

BASIC NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON 12--I-II CORINTHIANS AND GALATIANS

PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

We now move ahead about four years to 514-55 A.D. The large city of Corinth was situated upon the isthmus which separated the Corinthian from the Saronic Gulf. It was an important commercial center, and had been a Roman colony since the days of Julius Caesar. Because of its commercial importance and strategic position, Corinth appealed to Paul as a fertile field for the growth of Christianity. Paul lived and worked in Corinth for about 18 months and established a strong Christian church there, later moving to Ephesus.

Paul's correspondence with the church in Corinth represents a new watershed in his development. He had certain opponents within the church in Corinth, who attacked Paul's integrity and also the validity of his calling as an apostle. Since his opponents remain unnamed, and they themselves have left no extant writings, we are left to infer their views and character from what Paul wrote in opposition to them. As we have no way to return to that era and observe the people involved, scholars differ as to the merits of some of the arguments being made.

The Corinthian Church consisted of a group of Christians who possessed a good measure of intellectual skill and sophistication. Thus, Paul's opponents there were not only a challenge to his will, as in previous struggles, but also to his intellect. Paul, at this time, called forth his impressive intellectual powers. These had become more or less dormant, probably due to a radical shift in brain function at the time of his conversion.

It is apparent, then, that Paul developed an enlarged viewpoint in the process of responding to the issues that his Corinthian opponents laid before him. Some time after Paul had left Corinth, he sent a letter to the Corinthian Church that is now lost. In reply, they wrote a letter back to him, raising various questions about church teaching and policy. In his reply, which we today call I Corinthians, he addressed himself to a variety of issues, including an understanding of spiritual gifts, the sacrament of communion, church government, marriage, continuing to live with an unconverted husband and wife, eating meat which had been sacrificed to idols, and conduct and clothing at public worship.

It is to Paul's credit that in the process of composing I Corinthians, especially, he developed new policies in a creative manner to meet the current need.

The prevailing view in New Testament scholarship is that I Corinthians was always a single letter. II Corinthians, however, is a composite of two or more letters, in whole or in part, though different views exist as to the original sequence of the material. According to one view, which is not unanimous, Paul wrote four letters to the Corinthians, in the following order:

1. The first letter, lost except for a fragment in II Cor. 6:14-7:1. This material has a strong resemblance to Essene imagery and concepts. Paul himself was more or less influenced by Essene converts to Christianity, so the origin of 6:14-7:1 cannot be established with any certainty.

2. I Corinthians. The textual evidence indicates that 14:34-35 is probably a later interpolation. This will be of interest to many students, for it is here that women are forbidden to speak in church, a rule that has never applied in Divine Science.

3. II Cor., Chapters 10-13. This is Paul's "harsh letter," written after he had been physically ousted from the Corinthian Church.

4. II Cor., Chapters 1-9, except for 6:14-7:1 As a result of the harsh letter, the Corinthians repented and punished those who had conspired against Paul's leadership. Chapters 1-9 are sometimes called the "letter of reconciliation." This may originally have been a single letter; it may also consist, in whole or in part, of as many as four letters.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF MATERIAL IN I-II CORINTHIANS

I Cor. 1:1-9	- Greetings and statement of thanksgiving.
1:10-17	- Four opposing factions had developed. Paul appeals for unity, declaring, "Has Christ been divided?" (1:13)
1:18-2:5	- Christ is the power and wisdom of God. Paul had not come to proclaim wisdom, but to demonstrate the power of Spirit.
2:6-16	- After a probable pause in writing, and a period of literary incubation, Paul adds that there is a genuine wisdom that God reveals to us through the Spirit.
3:1-23	- The quarreling among them shows that they are not initiates into wisdom, but infants in Christ. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." (3:9)
4:1-21	- The ministry of the apostles, as viewed differently by Paul and the Corinthians. Paul presents himself both as a steward of God's mysteries and as a spiritual warrior.
5:1-13	- Against sexual immorality. One of the members had married his stepmother, and this Paul denounces.
6:1-6	- Christians must not sue each other in a secular court. "Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another?" (6:5)
6:9-20	- Glorify God in body and spirit. Against fornication and prostitution. "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God." (6:19)
7:1-40	- Directions regarding marriage, the unmarried, and widows. Still believing that the Second Coming was near, Paul advised that it is best for married people to remain married, and for single people to remain single, with certain exceptions.
8:1-13	- Food offered to idols. Eating such food in public is not wrong in itself, unless we believe in idols or false gods. But it is important for Christians to avoid doing so, to prevent weaker members from lapsing into idolatry.
9:1-27	- Paul defends his apostolic authority. Paul has a right to be paid as an apostle, but has chosen not to exercise that right. [In part to avoid being thought a charlatan.]
10:1-33	- Comments on Israelite history, and how their recorded experience applies to the Corinthian Christians. A key point: "Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols." (10:14)

- 11:1-16 - Head coverings. Women must be veiled in church. [In Corinth, women generally wore veils-- except prostitutes.]
- 11:17-34 -The Lord's Supper, abuses, and the correct attitudes toward this sacrament and the accompanying love feast.
- 12:1-31 - Spiritual Gifts - There are many gifts, but one Spirit that is All-in-all and functions through all. Paul names nine gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues.
- 13:1-13 - Spiritual Gifts, continued: Paul's great ode to agape--outstreaming love and its qualities. "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." (13:13)
- 14:1-40 - Spiritual Gifts, concluded: Paul places strict limits on speaking in tongues in public (14:27-28)
- 15:1-58 - The resurrection of Jesus, as pointing to the spiritual resurrection of humanity as a whole.
- 16:1-24 - Final comments: The collection for Christians in Jerusalem; Paul will visit Corinth in person; final messages and greetings.

- II Cor. 1:1-11 -Greetings and statement of thanksgiving. Paul tells of his difficulties in the Roman province of Asia.
- 1:12-2:4 -The postponement of Paul's planned visit.
- 2:5-11 -Forgive the erring person (probably the Christian who had married his stepmother, but had now repented).
- 2:12-17 -Paul's work in Troas.
- 3:1-18 - Paul as a minister of the New Covenant. The Orthodox Jews read the Scriptures with a veil over their minds. "But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed." (3:16)
- 4:1-6:13 -How Paul views his apostolic ministry. Spiritual warriorship (6:3-10, etc.). "If any one is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." (5:17)
- 6:14-7:1 -"Do not be mismatched with unbelievers." (6:14) May be a fragment of Paul's lost letter to the Corinthians.
- 7:2-16 -Paul rejoices at the church's repentance.
- 8:1-42 -Paul requests contributions for the Jerusalem Christians. He is sending Titus to them as his representative.
- 9:1-15 -An additional appeal for the Jerusalem collection. "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. (9:8)
- 10:1-18 -The "harsh letter" begins. Paul defends his ministry.
- 11:1-15 -Paul contrasts himself with false apostles.
- 11:16-33 -Paul's sufferings - spiritual warriorship for the gospel.
- 12:1-10 -Paul's out-of-body experience, which occurred about 41 B.C. The thorn in the flesh, possibly a reference to Paul's adversaries.
- 12:11-21 -Paul's concern for the Corinthian Christians.
- 13:1-10 -Paul warns his readers: "If I come again, I will not be lenient." (13:2)
- 13:11-13 -Closing and benediction.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

The Roman province of Galatia, in Asia Minor, included several cities where Paul's message of faith and love had been enthusiastically accepted. Scholars differ as to whether Galatians was written in an earlier or a later period, that is to say, before or after the Corinthian letters. A later date appears more likely. For one thing, Galatians shows that Paul's intellectual powers had become sharply honed by this time, with highly effective and insightful arguments in favor of his position. He had been much strengthened, in this respect, by his confrontation with his Corinthian opponents. A composition date of 57 A.D., or close to that year, is reasonable.

Despite the Galatians' earlier acceptance of Paul as their founding apostle, certain Jewish Christians were trying to undermine Paul's work among them. These were probably not Christians from Jerusalem, as is sometimes assumed. In any case, his opponents alleged that Christians should undertake some of the practices of the Jewish Law, including circumcision and the religious observances of certain days. Paul rejects this attitude as contrary to God's grace. Indeed, if accepted it would have reduced religion to the observance of countless rituals and practices unrelated to the Way of Christ. These Jewish Christians' apparent claim that Paul was not even a genuine apostle brought forth this vehement letter.

Martin Luther's interpretation of Galatians in relation to the 16th Century Church has merit. That is to say, all who follow a legalistic system of religion--whether Jewish, Christian, or some other form--have taken up a false burden and have cursed themselves. By contrast, true spiritual teaching is grounded in inward intuition and trust. The laws of Christ's kingdom are mental and spiritual. They can be understood, and consistently applied, only through an inwardly quickened faith. Thus an approach based on attunement with the Mind of Christ, and one based on external rules, are basically opposed to each other.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF MATERIAL IN GALATIANS

- 1:1-5 -Opening. He emphasizes his apostolic calling from the beginning.
- 1:6-10 -The customary words of thanksgiving are omitted, and are replaced by a twice declared curse. Those who bring a contrary gospel are accursed. (1:8-9)
- 1:11-24 -Paul vindicates his apostolic authority. He gives a brief narrative of events leading up to, and following, his conversion.
- 2:1-10 -The Jerusalem apostles approve of Paul's work, though he is independent of Jerusalem. He tells of a trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus, and the issues resolved at that time.
- 2:11-14 -Paul tells how he rebuked Peter (Cephas) in Antioch, because Peter-- lacking the courage of his own convictions--refused to eat with Gentiles.
- 2:15-21 - Both Gentiles and Jews are saved by faith, not by works of the law. "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (2:20)
- 3:1-14 -The blessings of faith, vs. the curse of the law. A key question: "Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?" (3:5)
- 3:15-18 - God's promise to Abraham, of salvation through faith, applies to the Gentiles. The Law of Moses has not annulled this promise.
- 3:19-29 -The purpose of the law as a disciplinarian. The coming of Christ sets the law aside, revealing that we are all children of God. "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." (3:27)
- 4:1-7 -We are all sons and heirs. We are no longer spiritual minors, but have come to our spiritual majority.
- 4:8-20 -Paul recalls his earlier contacts with the Galatians, and how they listened to the Gospel as he presented it. Now, however, they are at risk of reverting to spiritual slavery. Paul is a kind of spiritual midwife, and his readers are "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." (4:19)
- 4:21-31 -Allegorical interpretation. (4:24) Sarah and Hagar, found in the Book of Genesis, depict two types of religion, one of ceremonial bondage and the other of liberty in Christ. We are spiritually children of Sarah, the free woman.
- 5:1-12 -Do not allow yourselves to be circumcised into the law. "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (5:1)
- 5:13-18 -Baptism into Christ does not guarantee that all you think and do is right. Do not use freedom as an occasion for self-indulgence.
- 5:19-21 - Fifteen "works of the flesh" are listed.
- 5:22-26 - Nine "fruits of the spirit" are listed. A key principle: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." (5:25)
- 6:1-6 -A paradox: "Bear one another's burdens." (6:2) Yet "all must test their own work." (6:4)
- 6:7-10 -Like produces like, but the scope and limits of this principle must be evaluated correctly. As we sow, so do we reap. Also, let us not be weary in well-doing, for the harvest will follow.
- 6:11-18 -Final comments and benediction. Paul writes this section in his own hand.

REFLECTIONS ON THE GALATIAN LETTER

Rowan A. Greer distinguishes between allegorical and typological methods of interpretation. In typology, an earlier event foreshadows a later one. In allegory, the narrative represents a timeless spiritual truth. Greer correctly states that Paul's usage in Galatians combines these two methods:

"The confusion between typology (understood as relating old to new) and allegorism (understood as relating earthly to heavenly) should not surprise us. Paul's treatment of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael, Sarah and Isaac, and the two Jerusalems in Galatians 4, as we have suggested, poses the same ambiguity. The story in the Hebrew Scriptures foreshadows Christ and the Christians typologically, but the letter of Scripture points beyond itself to a heavenly meaning."¹

Paul's specific doctrine of the Two Covenants (4:24) is unacceptable in the form that he presented it. God did inspire the Ten Commandments. However, the religious-political system proposed in the five so-called Books of Moses, taken as a whole, was never authorized by God. Rather, it served as a temporary expedient, a stepping-stone toward a true discovery of God and His spiritual has always to change has always Kingdom. The laws of the spiritual universe never change, and God been omnipresent and available to every individual. Jesus came not God and

His Kingdom. He came to reveal and manifest the Truth that been true, and to show us how we can do the same.

Nevertheless, Paul's depiction of Sarah and Hagar as representing two approaches to the life of the spirit is valid, and can be accepted. Paul thus contrasts two states of the soul. Hagar, the slave woman, means "fugitive; wanderer." She represents those who are spiritually asleep, focus upon externals, and follow a legalistic system. Sarah, the free woman, means "princess; noble woman." She depicts those who are illumined by the Spirit. They focus upon the God within, and are right-minded, by grace.

Paul, in Galatians, rejects legalism as a religious option (1:6-5:12). He also rejects a religion where the guidance of Spirit is confused with conditioned responses, and people assume that they can do no wrong. Some Christians apparently believed that the rite of baptism conferred this state upon them. (5:13-6:10) Paul's two essential points are summarized in the assuring words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who declared: "When we live by principles instead of by traditions, by obedience to the law of the mind instead of by passion, the great mind will enter into us."

NOTES

1. Early Biblical Interpretation; op cit, pp. 140-141

REQUIRED BIBLE READINGS

Read I-II Corinthians and Galatians.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul write a series of letters to the Corinthians?
2. Briefly discuss Paul's message on love in I Corinthians, Chapter 13.
3. Why did Paul write his Letter to the Galatians?
4. What two essential points about the life of the Spirit does Paul make in Galatians (1:6-5:12 and 5:13-6:10)?