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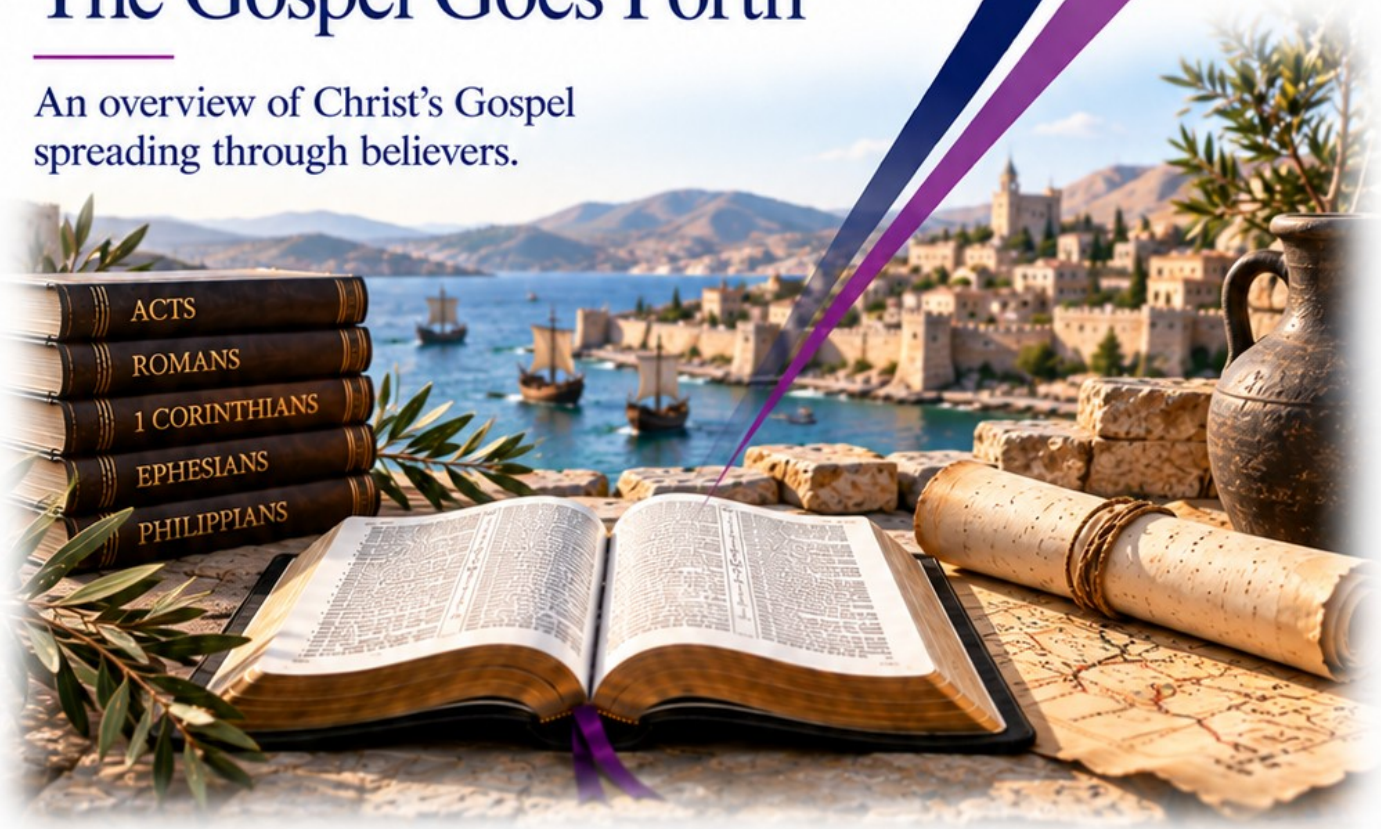
STUDY GUIDE 10

Understanding *the* Bible

STUDY GUIDE 7 OF 8:

Acts and Paul's Epistles — The Gospel Goes Forth

An overview of Christ's Gospel spreading through believers.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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The previous Study Guide examined the four Gospels and showed how Matthew, Mark, Luke and John reveal Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, King, Servant, Son of Man, Son of God and living Word. We now continue the New Testament story with the book of Acts and the thirteen Epistles associated with the apostle Paul.

Acts begins where the Gospel accounts conclude. Jesus Christ had completed His earthly ministry, and the Gospel was now to go forth from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and ultimately to the wider world.

The book records the apostles and early believers as they preached Jesus Christ, faced persecution, established congregations and gradually came to understand more fully that the Gospel was for Jew and Gentile alike. The message that had been centred initially in Jerusalem would now spread far beyond its Jewish beginnings.

Acts is also an important historical record of a period of transition. Jewish believers whose lives had been shaped by the Law of Moses were learning to walk in the reality of the New Covenant, while Gentiles were being brought into the same spiritual body through Jesus Christ.

Understanding this setting helps us read the events of Acts carefully and within their proper historical context. Transitional conduct does not by itself establish permanent New Covenant practice, and the completed work of Jesus Christ must remain central to our understanding.

The Epistles of Paul then allow us to listen to instruction given to congregations and individuals facing real questions, difficulties and spiritual needs. Paul wrote concerning salvation, liberty in Christ, unity, doctrine, Christian conduct, ministry, suffering, false teaching and the practical life of believers.

Throughout this Study Guide, the central Person remains Jesus Christ. Acts shows His Gospel spreading through the Church, while Paul's letters explain what it means to be saved, complete in Christ and joined together in His one body.

The great movement before us is therefore clear: The Gospel goes forth, people are saved, the Church grows, and believers learn how to live faithfully in Jesus Christ. This continuing New Testament story will take us from Jerusalem into the wider world as the Gospel reaches both Jew and Gentile.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Acts and Paul's letters show the Gospel going outward and changing lives?

Personal Reflection

Where do you need to see the Gospel as a call to live faithfully, not only a message to know?

Action Step

Read an event in Acts and a related instruction in Paul's letters. What truth needs to shape your own faith or conduct?

INTRODUCTION: FROM THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

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The four Gospels concentrated upon the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. They recorded His teaching, miracles, suffering, death and resurrection and showed that He was the Messiah promised throughout the Old Testament.

The book of Acts continues the story. Jesus had completed His earthly ministry, but the work of the Gospel was not finished. His disciples were now to carry the message of salvation beyond Jerusalem and eventually throughout the wider world.

Luke Continues the Story

Acts was written by Luke, who also wrote the Gospel bearing his name. The connection between the two books becomes clear from the opening words of Acts.

Luke wrote in **Acts 1:1-2**:

> *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:"*

Luke refers to his Gospel as *"the former treatise."* Acts therefore continues the account he had already begun.

The emphasis, however, now changes. Luke's Gospel focused especially upon what Jesus *"began both to do and teach,"* while Acts records what followed as the apostles carried forward the Gospel they had received from Him.

The Gospel Was to Go Beyond Jerusalem

Jesus had already told the disciples that their witness would not remain confined to Jerusalem. The Gospel was to move outward into other regions and eventually much further into the world.

Jesus said in **Acts 1:8**:

> *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

This verse provides an important outline for the movement of Acts. The Gospel begins in Jerusalem, reaches Judaea, moves into Samaria, and eventually reaches increasingly into the Gentile world.

Acts therefore records the Gospel moving outward beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries in which the first disciples had been raised. The message of Jesus Christ was not to remain confined to Jerusalem or to one natural people.

A Period of Transition

Acts also records believers living through an important period of transition. The first disciples were Jewish and had spent their lives within a society shaped by the Law of Moses, the Temple, circumcision and separation from Gentile nations.

Although Jesus Christ had established the New Covenant, those older customs and patterns of thinking did not disappear immediately from the lives of everyone who believed. Acts therefore records growth in understanding as well as geographical expansion.

The apostles had to learn that Gentiles could be accepted by God without first becoming Jews. They also had to understand more fully the spiritual reality of what Jesus Christ had accomplished.

This historical setting is important when reading Acts. Christ's completed work must interpret transitional conduct, and transitional conduct must never redefine Christ's completed work.

The Epistles Explain Christian Living

As congregations were established, believers faced practical and doctrinal questions. Paul's Epistles address many of these matters directly and explain salvation, liberty in Christ, unity within the body, Christian conduct, ministry, suffering, false teaching and the life believers are called to live.

Acts gives us the historical setting in which the Gospel spread. Paul's Epistles then help us understand how those who received the Gospel were to live in Jesus Christ.

Together they show the Gospel moving outward and the Church learning to walk faithfully in the truth Christ had given. They also help us understand how believers from different backgrounds were brought together as one New Covenant people in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do the events in Acts and the teaching in the epistles belong together?

Personal Reflection

Have you separated the spread of the Gospel from how believers should live?

Action Step

Compare an event in Acts with an Epistle's teaching. What old assumption about God's Church should you now reconsider?

ACTS: THE GOSPEL GOES FORTH

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Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 31-62
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 62
Place in the Biblical Story: Acts continues Luke's Gospel and records the spread of the Gospel through the apostles and early believers during the transition from the Old Covenant world into the life of the New Covenant Church.

Acts is the fifth book of the New Testament and contains twenty-eight chapters. It was written by Luke, who also wrote the Gospel bearing his name, and it continues the account he had already begun.

The Gospel of Luke concentrated upon the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Acts now records the apostles and other believers carrying His message outward after His resurrection and ascension.

Luke Continues His Earlier Account

Luke begins Acts by referring back to the Gospel he had already written. His opening words show clearly that Acts continues the same historical account.

Luke wrote in **Acts 1:1-2**:

> *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:"*

The words *"the former treatise"* refer to Luke's Gospel. Acts therefore belongs naturally beside Luke and continues the same historical story.

There is, however, a change of emphasis. Luke's Gospel centres upon what Jesus did and taught during His earthly ministry, while Acts follows the apostles as they respond to His commandments and carry the Gospel into new places.

Acts Is a Historical Record

Acts is written primarily as a historical account of events, speeches, journeys, opposition, conversions and the growth of the Church. Luke records what happened as believers moved through a period of great change.

The book contains many speeches and conversations. Peter, Stephen, Paul and others speak in different circumstances, and Luke records their words as part of the history he is telling.

This is important when reading Acts because the book records believers at different stages of understanding while the Gospel was spreading into situations they had never previously faced. Acts therefore allows us to watch the early Church learning, growing and responding to what God was doing.

History Must Be Read as History

Because Acts records a period of transition, we must distinguish between what Luke records as happening and what Jesus and the apostles establish as enduring New Covenant truth. A historical event may show what a believer did at a particular moment without automatically making every detail of that event a permanent practice for the Church.

This does not lessen the authority or importance of Acts. It helps us read the book according to the kind of writing Luke produced and alongside the clearer doctrinal instruction found throughout the New Testament.

Christ's completed work must interpret transitional conduct. Transitional conduct must never redefine Christ's completed work.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should Acts be read as a record of events before drawing rules from it?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated one event in Acts as if every believer must repeat it?

Action Step

Read an Acts event in context. What practice have you treated as necessary simply because it happened, and what will you correct?

The Gospel Was to Move Outward

Before the apostles began their wider ministry, Jesus gave them a clear direction. Their witness was to begin in Jerusalem and then move outward.

Jesus said in **Acts 1:8**:

> *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

This verse provides an important framework for the whole book. The Gospel would begin in Jerusalem, move through Judaea, enter Samaria, and eventually reach towards the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts records that movement taking place. The Gospel increasingly crosses the geographical, national and cultural boundaries in which the first disciples had been raised.

The Promise of the Holy Ghost

Jesus also prepared His disciples for the spiritual work that was about to take place. He placed John's water baptism beside the baptism that was coming and clearly distinguished between them.

Jesus said in **Acts 1:5**:

> *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

John had baptised with water, but the promised baptism was with the Holy Ghost. Jesus directed His disciples towards the greater spiritual reality that was about to come.

This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost when the disciples received the Spirit and the Gospel Day began in power. They were no longer waiting for the promise because God had begun the New Covenant work Jesus had foretold.

Years later, Peter remembered these words when Gentiles also received the Holy Ghost.

Peter said in **Acts 11:16**:

> *"Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost."*

Peter's remembrance shows that his understanding continued to develop as he witnessed God working beyond the boundaries with which he had been familiar. The greater emphasis remained upon the spiritual baptism Jesus had promised.

A Time of Transition

Acts covers approximately one generation in which Jewish believers were moving from a life shaped by the Law of Moses into a fuller understanding of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. The Temple still stood for much of this period, Jewish customs continued, and many believers had been raised from childhood within practices that had governed Israel for centuries.

The fact that Jesus Christ had fulfilled the Old Covenant did not mean that every believer immediately understood all the consequences of that fulfilment. Acts therefore records a genuine transition in understanding.

This is especially visible in the apostles' attitude towards Gentiles. Jesus had commanded them to witness to the wider world, but long-established Jewish separation from other nations remained deeply ingrained.

Peter and the Gentiles

One of the clearest examples appears in Acts 10. God prepared Peter to enter the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and Peter himself explained how significant this was.

Peter said in **Acts 10:28**:

> *"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."*

Peter had to learn that the distinctions which had separated Jew from Gentile under the former covenant could not govern the New Covenant Church. God was showing him that salvation in Jesus Christ was not restricted to one natural nation.

The events surrounding Cornelius therefore mark an important development in Acts. Peter saw that Gentiles could receive the same spiritual life without first becoming Jews.

The First Half Focuses Mainly on Peter

The first twelve chapters of Acts focus especially upon Peter and the early work centred around Jerusalem. During these chapters, the Gospel begins among Jewish believers and then increasingly crosses boundaries that had previously separated people.

Important events include:

- The coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost;
- Peter's preaching;
- The growth of the Church in Jerusalem;
- Persecution against believers;
- Stephen's death;
- The Gospel spreading into Samaria;
- Peter's experience with Cornelius;

- The growing recognition that Gentiles were also being received by God.

These events show both geographical expansion and growth in understanding. The Gospel was moving outward, and believers were learning that God's New Covenant people were not defined by the former national boundaries.

The Second Half Focuses Mainly on Paul

From approximately chapter 13 onward, the emphasis shifts increasingly towards Paul and his missionary journeys. Paul had once persecuted believers, but after his conversion he became one of the most important messengers of the Gospel to the Gentile world.

Acts records Paul travelling through many cities, preaching Jesus Christ, facing opposition and helping establish congregations. His ministry becomes central to the second half of the book as the Gospel moves further into the Gentile world.

This broad division provides a useful way of remembering Acts. Acts 1-12 focuses mainly upon Peter and the Gospel moving outward from Jerusalem, while Acts 13-28 focuses mainly upon Paul and the Gospel moving increasingly through the Gentile world towards Rome.

Persecution Did Not Stop the Gospel

Opposition repeatedly arose against the believers, yet persecution often contributed to the spread of the message. Those who were scattered carried the Gospel with them wherever they went.

Luke wrote in **Acts 8:4**:

> *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."*

Those who were scattered did not stop speaking about Jesus Christ. What appeared to be an attempt to silence the Church therefore became one means by which the message travelled further.

Congregations Were Established

As Paul and others travelled, people believed the Gospel and congregations were established. The message was no longer centred only in Jerusalem because believers were now found in many different places.

Luke wrote in **Acts 16:5**:

> *"And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."*

The word churches here refers to congregations of believers in different places. These congregations did not form different spiritual bodies because the New Testament teaches that there is one body under one Head, Jesus Christ.

Acts records the geographical spread of these congregations as more people were saved and added to the Church. Jew and Gentile were being brought into the same New Covenant people through Jesus Christ.

Acts Moves Towards Rome

The final chapters follow Paul through imprisonment, hearings before rulers and eventually his journey to Rome. Even opposition and imprisonment did not prevent him from continuing to bear witness concerning Jesus Christ.

The Lord said to Paul in **Acts 23:11**:

> *"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."*

Paul eventually reached Rome, the centre of the Roman Empire. Even while under guard, he continued preaching and teaching.

Acts therefore begins in Jerusalem and ends with the Gospel being proclaimed in Rome. The message that began among a relatively small group of believers had crossed national, cultural and geographical boundaries.

Acts Does Not End the Work

Acts ends without describing the deaths of Peter or Paul. The historical record stops, but the work of the Gospel does not.

The book has shown us Jesus' command being carried outward, the Holy Ghost working through believers, Gentiles being received, congregations being established and the Gospel reaching the heart of the Roman world. Acts therefore stands as the great bridge between the four Gospels and the Epistles.

The Gospels show us Jesus Christ completing His earthly ministry, while Acts shows His Gospel going forth through the Church. The Epistles will now help us understand how those who received that Gospel were instructed to live faithfully in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did persecution and new congregations show the Gospel continuing beyond Jerusalem?

Personal Reflection

What fear has kept you from speaking about Christ?

Action Step

Consider a fear that keeps you from speaking of Christ. What truthful and respectful step can you take as His life within directs you?

FROM JERUSALEM TO JUDEA, SAMARIA, THE GENTILES AND ROME

BACK TO CONTENTS

Acts records a clear geographical and spiritual movement in the spread of the Gospel. Jesus had told His disciples that their witness would begin in Jerusalem, but it would not remain there.

Jesus said in **Acts 1:8**:

> *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

This verse provides a simple outline for much of the book. The Gospel would move from Jerusalem → Judaea → Samaria → the wider Gentile world.

The Gospel Begins in Jerusalem

The first believers were predominantly Jewish, and the earliest preaching recorded in Acts was centred in Jerusalem. Pentecost took place there, the apostles preached there, and the number of believers increased rapidly.

At this stage, however, the Gospel was still being proclaimed mainly within the Jewish community. Although Jesus had commanded a much wider mission, centuries of separation from Gentile nations had shaped the thinking of the apostles and other Jewish believers.

The command had been given, but their understanding still needed to grow. Acts records that growth as the Gospel moved beyond the boundaries with which they were familiar.

Persecution Scattered the Believers

One of the events that helped move the Gospel beyond Jerusalem was persecution. After the death of Stephen, believers were scattered into other regions, yet leaving Jerusalem did not silence their witness.

Luke wrote in **Acts 8:4**:

> *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."*

The persecution intended to hinder the believers instead contributed to the geographical spread of the Gospel. The message now moved beyond Jerusalem into Judaea and Samaria.

Believers carried the Gospel wherever they went. This demonstrated that the Church was not tied to one city, Temple or geographical centre.

The Barrier Between Jew and Gentile

A much greater barrier still remained. For generations, Jewish people had been separated from Gentile nations through the Law, circumcision, dietary distinctions and other covenant practices.

These distinctions had become deeply rooted in Jewish life and thinking. Peter openly acknowledged this when he entered the house of Cornelius.

Peter said in **Acts 10:28**:

> *"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."*

Peter's words show the significance of what was taking place. God was teaching him that the former separation between Jew and Gentile could not define the people of God in the Gospel Day.

The important lesson was not simply about food or animals. Peter said plainly, *"God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did the Gospel move from Jerusalem to people beyond Judea?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed God's good news belongs chiefly to people like you?

Action Step

Read how the Gospel crossed a national or cultural boundary. What prejudice or hesitation in your own thinking should change?

Gentiles Were Received by God

The events surrounding Cornelius demonstrated that Gentiles could receive salvation without first becoming Jews. This was a major development in the understanding of the early believers.

The Gospel was not an extension of natural Jewish identity. It was for all who would believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul later expressed this truth clearly in **Galatians 3:28**:

> *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Natural distinctions do not determine spiritual standing in Christ. The defining identity is now that believers are *"all one in Christ Jesus."*

Jew and Gentile were not being placed into separate saving programmes or different covenant peoples. Through Jesus Christ, they were being brought into one New Covenant people.

The True Jew Is Inward

Paul also explained that covenant identity could no longer be understood through outward physical distinctions. The New Covenant work reaches into the heart.

Paul wrote in **Romans 2:28-29**:

> *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*

Under the former covenant, outward identity had great significance. Under the New Covenant, the defining work is inward and spiritual.

This truth became increasingly important as the Gospel spread among Gentiles. Membership among God's people was no longer determined by natural ancestry or outward circumcision, but by the spiritual work of God within.

Paul Carries the Gospel Further

The second half of Acts follows Paul as he travels through many cities and regions preaching Jesus Christ. Congregations were established, believers were strengthened and the message continued spreading.

Luke wrote in **Acts 16:5**:

> *"And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."*

The Gospel was no longer centred only in Jerusalem. It was now moving throughout the wider Roman world as people from different backgrounds believed in Jesus Christ.

These congregations existed in different geographical locations, but they belonged to the same spiritual body. The Gospel was producing one people in Christ, not separate Churches for different nations.

From Jerusalem to Rome

Eventually Paul's ministry brought him towards Rome. The Lord told him that the witness he had given in Jerusalem would also be carried to the centre of the Roman Empire.

The Lord said to Paul in **Acts 23:11**:

> *"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."*

The contrast is significant because Paul had testified in Jerusalem, the great centre of Jewish religious life, and would also testify in Rome, the centre of the Roman Empire. The movement described in **Acts 1:8** was visibly unfolding.

Acts begins with the Gospel centred in Jerusalem. By the end of the book, the message of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed in Rome.

The Gospel Could Not Be Contained

Acts therefore records more than the growth of a religious movement. It shows the Gospel breaking through geographical, national and cultural boundaries.

The movement can be followed simply:

- From Jerusalem to Judaea;
- From Judaea into Samaria;
- From Jewish believers towards Gentile believers;
- From local congregations into the wider Roman world;
- Finally to Rome itself.

The Gospel could not be confined to one nation because Jesus Christ came for all who would believe. The New Covenant people of God would not be defined by natural ancestry, geographical location or the former outward distinctions between Jew and Gentile.

Acts begins with a relatively small group of believers in Jerusalem, but it ends with the Gospel being proclaimed in Rome. The message had gone forth, and wherever people believed upon Jesus Christ, they were brought into the same spiritual body, the one Church of God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What did the reception of Gentiles show about belonging to God's people in Christ?

Personal Reflection

Where might background or outward identity still affect how you regard a believer?

Action Step

Think of a believer whose background differs from yours. How will Christ's love within guide the way you welcome or treat them?

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

BACK TO CONTENTS

Following the four Gospels and the book of Acts, the New Testament contains twenty-one books commonly known as the Epistles. The word epistle means a letter or written message sent to a person or group of people.

These letters give us valuable insight into the life of the early Church. They show believers facing questions about doctrine, Christian conduct, relationships, false teaching, suffering, unity and spiritual growth.

The Epistles therefore help us understand how the truths of the Gospel were to be lived in everyday life. They show believers learning to walk faithfully in Jesus Christ.

Letters Written to Real People

The New Testament Epistles were not originally written as general textbooks. They were letters addressed to particular congregations or individuals living in real historical circumstances.

Some letters answered questions or corrected problems, while others warned against false teaching. Some also encouraged believers who were suffering or discouraged.

This helps us understand why knowing the writer, recipients and circumstances of an Epistle can be important when interpreting its message. Although the letters addressed particular situations, their teaching was also valuable to believers elsewhere.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 4:16**:

> *"And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."*

This shows that letters could be shared and read among different congregations. Their instruction could therefore reach beyond the people to whom they were first addressed.

Paul's Thirteen Epistles

The first thirteen Epistles are traditionally associated with the apostle Paul and are often called the Pauline Epistles. Some were written to congregations, while others were written to individuals.

They are:

- Romans;

- 1 Corinthians;
- 2 Corinthians;
- Galatians;
- Ephesians;
- Philippians;
- Colossians;
- 1 Thessalonians;
- 2 Thessalonians;
- 1 Timothy;
- 2 Timothy;
- Titus;
- Philemon.

Paul used these letters to encourage, warn, teach and clarify matters of faith and Christian living. Together they form the largest group of letters in the New Testament.

The Epistles Are Not Arranged Chronologically

Paul's letters do not appear in the New Testament in the order in which they were written. They can instead be understood through several traditional groupings that help us recognise their general historical setting.

Early Letters

1 and 2 Thessalonians were written during the period of Paul's earlier missionary work. These letters addressed believers who needed encouragement and instruction as they continued in the faith.

Great Epistles

Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians and Romans deal with major questions concerning the Gospel, salvation, Christian liberty, conduct and life in Christ. Together they contain important teaching concerning what believers have received through Jesus Christ and how that truth should shape their lives.

Prison Epistles

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon are traditionally connected with Paul's imprisonment. Even during imprisonment, Paul continued teaching, encouraging and strengthening believers through his letters.

Pastoral Epistles

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus were written to men carrying important responsibilities among believers. They contain instruction concerning doctrine, leadership and godly conduct.

These groupings help us understand the circumstances surrounding the letters. However, every Epistle must still be read according to its own purpose, recipients and message.

The Usual Form of a Letter

Letters in the New Testament world commonly followed a recognisable pattern. Understanding this general structure can help us follow the movement of an Epistle more carefully.

They often began with a salutation, identifying the writer and recipients and giving a greeting. This might then be followed by thanksgiving or prayer.

The main body of the letter addressed the reason for writing. This could include teaching, correction, answers to questions, warnings against error or practical instruction.

The letter often concluded with personal greetings and a benediction, offering encouragement and blessing. Not every Epistle follows exactly the same pattern, but these features appear frequently.

Instruction for Life in Christ

The Epistles show that receiving the Gospel was the beginning of Christian life. Believers then needed to learn how to walk faithfully in the truth they had received.

These letters therefore address both what believers should believe and how believers should live. Doctrine and practical Christian living belong together because the truth received in Christ must shape the believer's life.

The Epistles repeatedly bring us back to Jesus Christ, the Gospel, the Church and the practical life of those who belong to Him. We will now turn particularly to the letters of Paul, whose thirteen Epistles form the largest group of letters in the New Testament.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should a letter's writer, first readers, and problem be understood before applying it?

Personal Reflection

Have you lifted a verse from an epistle without asking whom it first addressed?

Action Step

Read an Epistle with its first readers in mind. What hasty personal application do you need to reconsider before drawing a conclusion?

PAUL AND HIS LETTERS

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Paul's thirteen Epistles form the largest single group of letters in the New Testament. They were written to congregations and individuals facing real questions concerning faith, doctrine, Christian conduct, suffering, false teaching and relationships within the Church.

Paul did not write these letters as detached theological essays. He wrote to people he loved and cared for, often addressing circumstances he had personally encountered during his missionary work.

Letters of Encouragement and Instruction

Paul's letters had several important purposes. They were written to:

- Encourage believers;
- Warn against false teaching;
- Correct sinful conduct;
- Answer questions;
- Explain important truths;
- Strengthen congregations;
- Teach believers how to live faithfully in Jesus Christ.

Some letters were written to congregations Paul had personally helped establish, while others were addressed to believers in places he had not yet visited. Several were also written directly to individuals.

The circumstances differed, but Paul's central concern remained the same. Believers needed to understand the Gospel and live consistently with the truth they had received.

Letters to Congregations

Paul wrote to congregations in several important cities and regions, including Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and Thessalonica. These congregations faced different circumstances, and Paul's letters addressed the particular needs that had arisen among them.

Although a letter might originally be addressed to one congregation, it could also be shared with believers elsewhere. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Colossians.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 4:16**:

> *"And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."*

This shows that Paul's teaching was not always intended to remain only with the first congregation that received it. The letters could circulate and provide instruction to other believers facing similar needs.

Letters to Individuals

Paul also wrote personally to Timothy, Titus and Philemon. His letters to Timothy and Titus contain instruction concerning doctrine, leadership, godly conduct and responsibilities among believers.

Philemon is much shorter and deals with a personal situation involving forgiveness, brotherhood and reconciliation. These individual letters show another side of Paul's ministry because he was concerned not only with congregations, but also with individual believers and the practical circumstances of their lives.

Paul Wrote Into Real Situations

The Epistles repeatedly show Paul responding to actual problems. Understanding those situations helps us understand why particular subjects receive so much attention in each letter.

The Corinthians struggled with divisions and serious conduct issues, while the Galatians were being influenced by teachers who wanted believers brought back under Jewish laws and

traditions. The Colossians faced false teaching that diminished the identity and authority of Jesus Christ.

Other believers needed encouragement during persecution, instruction concerning Christian living or guidance concerning leadership. Paul therefore did not simply repeat the same message thirteen times because each Epistle addressed the needs of its particular recipients.

The Letters Continue to Teach Believers

Paul's writings have continued to instruct believers far beyond the congregations and individuals who first received them. Their enduring value comes from the spiritual truths they contain concerning:

- Salvation;
- Faith;
- Liberty in Christ;
- Unity;
- Holiness;
- Love;
- Ministry;
- Suffering;
- False teaching;
- Christian conduct;
- Life within the one body of Christ.

As we examine each Epistle individually, we should keep two important questions before us. We should ask why Paul was writing to these people and what truth he was teaching them concerning life in Jesus Christ.

Understanding the circumstances of each letter will help us follow Paul's teaching more carefully. It will also help us see how the Gospel was applied to the practical life of believers within the early Church.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Paul's letters continue to teach and correct real congregations?

Personal Reflection

Which instruction from a Pauline letter have you overlooked in your own life?

Action Step

Read an instruction of Paul that you have neglected. What change in conduct will you make because of its teaching?

ROMANS: THE GOSPEL, SALVATION AND LIFE IN CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 56
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 56

Place in the Biblical Story: Romans gives a broad explanation of the Gospel, salvation through faith, unity in Christ and the godly life that should follow salvation.

Romans is the first of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains sixteen chapters. Paul wrote to believers in Rome, a congregation made up of people from varied backgrounds who had been brought together through faith in Jesus Christ.

Rome was the centre of the Roman Empire and included people from many nations, occupations and social positions. Among the believers were people from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, former idolaters, tradespeople, slaves and others who now needed to understand that their true spiritual identity was found in Jesus Christ.

Paul Desired to Visit Rome

Paul had a strong desire to visit the believers in Rome, but other responsibilities delayed that journey. He therefore wrote to them before eventually arriving in the city himself.

At the time Romans was written, Nero was emperor. Severe persecution would come later during his reign, but the believers in Rome were then living during a period of relative peace.

Paul's letter therefore gave them a substantial explanation of the Gospel before the more difficult circumstances that would later confront believers in Rome. His teaching would help establish them more firmly in the truth they had received.

A Great Explanation of the Gospel

Romans is often regarded as one of the clearest and most comprehensive explanations of the Gospel found in Paul's writings. It deals with sin, faith, righteousness, salvation, spiritual life and the practical conduct that should flow from belonging to Jesus Christ.

One of the great statements of the book appears near its beginning. Paul explains the place of faith in the life of those who are made righteous before God.

Paul wrote in **Romans 1:17**:

> *"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."*

The final words are especially important: *"The just shall live by faith."* Paul does not present salvation as something earned through outward religious performance, but directs us towards faith in Jesus Christ and the righteousness God provides.

Chapters 1-8: The Foundations of Christian Faith

The first eight chapters contain much of Paul's teaching concerning the foundations of salvation and Christian life. He addresses the condition of humanity, the need for righteousness, faith, justification and the new spiritual life found in Christ.

These chapters are frequently used when explaining salvation because they bring the reader face to face with the need for a work that human effort cannot accomplish. Paul's emphasis brings us away from confidence in ourselves and towards Jesus Christ.

The believer's hope rests not in personal achievement, but in what God has provided through Christ. Salvation therefore establishes an entirely new foundation for life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Paul explain the Gospel to believers in Rome?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever treated salvation as something that still needs to be completed, rather than as the work received in Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Read a section of Romans 1-8. How does what Christ has completed change your confidence in salvation and your daily choices?

The Gospel Produces Spiritual Life

Romans does not leave salvation as a legal idea or simply a change of religious position. Paul continually shows that salvation results in a transformed spiritual life.

The believer is no longer to live under the dominion of sin, but is to walk in the life God has given. This new life is found in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:1-2**:

> *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."*

Notice the expression *"in Christ Jesus."* The freedom Paul describes is found in Christ, and the Gospel therefore brings the believer into a new spiritual relationship and a new way of living.

Chapters 9-11: God's Purpose and His People

In chapters 9 through 11, Paul deals especially with questions concerning Israel, faith and the way people enter into relationship with God. These chapters are important because Jewish and Gentile believers were now worshipping together.

Old distinctions of ancestry and outward identity could easily become causes of misunderstanding or division. Paul's wider teaching in Romans makes clear that true spiritual identity cannot be determined simply by outward ancestry or physical signs.

The Gospel brings people into relationship with God through faith. God's purpose is not to establish separate covenant peoples with different saving programmes, but to bring believers together in Jesus Christ.

Chapters 12-16: Living What We Believe

The final chapters move strongly towards practical Christian living. Paul takes the truths already explained and shows how they should affect daily conduct.

The movement of Romans is therefore important: Understand the Gospel → receive salvation through faith → live according to the life God has given. Doctrine is not intended to remain only in the mind because what believers understand about Jesus Christ should shape their relationships, attitudes, service and conduct.

Paul therefore moves from explanation to application. The truth of salvation is to become visible in the life of the believer.

One Body in Christ

Unity is especially important in a congregation made up of people from different backgrounds. Paul explains that believers may have different functions, yet they belong to the same spiritual body.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:4-5**:

> *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."*

The believers were many individuals, but spiritually they belonged to one body in Christ. Their natural backgrounds did not create separate Churches or separate covenant peoples before God because their unity was found in Jesus Christ.

The Great Movement of Romans

Romans therefore gives us a broad picture of the Christian message. The opening chapters explain why humanity needs salvation, while the central chapters show the spiritual life and freedom found in Christ.

Later chapters address God's purpose and the relationship of believers from different backgrounds. The final chapters then explain how Gospel truth should be lived.

Romans can therefore be remembered through one simple movement: Faith → salvation → life in Christ → godly living. Paul's message continually brings us back to the same foundation: *"The just shall live by faith."*

The Gospel is not simply something to understand because it brings people into salvation through Jesus Christ and changes the way they live. Those who are saved are brought together as one body in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Romans move from God's saving work to a changed life?

Personal Reflection

Are you treating the Gospel as an idea without considering its demands on your conduct?

Action Step

Read an instruction from Romans 12. What attitude or conduct will you change as Christ's life governs your response?

1 CORINTHIANS: UNITY, CONDUCT AND ORDER IN THE CHURCH

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 55
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 55

Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes to a congregation troubled by division, sinful conduct and difficult questions, calling believers back to unity, godly living and sound understanding.

1 Corinthians is the second of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains sixteen chapters. Paul had spent approximately eighteen months with the believers in Corinth and had seen the congregation become established.

After leaving Corinth, however, Paul received troubling reports. Quarrels had developed among the believers, serious problems of conduct had arisen, and the congregation also had questions that required clear instruction.

Paul therefore wrote to correct, instruct and strengthen them. His letter shows how Gospel truth must shape both individual conduct and the life of the congregation.

A Congregation Troubled by Division

One of Paul's first concerns was the division that had developed among the Corinthian believers. The Gospel had brought them together in Jesus Christ, yet quarrels were now damaging their fellowship.

Paul was deeply concerned that believers who belonged to Christ were allowing disagreements and personal loyalties to divide them. The opening chapters of the Epistle therefore deal especially with these quarrels and the need for believers to regain a proper spiritual focus.

The problem was not simply that people held different opinions. Their disagreements were affecting the unity and conduct of the congregation.

Paul's response reminds us that belonging to Jesus Christ must influence the way believers relate to one another. Those who belong to the same Lord should not allow personal loyalties and disagreements to divide the body.

Questions Were Brought to Paul

Paul also received information and questions from Corinth through believers who had travelled to see him. These reports helped him understand what was taking place within the congregation.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 16:17-18**:

> *"I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such."*

Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus helped Paul understand the circumstances among the believers. This helps explain the practical nature of 1 Corinthians.

Paul was not writing about imaginary problems. He was responding to actual circumstances among believers whom he knew and cared about.

Serious Conduct Had to Be Corrected

Paul's concerns extended beyond quarrels. In chapters 5-11, he addresses serious problems of conduct that had developed within the congregation.

These included sexual immorality, believers taking one another to court and other forms of behaviour inconsistent with Christian life. Paul did not treat salvation as permission to live carelessly.

The believers had received the Gospel, but they still needed instruction concerning how their lives should reflect the truth they professed. The Epistle therefore shows that Christian doctrine and Christian conduct cannot properly be separated.

What believers believe about Jesus Christ should affect the way they live. The Gospel changes more than what a person believes because it must also shape conduct.

Difficult Spiritual Questions

The Corinthian congregation also required instruction concerning spiritual matters that had become confused. In chapters 12-15, Paul addresses difficult subjects, including the proper understanding and use of spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues.

These chapters demonstrate the need for spiritual matters to be understood correctly and exercised within proper order. The congregation needed more than enthusiasm because they also needed instruction.

Paul therefore brought them back to sound understanding so that spiritual matters would strengthen rather than confuse or divide the believers. Spiritual activity within the congregation was to contribute to the good of the body rather than become another source of disorder.

Paul Brings Them Back to the Gospel

Towards the closing chapters of the letter, Paul again places the Gospel clearly before the Corinthians. This is significant because many of their problems had developed while they were losing sight of the spiritual foundation upon which their lives and fellowship should rest.

Paul therefore does more than correct individual problems. He continually directs them back towards the truth of Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

The answer to division was not simply better organisation, and the answer to sinful conduct was not simply stricter rules. The answer to confusion was not simply argument because the congregation needed to return to the truth they had received and allow that truth to govern their lives together.

The Movement of 1 Corinthians

The book can be remembered through four broad movements. These movements help us follow the different problems and questions Paul addresses:

- Chapters 1-4: Quarrels and division within the congregation;
- Chapters 5-11: Serious problems of conduct and practical Christian living;
- Chapters 12-15: Difficult spiritual and doctrinal questions requiring correction and understanding;
- Chapters 15-16: A renewed emphasis upon the Gospel and encouragement to remain faithful.

1 Corinthians gives us a realistic picture of a congregation containing believers who still needed substantial teaching and correction. Paul did not abandon them because problems had arisen, but wrote to help them understand where they had gone wrong and how they should live.

The central lesson is clear: Believers in Jesus Christ must not allow division, sinful conduct or spiritual confusion to govern the Church. The Gospel that saves us must also shape the way we live, worship and relate to one another.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did problems in Corinth require both correction and teaching?

Personal Reflection

How do you respond when the Bible corrects conduct in a church?

Action Step

Read Paul's correction of one problem at Corinth. Is there a similar attitude in you that needs correction, and how will you respond?

2 CORINTHIANS: MINISTRY, SUFFERING AND FAITHFULNESS

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 55-56
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 55-56
Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes again to the Corinthian believers, encouraging spiritual progress, answering criticism and showing how faithful ministry continues through suffering.

2 Corinthians is the third of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains thirteen chapters. It continues Paul's relationship with the believers at Corinth after the serious problems addressed in 1 Corinthians.

Paul had received several troubling reports concerning the congregation, but eventually Titus brought more encouraging news. Paul therefore wrote to strengthen the believers while also responding to continuing difficulties.

Paul's Continuing Concern for Corinth

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian believers had not been easy. He had invested considerable time in teaching them, yet problems repeatedly arose concerning conduct, division and attitudes towards his ministry.

2 Corinthians belongs within a larger correspondence between Paul and Corinth, and some of those letters were not preserved in Scripture. By the time Paul wrote this Epistle, however, there were signs of improvement.

Paul therefore combined correction with encouragement. He wanted the believers to recognise the progress that had been made and continue growing spiritually.

Paul Faced Serious Criticism

Titus also reported that false teachers were making accusations against Paul. Some questioned his authority and sought to undermine the ministry God had given him.

Paul therefore spends considerable time explaining and defending his apostleship. His purpose was not simply to protect his personal reputation because the truth of the Gospel was also involved.

If false teachers could persuade the Corinthians to reject Paul's ministry, they could also turn them away from the Gospel he had preached. Paul therefore defended his ministry because the spiritual welfare of the believers and the truth being taught were at stake.

Ministry Through Suffering

One of the strongest themes in 2 Corinthians is that faithful ministry does not always produce an easy life. Paul speaks openly about suffering, opposition, weakness and hardship, yet these experiences had not caused him to abandon the work Christ had given him.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9**:

> *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;"*

Paul's circumstances were difficult, but his confidence remained in God. He could be troubled but not distressed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, and cast down but not destroyed.

Faithfulness does not mean that believers will never experience hardship. It means that hardship does not need to destroy their confidence in Jesus Christ.

Paul's Life Supported His Message

Paul also pointed to the character of his own ministry. He had sought to be honest, sincere, hopeful and devoted even while suffering.

His manner of life therefore supported the message he preached. This gave Paul a basis for encouraging the Corinthians to live with the same openness and faithfulness.

Christian ministry cannot be separated from Christian character. What a person teaches should be reflected in the way that person lives.

Strength Is Found in Christ

2 Corinthians therefore gives us a deeply personal picture of Paul's ministry. He does not present himself as someone untouched by difficulty, but allows the believers to see his struggles while continually directing them towards the strength God supplied.

Several important lessons emerge from the Epistle:

- Faithful ministry may involve suffering;
- Opposition does not prove that God has abandoned His servant;
- Christian character must support Christian teaching;
- Believers should remain open-hearted and faithful towards one another;
- Our confidence must remain in Jesus Christ rather than in human strength.

1 Corinthians dealt strongly with disorder within the congregation, while 2 Corinthians allows us to see more of Paul's heart towards the believers. He encourages them to continue

forward, remain faithful and understand that genuine ministry can continue even through suffering.

Paul's hardships did not bring his ministry to an end because his confidence did not rest in his own strength. His confidence remained in Jesus Christ, who enabled him to continue faithfully through difficulty.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could Paul serve faithfully through criticism and suffering?

Personal Reflection

What difficulty has made you question whether faithful service is worthwhile?

Action Step

Read Paul's words about ministry under pressure. What discouragement will you bring under the strength of Christ within?

GALATIANS: LIBERTY IN CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 49-50

Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 49-50

Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes to believers in Galatia to defend the Gospel, oppose false teaching and remind them of the liberty they have in Jesus Christ.

Galatians is the fourth of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains six chapters. Paul had visited the believers in Galatia, but after his departure troubling teaching began to influence them.

Paul wrote with urgency because the Gospel they had received in Jesus Christ was being challenged. Teachers were attempting to place believers under Jewish laws and traditions that would bring them back into bondage.

Paul Had Personally Preached to Them

Paul reminded the Galatians that he had personally brought the Gospel to them. They knew both Paul and the message he had preached.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:13**:

> *"Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first."*

Paul's concern was that the Galatians were now allowing other teachers to move them away from the liberty they had received in Christ. They were not simply learning something additional, but were being drawn towards a system that would place them again under bondage.

False Teachers Were Bringing Believers Into Bondage

Paul speaks strongly about those who were trying to impose Jewish requirements upon the Galatian believers. He describes their purpose as an attempt to interfere with the liberty believers possessed in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:4**:

> *"And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:"*

Notice the contrast in Paul's language between liberty in Christ Jesus and bondage. The liberty Paul defended was not freedom to live carelessly or sinfully, but freedom from being placed again under religious requirements that Jesus Christ had fulfilled.

Paul wanted the Galatians to understand that salvation is received through faith. It is not earned by returning to the requirements of the Law.

"Stand Fast Therefore in the Liberty"

Paul's central appeal appears clearly in **Galatians 5:1**. He calls the believers to remain firmly in the freedom they had already received through Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

The liberty belongs to Christ because Paul does not say that believers made themselves free. He says plainly, *"Christ hath made us free."*

The danger was that those who had received freedom in Christ would voluntarily return to a yoke from which Christ had delivered them. This strong emphasis upon freedom in Jesus Christ has led Galatians to be described as the *"Magna Carta of Christian Liberty."*

Paul Defends His Apostleship

In chapters 1-2, Paul also responds to challenges concerning his apostleship and the Gospel he preached. He explains his former life, his experience of the Gospel and his relationship with the other apostles.

Those attacking Paul were also challenging the message he had preached. Paul therefore explains why the Galatians should not abandon the Gospel they had received and follow those who were leading them back towards bondage.

Faith Rather Than Legal Bondage

In chapters 3-5, Paul addresses the danger of legalism directly. He reminds the Galatians that salvation comes through faith rather than through attempting to obtain righteousness by keeping religious laws.

Jesus Christ had brought freedom, and the answer was not to return to bondage. Paul therefore repeatedly brings the believers back to the sufficiency of what God had provided in Christ.

The believer does not need to return to the former outward covenant system in order to complete what Christ has accomplished. The believer possesses the Person, and the Person is greater than the outward system that pointed towards Him.

Liberty Must Produce Godly Living

Paul does not end by teaching freedom without responsibility. In chapters 5-6, he explains how believers should live and includes important teaching concerning the fruit of the Spirit.

Christian liberty is therefore not freedom from obedience to God. It is freedom to live the spiritual life produced through Jesus Christ rather than being bound again to an outward legal system.

Galatians can therefore be remembered through Paul's central declaration: *"Christ hath made us free."* The believer's confidence must remain in Jesus Christ, and the liberty He gives must never be exchanged for religious bondage.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Paul resist teaching that brought believers back into bondage?

Personal Reflection

Where have you confused freedom in Christ with either rule keeping or doing as you please?

Action Step

Read Galatians about freedom in Christ. What reliance on outward rules or excuse for wrong conduct must you leave behind?

EPHESIANS: ONE BODY IN CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 60-62
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 60-62, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome
Place in the Biblical Story: Ephesians encourages believers concerning their position in Christ, their unity as one body and the way they should walk faithfully in their calling.

Ephesians is the fifth of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains six chapters. Paul had visited Ephesus more than once and had spent considerable time strengthening the believers there.

Because the letter contains fewer personal greetings than many of Paul's other writings, it has often been regarded as a circular Epistle intended to be read among more than one congregation. Its teaching therefore addresses broad truths concerning the believer's position and life in Jesus Christ.

Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

Paul's ministry in Ephesus had a significant effect upon the city. During one visit, so many people were turning from idolatry that the trade of those producing silver images was affected.

A silversmith named Demetrius became concerned that the spread of the Gospel was damaging the business connected with idol worship. The resulting disturbance nearly became a riot.

Paul eventually left Ephesus, but not before the congregation had been strengthened and the Gospel had made a clear impact upon the city. Years later, while imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote to encourage the believers.

Chapters 1-3: What Believers Have in Christ

The opening chapters emphasise what God has given believers in Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of spiritual blessings, adoption and God's purpose for His people.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 1:5**:

> *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,"*

Paul wanted believers to understand their spiritual position. They were not simply people who had joined a religious organisation, but through Jesus Christ they had been brought into relationship with God.

This understanding becomes the foundation for everything that follows. Paul first establishes what believers have received in Christ before explaining how they should live.

One Body and One Spirit

Unity is one of the strongest themes in Ephesians. Paul repeatedly shows that those who are saved belong together in one spiritual body.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in 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 you all."*

Paul's language is unmistakable because he speaks of one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith and one baptism. The Church is therefore not spiritually divided into many bodies because believers from different backgrounds are joined together in one body in Christ.

Their unity does not depend upon natural background, nationality or former religious identity. It is found in the spiritual life they share in Jesus Christ.

Chapters 4-5: Walk Worthy of Your Calling

After explaining what believers have received, Paul turns towards the way they should live. Spiritual position must be reflected in practical Christian conduct.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:1**:

> *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,"*

The order is important because Paul first teaches believers who they are in Christ and then teaches them how they should walk. Christian conduct should flow from spiritual reality.

Believers are called to live in a way that agrees with the life they have received. What Christ has accomplished within them should become visible in their relationships, attitudes and conduct.

Chapter 6: The Whole Armour of God

The final chapter includes Paul's well-known teaching concerning the whole armour of God. He uses the picture of armour to teach believers the need for spiritual preparation and steadfastness.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 6:11**:

> *"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."*

The believers were not simply to begin the Christian life. They were also to remain spiritually prepared and stand against opposition.

Ephesians therefore moves from spiritual identity to practical living and finally to faithful perseverance. The movement can be remembered as blessed in Christ → united in one body → called to walk worthy → equipped to stand.

Paul's message continually brings believers back to Jesus Christ. In Him they have received spiritual life, and in Him they are joined together as one body.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How should being one body in Christ change the way believers live together?

Personal Reflection

What attitude towards another believer needs to change in you?

Action Step

Consider someone in the body of Christ towards whom you have been unkind. What will change in the way you treat them?

PHILIPPIANS: JOY, FAITHFULNESS AND CHRIST-CENTRED LIVING

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 60-62
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 60-62, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome
Place in the Biblical Story: Philippians records Paul's warm relationship with the believers in Philippi and encourages them to remain faithful to the Gospel even during difficult circumstances.

Philippians is the sixth of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains four chapters. Paul wrote the letter while imprisoned, yet its tone is deeply personal and encouraging.

The congregation at Philippi had been established approximately ten years earlier during Paul's second missionary journey. During the years that followed, these believers showed unusual care for Paul and continued to support him during difficult periods of his ministry.

A Congregation That Cared for Paul

The believers in Philippi had developed a close relationship with Paul. They supported his ministry through gifts, practical assistance and expressions of concern, especially during his imprisonment.

Paul therefore wrote with genuine gratitude for their care. This relationship helps explain the warmth of the letter.

Philippians is not mainly a letter of correction like some of Paul's other writings. It reflects the affection between Paul and a congregation that had repeatedly stood with him.

The believers had not forgotten Paul when his circumstances became difficult. Their example reminds us that Christian fellowship includes more than words because believers can strengthen one another through practical support, encouragement and faithfulness during times of need.

Paul Wrote From Imprisonment

Paul's circumstances were far from comfortable when he wrote Philippians. He was under confinement in Rome and did not possess the freedom he had enjoyed during his earlier missionary journeys.

Yet imprisonment did not cause him to abandon confidence in God. Paul spoke openly about his circumstances while continuing to encourage the believers to live according to the Gospel.

His attention was not centred only upon his own difficulties because he remained concerned about the spiritual life of others. This gives Philippians much of its encouraging character.

Paul was experiencing hardship himself, yet he was still strengthening other believers. His circumstances restricted his movements, but they did not end his ministry.

Confidence During Difficult Circumstances

Paul expressed confidence that his circumstances would not prevent God's purpose from continuing. Although imprisoned, he looked forward with hope and encouraged the Philippians not to become discouraged because of what was happening to him.

His life therefore demonstrated an important principle: Circumstances do not determine whether a believer can remain faithful to Jesus Christ. Paul's freedom had been restricted, but his faith had not been imprisoned.

His confidence remained in God, and he continued using the opportunities available to him to strengthen the Church. Difficulty changed his circumstances, but it did not change the truth upon which his confidence rested.

Living in a Way That Reflects the Gospel

Paul also encouraged the believers in Philippi to live in a manner consistent with the Gospel they had received. Christian faith was not simply something they professed because their conduct should reflect the truth of Jesus Christ.

This included the way believers treated one another, responded to difficulty and maintained their spiritual priorities. Paul wanted the congregation to continue faithfully rather than

allowing pressure, discouragement or false teaching to draw them away from what they had already received.

The Gospel was therefore to shape both belief and conduct. Their lives should demonstrate the reality of the truth they professed.

Timothy Would Visit Them

Paul also informed the Philippians that Timothy would be sent to visit them. Timothy had become an important fellow worker with Paul and could provide encouragement and help to the congregation.

His planned visit also shows Paul's continuing concern for believers even while Paul himself was unable to travel freely. Paul's imprisonment did not end his ministry because he could still write, encourage and send trusted fellow workers.

The Gospel work therefore continued despite his personal restrictions. Paul used the opportunities still available to him rather than allowing imprisonment to bring his service to an end.

A Warning Against Legalistic Thinking

Paul also warned the Philippians against attitudes that would draw them towards legalistic religion. This concern appears elsewhere in Paul's letters, particularly Galatians, where he strongly defends the liberty believers possess in Christ.

Paul's consistent message was that believers must remain centred upon Jesus Christ rather than returning to confidence in outward religious requirements. The Christian life begins in Christ and must continue in Christ.

The believer's confidence cannot rest in outward religious identity or human achievement. It must remain in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Character of Philippians

Philippians can therefore be remembered through several important themes. Together they show the warm and encouraging character of Paul's letter:

- A close and caring relationship between Paul and the believers;
- Faithfulness during imprisonment and hardship;
- Gratitude for practical Christian support;
- Confidence in God despite difficult circumstances;
- Living in a manner consistent with the Gospel;
- Continued ministry through trusted fellow workers such as Timothy;
- Remaining centred upon Jesus Christ rather than legalistic religion.

Philippians is a deeply personal letter from a man whose outward circumstances were restricted but whose confidence in Jesus Christ remained strong. His imprisonment did not prevent him from encouraging others, continuing his ministry and looking forward with confidence.

The letter therefore encourages believers to remain faithful when circumstances are difficult and to support one another in practical ways. Above all, it calls them to allow the Gospel to shape their lives and to remain centred upon Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could Paul speak of joy and faithfulness in difficult circumstances?

Personal Reflection

What has hardship shown you about where you seek joy?

Action Step

Read Philippians during a present difficulty. What complaint or fearful attitude should Christ's joy within you govern?

COLOSSIANS: THE SUPREMACY AND SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 60-62
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 60-62, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome
Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes to protect believers from false teaching and to establish their confidence in the authority, divinity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Colossians is the seventh of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains four chapters. Paul wrote while imprisoned after receiving news concerning the congregation in Colossae from Epaphras.

The believers were being exposed to teachings that threatened to draw their attention away from Jesus Christ. Paul therefore wrote to strengthen their understanding and remind them that everything necessary for spiritual life is found in Christ.

False Teaching Was Entering the Congregation

The believers at Colossae were being influenced by a mixture of religious ideas. These included aspects of Greek philosophy, the worship of angels and attempts to bring believers under Jewish religious requirements.

Some teachings also diminished the identity of Jesus Christ by treating Him as though He were simply a great teacher or prophet rather than recognising who He truly is. Paul confronted this directly because the identity of Jesus Christ stood at the centre of the issue.

The problem was serious because once confidence in the identity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ is weakened, believers can begin looking elsewhere for spiritual fulfilment. Paul therefore continually directed their attention back to Christ.

Jesus Christ Is Fully Sufficient

One of the clearest declarations in the letter appears in **Colossians 2:9-10**. Paul brings together the identity of Jesus Christ and the completeness of the believer in Him.

Paul wrote:

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"

These two statements belong together. Paul first declares, *"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"* and then says, *"Ye are complete in him."*

Paul therefore places the believer's confidence entirely in Jesus Christ. If all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him, nothing spiritually necessary can be added to Him.

If believers are complete in Him, they do not need another religious system, philosophy, spiritual intermediary or outward requirement to make them spiritually complete. Complete means complete, and the believer possesses the Person in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily.

Christ Must Remain Central

The Colossians were in danger of becoming distracted by teachings that appeared spiritual but moved attention away from Christ. Paul therefore continually brings them back to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is enough, and the believer is complete in Him. There is no higher spiritual reality that must be found somewhere beyond the Person believers have already received.

The believer does not need another mediator or another spiritual system to complete salvation. Neither can outward religious practices produce something that is already complete in Jesus Christ.

The Person is greater than anything that only represents or points towards Him. The believer's confidence must therefore remain centred upon Jesus Christ Himself.

Christian Truth Must Shape Daily Life

Paul does not end with doctrinal correction because truth concerning Jesus Christ must affect the believer's life. In chapters 3-4, he turns towards practical Christian living.

Paul teaches believers concerning love, relationships within the home, conduct towards one another and the way Christians should live among fellow believers. The truth they had received concerning Christ was to become visible in their everyday conduct.

This demonstrates an important principle: Right doctrine should produce right living. Understanding the identity of Jesus Christ should influence the way believers speak, behave, love and relate to others.

Paul did not want the Colossians simply to reject false teaching intellectually. He wanted them to live lives shaped by the truth they had received in Jesus Christ.

The Central Message of Colossians

Colossians can therefore be remembered through several important truths. Together they bring the believer continually back to the identity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ:

- False teaching can distract believers from Jesus Christ;
- Jesus Christ is not simply a prophet or teacher;
- In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;

- Believers are complete in Him;
- No philosophy, religious system or spiritual practice can add to His sufficiency;
- Truth concerning Christ must shape everyday Christian living.

The great message of Colossians is that Jesus Christ must have the preeminence. Everything necessary for the believer's spiritual life is found in Him.

The believer's confidence, completeness and spiritual life are therefore found in Jesus Christ. All the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him, and the believer is complete in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Jesus Christ remain sufficient when other teaching seems attractive?

Personal Reflection

Has another teaching led you to act as though Jesus Christ is not sufficient for your spiritual life?

Action Step

Examine a teaching that claims you need something beyond Christ for spiritual completeness. How will Colossians correct your confidence?

1 THESSALONIANS: FAITH, HOLINESS AND ENCOURAGEMENT

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 51
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 51
Place in the Biblical Story: Paul encourages a young congregation in Thessalonica, strengthens them against false teaching and instructs them concerning holiness and spiritual life in Christ.

1 Thessalonians is the eighth of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains five chapters. Paul, Silas and Timothy had established a congregation in Thessalonica in Macedonia, but opposition forced them to leave after only a relatively short period.

Paul remained concerned about these believers because they were young in the faith and could easily have been influenced by persecution or false teaching. He therefore wanted to know whether they were continuing faithfully in the Gospel they had received.

Timothy Brings Encouraging News

Unable to return immediately, Paul sent Timothy to learn how the Thessalonian believers were progressing. The report was encouraging because, despite the opposition they had faced, the believers were continuing in faith.

Paul therefore wrote to strengthen them and encourage them to continue faithfully. He also addressed areas of confusion that still required instruction.

God's Will Is Holiness

One important concern involved immoral behaviour. Paul taught clearly that salvation must affect the believer's conduct.

Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 4:3**:

> *"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:"*

Paul's instruction is direct because God's will for believers includes holiness. Christian liberty does not mean freedom to return to sinful behaviour.

Those who belong to Jesus Christ are called to live lives consistent with the spiritual life they have received. Salvation therefore affects both the inward life and the conduct of the believer.

Understanding 1 Thessalonians 4

The latter part of chapter 4 is often misunderstood as describing a future physical rapture. These verses should instead be understood spiritually and in harmony with the wider teaching concerning the new birth.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:6**:

> *"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"*

The believer has already been spiritually raised up together in Christ. Through salvation, those who were spiritually dead have been brought into spiritual life.

Jesus also said in **John 5:28**:

> *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,"*

The Gospel calls those who are spiritually dead to life. Those who hear His voice and respond are raised spiritually and brought into Christ and His body, the Church.

The emphasis therefore belongs with the spiritual work accomplished through salvation rather than with an expectation of a future removal of believers from the earth. The believer has already been raised into spiritual life through the new birth in Jesus Christ.

Remain Faithful in Christ

1 Thessalonians was written to strengthen believers who had experienced opposition and still needed instruction. Its principal themes include steadfast faith, holiness in personal conduct, freedom from sexual immorality and sound understanding concerning spiritual life in Christ.

Paul's concern was that these believers should not simply begin well. They should continue faithfully in the Gospel they had received.

1 Thessalonians therefore encourages believers to remain steadfast, holy and centred upon Jesus Christ. The spiritual life received through the new birth must continue to shape the way they live.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How are faith, holiness, and encouragement joined in 1 Thessalonians?

Personal Reflection

Which call to holy living or encouragement do you need to hear?

Action Step

Read a call to holiness and encouragement in 1 Thessalonians. What kind word or faithful choice will follow from Christ's life within?

2 THESSALONIANS: PERSEVERANCE AND CORRECTION

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 51-52

Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 51-52

Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes again to the Thessalonian believers to correct misunderstanding, strengthen them during trouble and encourage continued holiness and faithfulness.

2 Thessalonians is the ninth of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains three chapters. Paul wrote only a few months after 1 Thessalonians because he had learned that some believers were still confused and troubled by teaching they had received.

Paul therefore wrote to steady their thinking and correct misunderstanding. He also encouraged them to remain faithful in Jesus Christ despite the difficulties surrounding them.

Do Not Be Troubled

Paul addressed their concern directly because some believers had become unsettled by claims concerning the day of Christ. He wanted them to remain grounded rather than allowing every claim or supposed message to disturb them.

Paul wrote in **2 Thessalonians 2:2**:

> *"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand."*

The believers were not to allow every claim, spiritual impression or supposed letter to unsettle them. Paul wanted them to remain grounded in the truth they had already received.

This remains an important principle because spiritual confidence should rest upon truth. Believers should not allow alarming claims or teachings to produce unnecessary confusion.

The Man of Sin

Paul also spoke about the *"man of sin"* and the evil that would become manifest within the religious world. These verses have often been interpreted as referring to a future individual antichrist, but the prophetic picture concerns the rise of Papalism, in which human religious authority would exalt itself within the place belonging to God.

These verses therefore belong within the larger prophetic history of the Gospel Day. It does not describe a future world ruler who will appear shortly before the end of time.

Paul's purpose, however, was not to leave the Thessalonians frightened or confused. He wrote so that they would understand the truth, remain steady and continue faithfully in the Lord.

Continue in Faithfulness

Paul also gave practical instruction concerning everyday Christian life. Believers were to work rather than live idly, remain steadfast and continue in holiness.

Christian expectation was never intended to produce inactivity. Whatever difficulties or confusion surrounded them, believers still had responsibilities to fulfil and a life of faithfulness to maintain.

2 Thessalonians therefore combines correction and encouragement. Paul corrects misunderstanding, warns of religious deception and then brings the believers back to steadfast Christian living.

His message is simple: Do not be shaken, and do not be deceived. Believers are to remain faithful and continue living for Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Paul urge troubled believers to continue faithfully in 2 Thessalonians?

Personal Reflection

Have predictions about the future distracted you from the present life and faithfulness found in Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Consider a fear about the future. What does 2 Thessalonians call you to do faithfully in the present instead?

1 TIMOTHY: ORDER, DOCTRINE AND GODLY LEADERSHIP

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 62-64
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 62-64
Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes to Timothy concerning sound doctrine, leadership and the practical responsibilities involved in caring for a congregation.

1 Timothy is the tenth of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains six chapters. Paul had a close relationship with Timothy and regarded him as a spiritual son who had faithfully served beside him in the work of the Gospel.

Timothy had travelled with Paul and assisted him during important periods of ministry. Paul later entrusted him with responsibility among the believers in Ephesus while Paul continued towards Macedonia.

Timothy Had Proven His Faithfulness

Paul held Timothy in high regard and spoke warmly of his character. He particularly valued Timothy because he genuinely cared for the spiritual condition of other believers.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:19-22**:

> *"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel."*

Timothy's leadership was therefore not based simply upon position. He had already demonstrated faithful service, genuine concern for believers and devotion to the things of Jesus Christ.

Do Not Let Youth Become a Hindrance

Timothy was still comparatively young and carried significant responsibility. Paul encouraged him not to allow his age to prevent him from fulfilling the work entrusted to him.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 4:12**:

> *"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."*

Paul's answer to Timothy's youth was not self-importance, but example. Timothy was to demonstrate godliness through his words, conduct, love, faith and purity.

His influence among believers would therefore be strengthened by the life he lived. Leadership required more than teaching others because Timothy himself needed to demonstrate the truth he taught.

Leadership Requires Sound Doctrine

A major concern throughout the letter is the need to protect believers from false teaching. Timothy therefore had responsibilities concerning both doctrine and conduct.

He needed to recognise error, teach truth and help the congregation remain spiritually healthy. Paul also gave practical instruction concerning leadership and the different situations Timothy would encounter among believers.

These verses provide important guidance concerning the character and responsibilities expected of those serving the Church. Sound teaching and godly character must remain together because leadership cannot be separated from the life of the person who leads.

Fight the Good Fight

Paul encouraged Timothy to remain courageous and faithful rather than becoming discouraged by the weight of responsibility. The ministry entrusted to him required perseverance and continued faithfulness.

1 Timothy therefore brings together several important principles:

- Sound doctrine must be protected;
- Leadership must be supported by godly character;
- Age does not prevent faithful service;
- Those who lead should genuinely care for believers;

- Christian leadership is service carried out for Jesus Christ.

Paul's instruction to Timothy shows that leadership in the Church is not primarily about status or authority over others. It involves faithfulness, sound teaching, godly example and genuine care for the people of God.

Timothy had already demonstrated that kind of concern through his service with Paul. He was now responsible to continue faithfully and help others remain established in the truth of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do sound doctrine and godly leadership belong together in 1 Timothy?

Personal Reflection

Do you judge a leader chiefly by ability or also by conduct and truth?

Action Step

Read a qualification for church leadership in 1 Timothy. What attitude in your own service needs to become more faithful?

2 TIMOTHY: FAITHFULNESS TO THE END

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 66-67
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 66-67
Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes near the end of his life, urging Timothy to remain strong, faithful and steadfast in Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy is the eleventh of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains four chapters. It was written during Paul's final imprisonment in Rome and is generally regarded as his final preserved letter.

His circumstances were much more severe than during his earlier imprisonment. Yet even as Paul faced the possibility of death, his concern remained focused upon encouraging Timothy to continue faithfully in the work of the Gospel.

Be Strong in Christ Jesus

Paul knew that Timothy would face difficulty, opposition and responsibility. He therefore directed Timothy towards the true source of spiritual strength.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:1**:

> *"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."*

Paul did not tell Timothy to depend upon natural strength. His confidence was to be found *"in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."*

Timothy would face difficult circumstances, but he did not have to face them in his own strength. Paul encouraged him to remain strong because the grace he needed was found in Jesus Christ.

Perilous Times Would Come

Paul also warned Timothy that difficult periods lay ahead. Faithfulness could not depend upon circumstances remaining easy.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:1**:

> *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."*

Timothy therefore needed courage and spiritual stability. Paul's warning was not intended to produce fear, but to prepare him to remain steadfast when opposition or spiritual decline appeared around him.

Difficult times did not change the truth Timothy had received. He was to continue faithfully regardless of the conditions surrounding him.

Paul Had Kept the Faith

As Paul looked back upon his own ministry, he could speak with confidence. His life was nearing its end, but he knew that he had remained faithful through the course God had given him.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 4:7-8**:

> *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."*

Paul's testimony was not centred upon regret. He could say that he had fought a good fight, finished his course and kept the faith.

2 Timothy therefore becomes a powerful call to perseverance. Paul had remained faithful through persecution, imprisonment and hardship, and he now encouraged Timothy to continue with the same steadfastness.

The central message of the letter is clear: Be strong in Jesus Christ, remain faithful in difficult times and finish the course God has given you. Paul had reached the end of his course, and Timothy was now responsible to continue faithfully in the work before him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does Paul's faithfulness at the end of his life teach about continuing in Christ?

Personal Reflection

What makes it difficult for you to remain faithful over time?

Action Step

Read Paul's final charge in 2 Timothy. Which difficulty threatens your perseverance, and what truth will keep you faithful?

TITUS: SOUND DOCTRINE AND GODLY LIVING

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 62-64
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 62-64
Place in the Biblical Story: Paul writes to Titus concerning leadership, sound doctrine and the need for believers to live godly lives.

Titus is the twelfth of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains three chapters. Titus was a younger companion who travelled and worked with Paul in the Gospel and was entrusted with responsibility among the believers in Crete.

The letter is similar in purpose to 1 Timothy because it deals with practical matters of leadership, sound teaching and Christian conduct. Paul wanted Titus to help believers live faithfully according to the truth they had received.

Choosing Faithful Leaders

Chapter 1 gives particular attention to the appointment of leaders. Paul wanted Titus to recognise that those entrusted with responsibility among believers must demonstrate godly character.

Leadership could not be based simply upon ability, influence or position. Those who teach others must themselves live in a way that agrees with the truth they proclaim.

This establishes an important principle concerning those who serve among God's people. Christian leadership requires both sound doctrine and godly character.

Sound Doctrine Must Produce Godly Living

In chapters 2 and 3, Paul turns especially towards Christian conduct. Truth is not given simply so that believers can explain doctrine correctly, but is intended to shape the way they live.

Paul wrote in **Titus 2:11-12**:

> *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"*

Grace therefore does not encourage careless living. It teaches believers to deny ungodliness and to live:

- Soberly;
- Righteously;
- Godly.

Salvation should produce visible spiritual change. The life of the believer should demonstrate the effect of the grace received through Jesus Christ.

Doctrine and Conduct Belong Together

Titus continually connects what believers believe with how they live. Sound doctrine should produce sound conduct, and those who teach truth should demonstrate that truth through their own lives.

The letter can therefore be remembered through four simple principles:

- Choose faithful leaders;
- Teach sound doctrine;
- Reject ungodliness;
- Live in a way that reflects Jesus Christ.

Titus reminds us that truth is not simply something to defend with words. It must be lived, and the believer's conduct should provide evidence of the spiritual life received through Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must sound doctrine lead to godly conduct in Titus?

Personal Reflection

Is there a truth you can explain but have not yet lived?

Action Step

Read Titus on sound doctrine and conduct. What belief have you explained but failed to express in your dealings with others?

PHILEMON: FORGIVENESS, BROTHERHOOD AND RECONCILIATION

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 60-62
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 60-62
Place in the Biblical Story: Paul appeals for Onesimus to be received not simply as a servant, but as a beloved brother in Christ.

Philemon is the thirteenth and final of Paul's Epistles in the New Testament and contains only one chapter. It is a deeply personal letter concerning Philemon and Onesimus.

Onesimus had been a servant belonging to Philemon. After leaving him and travelling to Rome, Onesimus came into contact with Paul and received the Gospel.

Paul valued Onesimus and could have continued benefiting from his help. However, he recognised the need for reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon.

Receive Him as a Brother

Paul appealed to Philemon to receive Onesimus differently because of the spiritual change that had taken place. The Gospel had changed the relationship between them.

Paul wrote in **Philemon 1**:15-16:

> *"For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?"*

Onesimus was now to be received as *"a brother beloved."* Paul even offered to take responsibility for anything Onesimus owed, demonstrating his desire to see reconciliation completed.

Equality in Christ

Although slavery was accepted within Roman society, Paul appealed to a higher spiritual relationship. In Christ, Onesimus was not to be viewed simply according to his social position because he was now a brother.

Philemon therefore teaches several important lessons:

- Forgiveness;
- Reconciliation;
- Brotherhood;
- Equality in Christ.

The letter is short, but its message is powerful. Jesus Christ changes not only individuals, but also the way believers are called to receive and treat one another.

Philemon therefore gives a practical example of Gospel truth affecting human relationships. Those who belong to Jesus Christ are called to recognise and treat one another as brothers and sisters in the same spiritual family.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Paul ask Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother?

Personal Reflection

Where might status or an old wrong affect how you treat another believer?

Action Step

Read Philemon's appeal concerning Onesimus. Whose dignity have you overlooked, and what respectful change will you make?

CONCLUSION: THE GOSPEL CONTINUES THROUGH THE CHURCH

BACK TO CONTENTS

Acts and the Epistles of Paul show what happened after the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. The Gospel did not remain confined to Jerusalem, but moved into Judaea, Samaria and eventually throughout the wider Roman world.

Acts records believers preaching Jesus Christ despite persecution and opposition. It also shows Jewish believers gradually learning that the Gospel was not restricted to their own nation, but that Jew and Gentile could be brought together in one spiritual body through Jesus Christ.

The Gospel Changed Lives

The central message remained salvation through Jesus Christ. People were called to believe upon Him and receive the salvation He had provided.

Paul and Silas said in **Acts 16:31**:

> *"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."*

People from very different backgrounds heard the Gospel and believed. Congregations were established, and those who had received spiritual life then needed instruction concerning how they should live.

This is where Paul's Epistles become especially valuable. They show how the truth received through the Gospel was to shape the continuing life of the believer.

The Epistles Teach Us How to Live in Christ

Paul's letters address many different circumstances, but several themes repeatedly appear. Together they provide instruction concerning salvation, doctrine, conduct, unity, holiness, leadership, suffering and relationships among believers.

Romans explains the Gospel and life through faith, while Corinthians addresses unity, conduct, ministry and spiritual order. Galatians defends liberty in Christ, while Ephesians teaches that believers form one body.

Philippians encourages faithfulness during difficulty, while Colossians declares the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Thessalonians calls believers to holiness and steadfastness, while the letters to Timothy and Titus give instruction concerning doctrine, leadership and godly living.

Philemon demonstrates forgiveness, reconciliation and brotherhood in Christ. Each letter addresses different circumstances, but throughout them all Jesus Christ remains central.

One Body Under One Head

The Gospel did not create separate spiritual peoples for Jew and Gentile. Those who were saved were joined together in Christ as one New Covenant people.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

This truth provides an important foundation for understanding the Church. There may be congregations in many places, but spiritually there is one body, and Jesus Christ is its Head.

Acts shows the Gospel going forth, while Paul's Epistles show believers learning how to live in the Gospel they had received. Together they show both the spread of the Gospel and the spiritual growth that must follow salvation.

Salvation is therefore not the end of Christian growth. Those who are born again are called to continue in truth, holiness, unity, love and faithfulness, allowing the life of Jesus Christ within them to shape

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Acts and Paul's letters show the Gospel creating one people in Christ?

Personal Reflection

Which part of this witness has changed how you see the Church?

Action Step

Review how Acts and Paul's letters reveal one people in Christ. What will change in your attitude towards another believer?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How does Acts trace the Gospel from Jerusalem through Judea, Samaria and the Gentiles to Rome, and how do Paul's letters teach the churches to live out the message they received?

2. Understanding

How do Romans' teaching on salvation and life in Christ and Galatians' defence of liberty in Christ correct the idea that obedience or religious status can earn the Gospel's promise?

3. Personal Reflection

Which issue in 1 Corinthians or 2 Corinthians most challenges you: division, conduct, church order, suffering in ministry or faithfulness under pressure? Explain the response it requires.

4. Response to Truth

How should Ephesians' teaching on one body in Christ, Philippians' example of Christ-centred living and Colossians' insistence on His sufficiency shape the way you treat other believers?

5. Action Step

Choose one instruction about holiness in 1 Thessalonians. What needs to change in your attitude or conduct, and how will Christ's life within govern your response?

6. Early Response

Have you begun responding to that instruction in a real situation? Explain what changed in your conduct or thinking. If not, identify the difficulty that remains.

7. Ongoing Practice

What ongoing practice will help you remain faithful when facing the delay, discouragement or false teaching addressed in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and 2 Timothy?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and Colossians together explain salvation, liberty, unity and the supremacy of Jesus Christ? Explain one misunderstanding these letters correct.

9. Living the Truth

Think of a real relationship affected by Paul's teaching on reconciliation in Philemon and godly conduct in Titus. What should change in the way you treat that person, and what action will you take?

10. Final Response

Bring together the Gospel's spread in Acts, salvation in Romans, freedom in Galatians, unity in Ephesians, and Christ's sufficiency in Colossians. What has changed in your understanding of the Church's life in Christ, and what part will you take in living and sharing the Gospel?