

Week 5:

**Paul's Early Letters (Galatians, 1-2 Thessalonians,
1-2 Corinthians, and Romans)**

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Crossroads Community Church,

Paul's Early Letters and Travels:

-Paul's Conversion: AD 34

-The 1st Missionary Journey: AD 47-48

Galatians

-The Council of Jerusalem: AD 49

-The 2nd Missionary Journey: AD 49-51

1 and 2 Thessalonians

-The 3rd Missionary Journey: AD 51-54

1 and 2 Corinthians

Romans

How to Read an Epistle:

1. The letters in the New Testament are a combination of personal correspondence, public letter, and theological treatise.
2. The personal components tell us about the early church and give us principles for Christian living.
3. The public components instruct the church on how to live as the people of God in this age.
4. The treatise components provide the church with both sound theology and its application.
5. We must always carefully and precisely move from particular situations to universal application.

Introduction to Galatians:

Authorship: The author of Galatians is Paul the Apostle. His name appears in the "from line" in the letter itself, and the text reflects Pauline language, concerns, and structure. Much of Galatians is, in fact, autobiographical for the missionary apostle.

Date: Scholars debate the date of the writing of Galatians (scholars debate everything!), but the best evidence indicates that Paul wrote Galatians very early, just after he returned from his first missionary journey and before the gathering of all the apostles, pastors, and missionaries in Jerusalem to deal with the "Judaizer" heresy around AD 49.

Provenance: If the conclusions above about the date are correct, then Paul most likely wrote Galatians from Antioch, Jerusalem, or somewhere on the road between.

Purpose: While Paul and crew were traveling through Asia Minor on their first missionary journey, the church began encountering the "Judaizers," a heretical Jewish Christian sect that taught a different gospel than what Paul taught. They are described in Acts 15:1.

¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

In Galatians Paul describes the Judaizers as preachers of a different gospel who trouble the church and distort the truth (Gal 1:6-7). Before Paul led the church in dealing with this heresy (Acts 15) he had to combat it on the mission field from which he had just returned. After Paul left, the Judaizers moved into Galatia and the Galatians were persuaded by them. Galatians is Paul's appeal to those Christians to return to the true gospel of Jesus and the doctrine of justification by faith.

Outline of Galatians:

In Galatians Paul does two things. He begins by directly attacking the Judaizers and their false gospel, and then he concludes by appealing to the Galatians that they might live their lives in the Spirit and not by works of the flesh.

I. Rebuke of the False Gospel

Chapters 1–2 Autobiography and Defense of Apostleship

Chapters 3–4 Theological Defense of Justification by Faith

II. Appeal to Pursue Life in the Spirit

Chapters 5–6 Practical Results of Justification by Faith

Galatians Chapter by Chapter:

Chapter 1 - Paul appeals to the Galatians to cling to the true gospel of Jesus.

Chapter 2 - Paul defends his apostleship and tells of his confrontation with Peter.

Chapter 3 - Paul teaches the doctrine of justification and uses Abraham as his focus.

Chapter 4 - Paul demonstrates from the Old Testament that the doctrine of justification is not a new creation of his.

Chapter 5 - Paul argues that we have freedom from sin and freedom from the law in Christ.

Chapter 6 - Paul admonishes the church that to live in the Spirit means to care for one another in community.

The Meaning of Galatians:

From Galatians we can see four essential truths about the Judaizers. 1) They were a Christian sect. 2) They taught that keeping laws and ordinances were how we were made right before God. 3) They taught Jewish exclusivity in the Kingdom of God. And 4) they challenged Paul's gospel and his apostleship. All four of these essential truths are relevant to us. In Galatians we see a stern warning, that even the most devout of believers can be led astray into a different gospel if we aren't careful and practice vigilant discipleship. In Galatians we see the longing of the human heart to earn our salvation by being good. But God is clear; we aren't good, and we can never be good enough. The righteousness that we need from God must be a gift from God. This is the true doctrine of justification. In Galatians we see Paul's clear teaching that the good news is for everyone, and it is God's desire to build his church out of every nation and skin color and language. And in Galatians we see a call to be obedient to the Scriptures. The Bible is God's word, and only it tells us the truth about God and his creation, man's sinfulness, our salvation, and God's promised deliverance.

Introduction to 1 and 2 Thessalonians:

Authorship: The author of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians is Paul the Apostle. His name appears in the "from line" in the letter itself, and the text reflects Pauline language, concerns, and structure.

Date, Provenance, and Sequence: The story behind 1 and 2 Thessalonians is an exciting and fascinating one.

-Paul first preached in Thessalonica on the second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9).

-Paul was there for at least three weeks (Acts 17:2), probably longer (6 months).

-After Paul left Thessalonica, he went to Berea. Thessalonian Jews tracked him down there and incited the Bereans to expel him from the city (Acts 17:10-15).

-Paul continued his travels and was apparently reached with news of the Thessalonians by Timothy while in Corinth.

-Paul corresponds with the Thessalonians to answer questions and accusations brought by Timothy, most likely around AD 50.

Purpose: Upon a careful reading of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, several purposes come through. In 1 Thessalonians the unbelieving Jews had stirred up questions and accusations against Paul and the other missionaries. Paul answers those questions. He addresses the accusation that the missionaries were preaching in order to fatten their wallets. Paul addresses several key misunderstandings about the end of the world. And Paul defends the authority of the apostles. In 2 Thessalonians Paul commends the church for enduring persecution, and he continues to correct their mistaken notions about the end of the world.

Outline of 1 Thessalonians:

As stated above, in 1 Thessalonians Paul answers accusations and questions stirred up among the Christians by hostile unbelieving Jews. Paul's answers and assertions can be best outlined as follows:

Chapters 1–3 Introduction and Personal Commendations

Chapters 4–5 Practical Instructions in Light of the Day of the Lord

1 Thessalonians Chapter by Chapter:

Chapter 1 - Paul Commends the Faith of the Thessalonians

Chapter 2 - The Story of the Salvation of the Thessalonians

Chapter 3 - Timothy's Report to Paul

Chapter 4 - A Description of the Coming of the Lord

Chapter 5 - How the Church Should Wait for the Coming of Jesus

Outline of 2 Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians is a continuation of 1 Thessalonians. Paul continues to deal with problems in the church: persecution and bad theology. Their theological problems still seem to revolve around misunderstandings of the coming of Christ.

Chapter 1	Greeting and Commendations
Chapter 2	More Teaching on the Day of the Lord
Chapter 3	Exhortations for Specific Problems in the Church

The Meaning of 1 and 2 Thessalonians:

There is much for the modern church to learn from the texts of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The gospel and the Holy Spirit that transformed the Thessalonians is the same gospel we believe and the same Holy Spirit that indwells us. And just as they were delivered by God from idols to serve the living God, so were we. Our idols were different from theirs, but we were no less lost. Additionally, modern misunderstandings about the coming of Christ abound in the modern church. About this Paul is clear: 1) we should live as a people who expect Christ to return at any moment; 2) the coming of Christ should encourage us to persevere in righteousness and good works; and 3) the coming of Christ is our great hope, because we don't wait for judgment; we wait for salvation!

Introduction to 1 and 2 Corinthians:

Authorship: The author of 1 and 2 Corinthians is the Apostle Paul. No one debates this anymore, not even the most skeptical of scholars. Paul's name is in the text of both letters, and these letters bear all of the features that mark a letter as genuinely Pauline: justification by faith, the Pauline style, the mention of the collection for the believers in Jerusalem, etc.

Date, Provenance, and Sequence: Reconstructing the timeline of the Corinthian epistles is challenging but possible to do with some certainty. Paul wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians and visited them at least three times. Below is the most likely sequence:

1. **First Visit** - Paul, on his second missionary journey, plants the church in Corinth (Greece) in AD 50-52 (see Acts 18).

2. **First Letter** - Paul, probably on the third missionary journey, writes the Corinthians a short letter about sexual immorality in the church (see 1 Cor 5). Scholars call this letter "Corinthians A." That letter is now lost to us, though the contents of the letter are clearly explained in 1 Corinthians.

3. **Second Letter** - Paul writes 1 Corinthians on the third missionary journey from Ephesus in AD 53-54. 1 Corinthians is a follow-up to and expansion of Corinthians A.

4. **Third Letter** - Paul gets word that the churches in Corinth were ignoring his teachings in 1 Corinthians, so he writes them a third letter. Paul calls this the "severe letter" and so do scholars (see 2 Cor 2 and 7). This letter also is now lost to us. A brief summary of its contents are in 2 Corinthians.

5. **Second Visit** - Paul visits Corinth to confront the churches on the problems there (see 2 Cor 2). Some scholars think this "painful visit" happens before the "severe letter" is sent.

6. **Fourth Letter** - Paul writes 2 Corinthians as an attempt to reconcile with the churches after his serious scolding of them. He is on his third missionary journey, probably in Macedonia around AD 54 or 55.

7. **Third Visit** - Paul visits Corinth for a third time (see Acts 20).

We are, technically speaking, missing two Corinthian epistles. Don't be alarmed by this. There is no indication that these letters ever circulated anywhere outside of the Corinthian churches and their content is summarized in 1 and 2 Corinthians. All evidence points to the fact that Paul disposed of these two letters because they were very specific to the circumstances of the Corinthian church and unnecessary once 1 and 2 Corinthians were written.

Purpose: The purpose of 1 and 2 Corinthians is somewhat involved. Paul had a long and difficult relationship with the churches in Corinth. Those churches were a mess. They were divided. They were theologically infantile. They were antagonistic toward Paul. And at the heart of all of their problems was an issue of sexual immorality. The churches had become accepting of a man who was "shacking up" with his step-mother. All of the other problems—the divisions, the bad doctrine, and the antagonism—developed as Paul tried to get the churches to deal with the issue. Paul wrote them letters and visited them, and many of his visits and letters were, by all accounts, quite unpleasant. By the time Paul writes 2 Corinthians, the problem is mostly solved and the churches are coming around to accepting of Paul's authority again.

Outline of 1 Corinthians:

Paul's letters to the Corinthians tackle the many problems in the church, and they are varied and many. In chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians Paul deals with divisions in the church. In chapters 4 and 15 he deals with the personal attacks against him. In chapter 11 Paul deals with abuses at and misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper. In chapters 5 and 6 he deals with the issue of sexual immorality in the church. In chapter 6 he also deals with lawsuits among believers. In chapter 15 Paul tackles some of the false doctrine in the church, especially concerning the resurrection of Jesus. And in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, Paul addresses their misunderstanding of spiritual gifts. Here is a basic outline of 1 Corinthians:

Chapters 1–4	Division in the Church
Chapters 5–6	Disorders in the Church
Chapter 7	Remarriage
Chapters 8–11	Christian Liberty, Paganism, and Worship
Chapters 12–14	Spiritual Gifts and Christian Liberty
Chapter 15	Resurrection
Chapter 16	Collection for the Poor, Conclusion

Outline of 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians is the fourth letter Paul wrote to the churches in Corinth. In that letter he is still dealing with problems and opponents, but their relationship is better and Paul is more encouraged.

Chapter 1	Greeting and Thanksgiving
Chapters 1-7	Paul's Apostolic Ministry
A.	His plans (Chapters 1-2)
B.	The character of (his) ministry (Chapters 3-7)
Chapters 8-9	The Collection for the Saints

Chapters 10-13 Paul Defends his Apostleship

Chapter 13 Conclusion

1 Corinthians Chapter by Chapter:

Chapter 1 - Greeting and thanksgiving

Chapter 2 - The difference between the spiritual person and the carnal person

Chapter 3 - God's prescription for a divided church

Chapter 4 - Faithfulness and humility in Christ's church

Chapter 5 - Sexual immorality in the church

Chapter 6 - Lawsuits in the church

Chapter 7 - Divorce and remarriage in the church

Chapter 8-9 - How to handle matters of conscience in the church

Chapter 10 - Idolatry in the church

Chapter 11 - The Lord's Supper in the church

Chapter 12 - Spiritual gifts in the church

Chapter 13 - Genuine gospel love

Chapter 14 - Spiritual gifts in the church service

Chapter 15 - The resurrection of Christ

Chapter 16 - Conclusion

2 Corinthians Chapter by Chapter:

Chapter 1 - Greeting and thanksgiving

Chapter 2 - The aftermath of Paul's last visit

Chapter 3 - Paul's confidence in the future of the Corinthians

Chapter 4 - Christians do not lose heart when suffering comes.

Chapter 5 - The church has been given the ministry of reconciliation.

Chapter 6 - The Christian and sexual immorality

Chapter 7 - Godly grief and godly joy in ministry

Chapter 8 - Giving generously

Chapter 9 - The collection for needy Christians in Jerusalem

Chapter 10 - Paul defends his ministry.

Chapter 11 - Paul defends his authority against the false teachers.

Chapter 12 - Paul prepares the Corinthians for another visit.

Chapter 13 - Conclusion

The Meaning of 1 and 2 Corinthians:

1 and 2 Corinthians are ultimately about toxic relationships. In them Paul focuses on the dysfunctional relationships within the church, the strained relationship the Corinthians have with the Apostle Paul, and, as a result, their failing relationship with God. Paul is abundantly clear—the only remedy for toxic relationships is the gospel of Jesus. Only when we understand God's patience toward us can we be patient toward others. Only when we understand God's love for us can we truly know how to love other people. Only when we understand God's sacrifice for us will we live lives that sacrifice for other people. That is why as Paul begins dealing with the Corinthians' toxic relationships, he begins with, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified . . . that your faith would not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Cor 2:2, 5)

Introduction to Romans:

Authorship: The author of Romans is Paul the Apostle. His name appears in the "from line" in the letter itself, and the text reflects Pauline language, concerns, and structure. Romans is, in many ways, the highpoint of Christian theology.

Date and Provenance: Romans was written near the end of the third missionary journey. Paul traveled through Macedonia and Achaia on the way back to Jerusalem, and he apparently stayed in Greece for about three months along the way. It was during this stay that Paul wrote Romans. This would put its writing at the mid-to-late 50s.

Purpose: Paul wrote Romans at the end of the third missionary journey on his way back to Jerusalem. His plan was to begin preparation for the fourth missionary journey to Spain. As Paul looked around the known world, he saw three things very clearly. First, he saw that Jews were continuing to reject Jesus and gentiles were getting saved in droves. Second, he saw that Jerusalem was ceasing to be the center of Christianity and that in the future Rome would be the hub of the Christian mission. And third, Paul

saw that there were gentiles in Spain and the rest of southern and western Europe who needed to hear about Jesus. Paul wrote Romans, a lengthy discourse on the gospel, to the churches in Rome to prepare them to be the launching pad for reaching the rest of the world with the good news about Jesus.

Outline of Romans:

By now you should be noticing a general pattern in Paul's letters. Paul often writes his letters in two general parts. The first part is nearly always doctrinal. Paul begins his letters with theological argumentation and teaches us about God and his gospel, often for the majority of the letter. The second part is nearly always practical. Doctrine matters, and Paul wants to be sure we don't miss that what we believe determines how we live. Romans is perhaps the clearest example of this structure. The outline is as follows.

I. A Clear Description of the Gospel

Chapters 1–3 The Depravity of Man

Chapters 3–5 Justification by Faith

Chapters 6–8 The Abiding Results of Salvation

Chapters 9–11 Israel, Salvation, and God's Sovereignty

II. Appeal to Pursue Life in the Spirit

Chapters 12–15 Christian Living in Light of Salvation

Chapters 15–16 Conclusion and Commendations

Romans Chapter by Chapter:

Chapter 1 - The gentiles are completely depraved.

Chapter 2 - The Jews are completely depraved.

Chapter 3 - If none are righteous then all are condemned before God, and our only hope is righteousness as a gift.

Chapter 4 - Abraham stands as a clear example of justification by faith (which is gift righteousness) and not by works.

Chapter 5 - Just as Adam brought death to the whole race, so Jesus, as the second Adam, offers righteousness to the whole race.

Chapter 6 - Complete forgiveness of sin produces righteousness not more sin.

Chapter 7 - Paul describes the internal tug-of-war that goes on inside the transformed believer who still struggles with sin and lives in a sinful world.

Chapter 8 - We are heirs of God and are awaiting an eternal inheritance that we cannot lose because it was bought for us by Christ.

Chapter 9 - God in his sovereignty has, in these last days, chosen to reveal himself to the gentiles and create out of them a church.

Chapter 10 - God intends his gospel to go to all the nations of the world, and it is the job of the church to take the gospel around the globe.

Chapter 11 - In Christ, Jews and gentiles are in one body, like different branches grafted into a single tree. In the church, Jews who believe in Jesus are saved.

Chapter 12 - A true Christian lives a life of love.

Chapter 13 - A true Christian submits himself to the government and lives as a good citizen.

Chapter 14 - A true Christian doesn't judge the conscience of other believers on matters of Christian practice.

Chapter 15 - Paul plans to visit Rome.

Chapter 16 - Paul gives greetings and final instructions.

The Meaning of Romans:

The outline of Romans is the outline of the gospel. Paul begins by reminding us that we are all lost and far from God. And if we are all sinners, then we cannot find any kind of salvation by being good. We are not good. God in his mercy, however, sent Christ to be righteous in our place, and now he offers us that righteousness as a gift. Romans is also clear that this gospel isn't just about our eternal salvation. This gospel changes us and the whole world. It is a gospel that turns idol worshipers into Christ followers. It is a gospel that reaches into every nation of the world. It is a gospel that grafts Jews and gentiles into one body, the body of Christ. Paul then concludes by explaining that people who are transformed by the love of God themselves become loving people. We love the lost. We love our neighbors. We love the church. Romans is the clearest picture of what the whole gospel is and what the whole gospel does.