Lesson 10 | November 8, 2020 The Letters of Paul (Part 1)

Study Text: Romans 1:17–23; 3:9–24; 5:1,6–8; 8:1–4; 1 Corinthians 3:1–11; 15:12–58; Galatians 3:1–14

Central Truth: The writings of the apostle Paul provide instructions for the Church.

Key Verse: Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (KJV).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Examine the specific instruction God gave the Church in the books of Romans, Galatians, and Corinthians.
- Accept our responsibility as Christians to live according to the teachings of Scripture.
- Reflect upon and rejoice in the great significance of Christ's resurrection.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: The apostle Paul wrote thirteen letters included in the New Testament (not counting Hebrews, as its authorship is uncertain). This lesson and next week's lesson will give an overview of those letters and how they advanced God's plan to redeem humanity.

Opening Activity—Letters

Ask: What important letters have you received?

Answers might include such things as letters from faraway loved ones, college acceptance or scholarship letters, and commendation letters for service in the military or some other career.

Have you heard of the Romans Road?

Say: Paul's letters were more than just a communication from him to the churches and individuals to whom they were addressed. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit and, as such, are part of God's Word. Even Paul's contemporary, Peter, recognized Paul's letters as Scripture (see 2 Peter 3:15–16). [2Pe 3:15-16 KJV] 15 And account [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all [his] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to

be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as [they do] also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

What a privilege it would have been to be one of the original recipients of these letters! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The grand story of the plan of God, revealed in Jesus, became central to the ministry of the apostle Paul. Not only did he preach and start churches, he also wrote letters of instruction and guidance to those churches. In his letters to three of those churches, in Corinth, Galatia, and Rome, he corrected a number of erroneous beliefs and also led them into great truths. These letters represent some of the richest and deepest studies of Scripture regarding the nature of Christ and salvation.

Part 1—Being Made Right With God All People Deserve God's Wrath

Romans 1:17-23; 3:20-24

[Rom 1:17-23 KJV] 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed [it] unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

[Rom 3:9-24 KJV] 9 What then? are we better [than they]? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; 10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. 13 Their throat [is] an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps [is] under their lips: 14 Whose mouth [is] full of cursing and bitterness: 15 Their feet [are] swift to shed blood: 16 Destruction and misery [are] in their ways: 17 And the way of peace have they not known: 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes. 19 Now we know that what things

soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law [is] the knowledge of sin. 21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God [which is] by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Say: Almost every evangelism tool that has ever been created begins with explaining the premise that everyone is a sinner and deserves to be punished for sin. Scripture itself does the same thing. Paul began with that premise when he presented the plan of salvation in the Book of Romans. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the most straightforward expression, the plan of God for the salvation of fallen humankind is that His Son, Jesus, was sent into the world to redeem the world from the rebellion of sin that began in the Garden of Eden. This basic message was a central part of Paul's message in his Epistles. Note what he wrote to the church at Rome: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last" (Romans 1:17, NIV). The gospel, then, is not based on human effort to earn salvation from God; it must be received by faith because people deserve the wrath of God and cannot do anything on their own to change that reality.

Paul was clear: people are without excuse before God (verses 18–23). God revealed His eternal power and divine nature in creation. Its order, beauty, purpose, and grandeur testify to the Creator God, plainly calling out to humans to worship Him for who He is and what He has done. Yet people have rebelliously chosen to turn aside from that worship and oppose the plans and provisions of God. They chose instead to seek the creation over the Creator—the essence of foolishness.

The summary of this departure from what is known about God's provision is tragic: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV). The only means by which humans may know and return to a right relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ, a provision made for all. And so, God offers that very promise to us (verse 24). His grace reaches out to the hopelessly lost individual, calling for belief in what He makes available: forgiveness and reconciliation. Belief in forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

Discuss

? What is it about creation that reveals the eternal power and divine nature of God to you? Why

Why do you think not all humans see this?

? How can keeping Romans 3:23 in focus help us be more gracious and loving toward one

another?

We Are Reconciled to God Through Jesus

Romans 5:1,6–8; 8:1–2

[Rom 5:1, 6-8 KJV] 1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ... 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[Rom 8:1-4 KJV] 1 [There is] therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Say: If you've been estranged from a family member or friend and later reconciled, you know the joy reconciliation brings. We were estranged from God, but because He desires a relationship with us He gave His Son to restore our relationship with Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God results in justification, which refers to being in right standing with Him (Romans 5:1). Although we deserve wrath because of sin, humans can reach out to God knowing that He has already reached out to us. Thus, by faith the former sinner can stand righteous before God. Paul noted that through Jesus, humans know peace with God. Such peace is not merely an emotional release from tensions and concerns; it is the assurance that while formerly the wrath of God was looming, now that wrath has been removed. Access into this grace is a reality only because of Christ, whose sacrifice demonstrated the unsurpassed love of God (verses 6–8).

God appeared at what Paul called the "right time" (verse 6). Clearly Paul was aware of the plan of God and that His timing is perfect. **But here Paul noted that the right time has to do with human powerlessness. Humans have absolutely no answer to their condition, so Christ died for fallen humanity to provide justification and reconciliation.** The analogy in verse 7 drives home this point: One human might die on behalf of another, and be called "good" for doing so. But Christ died for humans while they were sinners.

The glory of the gospel truth is that believing in what Jesus has provided will result in standing before God without condemnation (8:1–2). The law of sin and death—that is, the clear relationship between sin and punishment prescribed by the Law—has been replaced for the believer by the life provided by the Spirit.

Resource Packet Item 1: Reconciled to God

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to draw the sketch depicting the concept of reconciliation. Ask a few people to show their drawings and explain them.

Discuss

? What are some things unbelievers (perhaps even Christians) might do in an effort to gain

right standing with God? How might we help them understand that human effort in ineffective?

? How would you describe the difference between believing that salvation comes as a result of our own efforts and endeavoring to live a holy Christian life?

Part 2—Apostolic Correction and Counsel Believers Are Encouraged Toward Unity

1 Corinthians 3:1–11

[1Co 3:1-11 KJV] 1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, [even] as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it], neither yet now are ye able. 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas [there is] among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I [am] of Apollos; are ye not carnal? 5 Who then is Paul, and who [is] Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. 8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, [ye are] God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Say: The Bible is our authority for both belief and conduct. Paul's letters to the churches instructed them in the faith and corrected them for problems in their behavior. One theme in his letters that appears repeatedly is the need for unity in the body of Christ.(Share your highlights from the following text.)

The apostle Paul wrote at least two letters to the church in Corinth, a community of believers that began under his ministry (Acts 18:1-17). Paul spent eighteen months ministering among them, yet he recognized that they still needed further teaching and maturity. This is the focus of 1 Corinthians 3:1-11.

Paul chided the Corinthians for continuing in their worldly ways instead of living by the Spirit. Their mind-set and interactions were not guided by the Spirit; rather, they were motivated by carnal factors. Because Paul saw them as still infants in the faith, they could not yet receive with profit more mature teachings. There was a tendency among them to be driven by jealousy and quarreling. Such motivations, expressed in their relationships with each other, hindered the opportunity for growth toward maturity in Christ.

A clear indication of such worldly behavior could be seen in their choosing to elevate human ministers beyond the status any person should hold. Some claimed to be followers of Paul; others were followers of a well-known teacher named Apollos. Paul rebuked them, reminding them that both he and Apollos were mere human beings. They had specific roles in the work of the mission of God, but all results were to be attributed to God.

The Corinthian Christians needed to unite in following God, not be divided by elevating humans, whom He used for the building of His Church. The grace of God allowed human participation in the work of the Church, so they needed to be careful about their attitudes. Only God can bring true, everlasting results in ministry.

Discuss

? To what extent is there a tendency to overly elevate human leaders in the Church today?

Why is this dangerous for the Church?

? How can Christians overcome the tendency to be divided by jealousy and quarreling, like the Corinthian church?

We Are Saved by Faith, Not by Works

Galatians 3:1–14

[Gal 3:1-14 KJV] 1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? 2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made

perfect by the flesh? 4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if [it be] yet in vain. 5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, [doeth he it] by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, [saying], In thee shall all nations be blessed. 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. 11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, [it is] evident: for, The just shall live by faith. 12 And the law is not of faith: but. The man that doeth them shall live in them. 13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Say: Some people believe that, if they do enough good deeds, they can earn their way to heaven. If that were true, the death and resurrection of Jesus would have been unnecessary. The only way to be reconciled to God is by having faith in His redemptive plan, in which Jesus took the punishment for sin. Other people believe they are saved by faith plus works. Again, this detracts from the completion of the plan of salvation through Jesus. That doesn't mean Christians shouldn't do good works; instead, those good works should be the outgrowth of their relationship with God. Because we love Him, we serve Him out of that loving relationship. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In his role as apostle, Paul dealt with a wide variety of problems in the churches. The church of Galatia, located in what is now western Turkey, had deviated from the strong foundation of faith in the work of Jesus. False teachers had promoted a message that commanded Christians to follow the Law and to be circumcised, which represented a return to Judaism. This drew many away from the core gospel belief that salvation is faith-based. Paul called this a "different gospel" and condemned it in no uncertain terms (Galatians 1:6–9).

In Galatians 3:1–14, we notice that Paul did not use his familiar address of "brothers and sisters." Their moving away from the basis of faith prompted Paul to call them "foolish," a term indicating that they knew the correct path but chose to deviate from it. He appealed first to their own experience of receiving the Spirit, which was by believing what had been preached to them. If that was the way their walk with God began, how could they even consider it to be possible that they could continue such a relationship by the works of the Law? The work of the

Spirit among them came because they believed the gospel, not because of their works.

It seems that those who had brought this different gospel to Galatia appealed to Abraham as their father and saw circumcision as the means by which that relationship was confirmed (verses 7–8). Paul explained that Abraham was declared righteous by God because of his faith, before the rite of circumcision was instituted (Genesis 15:6; 17:9–14). Those, then, who have faith in the message of the gospel— not those who rely on the Law—are Abraham's children and part of the Church.

Resource Packet Item 2: Grace and Faith

Divide your class into small groups and distribute the case study. Give the groups a few minutes to answer the questions, then bring the class back together to discuss their responses.

Discuss

? Why, according to Paul, are works of the Law insufficient to bring someone into right into right relationship with God?

? How is your life, including your outlook and your lifestyle, different because you have been

saved by faith in Christ?

Part 3—Significance of the Resurrection The Resurrection of Christ

1 Corinthians 15:12–22

[1Co 15:12-22 KJV] 12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14 And if Christ be not risen, then [is] our preaching vain, and your faith [is] also vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith [is] vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. 20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, [and] become the firstfruits of them that slept. 21 For since by man [came] death, by man [came] also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 24 Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26

The last enemy [that] shall be destroyed [is] death. 27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under [him, it is] manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. 28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. 29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? 30 And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? 31 I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. 33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. 34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak [this] to your shame. 35 But some [man] will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? 36 [Thou] fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: 37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other [grain]: 38 But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. 39 All flesh [is] not the same flesh: but [there is] one [kind of] flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, [and] another of birds. 40 [There are] also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial [is] one, and the [glory] of the terrestrial [is] another. 41 [There is] one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for [one] star differeth from [another] star in glory. 42 So also [is] the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [was made] a quickening spirit. 46 Howbeit that [was] not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 47 The first man [is] of the earth, earthy: the second man [is] the Lord from heaven. 48 As [is] the earthy, such [are] they also that are earthy: and as [is] the heavenly, such [are] they also that are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Say: The foundational truth that separates Christianity from other religions is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which provides the basis for the hope of our future resurrection. Paul presented a reasoned argument for both the resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of believers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Corinth, a city west of Athens, was a center for trade and culture in the Roman world. In part because of these factors, the city had many visitors who represented a wide array of false religious beliefs. This brought some difficult challenges to the church there. Paul addressed a number of issues through the course of the two epistles found in the Bible.

Some in the Corinthian church had come to believe that humans will not be resurrected (a belief rooted in Greek philosophy), even as they believed that

Christ had risen from the dead. The Corinthian Christians failed to see the contradiction in that set of beliefs. So, Paul forcefully made the argument for the resurrection of Christ and the accompanying truth that believers will be resurrected.

Paul used a series of conditional clauses (see the unique clauses in 1 Corinthians 15:12–14,16–17,19) to make his position clear. The condition in each of them is asserted as fact: It is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead; there is a resurrection of the dead; Christ has been raised from the dead; and so on. Paul never turned from the fundamental truth that Christ has been raised from the dead for humans. If you deny believers' resurrection, you have denied Christ's resurrection.

To deny the resurrection of Christ is to make Paul's preaching of that truth of no value and to leave humanity in their sins. Further, to deny the resurrection of Christ is to say that those who have died as believers have no hope. Having the hope of the resurrection gives meaning to this life and to eternity.

Paul's conclusion is a declaration: "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (verse 20, NIV). Because He has been raised, He has reversed the death that befell humankind because of the sin of Adam (verses 21–22).

Discuss

? What are some human philosophies in the modern world that might threaten to mislead Christians?

? Why is the resurrection of Christ so fundamental to Christianity?

The Resurrection of Believers

1 Corinthians 15:50–58

[1Co 15:50-58 KJV] 50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where [is] thy sting? O grave, where [is] thy victory? 56 The sting of death [is] sin; and the strength of sin [is] the law. 57 But thanks [be] to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. **Say:** Because of Christ's resurrection, we can be certain that we, too, will be resurrected to live eternally with Him. Paul communicated that truth to the Corinthians, and it applies to each of us. We need not fear death because death has been conquered by Jesus.(Share your highlights from the following text.)

Believers anticipate a future resurrection. Since mortal flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God, a transformation must occur (1 Corinthians 15:50–54). Paul taught that believers who are alive when Christ returns as well as those who have died before then will be changed. While the human body is obviously perishable, Christians will experience the wondrous transformation into an imperishable state. Paul used comparisons between mortal and immortal to show that believers who are alive when Christ returns will be granted that which is immortal.

Paul used the instantaneous language of "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye" (verse 52, NIV) to explain the nature of this transformation. This change will be when the trumpet sounds, when Christ returns to claim His Church. **The parallel teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 leads us to the belief that this transformation is part of the rapture of the Church, the blessed hope of believers.**

The final enemy, death—the sting of which is the consequence of sin among humans will be conquered (1 Corinthians 15:55). Using two Old Testament quotations, Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, Paul proclaimed that death has been defeated, for victory has come through Jesus Christ our Lord (verses 56–57). This wonderful assurance should compel believers to be steadfast in the faith and lead them into service for the Lord. There is a rich reward for the faithful service of His Church (verse 58)!.

Resource Packet Item 3: Resurrection Hope

Distribute the work sheet, then read the passages as a class or in small groups and list the discoveries you make in your reading.

Discuss

? Why is the hope of the Rapture more than just "escapism" for the believer? How does this truth impact our daily living?

? In what sense are we to be motivated by a rich reward for faithful service?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We should be grateful for Christ's reconciling work on our behalf, and in response witness to our world still under His wrath. It is tempting for believers to allow jealousies and quarrels to divide us. God calls us to avoid that trap, choosing instead to pursue unity. Repentance is needed if divisiveness has been allowed to develop. The resurrection of Christ as a historical fact as well as the basic element of Christian faith is central to all

that the Church is. Think about ways to witness to this truth in a world that denies the miraculous..

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

■ Take time to examine your heart to see if you are trying to earn your relationship with God rather than serve Him out of love for all He has done..

■ If there is someone in the body of Christ against whom you are holding a grudge, take a step this week to repair that relationship.

■ Do at least one thing this week to help point an unbeliever toward reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Abraham's Faith Produces Blessing. Genesis 22:1–2,9–19 Tuesday: David's Cry for Mercy. Psalm 51:1–12 Wednesday: Salvation Provided Without Cost. Isaiah 55:1–5 Thursday: Paul Confronted by Christ. Acts 9:1-8 Friday: Paul Receives a Revelation. 2 Corinthians 12:1–6 Saturday: Paul's Apostleship Substantiated. Galatians 1:11–17