

# Study 8: Corinthians

## Romans & Galatians

These four letters were all written during Paul's third journey around AD 56-58. First Corinthians from Ephesus, Second Corinthians from Macedonia, Romans and Galatians from Corinth.

### ***Introduction***

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### ***Homework and preparation for next week:***

- Read the notes as a review of the study
- How is the Corinthian church different to churches today that you are familiar with?
  - How does Paul approach the issues?
  - How does that set an example for us?
- Read the first and last chapters of Philipians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon
  - Who is with Paul during his Roman house arrest?
  - Skim read the rest of Colossians, and Ephesians

## Notes for study 8: Corinthians, Romans & Galatians

### **Introduction**

These four letters were all written during Paul's third journey around AD 56-58. First Corinthians was written from Ephesus, and Second Corinthians from Macedonia (probably Philippi or Thessalonica). Romans and Galatians were written from Corinth, and bear a lot of similarity to the issues dealt with in Second Corinthians.

### **Corinthians – Background**

Paul spent 2½ years in Ephesus, and was in touch with what was happening elsewhere. He had previously spent 18 months in Corinth and established the church there (Acts 18:1-18), and the reports he heard about Corinth (whilst in Ephesus) were not good (1 Cor 1:11). Along with the reports came a lot of questions, and Paul answers them in the letter we know as First Corinthians. He almost certainly made a brief trip to Corinth whilst at Ephesus (not recorded by Luke).

After leaving Ephesus, Paul made another trip to Corinth in late AD 57 and stayed 3 months (Acts 20:2-3), travelling by way of Macedonia. He hoped to meet Titus in Troas and then go to Corinth, but when he didn't find him he travelled to Macedonia. Titus finally arrived with good news of the brethren, and Paul wrote the second Corinthians letter from Thessalonica or Philippi.

The culture of the Corinthian church has been described as follows:

Imagine a church wracked by divisions. Powerful leaders promote themselves against each other, each with his band of followers. One of them is having an affair with his stepmother, and, instead of disciplining him, many in the church boast of his freedom in Christ to behave in such a way. Believers sue each other in secular courts; some like to visit prostitutes. As a backlash against this rampant immorality, another faction in this church is promoting celibacy – complete sexual abstinence for all believers – as the Christian ideal. Still other debates rage about how decisively new Christians should break from their pagan past. Disagreements about men's and women's roles in the church add to the confusion. As if all this were not enough, alleged prophecies and speaking in tongues occur regularly, but not always in constructive fashion. A significant number of these immature Christians do not even believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ!<sup>1</sup>

### **Corinth – The City**

The ancient city of Corinth had a reputation for corruption and immorality so that the phrase “*to live like a Corinthian*” meant to live a life of drunken and immoral debauchery. The city was prosperous because of the trade passing through the city, and the rewards of that prosperity were spent on immorality. The new city of Corinth (of Paul's time) rapidly developed the same reputation as the ancient city.

Corinth had many temples to Greek gods, and at the summit of the imposing mountain behind it – Acrocorinth – was a temple of the Greek god Aphrodite – the goddess of love, reported to support 1000 religious prostitutes. At the foot of the hill was the temple of Melicertes – the patron of seafarers, and the sea-god Poseidon was especially honoured at the Isthmus Games.

With such a reputation, at first glance it would not be a source of fertile ground for the gospel. It is not surprising that Paul says “...*I came to you...in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling...*” (1:2:1-3 NKJV), yet God assures Paul “...*I have much people in this city...*” (Acts 18:10).

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<sup>1</sup> Blomberg, Craig: The NIV Application Commentary – Quoted from Jenkins, F: Christ and Culture at Corinth, Florida College Lectures 1996.

The Corinthian culture had invaded the church. How could things deteriorate so badly in the four years after Paul had left? In the First Corinthian letter we see the church with the lid lifted off, and we get to see what is happening in the inside – and it’s not a pretty picture! Paul certainly would not have put up with the nonsense whilst he was there – and he wouldn’t have *walked away* and left them in a mess to sort out. Those with spiritual gifts and the elders and leaders in the congregation had responsibilities in teaching and leadership, but appeared to have failed.

After hearing about the problems and the things happening in Corinth, Paul wrote a stern letter of condemnation to them (now lost but referred to in 1:5:9), and made a short visit to Corinth whilst in Ephesus that is not recorded in Acts.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians – Date and Occasion**

The First letter was written from Ephesus – Paul says that he plans to “...wait in Ephesus until Pentecost...” (1:16:8-9) due to the *great and effectual door that had been opened* to him. He would have been in Ephesus for three Pentecosts – AD 55, AD 56 and AD 57.

Paul’s plans – including travel plans are quite firm:

- 1:16:1-2 He gives quite specific instruction concerning the collection
- He was intending to come soon to deal with the matter
- 1:16:5 Quite definite plans to go through Macedonia
- 1:16:10 Specific instructions regarding Timothy
- 1:16:12 Specific comments regarding Apollos

This puts the date of the letter as quite late in the time at Ephesus, in the early part of AD 57 during Paul’s third missionary journey.

Whilst we don’t have a record of the questions that the Corinthians asked Paul, we do have the answers that he gave in the first letter – and from that we can deduce the questions:

1. Should we have sexual relations, or complete abstinence? (1:7:1)
2. Should we remain unmarried? (1:7:10)
3. Should virgins marry, or remain celibate? (1:7:25)
4. Should we eat or not eat food offered to idols? (1:8:1)
5. How should the spiritual gifts be used? (1:12:1)
6. Should we contribute to the poor in Jerusalem? (1:16:1)

### **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians – Brief Outline**

Paul deals in turn with 12 different issues:

1:1:1-9	Introduction
1:1:10-1:4:21	Division and leadership issues
1:5:1-13	An issue of incest
1:6:1- 11	External litigation of an internal dispute
1:6:12-20	Going to prostitutes
1:7:1-24	Sex and marriage
1:7:25-40	Those never married
1:8:1 – 1:11:1	Eating food offered to idols
1:11:2-16	Head covering in worship
1:11:17-34	The Lord’s supper
1:12:1- 1:14:40	Spiritual gifts
1:15:1-58	The resurrection
1:16:1-11	The collection
1:16:12-24	Conclusion and travel plans

Paul kept abreast of the happenings in Corinth by the frequency of trade between Corinth and Ephesus, and travelling brethren. In fact Paul is quite specific "...*Chloe's household have reported to me that ...*" (1:1:11). He has already written them the "lost letter" apparently condemning of their practices (1:5:9), and we don't know whether his quick trip (not reported by Luke) to Corinth during his stay at Ephesus was before or after the first letter.

In the earliest parts of the letter, Paul mentions those he baptised, and those he didn't. Several things are clear from this. Firstly, he had a very strong knowledge and relationship with the brethren. He knew them, even though he had not personally baptised them. It is a period of around 3 ½ to 4 years since Paul left, and things in the church are falling apart. Had Paul – or one of the other missionaries – stayed in the church for the duration, then things would never have digressed to where they had. His arrival back in Ephesus was only around 6 or 9 months after he had left Corinth, and during the entire time of his stay there he would have had a communication line opened that allowed him to be fully aware of the things that were happening as the world invaded the church.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians – Date and Occasion**

From Ephesus, Paul planned to move on, and outlined his travel plans in 1:16:5-6. He sent Titus to Corinth to correct the problems, and expected to meet him at Troas (2:2:12-13) and then go to Corinth. When Titus wasn't there, he consequently changed his plans, and went into Macedonia first. He responds to the Corinthians criticism of the change in the second letter. As Paul "*passed through*" Macedonia, he describes his feelings at this time in 2:7:5-7 "*For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn--conflicts on the outside, fears within.* <sup>6</sup> *But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,* <sup>7</sup> *and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.*" (2:1:15- 24 NIV).

He found Titus either in Thessalonica or Philippi, with a report from Corinth, and immediately wrote the second letter. This puts the date of the letter as late AD 57 during Paul's third missionary journey, and only about 6 months after the first letter.

Titus reported that whilst he was received well in Corinth, things were still not as they ought to have been. The factionalism had not been resolved, and despite Paul's previous instruction, they had failed to have the collection ready. The Judaisers had also arrived as false prophets and masquerading as the apostles of Christ. The occasion of the letter is therefore Paul's response to the news from Corinth, and his instructions to them to sort out the matters before he arrived in person to sort them out himself.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians – Brief Outline**

The following outline was adapted from Fee & Stuart<sup>2</sup>:

2:1:1-11	Introduction
2:1:12 -2:2:13	Explanation of a change of plans
2:2:14 – 2:7:4	Paul as a minister of the New Covenant
2:7:5 - 16	The Explanation renewed
2:8:1 - 2:9:150	Have the collection ready
1:10:1-2:13:14	Defence against false apostles
2:13:1- 10	Final Exhortations
2:13:11 - 2:13:13	Final Greetings

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<sup>2</sup> Fee & Stuart, p. 336

The letter is difficult and hard to follow. One writer<sup>3</sup> describes it as:

“...something like turning on the television in the middle of a very complicated play. People are talking and things are happening, but we’re not at all sure who some of the characters are or what the plot is. In fact, in coming to this letter from 1 Corinthians, one has the sense of entering a new world...”

The second letter is intensely personal, and at times the connections between the first and second letters are hard to make. Both letters are full of “*doctrine*”, and whilst some things had changed as a result of the first letter, the inside is still not a pretty picture. The factionalism had still not been resolved, and the Judaisers tried to discredit Paul.

Paul’s apostleship and authority had apparently been challenged. He writes as *an apostle of Christ Jesus (2:1:1)*, when the Corinthians had been *demanding proof that Christ was speaking through him (2:13:3)*. As an apostle, he *had not failed the test (2:13:6)*, and he could not do anything that was *against the truth, but only (those things that were) for the truth (2:13:8)*. If there was any doubt about who Paul was, they themselves knew full well that *the Lord gave him the authority (of an apostle) (2:13:10)*.

God is a *God of comfort and compassion (2:1:3)*. Despite *all our troubles we ourselves are comforted by God (2:1:4)*. Just remember *the sufferings of Christ (2:1:5) who was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God’s power (2:13:4)*. Though some people might think *we are weak, we display the same kind of weakness and power as Christ (2:13:3-4)*.

It is time for the Corinthians to *examine and test themselves (2:13:5) as this is the third time* that he has had to correct them, and *he previously gave them a second warning (2:13:2)*. Even though *God is a God of compassion and comfort (2:1:3)* Paul will not hesitate to set things in order and *will not spare those who sinned earlier when he comes (2:13:2)*. The reason that *he is writing the letter is so that he will not need to be harsh in the use of his authority when he arrives (2:13:10)*.

### **Galatia – The Region**

Galatia was a provincial region in the central area of Asia Minor. The name came from the Gauls (French people) who inhabited the region. They were part of the Celtic race (which includes the French, Irish, Welsh, and Scots). Tending to stay in their own clusters, they kept their own language (as well as speaking Greek), and very much their own culture. Although Celtic, the Gauls were very much French. Jerome suggests that a Galatian and a Frenchman could have conversed with ease as late as the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Julius Caesar described their nature as “...fickle in their resolve and fond of change, and not to be trusted...” Thierry describes them as “...Frank, impetuous, impressible, eminently intelligent, but at the same time extremely changeable, inconstant, fond of show, perpetually quarrelling, the fruit of excessive vanity...”

### **Galatians – Background**

Galatians stands alone in the New Testament for several reasons. Firstly, it is the only letter in the New Testament that is addressed to a **specific** group of churches (ignoring Revelation). The character of the letter is also unique in the way that Paul addresses them “...*You stupid idiots...*” and “...*what were you thinking...*”

Paul had passed through the southern region of Galatia twice on the first journey (Acts 13 & 14), which is often referred to as “The mission to the Galatians”. On the second journey, he travelled through the region again with Silas on his way to Europe (Acts 16: 1-6), and on the third journey,

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<sup>3</sup> Fee & Stuart, p.333

he again went “...over all the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening the disciples.” (Acts 18:23 NKJV). Two notable people in the New Testament from the Galatian region are Timothy from Lystra (Acts 16:1), and Gaius from Derbe (Acts 20:4).

### **Galatians – Date and Occasion**

The letter was written during Paul’s third missionary journey, most likely from Corinth. It has many similarities with the Roman letter, and both are thought to have been written during Paul’s three-month stay in Corinth (Acts 20:2-3). After being in Ephesus and Macedonia for about 3 years, Paul had heard about the problems in Galatia, even although he had been there earlier on the third journey, and also on the previous journeys.

The Judaisers had arrived and discredited Paul (“*he isn’t a real apostle – he isn’t one of the twelve*”) and almost certainly claiming to have the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem. They were commanding that in order to be a Christian it was necessary to become a Jew – *to keep the Law of Moses* – particularly the requirements of circumcision.

On the second journey, Paul came from the Jerusalem conference with a letter “*decree*” that emphatically stated that keeping the Law was **not** necessary for the Gentiles who believed, and a copy of that letter was left with the churches wherever they went (Acts 16:4). Soon after Paul’s visit on the third journey (his fourth visit) they fell prey to the Judaisers and they *turned around!*

The letter also shares many similarities with the second letter to the Corinthians, which was written from Philippi or Thessalonica not long beforehand. Soon after writing the Second Corinthian letter, Paul travelled to Corinth where he wrote the Galatian and Roman letters. The date of the Galatian letter is placed by the date of the Second Corinthian letter - the content of that letter clearly identify the timing as after Ephesus and before Corinth on the third journey. This places the time of writing at late AD 58.

### **Galatians – Brief Outline**

The main issues of the Galatian letter:

- Establishes the basis of OT Law & NT Covenant
- Justification is by faith (even in the OT case with Abraham)
- If we embrace the Law, where does it lead us?
- Jewish religion has nothing to offer, compared to Christianity!!!

The fickle characteristics of the Galatian churches can be seen in Luke’s record in Acts:

On the first journey at Pisidian Antioch, the Jews were at first really interested in Paul’s preaching in the synagogue, and the Gentiles are begging for more (13:42). Next week “...*the whole city has turned out to hear the gospel...*” The Jews became jealous of what Paul was able to do and rebelled and rejected Paul & Barnabas (as they did in most places), and then stirred up the rest of the people against them. As a result Paul & Barnabas were forced to leave (13:50).

In Iconium, “...*a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed...*” and they stayed there “...*a long time...*” but eventually the division between the Jews and the Greeks came up again. The Jews make a violent attempt to abuse and stone them, and Paul & Barnabas flee to Lystra.

In Lystra, Paul heals a man who had been lame from birth and Paul & Barnabas are held up “...*as gods come down in the form of men...*” They are held in such esteem in the city that “...*they could hardly restrain the people from offering sacrifices to them...*” (14:18). But soon after, the Jews come down from Antioch

and Iconium and persuade the multitudes to turn against them. Paul is taken out of the city and stoned – being *left for dead*.

Paul is miraculously healed, and the next day, he and Barnabas head to Derbe. There “...*they preached the gospel and made many disciples...*” and then head back through the region again “...*strengthening the disciples...and appointing elders in every church...*” (14:21-23).

The above passages clearly show the fickleness of the churches as they overwhelmingly embraced the gospel at first, but are soon turned against Paul & Barnabas when the Jews arrive and speak against them. This sets the *character and background* to the letter to the Galatians, and it is *precisely* in the light of such fickle character that the letter is written.

The letter can be broken into three groups of two chapters each. The Judaisers had questioned Paul’s apostleship, and he spends about 1/3 of the letter establishing his authority for the things he said and did (ch 1 & 2).

One characteristic of the letter is Paul’s outright criticism of the Galatians for their fickleness: *You stupid idiots!* (3:1), *What were you thinking of!* (3:3). He then makes a discussion on the purpose of the Law (ch 3 & 4), and the relationship between the covenants (4:22 – 31).

Finally, he instructs them on getting their act together with exhortations to faithfulness (ch 5 & 6), the relationship between spirit & flesh (5:16-26), the practicalities of bearing one another’s burdens (6:1-6), doing good to all (6:10), closing with greetings & exhortations (6:11-18).

### **Rome – The City**

Rome was the greatest city in the world at that time, and as the headquarters of the Roman Empire, all roads led to Rome. The city would have had a population of well over a million people (including women, children and slaves).

As in most parts of the Empire, the Jewish population was present and active. When Paul finally arrived in Rome, one of the first things that he did was call together “...*the leaders of the Jews...*” (Acts 28:17). There were “*many*” of them (ie many leaders, so the Jewish population must have been substantial) who came back to Paul’s lodgings to learn further the things that he had to say, so the Jews were quite extensive in number in Rome. They were remote and isolated from the influence of the Jews in Jerusalem – for those in Jerusalem had not written or communicated anything about Paul to those in Rome, nor did they come to present their prosecution of Paul within the two year Statute of Limitation period. Whilst these events happened some time after Paul wrote the Roman letter, they do give us some insight into the society and culture of Rome.

Jerusalem was important religiously, an outpost to the Roman Empire, and a place those in Rome would rather not have to deal with. The Roman metropolis was the most important city in the world, and the politically active Sadducees in Rome would regard the city as great importance as the political centre of the Empire, and of far more relevance than the remote outpost of the Empire in Jerusalem. Rome was filled with many religious buildings. In a single year 28 BC, Augustus claimed that he restored 28 Temples.<sup>4</sup>

### **Romans – Background**

Paul had not yet visited the church at Rome (1:11), although a visit had long been his desire (15:22-23), and was still on his plans (15:24). What is particularly interesting about the Roman letter is the association with the brethren that Paul has already established.

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<sup>4</sup> The New Lion Handbook to the Bible, Lion Publishing plc, Oxford UK; ISBN 0 7459 3870 1; p 684  
Piecing together the New Testament by Graeme Offer

There are around 70 (I'm sure someone who has counted them will correct me on this) named people in the New Testament. There are 37 named (including a couple of unnamed but specific) people mentioned in the Roman letter – almost ½ of the named people in the New Testament are those that Paul knew in Rome, or were with Paul and known to the brethren in Rome. But remember, Paul has not been there yet!

Paul later did go to Rome – about 3 years later, and was to spend two years there under house arrest. He was then released and went on another missionary journey, only to return to Rome as a prisoner where he was put to death by beheading.

The Roman letter is therefore very different than the Galatian letter. Paul had visited the brethren in Galatia on 4 occasions before he wrote the letter. They knew him well, and he knew them well. Consequently he was able to respond quite specifically to the problems (Judaizers entering the church and demanding that the Gentiles obey the Law of Moses) that had arisen amongst the churches. Paul had lots of rapport with them. In contrast, although Paul knew many of the Roman brethren, he did not have the same rapport with them.

Paul must have met the brethren in Rome whilst they were travelling to places where he had been, – but he also knew *where they were*. He knew those who had moved from Ephesus back to Rome (Aquila and Priscilla for example). It is wonderful to think about the communication that was going on in the churches, with all of the logistical communication difficulties of the time.

### ***Romans – Date and Occasion***

The letter is similar to the Galatian letter, and probably written about the same time. It was written after the Corinthian letters, since Paul talks about the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem in all three (Rom 15:25-26; 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:19). But in the Corinthian letters, Paul is instructing them to prepare the collection so that he can take it to Jerusalem – he is still in the preparation stage. However in the Roman letter, Paul's travel plans are well established. He is about to leave for Jerusalem.

This places the time as Paul's third journey, and quite late in the journey – just before he is about to depart to go back to Syria and Judea. Paul spent three months in Greece at that time (Acts 20:3) working with the church in Corinth.

Further, Paul commends Phoebe to them, who was a servant of the church at Cenchrea – a port city for Corinth. She must have been making a trip to Rome, and Paul used the occasion of her trip to send the letter, along with his personal commendation of her (16:1). He also sends greetings from Gaius (16:23) who was looking after Paul. Gaius was baptised in Corinth (1 Cor 1:14). And then there is Erastus the city's director of Public Works (NIV) or Treasurer (NKJV) – a prominent position in the city's administration. It is probably the same Erastus that had ministered to Paul, and whom he sent to accompany Timothy to Macedonia (Acts 19:22).

Based on all of the collective (but mostly circumstantial) evidence, the letter was written from Corinth, during the third journey, just before Paul left to go back to Syria. This places the time at early in the year AD 58, as Paul wanted to be back in Jerusalem by Pentecost of that year.

Paul had hoped to come to Rome on several occasions, but had not been able to. He was now heading in the opposite direction (back to Syria / Judea), and so it was obvious that he would not be able to come on this particular journey. Phoebe was (apparently) going to Rome, and so that prompted him to send the letter to them with her.

The Judaizers had been troubling the churches everywhere, and it was only a matter of time before they began to trouble the church at Rome also. So, Paul writes the letter – not to deal with specific issues as he had had to do in other places (Galatia and Corinth for example), but as a letter of encouragement and of forewarning. It was to help them to be instructed in the faith.



## ***Romans – Brief Outline***

Romans is a classic letter of logic. Paul poses a question, then proceeds to answer it, with the answer leading into the next question. Look for the questions as you read through the letter.

He begins by proposing three groups of people:

1. The moral reprobate
2. The good moral and upstanding citizen
3. The pious Jew,

and concludes that all have sinned before God (3:23), and that justification can not come by any system of law, but only by faith in God (3:28). Abraham is held up as the great example of faith, and as a test-case (chapter 4). Adam is contrasted with Christ. What Adam introduced, Christ countered – and always victoriously (Chapter 5).

The new life in Christ is contrasted to our sinful past (Chapter 6), and Paul poses the first question:

1. Shall we continue sinning so that we can get more of God's grace? (6:1)
2. Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? (6:15)
3. Is the Law sinful? (7:7)
4. Has what is good killed me? (7:13)
5. Is there unrighteousness with God? (9:14)
6. Have the Gentiles become righteous without pursuing it? (9:30)
7. Has God cast away the Jews, His people? (11:1)
8. Has the Jews stumbling become an absolute disaster? (11:11)

He then provides practical examples of the Law of Christ in the lives of the saints. (Chapter 12). We must present our bodies as a living sacrifice – not *conformed* to the world but *transformed* by renewed minds. We need to use our talents to serve God, with loving consideration for one another. (Chapter 13) We must subject ourselves to civil authorities and pay our taxes – because God has ordained the civil governments, and sanctions the punishment of evil doers. Above all, we must love our neighbours as ourselves. (Chapter 14) There are differences between many brethren. We must consider the weaker brethren, with their consciences as well as our own. We must give account of ourselves to God, and have patience with one another – because that is what Christ has done with us.

Paul describes his life of sacrifice and travel plans (Chapter 15), and sends greetings to the brethren (Chapter 16).