiss on the forehead or shoulder. This simple gesture demonstrated their acceptance of one another within the spiritual family. Two other examples of this tradition can be found in Romans 16:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:20.

The second thing of significance concerns Paul's benediction, which is the longest of any that he wrote. It also contains an early Trinitarian reference. Paul refers to the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. All three members of the Trinity have a part in our salvation. This benediction has become the most commonly used benediction in the contemporary Christian Church. In the New International Version of the Bible, this benediction is in 2 Corinthians 13:14; while, in the New Revised Version of the Bible, this benediction is in 2 Corinthians 13:13. In either case, this is the final verse of Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

MOVING BEYOND OURSELVES

The difference between being a mission and becoming a church involves the ability to move beyond itself. A mission is both led by and supported by others and the mission field is any place where people need to be won to Christ. Whenever a sufficient number of persons have been won to Christ, they are obligated to become a church and begin to engage in a mission of their own. When that happens, local leaders need to emerge and the congregation needs to move quickly towards self-support. As soon as that happens, the congregation not only needs to engage in its own mission, but it must begin to relate to other congregations around themselves and to Christianity in general. It needs to become ecumenical, which is to say, it needs to cooperate with other Christians, whether it completely agrees with them or not. To fail to do this, is to become self-centered, something no *true* Christian congregation can do.

Not only must churches become self-supporting, they must also contribute to the needs of other churches. The Church in Jerusalem was going through a severe economic crisis and

Paul was asking the churches he founded to send an offering to help. The crisis was severe and would not be resolved. In fifteen years, the Romans would destroy Jerusalem, and both Christians and Jews, would have to disperse. The center of Christianity would eventually move to Rome, the capital of the empire. Meanwhile there were Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering from the crisis. They needed to be helped. The leadership of Christianity had once been located in Jerusalem, then it moved to Antioch and Ephesus. Paul knew it would eventually end up in Rome and that is why he wanted to go to Rome. Both he and Peter ended up in Rome, where they were finally arrested and executed.

Paul gave birth to the Corinthian house churches and called them to give beyond themselves and to establish local leadership that would relate to him. Why was the leadership issue so critical? The vision of every church is carried on through its local leaders. If they are mature and biblically literate, then there is no cause to worry; on the other hand, if they are immature and biblically illiterate, then there is good reason to worry. The latter was not only the case in Corinth, but it is the case in many modern churches as well. The first sign of trouble is the attitude that we need to spend our money on ourselves before we can help anyone else. The second sign of trouble is that we do not need to relate to other churches and leaders. We can do everything on our own. These two attitudes lead a church into disaster. Cults emerge out of such attitudes.

From all of the above we can draw several conclusions, all of which contribute to the maturity of a church, distinguishing it from a mission. First, every church needs leadership that is either biblically literate, or in process of becoming biblically literate. Secondly, that leadership needs to relate to *all* the other Christian leaders around itself, while at the same time it is aware of the leadership that gave it birth. We need to be acquainted with our historical traditions. Finally, the church needs to engage in a mission of its own, moving beyond its own needs. That mission needs to be both evangelistic and social in nature, helping not only other Christians, but other human beings as well.

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

John Wesley found that he could live on 28# a year and from that time he gave every penny over that away. His theme was Gain all you can, Save all you can, and Give all you can. He told one of his wealthiest supporters; “What an amazing thing it will be if you endure to the end!” He told his sister; “Money never stays with me, it would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way into my heart.”

I have decided that God is owner. “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” ...I will set aside one tenth of my income as acknowledgment of His ownership. ...The remaining nine tenths still belong to God and must be used under His guidance. I believe that His will is always my highest interest, that He is not out looking for a chance to impoverish me, but seeking to enrich me. So I look for His guidance, not grudgingly but gladly. **E. Stanley Jones**

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. **C.S. Lewis**

I have been asked whether I am a capitalist or a Christian. The only answer I can make is: “I was a capitalist; I am now a Christian.” I have only one desire, to be wholly God’s. Money is not an end in itself; it is a means, an instrument. ... Capitalism seeks the increase of mammon; Christianity, the increase of God. Yet, Capitalism teaches one great truth—to God we are always individuals, and always individually responsible for our stewardship of his gifts. I plan to provide for my children; beyond this, it is my purpose to give everything to the service of my Master, and to give all I own away before I die. I want no part of it. Last year I gave away seventy-five per cent of my income.” **Asa Candler**

At Mountain Park Community Church we believe that the Bible teaches intentional giving. (2 Corinthians 9:7) “Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” If you are a visitor today, we want you to know that it is our policy to ask you not to give an offering. We want you to be able to search for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ without any financial pressure. When you make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and His local church, we will encourage you to give intentionally and consistently for the cause of Jesus Christ. When you make this choice, please let us know. We want to rejoice with you in your personal decision for Christ. **Mountain Park Community Church, Phoenix, Arizona**

11
JUSTIFYING FAITH
AND UNIFYING LOVE
Galatians 1:1—6:18

*We know that a person is justified
not by the works of the law
but through faith in Jesus Christ.*

*Now it is evident that no one is justified
before God by the law;
for the one who is righteous will live by faith.*

Galatians 2:16 and 3:11

The First E-Letters

11. JUSTIFYING FAITH AND UNIFYING LOVE (1:1 – 6:18)		
THE AUTHORITY AND VALIDITY OF PAUL’S TEACHING (1:1 – 2:21)		
The Salutation (1:1-5)	The Occasion for the Letter (1:6-10)	The Source of his Authority (1:11-24)
Paul’s Recognition in Jerusalem (2:1-10)		Peter’s Vacillation in Antioch (2:11-21)
THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE (3:1 – 4:31)		
Faith and Law (3:1-29)		Faith and Freedom (4:1-31)
THE PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF JUSTIFYING FAITH (5:1 – 6:10)		
Faith active in Love (5:1-26)		The Law of Love (6:1-10)
THE CLOSING (6:11-18)		
A New Creation (6:11-16)	The Marks of Jesus (6:17)	The Final Benediction (6:18)

11. JUSTIFYING FAITH AND UNIFYING LOVE

Galatians 1:1—6:18

ASSIGNMENTS					
The Context of the Letter (1:1-24)	Paul and Peter (2:1-21)	Faith and Law (3:1-29)	Faith and Freedom (4:1-31)	Faith active in Love (5:1-26)	Love and Persecution (6:1-18)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The author is clearly the Apostle Paul.

The Date

Paul wrote this letter on his second or third missionary journey. The date has been set somewhere between 55 to 56 C.E., but there are some who propose a date as early as 48-49 C.E.

Dating this letter depends upon who is being addressed by Paul. If he is addressing those churches he visited in the Roman Province of Galatia, which include Antioch of Pisidia Iconium, Lystrra, and Derbe (Acts 13:4—14:28), then the earlier date is more likely; but if he is addressing the ethnic Galatians who lived north of Asia Minor in Ancyra, Pessinus and Tavium (Acts 16:6 and 18:23), then the latter date is more likely.

The Place

The earlier date would suggest Antioch, but the latter date would indicate Corinth. Many modern scholars favor the later date and Corinth as the place of writing, although early church tradition says that the letter was written from Ephesus or Macedonia.

The Purpose

The primary purpose is very clear. Judaizers were disturbing the congregations Paul had founded by telling the people that in addition to faith in Christ they must keep the Mosaic Ceremonial Law. Because Paul deals with the heart of faith, Galatians has been

considered one of the most important books of the New Testament. It is the anvil on which the Protestant Reformation was hammered out, and Luther himself said: “The Epistle to the Galatians is my Epistle. I have betrothed myself to it.” Others have called it Christianity’s Declaration of Independence, or the Magna Charta of Christian Liberty. The most important verse is Galatians 3:28, which claims that we are all one in Christ. The principles this book sets forth on faith and freedom make Christianity into a world religion instead of a Jewish sect. These same principles are refined in the Book of Romans, which was to be written later.

Although Church organization is not its primary purpose, the following references are made to it: Cephas (Peter), James (the brother of Jesus), and John are named as leaders in Jerusalem (1:18-19 and 2:9); the Jerusalem Church Council is mentioned (2:1-10); an agreement to divide the mission field along ethnic lines is made (2:9), and Paul’s dispute with Peter is described (2:11-14).

A third unintended purpose has to do with Paul’s own life. The following are mentioned: the persecution of the Church (1:13-14), his conversion and call to preach (1:15-16), his visits to Jerusalem (1:18; 2:1), his activity in Antioch (2:11-14), and his bodily ailment (4:13).

The Outline

- A. The Authority and Validity of Paul’s Teaching (1:1 — 2:21)
- B. The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone (3:1 — 4:31)
- C. The Practical Applications of Justifying Faith (5:1 — 6:18)

1-2	3-4	5-6
Paul’s Apostleship	Justifying Faith	Christian Living

THE AUTHORITY AND VALIDITY OF PAUL’S TEACHING (1:1—2:21)

Salutation (1:1-5)

In his opening salutation to the congregations in Galatia, Paul reminds them that he too is an Apostle. Why would they have doubted it? He was responsible for establishing those very congregations. What is probably meant is that he does not have the same credentials as the twelve who traveled with Jesus; hence, Paul reminds them that his Apostleship came directly from God through Jesus Christ, who is risen and guiding his Church on earth.

These opening words differ from other salutations in which Paul praises and gives thanks for the faith and love of his readers. For examples of this, see Romans 1:8-15 and 1 Corinthians 1:4-9. Why are these things omitted? The reason is because, at this time, there is no reason to praise and give thanks for their work. They have departed from or perverted the Gospel.

Who are “all the brothers” with Paul? We have no idea. It could either be a small group of fellow travelers, or the entire congregation where he is writing the letter.

The Occasion for the Letter (1:6-10)

While the Galatian Apostasy is not defined in these verses, Paul gets right to the heart of the matter. The Galatian Churches have begun preaching a Gospel different from the one that Paul had first proclaimed to them. The different Gospel could be a return to Jewish Law or it could be thinking that one could believe without being transformed. The former is more likely to be the occasion of Paul’s letter. Thinking that one might believe without being transformed would be a perversion of the Gospel. Both are inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Good News is that one only needs to believe, but to believe is to be forever transformed by divine grace.

The Source of his Authority (1:11-24)

In defending his apostolic authority, Paul gives a brief autobiography, beginning with his call from God. That call was authentic. Prior to it, Paul persecuted the Church and tried his best to destroy it. His past ought not to cast doubt on his Apostleship, but should confirm it. His second defense, which has to do with his independence from the other Apostles, builds on his divine call. Following his conversion on the Damascus Road, he did not go to consult with the Apostles in Jerusalem; rather, he went to Arabia. The trip to Arabia is not mentioned in Acts 9:22-23, but then, we have already noted the gaps in the Book of Acts.

In the time of Paul, Arabia would have been a reference to the Nabataean Kingdom, the capital of which would have been Petra. Although three years is mentioned, it could be one full year and portions of two others. When Paul returned from Arabia he went to Jerusalem, where he met Cephas (Peter) and James, the brother of Jesus. Did he go there to consult with or to get acquainted with the leadership? The latter is most likely. Part of Paul’s affirmation of his own Apostleship is his independence from Jerusalem. Following this acquaintance with Peter and James, he went on to begin his ministry in Syria (Antioch) and Cilicia (Tarsus). This brief autobiography sets the stage for Paul’s mission to the Galatians. He is trying to demonstrate where his authority has come from; and although he is independent from Jerusalem, he is acquainted with the leadership there.

Paul’s Recognition in Jerusalem (2:1-10)

Paul took Barnabas and Titus to Jerusalem, where they met with the *pillars* of the Church, who are identified as James (brother of Jesus), Cephas (Peter), and John.

Although Titus was an uncircumcised Greek (Gentile), the *pillars* of the Church did not compel him to be circumcised. Paul found agreement with them in continuing his mission to the uncircumcised Gentiles; hence, there is a division of labor developing in mission strategy. Paul leads the mission to the Gentiles, and Peter continues in his leadership of the mission to the Jews. It must be said, however, that Peter also preached to Gentiles and ended up preaching in Rome, as did Paul.

Everyone agrees that the poor must not be forgotten. As Jesus directed his mission first to the poor, these two mission strategies will do the same.

Since Paul made more than one trip to Jerusalem, which visit is this one? Most scholars believe that it is his second, which would be described in Acts 15. There are some however who believe that this is his first, which is described in Acts 11:27-30. No firm conclusion can be drawn.

Peter's Vacillation in Antioch (2:11-21)

Even though the pillars of the Church supported Paul's mission to the Gentiles, some of them tried to keep Christianity within Judaism. When Peter visited the Church in Antioch, he first joined in with the table fellowship; but when the Judaizers arrived, he backed off. Although the Judaizers are described as being linked with James, this does not mean that James approved of what they were doing. James, like Peter, was an acknowledged leader of the mission to the Jews; for this reason, these men identified with him. When Paul sees Peter buckling under to their pressure, he chides him for it.

Paul mentions his encounter with Peter to demonstrate that his Gospel is in harmony with that taught by the pillars of the Church. These pillars did not challenge his interpretation, but actually affirmed it, even if they had trouble carrying it out with consistency themselves. That Peter vacillated in Antioch is the reason why some believe that the Jerusalem visit was Paul's first, described in Acts 11:27-30. They cannot conceive of Peter vacillating after they reached a formal decision in Acts 15.

Law verses Gospel

The story of Peter's vacillation in Antioch is also an occasion to get to the heart of the Galatian problem, which is that salvation can be earned through obeying the Jewish Law. Paul vehemently rejects this teaching. Salvation comes only through faith in Christ. (2:15-16). One does not have to fear the rejection of good works. Those who believe in Christ so identify with him that good works naturally flow out. They share in his crucifixion and also in his resurrection (Romans 6:5). They are tied to Christ like branches are tied to the vine (John 15:1-5), and without that nourishment, they wither away. The Law enslaves. Faith nourishes and gives life.

Paul had tried to justify himself through perfectly keeping the law, but he failed. His attempt to perfect himself by means of the law only led to the experience of frustration and condemnation. When Paul focused on Christ, he came alive. When John Wesley was

asked what he meant by “one that is perfect,” he replied by quoting Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” The Good News of God’s grace made known through Jesus Christ does more to move us to holy living than any law. The Law can only condemn; it is Grace that gives life.

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE (3:1—4:31)

Faith and Law (3:1-29)

Paul begins by insisting that *Faith* predates *Law*. Abraham’s faith existed prior to the giving of the Law through Moses. The Holy Spirit therefore is not received through obedience to the Law, but through the exercising of Faith. Faith is a much better motivator of righteousness than is the Law. The Law is powerless when it comes to making us righteous.

The purpose of the Law was and continues to be negative. It acted as a temporary restraint until the promise made to Abraham in Scripture could be fulfilled through God’s offspring, Jesus Christ. The Judaizers were talking about making Gentiles acceptable by forcing them to submit to the *legal* rite of circumcision, but Paul insisted that they were already acceptable through faith in Christ. There was no need to exchange their Christian Freedom for Jewish legalism. Christian Faith and Freedom came in Christ, and baptism is the new symbol of faith, which unites us all in Christ (3:28).

Faith in Christ makes us all one in Him. There is one faith and one baptism. The consequence of this is the tearing down of all distinctions, such as the distinctions that exist between Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female. All of us, by faith, become children of Abraham, children of God, and ministers of Jesus Christ. Paul may not have attacked the institution of slavery, but he sowed the seed for its eventual destruction. The same can be said for the subjugation of women.

Faith and Freedom (4:1-31)

Although there are a lot of confused images in this chapter, the point is crystal clear: To be in Christ is to be free from all legalistic constraints and any compromise undermines the integrity of the Gospel. Paul begins by noting the incarnation of God in Christ, which he insists took place in order to redeem us from bondage and to make possible our adoption as children of God. This sets us completely free. Paul laments what has been happening in the Galatian Churches. They have renewed their bondage to Jewish fast days, new moons, Passover seasons, and sabbatical years. They have continued the old bondage to the Law. Why have they forsaken the Gospel of Freedom, which he taught them? Their love for him was deep. Noting his physical ailment (4:13), he states that they would have gladly given him their own eyes (4:15). Does this mean that his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7) was poor vision? This conclusion cannot be made with any degree of certainty. The imagery used may only relate to the depth of their affection for him.

To make his point, Paul returns to the example of Abraham, only this time, he allegorizes Abraham's two wives. Hagar becomes a symbol of the Old Covenant, in which people were in bondage to the Law. Hagar was not a free woman, but a slave, and so her son, Ishmael, was born according to the flesh (in bondage). On the other hand, Sarah was a free woman, whose son, Isaac, was born through the promise; he is a symbol of the New Covenant of Freedom. The Old Testament quotation in 4:27 refers to Jerusalem before and after the Exile (Isaiah 54:1), and in this context, it becomes the Old and New Jerusalem. The point again is the movement from bondage to freedom. Faith does not move us backwards into bondage, but forward into freedom. Because we are justified by faith we are children of God. Those who follow the way of works live in bondage because they cannot obey every law, but we who trust in Christ are free for joyful obedience. Our salvation is not dependent upon our obeying every single law. It is dependent only upon divine grace.

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF JUSTIFYING FAITH (5:1—6:10)

Faith active in Love (5:1-26)

The issue raised in these verses is whether one relies on legalism or faith for justification. The Judaizers were relying on obeying the law of circumcision. Paul reminds them that such a dependence necessitates obedience to the whole law (5:3), and that such self-justification is impossible. Since it is impossible to accomplish fully, it is also futile to look back upon it with pride. It does not set us free, but enslaves us to the impossible. On the other hand, dependence on grace sets us free and causes us to look forward in hope. The Law then is fulfilled not through circumcision, but through the Spirit, who guides us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (5:14). Why does Paul not quote the double commandment? Perhaps the reason lies in the underlying assumption that the first commandment to love God is already fulfilled by our dependence upon the Spirit. This dependence is called faith, and faith operates through love.

The natural result of dependence on grace is not the works of the flesh, all of which are negative (5:19-21), but the fruit of the Spirit, all of which are positive (5:22-23). The nine fruit of the Spirit, which are made up of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are not to be confused with the gifts of the Spirit, which are described in (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). No one is supposed to possess all of the gifts, but we are to express all of the nine fruit of the Spirit. This comes naturally to those who rely on the Spirit for their justification, but it does not come naturally to those who rely on the Law.

The Law of Love (6:1-10)

It is not the Law of Moses, but the Law of Christ that should be followed by Christians; and the Law of Christ is the Law of Love. This includes bearing one another's burdens and doing good (6:2), especially to those who make up the household of faith (6:10). Bearing one another's burdens and doing good, to everyone are two principles that are

synonymous with the love commanded and revealed by Jesus from the cross. This is the practical working out of love for one's neighbor.

THE CLOSING (6:11-18)

A New Creation (6:11-16)

As Paul comes to the end, he cannot leave the most important point to his secretary and so he writes it himself, using large letters to make his point. The large letters might have also been due to a vision disability. Circumcision is not only an occasion for pride, but also an evasion of persecution. The only thing that ought to give us pride is the cross of Jesus Christ, whose presence causes our ego to die, transforming our self-image. This inner transformation is the cardinal principle of all true faith. Those who experience such transformation are the "Israel of God."

The Marks of Jesus (6:17)

The mark of circumcision means nothing. The marks of Jesus mean everything, and Paul bears them (2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 6:4-10; and 11:23-29). Although they could be an occasion for pride, they are more of an occasion for true humility.

The Final Benediction (6:18)

A final benediction is given, which includes the word *brothers (and sisters)* to soften the sharpness of the letter and to make the Galatians aware that they are included among the saints. Paul has written to them to keep them within the fold.

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Not only has Galatians been traditionally viewed as the first letter to be written, but it may also be the most important. In Galatians Paul affirms justification by faith alone, apart from any works of the Law, including circumcision. The most definitive reference to Paul's teaching about justification is Galatians 3:11, where he says, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'" This point is also made in Romans 1:17, but it was made first in Galatians, even though it was refined and expanded upon in Romans. While the heart of the Gospel is indeed Jesus' resurrection from the dead, this is only what God has done for us. Our part is to believe what God has done and to live by faith. We cannot justify ourselves before God, for we cannot keep or fulfill the Law. This makes circumcision, the symbol of the Law, obsolete. Baptism, the symbol of grace, takes its place.

The really Good News is that all may become children of God by faith. No one is excluded from this possibility. Justification by faith alone leads to the inclusion of everyone, that is, everyone who will respond by faith. The key passage is Galatians 3:25-29:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

The practical implication of this passage is that we all become one in Christ. This means that there is no longer any room for discrimination. These verses put an end to any justification of racial superiority, the institution of slavery, and the subjugation of women. In Christ we all become one and that oneness needs to be lived out.

But if we accept the idea that we are justified by faith alone, what is to keep us from continuing to live immoral lives? If obeying the law does not save us, then why bother? The reason is simple. Faith fulfills the law by setting us free to love. Salvation no longer depends upon our succeeding. Paul puts it this way in Galatians 5:13-14: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Faith leads us away from slavery to sin."

Faith also makes us aware of the presence of the Spirit, who bestows upon us its fruit. In Galatians 5:19-23 Paul contrasts the old slavery to sin with the new freedom in the Spirit:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

The above passage makes it sound like we earn our way into the Kingdom of God, but it is only contrasting the way of sin with the way of the spirit. The person of faith may slip into the way of sin from time to time, but the way of the Spirit is the norm. Martin Luther, the champion of justification by faith *alone* saw the vital relationship that exists between faith and works. In his preface to his commentary on the Book of Romans, he said, "it is as impossible to separate works and faith as it is impossible to separate light and heat from the fire."

12
SALVATION
AND UNITY IN CHRIST
Ephesians 1:1—6:24

*For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—
not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*
*For we are what he has made us,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

Ephesians 2:8-10

The First E-Letters

12. SALVATION AND UNITY IN CHRIST (1:1 – 6:24)

THE PURPOSE OF GOD (1:1 – 3:20)

Salutation (1:1-2)

God's Plan for Humanity (1:3-14)	Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:15-23)	Salvation by Grace (2:1-10)	The New Unity in Christ (2:11-22)	The Mission to the Gentiles (3:1-13)
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Paul's Prayer and Doxology (3:14-20)

THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS (3:14-20)

Christian Unity and Spiritual Gifts (4:1-16)	The Christian Life-style (4:17 – 5:20)
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The Christian Household (5:21 – 6:9)

Husbands and Wives (5:21-33)	Children and Parents (6:1-4)	Masters and Slaves (6:5-9)
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The Christian Warfare (6:10-24)

Personal Matters and Benediction (6:21-24)

12. SALVATION AND UNITY IN CHRIST

Ephesians 1:1—6:24

ASSIGNMENTS					
God's Plan for Humanity 1:1-23	Salvation and Unity (2:1-22)	The Mission to the Gentiles 3:1-20	Unity and Lifestyle (4:1—5:20)	The Christian Household (5:21—6:9)	The Christian Warfare (6:10-24)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

There is some question as to whether Paul is the author of Ephesians. If he is, then he was imprisoned in Rome at the time; but the style and vocabulary differ from Paul's and many key concepts are stated and developed in a nonPauline manner. In addition to these arguments, the author does not seem to know his readers and refers to himself as one of the holy apostles. Paul spent three years in Ephesus and would have known his readers. Because of his background, Paul saw himself as the chief of sinners.

The Date

If Paul wrote Ephesians, then it had to be written in the early sixties, prior to his death in 64 C.E. If someone else wrote the Epistle, it could have been written somewhere between 70 and 90 C.E. In 96 C.E. Clement I, the first bishop of Rome, was the first one to refer to Ephesians. He did this in 96 C.E., so we know the letter was written before the close of the first century.

The Place

It is difficult to identify the place where it was written unless Paul wrote it. In this case it would have been written in Rome, but this cannot be proven. We cannot even be sure of the intended reader. The Ephesian Church is nowhere mentioned in the Letter. The earliest manuscripts of the letter leave a blank space where Ephesians is inserted in our modern manuscripts (1:1). It seems strange that Paul, who spent a good deal of time in Ephesus, would make no personal references to those with whom he had labored. This was his custom in his other letters.

Ephesians could be what became known as a “circular letter,” which was a general letter to many churches. This would explain the absence of any personal references. The reason it was given the label Ephesians is because it might have ended up there. It was the letter contributed to the New Testament by the Christians in Ephesus.

The Purpose

The author was Jewish, and his intended readers were generally considered to be Gentiles. The purpose of the letter is to state the unity of Jew and Gentile, and to describe the Ecumenical nature of the Christian Church. Salvation and Ecumenism are two dominant themes. In Ephesians 2:8-9, a clear definition of Salvation is given. Salvation comes, according to these verses, by God’s grace through faith. This is God’s gift, which does away with all human boasting. Three images are used to describe the resulting Church: the Body of Christ (1:22-23), the Temple of Christ (2:20-22), and the Bride of Christ (5:23-32).

The purpose of this letter was to strengthen the Church and to make all Christians conscious of their oneness in Christ. The simple expression “in Christ” appears almost 30 times in various forms.

The Outline

- A. The Centrality of Christ and Our Relationship to Him (1:1 — 3:20)
- B. The Application of Faith in Christ to Daily Living (4:1 — 6:24)

1-3	4-6
Doctrinal	Practical

THE PURPOSE OF GOD (1:1—3:21)

Salutation (1:1-2)

The letter is addressed to the “saints,” who make up the membership of the churches. Saints are simply people called by God and set apart for his purpose in the world. Some manuscripts include the phrase “who are at Ephesus and faithful,” but it is missing in the oldest ones.

God’s Plan for Humanity (1:3-14)

Although this section contains many liturgical and poetical phrases, it also describes the plan of God for all time. According to Ephesians 1:9-10, God will unite heaven and earth.

This plan has been revealed in Christ, and God's creation has been destined in love to participate in this new union.

Verses 5 and 11 do not refer to any mechanical predestination. They refer to how God has taken the initiative to call people into their proper roles as believers in Christ and to become obedient members of Christ's Church. The promised gift of the Holy Spirit enables them to attain their inheritance and destiny (1:13-14). The first gift of God to every human being is the right to resist or even reject their inheritance and destiny.

Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:15-23)

The author has heard of the faith and love of all the saints and how they love one another. For this he thanks God for revealing himself and his wisdom to his people. He has given them "eyes for the heart" (1:17-18) enabling them to see what is truly important. Christ is head over all things (1:21-22), and the Church is his body and representative in the world (1:23).

Salvation by Grace through Faith (2:1-10)

God's grace is so deep that it alone is responsible for the salvation of both Jew and Gentile. The Law had no power to save, it could only condemn; hence, good works can never be the cause of salvation. They can only be the results. Ephesians 2:8-9 is the best definition of how God saves. It is by grace through faith. Grace is the divine unearned and undeserved love of God. It can only be accepted, and that acceptance we call faith.

The New Unity in Christ (2:11-22)

The old symbol of circumcision has no place where salvation comes by grace. The dividing wall of hostility that once existed between Jew and Gentile is now destroyed. What was this wall of hostility? The author is either referring to the dividing wall in the Temple, which separated Jews and Gentiles, or the Law, symbolized by circumcision. The former is most likely. Within Christianity there can be no such wall (2:14-16). Reconciliation with God results in reconciliation with God's people. There can be no dividing walls within the community of believers, for the Church symbolizes the new humanity in Christ.

Christians are built into a living, growing Temple, or dwelling place for God (2:19-22); and Christ is the cornerstone or capstone of this new Temple. The Greek word for cornerstone could also be translated as capstone. These two words have a slightly different connotation. Cornerstone would be the first stone to be laid, which would give direction to the construction of the rest of the building. Capstone would be the final stone to be laid, and would symbolize the building's completion. In this context, cornerstone is favored, for this human Temple is not yet completed. We still take our direction from Christ, who shapes us into his own Temple, where we can experience the presence of the Spirit of God. God's Spirit is resident in the Church, the place where God is praised.

A word of explanation about the Church is needed. This Church is not a dwelling place, a building, or a steeple. The Church is a living body; it is people who have responded to grace by faith. Calling it a Temple suggests that the author understands this living house to replace the holy of holies. The Church is the inner sanctuary where God dwells.

The Mission to the Gentiles (3:1-13)

The hidden mystery has now been revealed. Before Christ came into the world, it still remained a secret; but in Christ we become aware of God's intention all the time, to include all persons in his eternal Kingdom. The Creator of all becomes the Redeemer of all. To this task Paul has been called and it is for this reason that he has been imprisoned. As he began to advocate equality with the Gentiles, the Jewish hostility increased; but Paul responded to his calling, knowing that the mission to the Gentiles was more important than his own personal safety.

Paul's Prayer and Doxology (3:14-21)

The heart of this closing prayer in the doctrinal section of Ephesians focuses on strength (3:16) and love (3:17) so that Christians might fathom the depth of the love of Christ and his Good News for everyone. The key word is not *knowledge*, as the Gnostics would have it, but *love*, particularly the love of Christ.

The doxology, which follows, is a burst of praise, which is one of the Church's highest privileges. It knows the mystery. How can it but praise the one who has made it known?

THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS (4:1—6:24)

Christian Unity and Spiritual Gifts (4:1-16)

The first implication of the purpose of God is Christian unity, which Paul grounds in the seven elements of such unity (4:4-6):

1. One Body
2. One Spirit
3. One Hope
4. One Lord
5. One Faith
6. One Baptism
7. One God

Christian unity does not force us all into the same mold. There are many spiritual gifts, but they all have the same purpose. God calls some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; but all are called to equip others for the work of the ministry, which is to build up the body of Christ in the world (4:11-12). All aim at a unity of faith under their common head, Jesus Christ (4:13-16).

The Christian Lifestyle (4:17—5:20)

This emerging community of Christians is expected to live differently from their pagan neighbors. To begin with, there is to be truthfulness (4:15, 25), forgiveness (4:26, 32), honesty and philanthropy (4:28), and edifying speech (4:29, 31).

Some of the primary pagan acts of immorality, such as fornication and idolatry (5:3-5) have no place within the Christian community. Christians are to follow the light of Christ, not the darkness of paganism. Ephesians 5:14 is an early Christian hymn based on Isaiah 60:1, which expresses this idea.

Christians do not get drunk with wine (5:18), rather, they get filled with the Spirit and this leads to singing praises and thanksgivings to God (5:18-20). This may look very strange to the world, but singing is often the result of drunkenness. It should not be considered a strange response and our dullness in singing may be but the symbol of the absence of the Spirit.

The Christian Household (5:21—6:9)

The Christian household consists of husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. Christian relationships are discussed. The general operating principle in every case is that of “mutual subjection.” (5:21)

Husbands and Wives (5:21-33)

The husband is the head of the household and carries responsibility for loving, cherishing, nourishing, and protecting his wife. The wife should obey and respect her husband. The relationship that should exist is similar to that which exists between Christ and the Church, and that relationship is a “mystery” of Christ’s spiritual union with his bride, the Church. No deeper relationship could exist and so it is compared to marriage.

As one reads about the relationship that should exist between husband and wife, one can only conclude that polygamy is made impossible (5:31) and ultimately Christianity rejected it. Marriage is defined as being between one man and one woman, which would also imply the rejection of same-sex marriages.

Children and Parents (6:1-4)

Children are to obey their parents as the Law commands in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16. Fathers are to take the initiative for instruction and discipline. Nothing is said about parents who fail to put their children’s best interest at heart. This is assumed because the author is discussing the relationship between children and parents in a Christian home. He is not concerning himself with special cases, but with what ought to be normal.

Masters and Slaves (6:5-9)

There were slaves at this time and both masters and slaves became Christians. When that happened, what should their relationship be? One might think that slaves ought to have been set free, but that is to look at the situation with twentieth century eyes. How would such slaves support themselves in a culture that based itself on slavery? These verses neither condone nor condemn slavery, but they do contain within them the seeds for the destruction of the master-slave relationship. We could replace these terms today with employer and employee or management and union. We still struggle with the issues that these verses describe.

The Christian Warfare (6:10-24)

Christians are called upon to enter a holy war with spiritual armament. This warfare is serious since the enemy is demonic. The weapons are as follows:

Belt:	Truth
Breastplate:	Righteousness
Shoes:	Peace
Shield:	Faith
Helmet:	Salvation
Sword:	Word of God
Mouth:	Prayer

We begin this warfare by standing on the side of truth, righteousness, and peace. Our defense is faith and salvation. The flaming arrows of the enemy cannot penetrate our shield and helmet, for God has given us the gift of eternal life and that cannot be taken away. Our primary offensive weapon is the Word of God, and prayer directs our use of it. Even prison cannot keep us from being active participants in this warfare.

Personal Matters and Benediction (6:21-24)

Tychicus was a beloved companion and servant of Paul; and with Onesimus, he delivered Paul's letter to the Church at Colossae. The two of them reported news about Paul who was imprisoned in Rome. Ephesians 6:21-22 is almost a letter-for-letter copying of Colossians 4:7-8. The writer of Ephesians may have been copying Colossians at this point. The benediction is not like Paul's benedictions, which are usually in the first person.

SALVATION AND ECUMENISM

The author of Ephesians makes salvation crystal clear. "For by grace you have been saved through faith," he says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God not the result of works, so that no one may boast." *Grace* is a very difficult word to define, even when one knows the Greek word. For Christians it refers to God's unmerited free, spontaneous love for sinful humanity, revealed and made effective in

Jesus Christ. In short, it is undeserved and unmerited love. No one can earn it, but everyone must accept it to receive the benefits of salvation. We are not saved because we are good, but because of God's grace. Faith is our acceptance of that grace.

One of the implications of salvation by grace through faith is that not all good people are saved. Salvation is not a reward for good works. It is God's free gift to sinful human beings, who respond to him in faith. They also respond with good works, but those good works are now offered out of gratitude. Salvation by grace through faith makes people interested in doing good works, but good works do not save anyone. One can live a life of good works and still be lost. "Good works," said Martin Luther, "do not make a man good, but a good man [a man of faith] does good works." The more Luther tried to save himself through good works, the more frustrated he got. The same was true for John Wesley. We can only be saved by God's grace. Our response is to accept that grace by faith. When that happens, we pursue a life of good works out of *sheer* gratitude.

Because the saved seek to do good works out of gratitude, they no longer need the law. That is why we read the following in Ephesians 2:14-16:

For he [Jesus Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one [a people of faith] and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances [because it is no longer needed], that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Our oneness comes from our common faith, that is the acceptance of God's grace [undeserved and unmerited love], which has been given to all humankind. It has been offered to us even before we started looking for it. Augustine illustrated how grace operates by describing three kinds of grace. First, he says, there is *prevenient* grace, which moves our "wills" toward God; next, there is *cooperating* grace, where there is a human response; and finally, there is *persevering* grace, which keeps us secure in our salvation. Other terms that have been used are *prevenient* grace, *justifying* grace, and *sanctifying* grace. All three kinds of grace illustrate for us the process of salvation. God's purpose is to move us towards full humanity, as it has been demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As we move toward the new humanity, the walls of hostility fall down.

Our new humanity is the basis for a new unity, or ecumenism, as it has been called in our time. Those who have experienced God's grace through faith become one, no matter how diverse their backgrounds. Both Jews and Gentiles become children of God. That common humanity, and unity, has come to us through Jesus Christ, who revealed God's grace to us. That is why the author writes in Ephesians 4:4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

The author goes on to describe the Christian lifestyle and moral values. We follow the Christian lifestyle and moral values not to save ourselves, but out of gratitude. Our salvation has already been accomplished in Jesus Christ. The difficulty is that we do not all agree on what the Christian lifestyle and moral values are. That will continue to be a problem for us, but it should not build a wall of hostility between us. Those who know themselves to be saved by grace through faith also know themselves to be one in Jesus Christ. Our common search for the Christian lifestyle and moral values should not separate us, particularly if we are faithful in our study of the life and teachings of Jesus.

13
JOY AND UNITY
IN CHRIST
Philippians 1:1—4:23

*Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited, but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.*

Philippians 2:5-7

The First E-Letters

13. JOY AND UNITY IN CHRIST (1:1—4:23)		
GOD’S CARE (1:1-26)		
Salutation to the Church at Philippi (1:1-2)	Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-11)	Paul’s Circumstances (1:12-26)
LIFE IN CHRIST (1:27—2:18)		
<p>[Who] though he was in the form of God Did not count it robbery To be equal with God</p> <p>But emptied himself, Taking the form of a servant, Coming into existence in the likeness of men;</p> <p>And being found in human form He humbled himself And became obedient to the point of death</p>	<p>Therefore God has highly exalted him And bestowed on him the name Which is above every name,</p> <p>That at Jesus’ name Every knee should bow— In heaven and on earth and under the earth—</p> <p>And every tongue confess “Jesus Christ is Lord” To the glory of God the Father.</p>	
PLANS FOR TIMOTHY AND EPAPHODITUS (2:19-30)		
Timothy will Stay with Paul	Epaphroditus will go to Philippi	
WARNINGS (3:1—4:1)		
Against Judaizers	Against Libertines	
EXHORTATIONS (4:2-23)		
Argument between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3)	On Anxiety (4:4-13)	Thanksgivings and Greetings (4:14-23)

13. JOY AND UNITY IN CHRIST

Philippians 1:1—4:23

ASSIGNMENTS			
Witnessing in Every Circumstance (1:1-26)	Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus (1:27—2:30)	Warnings Against Judaizers and Libertines (3:1—4:1)	A Call to Unity (4:2-23)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

Philippians is one of the four prison letters of Paul, the others being Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. No one has seriously questioned Paul as the author, although a few questions have been raised about where he was imprisoned as he wrote this letter.

The Date

The date depends upon where Paul was when he wrote this letter. If he was imprisoned in Rome, the date would be 61-63 C.E., but if he was imprisoned in Ephesus (Acts 19-20), the date would be 54-55 C.E. Another suggestion has been Caesarea by the Sea (Acts 24-26). If that imprisonment were accepted, the date would be 56-61 C.E.

The Place

To determine the place of writing, we only need to discover which imprisonment this is. Most favor Rome because of references to the “imperial guard” (1:13) and “the Emperor’s Household” (4:22), but these terms might have been used in Roman provinces such as Ephesus and Caesarea by the Sea as well. Some favor Ephesus because of its proximity to Philippi. Paul’s friends in Philippi made frequent trips to the place where he was imprisoned. This seems to rule out Caesarea by the Sea, but not Rome. Although Rome was much farther away than Ephesus, it was linked to Philippi by means of the *Via Egnatia*, one of the main Roman roads. Travel between Rome and Philippi would have been reasonably swift for the time. Although Ephesus is a possibility, the Book of Acts does not mention any imprisonment in Ephesus. Rome is still favored as the place where Paul wrote to the Church in Philippi.

The Context

In 31 B.C.E. Augustus made Philippi, located in Macedonia, into a Roman colony. Many of its citizens were former Roman soldiers, who received land following their discharge from the army. They were proud to be Romans. In spite of the size of Philippi, not many Jews lived there. We know this because there was no Synagogue. It only took ten Jewish men to form a Synagogue. In Philippi the Jews were greatly outnumbered by persons loyal to Rome.

Paul received his Macedonian call while he was in Troas. Philippi was the first European city in which he preached the Gospel. The persons who made up the first congregation were made up of some very diverse people. There was Lydia, the wealthy woman merchant, a slave girl, and the jailer.

The Purpose

While there is no unified purpose to Philippians, it is Paul's most personal letter and it contains some very important passages. The Philippians were the first Europeans to become Christians (Acts 16:6-40), and their church was the only congregation to support Paul's work financially (4:14-16 and 2 Corinthians 11:9). Paul had a close and happy relationship with them and in this letter he gives thanks for them and their gifts (4:18).

The letter was written on the occasion of Epaphroditus' return to Philippi (2:25-29). He was the one who delivered their gifts to Paul. The letter contains exhortations to rejoice (1:4) and to be unified (1:27). Both are illustrated in the lives of Christ (2:5-11), Timothy (2:19-24), Epaphroditus (2:25-30), and in Paul himself (3:1-17). In this and in several other passages about himself, Paul shares his experience with Christ (3:12-14), his struggle over life and death (1:21-26), and his concern for spiritual growth (1:6-7, 25-26, and 2:16-18).

Although Paul's immediate purpose was to thank the Philippians for their gifts, he used the occasion to remind them of their joy and unity in Christ. They should continue to pattern their lives after Christ and shine like lights in a crooked and perverse world (2:15).

The Outline

There might be two letters contained within Philippians. If so, the following would be a possible reconstruction of the two letters:

- A. First Letter (1:1—2:30 and 4:10-23)
- B. Second Letter (3:2—4:9)
- C. Editorial Splice (3:1)

As a whole, Philippians might be outlined as follows:

- A Paul's Personal Circumstances (1:1-26)

- B. Life in Christ (1:27—2:18)
- C. Plans for Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30)
- D. Warnings Against Enemies and Dangers (3:1—4:1)
- E. Paul and His Philippian Friends (4:2-20)
- F. Conclusion (4:21-23)

1	2	3	4
God's Care	Unity	Warnings	Exhortations

GOD'S CARE (1:1-26)

Salutation (1:1-2)

The salutation includes Timothy's name, but Paul wrote the letter. Timothy was with Paul when he first preached in Philippi. According to this letter, Paul is about to send Timothy back to Philippi (2:19). Paul sees Timothy and himself as servants (slaves) of the saints in Philippi. *Saints* refers to all Christians set apart for God's service. They make up the members of the Church. Christ is the great example of sainthood and servant-hood, and so we must understand our sainthood as it relates to servant-hood. Only in Christ can we be saints; and if we are in Christ, we are also servants.

Special recognition is given to bishops (overseers) and deacons (servers), who are the administrators of the Church. This is the only letter, which has been uncontested, in which Paul uses these terms; but notice, he does not define what bishops and deacons do. We only assume that bishops give spiritual oversight and that deacons administrate the affairs of the Church. They too are servants.

Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-11)

Paul begins his letter by offering thanks for the Philippian Christians. They fill his heart full of love and joy, for they have entered into a *partnership* with him since the establishment of their Church (1:5). This may be a reference to their financial gifts. These gifts were not charity, but participation in the mission of the Church. They are truly partners. This section ends with Paul's prayer for them.

Paul's Circumstances (1:12-26)

It is clear that Paul is imprisoned and that the whole *imperial guard* knows about it (1:13). This guard would have been made up of selected persons of the crack imperial force. Paul is not worried for himself, but happy that the name of Christ is becoming known. His friends, as well as his enemies, continue to preach Christ. His enemies do it

out of envy and rivalry, but his friends do it out of goodwill (1:15). Those preaching out of envy and rivalry may be Judaizers or persons with theological differences. They may see Paul's imprisonment as affirmation that their own theological positions are correct and Paul's false. Paul is just happy that Christ is being preached.

If judgment goes against Paul, he assumes that death will simply take him to Christ; but if judgment goes for him, then his captors will release him to serve the Churches. In these verses there is a slight problem with Paul's theological thinking. He seems to assume that death would mean an immediate departure from the flesh and entry into the presence of the Lord. If this is the case, then why does he talk about resurrection the way he does in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In these passages he indicates that there will be a time lapse between death and resurrection. If this is the case, then Philippians 1:23 seems to be inconsistent with Corinthians and Thessalonians, where some kind of intermediate stage of existence is suggested.

LIFE IN CHRIST (1:27—2:18)

Paul calls upon the Philippians to set aside all human arrogance and begin to live and work and think like Christ. The heart of his advice is expressed in an early Christian hymn, which he quotes. The following is an attempt to reconstruct the hymn:

[Who] though he was in the form of God
Did not count it robbery
To be equal with God

But emptied himself,
Taking the form of a servant,
Coming into existence in the likeness of men;

And being found in human form
He humbled himself
And became obedient to the point of death

Therefore God has highly exalted him
And bestowed on him the name
Which is above every name,

That at Jesus' name
Every knee should bow—
In heaven and on earth and under the earth—

And every tongue confess
"Jesus Christ is Lord"
To the glory of God the Father.

The above hymn appears in verses 6-11 and consists of two halves. The first half (6-8) begins with his equality with God and descends to the low point of his death on the cross. The second half of the hymn (9-11) celebrates the dramatic act of God in exalting him as the sovereign of the universe. Behind this exaltation lies the resurrection which crowns him King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In the midst of the darkness of this world, such Christians will shine like stars (2:15).

The hymn is not to be systematically analyzed, but simply to be sung in praise of Jesus as Lord. If the Philippians, and all other Christians, will focus their minds on Christ alone, they will be set free from all pettiness and division, for they will have comprehended and experienced the grace of God, which has been revealed in the humble but exalted Christ.

PLANS FOR TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS (2:19-30)

Paul's trial is not yet over, and so he does not intend to send Timothy until his own fate has been decided. Timothy was one of his closest colleagues, who had helped him found the Philippian congregation on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-31; 17:13-15). Epaphroditus was different. He would deliver this letter, Timothy would follow a little later, and finally Paul would make the trip.

The Philippians seem concerned over Epaphroditus' illness, from which he almost died; and their very knowledge of his illness causes some to believe that Paul's imprisonment is nearby. Paul's closing remark about the risk taken by Epaphroditus, which almost cost Epaphroditus his life, does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament; and so we know nothing about this incident. What we do know is that Timothy and Epaphroditus were beloved colleagues of Paul's and that they had proven themselves as worthy disciples of Jesus Christ. Like Paul, they were genuinely interested in the Philippian Church and they sought to promote Christ's cause above their own interests.

WARNINGS (3:1—4:1)

Paul may be warning the Church against two different kinds of groups: (1) Judaizers, and (2) Libertines. The Judaizers would have been those who were trying to circumcise everyone according to Jewish Law, and the Libertines would have been those who believed that Christians were free to do whatever they pleased. Their *god*, says Paul, is their belly (3:19).

Both groups are called *dogs*, the modern equivalent of which would be *bitch*. Paul accuses the Judaizers of mutilating the flesh when the Christian hope is for transformation of the flesh. This whole question of circumcision had been settled in Acts 15. It was upsetting to Paul that the issue should continue to come up. If anyone had a Jewish background, it was Paul. He was born of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day, and had become a Pharisee; yet, he saw circumcision as unnecessary in becoming a Christian. His new circumcision was spiritual, and his goals were to know Christ (3:7-8) and experience a similar resurrection (3:10-11).

Even though circumcision was unnecessary, this did not mean that Christians could be libertines, doing as they pleased. Like the Greek Athlete or Roman Chariot Racer, Christians were to press on for perfection. They were to forget the past and press on towards the future (3:13-14). Paul uses himself as an example. Although he is under no obligation to the law, he presses on to perfection. Christians are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Philippians would have understood this, for they were proud of their status as a Roman colony. They should be even prouder of their status as a colony of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In a final warning, Paul calls his Philippian friends to stand firm in the Lord (4:1). They are to follow neither the Judaizers nor the libertines, but Christ alone. The ultimate goal of every Christian is to know Christ, live according to his teachings, and share in his sufferings. Christians may live on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.

EXHORTATIONS (4:2-23)

An Argument (4:2-3)

Nothing is known about the argument between Euodia and Syntyche. Paul simply exhorts them to agree in the Lord. Was the argument theological? We do not know. There has been a great deal of speculation about the “loyal companion.” Who was this? Such names as Lydia, Luke, and Epaphroditus have been suggested; but all are guesses. We do not even know who Clement was, or in what manner he assisted Paul.

On Anxiety (4:4-13)

If anyone had reason to be anxious, it was Paul; yet, he is the very one who exhorts others to empty their minds of all their worries. Anxieties are to be replaced with some of the Greek virtues, which help to shape character. Paul does not hesitate to use pagan virtues when they do not conflict with Christian faith. Justin Martyr suggested a similar thing a century later when he said: “The truths which men in all lands have rightly spoken belong to us Christians.”

Two of the most beautiful verses that Paul wrote to the Philippians, 4:11 and 4:13, apply to all who suffer from anxiety. We all need to learn to be content in whatever we have and to rely fully on Christ, who alone can strengthen us.

Thanksgivings and Greetings (4:14-23)

The Letter is concluded with gratitude for the financial help, which was given by the Philippians. Why they were the only ones to enter into a partnership with Paul is not explained. It is only stated (4:15). Their thoughtfulness and generosity has been deeply appreciated, and it is easy to understand why Paul thought so much of them. The final greetings include greetings from the “emperor’s household.” Could it be that some of them have been converted to Christ? Whatever is the case, the reference seems to indicate that Paul is writing from Rome.

UNITY THROUGH HUMILITY

There was no church like the one in Philippi. The Christians in Philippi gladly contributed to Paul's missionary efforts and they supported him when he was imprisoned. The congregation faced the usual heresies, such as *legalism* (the Judaizers) and *anything goes* (the Libertines), but its leaders listened to Paul's warnings and advice. The greatest advice Paul gave to them was to remind them that as the saints of God they were called to servant-hood, the same kind of servant-hood we find in Jesus himself. That servant-hood is expressed best in humility; hence, we find in Paul's letter to the Philippians an early hymn on the servant-hood and humility of Christ. Our hymns make our best theology, for they are passed on and remembered. "I don't care who writes the theological books," said Charles Wesley, "so long as I can write the hymns." John Wesley agreed on the significance of hymns and said about their arrangement in the Hymn Book: "The Hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is, in effect, a little body of experimental and practical divinity." One might say that the hymns are second only to the Bible itself and in many cases are drawn right out of the Bible.

The emphasis in Philippians is on the unity of God's people. That unity can only be achieved in an atmosphere of humility. The fruit of unity and humility is a deep and abiding joy, which can be found neither in *legalism* nor in an *anything goes* morality. Christians are not called to imitate the morality of the world, but to shine like stars in a crooked and perverse generation (2:15). This will require running the race and pressing towards the goal and the prize of the call of God in Christ Jesus (3:13-14). Life is not only a temporary journey in this world, but it is a race in which we reach for the prize. Our citizenship is in heaven, where we will finally realize transformation and eternal life (3:20).

Like Paul, we may prefer to be with the Lord (2:21-24) but for the time being, we are in the world. Christ, however, can be known in the world as well; therefore, we need to prioritize our time and our money that we might become acquainted with him in the present. No community of believers did that like those who lived in Philippi. Paul doesn't scold them like he does the Corinthians; instead, he encourages them with such passages as Philippians 4:8: "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Thinking on these things humbles us, unifies us, and fills us with joy in the Holy Spirit.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM 1 PHILIPPIANS

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

Philippians 1:21-24

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Philippians 3:8

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

1 Philippians 4:8

I have learned to be content with whatever I have.

Philippians 4:11

14
THE VISIBLE IMAGE
OF
THE INVISIBLE GOD
Colossians 1:1—4:18

*He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation;
for in him all things in heaven and on earth
were created, things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—
all things have been created through him and for him.*

Colossians 1:15-16

The First E-Letters

14. THE VISIBLE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD (1:1—4:18)		
INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)		
THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER (1:3-14)		
THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST (1:15-23)		
THE MINISTRY OF PAUL (1:24—2:7)		
FALSE TEACHINGS (2:8-23)		
Philosophy (2:8)	Circumcision (2:11)	Sacred Observances (2:16)
Worship of Angels (2:18)	Ascetic Practices (2:18 and 23)	Dietary Regulations (2:20-21)
PUTTING ON CHRIST (3:1-17)		
The Vices (3:5 and 8)		The Virtues (3:12-14)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fornication (3:5) 2. Impurity 3. Passion 4. Evil Desire 5. Greed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Anger (3:8) 7. Wrath 8. Malice 9. Slander 10. Abusive Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compassion (3:12-14) 2. Kindness 3. Humility 4. Meekness 5. Patience 6. Forgiveness 7. Love (above all)
CHRISTIAN OBLIGATIONS (3:18—4:6)		
The Family (3:19-20)	Masters and Slaves (3:22—4:1)	Prayer and Witnessing (4:2-6)
THE CONCLUSION (4:7-18)		
Tychicus and Onesimus	Aristrachus, Mark, Justus	Epaphras
Luke and Demas	Nympha	Archippus

14. THE VISIBLE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Colossians 1:1—4:18

ASSIGNMENTS			
Deity of Christ (1:1—2:7)	False Teachings (2:8-23)	Life in Christ (3:1—4:6)	Personal Matters (4:7-18)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

Colossians is one of the prison letters of Paul. There are fewer questions raised about the Pauline authorship of Colossians than was true for Philipians. Tychicus and Onesimus delivered both this letter (4:7-8) and the one to Philemon.

The Date

The date depends upon where Paul was when he wrote this letter. If he was imprisoned in Rome, the date would be 61-62 A.D., but if he was imprisoned in Ephesus, the date would be 56-57 A.D. The favored date is 62 A.D., during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31).

The Place

To determine the place of writing, we only need to determine which imprisonment this is. We lack some of the references found in Philipians, which might help us to make a decision. The place is either Rome or Ephesus, with Rome being favored.

The Context

Paul never visited the congregation in Colossae, but he may have played an indirect role in its birth. He sent Epaphras to preach there (1:7 and 4:12) and he was personally acquainted with Philemon. Epaphras and Philemon were from Colossae. The church was probably organized during Paul's visit to Ephesus. Colossae was located in the Valley of the Lycus River of Phrygia and was about 100 miles East of Ephesus. Its prosperous neighbors were Laodicea and Hierapolis, both of which overshadowed Colossae.

The Purpose

Paul's purpose in this letter is to combat an inadequate Christology and sub-Christian practices. The problem emerged as Greeks, Jews, and native Phrygians were converted to Christianity. Each group wanted to hang on to their own culture. To accommodate all this, religious syncretism emerged; and this resulted in the inclusion of circumcision, food-laws, festivals, and angel intermediaries, all of which challenged the supremacy of Christ. Paul's response to all of this can be summed up as follows: "In Christ we have encountered God himself and love forms the basis of all Christian morality."

As a whole, Colossians might be outlined as follows:

- A Introduction (1:1-14)
- B The Nature and Work of Christ (1:15-23)
- C. The Threat of False Teachings (1:24—2:23)
- D. New Life in Christ (2:20—4:6)
- E. Conclusion (4:7-18)

1	2	3	4
Deity of Christ	False Teachings	Life in Christ	Personal Matters

INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)

The letter begins with a typical Pauline introduction. In it we are informed that Timothy is with him and that he is addressing the "saints" in Colossae. *Saints*, here as elsewhere in the New Testament, refers to ordinary Christians.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER (1:3-14)

Paul gives thanks for the Colossian Christians (1:3-8) and prays for them (1:9-14). Their faith, love, and hope have made Paul extremely grateful. Epaphras, a Colossian sent out by Paul from Ephesus, had come to share the Good News of their response to Christ. Epaphras' ministry included the Lycus Valley (4:13) and was not limited to Colossae.

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST (1:15-23)

In addressing the problems of the Colossae Christians, Paul begins with a hymn, which stresses the supremacy of Christ. In this hymn Christ is lifted up as the image of God, the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the world. As the very agent of creation, he also is to be considered the agent of the new creation; hence, mystic visions and ascetic regulations are unnecessary.

THE MINISTRY OF PAUL (1:24—2:7)

Paul appeals to the Colossians to listen to him as one who has apostolic authority. He has suffered to make known the Good News, and he warns them not to follow those who are smooth talkers.

Included in that Good News is the *mystery* that has been hidden throughout the ages and for generations. That mystery has now been revealed. It consists of the possibility of Christ living in us. When we come to the realization that Christ lives in us, then our faith will mature. We, however, are only the Body of Christ; the risen Christ remains our head. With Christ in us, we live according to the will and direction of our living head.

FALSE TEACHINGS (2:8-23)

This whole section is difficult to follow, but one might begin by making a list of those false teachings that seem to be addressed.

1. Philosophy (2:8)
2. Circumcision (2:11)
3. Sacred Observances according to a Calendar (2:16)
 - a. Festival (Annual)
 - b. New Moon (Monthly)
 - c. Sabbath (Weekly)
4. Worship of Angels (2:18)
5. Ascetic practices [self-abasement] (2:18 & 23)
6. Dietary Regulations (2:20-21)

Paul's conclusion is that none of the above will help anyone establish a saving relationship with Christ. Circumcision is spiritual, and baptism is a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection. The central focus for all Christians should be the supremacy of Christ, in whom we are dealing with the fullness of God.

PUTTING ON CHRIST (3:1-17)

The Christian must always seek the things of Christ, and this means setting aside the vices of the world. Two lists of vices are given:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Fornication (3:5) | 1. Anger (3:8) |
| 2. Impurity | 2. Wrath |
| 3. Passion | 3. Malice |
| 4. Evil Desire | 4. Slander |
| 5. Greed | 5. Abusive Language |

These lists are then contrasted with a list of Christian virtues, put on by the chosen ones (elect) of God. “Election, in the scripture sense,” said John Wesley, “is God’s doing anything that our merit or power have no part in.” That means that God calls all people to salvation and those who accept the invitation become the elect or chosen. They become God’s special people, who willingly accept the following virtues:

1. Compassion (3:12-14)
2. Kindness
3. Humility
4. Meekness
5. Patience
6. Forgiveness
7. Love (above all)

While the Christian virtues have parallels in paganism, “lowliness” was considered a pagan vice. Christians do march to a different drummer, and experience a different kind of peace. This peace is not only an individualistic inner serenity, but a sense of peace that is also experienced within the Christian community (3:15).

This new community has distinguished itself by breaking down national, religious, and social barriers. Baptism was incorporation into a new community of believers, which was even inclusive of barbarians (non Greeks or foreigners) and Scythians (nomads known for their bestial and brutal ways). This new inclusiveness (3:11) was cause to give thanks with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The early church had a rich hymnody based on the Psalms, but certainly not limited to them. Colossians 1:15-20 is an excellent example of a new song.

CHRISTIAN OBLIGATIONS (3:18—4:6)

Several sets of obligations are mentioned.

The Family (3:18-20)

Wives are to be subject to their husbands, but husbands are to love their wives. Children are to obey their parents. Jesus says nothing about these relationships. These are examples of the family obligations of the time. Wives looked forward only to marriage and homemaking, and children obeyed their parents. There is however an attempt to Christianize these relationships, making them more sensitive to human worth. It is important to emphasize that these are not new laws. The Gospel does away with law and creates freedom. This does not mean that we are free to treat people as property; rather, we are set free to humanize all family relationships. The husband was not free to lead his wife into a life of sin, nor was he to provoke or abuse his children.

Masters and Slaves (3:22—4:1)

Paul advises slaves to subject themselves first to God, then to their masters; and masters are to treat their slaves justly and fairly. No attempt is made to confront the institution of slavery, but Paul's treatment of Onesimus as a full brother in the Lord undermines and eventually destroys slavery. Judaism viewed slavery as idolatry. It was the disobedience of the first Commandment.

Prayer and Witnessing (4:2-6)

Christians are to be in a constant attitude of prayer, always in tune with God's Word, and always ready to answer anyone, who might question it. Witnessing however should always be seasoned with salt, which is to say that it should be gracious and sensitive to other people's feelings and needs. It should not irritate.

THE CONCLUSION (4:7-18)

A list of Paul's companions and friends is given in the Conclusion.

Tychicus and Onesimus

Tychicus delivered the letter. This links it with Ephesians and Philemon, which were also delivered by Tychicus. Onesimus was a run-a-way slave, whom Paul was returning to Philemon. It is clear that Paul gives him full status as a brother in Christ, thus undermining the whole institution of slavery.

Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus (Jesus)

These were Paul's only Jewish colleagues at the time. The former alienation between him and Mark has been overcome, even though no reference has been made to it. Aristarchus alone is described as a fellow-prisoner.

Epaphras

Epaphras was the founder of congregations in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Paul probably dispatched him from Ephesus. His hometown though was Colossae.

Luke and Demas

This is the only place where Luke, the author of the third Gospel, is described as the "beloved physician." Demas later defected out of a love for the world (2 Timothy 4:10).

Nympha

Nympha offered her home as a meeting place for the congregation in Laodicea, or Colossae. Others who did this were Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus and Rome, Philemon in Colossae, and Gaius in Corinth. Nothing else is known about Nympha.

Archippus

Archippus was instructed to “complete the task” he had received. What does this mean? We can only guess. Some guesses have been that he was given the responsibility to continue the work of Epaphras in Colossae, or to assist in the collection of money for Jerusalem. Another guess is that he was Philemon’s son, and that he was to release Onesimus as a slave. The former guesses are more realistic.

Paul concluded this letter by writing in his own hand the final greeting. Everything else had been dictated. Prior to concluding the letter he advised the congregation to share its letter with Laodicea and to obtain the letter he sent to them. Since we have no letter to Laodicea, some early church leaders suggested that Ephesians is that letter. This was the belief of Marcion in the second century, but we cannot confirm it. We only know that the churches exchanged and preserved their letters. These are the letters that finally were included in the New Testament. Perhaps the letter to Laodicea was lost.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and Christ is the Image of God. As Colossians 1:15 puts it, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation....” No one else has ever lived out completely the Image of God; therefore, in Him we encounter God Himself. As such, He alone is the only one worthy of being “head of the body, the church.” (Colossians 1:18)

The logical consequence of the above affirmation is that we reject every false teaching and adopt the teachings of Jesus as valid for us. We, like the Colossians, face attempts to assimilate pagan theologies and values in our lives. These theologies and values come either from the society in which we live or from other religions. Many of them appear to be harmless and are easily assimilated. One of those values in Colossae was the institution of slavery. Paul knew that he could not attack it outright and so he simply undermined it by calling upon those who held slaves to consider Christian slaves as brothers and sisters. That was the beginning of the end for slavery. Slavery was simply viewed as incompatible with Christian values.

If Christ is the full Image of God, and every Christian is to imitate Christ, that spells the end to all abuse in human relationships. All false teaching must be set aside and all negative values must be rejected. Everyone is to imitate the one who is the full Image of God. “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved,” says Paul in Colossians 3:12-14, “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the

Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Is it possible for Christians to live like this? It is if we adopt Christian values and aim at Christian holiness, which always includes humility and meekness. It will never be possible if we compromise Christian values in order to accommodate pagan values. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul clearly differentiates between Christian and pagan values and calls upon Christians to put on Christ. “In that renewal,” he concludes in Colossians 3:11, “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” None of this works if we try to mix religions. Other religious theologies are human attempts to make contact with God. Christianity alone claims that in Christ we encounter God’s attempt to reach us. He alone is the visible image of the invisible God. There is nothing wrong with studying other religions for the sake of understanding them, but Christ alone stands as the Image of God.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM COLOSSIANS

The mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:26-27

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:16-17

15
WAIT FOR THE LORD
IN HOPE!

1 Thessalonians 1:1—5:28

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The First E-Letters

15. WAIT FOR THE LORD IN HOPE! (1:1—5:28)			
INTRODUCTION AND THANKSGIVING (1:1-10)			
PAUL’S MINISTRY TO AND LOVE FOR THE THESSALONIANS (2:1—3:13)			
EXHORTATIONS TO HOLINESS (4:1-12)			
THE SECOND COMING (4:13—5:11)			
What will happen to those who have died? They will rise first. (4:13-18)		When will the Lord Come? No one knows. (5:1-11)	
CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS (5:12-28)			
Concerning Idleness and Work	Concerning Joy, Prayer, and Gratitude	Concerning the Holy Kiss	Concerning Scripture

15. WAIT FOR THE LORD IN HOPE!

1 Thessalonians 1:1—5:28

ASSIGNMENTS				
Introduction and Thanksgiving (1:1-10)	Paul's Ministry and Love (2:1—3:13)	Paul's Exhortation to Holiness (4:1-12)	The Second Coming (4:13—5:11)	Paul's Concluding Exhortations (5:12-28)

The Author (s)

Thessalonians is the first letter in the New Testament to be written by Paul. It is also the oldest portion of the New Testament. Another letter for which this claim is made is Galatians. It may be possible that Silas and Timothy shared in the writing of this letter. Along with Paul, Silas was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38).

The Date

Since we know that Thessalonians was written from Corinth during Paul's second missionary journey, it is easily dated around 50-51 C.E.

The Place

The letter was written from Corinth shortly after Timothy and Silas joined Paul from Thessalonica.

The Context

Thessalonica was the capital and largest city in Macedonia. Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's generals, founded it in 316 B.C.E. and named the city after his wife, who was a half-sister of Alexander the Great and the daughter of Philip II. When Macedonia became a Roman province in 146 B.C.E., Thessalonica became its capital. With its location on the *Via Egnatia* (East-West road) and its harbor, it became a prosperous political and trade center. Along with Greek and Roman Religions, Judaism had a strong presence. Although the location of the Synagogue is unknown, it probably was located near the agora (marketplace) close to the harbor. A considerable number of Gentiles would have been sympathetic to Judaism because of its focus on one God and its high moral standards, but they hesitated to convert because of its legalism. Many of these

people would have been the first converts to Christianity, which maintained the focus on one God and high moral standards, with less legalism. The emphasis on Christ as Lord caused outsiders to view Christians as disloyal to Rome and unpatriotic. This made it difficult for Paul, his companions, and their converts, both Jew and Gentile.

Thessalonica was the location of the second congregation established in Europe during Paul's second missionary journey. After establishing a congregation in Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy went on to Thessalonica, where Paul preached for three Sabbaths. His stay might have been a little longer, but not much. Hostility against him emerged from the Jewish community as he gained converts from them and from the Gentiles who had been influenced by Judaism. The hostility became so strong that Paul had to flee to nearby Beroea. Jews from Thessalonica followed him there, and so he moved on to Athens. He sent a message back to Silas and Timothy, asking them to meet him in Athens. Apparently Timothy did meet him in Athens, but we have no account of it in the Book of Acts. Acts 17:15 does tell us that they intended to meet in Athens and perhaps they did. We do know that Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, and Paul went on to Corinth, where he waited for Silas and Timothy. After they joined Paul in Corinth, 1 Thessalonians was written to clear up the congregation's questions. A second letter followed a few months later.

The Purpose

The young congregation was leaderless and in need of help concerning two theological questions:

1. What will happen to those who die before the Lord's return?
2. When will the Lord return?

The first question is answered in 4:13-18 and the second in 5:1-11. Paul assured them that the dead will enter the Kingdom first, and that no one knows when the Lord will return. Paul rejected every idea that the Kingdom had already been established. It had only been inaugurated. Paul's message to the young church might be summed up as follows: "Wait for the Lord's Return in Hope!"

The Outline

- A. Introduction (1:1)
- B. Gratitude and Praise (1:2--3:13)
- C. Exhortation to Christian Conduct (4:1-12)
- D. Instructions about the Coming of Christ (4:13—5:11)
- E. Final Exhortations (5:12-22)
- F. Conclusion (5:23-28)

1	2:1—4:12	4:13—5:11	5:12-28
Their Faith	Paul's Ministry	The Second Coming	Lives that Please God

INTRODUCTION (1:1)

The letter begins with greetings to the new congregation at Thessalonica from Paul, the writer, and his two companions Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy. In the Book of Acts, Luke refers to Silvanus as Silas, his Greek-Semitic name, but here Paul refers to his Latinized or Roman name. Like Paul, Silvanus (Silas) was a Roman citizen.

In this greeting Paul attaches “Lord,” the title of Israel’s Covenant God, to the risen and glorified Jesus. “Grace” was the common Greek salutation and “Peace” the common Jewish greeting. In writing to a church consisting of both Gentiles and Jews, Paul uses both terms. Grace, as God’s unmerited favor, leads to peace with God.

THANKSGIVING (1:2-10)

There is much to be thankful for in Thessalonica. The young church has rapidly matured in the work of faith, the labor of love, and the steadfastness of hope. These three terms are placed in a slightly different order from their appearance in 1 Corinthians 13:13, but that they are present in this new congregation, is a sign of Christian maturity. Within just a few months the Thessalonian Christians have become an example throughout Macedonia and Achaia. This can only be due to the activity of God’s power and Spirit operating in their midst. The Gospel or Good News is not simply made up of words. It has been incarnated in persons, and for this Paul is grateful.

Israel’s privileges and responsibilities as the chosen have been transferred to the Church, and it looks to the future anticipating the Lord’s return. He has delivered them from the wrath (justice) of God. Perhaps John Wesley had this in mind when he set as the sole condition for accepting people into classes and bands, “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.”

PAUL’S MINISTRY IN THESSALONICA (2:1-16)

Paul seems to be defending his ministry and himself to the Thessalonians. He insists that he and his companions went to Thessalonica to please God, not men (2:4); but they were ready to share themselves as well as the Gospel (2:8). That is why they supported themselves financially in Thessalonica. There must have been some suspicion that they were religious hucksters. While Paul accepted help from the Philippian Church (Philippians 4:16), he makes no mention of it to the Thessalonians. This congregation has not matured as much, and so he compares them to children and himself as their mother

(2:7) and as their father (2:11). As congregations matured, Paul reminded them that they had a responsibility to give financial support to professional leadership. For Paul's support of paying professional leadership, see 1 Corinthians 9:3-14.

The Thessalonians, as imitators of the Judean Church, have had to deal with Jewish hostility and persecution. Verses 14-16 make up Paul's harshest words against his fellow Jews. These words are so harsh that some scholars suspect that they had been added much later. The final phrase, "...God's wrath has overtaken them at last," has been interpreted to mean that Jerusalem has been destroyed and Jewish disbelief lies at the root of it. Those who do not accept the later insertion of these verses suggest that Paul, like Jesus before him, simply foresaw the inevitable result of Jewish disbelief and persecution. These verses stand in sharp contrast to Romans 9-11.

PAUL'S LOVE FOR THE THESSALONIANS (2:17—3:13)

In defense of his love for the newly formed Church in Thessalonica, Paul insists that Satan is responsible for his absence. What could this mean? It most certainly means that Paul believed that there was a *cosmic* struggle within the world between Satan and God. When one tries to interpret how Satan was preventing Paul from returning, four possibilities emerge: (1) Paul's illness, (2) the Thessalonian magistrates, (3) the Thessalonian Jews, and (4) problems in Corinth. Paul would have seen Satan acting in all four of these circumstances, preventing him from returning to Thessalonica.

Instead of returning to Thessalonica himself, Paul sent Timothy. Why does he not mention Silas? When Timothy returns from Thessalonica, Silas accompanies him (Acts 18:5). Perhaps Silas stayed in Beroea or went to another Macedonian town. All we know is that the two of them turned up in Corinth together.

Paul ends this section with a prayer for reunion, love, and holiness. We usually think of the increase of holiness producing more love, but here Paul implies the reverse. Increasing love leads to holiness. Every Christian is called to sainthood, and the reference to saints is to all God's people.

EXHORTATIONS TO HOLINESS (4:1-12)

Two issues are brought up, with which the Gentile world struggled. They are (1) sex, and (2) work. Paul insists that in the right context, both sex and work can be holy, but in the wrong context, they become sinful.

The Gentile world was notorious for sexual license, which could be traced to polytheism or idolatry. Paul calls for purity, not abstinence. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Sexual relationships are holy within, and only within, marriage. To live in the passion of lust is to live for self-gratification, which would be a sin against God. Christians are expected to abstain from sexual activity in singleness and to be faithful in marriage.

The Greeks had an aversion to manual labor, and so it did not take very much to make them stop working. Belief in an early return of Jesus caused many of them to give up their work and live off the generosity of other Christians. This, says Paul, does not reflect maturity in loving one another, and it certainly is not a good example to others. The Thessalonians should deepen their love for one another so they can command the respect of outsiders.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SECOND COMING (4:13—5:11)

Two questions about the second coming are raised. They have to do with what happens to those who have already died and when will the Lord come.

The first question is answered in 4:13-18 and the second in 5:1-11. Neither the question nor the answer deals with the non-Christian dead. Both deal with those who have died in Christ. The question does not ask about the sequence of the resurrected dead, but Paul's answer concludes that the dead in Christ will rise first. The word *rapture* comes from the Latin translation of the phrase, "will be caught up." It does not mean only a few will be caught up in the air. According to Paul, everyone will meet Christ in the air. Sleeping was a common metaphor for the dead (Matthew 9:24 and John 11:11), and one gets the idea that we all wait for the coming of the Lord, both the living and the dead.

There is no specific answer to the second question. No one knows when the Lord will come, therefore, everyone must be ready at all times. He will come suddenly and unexpectedly. This calls for constant readiness. We must put on our breastplate of faith and love and wear for our helmet the hope of salvation. A time like this calls for encouraging one another and building one another up. This, the Thessalonians have been doing.

Amos was the first to use the phrase "the day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18). This phrase means the same thing as "the second coming." Although "the second coming" was not used in the New Testament, it was used in the early Church. Justin Martyr coined the phrase in the second century. The author of Hebrews¹ comes very close to using the phrase, and so we must conclude that "the second coming" is indeed a biblical concept.

CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS (5:12-28)

A group of unconnected admonitions follows.

Concerning Idleness and Work

First, Paul exhorts the congregation to admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, and help the weak (5:14). The idle were those who had given up work in expectation of the Lord's return. The fainthearted were those who worried about dead relatives and their own salvation. The weak were those who were morally unstable.

¹ See Hebrews 9:28.

Concerning Joy, Prayer, and Gratitude

Next, Paul exhorted the people to constant joy, prayer, and gratitude (5:16-18). This is best experienced within the Christian community.

Paul's own prayer is for the spirit, soul, and body (5:23). This is not an attempt to divide us into three distinct parts, but a concern for the whole person.

Concerning the Holy Kiss

Thirdly, Paul exhorts the people of God to greet one another with a "holy kiss." (5:26), which was some kind of liturgical greeting practiced by a number of congregations. Other references to it appear in Romans 16:6, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, and 1 Peter 5:14. Nothing however is known about the practice itself, which soon disappeared.

Concerning Scripture

Paul's final exhortation was to read this letter in public worship (5:27), which became a practice of the Church continuing right up to the present. This exhortation can also be found in Colossians 4:16. It has become the basis of Christian preaching and Paul's letters became the Church's first Scripture.

EXPECTING THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Why should we be good? Because the end of history will come on us like a thief in the night and we will be held accountable for our actions. The time of judgment will be the beginning of the end. History as we know it will end and a new age will begin. In the new age, sin and evil will not be tolerated, but cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). All those who have died in the Lord, will be raised up from the dead to greet him in the air. Then, those still living, will join them in a new beginning, where evil and sin no longer exist.

Does this mean that our freedom will be taken from us? No! We will have chosen the way of the new Adam, Jesus Christ, over the fall of the old Adam, who represents all of us. It is this new Adam, who will put an end to sin and evil. At the same time, he will invite all who desire him and his ways to join him in a new creation. The Garden of Eden will be restored. Only this time it will be called the City of God, the New Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of Heaven.

We do not seek holiness in our lives just because we fear the Lord. We seek it because it is the way of God, lived out in the life of Jesus, and we desire to prepare for the new age where sin and evil will be completely absent. We know that day is coming, even if we do not know when it will finally come. That is why we can say with Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:16: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." These are not unusual activities for people who expect the Lord to establish his Kingdom any minute.

One question remains for those of us who wait for the beginning of the end. That question is this: “Why is God taking so long to put an end to sin and evil?” One would think that God would like to establish his Kingdom once and for all. The answer lies in one word—patience. God patiently waits for us to recognize the validity of all that he has revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God does not want to force his Kingdom on us, although in the end, he will force an end to sin and evil. Those who will make up God’s Kingdom will not be dragged in kicking and screaming; rather, they will enter on their own volition, in full agreement with the rules of the Kingdom.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM 1 THESSALONIANS

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

16
WORK FOR THAT DAY
IS COMING!
2 Thessalonians 1:1—3:18

*Therefore we ourselves boast of you
among the churches of God
for your steadfastness and faith
during all your persecutions and the afflictions
that you are enduring.*

2 Thessalonians 1:4

The First E-Letters

16. WORK FOR THAT DAY IS COMING! (1:1—3:18)		
INTRODUCTION AND THANKSGIVING (1:1-4)		
THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT (1:5-12)		
THE DAY OF THE LORD (2:1-17)		
EXHORTATIONS (3:1-15)		
To Pray (3:1-5)	To Work (3:6-15)	
PERSONAL GREETINGS (5:12-28)		
Of Peace (3:16)	Greeting (3:17)	Of Grace (3:18)

16. WORK FOR THAT DAY IS COMING!

2 Thessalonians 1:1—3:18

ASSIGNMENTS		
God's Impending Judgment (1:1-12)	Evil's Brief Reign (2:1-17)	Pray and Work Hard! (3:1-18)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

According to tradition, Paul wrote this second letter only a short time after he wrote 1 Thessalonians; but there are those who reject Pauline authorship, suggesting a much later date. The reason why Paul has been rejected by some as the author is due to the distant and formal style of 2 Thessalonians. The style of 1 Thessalonians is warm and personal. Another reason for the Pauline rejection is the different view of the end. Contrast 2 Thessalonians 2 with 1 Thessalonians 4-5.

The Date

If Paul wrote this letter, its date would be around 50-51 C.E. Those who reject Pauline authorship, estimate a date from 75 to 90 C.E.

The Place

Was this letter written from Corinth, or was it written in Thessalonica itself? Tradition favors the former.

The Purpose

Why was 2 Thessalonians written? Two problems had not disappeared, but had actually grown worse. They have to do with (1) the end of history, and (2) the idle Christians. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 tells us what was happening in regard to the first problem. A letter had circulated indicating that Paul taught that the Day of the Lord had already come. 2 Thessalonians opposes that letter by arguing against such a view. The necessary preliminary events, of which Paul had spoken, had not yet occurred. This could be the struggle of the early Church over a correct understanding of Paul's view of the end. That

this letter had always been accepted as genuine does not prove anything except that the author succeeded in doing what he set out to do—provide a definitive Pauline rebuttal of the erroneous opinion that the end had arrived. Linked to this problem was the mistaken view that Christians did not need to work in anticipation of or within the Kingdom. Whether the letter was written by Paul, or someone else, no one questions the consistency of the Pauline view being reflected. It is Pauline, even if there are a few inconsistencies concerning the end of history.

The Outline

- A. Introduction (1:1-2)
- B. Praise and Commendation (1:3-12)
- C. Instructions about the Coming of Christ (2:1-17)
- D. Exhortation to Christian Conduct (3:1-16)
- E. Conclusion (3:17-18)

1	2	3
Commendations	Instructions	Requests

INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)

A combined Greek (Grace) and Hebrew (Peace) greeting is given. This greeting does not simply represent the good wishes of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, but the grace and peace of God.

THANKSGIVING (1:3-4)

Paul gives thanks for their faith, love, and steadfastness in *persecution*. In 1 Thessalonians (1:6; 3:3) Paul only talks about afflictions and other difficulties. He does not mention persecution. The reference to *persecution* supports a much later date when the church began to encounter organized persecution.

THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT (1:5-12)

Paul continues to commend the Thessalonians for their confidence in the righteous judgment of God, who promises to afflict the afflicters and relieve the afflicted. We do live in a moral universe, even if judgment does not proceed as quickly as we might like. Christians cannot gloat over God’s righteous judgment, nor do they pray for it to come. This judgment consists of eternal destruction and exclusion from God’s presence. The future lies with the persecuted and their willingness to take it is rooted in the martyrdom

theology of Daniel, reaffirmed by Jesus (Matthew 5:10-12), and ratified by the cross and resurrection.

THE DAY OF THE LORD (2:1-17)

Some of the Thessalonians believed that the Day of the Lord had already come. According to oral and written tradition (2:15), this could not be the case. The time of rebellion and the rise of the “lawless one” or the “son of perdition” had not yet taken place. Some of the tradition lying behind this passage might be Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21:5-36. These passages point to a “desolating sacrilege,” which is very difficult to identify. Is this “son of perdition,” who commits the “desolating sacrilege,” the Roman Emperor (or Empire), some supernatural power, or Satan himself? During the Reformation, many reformers thought that he was the Pope. No one knows how to identify him. All we know is that his rise to power will precede the final Day of the Lord and that God will finally destroy him and all the evil that has supported him. For the moment, God permits evil because he respects human freedom; but the time is coming when evil will be completely annihilated.

EXHORTATIONS (3:1-15)

To Pray (3:1-5)

The first exhortation is to pray for the author and his companions as they pray for the Thessalonians. They are all to pray for the victory of love over evil.

To Work (3:6-15)

Everyone is to work. Those who are not willing to work are not to be given any food (3:10). In 1 Thessalonians the exhortation was to admonish the idlers (5:14), but in 2 Thessalonians the Church is told to dissociate itself from them (3:6 and 14). This does not mean excommunication. It simply means that they are not to be allowed to sponge off the congregation. Those who refuse to work will not be allowed to eat (3:10). It is as simple as that. Everyone must follow Paul’s example of supporting himself.

PERSONAL GREETINGS (3:16-18)

Of Peace (3:16)

This closing benediction on peace has a parallel in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Christians possess an inner peace, which the world cannot understand.

Of Greeting (3:17)

The author concludes in his own handwriting, which was to be the mark of authenticity. Paul frequently used a secretary, but would sign off in his own handwriting.

Of Grace (3:18)

Paul can conceive of no greater blessing than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and so he concludes with this personal benediction, which he gives at the close of all his letters.

WORKING IN THE MIDST OF EVIL

We would like to think that Christians could make the world better and that evil would disappear. Then we discover that even in the church evil is present. Leaders in the church disappoint us with adulterous affairs and sexual abuse, not to mention the breaking of any or every one of the commandments. What's the matter? Aren't Christians supposed to be transformed? It's bad enough that we have to deal with evil in the world, but must we also have to deal with it in the church?

Let's personalize evil for a moment, as the New Testament does. Let's call the leader of the forces of evil Satan. If you were Satan, how would you deal with the rise of good? You would attack it at its source. That means that you would attack good in the church itself and you would tempt those who have been transformed and renewed in Christ. If you can make them yield to temptation, then there is hope for evil to win over good. What better thing can you do than to convince the followers of Christ to cease working for their cause and simply to wait for the coming of their Lord?

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Paul warns:

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.

The Kingdom of God will not come without a battle. The forces of evil will attack Christians and the Church itself. If we just cease working and wait for the Lord's return, we simply give up the fight against evil. We need to recognize that there is a battle going on and we need to be able to recognize who the enemy really is. C.S. Lewis describes the appearance of evil in a different way than we might expect.

The greatest evil is not now done in those sordid "dens of crime" that Dickens loved to paint. It is not done even in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried, and minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voice.¹

¹C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. x.

The above description must include the church office and Sunday School, because, that is where the most damage can be done. From there it will penetrate our schools, offices, and factories. By the time it hits the streets, we are only looking at the final results.

The worst thing we can do in the church is to sit idly by waiting for the promised coming of the Kingdom of God. There is a battle going on and we need to engage all the forces of the church in that battle. The forces of evil will try to convince us that there is no hurry, for that is their main military tactic.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM 2 THESSALONIANS

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.

2 Thessalonians 2;3-4

Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

17
ON FULFILLING
THE MINISTRY
1 Timothy 1:1—6:21

*But as for you, man of God, shun all this;
pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love,
endurance, gentleness.*

*Fight the good fight of the faith;
take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called
and for which you made the good confession
in the presence of many witnesses.*

1 Timothy 6:11-12

The First E-Letters

17. ON FULFILLING THE MINISTRY (1:1—6:21)			
INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)			
IN DEFENSE OF THE TRUTH (1:3-20)			
The Heresies (1:3-7)	The Place of Law (1:8-11)	The Chief of Sinners (1:12-17)	The Place of Conscience (1:18-20)
THE REGULATIONS FOR WORSHIP (2:1-15)			
The Inclusiveness of Prayer (2:1-7)		Men and Women in Worship (2:8-15)	
QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY (3:1-16)			
For Bishops (3:1-7)	For Deacons (3:8-13)	Behavior in the Church (3:14-16)	
OVERCOMING FALSE TEACHINGS (4:1-16)			
DEALING WITH PEOPLE (5:1—6:2)			
Elderly (5:1-2)	Widows (5:3-16)	Elders (5:17-25)	Slaves (6:1-2)
FINAL INSTRUCTIONS (6:3-21)			

17. ON FULFILLING THE MINISTRY

1 Timothy 1:1—6:21

ASSIGNMENTS				
In Defense of the Truth (1:1-20)	Regulations for Worship (2:1-15)	Qualifications for the Ministry (3:1-16)	Overcoming False Teachings (4:1-16)	Dealing with People (5:1—6:21)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

Although Paul has traditionally been considered the author of 1 Timothy, the vocabulary and style of this letter differ remarkably from all his other letters. In addition to that, his most important theological ideas are absent. This certainly does not rule him out as the author, but it does raise some serious questions.

It is possible that a disciple of Paul's wrote the letter, using fragments of Paul's ideas. This would not have been unusual at this time. It was customary to write a letter and sign someone else's name to it to give it more authority. This may be considered legally wrong today, but it was not wrong in the first century. If this happened, we do not know who wrote 1 Timothy. All we would know is that he was a loyal disciple of Paul's and that he probably used some of his unpublished letters and expanded them to deal with contemporary conditions in the Church

The Date

The activities mentioned in 1 Timothy do not fit into the account we have of Paul's career as told in the Book of Acts. If Paul is the writer, then he must have written it following the story told in Acts and prior to his death. This would set the date for 1 Timothy at 63 C.E., or two years after his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30). If someone else wrote the letter of 1 Timothy, we would not be able to come up with any specific date. Those who take this position, guess at a date somewhere between 64 to 180 C.E., focusing usually within 115 to 135 C.E.

The Place

The letter was written from Macedonia (or Rome) to Timothy, who was in charge at Ephesus (1:3). Timothy was converted during Paul's first missionary journey through Lystra (Galatia), after which he became Paul's constant and loyal companion. Lystra is located close to Konya in modern Turkey. Timothy came out of a mixed marriage. His father was Greek and his mother Jewish.

The Purpose

In addition to personal instructions to Timothy, the Letter focuses on guiding him through the problems of church administration and opposing false teachers and teachings. The primary false teaching of the time was *gnostic asceticism*. This heresy taught that the physical world is evil; salvation comes through special knowledge; that we should avoid certain foods; and not marry. The author of 1 Timothy opposes all of these ideas.

The Outline

1 Timothy

- A. In Defense of the Truth (1:1-20)
- B. Worship and Leadership (2:1—3:16)
 - 1. Regulations for Worship (2:1-15)
 - 2. Qualifications for the Ministry (3:1-16)
- C. Issues in Pastoral Care (4:1—6:2)
 - 1. Overcoming False Teachings (4:1-16)
 - 2. Dealing with People (5:1—6:2)
- D. Final Instructions (6:3-21)

1	2-3	4-6
Hold Fast	Worship and Leadership	Pastoral Care

INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)

The writer begins by claiming to speak with apostolic authority, which has been derived directly from Jesus Christ and God. “Mercy” is added to his usual greeting of “grace” and “peace.”

IN DEFENSE OF THE TRUTH (1:3-20)

The Heresies (1:3-7)

The letter is written to the Church in Ephesus (1:3), where more than one heresy exists. They are referred to as “myths and endless genealogies.” While we cannot be sure of what heresies the author has in mind, three of the early Church’s most persistent heresies had to do with Judaizing, Gnosticism, and Marcionism. The first one had to do with obeying the Jewish Law, the second with a complex system of divine beings or emanations from deity, and the third with the rejection of the God of the Old Testament. Timothy is to lead the Church away from all such heresy, and promote the goal of love (1:5), which is supposed to put an end to endless discussion and debate. But does it really? I think not.

The Place of Law (1:8-11)

Paul’s usual place for law is that it acts as a “schoolmaster,” but here law is described as being unnecessary for the godly and exists only to hold the ungodly in check, which the godly do not need, for they are motivated by divine love.

The list of wrongdoings follows the order of commandments five through nine. Below I have listed the commandment, followed with the wrongdoing listed in 1 Timothy 1:9-10.

5. Honor thy father and mother: those who kill their father or mother
6. Thou shalt not murder: murderers
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery: fornicators, sodomites
8. Thou shalt not steal: slave traders
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness: liars, perjurers

Chief of Sinners (1:12-17)

None of the above means that sinners are condemned, for Christ came to save sinners (1:15). Even Paul saw himself as the “foremost [chief] of sinners,” whom God could forgive. The awareness of such forgiveness only motivates us to praise and glorify God for such grace.

The Place of Conscience (1:18-20)

Conscience has a very positive role to play and cannot be rejected, without making shipwreck of one’s faith. Examples of persons who have disregarded their conscience are Hymenaeus (2 Timothy 2:16-17) and Alexander (2 Timothy 4:14). Paul has turned them over to Satan, who is the source of evil, suffering, and disease. This does not mean that he has given up on them. Paul hopes that if they suffer more under Satan, they might be moved towards repentance and reconciliation with God. Another example of this method is given in 1 Corinthians 5:5.

REGULATIONS FOR WORSHIP (2:1-15)

The Inclusiveness of Prayer (2:1-7)

Beyond praying for the masses and their salvation, Christians are to pray for Kings and other leaders. Good and stable government was considered necessary for the growth of Christianity, but the amazing thing was that Christianity grew even in the environment of hostile political power. God desires everyone to be saved and to come to a full knowledge of the truth, especially political leaders, who have a tremendous impact on society.

Men and Women in Worship (2:8-15)

Men are to do the praying, and the normal posture for prayer is standing with “holy hands” lifted upward. The artwork found in the catacombs confirms this posture. It was how early Jews and Christians prayed. Kneeling came much later. What does “holy hands” mean? It has been suggested that it could have to do with the *ceremonial washing* of the hands, but there is nothing in this chapter that would suggest this. It is more likely related to what follows. “Holy hands” are free of “anger or argument.” This points to an ethical, rather than a ceremonial, emphasis.

Women are to be silent and submissive in worship. No woman is to teach or have authority over men. They are to dress modestly, without braiding their hair, wearing gold, pearls, or other costly attire, and their focus too should be on good deeds. Conservative churches take these verses literally, while more liberal churches focus on Galatians 3:28, which claims that distinctions between men and women have fallen away in Christ. While these verses are indeed difficult to understand, 1 Timothy 2:15 is the most difficult of all. It claims that a woman’s salvation is related to childbirth. What could this possibly mean? The discussion preceding it might give us a clue. Woman is described as the first person to yield to temptation, but man quickly followed. It was woman who gave birth to the Savior, and it could be in this sense that salvation comes. Another rendering of this verse is, “She will be saved through the birth of the Child.” I prefer the former interpretation because it makes more sense. How can giving birth to ordinary children save anyone? This is not consistent with the rest of the Bible.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY (3:1-16)

Qualifications of Bishops (3:1-7)

Our English word for *Bishop* is closely related to two Greek words: “Episkopos” and “Presbyteros.” *Episkopos* means “overseer,” and *Presbyteros* means “Elder.” Both words can be used interchangeably. Bishops were pastors of congregations, not administrators of institutions. As time went on, many of them became administrators, but this was not what happened in the early Church. Ordination of new pastors came through the laying on of hands from other pastors. This caused John Wesley to justify his own ordination of Methodist pastors for the American Church.

Quite a list of qualifications is given. We can deduce a number of things from this list. First, pastors could marry, but what does having one wife mean? It could mean that a pastor was not to engage in polygamy, or having divorced his wife, marry again. What was meant is not clear, nor can it be discerned from other passages. Secondly, there is no support for total abstinence in alcoholic beverages; however, drunkenness is to be rejected. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Timothy is told to take a little wine for medicinal purposes. Thirdly, pastors are not to be lovers of money. Fourthly, they are not to be recent converts. They are to have been Christians for some time prior to their call into the ordained ministry; hence, they must be mature, discerning persons.

Qualifications of Deacons (3:8-13)

The qualifications for deacons are very similar to those for bishops. Additional qualifications are mentioned in Acts 6:1-6, where the first deacons are chosen. One thing is new here in the Letter to Timothy, and that is the inclusion of women (3:11). Those who object to women in ministry insist that this verse refers to the deacon's wife, but it is not at all clear. Most Bibles note that it might refer to women deacons or deaconesses.

Behavior in the Church (3:14-16)

The above instructions were sent on ahead so that the congregation would not have to wait for the author to arrive in order to deal with the ordination of bishops (elders) and deacons. One point being made is that church administration is a spiritual task, not a necessary evil; therefore, the Church ought to take it very seriously. The Church's leadership is responsible for passing on the "mystery" of Christ. This mystery is described in an ancient Christian Hymn, which rejects some of the heretical teachings present in the ancient world. Many of them are still present today. The hymn emphasizes (1) the Incarnation of God in Christ, (2) the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, and (3) the Proclamation of this Good News to the whole world. "Vindicated in the Spirit" refers to his Resurrection (3:16).

OVERCOMING FALSE TEACHING (4:1-16)

Gnostic teachers were misleading people by calling for *celibacy* and *abstinence* (4:3). Their teachings, which were moving people towards asceticism in the Church, were to be resisted. Everything created by God is good, and can be received with gratitude and consecrated to God in prayer (4:4-5). We ought not to allow false teachers to mislead us and we can overcome such teachings by becoming spiritually fit ourselves.

Spiritual fitness is more important than physical fitness. While physical fitness is of some value, it is only for this life. Spiritual fitness is for both this life and eternity (4:7b-8). This makes it extremely valuable. How does one proceed to become Spiritually fit? The answer is by attending the public reading, preaching, and teaching of God's Word, a practice taken over from the Synagogue Service (4:13).

We are not simply to become consumers of the Word, but we are to receive Spiritual gifts, which are to be shared in and through the Community of Faith. The laying on of hands symbolizes the giving and receiving of such gifts. Spiritual gifts are not to be neglected. They are to be used so that all may be led to the truth, which brings salvation.

DEALING WITH PEOPLE (5:1—6:2)

Four categories of people being dealt with are the elderly, widows, elders, and slaves.

Elderly (5:1-2)

The elderly, both men and women, must be treated with respect. They are to be treated as we would treat our own fathers and mothers. Naturally such attitudes begin with how we treat one another. Younger men and women are to be considered as brothers and sisters. The Church is a family.

Widows (5:3-16)

Social Security was nonexistent in the early Church, and so congregations had to offer support to those in need. If a family could care for its own, it should do so (5:8). “Real Widows” (5:5) would be those who lacked such a resource. The Church felt an obligation to support them, but they had to be above sixty years of age and of good Christian character. “Younger widows” need not be supported because they could marry again, and should. Caring for all the widows was a sizable task (Acts 6:1), and the Church could not help everyone; therefore, its solution was to help those most in need, who had no families.

Elders (5:17-25)

The qualifications for elders have been given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and are not repeated here. What is dealt with here is the Scriptural basis for paying and disciplining them. Remuneration is based on Scripture (Deuteronomy 25:4) and Christian Tradition (1 Corinthians 9:9,14; Matthew 10:10; and Luke 10:7). I do not think “double honor” (5:17) means “double wages.” New Testament writings were not yet considered Scripture. Discipline was based on Scripture (Deuteronomy 19:15) and Tradition (Matthew 18:15-17) as well. After a person was disciplined, a new *laying on of hands*, was in order, but the Church should not be too quick to reinstate an erring elder. Elders were not to be drunkards, and Deacons were not to become addicted to wine; but neither of these support total abstinence, for the teaching of Christianity is moderation. The recommendation to drink wine in 1 Timothy 5:23 is primarily for medicinal purposes, but wine was also a beverage substitute for bad water.

Slaves (6:1-2)

While Christian slaves are considered equal to other Christians, they are not encouraged to demand their freedom; instead, they are admonished to treat their masters with respect.

If their masters are Christians, they are to treat them with even more respect. The times were too early to expect a major change in the master-slave relationship, but the seeds to the destruction of that relationship were planted.

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS (6:3-21)

These final verses deal with two topics: false teachings and the danger of wealth. The *love* of money is identified as the main idol (6:10). Money itself is not the idol. Money can be used for good purposes, but too much wealth corrupts. Money does not bring happiness (Luke 6:20 and 24). What brings happiness is a *love* of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness (6:11). Christians are wealthy in these things. The greatest false teaching of all is that Christians are rewarded financially by God.

Christians are concerned with the confession and commandment of Jesus. The confession is that he is the Messiah (Christ) and the commandment is that we are to love as he loves. This confession has been entrusted to Timothy, and he is to guard it against the false teachings of the Gnostics and anyone else who would twist it to suit him or herself. The letter closes with the famous Pauline emphasis on “Grace.”

LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

No job is so difficult as leadership in the Church, where one has to lead people who have strong convictions and deep commitment. While those are positive traits, they also make leadership difficult. Everyone expects the leader to think like they do; and if they do not, then they are not leading. Every leader will have to deal with what is true and false teaching and what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Theology and morality cannot be avoided in Church leadership. Without dealing with them, nothing else will get done.

1 Timothy raises a couple of issues. The first one is a theological issue, one that some churches are still struggling with today. In 1 Timothy 2:12, the author writes to Timothy, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.” This sounds strange in light of Galatians 3:28, which says, “...there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Another theological issue, closely related has to do with marriage. What does it mean to say, as this author does in 1 Timothy 3:2, “Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher....” Does this mean that a bishop *must* have a wife, or does it mean, if he is married, he must only have one wife? The same issue is raised over deacons, who must also “be married only once.” (1 Timothy 2:12) To some of us it seems crystal clear. All are one in Christ; therefore, both men and women can be called into ministry. One does not have to be married in order to be in the professional ministry, but if one is going to marry, they should only have one wife (or husband). To others, it also seems crystal clear. Only men can be called into professional ministry and they must only marry once. There are many other variations of the above, all supposedly based on the same scriptures. When I was ordained a deacon, I was single. Someone wrote an

anonymous letter to me quoting 1 Timothy 2:12, informing me that because I was not married, I was not fit to be an ordained deacon.

The other issue that a leader must deal with is in the moral realm. In 1 Timothy 6:1, the following advice is given to slaves: “Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed.” It almost sounds as if Christianity is not willing to challenge the institution of slavery as being immoral. It must be remembered that the Church was in its infancy and that the institution of slavery was very widespread. About all the Church could do at that time was to advise its members to respect all those authorities over them, so that the name of God might be respected. This does not mean that the Church approved of slavery. In Galatians 3:28 Paul not only undermined the domination of women, but he also planted the seeds that would eventually destroy the institution of slavery.

...there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Every leader has to define and defend the Christian faith and how that faith should be expressed in life. No moral issue can be avoided, but dealing with some moral issues may take time and patience. After warning Timothy that the “love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10), the author urges Timothy, and every Christian leader, to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 6:11-12)

A Christian leader is only leading when he or she is listening for the will of God and placing that into practice. Listening to the crowd may make one popular, but it does not make anyone into a Christian leader. The early Church followed the pattern of the Synagogue. First came the study of Scripture, then came the formulation of theological doctrines, and last of all came the moral applications. The modern Christian leader cannot forget this pattern. It is the appropriate pattern for leadership. One cannot apply it without running into conflict with an unbelieving world. Dealing with that unbelieving world will require patience and persistence.

18
ON MAINTAINING
THE FAITH
2 Timothy 1:1—4:22

*Do your best to present yourself to God
as one approved by him,
a worker who has no need to be ashamed,
rightly explaining the word of truth.*

2 Timothy 2:15

The First E-Letters

18. ON MAINTAINING THE FAITH (1:1—4:22)

INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)

PRAISE AND EXHORTATION (1:3-7)

CONFESS CHRIST (1:1—2:13)

An Appeal for Courage

Like a Soldier's Endurance
(2:4)

Like an Athlete's Discipline
(2:5)

Like a Farmer's Perseverance
(2:6)

FIGHT FALSEHOOD (2:14—4:22)

Know the Scriptures
(2:14—4:5)
(2:15)
(3:16-17)

Keep the Faith
(4:6-22)
The Faithless: Demas and Alexander
The Faithful: Titus, Luke, and Mark

18. ON MAINTAINING THE FAITH

2 Timothy 1:1—4:22

ASSIGNMENTS		
Confess Christ (1:1—2:13)	Fight Falsehood (2:14—4:5)	Keep the Faith (4:6-22)

INTRODUCTION

See 1 Timothy for the author, date, and place of writing. 1 and 2 Timothy were written by the same person. They were also addressed to the same person.

The Outline

2 Timothy

- A. Confess Christ (1:1—2:13)
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-2)
 - 2. Praise and Exhortation (1:3-7)
 - 3. An Appeal for Courage (1:8—2:13)
- B. Fight Falsehood (2:14--4:22)
 - 1. Know the Scripture (2:14—4:5)
 - 2. Keep the Faith (4:6-22)

1:1—2:13	2:14-4:5
Confess Christ	Fight Falsehood

CONFESS CHRIST (1:1—2:13)

Introduction (1:1-2)

The letter simply claims to be written by the Apostle Paul to his younger colleague Timothy.

Praise and Exhortation (1:3-7)

Timothy is praised for his faith and encouraged to endure in it. We discover the names of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. In Acts 16:1 we are told that he came from Lystra, and that his mother was Jewish and his father Greek. He was a third generation Christian.

An Appeal for Courage (1:8—2:13)

After sharing something of his own suffering and courage, Paul appeals to Timothy to muster up the same kind of courage. There must have been some tremendous pressures on him. Phygelus and Hermogenes buckled under and turned away from the Gospel. Onesiphorus, on the other hand, endured, for he was not ashamed of the Gospel. He even sought Paul out in Rome, and this was very uplifting for Paul.

In trying to encourage Timothy to stand up in the face of all these pressures, Paul uses the following three images: a soldier's endurance (2:4), an athlete's discipline, (2:5), and a farmer's perseverance (2:6). This appeal for courage ends with a quotation from an early Christian Hymn, which focuses on the reasons why Timothy, and we, should endure in the faith. If we endure with Christ, we shall also reign with him. This hymn was probably sung or recited at early Christian baptisms.

FIGHT FALSEHOOD (2:14—4:22)

Know the Scripture (2:14—4:5)

Timothy's primary task is to preach and teach the Scriptures. This comes out in 2 Timothy 2:15 and then again in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Scripture would have been identified primarily as the Old Testament, but it could have included Paul's own letters. Paul believed them to be authoritative. At this time Scripture did not include the Gospels. Christians needed to be Scripturally literate, or they would be taken in by the false doctrines of Homenaeus and Philetus, who taught that the resurrection had already taken place. What they did was to spiritualize it, relating it simply to one's moral transformation at conversion. Paul rejected such interpretations, affirming the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

There will always be false teachers. Jannes and Jambres (3:7), who according to Jewish tradition were Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus 7, opposed Moses; therefore, we can expect the Biblically illiterate to oppose us. This is not to suspect them of insincerity, but

only of being misled by ignorance. Arguing with such persons does little good. Our task is to know the Scriptures, depart from iniquity (2:19), and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2:22). All who do this, who attempt to live out a godly life in Christ will experience some form of persecution (3:12). Jesus predicted it in John 15:20, and so we can expect it. Paul referred to his own initial persecutions in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (3:11), which were part of his first missionary journey (Acts 13:14—14:20). Timothy would have known about this since he was born and raised in Lystra.

False teachers lead themselves and others away from, rather than toward, godliness. Our task as Christians, and particularly as Christian leaders, is to become familiar with the Scriptures. We fulfill our ministries by preaching and teaching the Word, which focuses on salvation and right living. It equips us for discipleship. Great preaching will not make up for immoral lifestyles, but godliness will make up for weak preaching skills. The aim however is to excel in both, great preaching and holiness.

Keep the Faith (4:6-22)

In this final section of 2 Timothy, Paul expresses his personal loneliness; but he also exhorts others to keep the faith, just as he has done. There is a crown of righteousness for all who finish the race (4:8). Jews wore crowns, or wreaths of flowers—symbols of joy and honor—at feasts and weddings. Greeks gave wreaths to the winners of athletic contests (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Two persons have disappointed Paul deeply. Demas has fallen in love with the world and left him (4:10), and Alexander the coppersmith opposes his message (4:14). Quite a list of the faithful is given, but prominent on that list are Titus, Luke, and Mark. Luke alone remains with Paul, but Paul longs to see Mark and Timothy. Tychicus may have been sent to Ephesus to assist Timothy, or even replace him, as he would take Mark to visit Paul. The alienation between Paul and Mark has been overcome. When they come Paul asks for his cloak (heavy overcoat), his books and parchments (personal papers and the Old Testament) (4:13).

Just prior to his final benediction Paul mentions being delivered from the lion's mouth (4:17). What does this mean? He might only have been speaking figuratively, but then he might have been referring to the lions in the arena, or to Nero the Emperor. Whatever he means, he faced imminent death; but even that could not separate him from the love of Christ. Out of his suffering he overcomes fear and encourages his friends to keep the faith.

APPLYING THE WORD

The best way to maintain the faith, and to defend it against heresy, is to become Biblically literate. That means a lifetime of studying the Scriptures on a regular basis. This is the only way that one can rightly explain “the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) and use it “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16) One must know the historical context before one is able

to interpret and apply the Word in today's cultural context. Our primary purpose is not to fight heresy, but to apply God's Word to our personal and national lives.

In many ways the heresies of our day are different from those faced in the first century, but in many ways they are similar. We cannot simply use the arguments of the first century to fight our modern heresies. We live in an entirely different cultural and sociological context, which has been influenced by science and technology. Theology is no longer the Queen of the Sciences and so Scripture no longer has the authority it once had. What are we to do in this new setting? Scripture is viewed in a different way today. For some of our contemporaries it is to be compared with history, which may inform the present, but does not dictate to it. The greatest appeal that we can make to our contemporaries, who view Scripture as nothing but history, is the warning given by philosopher George Santayana, who said: "Those who refuse to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat its mistakes."¹ That is good advice not only for the historian but also for the theologian. Scripture should be viewed today as sacred history.

As we read the Scriptures our purpose is greater than learning the lessons from the past. Our purpose is to see traces of God operating in history so that we will know how to cooperate with God in the present. While this will move us away from a literal and legalistic interpretation of the Scriptures, it will not undermine our appreciation of the truths that are present in the Scriptures. Persons and nations, for example, who ignore God and his divine laws, are condemned to collapse. The wisdom of the Old Testament, which was Timothy's Scripture, suggests three principles: Fear God, keep His commandments, and shun evil. These principles still hold today. The wisdom of the New Testament, which was not yet Timothy's Scripture, follows the wisdom of Jesus, who moved us to see God as our Father, to understand the spirit and intention of the commandments, and to seek first God's Kingdom. This is the wisdom of the Old Testament given in a new context. It is a much more positive approach and it clearly identified the heresies of the time.

Our task is to carry on the tradition. In proclaiming and applying the Word, we will reveal the heresies of our time, but our focus will be on the God of grace who saves us and leads us into the future. Those who fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith, will obtain the crown of righteousness, that is eternal life (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

¹ George Santayana. I copied these words from an inscription at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio. Santayana was an American poet and philosopher who lived from 1863 to 1952. This quotation sometimes appears in a slightly different form.

19

ON LEADING THE CHURCHES

Titus 1:1—3:15

*But when the goodness and loving kindness
of God our Savior appeared, he saved us,
not because of any works of righteousness
that we had done,
but according to his mercy,
through the water of rebirth and renewal
by the Holy Spirit.*

*This Spirit he poured out on us richly
through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that,
having been justified by his grace,
we might become heirs
according to the hope of eternal life.*

Titus 3:4-7

The First E-Letters

19. ON LEADING THE CHURCHES (1:1—3:15)

CHURCH LEADERS (1:1-16)

Salutation
(1:1-4)

Church Leaders
(1:5-16)

VARIOUS GROUPS (2:1-15)

Older Men
(2:2)

Older Women
(2:3)

Younger Women
(2:4-5)

Younger Men
(2:6-8)

Slaves
(2:9-10)

Salvation is for All (2:11)

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT (3:1-11)

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS (3:12-15)

19. ON LEADING THE CHURCHES

Titus 1:1—3:15

ASSIGNMENTS		
Leaders (1:1-16)	Groups (2:1-15)	Conduct (3:1-15)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

What has been said about 1 and 2 Timothy is also true of Titus. The vocabulary and style of the letter differs remarkably from all of Paul's other letters, and his most important theological ideas are absent. This does not rule him out as the author, but it does raise some question about Pauline authorship.

Common in this time was the widespread custom of writing a letter and signing someone else's name to it to give it more authority. This may be considered legally wrong today, but it was not wrong in the first century. If this happened, we do not know who wrote Titus. All we would know is that he was a loyal disciple of Paul's and that he used some of his unpublished letters and expanded them to deal with contemporary conditions in the Church.

The Date

Titus would have been written about the same time as 1 and 2 Timothy. If Paul wrote it, 66 C.E. would be a good date; but if the letter was written by a disciple of Paul's, then it could have been written somewhere between 66 to 180 C.E., with 115 to 135 C.E. being most likely.

The Place

The letter was written from Greece (or Rome) to Titus, who was entrusted with leadership in Crete (1:5). Titus was born of Gentile parents (Galatians 2:3). Although the Book of Acts does not mention it, Paul says in Galatians 2:1,3 that Titus accompanied him to the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:2). Titus was sent on urgent missions to the Corinthian congregation to restore harmony between Paul and the Church during the third missionary journey. He also had a hand in collecting the offering for the poor in

Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:6, 16-23). After ministering a brief time in Crete, we find Titus going to Dalmatia (Yugoslavia), a region on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea (2 Timothy 4:10). Tradition informs us that he later returned to Crete.

The Purpose

The purpose of this pastoral letter is to help Titus deal with the requirements of church leaders, various groups within the Church, and with Christian moral conduct. Two classic summaries of salvation are found in Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4-7.

The Outline

- A. Salutation (1:1-4)
- B. Requirements of Church Leaders (1:5-16)
- C. Duties of Various Groups (2:1-15)
- D. Christian Moral Conduct (3:1-11)
- E. Final Instructions (3:12-15)

1	2	3
Church Leaders	Various Groups	Christian Conduct

CHURCH LEADERS (1:1-16)

Salutation (1:1-4)

The author is named as Paul, and the letter is written to Titus, instructing him to further the faith of God’s elect by sharing with them the truth which is to result in godliness.

Church Leaders (1:5-16)

Titus has been Paul’s trouble-shooter. First, he dealt with the problem in Corinth (2 Corinthians 7:6-7, 13-14), and now he is assigned to the problem in Crete. Just what is the nature of the problem? It has to do with exaggeration, or to put it bluntly, lying. The sixth century poet, Epimenides (1:12), described how badly lying was practiced in Crete. Lying has even crept into the Church, and so it is important that elders (bishops) be chosen of high moral character who can give reliable instructions in sound doctrine. This will be necessary if the Church is to defend itself against the Circumcision Party (the Judaizers), whose aim is to make the Gentile converts obey the Mosaic Law prior to their being accepted as Christians.

VARIOUS GROUPS (2:1-15)

Titus is to teach the various groups the implications of Christian Faith. Sound doctrine always results in moral living. The various groups are divided into five: older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves.

Paul's suggestions for the various groups, reveals to us what they were like. They were resentful of authority, had a tendency to drink too much, and said unkind things about one another. The solution was to submit to authority, become temperate in drink, and to be kind towards one another.

Although the position of women and slaves in society was not challenged, the seeds have been planted to making people sensitive to their plight. The Grace of God has come in Jesus Christ for "all" (2:11); therefore, Titus must teach sound doctrine, setting a good example, so that the followers of Jesus in Crete will live sober, upright, godly lives.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT (3:1-11)

Christians had a precarious relationship to the State. They had decided to call Jesus (not Caesar) Lord; and that made their patriotism suspect. This must be made up through good moral conduct; hence, it was important for Christian conduct to be above reproach in such a place as Crete. Good moral conduct would attract people to Christ, but immoral conduct would become an obstacle to potential faith.

The good life should not be insurmountable. The baptism of the Holy Spirit both washes away the old life and creates a new one (Romans 6:4). Water baptism symbolizes this. Those who do not reflect this new life, and become divisive, are to be admonished. If this does no good, they are to be shunned. Titus 3:4-7 is the second classic definition of the Christian life. The other definition can be found in Titus 2:11-14.

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS (3:12-15)

Paul expects Titus to come to him soon, and so he suggests that they meet in Nicopolis, located in Epirus on the Adriatic Coast of Western Greece. Artemas, about whom nothing is known, or Tychicus, one of Paul's inner circle (Ephesians 6:21 and 2 Timothy 4:12) are sent to fetch Titus. Tychicus might have been a possible replacement for Titus in Crete, but we do not know this for sure. Zenas and Apollos are probably starting out on some preaching mission. Just what kind of a lawyer Zenas was is not known. Was he a former Jewish Scribe, or was he a lawyer in the Greek/Roman sense? Apollos, who came from Alexandria, was a skillful preacher around Ephesus and Corinth (Acts 18:24-28). The letter is closed in a typically Pauline manner, sending greetings and grace.

THE PURPOSE OF GOOD WORKS

Two passages stand out in the Letter to Titus. They are Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4-7. Both of them have to do with salvation by grace through faith alone.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. (2:11-14)

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (3:4-7)

The above passages are consistent with Ephesians 2:8-9, which also affirm salvation by grace through faith alone. None of this means that the Christian is uninterested in good works, only that good works in themselves have no saving power. Grace alone saves and faith is the acceptance of that grace.

All who experience salvation by grace through faith undergo a baptism of the Spirit, which makes them zealous for good works. Such persons rise above worldly passions, seeking to become what God created them to be—HOLY. They do not seek holiness to save themselves. They seek holiness because they have experienced the grace of God and God makes them zealous for good works. As Martin Luther put it, “Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works.” A person is made good by God’s grace and so good works are the inevitable result. Luther, of course gets this from Jesus, who said in Matthew 7:17, “...every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.”

So, what is the purpose of good works? Good works represent the grateful response of the person who has experienced the grace and mercy of God. In experiencing forgiveness and cleansing of sin, the natural result is to rise above the sin that dragged one down. One aims at things eternal out of sheer gratitude, but one also aims at holiness. Because God is holy, the forgiven sinner wants to be holy. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is sanctification, that is, to make the believer holy. Holiness is the bringing together of faith and good works. God is a holy and moral God and he has created us in his own image. James 2:26 sums it up: “...as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.” Faith needs works as a fruit tree needs to bear fruit. Without fruit, the tree ultimately dies. The same is true of faith. “So,” says James 2:17, “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

20
UNDERMINING
SLAVERY
Philemon 1-25

*Perhaps this is the reason
he was separated from you for a while,
so that you might have him back forever,
no longer as a slave but more than a slave,
a beloved brother—especially to me
but how much more to you,
both in the flesh and in the Lord.*

Philemon 15-16

The First E-Letters

20. ON UNDERMINING SLAVERY (1-25)

SALUTATION (1-3)

PRAISE FOR PHILEMON (4-7)

APPEAL FOR ONESIMUS (8-22)

CONCLUSION (23-25)

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

It is Grateful for the Best in Others (4)	It Seeks the Welfare of Others (10)	It Deals Honestly with Others (12)	It Bears the Burdens of Others (18)	It Believes the Best of Others (21)
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20. UNDERMINING SLAVERY

Philemon 1-25

ASSIGNMENTS	
Praise for Philemon (1-7)	Appeal for Onesimus (8-25)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The author is Paul. The only question remaining is when and from where did he write?

The Date

Paul was imprisoned at the time of this writing. The date depends upon which imprisonment. We usually think of him being imprisoned in Rome, which would date Philemon between 61-63 C.E.; but if he were in Ephesus, another possibility, then the letter would have to be dated between 54-56 C.E. The first date is most likely.

The Place

The letter could have been written from either Rome or Ephesus, but Rome is favored. Although it was written to Philemon, a member of the Church in Colossae (Phrygia), the letter has far more significance to the Church as a whole than one might expect. Onesimus and Tychicus delivered the letter to Philemon.

The Purpose

The purpose of the letter has to do with the question: "What should be done with a slave, who has robbed his master and then run away, but who then has become a Christian?" The cultural answer would have dictated the death penalty for such behavior towards one's master.

It would not have been easy for Christianity to reject slavery in this time. While there was an abundance of work for slaves, there was a scarcity of work for free persons. It has been estimated that one-third of Rome's one million people were slaves. To insist upon their freedom would have deprived them of their livelihood.

Jesus' teachings (Matthew 10:24-31 and Luke 15) and Paul's letters (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 6:5-9; and Colossians 3:11) do not rebel against the institution of slavery, but they do undermine it by considering slaves valuable in God's eyes and making them brothers and sisters in Christ. On this basis Paul appeals to Philemon to accept Onesimus as his brother in Christ, which would mean that he would not push for the death penalty. Paul is even asking Philemon to set him free to work with him in Rome. He reminds Philemon of the great debt owed to him, but that he would never think of holding this over him. Philemon is trusted as a Christian brother to do what is right.

The Outline

- A. Salutation (1-3)
- B. Praise for Philemon (4-7)
- C. Appeal for Onesimus (8-22)
- D. Conclusion (23-25)

1-7	8-25
Praise for Philemon	Appeal for Onesimus

Salutation (1-3)

The letter seems to be addressed primarily to Philemon, but intended for the church that meets in his house. Other leaders of that church might be Apphia and Archippus. Only Archippus is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (Colossians 4:17). Some scholars have suggested that Apphia is Philemon's wife and Archippus their son. It is obvious that Philemon lives in Colossae and that we are talking about the Colossian congregation.

Praise for Philemon (4-7)

Paul begins by stating how grateful he has been for Philemon's faith and love and that he considers Philemon his brother in Christ.

Appeal for Onesimus (8-22)

By referring to himself as Onesimus' father, we conclude that Paul means *spiritual* father. Onesimus was converted under Paul's ministry. Playing on Greek words Paul emphasizes the *usefulness* of Onesimus. A rebellious slave would be *useless*, but a converted slave would be *useful*. In fact, the word Onesimus means "useful." Following his legal obligation, Paul sends the run-a-way Onesimus back to his owner. He reminds Philemon that Onesimus is now a brother in Christ.

While Paul does not mention any theft, he does offer to pay Philemon for any losses, but not without reminding Philemon of his personal debt to him. This probably refers to Philemon's conversion in Ephesus. Paul had never been to Colossae and so the two must have met in Ephesus. His request for the guest room indicates that he hoped to visit the Colossian church in the near future and that he did not see his imprisonment as permanent.

Conclusion (23-25)

In his concluding remarks we are told that Epaphras is his fellow prisoner, and that Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke are with him. The alienation between Paul and Mark has apparently been overcome. Epaphras would have been of special interest to the Colossians, for he had been an evangelist among them, as well as to Laodicea and Hieropolis.

UNDERMINING SOCIAL ILLS

The question many ask upon reading Paul's letter to Philemon is, "Why does Paul not attack the institution of slavery?" The answer is, "He could not attack it directly, but he could undermine it, and undermine it, he did." It's easy for us in the twentieth century to criticize Paul's approach in the first century. Paul was living in a totally different environment. Nearly one-third of the people in Rome were slaves. James Sargent describes both the pros and the cons of the institution of slavery in the first century:¹

The Positive Aspects of Slavery

...slavery had become a predominant means of labor. Roman practice included slaves in nearly every aspect of labor, from the most menial tasks to the higher responsibilities. Wealthy people would often have a large number of slaves that would care for every detail of family life. Slaves were frequently artists, painters, architects, librarians, even doctors. Slavery was intertwined with every aspect of culture. In short, slavery was a fact of life as readily accepted as Roman rule itself.

The Negative Aspects of Slavery

A slave had no rights. Indeed, a slave was little more than another object in the owner's inventory of possessions to be considered along with wagons, cattle, and household goods. The slave's entire life lay within the authority of the owner. Marriage was not a right. Punishments were entirely up to the owner; there was no recourse for the slave. Punishments varied. Frequently slaves were branded on the forehead, or forced to carry a *fucra*—a V-shaped instrument of torture. Occasionally slaves were the playthings of cruel owners and were forced to fight

¹ James E. Sargent, *First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1988), p. 139.

animals in an arena. One incident gives stark evidence of how precarious the slave's life could be. A record exists of how one slave was crucified for no more reason than for the master's own pleasure. No more reason was required! Had the Christian movement arbitrarily attacked the detestable institution, the church could easily have become the target of immeasurable censure and attack by a threatened society and government.

Paul may not have attacked the institution of slavery, but he did undermine it. His strategy can be seen in some of the following quotations from his writings:

To the slaves, Paul wrote...

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. (Ephesians 6:5-6)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. (Colossians 3:22)

Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior. (Titus 2:9-10)

Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. (1 Peter 2:18)

To the slaveholders, Paul wrote...

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all! (Colossians 3:11)

Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven. (Colossians 4:1)

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, **slave traders**, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1 Timothy 1:8-11)

Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother — especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. (Philemon 15-16)

Paul couldn't have done a better job at undermining a major social ill of his time. What is fascinating about his approach is his identification of the Christian as a slave to Christ and his righteousness. In addition to undermining the institution of slavery, Paul used some of its very terminology to describe the new relationship that one ought to have with God. Below are just a few passages describing Paul's use of the slave imagery.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:16-18)

For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. (1 Corinthians 7:22)

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. (1 Corinthians 9:19)

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. (2 Corinthians 4:5)

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. (Galatians 5:13)

The strategy used by Paul to undermine social ills is the strategy used by Jesus. It should also be the strategy used by contemporary Christians to undermine and overwhelm the social ills of our time. It was and continues to be a magnificent strategy for social change.

HEBREWS (1:1—13:25)				
REVELATION OF GOD (1:1-4)				
Superiority over Angels (1:5—2:18)	Superiority over Moses and Joshua	Superiority of Christ’s Priesthood (4:14—7:28)	Superiority of Christ’s Cov- enant	Superiority of Christ’s Sacrifice (9:1—10:39)
<p>1. Angels (1:14)</p> <p>“Ministering Spirits” God sent his best.</p> <p>2. Warning (2:3)</p> <p>How shall we escape?</p>	<p>1. Moses (3:1-19)</p> <p>Moses=Servant Jesus=Son (3:5-6)</p> <p>2. Joshua (4:1-13)</p> <p>Earthly Promised Land</p> <p>Heavenly Promised Land (4:8-11)</p> <p>3. Warnings (4:7b) (4:12-13)</p>	<p>1. Sinless (4:15)</p> <p>2. Chosen (5:5)</p> <p>3. Eternal (5:6)</p> <p>Maturity (5:12)</p> <p>4. Warnings (6:4-7)</p> <p>a. Theological? b. Psychological?</p>	<p>Jeremiah in the Darkest Hour of Israel (8:8-12)</p> <p><i>Old Covenant: They could not live up to it.</i></p> <p><i>New Covenant: God will help us with his grace.</i></p>	<p>1. High Priest (9:1-10)</p> <p>Once a year (9:6-8) His own sins and the People’s</p> <p>2. Jesus’ Sacrifice (9:1—10:18)</p> <p>Priest/Victim Tears the Veil (9:27-28)</p> <p>3. Warnings (10:19-39)</p> <p>Draw Near (10:22) Hold Fast (10:23) Stir Up (10:24) Don’t Neglect... Worship (10:25) Grace (10:28-29)</p>
Faith: (11:1-40)	Definition (11:1)	Direction (11:15-16)	Promises (11:13 & 39)	Results (11:33)
THE GOAL AND ITS DISCIPLINES (12:1-17)				
The Race (12:1-2)	The Disciplines (12:3-11)		The Goal (12:12-17)	
THE TWO COVENANTS				
Moses on Mount Sinai (12:28-29)			Jesus on Mount Zion	
PLEASING GOD (13:1-17)				
Conduct (13:1-6)			Prayer (13:7-17)	
PERSONAL MESSAGES (13:18-25)				
Prayer (13:18-19)			Greeting (13:22-25)	

21

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

Hebrews 1:1—10:39

*Since, then, we have a great high priest
who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession.
For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but we have one who in every respect has been tested
as we are, yet without sin.
Let us therefore approach the throne of grace
with boldness, so that we may receive mercy
and find grace to help in time of need.*

Hebrews 4:14-16

The First E-Letters

21. THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST (1:1 – 10:39)				
THE REVELATION OF GOD (1:1-4)				
CHRIST’S SUPERIORITY OVER ANGELS (1:5 – 2:18)				
CHRIST’S SUPERIORITY OVER MOSES AND JOSHUA (3:1 – 4:13)				
Moses (3:1-6)	Warnings and Exhortations (3:7-20)	Joshua (4:1-11)	Warning and Exhortation (4:12-13)	
THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD (4:14 – 7:28)				
Jesus is Our High Priest (4:14 – 5:10)	Warnings and Exhortations (5:11 – 6:20)	A New Kind of Priesthood (7:1-28)		
THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S COVENANT (8:1-13)				
THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICE (9:1 – 10:39)				
The High Priest’s Sacrifice (9:1-10)	Jesus’ Sacrifice (9:11 – 10:18)	Warnings and Exhortations (10:19-39)		
		Our Response (10:19-25)	Warning against Apostasy (10:26-31)	Need to Endure (10:32-39)

21. THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

Hebrews 1:1—10:39

ASSIGNMENTS					
Christ's Superiority over Angels (1:1—2:18)	Christ's Superiority over Moses/Joshua (3:1—4:13)	Superiority of Christ's Priesthood (4:14—6:20)	A New Kind of Priesthood (7:1-28)	Superiority of Christ's Covenant (8:1-13)	Superiority of Christ's Sacrifice (9:1—10:39)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The author is unknown. All we know is that he was articulate in Greek, and that he quoted from the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament). Scholars have tried, without success, to name Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Silas, Aquila or Priscilla as the author.

The mention of Timothy in Hebrews 13:23 has caused some to name Paul as the author. Paul is rejected as a possibility not because his teachings are incompatible with the author of Hebrews, but because his emphases and literary style are different. Besides, Paul always identified himself as the author, something that the author of Hebrews does not do. Tertullian was the first to suggest Barnabas and Martin Luther named Apollos. There is no evidence to suggest any of the above as the author. All we know is that the author was Jewish and that he or she was well versed in Greek learning and literary style. What we do know is that Hebrews is quoted by Clement in a letter to Corinth in 95 C.E.

The Date

Since no mention is made of the Fall of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the assumption is that Hebrews was written in the 60s. The author of Hebrews writes about the Temple and the priestly activity of the Temple in the present tense, indicating that Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed.

Hebrews 13:24 causes some to believe that it was written during Claudius' expulsion of Jews from Rome or Nero's persecution of Christians, with the latter fixing a date somewhere between 64 to 70 C.E.

The Place

While it may have been written to Jewish Christians in Rome, we have no idea where it was written.

The Purpose

The purpose is clear. It is the longest sustained argument in the Bible. The author is trying to convince Jewish Christians, who have tendencies to revert to their Jewish beliefs and practices, and those who are trying to Judaize Christianity. He is trying to demonstrate the superiority and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the revealer and mediator of God's grace. In short, he attempts to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. His argument is threefold:

1. Jesus is the Perfect Revelation. (1:1—4:13) He is superior to the prophets, angels, and Moses/Joshua.
2. Jesus is the Perfect Priest. (4:14—7:28) His priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.
3. Jesus is the Perfect Sacrifice. (8:1—10:39) His sacrifice was made once and for all and is superior to all the animal sacrifices.

The Book of Hebrews is not a letter or a sermon, but an essay; but having said that, we see warnings and admonitions commonly used in sermons and a concluding greeting, characteristic of a letter.

The Outline

- A. The Revelation of God (1:1-3)
- B. Christ's Superiority over the Angels (1:4—2:18)
- C. Christ's Superiority over Moses and Joshua (3:1—4:13)
- D. The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood (4:14—7:28)
- E. The Superiority of Christ's Covenant (8:1—9:28)
- F. The Superiority of Christ's Sacrifice (10:1-39)
- G. The Primacy of Faith (11:1—12:29)
- H. Pleasing God (13:1-19)
- I. Personal Messages (13:20-25)

1-10	11-13
The Superiority of Christ	The Primacy of Faith

THE REVELATION OF GOD (1:1-4)

The theme of Hebrews is contained in these four verses. Under the old covenant God spoke through the prophets, but now he speaks through his own Son, who not only created the world, but sustains the universe. Under the old covenant God spoke through messengers (angels), but now he speaks directly through his Son.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY OVER THE ANGELS (1:5—2:18)

This section begins with seven quotations from the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament). Five of them emphasize the superiority of Christ over the angels; and two of them, verses 6 and 7, stress the servant status of angels and their obligation to worship the Son.

1:5	=	Psalm 2:7
1:5	=	2 Samuel 7:14
1:6	=	Deuteronomy 32:43 (or Psalm 97:7)
1:7	=	Psalm 104:4
1:8-9	=	Psalm 45:6-7
1:10-12	=	Psalm 102:25-27
1:13	=	Psalm 110:1

Angels are described in two ways: (1) their nature and (2) their function. By nature they are spirits and by function they minister or serve. That is why they are called “spirits in the divine service.” (1:14)

Before proceeding with the argument of Christ’s superiority over angels, the author punctuates this section with a warning (2:1-4) to those who might be wandering away from their faith in Christ. He simply asks the question: “...how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (2:3)

The argument proceeds with more Old Testament quotations.

2:6-8	=	Psalm 8:4-6
2:12	=	Psalm 22:22
2:13	=	Isaiah 8:17-18

What is significant about the way in which these quotations are used is that the author assumes that Christ is the fulfillment of them. Jesus did not come to us as an angel, but as a man, tempted even as we are tempted. This is the only way in which he could truly help us, and help us he did, with humanity’s two greatest problems—sin and death. He was tempted by sin and tasted death, but he has made forgiveness possible and demonstrated God’s power over death.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY OVER MOSES AND JOSHUA (3:1—4:13)

Moses (3:1-6)

The place of Moses is compared to that of Jesus. Moses, who was so highly revered, is only a servant in God's house (Numbers 12:7), but Jesus is the Son (3:5-6). The people of God make up the house, for they are members of the household of God.

Warnings and Exhortations (3:7-19)

Salvation cannot be taken for granted. Even those who experienced the Exodus with Moses fell into rebellion and disbelief and were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land. Those who have experienced Salvation in Christ must never take it for granted, lest they too be denied entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Joshua (4:1-11)

The Possession of Canaan under Joshua did not lead to the promised rest. Only Jesus can lead us into the eternal Promised Land, where the promised rest will be realized. The observance of the Sabbath then has both a backward and a forward glance. David, in writing Psalm 95, knew that it had not yet been fulfilled. In preaching about the Kingdom of God, Jesus went way beyond Joshua, who only led them into an earthly promised land.

In trying to define this "rest," John Wesley called it one's "eternal rest in heaven." Some of his followers also tied it in with the experience of "entire sanctification" available to every Christian on earth. Philip Doddridge, for example, wrote in his hymn, "Now rest, my long divided heart," and Charles Wesley wrote in his hymn, "Let us find that second rest." These two views, "eternal rest" and "entire sanctification" can be complementary. There is justification in Hebrews for both of them. We best enter God's rest when we abandon all efforts to make ourselves holy and simply trust in God to do that through Jesus Christ, our High Priest. But in the end "disobedience" is equivalent to "unbelief." (4:6)

Warning and Exhortation (4:12-13)

In this final exhortation, we are reminded that the Word of God can discern the secret intention of the human heart. Nothing can be hidden. We will not be able to put anything over on God. The Word of God mentioned here is no static written word, but the Living Word of a Living and Active God.

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD (4:14—7:28)

Jesus is Our High Priest (4:14—5:10)

As the High Priest passed through the veil between the holy place and the holy of holies once a year Jesus passed through the heavens once and for all. Unlike the earthly High

Priest, who seeks forgiveness for himself as well as the people, Jesus, though severely tempted, did not sin. He can sympathize with us, but he can also help us. He has been appointed and called by God to represent us. This brief selection on the high priesthood of Christ, found in Hebrews 4:14-16, makes up the heart of the letter to the Hebrews.

Two Royal Psalms are used to make the above point. The first is from Psalm 2:7 (5:5), which according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke was quoted at his baptism. Baptism is ordination into ministry, or in this case, his priesthood. The second is from Psalm 110:4 (5:6), which brings up the length of his priesthood. Like the priesthood of Melchizedek, which was permanent, his will last forever. Melchizedek was the King/Priest of Salem, to whom Abraham paid a tithe (10 percent) of all his possessions (Genesis 14:18-20). The superiority of Jesus' priesthood is that he has been divinely appointed forever, and that makes his priestly ministry to us effective. Nothing can get in the way of God's forgiveness. We have a priest who has effectively made intercession for us, and he will always be able to do this.

Warnings and Exhortations (5:11—6:20)

The author laments the fact that most of his readers are still drinking milk when they should be taking solid food. The high rate of biblical illiteracy today indicates that we have not improved very much. When we should be teaching others, we have not even begun to learn ourselves. Christians ought to be familiar with the basic teachings of Christ, which would include: (1) repentance and faith, (2) instruction about baptisms, (3) laying on of hands, (4) resurrection of the dead, and (5) eternal judgment.

The danger of ignoring the basics and slipping into immaturity is that it is the first step of an inevitable slide into apostasy, from which there is no turning back. It is not clear why, but turning back is deemed impossible (6:4-6). The reason could be theological (the Will of God) or psychological (the hardening of the human heart), the latter being more implied than the first. Apostasy simply follows complacency, and that is our fault, not God's.

John Wesley tried to avoid this complacency by calling us to "go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ..." (6:1) We have examples in both Abraham and Jesus. Abraham's faith and patience result in the Promises of God, and Jesus, our High Priest, leads us into the Holy of Holies. This Holy of Holies has nothing to do with the Tabernacle or the Temple, but the Presence of God in Heaven, of which the Tabernacle and the Temple are only poor shadows or examples.

A New Kind Of Priesthood (7:1-28)

The comparison of the Levitical priesthood with that of Melchizedek may seem strange, but the argument itself is very clear. There is a priesthood older than the Levitical priesthood, and even Abraham tithed to it. See Genesis 14:18-20 for a brief description of Abraham's relationship to Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews uses *Melchizedek* allegorically. *Melchizedek* symbolizes *righteousness* and *peace*. His very name means

“king of righteousness” and the name of the city where he reigned, as the priestly king is *Salem*, which means “peace.” Salem eventually became Jerusalem, the place where David reigned as king. The point being made here is that Jesus, in the line of David, will reign as King of righteousness and peace.

What is unique about Melchizedek as the priestly king is that we have no record of his beginning and no record of his end. This does not mean that Melchizedek was divine. It means that priestly and kingly offices cannot be passed on from generation to generation, which was exactly what was being done in the Levitical priesthood. The Law had to be changed (7:12-14) and was changed by God himself. Jesus did not descend from Levi (the priestly tribes), but from Judah (the kingly tribe). He became a priest and king by the Word (an oath) of God (Psalm 110:4). He is not a priest through some legal requirement that limits priesthood to a specific tribe, such as the Tribe of Levi, but through the power of an indestructible life. Hence, his priesthood is permanent. Unlike the Levitical priests, who had to first offer sacrifices for their own sins, Jesus did not sin and did not have to offer any sacrifice for his own sins, but he willingly became the one sacrifice for all our sins. This makes him a new kind of priest.

Melchizedek was the only priestly king that the author could think of to compare him to, but even Melchizedek’s priesthood is only an inadequate imitation of this new more effective priesthood.

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S COVENANT (8:1-13)

The Old Testament prophets had already viewed the Old Covenant obsolete, particularly by Jeremiah, who lived through the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Jeremiah’s prediction of the New Covenant is quoted in 8:8-12, the longest Old Testament quote in the New Testament. The only thing wrong with the Old Covenant was the disobedience of Israel; hence, in the New Covenant, the law will be written into the hearts and minds of God’s New People. Jesus plays a significant role in this New Covenant, for he serves as its High Priest, not in some earthly shrine, but in the presence of God himself.

The ancient Tabernacle was but a mere shadow of the heavenly presence. Some see Platonic ideas in this imagery, and others ask why the author does not draw the comparison with the Temple. Why the Tabernacle? This would seem to be even further removed. Several answers might be given. He might, like Stephen, be opposed to the Temple; or else the recent destruction of the Temple might be too painful a topic to even bring up. Another possibility is that he is simply concerned about going back to the beginning of the Old Covenant, and that would mean going back to the Tabernacle, which was built immediately upon receiving the Law at Sinai.

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE (9:1—10:39)

The High Priest's Sacrifice (9:1-10)

A detailed description of the Levitical Priesthood is given, beginning with the work of the priests, which was restricted to the HOLY PLACE. The High Priest was the only one permitted in the HOLY OF HOLIES, and he could only enter it once a year to make a blood sacrifice for his own and the people's sins. There is a slight problem with the description of the Holy of Holies. Exodus 25:10-40 does not locate Aaron's rod or the urn of manna in the Holy of Holies, but this mistake is not related to the main point being made. The weakness of the Old Covenant lies in its emphasis on God's inaccessibility and its inability to deal effectively with human sinfulness. God was remote, and a remote God lacks the ability to transform. There was a way to experience forgiveness, but it was only available for those who lived within and practiced the ritual of the Covenant. There was no way to take forgiveness to those who had deliberately sinned or those who lived outside of the Covenant Community.

Jesus' Sacrifice (9:11—10:18)

Jesus' Sacrifice overcame God's remoteness and was effective even for those outside the Covenant Community who sinned deliberately. The Old Covenant had been mediated by Moses and ratified by animal sacrifices of goats and calves. The New Covenant was mediated by Christ and ratified by his own sacrifice. He became both the priest and the sacrificial victim. The other priests had to offer repeated sacrifices, but he only had to offer one—himself (10:12-14). As in the Old Covenant, the blood of Sacrifice was necessary for the expiation (forgiveness) of sins (9:22b). This might be difficult to understand, but it was and is necessary for sinners to see the serious consequences of their sinful condition. The shedding of blood brings that message home, and it does it more clearly in the death of Christ than in the death of goats and calves.

Jesus' first coming was to deal with human sinfulness. His second coming will be to save those who are waiting for him. This is the only direct reference to a *second coming* of Christ (9:28). All other references are to the *Parousia*, which means "coming" or "presence." In his presence, or coming, the remoteness of God has been, and is being, overcome. This is why his Sacrifice is superior to that of the High Priest. It deals effectively with all sin and tears away the curtain dividing the Holy of Holies from the world. That curtain was torn down as Christ's Sacrifice was being made (Mark 15:38). His death brought into effect the terms of the Will (Covenant). We are forgiven, and no further sacrifice is needed. Jeremiah had envisioned this new age in Israel's darkest hour. John Wesley said that Christ's work of inward cleansing, contained in Jeremiah's prophecy (31:31-34), begins at conversion with *initial sanctification* and leads to *entire sanctification*, where the heart is purified from the very tendency to sin.

Warnings And Exhortations (10:19-39)

The warnings and exhortations consist of the following three parts:

Our Response to Christ's Sacrifice (10:19-25)

In this warning, three privileges and duties are set forth. In the first one we are invited to “approach” with a true heart (10:22). This has to do with the privilege and duty of worship. Next we are told to “hold fast” to the confession of our hope (10:23). We are to maintain the public creed of the Christian Faith against all pressures to return to the Old Covenant. Finally we are to “provoke” one another to love and good deeds (10:24). We cannot do any of the above without meeting together regularly, and so we are to resist the neglect of public worship (10:25). The Day (Second Coming of 9:28) is coming, and that should give us sufficient motivation to respond to Christ’s Sacrifice.

The Warning Against Apostasy (10:26-31)

This is a stern warning against drifting into unbelief. God’s mercy draws us into his purposes and does not give us license to do as we please. To turn away from the Sacrifice of Christ at this point will lead to our own condemnation. Rejection of Christ is in the end self-rejection in the face of judgment. If we reject this Sacrifice, there is no other. We condemn ourselves. It is much more serious to reject the Grace of God than to reject the Law of God, and that is precisely what this drifting into apostasy (unbelief) will mean. It will indeed be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (10:31) if we have rejected his most powerful attempt to reach out to us in Christ.

The Need to Endure (10:32-39)

All we need to endure is to recall God’s previous victories. They will motivate and encourage us as we struggle through suffering and persecution. The key to enduring will be faith, which the author of Hebrews takes up next.

ELIMINATING HIGH PRIESTS AND THEIR SACRIFICES

The author of Hebrews raises issues that are strangely unfamiliar to most Protestants, but the conclusions he draws are consistent. We just don’t use these terms very much. We do however consider Jesus greater than the angels and certainly greater than Moses and Joshua. His sacrifice on the cross put an end to the very need for high priests and sacrifices. Just why Jesus’ death on the cross should take away our sins is still a mystery, as was the whole sacrificial system in which animals were offered as sacrifices. How did that take away human sin? In Hebrews 9:22, we are given the following answer: “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Why is this necessary? Maybe it isn’t. After all, it all ceased with the death of Jesus on the cross, the final sacrifice. The whole sacrificial system was cast aside because it was ineffective. A new Covenant had to be introduced.

Prophets, such as Jeremiah, understood the ineffectiveness of the Old Covenant and looked forward to the introduction of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The author of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah in Hebrews 8:8-12 and then states that the Old Covenant has become obsolete (8:13). Let us look for a moment at the main difference between the sacrifices of the Old Covenant and the sacrifice of the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant the sacrifices had to be without physical blemish, but Christ, the sacrifice of the New Covenant, was without sin (4:15). Christ has demonstrated to us the possibility of living a holy life in a corrupt and sinful world. We cannot say, “But he was God.” The first false doctrine the early Church had to reject was that Christ was not fully human. He was fully human, tempted like us, but he did not give in to that temptation. We don’t have to give in either, but of course, there is a price to be paid for resisting temptation. Jesus understood what that price was—death on the cross. That’s why he warned everyone who would become his disciple that they too would have to take up a cross daily. This does not mean that every disciple would have to die physically, but that would always remain a possibility.

So, what does Jesus’ death on the cross do to us to make forgiveness of sin possible? In Hebrews 10:14-17 we get our answer:

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,” he also adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

Jesus predicted his death and resurrection several times, after which, he said the Holy Spirit would descend on those who were willing to take up their crosses. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked the birthday of the Church. It also marked the beginning of the New Covenant. High Priests and their sacrifices would no longer be needed. Believers, that is, disciples, would become the Temple; and the Law, previously written in stone, would now be written in the mind and heart. Christ’s work of inward cleansing, insisted John Wesley, would begin at conversion with *initial sanctification* and lead on to *entire sanctification*, which would purify the heart from the very tendency to sin. While no one could claim *entire sanctification* in this life, this was to be the goal for every believer. This was why God sent the Holy Spirit to be present with and to guide every believer.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM HEBREWS

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart..

Hebrews 4:12

Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And we will do this, if God permits.

Hebrews 6:1-3

22
THE PRIMACY
OF FAITH
Hebrews 11:1—13:25

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.*

Hebrews 11:1

The First E-Letters

22. THE PRIMACY OF FAITH (11:1 – 13:25)				
DEFINING FAITH (11:1-40)				
A Definition of Faith (11:1-3)				
Early Witnesses to Faith (11:4-16)				
Abel	Enoch	Noah	Abraham	Sarah
More Witnesses (11:17-31)				
The Accomplishments of Faith (11:32-38)				
The Communion of the Faithful (11:39-40)				
THE RACE AND ITS DISCIPLINES (12:1-29)				
The Race (12:1-2)	The Disciplines (12:3-11)	The Goal (12:12-17)	The Two Covenants Contrasted (12:18-29)	
PLEASING GOD (13:1-17)				
PERSONAL MESSAGES (13:18-25)				
Prayer (13:18-19)	Benediction (13:20-21)		Greeting (13:22-25)	

22. THE PRIMACY OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:1—13:25

ASSIGNMENTS		
Defining Faith (11:1-40)	The Race and Its Disciplines (12:1-29)	Pleasing God (13:1-25)

DEFINING FAITH (11:1-40)

A Definition of Faith (11:1-3)

Faith is the “assurance of things hoped for” and the “conviction of things not seen.” It is our first unsteady step towards God, of which the Old Testament has many examples.

Early Witnesses to Faith (11:4-16)

Five heroes of faith are named, with a brief description of how they expressed their faith.

Abel

He understood the deeper meaning of sacrifice as trusting in God, and that is why his sacrifice was found to be more acceptable than Cain’s. His death does not deprive him of the Promise of Faith.

Enoch

He walked with God, which was pleasing to God. Those who do this will not die, for God will reward them.

Noah

He endured the mockery of his contemporaries and obeyed God’s commandment to build an Ark. He and his family were thus saved from the flood. This has more symbolic value to Faith than historical value.

Abraham

He obeyed God and ventured to a foreign land. He left the security of country, family, and religion to move into the unknown.

Sarah

She received the power to conceive when she was past the age of childbearing. The impossible was accomplished through her trust in God.

All of the above died without seeing what was fully promised. Their faith seemed in vain, and yet they looked forward to the city of God. Why did they not yearn for the paradise of Eden? The answer lies in the primitive valuing of the city as representing an ordered civilization, a security against enemies, and a symbol of prosperity. (Order, Peace, and Prosperity) This may not be what the city symbolizes today, but it is what was symbolized in their day.

More Witnesses (11:17-31)

Returning to Abraham, the author proceeds through to the Exodus and the Settlement of Canaan. Abraham's faith was tested in the called for sacrifice of Isaac, who lived to invoke blessings upon Jacob and Esau. Jacob carried on the tradition by blessing the sons of Joseph. Joseph foresaw the Exodus and gave directions for his burial. Moses carried out the Exodus, and Joshua led the people into Canaan, taking Jericho by a method, which would have seemed futile even by the military standards of his day. Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was spared the fate of the other Canaanites.

The Accomplishments of Faith (11:32-38)

More of the faithful are listed, such as Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, too numerous to name. They all had faith in the midst of disaster, and their faith enabled them to conquer kingdoms, enforce justice, and suffer persecution.

Some of the prophets paid for their faith with their lives. Prophets were stoned to death, sawn in two and killed by the sword. Zechariah, for example, was stoned to death (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). Tradition has it that Jeremiah was also stoned, but we have no confirmation in Scripture. According to another tradition, Isaiah was sawn in two with a wooden sword. Scripture does confirm the killing of the prophet Uriah by sword (Jeremiah 26:23) and 1 Kings 19:10 confirms the killing of other prophets by the sword.

The Communion of the Faithful (11:39-40)

These giants of the faith, just named, did not receive the full promise in their lifetimes. This was not due to God's unfaithfulness, but due to his desire that the faithful of all

generations share in the joy and triumph of the new age ushered in by Jesus Christ. If faith could play such a role in the old age, imagine what it can do in the new age.

THE RACE AND ITS DISCIPLINES (12:1-29)

The Race (12:1-2)

Life is compared to an Olympic contest in which all the heroes of the faith are now seated in the stadium watching the present generation perform on the field. Jesus and his joy in doing his Father's will becomes our motivation for participation.

The Disciplines (12:3-11)

In order to achieve victory, hard and painful discipline will be required. The quotation in 12:5-6 comes from Proverbs 3:11-12. Such discipline is compared to suffering. It is not that God enjoys sending suffering to his people, but that he does not spare them from it. His own Son was not spared pain and suffering, and so why should we be spared it, we who are indeed his sons and daughters? Discipline can only be fully appreciated after the victory has been achieved.

The Goal (12:12-17)

The goal towards which we press on is "peace" and "holiness." (12:10 and 14) These do not fall in our laps. We must strive to obtain them. We should not get impatient, such as did Esau when he sold his birthright for a single meal, but we should endure to the end in our efforts. Those who give up their birthright also give up their inheritance. The two are tied together, as Esau found out after it was too late.

The Two Covenants Contrasted (12:18-29)

God has made himself known in two dominant ways—through Moses on Mount Sinai and Jesus on Mount Zion. Encountering God on Sinai was so intense an experience that it was emotionally draining, but encountering Jesus on the Cross and in his Resurrection was an exhilarating and joyful experience. Moses represents an encounter with God from the earth, but Jesus represents an encounter with God from heaven. The voice that spoke from Mount Sinai shook the earth, but the voice that spoke from heaven shook the universe. Moses was but a mere human prophet, but Jesus is the divine Son of God. This earthly existence will soon end, and so we better make sure that we have set our priorities accordingly. Apart from judgment grace would have no meaning.

PLEASING GOD (13:1-17)

Christians are to please God by their conduct and their prayers. Conduct includes entertaining strangers, remembering those in prison, faithfulness in marriage, and the proper use of money to meet human needs. Covetousness is to be resisted. Christians are

to obey and pray for their leaders, who in turn are to exercise responsible leadership joyfully.

Several well-known passages are contained in this section. They concern entertaining “angels without knowing it” (13:2), that Jesus is the “same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8), that Jesus was crucified “outside the city gate” (13:12), and that we are a pilgrim people looking for that city which is yet to come (13:14).

PERSONAL MESSAGES (13:18-25)

Three brief personal messages conclude this letter. They are as follows:

Prayer (13:18-19)

The first message is a request for intercessory prayer for the author and his companions. It sounds as if he is in prison and really needs their prayers.

Benediction (13:20-21)

This well-known benediction not only emphasizes the new covenant, but also focuses our attention on the Resurrection of Christ. Strangely enough, up to this point, the Resurrection has not been brought up in this letter, in the defense of Christianity over Judaism.

Greeting (13:22-25)

The mention of Timothy and the Italians raises some questions about authorship and the origin of Hebrews. Timothy was Paul’s young companion, but being young, others may have written to him as well. The name was commonly used, and there could have been, more than one Timothy in the Church. The reference to the Italians is far from clear in the original language, and most scholars suggest that it could be a reference to people in or from Italy. We simply do not know whether the Letter was written to Rome or from Rome, and this reference does not really help us to understand.

CHRISTIAN FAITH

Hebrews 11 offers a definition of Christian Faith and goes on to illustrate that faith in action. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for” and “the conviction of things not seen.” “To have faith,” concludes Augustine, “is to believe what you can’t see, and the reward of faith is to see what you believe.” If I were to define Christian Faith, I would say that it is belief in, trust of, and obedience to the Living God, who has revealed himself, and continues to reveal himself, in Jesus Christ (the Messiah). Jesus Christ enables us, by faith, to see the unseen and to act upon it. In addition to being defined, faith is also illustrated in the lives of those who lived prior to Jesus Christ. Following the list of the faithful, the author invites the reader to join the faithful in what

he calls a race to the finish, which will involve suffering. Seven steps leading into faith are offered:

1. Faith is certain of God's promises (11:1)
2. Faith perceives God's design (11:3)
3. Faith acts on God's promises (11:8-22)
4. Faith values Christ above all (11:26)
5. Faith overcomes tremendous odds (11:29-38)
6. Faith enters the race with Christ (12:1-2)
7. Faith seeks holiness as its goal (12:10 and 14)

All of the examples of faith come from the Old Testament, but that does not mean that they have nothing to do with Christ. Hebrews 11:25-26 says that Moses chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. In making this choice Moses was valuing *Christ* to be of greater value than the treasures of Egypt. How could he do that? He preceded Christ. By identifying with the people of God, Moses identified himself with Christ's people, the faithful of all time. The suffering Moses accepted was *like* the suffering that Christ accepted for himself.

Faith is a risky adventure into the future, following a promise that cannot be seen or verified. Pascal identifies faith as a wager. "Let's assume," says Pascal, "that I am wrong and there is no life hereafter—then I have lost nothing. On the other hand, let's assume that I am right and there is life hereafter, then I have gained everything." Faith is willing to take this risk. In the process, Pascal clears the way for the reasons of the heart. "The heart," concludes Pascal, "has its reasons which reason cannot know." This does not mean that the faithful act without reason. Pascal's wager is carefully reasoned out. What faith finally means is this: Forsaking All, I Trust Him. In the end, that's what faith means. We don't do this without evidence. We have all those faithful men and women from the past who risked everything. We also have the example of Jesus, who was crucified on a cross and then resurrected from the dead. It is not faith that creates Jesus, but Jesus who creates the very possibility of faith. Without his death and resurrection, we would be lost in our sins and there would be nothing to believe. That's the message of Hebrews.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM HEBREWS

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:1-2

23

THE FRUIT OF FAITH

James 1:1—5:20

*Be doers of the word, and no merely hearers
who deceive themselves.*

James 1:22

The First E-Letters

23. FAITH BEARS FRUIT (1:1—5:20)			
FAITH MEETS TRIALS WITH JOY (1:1-27)			
Salutation (1:1)	Blessings and Trials (1:2-18)	The Path to True Religion (1:19-27)	
FAITH AFFECTS WORSHIP AND WORKS (2:1-26)			
Faith and Worship (2:1-13)		Faith and Works (2:14-26)	
FAITH INFLUENCES TEACHING (3:1-18)			
Demonic and Divine Speech (3:1-12)		Demonic and Divine Wisdom (3:13-18)	
FAITH SHOWS ITSELF IN SUBMISSION (4:1—5:6)			
FAITH IS PATIENT AND PRAYERFUL (5:7-20)			
The Three Models (5:7-12)	Prayer for the Sick (5:13-15)	Confession and Intercession (5:16-18)	Evangelism (5:19-20)
The Farmer The Prophets Job			

23. THE FRUIT OF FAITH

James 1:1—5:20

ASSIGNMENTS				
Faith meets Trials with Joy (1:1-27)	Faith affects Worship and Works (2:1-26)	Faith influences Teaching (3:1-18)	Faith shows Itself in Submission (4:1—5:6)	Faith is Patient and Prayerful (5:7-20)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

Tradition names James the Just, brother of Jesus, as the author; but some have raised questions about his authorship. The letter indicates that the author is at home in the Greek language and culture. This would eliminate James. It is not unlikely that there was another James in the early Church. James was as common a name then as it is now. At least five men with the name James can be found in the Gospels:

- James, the Just and Brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3)
(See also Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19 and 2:9)
- James, Son of Alphaeus (Luke 6:15)
- James, Brother of John and Son of Zebede (Mark 3:17)
- James, Father of Judas (not Iscariot) (Luke 6:16)
- James the Younger, who was with the women (Mark 15:40)

Another reason given for doubting the brother of Jesus is that the Book of James was not known until Origen came up with it at the close of the second century. One would think that anything written by the leader of the Jerusalem Church would have had wide distribution.

The letter might have been begun by James and finished by someone else, who then claimed James as his source. The Jewish historian, Josephus, writing in 94 C.E., notes that James was stoned to death at the instigation of the Sadducee High priest Ananus in 62 C.E. Another account of the death of James comes from Hegesippus, who claims that James was cast down from the temple, stoned, and clubbed to death. Hegesippus agrees with Josephus that James was put to death by priestly authorities in the sixties, though he

dates the stoning of James shortly before the siege of 66 C.E. Both of these traditions indicate that James died shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

The Date

We cannot be certain of the date. Some think that James was the first New Testament book, being written somewhere between 45 and 62 C.E. They say this because he seems to assume that his readers have some acquaintance with the Gospel message. Others suggest that James was not written until near the end of the first century. The book seems to be a correction of Paul's emphasis on faith alone, and if this is the case, then we must date James somewhere between 100 to 125 C.E. The Pauline writings were not collected until about 95 C.E., and so some time is needed for them to make their impact on the Church.

The Place

If James the Just wrote the book, then it would have been written in Jerusalem, where he led the Church. There was no specific person or Church to whom it was written. It was simply written to the twelve tribes in dispersion (1:1), which would have been a general reference to Jewish Christians. Because it had no specific person or Church in mind, it becomes the first of what have been called the Catholic Epistles. We could say that it was written to all who tended to believe in Christ, but who failed to act out their beliefs. In James' time, this was becoming a serious problem, as it is in our own time. James was not attacking Paul's *salvation by faith alone*, but he was protesting against *hypocrisy*.

The Purpose

The Book of James is similar to Old Testament Wisdom literature. It contains no unified theme. All we find is a series of unrelated statements, which indicate a deep acquaintance with the Sermon on the Mount. James' main concern seems to be that Christians ought to live out their faith in works and this concern is stated clearly in James 1:22 and 2:26. James' emphasis on works caused some concern to both the early Church and to Martin Luther. The Epistle was the last to be accepted into the canon of Scripture (Council of Carthage in 397 C.E.) and Luther called it an "Epistle of Straw." It must be noted however that Jerome included it in the Vulgate and that Augustine (354-430) accepted it as Scripture. It has always had its advocates, just as it has always had its critics. As long as we recognize that it is not a theological book, but a collection of practical instructions, we are likely to appreciate it for what it was intended to be. As the Church was establishing itself as an institution, it was also struggling to establish a code of ethics. We continue the struggle for a code of ethics today.

The Outline

- A. Faith meets trials with joy (1:1-27)
- B. Faith affects Worship and Works (2:1-26)
- C. Faith influences Teaching (3:1-18)

- D. Faith shows itself in Submission (4:1—5:6)
- E. Faith is patient and prayerful (5:7-20)

FAITH MEETS TRIALS WITH JOY (1:1-27)

Salutation (1:1)

James writes to the Twelve Tribes in Dispersion. This means more than the fact that the Jews have been scattered all over the world. He is not writing primarily to Jews, but to Christians, the new Israel. In this sense, he is like Jacob of old, who offered a blessing to his twelve sons. In fact, James means Jacob in Hebrew.

Blessings and Trials (1:2-18)

What follows is a series of exhortations to those who are or will be facing trials, poverty, and temptation. He is encouraging them to remain faithful, for blessings will certainly follow. God tempts no one with evil (1:13); rather, God bestows good gifts upon his children (1:17).

The Path to True Religion (1:19-27)

The person who endures will be “quick to listen” but hearing will only be the first step. We must be “doers of the Word, and not merely hearers” (1:22). This thought anticipates James’ teaching that “faith without works is dead” (2:14-26). Everyone who ties “listening” and “doing” together has discovered the perfect law which is liberty and freedom. The Law was given, not to enslave, but to set us free. Those who do not recognize this truth are like people who see their faces in the mirror, and quickly forget what they look like as they turn away. God created us to be free, not to be enslaved to sin and death.

This chapter finally ends with a definition of true religion, which is (1) to visit orphans and widows, and (2) to keep oneself unstained from the world. The first dimension of religion has to do with justice and mercy (Micah 6:8) and the second dimension has to do with devotional exercises that help one to resist the trials and temptations of the world (1 John 2:15-17). Such a life-style will bring true and perfect joy.

FAITH AFFECTS WORSHIP AND WORKS (2:1-26)

Faith and Worship (2:1-13)

The point made concerning true religion is illustrated in how the Christian should greet a rich person and a poor person coming to worship. The word used is “assembly” which would mean “synagogue,” but must be understood here in terms of “church.” The visit would be to public worship. The Christian response would be to show no partiality at all, but if partiality is to be expressed, it ought not to be in favor of the rich, which would be our natural inclination. The poor generally show more faith than do the rich, and so

Christianity has always taken root among the poor, who then have prospered because of a new faith, morality, and purpose in life.

Christians are called to obey the Royal Law, which is to love others as themselves, without favoring the rich. Other examples of the Royal Law can be found in Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:9; and Galatians 5:14. Freedom comes in obeying the Law, but full freedom cannot be experienced without obeying the whole Law. This does not mean that one must obey the whole law to be saved; it only means that those who are saved by faith do not see the Law as enslaving them. The Law liberates and sets us free. It also helps us to treat one another, rich or poor, as we would want to be treated ourselves.

Faith and Works (2:14-26)

James makes a second point in reference to faith and the poor. When the poor come to us in need of food and clothing, what should we do? Do we help them, or do we simply send them away? True faith will help them. James does not deal with what true help might be. He just assumes that the poor would be helped to obtain their basic needs. Christians who are not interested in helping the poor are not persons of faith; hence, they can hardly be called Christians.

It is clear that James and Paul deal differently with faith. For Paul faith is a living relationship with God, but for James it seems to be mere belief. Both of them believe that faith produces works, but Paul's concept of faith seems much more profound. James does make some good points, and one of his best is the illustration of how demons believe and shudder (2:19). He goes a little too far when he insists that justification comes *not* by faith alone, but by works (2:24). This may be true, using his weak definition of faith, but using Paul's more profound definition, it is not true. We are not dealing with a difference of opinion between Paul and James, but with different definitions of faith. Both would agree with the unity of faith and works, faith being the inner side of works, and works being the outward expression of faith. Faith (belief) without works is like a body without a spirit; it is dead (2:25).

James closes this chapter with two illustrations to make his point. He uses Abraham, one of Paul's favorites, and Rahab to make the point that they were not saved because they merely believed, but because they acted on their beliefs. According to James, their works saved them, but according to Paul, their deep personal relationship (faith) motivated them to act. While Paul's thought is much more profound, James perceives what is happening in the lives of people who do not understand Pauline theology, and so he is trying to speak to them in terms that they might understand. Both the teachings of Paul and James are needed today as much as they were needed in the early Church.

FAITH INFLUENCES TEACHING (3:1-18)

The two potential sins of the teacher are an *uncontrolled tongue* and *human arrogance*; but faith will turn both of these into *divine speech* and *divine wisdom*.

Demonic and Divine Speech (3:1-12)

The primary tool of the teacher is the tongue, which operates like a bit in a horse's mouth, or like the rudder of a ship. Its power for both good and evil is tremendous, and like a small fire (or discarded cigarette) it can set a forest ablaze. The tongue has the potential for the demonic, but it can also be used to praise God. It blesses and curses, and therein lies the contradiction. Nothing else in nature operates like it. A spring does not produce both fresh and brackish water at the same time. A fig tree does not produce olives, nor does a grapevine produce figs. The tongue was given to bless, not to curse; and teachers, who have the potential to misuse the tongue, will be judged with greater strictness. While everyone makes mistakes, the mistakes of teachers have a greater potential for damage.

Demonic and Divine Wisdom (3:13-18)

Demonic wisdom is related to arrogance, jealousy, and selfish-ambition; and every teacher ought to reject it. Divine Wisdom is a Spiritual Gift from above, which manifests itself in mercy, righteousness, and peace; and every teacher ought to embrace it. Wisdom expresses itself not so much in intellectual gymnastics as in a good life (behavior). It begins with the "fear of the Lord" (Proverbs 9:10) Wisdom and godliness are intimately related, and the supreme example is found in Jesus (John 14:6 and I Corinthians 1:30).

FAITH SHOWS ITSELF IN SUBMISSION (4:1—5:6)

While much of this section consists of many subjects loosely organized, there is a basic theme running through it. That theme is: "Faith expresses itself in submission to God." Two groups refuse to submit, and they are the rich and the arrogant. Their incessant passion and covetousness cause strife and war. Life becomes so pleasant for them that they lose sight of eternity. They are headed for disappointment in this life and judgment in the next. They fatten themselves up like cattle for the slaughter.

John Wesley defined sin as a willful transgression of the known law of God. This definition would include the sin of omission. "Anyone...who knows the right thing to do," says James 4:17, "and fails to do it, commits sin." When one knows what to do and does not do it, that is just as much a sin as breaking one of the commandments. Not to submit to what we know to be right leads only to our downfall.

Behind some of these thoughts lies Jesus' Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21). The poor and the humble on the other hand have submitted to God and have received his grace (4:6). The Righteous (5:6) can be equated with the poor and humble (Amos 2:6-7; 5:12; and 8:4). Since they are more submissive to God, they will experience more of God's grace. The righteous are not the rich and the arrogant, who do nothing but trample over what they know to be right. The rich and the arrogant are seeking security in this world, but will discover it vanishing like the morning mist (4:14).

FAITH IS PATIENT AND PRAYERFUL (5:7-20)

The Models (5:7-12)

As we wait for the coming of the Lord, Job is our model of patience, and Elijah our model of prayer. Christians are to live God-centered lives.

The exhortation against swearing (5:12) is a detached teaching. It does not relate to what precedes or follows it, but it is consistent with Jesus own teaching concerning oaths (Matthew 5:33-37). Oaths do not make Christians more truthful, nor do lack of them give permission to Christians to lie. To those who have a right to hear the truth from us, we are obligated to give it with a simple yes or no. They can depend upon us.

Three activities are mentioned, which are part of every Christian's ministry. They make us aware of the early roots of the priesthood of every believer.

Prayer for the Sick (5:13-15)

When a fellow believer is sick, the elders are to be called to pray. Are the elders lay or clergy? The answer to this question had less relevance in James' time than in ours. They are however responsible for anointing the sick with oil and praying for them. That all of us have a responsibility to pray for the sick does not mean that we all have been given the Spiritual Gift of Healing; nevertheless, faith has a very significant impact on the physical healing of the body. Oil was believed to have had medicinal value, and that is why it was used to accompany prayer. These verses lie behind the Roman Catholic Sacrament, which used to be called *extreme unction*, but now has been broadened to include prayer for the sick. Extreme unction came to be known as an anointing of the dying.

Confession and Intercession (5:16-18)

As important as physical health is, spiritual health is even more important. Confession of sin to one another and prayers of intercession are even more important than prayers for the physically ill. Roman Catholics have given this dimension more consideration than have Protestants, although this was part of the early Wesleyan class meetings. It has been lost today and needs to be recovered. Alcoholics Anonymous is a modern counterpart, but it does not deal with confession and intercession in the same way. Its focus is on the problem of alcoholism, which it considers an illness and not a sin. Confession and intercession *here* has to do with sin.

Evangelism (5:19-20)

The most important ministry of any believer is to bring a person into the community of faith, whether for the first time, or to restore someone who has strayed. Straying away from the faith is not a modern phenomenon. It happened in James' time as well as in our own, and we need to be engaged in gently leading people home. If we cannot take an

active part in leading them home, we need to at least be part of the welcoming committee when they finally come home.

The letter of James ends abruptly on a note of love and pastoral concern. There is, however, no benediction or doxology like we find in every other New Testament letter.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH AND BELIEF

It is easy to understand why Luther considered the Book of James “an epistle of straw.” Luther and James had different definitions of faith. Luther knew the difference. He also knew the relationship between faith and works. In his “Introduction to the Book of Romans,” Luther wrote, “...it is as impossible to separate works of faith as it is impossible to separate light and heat from the fire.” The same, however, could not be said of belief. James understood this and wrote in James 2:17, “...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” He follows this up in James 2:19 by saying, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” Faith, then, is belief that acts by producing good works, not because they save, but because it’s the natural thing to do. Works are the fruit of faith.

Both Luther and James understand the difference, but Luther was afraid that the average person reading James might not understand. Good works may be evidence that one believes, but good works do not guarantee belief. Good works alone do not save. “Good works do not make a man good,” insisted Luther, “but a good man does good works.”¹ We do good works, not to justify ourselves, but because we have been justified in Christ. In other words, we do good works out of sheer gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ.

But what about those persons who do good works who have never known Christ or have even rejected Christ. We must admit that Christians are not the only ones who do good works, but we must insist at the same time that good works justify no one. Good works can also be done for very wrong reasons. Only God knows why someone does good works or refuses to do them. Are a person’s good works the fruit of faith or are they the effort of self-justification? God alone knows. What the Christian knows is that justification and salvation come by the grace of God alone. One responds to that grace by faith, which produces good works. Can one experience that grace outside the Christian faith? Yes, that’s what we call prevenient grace. When one consciously accepts that grace, we call it justifying faith, and when one goes on to produce good works, we call the grace that acts upon such a person, sanctifying or perfecting grace.

Are the differences between these three kinds of grace important? Yes, if misunderstood, it can mean the difference between life and death. If one depends upon one’s works to justify, failure is the inevitable result. There is a world of difference between believing that God exists and responding to the three kinds of the grace of that God by faith. Luther

¹ Quoted in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Abingdon Press, Nashville), p. 178.

was correct in assuming that the masses have difficulty discerning the difference between belief and faith. He himself had difficulty with that distinction, as did John Wesley. If persons of such stature had difficulty, we can certainly expect the masses to have difficulty. There is no way to make the difference so clear that no one will ever make the mistake again. It was for this reason that Luther insisted that justification comes by faith *alone*, without good works. As we have seen, Luther says at the same time that good works will accompany faith. Good works, however, do not always accompany belief. Perhaps that is the single most important difference between faith and belief.

24
**A CALL TO HOPE
AND HOLINESS**
1 Peter 1:1—5:14

*As he who called you is holy,
be holy yourselves in all your conduct;
for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*
1 Peter 1:15-16

The First E-Letters

24. A CALL TO HOPE AND HOLINESS (1:1—5:14)

A LIVING HOPE (1:1-12)

Salutation (1:1-2)

The Hope (1:3-12)

The Resurrection (1:3-9)

The Prophets (1:10-12)

A CORPORATE HOLINESS (1:13—2:10)

MORAL OBLIGATIONS (2:11—4:19)

1. Abstain from the Passions of the Flesh (2:11-12)
2. Be Subject to every Human Institution (2:13-17)
3. Be Submissive to Your Masters (2:18-25)
4. Be Submissive to Your Husbands (3:1-6)
5. Be considerate of Your Wives (3:7)
6. Be unified in the Spirit (3:8—4:19)
 - a. Use Your Spiritual Gift (4:10-11)
 - b. Be Ready to Suffer for Your Faith in Christ (4:12-19)

FINAL EXHORTATIONS (5:1-14)

Three Exhortations (5:1-11)

Tend the Flock
(5:2)

Clothe Yourself in Humility
(5:5)

Resist the Devil
(5:8-9)

Greetings (5:12-14)

24. A CALL TO HOPE AND HOLINESS

1 Peter 1:1—5:14

ASSIGNMENTS			
A Living Hope (1:1-12)	A Corporate Holiness (1:13—2:10)	Moral Obligations (2:11—4:19)	Final Exhortations (5:1-14)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

Although there has been some doubt concerning the author of 1 Peter being Jesus' closest disciple, there is general agreement that Peter is indeed the author. One of the reasons for doubt is the excellent Greek in which this letter is written, but this can easily be explained. Silvanus, Peter's secretary, did the writing (5:12). Mark, his other secretary and author of the Gospel, is also with him. Both had been companions of Paul's, but are now with Peter. Silvanus' other name is Silas. This is the Silas who accompanied Paul in Acts 15-18.

There are at least two good reasons for attributing authorship to Peter. The first has to do with expressions used in 1 Peter that can also be found in Peter's sermons in the book of Acts. The second has to do with the advice Jesus gave to Peter in John 21:16 to "tend my sheep," which he then passes on to his readers in 1 Peter 5:2, "to tend the flock of God."

The Date

The letter can be dated almost to the year. Since Peter urges loyalty to the Emperor (2:13-17) and then goes on to discuss the coming persecution, the date must be 64 C.E. Persecution, while anticipated, had not yet occurred. On the other hand, some have suggested the persecutions of Domitian (81-96 C.E.) or Trajan (97/98-117 C.E.) as the context for the writing of 1 Peter.

The Place

The presence of Silvanus (Latin) or Silas (Greek) and Mark indicate that Peter was in Rome at this time, but he is writing a circular letter to Christians in Asia Minor, which consisted of the following four Roman Provinces: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and

Bithynia (modern Turkey). It should be noted that Bithynia and Pontus were part of the same administrative district. When the author refers to the “exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1), he is referring to God’s chosen people, who include Jewish and Gentile Christians. “Exiles” should be taken as persons whose real home is in heaven.

The Purpose

The key word is *hope*. The theme is to provide encouragement to people who are about to experience persecution. The impending persecution is mentioned several times, as is the promised return of Christ. Jesus himself told his followers that they should expect persecution, but that it would not last forever. A “living hope” has been given through his own Resurrection from the dead (1:3), and an “inheritance” has been kept for them in heaven (1:4).

1 Peter contains all the elements of a letter. There is the naming of the author (1:1), comments to the recipients and wishes for their spiritual welfare (1:2), the naming of the church member who delivered the letter (5:12), a farewell from the author and others who are with him (5:13), and a final greeting and peace (5:14). Some of the major themes that make up the content of the letter include baptism and the new birth, encouragement in times of persecution, the church as the true home of believers, and advice on how to live successfully in an alien culture.

The Outline

- A. Salutation (1:1-2)
- B. A Living Hope (1:3-12)
- C. A Corporate Holiness (1:13—2:10)
- D. Moral Obligations (2:11—4:19)
- E. A Final Word (5:1-11)
- F. Greetings (5:12-14)

1:1-12	1:13—2:10	2:11—4:19	5:1-14
Hope	Holiness	Obligations	Exhortations

A LIVING HOPE (1:1-12)

Salutation (1:1-2)

This letter is addressed to Christians living in the four Roman Provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (Bithynia and Pontus being one Province), which

were important in Paul's travels and in the Book of Revelation. Peter addresses these Christians as being "the exiles of the Dispersion." This was a Jewish term which referred to Jews who lived outside of Palestine (the Promised Land), but in this context it refers to Christians who live outside of the *heavenly* Promised Land. Peter sees them as the New Israel and so he symbolically uses Jewish terminology. One can see this even in the way Peter identifies himself. His name was Simon bar-Jona (Simon son of John). Jesus gave him a new name, which was "Cephas." The Greek term for Cephas is "Petros" or in English "Peter."

Peter knew that his readers were Gentiles, who had been alienated from their own land and culture; and for this reason, he addresses them as "exiles in the Dispersion." He pays them a second compliment when he calls them "chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood..." (1:2) Most of the early Christians came out of the lower classes. They have been chosen (elected) by God to be sanctified. The purpose of both divine election and sanctification is obedience to Jesus Christ and forgiveness. Sprinkling with his blood refers to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, which was the basis of divine forgiveness.

Although we clearly find references to the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, this letter is too early for any clearly defined doctrine of the Trinity. This would have to wait another two hundred years, but we can say that these early Christians experienced something that later was defined.

The Hope (1:3-12)

The Resurrection (1:3-9)

The foundation of this living hope was the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. This made new persons in Christ. It made them and us aware of the divine Inheritance, imperishable, and kept in Heaven. Inheritance was an Old Testament word for Canaan, the Promised Land of the Israelites. For Christians it becomes the Kingdom of Heaven. Although the Kingdom, according to Jesus, was in their midst, its fullness lies in the future. For the present there is suffering, which Jesus experienced, and which he warned his followers about. In comparison to what lies ahead, it will not last long. While it will serve as a kind of testing ground, Christians should rejoice in their living hope. They are not being called to anything which Jesus himself did not experience.

The Prophets (1:10-12)

Even the Old Testament Prophets envisioned the suffering and glory of Christ. That the early Church understood the emphasis on his suffering can be seen in how they referred back to the "Suffering Servant" passage found in Isaiah 53. Three examples can be found in Luke 22:37 (Isaiah 53:12); Acts 8:32-33 (Isaiah 53:7-8); and Hebrews 9:28 (Isaiah 53:12). What the Prophets only longed for, Peter had seen and then proclaimed to others. Their message lay in the Resurrection of Christ. This was their living Hope, and it is also ours.

A CORPORATE HOLINESS (1:13—2:10)

“Prepare your minds” is the equivalent of, “roll up your sleeves.” We are to enter into a *corporate* holiness (1:15-16), just as the Lord did with Israel (Leviticus 11:44-45). To be holy means to “...love one another deeply from the heart.” (1:22) Apart from this corporate or covenant relationship with God, we are as frail as the grass and flowers that wither and die (Isaiah 40:6-9). All these images, related to holiness, are corporate; and the implication is that to be a Christian means living within the community of faith.

Those who accept the call to holiness become the *laos* (laity) of God. All the people of God are called to form themselves as living stones into a spiritual Temple with Jesus as the cornerstone. Many will stumble over him, but those who join themselves to him have the clear task to: “...proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (2:9)

MORAL OBLIGATIONS (2:11—4:19)

While the moral obligations are broken down into several areas of life, there is an underlying theme that is consistent. Christians should follow the *righteous* example of Jesus, who suffered himself instead of inflicting suffering on others. This is our moral obligation. Now let us identify some of the behavior expected of Christians, even if it means undeserved suffering.

Abstain from the passions of the flesh (2:11-12)

There were many rumors of unethical Christian behavior. Christians were to make sure that these rumors were not true, for they have been called to let their light shine before others, giving glory to their Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Be subject to every human institution (2:13-17)

It must be remembered that this was not a time in which every human institution was good. Peter defines what God expects of these institutions. They are to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right (2:14). Christians are free, but they are not free to do wrong. They are free to do the will of God. Even though the Emperor or his Governors may not be just, Christians must honor the institutions through which they operate. They are to love the family of believers (other Christians), fear God, and honor the Emperor. Peter calls for an attitude of respect towards an evil Emperor, which many could not endorse.

Be submissive to your masters (2:18-25)

This advice is given to those who are household and domestic slaves, who numbered about 60,000,000 people in the Roman Empire. Frequently, slaves were more educated than their masters, being doctors, teachers, librarians, secretaries, and musicians. This however did not give them any standing in Roman society. Peter does not call for a

revolution, but rather, to “follow in his steps.” (2:21) This must be read in light of the suffering servant passage of Isaiah 53. Christians, like Christ, must suffer vicariously, that is for the benefit of their masters.

Masters are not warned in 1 Peter, like they are in Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 4:1, to follow Christ’s example in their treatment of slaves, but the same rule of love may be implied in 1 Peter 2:18, where the kind and gentle owners are mentioned.

Be submissive to your husbands (3:1-6)

While husbands usually brought their wives into the Church, some wives entered the Church by themselves. The reason for the former practice is that wives were considered property, owned by their husbands. What should a wife of a non Christian do after she became a Christian? Instead of rebelling against the traditions of the time, she should submit patiently to her husband, *expressing her inner beauty* so that her husband might be won to the Lord through her example.

Be considerate of your wives (3:7)

Husbands should recognize that their wives are *joint heirs* with them in the gift of life. This spiritual equality helped to destroy the inferior status of women, paving the way for women’s liberation in other areas of life as well.

Be unified in the Spirit (3:8—4:19)

While this passage begins with admonition to be unified in the Spirit, it is not well organized; therefore I would like to lift up a few important ideas, some of which are not consistent with the theme.

Do not return evil for evil (3:9)

There is no place for revenge in the Christian life. The Christian is to follow Jesus’ example of non-retaliation. Verses 1-12 are an adaptation of Psalm 34:13-17. As Peter has said before, the key to the Christian life is to do right (2:12, 14, 20).

Be prepared to witness at any time (3:15)

Sanctifying Christ means the same as confessing Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9). It is an early Christian Creed. Witnessing is not difficult under the influence of the Spirit, but it must always be done with gentleness and reverence. Never should it be done with arrogance.

Christ preached to the Spirits in Hell (3:19 and 4:6)

While it does not say Hell, this is what Peter means. What is actually said is that he preached to the dead in their prison, which would have been Hades. This passage may be

the foundation for the phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into Hell." 1 Peter 4:6 may simply be referring to those who heard the message and have already died. Both are difficult passages to interpret.

Baptism is a symbol of Salvation (3:21)

Baptism does not save by washing off the dirt of the body, but by calling attention to the need for the inner cleansing of the conscience. Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection demonstrate how this inner cleansing takes place, and baptism becomes the symbol of the process of salvation (Romans 6:4).

Use your Spiritual Gift (4:10-11)

Christians are to avoid the sins of the Gentiles and put into practice whatever Spiritual Gift they have been given. All this must be done to glorify God. Spiritual Gifts are given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). When everyone contributes and accepts everyone's contribution, there is unity in the Spirit.

Be ready to suffer for your Faith in Christ (4:12-19)

Make sure that your suffering is not for your sins, but for your faith in Jesus Christ. Here we have a kind of summary of the underlying theme. Christians have already begun to experience judgment with their relationship with Christ, and if they are scarcely saved (by faith), how will the impious and sinner be saved (without faith)? There is no thought of universal salvation in these words. The idea of judgment beginning with the people of God began with Amos (3:2), but was carried on by such great prophets as Isaiah (10:12), Jeremiah (25:29), and Ezekiel (9:6). While judgment of the people of God may mean temporal punishment, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, it does not mean eternal punishment. God's people experience temporal punishment along with everyone else, but their faith in God results in their eternal salvation.

FINAL EXHORTATIONS (5:1-14)

This final word comes in the shape of three commands and a greeting.

Three Exhortations (5:1-11)

Tend the flock (5:2)

The elders are exhorted to tend the flock, just as Jesus exhorted Peter to tend his sheep and lambs (John 21:15-17). In every new congregation Paul appointed elders, who had the responsibility of overseeing the congregation. He got the idea from the organization of the Synagogue, which had elders who were the local officials. The real question for us today is, "Did a congregation have only one or many elders?" He seems to be exhorting the elders, not the elder.

Clothe yourselves in humility (5:5)

Quoting Proverbs 3:34, the author cautions Christians against arrogance and exhorts them to clothe themselves in humility. Humility does not come naturally. It must be consciously accepted.

Resist the devil (5:8-9)

The early Christians did believe in a *personal* devil, and urged one another to resist him. According to Ephesians 6:11, this is done by putting on the “whole armor of God.” James suggests doing it by submission to God (James 4:7), and Peter by a firm faith. We may have more difficulty thinking in terms of a *personal* devil, but we ought not to be so naive as to think that evil does not manifest itself *personally* and *corporately*. It has and continues to do so and we need to resist it with every Christian weapon available to us.

Greetings (5:12-14)

Silvanus has acted as Peter’s secretary, just as he did for Paul in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. This is obviously Silas, a prominent member of the Church in Jerusalem and Paul’s traveling companion on the second missionary journey. “Your sister church in Babylon” (5:13 NRSV) indicates that this letter is being written in Rome. Babylon is the symbolic name given to Rome that we find in the Book of Revelation. This is not a compliment to Rome. There is some speculation that “she,” (5:13 NIV) refers to Peter’s wife, but it is not likely. Although Peter had a wife, we know very little about her.

Mark is identified as Peter’s son, but this must be taken in a spiritual sense. Mark was not related to Peter except as a brother in Christ. The final comment is to greet one another with a holy kiss, which was the early Church’s usual greeting (Romans 16:16), replaced today with a handshake. A hug more closely represents the holy kiss, but can be just as easily abused.

THE CALL TO HOLINESS

1 Peter is a treasure of important scriptures. The first one is God’s call to holiness, found in 1 Peter 1:15-16, where the author says, “as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” This is not only a call to individual holiness; it is also a call to corporate and social holiness. In chapter two we read how we are called to be “living stones” built into a “spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood...” (2:4-5) The chief “cornerstone” is Jesus Christ, and the task of this “spiritual house” is beautifully described in 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

There are of course some passages that reflect the social conditions of the end of the first century, where slaves were expected to accept the authority of their masters (2:18) and women were expected to accept the authority of their husbands (3:1). All Christians are

called for the Lord's sake to accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, whose task is "to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right." (2:13-14) Christians are not called to participate in evil. They are called to do right. Sometimes they will suffer for doing right. This is because every Christian is called to "follow in his steps." (2:21). Because he is holy, we too must become holy. The phrase "in his steps" became the title of a classical book on what it means to follow Jesus.

Each living stone has a special function, which we call spiritual gifts. In 1 Peter 4:10, the author says, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." Everyone has a spiritual gift. We call them spiritual because the Holy Spirit gives them to us to glorify God and to serve one another, including those who are still outside of the spiritual house. As God's holy people, we must extend a hand to those who have not yet joined themselves to the spiritual house. We must also do it clothed in humility for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (5:5) As we respond to God's call to holiness, our greatest danger is to express spiritual arrogance to those we are trying to reach. To reach them we must be clothed in humility, obedience, and love.

25
GETTING READY
FOR THE END
2 Peter 1:1—3:18

*The Lord is not slow about his promise,
as some think of slowness,
but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish,
but all to come to repentance.
But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and
then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise,
and the elements will be dissolved with fire,
and the earth and everything that is done on it
will be disclosed.*

1 Peter 3:9-10

The First E-Letters

25. GETTING READY FOR THE END (1:1—3:18)

GROW IN GRACE (1:1-21)

Those who are justified by faith should grow in grace.

The Christian Virtues (2 Peter 1:5-7)	The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Goodness 2. Knowledge 3. Self-Control 4. Endurance 5. Godliness 6. Mutual Affection 7. Love 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Love 2. Joy 3. Peace 4. Patience 5. Kindness 6. Generosity 7. Faithfulness 8. Gentleness 9. Self-Control

The Transfiguration Remembered (1:16-18)

AVOID FALSE TEACHING (2:1-22)

Same as Jude 4-16 and 18

The Angels Who Sinned (2:4)	The Flood Noah (2:5)	Sodom and Gomorrah Lot (2:6-7)
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Fix your eyes on the Holy Commandment (2:21)

Falling from Grace is like...

A Dog Returning to his Vomit (2:22)	A Sow Wallowing in the Mire (2:22)
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ANTICIPATE THE PROMISE (3:1-18)

Where is the Promise (3:4)	God is Patient (3:9)	Destruction by Fire (3:7, 10, 12)
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Paul's Letters are Scripture (3:15-16)

25. GETTING READY FOR THE END

2 Peter 1:1—3:18

ASSIGNMENTS			
Grow in Grace! (1:1-21)	Avoid False Teaching! (2:1-22)	Anticipate the Promise (3:1-18)	By Their Fruit You Shall Know Them (Jude 1-25)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The Apostle Peter, as author of this Letter, was questioned from very early times. Both Eusebius (263-340 C.E.) and Jerome (340-420 C.E.) denied Peter as the author. Many reasons have been given, but two which stand out are the author's tendency to equate Paul's writing to Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16) and the dependence of this Letter on Jude. Compare 2 Peter 2:1—3:4 with Jude 4-19. No fewer than nineteen of the twenty-five verses of Jude can be found in some form in 2 Peter. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that some author, deeply indebted to Peter, published this Letter under his name. This was not unusual. A number of other books, not accepted as Scripture, also bore Peter's name. They are the Gospel of Peter, the Acts of Peter, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Preaching of Peter. There were some doubts about 2 Peter being accepted as Scripture, making it the last Book to be included in the New Testament. It was not accepted until late in the fourth century.

The Date

If Peter were the author, the date would have to be in the early sixties, but there is a great deal of internal evidence in this letter to indicate that it was written much later. The reference to Paul's Letters, as being equal to Scripture, force us to think of Marcion (140 C.E.), the first to suggest such a thing. The denial of Jesus' return was not yet an issue of the early Church in the sixties, so 2 Peter is usually dated sometime in the middle of the second century, certainly no earlier than 125 C.E. A good guess would be somewhere between 125 and 150 C.E.

The Place

Where and to whom was 2 Peter written? It was a general Epistle to the Church. We cannot be sure of where it was written. The author was influenced both by Peter and by Jude. This could place it either in Rome, where Peter ministered, or in Palestine, where Jude ministered.

Because of the content of 2 Peter, the readers of 2 Peter must have lived outside of Palestine, probably in an urban setting. This would most likely mean Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Other places that have been mentioned include Syria or Egypt. Wherever the readers lived, they had to deal with the Jewish tradition and pagan culture and religion.

The Purpose

If authorship and location are difficult to determine, the purpose of this Letter is not. Two things are addressed: Immorality and False Teaching. In fact, immorality results from false teachings, and one of the most critical is the idea that Christ will not return. The author of 2 Peter rejects such an idea, recalling the apostolic witness (1:16), the prophetic word (1:19-21), and the patience of God (3:9).

The Outline

- A. Salutation (1:1-2)
- B. The Christian Calling (1:3-21)
- C. False Teachers (2:1-22)
- D. The Final Coming of Christ (3:1-18)

1	2	3
Grow in Grace!	Avoid False Teaching!	Anticipate the Promise!

GROW IN GRACE (1:1-21)

Instead of Simon Peter the author introduces himself as “Simeon Peter,” who was a personal witness to the transfiguration of Jesus (1:16-18) and was informed by Jesus to expect an early death (1:14). Even if Peter was not the author, we are dealing with his testimony. Peter’s main concern is that those who have come to faith should also grow in grace. Faith necessarily results in the seven Christian virtues, some of which overlap with the fruit of the Spirit.

The Christian Virtues
(2 Peter 1:5-7)

1. Goodness
2. Knowledge
3. Self-Control
4. Endurance
5. Godliness
6. Mutual Affection
7. Love

The Fruit of the Spirit
(Galatians 5:22-23)

1. Love
2. Joy
3. Peace
4. Patience
5. Kindness
6. Generosity
7. Faithfulness
8. Gentleness
9. Self-Control

Although the Christian Virtues have sometimes been called a “Ladder of Virtues,” they should not be thought of as a way into the Kingdom of God. They are an expression of faith in the same sense that the fruit of the Spirit are expressions of the Spirit. Both describe the process of growing in Grace.

One ought not to be misled into thinking that these virtues are unnecessary. Those who are justified by faith must also grow in grace, for this Good News has both an Apostolic Witness and a Prophetic Insight behind it. The Apostolic Witness is the experience of Peter, James, and John in seeing Jesus transfigured (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36). Why is the Transfiguration mentioned instead of the Resurrection? As it was a foretaste of the first coming, it now becomes a foretaste of the second coming, which was being denied by some. It is an affirmation that Christian Faith is not based on clever myths, but on eyewitness accounts, some of which were given in advance. Even the Old Testament prophecies shed light on these events, and are like a lamp shining in a dark place (1:19 and Psalm 119:105). The Holy Spirit lies behind these prophetic insights and can be trusted. Unfortunately many of us do not understand these prophetic insights until it is too late.

AVOID FALSE TEACHING (2:1-22)

As there were plenty of false prophets in the past, there are plenty of false teachers in the present. They are to be avoided. Why? False prophecies and false teachings lead to disaster. What we believe leads to how we behave. Jude 4-16 and 18 deals with essentially the same train of thought, and should be read at the same time. Even a very general reading of the Old Testament illustrates the way in which God judges sin and rescues his own. Examples used here are the angels (Genesis 6:1-4); the flood (Genesis 6:5—8:22); and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). Noah and Lot, the righteous, were rescued from those judgments, and so faithful Christians have nothing to fear; unless of course, they act like Balaam, a prophet who sold out and corrupted his prophetic office for covetousness and cowardice (Numbers 22-24 and 31:16). In doing this Balaam was not as intelligent as his ass.

False teaching must be avoided. God's people fix their eyes on the "holy commandment." The "holy commandment" is referred to both in 2 Peter 2:21 and Romans 7:12. In the former case, it becomes a general description of *orthodoxy*. More than the Great Commandment of Jesus is meant. The whole Christian way of life is at stake here. It is possible to fall from Grace, but that would be like a dog returning to its own vomit or a sow wallowing in the mire. This vivid description of the fall from Grace is taken both from Proverbs 26:11 and the ancient Story of Ahikar¹, which never made it into Scripture.

ANTICIPATE THE PROMISE (3:1-18)

The question in this last chapter is formed in verse 4: "Where is the promise of his coming?" It was natural that this question would be asked, not only by scoffers, but also by believers. Jesus had seemingly promised the Kingdom before the present generation had passed away (Matthew 24:34). Why has it not yet come? The answer lies in the different way in which God looks at things. First, God judged the world with a flood in the past; and promises that he will bring down judgment again in the future, only this time with fire (3:7, 10, and 12). This is the only place in the Bible where the destruction of the world is described by burning. It was popular however in apocalyptic literature of the time, and supported by Hebrew, Greek, and Roman non-biblical sources as well. Our present day nuclear arsenals make us very much aware of this possibility; but God, for some reason, has not yet acted in this way. Why? First, because his timetable is different; and secondly, because he is exercising divine patience. For him one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (3:8 and Psalm 90:4). In spite of the delay, we should not get discouraged. The emphasis is not on the destruction of the world, but on the renewal and transformation of the universe itself. Hope in Jesus' second coming is an important teaching of the Church because it makes us zealous for Christian behavior in anticipation of the promise. It eliminates every inclination towards moral laxity.

At this point the author brings up the Letters of Paul, which he seems to equate with other Scripture (3:15-16). His awareness of an emerging collection of Pauline Letters indicates the lateness of 2 Peter. Such a collection did not begin to appear until around 90 C.E., making it impossible for Peter to be the author. Peter died around 64 C.E., long before this collection of Letters began to emerge and certainly long before they were equated with Scripture. What then does the author mean when he refers to this as his second Letter (3:1)? If Peter wrote this letter, does it not make sense that this is his second letter? If Peter wrote it, that would be the case, but this author's first Letter might have been lost. The authorship question is quite different from the message. The message is valid even if someone else wrote it down. Christians ought to anticipate the fulfillment of the promise in which the Kingdom of God will be established, accompanied by the elimination of evil and sin and the establishment of righteousness and peace.

¹ The Book of Ahikar was a wisdom work containing proverbs. Ahikar was a nephew of Tobit and a trusted official of Sennacherib.

OUR TWO MOST SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS

In 2 Peter our two most significant questions are asked. “Is God really in control of the world?” The author answers this first question by pointing to three acts of divine judgment: the judgment of the fallen angels, the destruction of the world in the time of Noah, and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. While nothing is said about salvation in the judgment against the fallen angels, Noah and his family, and Lot and his daughters were spared judgment. These examples, insisted the writer of 2 Peter, demonstrate that God is in control of his world.

The second question is related to the first: “If judgment is going to be exercised again, why is God taking so long?” The answer is beautifully stated in 2 Peter 3:9, where he writes: “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” Judgment is the last thing God wants to exercise. He wants to save the world from its own self-destructive behavior. That’s why he exercises so much patience. Nevertheless, we learn from 2 Peter that history will end in a ball of fire. This time nothing will be left.

Some have suggested that we might destroy ourselves in a nuclear holocaust. While that possibility exists, this is not what Scripture predicts. God, not man, will bring an end to history. No one knows when that end will come, but we do know that it is being delayed because God wants everyone to be safe in his fold. That’s why he sent the Good Shepherd, to seek out even one lost sheep. We too are given the task of herding lost sheep into God’s sheepfold. As we succeed at this, we hasten the day of Jesus’ coming.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM 1 AND 2 PETER

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

2 Peter 1:16-18

26
**THE TESTING OF
FAITH AND MORALS**
1 John 1:1—5:21

*Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God,
for God is love.
No one has ever seen God; if we love one another,
God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

1 John 4:7-8 and 12

The First E-Letters

26. THE TESTING OF FAITH AND MORALS (1:1—5:21)

INTRODUCTION (1:1-4)

GOD IS LIGHT (1:5—2:29)

Confess Your Sins (1:5-10)	Obey the Commandments (2:1-6)	Obey the New Commandment (2:7-17)	Profess Jesus as the Christ (2:18-29)
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GOD IS RIGHTEOUS (3:1-24)

Don't Give in to Sin (3:1-10)	Be Capable of Loving (3:11-24)
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GOD IS LOVE (4:1—5:13)

The Test of Flesh (4:1-6)	The Test of Love (4:7-21)	The Test of Faith (5:1-13)
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CONCLUSION (5:14-21)

26. THE TESTING OF FAITH AND MORALS

I John 1:1—5:21

ASSIGNMENTS				
God is Light (1 John 1:1—2:29)	God is Righteous (3:1-24)	God is Love (4:1—5:21)	Using Tough Love (2 John 1-13)	The Issue of Leadership (3 John 1-15)

INTRODUCTION

The Author

Although there is not universal agreement that the author is John, the Son of Zebedee and brother of James, most scholars suggest that this John is indeed the author. The style, vocabulary, and themes of the Gospel of John and these three Letters are similar.

The Date

The earliest citation of 1 John occurs in a letter of Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna to the Church in Philippi. Since this letter can be dated in 117 C.E., 1 John, and perhaps the other Letters as well, must be dated prior to this.

The Place

John's activity in Asia Minor is well known, and since Ephesus was the Capital, John probably wrote these Letters from Ephesus. At the time that these Letters were written, John was growing old. While some scholars believe that these Letters form an introduction to the Gospel, others suggest that they were written much later. The content and style reveal an author of advancing age, who shows signs of a weakening capacity for expression.

The Purpose

While the purpose of each Letter differs, there is a common theme or concern running throughout. John is dealing with the crucial issue of heresy, and has two primary purposes: (1) to encourage his readers to live in fellowship with God and his Son Jesus Christ, and (2) to warn against false teachers who could destroy this fellowship. The false

teachers were called Gnostics (knowers), who denied the humanity of Jesus and that salvation had anything to do with morality or love of one's fellow human beings. John insists that Jesus was God in human flesh and calls all believers who love God to also love one another.

Gnosticism, as a false teaching, was a constant threat to Christianity. It existed prior to Christianity, but many who accepted Christianity, tried to make Christianity conform to Gnosticism. They saw themselves as intellectuals, who possessed superior knowledge of God. A sharp distinction was made between the spiritual (good) and material (evil). This led to immorality because they did not believe that the body (evil) could tarnish the spirit (good). Gnosticism also led to the denial of Christ's human nature, which was at best only a temporary situation. Some Gnostics even taught that divinity came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him prior to his crucifixion. John rejects all attempts at making Christianity conform to Gnosticism, and claims that divinity and humanity came together in Jesus Christ.

John accomplishes his purpose in 1 John with only 303 Greek words. Upon reading 1 John, Martin Luther said that he had never read a book with such simple, yet expressive words. What we have is a tract, sermon, or guidebook for Christians. While it is an invitation to choose between life and death, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hatred, it is also a call to entire sanctification. John Wesley used the following six texts from 1 John in order to support his doctrine of entire sanctification:

1 John 1:5 *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.*

1 John 1:7-9 *...but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

1 John 2:6 *...whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.*

1 John 3:3 *And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

1 John 3:8-10 *Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.*

1 John 5:18 *We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them.*

1 John is a marvelous book of simple and profound insights. In it we find concepts so simple that any new Christian should be able to understand them; at the same time, we also find challenges so profound that mature Christians never tire of gleaning diamonds of truth from its pages.

The Outlines

1 John

- A. Introduction (1:1-4)
- B. The Test of Light (1:5—2:29)
- C. The Test of Righteousness (3:1-24)
- D. The Test of Flesh (4:1-6)
- E. The Test of Love (4:7-21)
- F. The Test of Faith (5:1-12)
- G. Conclusion (5:13-21)

1-2	3	4-5
God is Light	God is Righteous	God is Love

2. John

- A. Introduction (1-3)
- B. The Primacy of Truth and Love (4-6)
- C. Warning Against False Doctrine (7-11)
- D. Conclusion (12-13)

1-6	7-13
The Primacy of Truth and Love	Warning Against False Doctrine

3 John

- A. Introduction (1)
- B. Gaius is Praised (2-8)
- C. Diotrephes is Condemned (9-10)
- D. The Favorable Testimony about Demetrius (11-12)
- E. Conclusion (13-15)

1-8	9-10	11-15
Praise of Gaius	Condemnation of Diotrephes	Testimony of Demetrius

INTRODUCTION (1:1-4)

The Introduction recalls, without quoting, the Introduction to the Gospel of John. “In the beginning was the Word...In him was life...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...we have beheld his glory.” (John 1:1, 4, 14) John writes both in the Gospel and in this Letter as an eyewitness. He heard him, he saw him, and he touched him. All this is not only written against the Gnostic heresies, but also to the Churches, that they might obtain eternal life, fellowship with God and one another, and a deepening joy. “Joy,” says G.K. Chesterton, “is the gigantic secret of the Christian....”

GOD IS LIGHT (1:5—2:29)

What follows is not as well organized as one might like it to be, but several themes can be picked up which illustrate the differences between those who walk in the light and those who wallow in darkness. John speaks with great intimacy as he refers to the readers as “little children,” and calls them to “abide” in the Lord. Those who abide in the Lord will walk in the light and find direction and meaning in their lives. Those who walk in the light will do four things.

Confess their Sins (1:5-10)

The Gnostics insisted that the issue was not sin, but ignorance. Humanity, according to them, needed illumination, not forgiveness. For John, denial of sin ignores God’s light, and all who deny it end up calling God a liar. Those who walk in the light confess their sins and accept God’s forgiveness.

Obey the Commandments (2:1-6)

All who confess their sins will at the same time discover the validity of God’s commandments. Since John is writing in the plural, I take John to mean the Ten Commandments, which make up the heart of Jewish piety. The commandments make us aware of our sins, but they also set us free. We do not obey the commandments to justify ourselves. It is because we are justified through the life and death of Christ that we now desire to obey the commandments.

Obey the New Commandment (2:7-17)

Actually the new commandment is an old one, but John calls it new because everyone needs to discover it anew. It is the same one given by Jesus in John 13:34, where he commands us to love one another as he has loved us. Loving one's "brother or sister" is equated with walking in the light, and hating one's "brother or sister" is stumbling in the darkness (1 John 2:10-11). The tragedy of hatred is not only what it does to the other person, but what it does to the one who hates as well.

Profess Jesus as the Christ (2:18-29)

One thing the Gnostics could not do was to profess the historical Jesus as the Christ of Faith. According to Karl Barth, the critical theological question for us all is: "Who is Jesus of Nazareth and what do you think of Him?" "Tell me how it stands with your Christology," said Barth, "and I will tell you who you are." The Gnostics could not make this profession and so John accuses them of choosing the darkness. He calls them the antichrist. The ordinary meaning of the word *anti* in Greek is "against," or "opposite." The antichrist are those who are opposed to Christ. 1 and 2 John are the only books in the Bible, which use this word. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 comes close to it with "the lawless one," and Mark 13:14 comes close with the "desolating sacrilege."

Notice that the word antichrist is used in the plural in 1 John to refer to the Gnostic heretics. Antichrist, as it is used here, does not point to some Jewish pretender or blasphemous world leader. It refers primarily to false teachers who are against Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God, but it could also refer to those pseudo christians that Jesus warned us about in Matthew 24:24. While Hitler might have been the antichrist of his time, he was not the only one. All who oppose the Lordship of Christ might be numbered among the antichrist. The term simply designates those who refuse to make this profession, and prefer to walk in darkness when they are offered the opportunity of walking in his light.

To sum up, we are challenged to choose for ourselves the way of light, which is to confess our sins, to keep God's commandments, to love one another, and to profess Jesus as the Christ. Doing these four things is to walk in the light of God, which has entered our world by means of the man, Jesus of Nazareth.

GOD IS RIGHTEOUS (3:1-24)

The first and most distinguishing feature of false teaching has to do with the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, and whenever we distort this theological center, we also distort the ethical circumference. Theological confusion always results in ethical confusion, and John repeats his concern over this confusion in chapter three, just as he did in chapters one and two; but now he relates it to God as Righteous. "Everyone who does what is right," he says in 3:7, "is righteous, just as he is righteous." The infection of bad doctrine made these young Christians give in to sin and made them incapable of loving.

Giving in to Sin (3:1-10)

If God is Righteous, no Christian can *willingly* give in to sin. “Those who have been born of God do not sin;” says 1 John 3:9, “because God’s seed abides in them....” Chapters one and two make it clear that even Christians sin, but they rely upon God’s forgiveness. It is not that those born of God cease to sin, but that they cease to sin deliberately and habitually. Christians are engaged in warfare with sin, and cannot live comfortably with sin. Christians relate to a Righteous God, and this makes Righteousness their goal.

Incapable of Loving (3:11-24)

The second problem with bad theology is how it affects our relationships with one another. John goes straight to the example of Cain, whose relationship with God was not right, rendering him incapable of loving his brother. While his hatred resulted in murder, Jesus makes us acutely aware of the fact that hatred itself is to be equated with murder (Matthew 5:21-22 and 43-45). One does not even have to commit the act to violate the commandment.

To be confused about God always results in our giving in to sin and makes us incapable of loving. Everything is tied together in the Great Commandment, which John now paraphrases in 3:23. Our relationship with God can always be tested by our obedience to the Law and our willingness to love as he loved. The first commandment has to do with our relationship with God and the second with our relationship with one another. When we are properly related to God, who is both righteous and loving, we too will hate sin and allow his love to flow through us.

GOD IS LOVE (4:1—5:13)

The Test of Flesh (4:1-6)

This passage illuminates for us what these young Christians were up against. There are false prophets all around, and they are teaching the Gnostic idea that Jesus could not have come in the flesh and that he was not really human. The first test of the Spirit for John is that we have encountered God in Jesus Christ, who came to us in the flesh, as a human being (4:2).

It might be noted at this point that John rarely says “Holy Spirit.” Most of the time he refers to the third person of the Trinity as “Spirit.” This style of writing can be found in the Gospel of John¹ and in the Book of Revelation, and is one of our strongest reasons for believing that one person wrote the Gospel, the Letters, and the Revelation. John’s main reason for constantly mentioning the Spirit is to inform us that the Spirit alone enables us to recognize this central truth of Christianity, the incarnation of God in Christ, that God entered our world in this human being.

¹ It must be noted that “Holy Spirit” is used three times in the Gospel of John. The term can be found in John 1:33; 14:26; and 20:22.

The Test of Love (4:7-21)

If the first test is a doctrinal test, that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, then the second test is that of our lifestyle. Those who have experienced the love of Christ are motivated to love as they have been loved. Jesus has given himself as an expiation for our sins, which means that our sins have been forgiven through him. We do not earn God's love through our acts of love, but through our experience of God's love, we are motivated to love. His death on the cross is the highest expression of that love. This means that our comprehension of love originates in God, whose love perfects our ability to love. As we mature in his love, all our fears are eliminated. The Christ we meet as our redeemer is the same Christ we will meet as judge; hence, there is nothing to be afraid of, not even in the final judgment. Failure to love, however, is visible evidence of a broken relationship with God. It is only as our relationship with God is strengthened, that we will ever have strength to love our neighbor and particularly our enemy.

Chapter four includes some of the most profound and exciting teachings in the entire Bible. The Greek word for love, which in this case is *Agape*, is used twenty-eight times in this chapter. What is striking is that this word is quite colorless in classical Greek. Maybe that is why it was taken over by the Septuagint translators of the Old Testament. They were looking for a new way to translate the Old Testament meanings of love from the Hebrew. They suppressed *eros* and *philia* and gave the milder *Agape* a new content and a new excitement. They filled this colorless Greek word with their own rich and strong meaning. A modern example of the same thing occurred in the 1960s when teenagers took the colorless words *cool* and *neat* and filled them with new meaning.

A word of caution needs to be given in regard to the very meaningful phrase in 1 John 4:8 and 16 that "God is love." John never invites his readers to reverse this phrase to say that, "love is God." This would be demonic because it would misrepresent God. John is only teaching us that God gives meaning to love, and would never say that the ideal of love is our god. Love in the New Testament is not an ideal, but a relationship. Those who have a relationship with a loving God will be motivated to love, and they will not have to fear the judgment of God. God's love casts out fear.

The Test of Faith (5:1-13)

The test of faith has to do with believing in Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God (5:1 and 5). Such belief can be considered faith because it results in obeying the commandments, which are never burdensome to the one who believes. Whoever believes and obeys the commandments expresses faith and is born of God.

There are three witnesses: the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood (5:8). These three relate to Confirmation, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Water recalls the Baptism of Jesus, blood commemorates the Cross of Jesus, and the Spirit gives a new birth to the new believer. The new birth (John 3:1-15) results in eternal life (John 3:15), and eternal life is to know Jesus Christ (John 17:3). He who has the Son has life, but he who does not have the Son has not life (5:12).

There is an additional sentence in the King James Version of 1 John 5:7, which has been universally rejected. It is: “For there are three that bear record in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” It was first quoted by Priscillian, the Spanish heretic, in 385 C.E., and slowly made its way into the Latin Vulgate, but since it cannot be found in Jerome’s Latin text, nor in any Greek manuscript earlier than the 15th century it is rejected by conservative and liberal scholars alike.

CONCLUSION (5:14-21)

John concludes with a call to prayer and a warning about idolatry. John does not urge his readers to pray for “mortal” sins, for they are unforgivable. The rest of the New Testament recognizes only one unforgivable sin, and that is the sin against the Holy Spirit. It is described in Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10; and in Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26; and 12:16-17. The sin against the Holy Spirit is attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the Devil and persistently rejecting the one who makes forgiveness possible. John believes the Gnostics have done the latter. They have felt no need to repent and seek forgiveness, and in John’s opinion, they have committed a mortal sin. There remains no reason to pray for them. One might add that there are plenty of practicing Gnostics today, who find it difficult to believe that they stand in need of forgiveness, for they have no understanding that they have sinned.

The warning about idolatry is very much related to all this discussion about mortal sins. Sin is but an expression of one’s faith, or lack of it. The Gnostics have not believed in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. They have exchanged the reality of Jesus Christ with a phantom Christ, fashioned according to their own Gnostic beliefs. The Greek word for *idol* is “eidolon,” which has the meaning of “shadow” or “phantom.” John’s warning to the Church is not to set its affection on shadows or phantoms, as the Gnostics have done, for that is nothing less than idolatry itself. Idols are a serious threat because they look so much like the real thing and that is why they are so dangerous. Fortunately they can be recognized and rejected, and that has been part of John’s purpose in this letter. He wants the Church to recognize Gnosticism as a serious form of idolatry and heresy, which results in immoral behavior, which Christians should avoid at all costs.

THE ACID TESTS

What are the acid tests that determine whether one is a Christian or not? According to 1 John they consist of the confession that God has entered our world in Jesus Christ (human flesh), a willful rejection of sin, and an intentional adoption of love as the way of life. “There are only two kinds of people in the end:” wrote C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*, “those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.”² To avoid making that self-choice that leads to Hell, we must first recognize our sinful condition and choose God’s will. In 1 John 1:8-9, John warns, “If we say that

² C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1946), p. 72.

we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The first step towards God is simply to recognize one’s sinful condition, confess it, and trust in God for the promised forgiveness.

It is not enough simply to confess our sins and trust in God to forgive us. We must also recognize that God has approached us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the incarnation of God, which means that in him God has appeared to us in the flesh. If that is true, and the Christian believes that it is, then we will cease to *willfully* sin. In 1 John 3:6, John says, “No one who abides in him (Jesus Christ) sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.” To willfully sin, then, is to fail the first of the *acid* tests. It means that we do not abide in Jesus Christ and cannot call ourselves a Christian. “Everyone who commits sin,” John continues in 1 John 3:8, “is a child of the devil.... The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”

The second acid test has to do with love. In 1 John 3:10, both tests are described: “The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.” In the first acid test one aims at the righteousness of God and in the second acid test one aims at loving one another, including those who might not love us back. This acid test is described in 1 John 4:7: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” This does not mean that *love* is God. Love is one of the many attributes of God. It is an adjective, not a noun. It describes one of the essential characteristics of God, a characteristic so essential that if we do not *willfully* imitate it, we fail the acid test. It means that we do not even know God. “By this we know that we love the children of God,” concludes 1 John 5:2, “when we love God and obey his commandments.” To those who have met God in the person of Jesus Christ, the commandments are not burdensome. They enable the believer to conquer sin and overcome fear. The reward of passing these acid tests is eternal life.

SOME KEY VERSES FROM 1 JOHN

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:5

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

By this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments

1 John 2:3

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

1 John 4:20-21

27
TOUGH LOVE
2 John 1-13

*And this is love,
that we walk according to his commandments;
this is the commandment
just as you have heard it from the beginning
—you must walk in it.*

2 John 6

The First E-Letters

27. TOUGH LOVE (1-13)	
INTRODUCTION (1-3)	
From the Elder (John)	To the Elect Lady and Her Children
THE PRIMACY OF TRUTH AND LOVE (4-6)	
The Truth about Jesus	The Necessity to Love
WARNING AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINE (7-11)	
Believe Jesus came in the Flesh (7)	Follow the Teachings of Jesus (9)
CONCLUSION (12-13)	
The Elder Intends to Visit	The Children of the Elect Lady send Greetings

27. TOUGH LOVE

2 John 1-13

INTRODUCTION (1-3)

Two descriptive words are used for the first time in John's introduction. They are *Elder* and *Elect Lady*.

Elder is descriptive of himself, and in the Greek it means "old man." Elders were also given a place of honor in the Jewish Synagogue, and the Church simply took it over. It soon came to be used of all Church leaders who exercised oversight and pastoral care in the congregation. John fits naturally into this kind of a description, but this is the first time he calls himself an Elder?

The *Elect Lady* is a little more difficult to understand. Most Scholars think that the *Elect Lady* is a Church, and that her children are its members. If this is true, then "the children of your elect sister" (13) would have a similar meaning. Earl Palmer disagrees and suggests that John is writing to a personal friend. He suggests that *Lady* in Aramaic is equivalent to the name *Martha*. Supporting this theory, he continues, is the fact that John does not name the city in which the Church was located. This would have been unusual for John, who names cities in the Book of Revelation.

THE PRIMACY OF TRUTH AND LOVE (4-6)

We do not find any new themes in 2 John, only a summary of the same themes dealt with in 1 John. Those themes are (1) the truth about Jesus Christ and (2) the necessity to love. All who recognize Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God and Savior of the world will obey the commandment of love. Truth and love are primary, and all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, will obey the commandments, including the commandment to love as Christ loved.

WARNING AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINE (7-11)

From the very earliest times, traveling evangelists and teachers stayed as guests in the homes of Christians. They did this because congregations also gathered in homes, and the Inns in most Roman cities were not very nice places. As these wandering evangelists and teachers grew in number, it was inevitable that some of them would teach false doctrines, the most widespread in this time being that of the Gnostics or those who denied the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh (7). According to John there is no obligation to receive such persons into Christian homes, and to do so involves Christians in the spreading of such a person's false teachings. John advises that teachers and evangelists be questioned, and if they do not believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, they not be received. This might be called tough love, but it was necessary for the infant Church to survive. The early second-century Church was still struggling with how to accept or reject visiting teachers. *The Didache* offers the following advice:

Now, you should welcome anyone who comes your way and teaches you all we have been saying. But if the teacher proves himself a renegade and by teaching otherwise contradicts all this, pay no attention to him.... Now about apostles and prophets: Act in line with the Gospel precept. Welcome every apostle on arriving, as if he were the Lord. But he must not stay beyond one day. In case of necessity, however, the next day too. If he stays three days, he is a false prophet...if he asks for money he is a false prophet (Did. 11.1-6).

CONCLUSION (12-13)

John intends to visit the *Elect Lady and her children*, that is this congregation or his special friend. He sends greetings from the children of her *Elect Sister*. He was probably writing from Ephesus to a congregation or person within the Roman Province of Asia. Although he does not name the location, he does indicate a preference to talking over writing. This implies that this is possible, even for a man who is growing old.

TRUTH AND LOVE

Tough love requires the combining of truth with love. Truth is never to be set aside for the sake of love. That's why John advises in 2 John 10: "Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person." Truth is as important as love. One of the things that the Church can never do is to place love above truth. The truth I am talking about has to do with the revelation of and the teachings of Jesus. John, who was known as the Apostle of Love, writes in 2 John 6: "And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments...." Just what are his commandments? The most logical answer would be Jesus' interpretation of the Ten Commandments and those teachings we find in the Sermon on the Mount. A reading of Matthew 5-7 makes us aware of how much more difficult it is for us to obey the teachings of Jesus than it was to obey the commandments of Moses. When Jesus gives commandments they are related to summarizing Moses' commandments, with an emphasis on loving God and the neighbor. In the Sermon on the Mount, he spiritualizes the commandments and goes beyond loving the neighbor to including the enemy. That's tough love.

Our willingness to obey Jesus' commandments and teachings hinges on our understanding of just who he is. The central truth of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who became human, died for our sins on the cross, and was raised from the dead on the third day. We may disagree over peripheral matters, but to disagree over the central truth would be heresy. The central truth validates our need to love as we have been loved in Christ. Without that central truth, we have no motivation to love like Jesus loves.

28
THE ISSUE
OF LEADERSHIP
3 John 1-15

*I have no greater joy than this,
to hear that my children are walking in truth.*

3 John 4

The First E-Letters

28. THE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP (1-15)		
INTRODUCTION (1)		
From the Elder (John)	To Gaius	
GAIUS IS PRAISED (2-8)		
Spiritual (2)	Truth (3-4)	Love (6)
DIOTREPES IS CONDEMNED (9-10)		
He refuses John's Authority (9)	He makes false charges (10)	
THE FAVORABLE TESTIMONY ABOUT DEMETRIUS (11-12)		
CONCLUSION (5:14-21)		

28. THE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP

3 John 1-15

INTRODUCTION (1)

This letter is without any doubt sent to an individual named Gaius. Since Gaius was one of the most common names in the New Testament world, we cannot identify him with any particular person. We know of at least three persons named Gaius. There was the Gaius from Macedonia, active right there in Ephesus, who is mentioned in Acts 19:29 as a companion of Paul's. In Acts 20:4 Gaius' home town is given as Derbe. Another Gaius, from Corinth, is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and Romans 16:23. Paul baptized this Gaius. We do not know whether there is one or several men named Gaius, or whether any of these is the same Gaius to whom John is writing his letter. A fourth century tradition identifies the Gaius of 3 John as a man who later became the bishop of Pergamum.

GAIUS IS PRAISED (2-8)

John praises Gaius for his hospitality to strangers. Who are these strangers? They were traveling missionaries or evangelists, who relied upon members of the Churches instead of non-believers for lodging. They were certainly known by John, if not actually sent by John. The emerging issue is John's own leadership, which Gaius gladly accepts. John praises Gaius for the *truth* he believes and the *love* he practices.

DIOTREPES IS CONDEMNED (9-10)

Diotrephes challenges John's leadership. John does not accuse him of any false teaching. The problem is Diotrephes' resistance to apostolic authority. The accusations made against him are that he is arrogant, spreads evil rumors, refuses to welcome the brethren, and puts people out of the Church. John had previously advised Christians not to be hospitable to false teachers (2 John 10-11). The issue here is not false teaching, but rebellion against authority. Diotrephes saw John, and those he might have sent, as interfering with his leadership in the congregation.

John mentions something he has written. Nothing is known of it, and so we can only assume that it was a letter of apostolic counsel, which has since been lost to the Church. Two unusual words are used in this section. The first is *ekklesia*, which is a word for "Church." Although Paul uses it extensively, John only uses it here and in the Book of Revelation. The second is translated as *prating* in the King James Version. In the New Revised Standard Version the word is simply explained in terms of "spreading false charges." The word means, "to talk nonsense, to gossip."

THE FAVORABLE TESTIMONY ABOUT DEMETRIUS (11-12)

Everyone has given a favorable testimony about Demetrius. Who is this Demetrius? He might have been the leader of John's delegation, who was rejected by Diotrephes. Since

there was no mail service, Demetrius probably carried this letter to Gaius. Should we connect this Demetrius with Demetrius the Silversmith, who opposed Paul with such anger in Ephesus (Acts 19:25-27), or with Demas (a shortened version of Demetrius), who fell in love with the world and left the faith (2 Timothy 4:10)? Could it be that this Demetrius was converted for a short time? We simply do not know. All we know is that the Demetrius, who carries this letter to Gaius, is in good standing with John and the Church.

CONCLUSION (13-15)

John concludes this letter much as he concluded the letter to the “Elect Lady and her children.” (2 John 1 and 13) He had much more to write, but would rather tell them in person. The Gospel of John was concluded in much the same way: “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25) John not only had a lot to say, but he said it very profoundly.

TRUTH AND AUTHORITY

We believe truth and we practice love. Those who lead are expected to understand that their authority must be based on two central truths of the Christian Faith, the cross and the resurrection. When they move away from these central truths, they lose their authority. Their authority is also undermined when they do not practice the love that was taught by Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Leaders, according to John, are “co-workers with the truth.” (3 John 8) The truth does not reside in any leader. When a leader thinks that his or her opinions represent the truth, the result is arrogance and manipulation, which are not characteristics of good Christian leadership. Rather, these characteristics are to be identified with evil; hence, we must be very careful how we define truth and exercise authority. One of the most important qualities of Christian leadership is humility.

29
BUILD
YOURSELVES UP
Jude 1-25

*But you, beloved, build yourselves up
on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit;
keep yourselves in the love of God;
look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ
that leads to eternal life.*

Jude 20-21

The First E-Letters

29. BUILD YOURSELVES UP! (1-25)

INTRODUCTION (1-4)

From Jude

To Those Who are Called

FALSE TEACHERS (5-16)

Gnosticism (Special Knowledge)

Antinomianism (Freedom from the Law)

The Angels
(6)

Sodom and Gomorrah
(7)

Balaam
(11)

Korah
(11)

EXHORTATIONS (17-23)

Faith and Prayer
(20)

Love and Obedience
(21)

Mercy for the Wavering
(21)

THE BENEDICTION (24-25)

29. BUILD YOURSELVES UP!

Jude 1-25

INTRODUCTION

The Author

Tradition identifies the author as Jude (Judas), a half-brother of Jesus, and younger brother of James (not the Disciple). Liberal scholarship rejects this tradition, but admits that it is hard to conceive of anyone taking on the obscure name of Jude to write an authoritative general letter to the Churches.

The Date

A date generally attached to this letter is 80 C.E., but there is some internal evidence to suggest a later date. Some have suggested dates as late as 150 C.E.

The Place

Nothing is known about where this letter was written or to whom it was written. We only know that, it was written by a Jew to Jewish Christians, and they could be part of the dispersion. It has been suggested that because of the polished Greek, the readers lived in Syria, Asia Minor, or Egypt.

The Purpose

The purpose is clear. The letter was written to warn Christians of false teachers who had penetrated their fellowship, even to the extent of being present in their love feasts (12). Not much is said about the content of their false teachings, but much is said about their behavior and morality. By their fruits you shall know them. Like the author of 2 Peter, Jude draws upon Old Testament and Apocryphal imagery to denounce false teachers and their teaching.

The Outline

- A. Introduction (1-4)
- B. False Teachers (5-16)
- C. Exhortations (17-23)
- D. Benediction (24-25)

1-4	5-16	17-23	24-25
Introduction	False Teachers	Exhortations	Benediction

INTRODUCTION (1-4)

In the introduction we are told who is writing, but we know nothing about those to whom the letter is intended, other than most of them follow the truth. Is this really a general letter to the Churches, or is it specifically written to one congregation? The consensus is that it is written to Churches in general, but there is reason to believe that Jude has specific persons and their behavior in mind.

FALSE TEACHERS (5-16)

Most of the attack on the false teachers is on their behavior and immorality. What is the content of their false teachings? Claude Thompson suggests that it was twofold: Gnosticism and Antinomianism. Gnosticism was the teaching on the part of some that they had special knowledge (gnosis) concerning salvation and that all matter (flesh) was evil. Antinomianism is the teaching that a person living within the faith is free from observing the law. We still have these false teachings present within the Church today. There are those who believe that they alone know the way and there are those suggesting a new morality, which in practice becomes nothing more than the old immorality. The emphasis is clearly on the immorality of these false teachers, which demonstrates the importance of believing the right things. What we believe determines how we will live and act.

God will judge our beliefs and our actions. He has done so with his angels, with Sodom and Gomorrah, Balaam’s error, and Korah’s rebellion. Much of Jude’s imagery is similar to that found in 2 Peter, but Jude also draws upon the *Apocryphal Assumption of Moses* and the *Book of Enoch*. It must be remembered that New Testament Scripture was not yet established and so these early authors quoted what was familiar to and respected by their readers.

EXHORTATIONS (17-23)

Jude does not think that it is sufficient to rail against these false teachers, and so he suggests some positive action that members of the Church might take. The key verses are 20-21. Three things are being suggested: (1) Prayer. Christians are to pray in the Holy Spirit, who not only inspires prayer (Romans 8:26), but leads believers into Christian living. He is the sanctifier of life. (2) Obedience. To keep oneself in the love of God involves the acknowledgment of God’s gift of love with a corresponding human response. Christians do not violate the love of God with immorality. Human obedience is gratitude for divine love. (3) Expectation. Two things are to be expected, judgment and

eternal life. Judgment yields both condemnation and rewards. Christians can exercise patience because they know that God will reward the faithful and bring evildoers to justice. There is always hope that evildoers will be brought to repentance, that they too might experience the mercy of God.

BENEDICTION (24-25)

A benediction concludes this Letter like a breath of fresh air. Jude has had to deal with some very unpleasant things. One would expect him to end with a warning, but he ends with a doxology of praise and confidence. Although Christians may have to live in the midst of sin, God can keep them from falling. This is no temporary help, but that which will be sustained right up to the time when we will be ever with the Lord in glory.

OVERCOMING SIN WITH GRACE

In verses 20-21, Jude calls for prayer and obedience: “But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” He is convinced that while one is saved by divine grace, there is some form of cooperation required on the part of the believer. An anonymous author once described it as follows:

There are two natures in my breast:
One I love and one I hate.
The one I feed will dominate.

Jude lifts up the seriousness of sin by listing Old Testament and Apocryphal examples of divine judgment on human sinfulness, but his conclusion is that sin can be overcome. Sin is but a drop of water in an ocean of divine love and grace. That is why he concludes his brief letter in verses 24-25 with a doxology of praise. This is one of the most beautiful doxologies in all of Scripture.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Unbelievers may not be interested in standing before the Lord without blemish, but that desire dominates the Christian. While we cannot perfect ourselves, we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who was given to sanctify us. Our primary goal in life is to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, who can take us into the presence of God where our sinful condition will be covered with divine grace.

FAVORITE BIBLE PASSAGES

When asked what their favorite Bible passages are people will name verses from all over the Bible. Many will come from the Old Testament and many from the Letters. Some will even name passages out of the Book of Revelation. Not everyone quotes only the words of Jesus. Some point to passages which interpret Jesus' teachings. Below are a few favorite verses that compliment one another.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

John 3:16

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Ephesians 2:8-10

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

2 Corinthians 5:17

THE AFTERWORD

The letters give us a full range of the problems faced by the church of the first century. Those of us who have tried to lead a congregation recognize many of these same problems in the contemporary church. These letters are as important to read and study as are the four Gospels. Some of them appeared on the scene prior to the Gospels. They also give us insights into how Jesus' first followers understood his message and how they did their best to take it to the world. These were truly the first e-letters. They were meant to keep the church focused on its true mission of taking the Good News to all the world.

I don't think it matters where one starts, but I have found it very helpful to read and study all of them, beginning with Romans and ending with Jude. Since Jude is so similar to parts of 2 Peter, I would study Jude at the same time as 2 Peter. I would also group the three letters of John together. All three of these letters are very brief. Beyond these changes, I would study them just as they appear in the Bible. Romans is the most theological of the letters and it is followed by the Corinthian letters that describe more problems than anyone would want to solve.

One might wonder why I have left out John's letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. They certainly do a good job of analyzing how the various congregations are doing with their mission. Some of these letters are addressed to the same congregations. Wouldn't these seven letters make a good summary and conclusion to these twenty-one letters? They sure do and they should be studied, but I prefer to study them in the context of the first century church. That's why I have put together a study of Acts and Revelation and called it, An Explosion of Faith. The entire New Testament series is listed below:

The Messengers: A Study of the Four Gospels

An Explosion of Faith: A Study Acts and Revelation

The First e-Letters: A Study of the Letters

Pictures and updates to these studies and other books I have written can be found on my Web Site.

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A BIBLE STUDY SCHEDULE

ROMANS

Dates

1. The World's Need and God's Gift (Romans 1:1—4:25)....._____
2. New Life in Christ (Romans 5:1—8:39)_____
3. Israel in the Plan of God (Romans 9:1—11:36)....._____
4. Christian Moral Conduct (Romans 12:1—16:16)....._____

CORINTHIANS

5. Factions in the Church (1 Corinthians 1:1—4:21)....._____
6. Christians and Pagans (1 Corinthians 5:1—11:1)....._____
7. Church Life and Worship (1 Corinthians 11:2—14:40)....._____
8. Resurrection and Final Messages (1 Corinthians 15:1—7:16)_____
9. Paul's Ministry in Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:1—7:16)_____
10. An Offering and Defense (2 Corinthians 8:1—13:14)....._____

GALATIANS

11. Justifying Faith & Unifying Love (Galatians 1:1—6:18)....._____

EPHESIANS

12. Salvation and Unity in Christ (Ephesians 1:1—6:24)....._____

PHILIPPIANS

13. Joy and Unity in Christ (Philippians 1:1—4:23)_____

COLOSSIANS

14. The Visible Image of the Invisible God (Colossians 1:1—4:18)....._____

THESSALONIANS

15. Wait for the Lord in Hope! (1 Thessalonians 1:1—5:28)_____
16. Work for that Day is Coming! (2 Thessalonians 1:1—3:28)_____

TIMOTHY

- 17. On Fulfilling the Ministry (1 Timothy 1:1—6:21).....
- 18. On Maintaining the Faith (2 Timothy 1:1—4:22).....

TITUS

- 19. On Leading the Churches (Titus 1:1—3:15).....

PHILEMON

- 20. Undermining Slavery (Philemon 1-25).....

HEBREWS

- 21. The Superiority of Christ (Hebrews 1:1—10:39)
- 22. The Primacy of Faith (Hebrews 11:1—13:25).....

JAMES

- 23. James: The Fruit of Faith (James 1:1—5:20).....

PETER AND JUDE

- 24. A Call to Hope and Holiness (1 Peter 1:1—5:14).....
- 25. Getting Ready for the End (2 Peter 1:1—3:18)
[29] Jude: By Their Fruits You Shall Know Them (1:1-25)

JOHN

- 26. 1 John: The Testing of Faith and Morals (1:1—5:21).....
[27] 2 John: Tough Love (1:1-13)
[28] 3 John: The Issue of Leadership (1:1-15)