

Bible Overview

Paul's Letters (1)

Romans

1 Corinthians

2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

Romans

Author: Paul

Time: A.D. 57

Summary: Paul begins the letter by showing how Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners in the eyes of God and therefore worthy of death. However, Paul explains that Jesus Christ is able to provide a covering for our sin if we accept all that Jesus said and follow him in faith. With this in mind, Paul explains that Israel too, though presently in a state of unbelief, has a place in God's plan of redemption. The letter concludes with an appeal to the readers to work out their Christian faith in practical ways.

Key verses:

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (3:23–24)

1. Introduction 1:1–17

2. The unrighteousness of all mankind 1:16–3:20

a) Gentiles 1:18–32

b) Jews 2:1–3:8

c) Summary: all people 3:9–20

3. Righteousness imputed: justification 3:21–5:21

a) Through Christ 3:21–26

b) Received by faith 3:27–4:25

- c) The fruits of righteousness 5:1–11
- d) Summary: man's righteousness contrasted with God's gift 5:12–21

4. Righteousness imparted: sanctification 6–8

- a) Freedom from sin's tyranny 6
- b) Freedom from the law's condemnation 7
- c) Life in the power of the Holy Spirit 8

5. The problem of the rejection of Israel 9–11

- a) The justice and cause of the rejection 9:1–10:21
- b) The restoration of Israel 11

6. The Gospel in practice 12:1 – 15:13

- a) in the body—the church 12
- b) in the world 13
- c) among weak and strong Christians 14:1 – 15:13

1 Corinthians

Author: Paul

Time: A.D. 55

Summary: Written to the church at Corinth by the apostle Paul. He deals with a series of problems, sins and false teachings that were present in the newly formed church. Most members were from a promiscuous pagan background and were exhorted to put away their previous ways. Paul's purposes for writing were (1) to instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness, correcting erroneous practices such as divisions, immorality, litigation and abuse of the Lord's supper; (2) to correct false teaching concerning the resurrection; and (3) to give instruction concerning the offering for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem.

Key verse:

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1:10).

1. Introduction 1:1–9

2. Responses to their letter 1:10–6:20

a) The problem of division in the church 1:10 – 4:21

b) The problem of the incestuous man 5:1–13

c) The problem of lawsuits 6:1–11

d) The problem of sexual immorality 6:12–20

3. Instruction about marriage 7

4. Instruction on questionable practices 8:1–11:1

a) The principles involved 8

b) The principles illustrated 9

c) A warning from Israel's history 10:1–22

d) The principles applied 10:23 – 11:1

5. Instruction on public worship 11:2 – 14:40

a) Women in the church 11:2–16

b) The Lord's supper 11:17–34

c) Spirit gifts 12:1 –14:40

6. Instruction on the resurrection 15

7. Conclusion: practical and personal matters 16

2 Corinthians

Author: Paul

Time: A.D. 55

Summary: This second letter to the church at Corinth was penned by Paul also. It was written after he made a "painful" and unsuccessful visit to the small church in an attempt to give instruction and guidance on several divisive issues. Upon learning that a majority of members had repented, he wrote the letter of 2nd Corinthians. It gives encouragement, yet teaches of the suffering that each member must face for the Lord Jesus' sake. He concludes by surmising when he is weakest, then God is able to work through him most powerfully. This letter was, in all likelihood, written about six months after the first letter to the Corinthians.

Key verse:

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (5:20).

1. Greeting and thanksgiving 1:1–11

2. Paul's explanation of his conduct and ministry 1:12 – 7:16

a) His motives 1:12–2:4

b) Forgiving the offender at Corinth 2:5–11

c) God's direction in his ministry 2:12–17

d) The Corinthian believers: a letter from Christ 3:1–11

e) Seeing the glory of God 3:12–4:6

f) Treasure in clay jars 4:7–16a

g) The prospect of death for a Christian 4:16b–5:10

h) The ministry of reconciliation 5:11–6:10

i) A spiritual father's appeal to his children 6:11–7:4

j) The meeting with Titus 7:5–16

3. The collection for the Christians at Jerusalem 8–9

a) Generosity encouraged 8:1–15

b) Titus and his companions sent to Corinth 8:16–9:5

c) Results of generous giving 9:6–15

4. Paul's vindication of his apostolic authority 10–13

- a) Paul's defence of his authority 10
- b) Paul forced into foolish boasting 11–12

5. Final warnings and conclusion 13

- a) Final warnings 13:1–10
- b) Conclusion 13:11–14

Galatians

Author: Paul

Time: A.D. 49

Summary: The letter to the believers in Galatia focuses on the divisions that Jewish Christians were causing among new Gentile converts. These 'Judaizers' were trying to convince the Gentiles that they needed to be circumcised and to keep the ritual law in order to be saved. Paul argues that both Jew and Gentile alike enjoy in Christ complete salvation. Reliance on the Law was only a bondage to death and could not produce life-giving freedom, as only Christ could grant that freedom. Paul was showing that all legalistic variations of the Gospel are perversions of it and should be shown as such.

Key verse:

"We, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (2:16).

1. Introduction 1:1–9

- a) Greetings 1:1–5
- b) Purpose of letter 1:6–9

2. Paul's defence of his apostleship 1:10–2:14

- a) Paul called by God 1:10–24
- b) Paul accepted by apostles 2:1–10
- c) Paul opposes Peter at Antioch 2:11–14

3. Salvation by faith not law 2:15–4:31

- a) Justified by faith in Christ 2:15–21
- b) The Galatians' experience at conversion 3:1–5
- c) Experience of Abraham 3:6–9
- d) Curse of the law 3:10–14
- e) Promises before the law 3:15–18
- f) Purpose of the law 3:19–25
- g) Sons not slaves 3:26–4:11
- h) Personal appeal 4:12–20
- i) Allegory of Hagar and Sarah 4:21–31

4. The life of liberty and faith 5:1–6:10

- a) Exhortation to freedom 5:1–12
- b) Liberty is not licence 5:13–15
- b) Life by the Spirit, not by the flesh 5:13–26
- c) Doing good to all 6:1–10

5. Conclusion 6:11–18

Ephesians

Author: Paul

Time: A.D. 61

Summary: The letter is divided into two sections. The first outlines the spiritual riches in Christ and our part in God's eternal purpose; in the second section, Paul discusses practical ways in which we can fulfil God's purpose. The intent was to illustrate the abundance of spiritual riches that Christ himself received or would receive, namely grace, glory, mercy, immortality, and to foster the incentive to walk as Christ himself did. By doing so, believers would learn to walk worthy of their calling. It is thought that this letter was a circular letter, intended for other churches in addition to the one in Ephesus.

Key verse:

"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace" (2:6,7).

1. Greetings 1:1–2

2. Spiritual blessings in Christ 1:3–23

a) The divine purpose 1:3–14

b) Prayer that Christians may realise God's purpose 1:15–23

3. Steps toward the fulfilment of God's purpose 2–3

a) Salvation of individuals by grace 2:1–10

b) Reconciliation of Jew and Gentile through Christ 2:11–22

c) Revelation of God's wisdom through the church 3:1–13

d) Prayer for deeper experience of God's fullness 3:14–21

4. Practical ways to fulfil God's purpose 4:1–6:20

a) Unity and maturity 4:1–16

b) Renewal of personal life 4:17–5:20

c) Consideration in personal relationships 5:21–6:9

d) Strength in spiritual conflict 6:10–20

5. Conclusion and final greetings 6:21–24

Philippians

Author: Paul

Time: A.D. 62

Summary: Paul's main purpose in writing this letter seems to have been to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him when they heard he had been imprisoned at Rome (1:5; 4:10–19). But Paul also discusses several other issues. He encourages the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and exhorted them to humility and unity. He also

commended Timothy and Epaphroditus to the church and warned the Philippians against people who encouraged a return to the Jewish law. The letter is outstanding in its emphasis on joy; the word 'joy' occurs 16 times.

Key verse:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (4:6,7).

1. Greetings and thanksgiving 1:1–11
2. Paul's personal circumstances 1:12–26
3. Exhortations 1:27–2:18
 - a) Living a life worthy of the gospel 1:27–30
 - b) Following the servant attitude of Christ 2:1–18
4. Timothy and Epaphroditus 2:19–30
5. Warnings against false teachers 3:1–4:1
6. Final exhortations, thanks and conclusion 4:2–23
 - a) Exhortations 4:2–9
 - b) Thanks 4:10–20
 - c) Greetings and benediction 4:21–23

Colossians

Author: Paul

Time: A.D. 61

Summary: The letter to Colosse was written in response to heresy that had been brought to Paul's attention. The major errors that had crept into the church seemed to have been: (1) the exaltation of angels or other "elemental spirits"; (2) the emphasis on ascetic or liturgical

practices thought to produce spirituality; and (3) those in error claimed a special knowledge beyond that found in the Gospel of Christ. Paul states that these are philosophies based on human tradition and are therefore worthless. He teaches love, humility, submission to authority, and finally prayer to establish a believer in the wisdom of God.

Key verse:

"See, to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (2:8).

1. Introduction 1:1–14
 2. The supremacy of Christ 1:15–23
 3. Paul's labour for the church 1:24:2–7
 4. Freedom from human regulations through life with Christ 2:8–23
 5. Rules for holy living 3:1–4:6
 6. Final greetings 4:7–18
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