

Paul's Epistles 1

The book of Acts provides the backdrop for many of the epistles that were written by Paul. When he could do so, Paul visited the brethren, showing great concern for their well-being. What are called Paul's

missionary journeys occurred between about AD 45-67. From Acts 13 on, Paul's journeys took him from Palestine to Rome and many places in between. His epistles fit within that time-frame. While Paul wanted to encourage the brethren, he also addressed some specific issues that confronted the various congregations who received these epistles. Here we begin a basic, broad overview of each epistle:

Romans

Generally dated to about AD 57, Paul wrote this likely from Corinth (Acts 18:21-21:17). He wanted to visit Rome, but so far had been unable to do so. One of the obvious themes of Romans is the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul pointed out the sins of the Gentiles (ch. 1), then showed how the Jews were also guilty (ch. 2). In other words, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). This leads to a discussion of major salvation issues such as justification and righteousness. Since the righteous would live by faith (1:17), faith is also a major theme throughout. Overcoming



the problem of sin by God's grace is highlighted. Then, the relationship shared by believers is addressed, both to the world and to one another.

1-2 Corinthians

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians somewhere around AD 50-54, followed by 2 Corinthians in about AD 55. He had first visited Corinth in about AD 51-52. He wrote this epistle from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8). Clearly, the Corinthians were having many problems, divisions, and questions that impacted their spiritual health. Paul urges their unity in the face of problems that could tear them apart. Their carnal thinking was leading them to division. Paul addressed an array of problems, such as immorality (ch. 5), openly taking one another to court (ch. 6), marriage questions (ch. 7), relationship with former pagan practices (ch. 8), and even dealt with the misuse of spiritual gifts. By the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, there had been some change, but they were potentially being led by false apostles, and Paul, concerned for their divided minds, defended his own apostleship.

Galatians

While some opt for a little later date (mid-50's), most believe that Galatians was written to the southern part of Galatia in about AD 48-49. The

overriding issue addressed in this epistle has to do with the fact there were teachers who were intent on forcing the idea that Gentiles first needed to go through Judaism (i.e., be circumcised) in order to be Christians. This was a problem experienced through much of the early history of the church (see Acts 15). Paul shows that the nature of the gospel message is freedom from the Law of Moses, and that attempts to force people back into the Law would result in being severed from Christ. Through Christ's death, one is freed from sin and the Law, and must not try to return. The only boast a Christian can make is in the cross of Jesus, through which we are crucified to the world (6:14).

Ephesians

Ephesians was likely written between AD 60-62 while Paul was in prison in Rome; Tychicus delivered it (6:20-22). Paul first addresses the blessings that believers have in Christ (ch. 1-3), which includes God's eternal purpose for salvation to the praise of His glory. Sin brought about death, but God, rich in mercy, made salvation possible as a gift of His grace. Therefore, believers can share in the power of Christ's resurrection. This salvation also becomes the basis for unity. Christ's death brings together Jew and Gentile, and together all should praise Him. Paul then addresses the practical nature of the unity found in Christ (ch. 4-6). The instructions address various relationships, including husbands and wives, children, and servants. He ends with a plea to take up the full armor of

God in order to fight against the schemes of the devil.

Philippians

Paul was likely still a prisoner in Rome when he wrote this epistle, perhaps between AD 60-63. The tone of this letter is positive, and Paul has a desire to stay in communication with a congregation that was dear to him and had helped him. He was thankful for them and wanted their love to abound even more. Though there were some who meant Paul harm, his concern was to do God's will, whether through life or death. "To live is Christ." He reminded them of their need to humbly submit to one another, to have the mind of Christ, and to be the lights in the world God called them to be. There is great joy in serving Christ if we think on what is excellent and worthy of praise. "Rejoice in the Lord" and keep pressing on toward the ultimate goal, for "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20-21).

More to follow.

Doy Moyer