

# Church Epistles

## (Part 1)

1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians

## Overview of the Epistles:

These next six books which are referred to as the Church Epistles are all written by Paul who is mainly writing to deal with specific issues in each one of these churches. Each church is dealing with different issues but they all have one in common and that is that false teachers are attempting to malign the name of Paul and teach false gospels. Paul deals with those false teachers and teachings by defending his apostleship and refuting the false gospels by pointing the people back to Christ.

## 1 Corinthians

**Theme:** Correction

- ❖ **Author & Date:** Paul. A.D. 55
- ❖ **Author's reason for writing:** Before the Book of 1 Corinthians was written, it seems that Paul had penned another letter to this church in order to lay out some ethical guidelines for the church to follow. These guidelines were apparently misunderstood and misapplied (1 Cor. 5:9-11). Paul writes the letter of First Corinthians to deal with some of these disorders, and to answer questions, which the Christians in Corinth had raised on crucial issues.
- ❖ **Literary Style:** Epistle.
- ❖ **Background and Setting:** The church of Corinth was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:11ff). The church of Corinth was located in southern Greece, in what was the Roman province of Achaia, about forty-five miles from Athens. For many

centuries, all north-south land traffic in that area had to pass through or near this ancient city. Corinth understandably prospered as a major trade city, not only for most of Greece but for much of the Mediterranean area. Because all of its outside influences the city of Corinth became one of the most immoral cities of its time. These influences did not help the Corinthian church.

- ❖ **Key People:** Paul. Timothy. Members of Chloe's household
- ❖ **Historical/Cultural Context:** Because of where the Corinthian church was located they had a lot of immoral influences which they could not break away from, showing its carnality and immaturity. After the gifted Apollos had ministered in the church for some time, a group of his admirers established a clique and had little to do with the rest of the church. Another group developed that was loyal to Paul, another claimed special allegiance to Peter, and still another to Christ alone (see 1:10-13, 3:1-9) The most serious problem of the Corinthian church was worldliness, an unwillingness to divorce the culture around them. Most of the believers could not consistently separate themselves from their old, selfish, immoral, and pagan ways. It became necessary for Paul to write to correct this, as well as to command the faithful Christians not only to break fellowship with the disobedient and unrepentant members, but to put those members out of the church (5:9-13)
- ❖ **Summary:** Paul spends the first six chapters correcting the church of what they had misunderstood and misapplied from his previous letter and then writes in the remaining chapters answers about questions that the church had written back to him from his first letter.
- ❖ **Outline:** Chapter 1: Unity/Wisdom/Foolishness of God  
Ch.2: Spirit Revelation, inspiration, Illumination  
Ch. 3: Immaturity, Foundation, Fleshliness, Reward

Ch.r 4: Superiority Sarcasm  
Ch. 5: Incest/Attitude towards a sinning brother.  
Ch. 6: Lawsuits, immorality/Liberty.  
Ch. 7: Marital advice, divorce, singleness.  
Ch. 8: Eating food offered to idols.  
Ch.9: Paul's liberty/His rights  
Ch.10: O.T. Example/Principles of liberty.  
Ch. 11: Order! Woman/Communion.  
Ch. 12: Body and gifts/Particular.  
Ch. 13: Love and Gifts/Priority  
Ch. 14: Order and Gifts/Procedure  
Ch. 15: Resurrection.  
Ch.16: Collections/Benedictions.

- ❖ **Tough Questions:** What factors made it difficult for the gospel to take root in a healthy way in the city of Corinth?
- ❖ How does Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians help resolve the controversy over the gifts discussed in ch. 12-14?

## 2 Corinthians

**Theme:** Defense of Apostleship

- ❖ **Author & Date:** Paul. A.D. 56
- ❖ **Author's reason for writing:** False teachers had crept into the church body, claiming to be apostles themselves (11:13) and refuting the authority of Paul's apostleship. The reasons behind this attack on Paul were as follows: he lacked letters of commendation (3:1), he was not a "skilled" orator (10:10), he never asked for monetary compensation for his ministry (11:7), he was too humble (10:13-18), he suffered frequently (4:7-12), and he lacked success among the Jews (3:12-4:6). Paul writes this epistle to renounce these misguided accusations (and expose his accusers as servants of Satan) and to defend his authority as a true apostle.
- ❖ **Literary Style:** Epistle

- ❖ **Background and Setting:** Second Corinthians is the fourth and final letter that Paul writes to the Corinthians. While we call the two letters that we have 1 & 2 Corinthians they are actually 2 & 4 Corinthians. We are missing the first original letter (1 Corinthians 5:9) "the lost epistle" and the third letter (2 Corinthians 2:4) "the severe letter." After having left from his first trip to Corinth Paul then heard disturbing news of the Corinthian church while he was in Ephesus about further difficulties at the Corinth church, including the arrival of self-styled apostles. These false apostles began teaching a false gospel and also assaulted the character of Paul. Once Paul heard of this he left the work he was doing in Ephesus and went to Corinth. This visit was known as the "painful visit" (2:1) for it was not a successful one from Paul's perspective; someone in the Corinthian church (possibly one of the false apostles) even openly insulted him (2:5-8,10; 7:12). Saddened by the Corinthians' lack of loyalty to defend him, seeking to spare them further reproof and perhaps hoping time would bring them to their senses, Paul returned to Ephesus. In Ephesus is where Paul writes the "sever letter" (2:4) After writing the "sever letter" Paul was so anxious to hear back from the Corinthians that he went on looking for Titus (2:12-13). To Paul's immense relief and joy, Titus met him with the news that the majority of the Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul (7:7). Wise enough to know that some rebellious attitudes still smoldered under the surface, and could erupt again, Paul wrote what we now call Second Corinthians.
- ❖ **Key People:** Paul. Timothy. Titus. False Apostles.
- ❖ **Historical/Cultural Context:** Second Corinthians complements the historical record of Paul's dealings with the Corinthian church recorded in Acts and First Corinthians. It also contains important biographical data on Paul.

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- ❖ **Summary:** Paul expresses his relief and joy in the Corinthians repentance (7:8-16), his main concern was to defend his apostleship (chapters 1-7), encourage the Corinthians to resume preparations for the collection for the poor at Jerusalem (Chapters 8,9) and confront the false apostles head on (Chapters 10-13).
- ❖ **Outline:** Paul's Greeting (1:1-11)  
Paul's Ministry (1:12-7:16)  
Paul's Collection (8:1-9:15)  
Paul's Apostleship (10:1-12:13)  
Paul's Visit (12:14-13:14)
- ❖ **Tough Questions:** What does Paul mean when he writes about being "in Christ" and someone being "a new creation" (5:17)?

## Galatians

**Theme:** Freedom

- ❖ **Author & Date:** Paul. Around A.D. 49
- ❖ **Author's reason for writing:** Galatians was written to remedy a desperate situation and to call early Christians back from the Mosaic Law to grace, from legalism to faith.
- ❖ **Literary Style:** Epistle
- ❖ **Background and Setting:** In Galatia Paul had founded churches in the southern Galatian cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14-14:23). These are the people that Paul is writing to not the actual ethnic Galatians (as some believe he wrote to). Shortly after establishing these churches false teachers went in teaching a "different gospel" (1:6) which is why Paul is writing this letter.
- ❖ **Key People:** Paul. Peter. Barnabas. Titus. Abraham. False teachers.
- ❖ **Historical/Cultural Context:** Galatians provides valuable historical information about Paul's background (Chapters 1,2) including his three-year

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- stay in Nabatean Arabia (1:17,18); his trip to the Jerusalem Council (2:1-10); and his confrontation of Peter (2:11-21).
- ❖ **Summary:** Upon the completion of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch. They found that Judaizing false teachers had infiltrated the churches in Galatia and were denying Paul's apostolic authority and teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Additionally, even Peter acted hypocritically during his visit to Antioch by withdrawing from the Gentiles and fearing the circumcision party. All of these factors, along with the upcoming Jerusalem Council, prompted Paul to write this strong letter defending his apostleship and upholding the centrality of the gospel.
- ❖ **Outline:** Personal: The Preacher of Justification (1:1-2:21). Doctrinal: The Principles of Justification (3:1-4:31). Practical: The Privileges of Justification (5:1-6:18)
- ❖ **Tough Questions:** How does Paul's statement about gender, race, and status equality in 3:28 affect other biblical teachings about roles?

## Ephesians

**Theme:** Practice your Position

- ❖ **Author & Date:** Paul. A.D. 60.
- ❖ **Author's reason for writing:** Paul's reason for writing is to encourage and admonish the believers at Ephesus of their immeasurable blessings in Jesus Christ; and not only to be thankful for those blessings, but also to live in a manner worthy of them.
- ❖ **Literary Style:** Epistle.
- ❖ **Background and Setting:** It is likely that the gospel was first brought to Ephesus by Priscilla and Aquila, an exceptionally gifted couple (Acts 18:26),

who were left there by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18,19). The church was then firmly established by Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 19) and he served as their pastor for about three years. After Paul left, Timothy pastured the congregation for perhaps a year and a half, primarily to counter the false teaching of a few influential men (1 Timothy 1:3,20)

- ❖ **Key People:** Paul, Tychicus.
- ❖ **Historical/Cultural Context:** Just like the previous churches Paul wrote to he is dealing with false teachers creeping into the church teaching “fables and endless genealogies.” (1 Timothy 1:4), abstaining from marriage and certain foods (1 Timothy 4:3), and while they did not understand what they taught they taught with confidence (1 Timothy 1:7), which produced in the church harmful “disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (1 Timothy 1:4) Thirty years later, Christ gave to the apostle John a letter for this church, indicating its people had left their first love for Him (Revelation 2:1-7)
- ❖ **Summary:** Paul takes the first three chapters emphasizing New Testament doctrine, and then takes the last three chapters to explain how to put into practice what he wrote in the first three chapters.
- ❖ **Outline:** Salutation (1:1,2), God's Purpose for the Church (1:3-3:13), God's Fullness for the Church. (3:14-21), God's Plan for Faithful Living in the Church (4:1-6), God's Son Endows and Builds the Church (4:7-16), God's Pattern and Principles for Members of the Church (4:17-32) God's Standards for Faithfulness in the Church. (5:1-21), God's Standards for Authority and Submission in the Church (5:22-6:9), God's Provision for His Spiritual Battles (6:10-17), God's Appeal for

Prayer in the Church (6:18-20), Benediction (6:21-24).

- ❖ **Tough Questions:** Why does Paul insist in 6:10-17 that Christians must be prepared for spiritual battle?

## Gospel Connection

- ❖ **1 Corinthians** – The Gospel is clearly seen and best displayed in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Corinthians. Paul also emphasizes on the truth and importance of the resurrection in chapter 15.
- ❖ **2 Corinthians** – Reveals Jesus Christ as the One who comforts the persecuted (1:5;12:9), fulfills the promises of God (1:20), remains Lord over humanity (4:5), and perfectly reconciles believers to God (5:19). Paul declares believers to be new creations reconciled by Christ's atonement for sin “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (5:21)
- ❖ **Galatians** – Deals with the freedom that Christ gives to believers, and urges believers to “not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” But to hold to their position of liberty in Jesus Christ (5:1)
- ❖ **Ephesians** – Paul explains the unique relationship between Jesus and the church as His body. Christ is the head of the church uniting believers together and strengthening the body (4:15,16).

## Life Passages

- ❖ **1 Corinthians:**
  - **1 Cor. 1:10 – Division**
    - How have we failed to do this and how can we be better at it?
  - **1 Cor. 1:18 – The Cross**
    - Why is the Cross foolish to those who are perishing? How does this relate to the

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“new age atheist” of our time? (1 Cor. 18-31)

- **1 Cor. 3:1-3 – Carnal Christians**
  - What does this verse say about our sanctification process and why it's important to grow in our walk?
- **1 Cor. 5:9-13 – Discipline**
  - According to this passage how should we deal with a “so called brother/sister” who is in continual sin? And Why? (1 Cor. 5:5)
- **1 Cor. 6:18-19 – Flee**
  - Why is it important to FLEE sexual immorality?
- **1 Cor. 7:35 – Purpose of Singleness**
  - How can one be encouraged by this verse?
- **1 Cor. 10:31 – Doing all to the glory of God.**
  - How do you do all things to the glory of God
- **1 Cor. 11:23-29 – Instruction on communion**
  - What's the danger of taking communion in the wrong manner? (v. 29)
- **1 Cor. 12:1-7 – Definition of Spiritual Gifts**
  - Why is it important to understand the purpose of Spiritual Gifts? (v.7)
- **1 Cor. 13 – Love Chapter**
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- **1 Cor. 15:3-4 – The Gospel**
  - This verse should be known by every believer. It's the Gospel in a nutshell
- **1 Cor. 15:14 – The Resurrection**
  - Why is the resurrection so important for our faith?
- **1 Cor. 16:1-2 – Giving**
  - Is tithing for today?
- ❖ **2 Corinthians:**
  - **2 Cor. 1:4 – Comfort**
    - According to this passage why does God comfort us in our afflictions?
  - **2 Cor. 5:17 – New Creature**

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- What does it mean to be a new creation? (Romans 6)
- **2 Cor. 7:10-11 – Genuine and false repentance**
  - What does true repentance look like?
  - What does worldly repentance look like?
- **2 Cor. 9:6-7 – Giving**
  - What kind of heart attitude should we have when giving?
- **2 Cor. 12:9-10 – My Grace is sufficient**
  - Why should we look to God's grace over our physical comfort?
- **2 Cor. 13:5 – Test of Assurance**
  - Why is it important to test our own faith?
- ❖ **Galatians:**
  - **Gal. 1:9 – False Gospel**
    - Can you think of some false gospels of our time?
  - **Gal. 1:10 – Fear of Man**
    - Why is it important to not fear man about sharing the gospel? (Romans 1:16)
  - **Gal. 2:20 – Christian Living**
    - How does living in this way make us different?
  - **Gal. 5:16 – Overcoming the Flesh**
    - How do we walk in the Spirit? (Ephesians 5:18)
  - **Gal. 5:19-24 – Fruit of the Flesh/Spirit**
    - Is ok for Christians to be continually displaying the fruits of the flesh? (v.21)
  - **Gal. 6:2,5 – Bearing others load**
    - How can bearing the loads of others be encouraging to that person?
  - **Gal. 6:3 – You are nothing**
    - What does this say about arrogance?
  - **Gal. 6:7 – Consequences to action**
- ❖ **Ephesians:**
  - **Eph. 2:1-3 – Dead without Christ**

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- What does it mean to be dead in our trespasses? (Romans 6:23)
- **Eph. 2:1-10 – The Gospel**
  - How is this a picture of the Gospel?
- **Eph. 2:8-10 – Grace through Faith**
  - Can we gain God's favor through works?
- **Eph. 4:11-16 Pastors equip the body to serve**
  - Why do pastors need to equip the body? (v.12)
- **Eph. 5:16 – Importance of time**
  - Why is it important to redeem you time?
- **Eph. 5:18 – Filled with the Spirit?**
  - Why is walking in the Spirit important to our walk?
- **Eph. 5:22-33 – Wives and Husbands**
  - What is the purpose of marriage? (v.32)
- **Eph. 6:1-4 – Children and Parenting**
  - Why should children honor their parent? (v.3)
- **Eph. 6:11 – Spiritual Warfare**

Why is it important to realize that who we battle against is spiritual? (v.18)