

Stories to be Told

BibleTelling Seminars

Excerpted from
All the Stories of the Bible
crafted by John Walsh

BibleTelling.org
BTStories.com
info@BTStories.com

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DAY #	Day 1-2	3 Turkey	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	October 9-10	October 11	October 12	October 13	October 14	October 15	October 16
DAY	Monday-Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
AM	Monday Fly to Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul Tour - Hagia Sophia - Hippodrome Square - Archeological Museum St. Irene Church	Fly to Izmir (Smyrna) Smyrna ruins Drive to Sardis Sardis excavations	Drive to Hierapolis Hierapolis excavations - Theater - Philip's Tomb Drive to Laodicea : - New excavations - Mosaics	Drive to Ephesus Ephesus ruins - Library of Celsus - Amphitheater - Terrace Houses Basilica of St. John	Drive to Pergamum Pergamum Acropolis Drive to Troas	Ferry to Gallipoli Drive to Greece border
PM	Tuesday Arrive in Istanbul Boat tour along the Bosphorus		Drive to Philadelphia Philadelphia excavations		Drive to Izmir		Drive to Neapolis (Kavala)
In-Out	October 10-12 Istanbul, Turkey		October 12-13 Pamukkale, Turkey	October 13-14 Kusadası, Turkey	October 14-15 Izmir, Turkey	October 15-16 Canakkale, Turkey	October 16-17 Kavala, Greece
DAY #	9 Greece	10	11	12	13 Rome Extension	14	15-16
DATE	October 17	October 18	October 19	October 20	October 21	October 22	October 23-24
DAY	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday-Tuesday
AM	Egnatia Way at Kavala Drive to Philippi Philippi Ruins: River - Church Mosaic - Ruins - Prison Cell - Forum Theater	Drive to Berea - Synagogue - Paul memorial Return to Thessaloniki	Athens Acropolis - Acropolis: - Propylea - Erechtheum - Parthenon Mars Hill - Agora - FREE AFTERNOON	Drive to Corinth Corinthian Canal Diolkos Transport Stones Corinth Ruins: - Erastus Stone - Apollo's Temple - Forum Bema Judgment seat	Fly Home OR Fly to Rome, Italy	Rome Vatican Museum Sistine Chapel Basilica of St. Peter - St Peter's Piazza	Rome -St. Peter in Chains - Colosseum - Arch of Titus - Walk through Forum - Mamertine Prison Venezia Piazza
PM	Drive to Thessaloniki: - Old city ramparts - Galerius arch - St. George's Basilica - Agora Archeological Museum	Fly from Thessaloniki to Athens		Corinth Acropolis Drive to Cenchreae Harbor	Christian Catacombs Appian Way Trastevere area where Paul lived	Tour of Rome -Pantheon - Trevi Fountain	Tres Fontane Church of Paul's Martyrdom Church Outside the City --Paul's Burial Tuesday Fly Home
In-Out	October 17-18 Thessaloniki, Greece	October 18-21 Athens, Greece		October 21-24 Rome, Italy			

This is a sample calendar for a BibleTelling Seminar in **Turkey-Greece-Rome**. It is not practical to visit every site and tell every story listed in this booklet. Each Seminar group determines which stories they tell and where they tell them.

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TURKEY

Istanbul

Conversion of Saul 1

Acts 9:1-19 #230a

Saul was on a campaign to hunt down and kill those who followed Jesus. He was given authority from the high priest to go to Damascus and bring believers back to Jerusalem.

As he and his men approached Damascus, suddenly a bright light shown around them, and Saul fell to the ground. He heard a voice saying, "Saul! Saul! Why are you fighting against me?"

"Who are you Lord?"

"I'm Jesus, the one you're persecuting. It's hard to fight against my will for your life."

Those with Saul didn't know what was going on. They could hear the sound of a voice, but they couldn't see anyone.

Saul trembled. "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

"Go into the city and you'll be told what to do."

When Saul got up, he realized he was blind. Others led him into the city. He waited for three days and refused to eat or drink anything.

The Lord spoke to a disciple in Damascus. "Ananias, go to a house on the street called Straight, and ask for Saul of Tarsus. Place your hands on him and he'll regain his sight."

Ananias was concerned. "Lord, everyone knows about this violent man. He's here to imprison anyone who calls on your name."

The Lord said, "He is a chosen servant of mine. He'll spread the Gospel to Jews, Gentiles, and kings. He'll suffer greatly for me."

Ananias found him and said, "Brother Saul, Jesus appeared to you on the road, and then he told me to come to you." Ananias placed his hands on Saul's head. "Regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit!"

Immediately Saul could see. With joy, he was baptized and then ate some food.

Conversion of Saul 2

Acts 9:20-31 #230b

Saul spent several days with the believers in Damascus, and then started preaching that Jesus was the Son of God. People were amazed because they knew he had come there to kill followers of Jesus.

But now they listened to him and found he was very persuasive when he talked about Jesus. No one could argue with him. So they decided to kill him.

Their plan was to capture him when he tried to leave the city. The believers found out about this and took him to the city wall. They put him in a large basket and let him down on the other side. From there, he returned to Jerusalem.

The believers in Jerusalem were afraid of him. They felt he was trying to entrap them. So, Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and told them what had happened to him. “The Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. Since then he has been speaking in the name of Jesus with great courage.”

The believers finally accepted Saul and he moved freely among them. He went into Jerusalem and told everyone about the Lord. Some started arguing with him, but again they could not compete with his power of persuasion. So, they plotted to kill him.

The believers in Christ found out about their scheme, so they sent him to Tarsus.

This started a time of peace for the believers in Israel. The Holy Spirit was with them. They grew in their faith and increased in numbers.

Christians at Antioch

Acts 11:19-30 #233

The killing of Stephen started a great persecution. Therefore, some believers went north to a city called Antioch. When they first got there, they preached only to Jews, but eventually they shared the message of Christ with Gentiles as well. God honored this and gave great power to their teaching. Many Gentiles put their faith in Jesus.

The church in Jerusalem heard about what happened and felt they needed to investigate, so they sent Barnabas. When he got there, he watched what the church was doing—and found that God was blessing them with abundant grace!

Barnabas was thrilled, so he encouraged the believers. He told them to always follow Jesus and remain true to what the Lord taught. The people responded to the teaching of Barnabas because they knew he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

This resulted in even more people coming to Christ—in large numbers. Barnabas soon realized he needed help. So he went to Tarsus and found Saul. The two of them returned to Antioch, and for a full year they worked together with the believers. They taught large crowds of people.

It was in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

The Lord revealed to the church in Antioch that there would be a great famine. When it came, it was especially bad in Judea.

Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem 1

Acts 12:1-11 #234a

The Christians in Antioch were concerned about their fellow believers in Jerusalem. They took a collection, and every family gave according to their ability. Then they asked Barnabas and Saul to take their offering to the church in Jerusalem

They arrived about the time King Herod arrested and killed James, the brother of John. When the king saw how much this pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter and had him put in prison. Sixteen soldiers guarded him. The church began praying for Peter and didn't stop.

The night before he was to be executed, Peter was sleeping between two guards. His hands and feet were in chains. The other guards were standing next to various doors in the prison.

Suddenly, an angel appeared and filled the prison cell with light. Peter didn't wake up; so the angel poked him. "Wake up and get dressed." Peter looked up and saw the angel, but he didn't believe this was really happening. He thought he was seeing a vision. Still, he got up, and his chains dropped to the floor.

The angel said, "Follow me." Peter followed him through several guard posts until they came to the iron gate that led out into the city. Peter watched as it opened by itself.

They went along a city street when suddenly the angel disappeared. Peter stood alone in the night air, and finally realized he wasn't dreaming.

Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem 2

Acts 12:12-25 #234b

Peter went to where believers were praying for him and knocked on the gate. A servant girl came to answer. She was surprised to hear Peter's voice through the door. She ran back into the house and yelled, "Peter is standing at the door."

They didn't believe her, but she kept saying, "I know what I heard. Peter is at the door."

They said, "That's impossible! Peter is in prison. You probably heard his angel."

Peter continued knocking at the door, so they finally opened it. They were shocked when they saw him standing there, and they all started talking at the same time. Peter said, "Please, let me tell you what happened."

He then told them exactly how the Lord sent an angel to deliver him. They all gave praise to God for what he had done.

The next morning, the guards were horrified to find that Peter was missing! When Herod found out, he had all sixteen men executed.

Herod then went to a resort on the coast and delivered a speech to a crowd of people. After he was done, they shouted, "This is the voice of a god!" Herod was filled with pride. Suddenly, an angel struck him, and he was infested with worms and died.

The work of God continued to grow and spread. Barnabas and Saul left Jerusalem and headed back to Antioch, taking John Mark with them.

Ephesus

The Letter to Ephesus

Rev 2:1-7

Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand
and who walks among the seven gold lampstands says:

I know your works,
your labor, and your endurance,
and that you cannot tolerate evil.

You have tested those who call themselves apostles
and are not,
and you have found them to be liars.

You also possess endurance
and have tolerated many things
because of My name
and have not grown weary.

But I have this against you:

You have abandoned the love you had at first.

Remember then how far you have fallen;
repent,
and do the works you did at first.

Otherwise, I will come to you
and remove your lampstand from its place
—unless you repent.

Yet you do have this:

You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans,
which I also hate.

Anyone who has an ear should listen
to what the Spirit says to the churches.

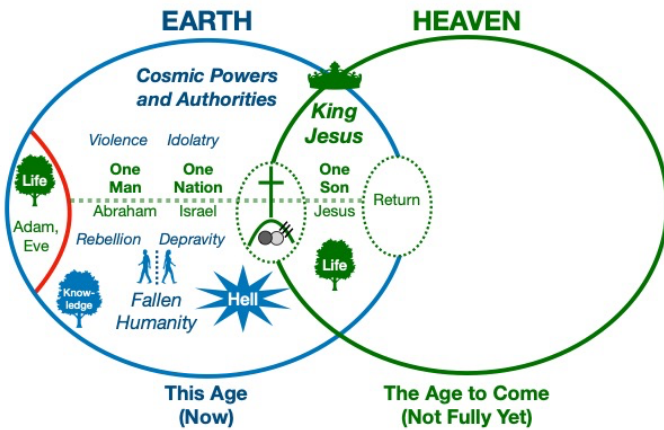
I will give the victor the right to eat from the tree of life,
which is in God's paradise.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Ephesians 1-6

BACKGROUND

Paul's Worldview



In the beginning, the Heavens and Earth were one united realm with God's presence and rule. But Adam and Eve rejected God's rule and instead followed the cosmic powers and authorities God had appointed for the Earth. Together, fallen man and the fallen powers and authorities created hell on earth—with all types of evils, idolatries, violence, crime, oppressions, and injustices.

But God resolved to redeem and restore Creation, to bring heaven and earth back to complete unity as in the beginning.

- First, He blessed **one man**, Noah, to save humanity
- He then chose **one family**, Abraham's, to bless all the nations of the earth
- Next, He chose **one nation**, Israel, to take Him to the nations
- Finally, God sent Jesus, His **one Son**, Messiah. He was victorious over sin and death and ascended to right hand of the God as the ruling Christ.

Paul, writing from prison in Rome, sends this further revelation of Jesus and the whole plan of God.

STORY

Paul, an apostle of Messiah Jesus, to the holy people, the church, in Ephesus and beyond. God has blessed us, the church, in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in the Messiah: *we were chosen before creation to be holy and blameless in his sight, predestined in love to be adopted as his children, redeemed through His blood, forgiven of our sins through his grace and, when we believed, were sealed with the Holy Spirit.*

God has now revealed the mystery of his will, his purpose in Christ—to re-unite all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

I pray continually that God will give you the wisdom and revelation to know that the same great power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him in the heavenly

realm, far above all the earthly powers and authorities, is now at work in you. We, His Church, are the very body of Christ—with Christ as our head.

We were captives of the powers and authorities of the earthly realm—dead in our sins. But God also raised us up and seated us in the heavenly reality with Christ. We are not saved by our works but are saved by the gift of God's grace--alive in Jesus to do the good works God prepared for us to do.

We are no longer divided: Jews v. Gentiles, Black v. White, Rich v. Poor, Men v. Women. Jesus has destroyed the dividing wall between us and made us one, radical, peaceful, new humanity in Him. In Jesus we are joined together and rising as the new, holy Temple of God, the dwelling place for God by his Spirit with Christ as the chief cornerstone. I preach this great mystery which was hidden in the past—that through you, the powers and authorities would see this temple of the church as a monument to the wisdom and victory of God.

I pray that you, the church, rooted and established in love, will have power to grasp *how wide and long and high and deep* is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the full of all the fullness of God.

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Learn the truth and the way of life of cruciform love—the love Jesus demonstrated on the cross—be completely humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in peace: *1 body, 1 Spirit, 1 hope, 1 Lord, 1 faith, 1 baptism, 1 God and Father over all and through all and in all*. Also, realize that God has given gifts to the church to equip us: *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers*. They guide us to:

- build up the body of Christ until we are all united in the faith and knowledge of Jesus
- become mature and have the whole measure of the fullness of Christ
- no longer as infants tossed back and forth by false doctrines and spiritual fads
- speaking the truth in love, grow up into Christ, our head, held together as each part does its work

Remember that every day we choose to participate in either the Earthly or Heavenly reality: Old Humanity v. New Humanity, Darkness v. Light, Foolish v. Wise. So, for example, put off Lies, put on Truth; put off Anger, put on Peace; put off Laziness and Theft, put on Diligence and Generosity; no longer Gossip, put speak words of Encouragement; don't take Revenge, but offer Forgiveness; put off Promiscuity, put on Self-Control; don't be drunk with wine, but be under Holy Spirit guidance.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit—walk in the New way of love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. Live as children of Light in the Heavenly Reality. Find out what pleases the Lord!

Submit to one another in Christ: *husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees*. Wives, respect your husbands and allow them to care for you.

Husbands, love your wives and be prepared to lay down your lives for them. But I speak of the mystery now revealed--as Jesus provided and gave his life for the church.

We are engaged in divine warfare—not against human enemies, but against the rulers, powers, and authorities of this dark world and evil spiritual forces. So, Body of Christ, put on the full armor of God so you are able to stand your ground: *belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the Good News of peace, shield of faith to extinguish all flaming arrows, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.*

Finally, pray on all occasions, with all kinds of requests, for all the Lord's people. Peace and love and grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Riot at Ephesus 1

Acts 19:1-17 #244a

Paul left Antioch and went to Ephesus. When he got there, he found twelve believers. He asked them, "Have you received the Holy Spirit yet?"

They were confused and answered, "We haven't heard of this Holy Spirit."

Paul said, "Where were you baptized?"

They said, "We were baptized by John."

"Ah, John came to prepare the way for Jesus. He baptized people who were willing to repent and look for the Messiah. But now Jesus has come."

As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of Jesus. Afterwards they received the Holy Spirit and started to praise God in various languages.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for several years. At first, he went to the synagogue and preached Christ, but eventually the believers had to find a different meeting place.

God did wonderful things through Paul. People from that entire region heard God's Word. The sick were healed and demons were cast out. People even touched Paul's skin with pieces of cloth and took them to those who were sick, and they were healed.

Some young men saw Paul cast out a demon, so they decided to try it. They said to a demon-possessed man, "Come out of him in the name of Jesus—the one that Paul preaches about."

The spirit said, "I know about Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" The demon-possessed man jumped on them and beat them. He ripped off their clothes, and they ran from the house bruised and naked.

People were afraid when they heard about this. Suddenly the name of Jesus was held in high regard.

Riot at Ephesus 2

Acts 19:18-41 #244b

Many people in Ephesus repented of their sins and called on the name of the Lord. They collected their books on witchcraft and burned them in front of everyone.

A silversmith called a meeting of those who made expensive shrines to an idol called Diana. He said, "Paul is turning people away from the worship of Diana, the one everyone adores. He's saying that a god made by hands isn't really a god. This is an insult to Diana. Besides, we're losing money."

The people became more and more angry until they started shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" They ran out, screaming this in the street. Soon it spread throughout the city, and confusion was everywhere. A mob grabbed some Christians and took them to the amphitheater. The entire city went there to see what was happening.

The crowd kept shouting. Some said one thing while the others said something different. The situation became totally chaotic! Most of the people didn't even know why they were there. This went on for two hours.

Paul wanted to go to the amphitheater and defend the cause of Christ, but fellow believers refused to let him go. Even city officials sent word to him saying, "Don't go to the amphitheater!"

Finally, one of the officials stood before the crowd and said, "People of Ephesus! No one can deny that the image of Diana fell from heaven and landed here. Therefore, calm down. The men you have brought here have done nothing wrong to Diana. They haven't robbed her temples or blasphemed her name.

"If the silversmiths have a problem with anyone, let them take it to the courts. For now, go home before you're charged with conducting a riot for no reason."

With that, the people went home.

John's Visions 1

Revelation 1, 4:1-4 #258a

John was exiled to the island of Patmos for being a follower of Jesus and preaching the word of God. On the Lord's Day, he was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly he heard a loud voice behind him. It sounded like a trumpet blast that said, "You are going to see amazing things. Write all of it in a book and send it to the seven churches of Asia."

John turned to see who was talking. There, right in front of him, were seven gold lampstands with the Son of Man standing in the middle of them. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His hair was white like wool—it was as white as snow! His eyes were like flames of fire and his feet like polished bronze. His voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and when he spoke, it was like a sharp, two-edged sword came from his mouth. His face was shining like the sun!

John fell to the ground as if he were dead. The Son of Man put his hand on John and said, “Don’t be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. Yes, I died, but look ... I’m alive forever and ever! I hold the keys of death and the grave. Write what you see—about the things happening now and the things that will happen in the future.”

John was told what to write to the seven churches. And after that, he saw a door in heaven, standing open. Suddenly that same voice, blasting like a trumpet, said to John, “Come up here!” Instantly, his spirit was in heaven and he saw a throne, and someone sitting on it. There was a rainbow around the throne.

John’s Visions 2

Revelation 4:5 – 5:14 #258b

John then saw there were twenty-four elders next to the throne, but each of them was sitting on his own throne. They were clothed in white and wearing gold crowns.

There were four heavenly beings, too, and they worshiped God all day and all night saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!”

Flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder came from the throne. In front, there were seven flaming torches, which were the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne, John saw a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

He focused on the one sitting on the throne and saw that he had a scroll in his hand. It was sealed with seven seals. A strong angel shouted with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” No one was able to open the scroll and read it—not anyone in heaven or on earth.

When John saw this, he started to cry because no one was worthy. One of the twenty-four elders turned to him and said, “Stop crying! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has won the victory. He is the heir to David’s throne, and he is worthy to open the scroll.”

Then John saw a Lamb that had been killed but was now standing among the elders. He stepped forward and took the scroll from the one sitting on the throne. As he did, the heavenly beings and the elders fell down before him and sang a new song. Then millions of angels came and joined them. Together, they all sang, “Worthy is the Lamb!”

Smyrna (Izmir)

The Letter to Smyrna

Rev 2:8-11

Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna:

The First and the Last,
the One who was dead
and came to life, says:

I know your affliction and poverty,
yet you are rich.

I know the slander of those who say they are Jews
and are not,
but are a synagogue of Satan.

Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer.

Look,
the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you,
and you will have affliction for 10 days.

Be faithful until death,
and I will give you the crown of life.

Anyone who has an ear
should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

The victor will never be harmed by the second death.

Beginnings of Missionary Journeys 1

Act 13:4-13 #235a

The Holy Spirit said to the church at Antioch, "I've called Barnabas and Saul to a special work." So, the leadership sent them out to serve the Lord.

They took John Mark with them and sailed to the island of Cyprus. There they preached at Jewish synagogues as they moved across the island. Saul was also called Paul.

The governor of the island was known for his sound wisdom, and his willingness to learn. He called for Barnabas and Paul to come and tell him God's message. As they talked, a man who practiced witchcraft kept interrupting. He was trying to keep the governor from putting his faith in Christ.

Paul turned to the sorcerer and said, "You're an enemy of God. Stop talking against the Lord. Look! The Lord is about to make you blind."

Instantly the man became blind. Others had to lead him out of the room. The governor was shocked, and he listened even more carefully to Paul. Soon he put his faith in Christ.

After this, Paul and the others sailed to the mainland, where John Mark returned home to Jerusalem.

Beginnings of Missionary Journeys 2

Act 13:14-52 #235b

The rest of Paul's team went to the synagogue because it was the Sabbath. The leader said to them, "Friends, speak to us if you have an encouraging message."

Paul stood and talked to them. He started by reminding them of the stories of Israel. He then said, "God promised to bring a Savior from the line of King David. Jesus fulfilled that promise. The rulers in Jerusalem knew these things. Still, they killed Jesus by putting him on the cross. Then they buried him in a tomb, but God raised him from the dead!"

"We're here to tell you that Jesus is the Son of God, and he brings forgiveness of sins to those who believe in him. Be careful that you don't miss what God is doing for you."

Some of the Jews listened to Paul and received the grace of God. Others wanted him to come back the following Sabbath so they could talk about it some more.

The Jews returned the next week and found that almost the entire city was there to hear the message of God. They became jealous and spoke out against Paul and Barnabas.

Paul said, "It was right for us to bring God's message to you first. But you didn't accept it. You're not worthy of eternal life. Now we'll turn to the Gentiles because they'll listen."

The Gentiles were glad when they heard this, and many received the message. The Word of God spread throughout the region, which made the Jews furious. They finally convinced the town leaders to persecute Paul and Barnabas.

Eventually, the men had to leave that area. Still, the disciples in the city were filled with the Holy Spirit, and joy was in their hearts.

Pergamum

The Letter to Pergamum

Rev 2:12-17

Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum:

The One who has the sharp, double-edged sword says:

I know where you live

—where Satan's throne is!

And you are holding on to My name

and did not deny your faith in Me,

even in the days of Antipas,

My faithful witness who was killed among you,
where Satan lives.

But I have a few things against you.

You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam,
who taught Balak

to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites:
to eat meat sacrificed to idols
and to commit sexual immorality.

In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Therefore repent!

Otherwise, I will come to you quickly
and fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Anyone who has an ear
should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

I will give the victor some of the hidden manna.

I will also give him a white stone,
and on the stone a new name is inscribed
that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Thyatira

The Letter to Thyatira

Rev 2:18-29

Write to the angel of the church in Thyatira:

The Son of God,
the One whose eyes are like a fiery flame
and whose feet are like fine bronze, says:

I know your works—
your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance.

Your last works are greater than the first.

But I have this against you:

You tolerate the woman Jezebel,
who calls herself a prophetess
and teaches and deceives My slaves
to commit sexual immorality
and to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

I gave her time to repent,
but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality.

Look!

I will throw her into a sickbed
and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation,
unless they repent of her practices.

I will kill her children with the plague.

Then all the churches will know
that I am the One who examines minds and hearts,
and I will give to each of you
according to your works.

I say to the rest of you in Thyatira,
who do not hold this teaching,
who haven't known the deep things of Satan
—as they say—

I do not put any other burden on you.
But hold on to what you have until I come.

The one who is victorious
and keeps My works to the end:
I will give him authority over the nations
—and he will shepherd them with an iron scepter;

he will shatter them like pottery
—just as I have received this from My Father.
I will also give him the morning star.

Anyone who has an ear
should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Sardis

The Letter to Sardis

Rev 3:1-6

Write to the angel of the church in Sardis:

The One who has the seven spirits of God
and the seven stars says:

I know your works;
you have a reputation for being alive,
but you are dead.

Be alert and strengthen what remains,
which is about to die,
for I have not found your works complete before My God.

Remember, therefore,
what you have received and heard;
keep it, and repent.

But if you are not alert,
I will come like a thief,
and you have no idea at what hour

I will come against you.

But you have a few people in Sardis
who have not defiled their clothes,
and they will walk with Me in white,
because they are worthy.

In the same way,
the victor will be dressed in white clothes,
and I will never erase his name from the book of life
but will acknowledge his name before My Father
and before His angels.

Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit
says to the churches.”

From Worship to Stoning

Acts 14:1-28 #236

Paul and Barnabas went to a city called Iconium and preached the message of Christ at the Jewish synagogue. The reactions were extreme. A great number of Jews and Gentiles put their faith in Jesus. But others were offended and eventually stirred up the population against the Christians. Soon the entire city was in an uproar.

City officials decided that the only way to solve the problem was to kill Paul and Barnabas. The apostles found out about this and were able to escape.

They went to a town called Lystra, and Paul preached the gospel of Christ. A man was sitting nearby who had been crippled since birth. He listened carefully to everything that was being said. Paul looked at the man and realized that God had put faith in his heart. So he said to him, "Stand up!" Immediately the man got up and started walking.

The people saw this and were amazed. They started yelling, "The gods have come to visit us!" People crowded around to see the gods who looked like men. Soon a pagan priest ran up with some animals. He and the people started sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas.

The apostles were horrified and ran out among the people, "What are you doing? We are men just like you. We're here to bring you good news. God wants you to leave such foolishness and turn to him. He created all things, and he's the one who provides for your daily needs." Still the people wanted to sacrifice animals to them.

During this commotion, Jews arrived from the other cities where Paul and Barnabas had been. It didn't take them long to turn the crowd into an angry mob. They picked up large rocks to kill Paul. Surrounding him, they threw the stones until he fell beneath the blows. This continued until they thought he was dead. His body was dragged out of the city and thrown onto a trash heap.

The believers of Christ gathered around the body of Paul to mourn his death. Suddenly he stood up—and walked back into the city!

The next day he and Barnabas went to another city, where many people put their faith in Christ. At this point, they revisited the various places they had been. They encouraged the believers and appointed elders for the churches. All of these towns were in a region called Galatia.

Finally they sailed back to Antioch to visit the church that had sent them out. When they arrived, the people gathered to hear all that had happened on their trip. Paul and Barnabas told what God had done, and how he opened doors so Gentiles could put their faith in Christ.

Philadelphia

The Letter to Philadelphia

Rev 3:7-13

Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia:

The Holy One, the True One,
the One who has the key of David,
who opens and no one will close,
and closes and no one opens says:

I know your works.

Because you have limited strength,
have kept My word,
and have not denied My name,

look,

I have placed before you an open door
that no one is able to close.

Take note!

I will make those from the synagogue of Satan,
who claim to be Jews and are not,
but are lying
—note this—

I will make them come and bow down at your feet,
and they will know that I have loved you.

Because you have kept My command to endure,
I will also keep you from the hour of testing
that is going to come over the whole world
to test those who live on the earth.

I am coming quickly.

Hold on to what you have,
so that no one takes your crown.

The victor:

I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God,
and he will never go out again.

I will write on him the name of My God
and the name of the city of My God
—the new Jerusalem,
which comes down out of heaven from My God
—and My new name.

Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Keeping Jewish Laws 1

Acts 15:1-11 #237a

Jewish teachers from Jerusalem went to Antioch. They started teaching members of the church that a person had to obey Jewish law to be truly saved. Paul and Barnabas were shocked at this teaching and tried to correct it. This only started an argument.

Finally, the church leaders felt they needed to get guidance from the apostles. So, they sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, along with several others.

When they arrived at the church in Jerusalem, the two men gave a report of how eagerly the Gentiles received the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Pharisees among the membership responded by saying, “It’s wonderful that they’ve put their faith in Christ. But now they must be circumcised and be taught to obey the laws of Moses.”

This caused a lot of discussion. Finally, the church leaders realized that this issue had to be resolved if the work of God was to prosper. They decided to meet and not leave until they knew God’s will on this matter.

At one point, Peter spoke to the group. He said, “I was the first one to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. God forgave their sins and gave them the Holy Spirit. The way he treated them was no different than how he has treated us. I don’t believe God would be pleased if we required them to do something that we Jews have not been able to do. Listen to what I say. It’s only by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we can be saved from our sins, both Jews and Gentiles.”

Keeping Jewish Laws 2

Acts 15:12-34 #237b

Paul and Barnabas then told what God had done among the Gentiles. They described the miracles and the wonders that were done.

Finally, James (the brother of Jesus) stood up and spoke to the others. He said, “We must remember that years ago the Scriptures told us about this. It clearly states that God will call Gentiles by his name. Here’s my advice. It wouldn’t be right to put all our rules on the Gentiles. Instead, let’s give them three simple commandments:

- Don’t eat meat that has been offered to idols.
- Don’t be immoral.
- Don’t eat blood or anything that has been strangled.”

The church agreed on this idea. They put it in a letter and sent it to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They also sent a couple of men so there would be no doubt that the letter was from them. One of the men was Silas.

When they arrived at Antioch, they gave the letter to the church leaders, who read it to the congregation. The church received the letter with joy. Everyone was encouraged when they heard of their freedom in Christ.

Laodicea

The Letter to Laodicea

Rev 3:14-22

Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

The Amen, the faithful and true Witness,
the Originator of God's creation says:

I know your works,
that you are neither cold nor hot.

I wish that you were cold or hot.

So, because you are lukewarm,
and neither hot nor cold,
I am going to vomit you out of My mouth.

Because you say,
'I'm rich;
I have become wealthy and need nothing,'
and you don't know that you are wretched,
pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,

I advise you
to buy from Me gold refined in the fire
so that you may be rich,
white clothes so that you may be dressed
and your shameful nakedness not be exposed,
and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see.

As many as I love,
I rebuke and discipline.

So be committed and repent.

Listen!

I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and have dinner with him,
and he with Me.

The victor:
I will give him the right to sit with Me on My throne,
just as I also won the victory
and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Anyone who has an ear should listen
to what the Spirit says to the churches."

Freedom to Serve 1

Galatians 1:1 – 2:13 #238a

I'm shocked that you turned away from the grace of God. These false teachers told you that you must keep Jewish Law to be completely saved—and you believed them! How can you be so foolish as to accept this “other gospel?”

I gave you the pure gospel of Christ. So even if an angel from heaven comes and tells you something different—that angel is cursed! Yes, you heard me right. Let me be perfectly clear. Anyone who preaches this heresy is cursed.

Believe me, I understand what they're teaching. I loved Jewish tradition—so much that I tried to destroy the churches of God. But Christ saved me and called me to preach the gospel to Gentiles. He personally instructed me for three years in Arabia.

Now listen. Those same false teachers came to Antioch and tried to enslave our believers. I didn't tolerate it for one moment—absolutely not! The church finally sent Barnabas and me to Jerusalem to bring this issue before the apostles. They saw that God called me to the Gentiles in the same way Peter was called to the Jews.

Peter and I had already discussed this very issue. He came to Antioch and ate freely with Gentiles. But then some Jews came from Jerusalem. He immediately separated himself from his Gentile brothers. Other Jews joined him in this. Even Barnabas was pulled into this hypocrisy. I told Peter in front of everyone that this wasn't right!

Freedom to Serve 2

Galatians 2:14 – 3:22 #238b

Here's the principle he was ignoring: In Christ, there are no Jews or Gentiles. There are no slaves or free, male or female. We all died with Christ when he was crucified. We rose from the dead with him, so now Christ lives in us. Salvation comes by the death of Christ, and it has nothing to do with keeping the Law.

Do you understand this? How are you so easily deceived? Did you receive the Spirit of God because you obeyed the Law? Did God work miracles among you because you were so good? Absolutely not! It was because of your faith in Christ. Don't be so silly as to think that by keeping the Law you can add one little thing to what God has done!

God didn't even give Abraham righteousness because he kept the Law. No. He was born 430 years before it was written. He was righteous because of his faith in God. The Law was given later to show that people are sinners, and they are condemned. It reveals our need to accept Christ.

God said to Abraham, “All the nations will be blessed through you.” Think of it. The promises given to Abraham are now given to you because of Christ. Are you going to turn your back on that?

These false teachers want to take away these blessings, and they want to take away the freedom you enjoy in Christ. Don't let them do it! This freedom gives you the ability to serve others.

Freedom to Serve 3

Galatians 3:23 – 6:18 #238c

Instead of worrying about the Law, focus on being led by the Spirit of God. He'll keep you from things like immorality, going after false gods, being consumed with yourself, taking advantage of others, and losing control of your good senses.

The Spirit of God gives you the gift of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. The Law can't do that. The Spirit of God controls your thoughts and desires. He gives you the power

- to gently restore those who have done wrong
- to help others when they need you
- to accomplish great things for God
- to give to those who invest their lives in you.

Don't submit to the Law. Instead, allow the Spirit of God to control your life. Listen, you can't fool God. You'll reap the results of what you do. Destruction awaits those who are controlled by fleshly desires. Life is given to those who let the Spirit of God use them to help others.

God knows my heart, and he knows I'm not writing to you so I can brag to others. That is what those false teachers are doing. No, I don't brag about anything except the cross of Jesus Christ. I was crucified with him, so this world is dead to me. I carry the marks of this death in my body.

Pay attention to what I say, and the grace of Jesus Christ be with you.

Colossae

257 Onesimus – Philemon

Philemon #257

Onesimus was a slave who ran away from his master Philemon. He went to Rome and eventually met Paul who led him to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Onesimus stayed with the apostle and helped him in the ministry. Eventually they knew it was time for the “runaway slave” to return to his master. Paul was a personal friend with Philemon, so he wrote a letter to help the two men reconcile their relationship. He said...

Philemon—my dear friend—greetings to you, your family, and the church that meets in your home. I pray for you on a regular basis. I thank God for the love you have for the Lord Jesus Christ and for fellow believers. Those who meet you are encouraged in their faith.

Dear brother, you know me. I don't normally hesitate in telling you what is right and wrong. I'm usually quick in reminding you of your duties in Christ. But I'm not going to do that this time. Instead, I am going to beg.

Picture this in your mind. I'm an old man who is in prison for the cause of Jesus Christ. In my weakness, God sent me a helper, Onesimus—a man who caused you pain and grief. But God sent him to me and I was able to introduce him to Jesus. He yielded his life to Christ and then became invaluable as a helper to me.

In a way, it was like you sent him here to help me because you couldn't come yourself. I don't know how I can carry on without him; but he and I both know he should go back to you. He was helping me in your stead, but we didn't have your permission.

Listen, he was a worthless slave when he ran away from you. Now he's coming back as a valuable brother in Christ, a co-worker in the ministry and a dear friend of mine. Receive him back in love.

Oh, concerning those things he stole from you —put those on my account. Here, I will pick up the quill and write this in my own handwriting. “I, Paul, will repay it.” I won't remind you of the fact that you actually owe me your very life.

Please receive him as if you were receiving me. You'll bring joy to my life when I hear how you've accepted Onesimus back into your life and home.

But what am I talking about? I know you'll do this and even more.

By the way, prepare your guest room for me. I know you've been praying that I'd be set free and come back to visit you. I think the Lord is going to answer your prayers.

Greet all my good friends who are there. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Paul.

Troas

Third Floor Window

Acts 20:5-18 #251a

Paul stayed three months in Corinth. Afterwards he went back to Troas, where he spent a week before starting his trip to Jerusalem.

The night before Paul left Troas, he preached to the church on the third floor of a house. He preached for hours—well into the night. A young man sat on a windowsill and soon became very sleepy. Eventually he went to sleep and slid out of the window, falling to the ground!

People rushed down, only to find him dead. Paul took the body and hugged it tightly. He finally looked up and said, “The young man is alive.”

Everyone rejoiced and together went back up the stairs. They continued their fellowship until dawn when Paul left on his trip to Jerusalem. They took the young man to his home, still rejoicing that he was alive.

Paul sailed to a town near Ephesus, and the elders of the Ephesian church went there to meet with him.

The Call to Europe

Acts 15:36 – 16:12 #239a

Paul said to Barnabas, “It’s time we visit Galatia and see how the churches are doing.” Barnabas agreed but wanted to take John Mark along. Paul refused, pointing out that Mark deserted them on the last trip. They couldn’t agree upon this, so they decided to go different directions. Paul chose Silas to go with him.

While they were visiting Galatia, they found a young man named Timothy. His mother was a believing Jewish woman, and his father was a Greek. He was highly respected by all the believers, so Paul encouraged him to join their ministry.

Paul led his team to go farther into Asia, but the Holy Spirit didn’t allow it. Finally, one night, Paul had a dream. He saw a man saying, “Come. Cross over the sea and help us.” Paul awoke and knew this was from God.

Once they sailed across the sea, they went to a city called Philippi.

GREECE

Philippi

First European Believer

Act 16:11-15 #239b

It was at Troas that Paul was given a clear understanding of where his team was to go. So, taking Luke with them, they sailed across the sea to Neapolis. From there they went to a city called Philippi, a leading Roman city in Macedonia.

On the Sabbath, they went to a river outside the city gate, thinking it would be a good place for prayer. They sat down and started talking to a group of women who were gathered there. One of them was Lydia, a woman who sold expensive purple cloth from Thyatira. She was known as a woman who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart as she listened to Paul preach. Her entire family were baptized! They then convinced Paul to use their house as the home base for his ministry.

Singing in Jail

Act 16:16-40 #239c

There was a demon-possessed slave girl in Philippi who made money for her owners by predicting the future. She started following Paul and Silas through the streets of Philippi. Suddenly she yelled out, “These men are here to tell us about salvation.”

She did this for several days. Finally, Paul turned and said to the spirit within her, “Leave that girl! By the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her.” Immediately the spirit left her.

Her owners were furious! They knew the slave girl was no longer profitable to them. So, they gathered a mob who took Paul and Silas to the city officials. They said, “These Jews came to Philippi and started teaching the citizens of Rome about their God. It’s not right!”

The city officials agreed and had the two men beaten publicly. They were then taken to jail, where the jailer put them in chains.

Around midnight, Paul and Silas started praying, singing, and giving praise to God. Suddenly an earthquake shook the foundations of the jail. The doors flew open and the chains fell off the prisoners.

The jailer woke up and saw that the doors were open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he pulled out his sword to kill himself. Paul shouted, “Wait! Don’t do that! We’re all here.”

The jailer grabbed a torch and rushed into the cell. He fell to the floor and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you’ll be saved—you and your family.” The jailer took them to his home and Paul explained the message of Christ. The entire family believed

and was baptized. The jailer then washed the wounds of the men and served them a meal.

The next morning the city officials sent guards to the jailer. They said, “You may release those men and let them go their way.”

Paul sent a message back to the city officials. “We’re not leaving! We’re Roman citizens and you had us beaten publicly and thrown into jail without a trial. Now you want us to leave quietly. We’re not going. If you want us to leave, you’ll have to come and personally release us.”

The city officials were shocked when they heard that these men were Roman citizens. They rushed to the jail and quickly apologized. They personally brought them out of the jail and asked them to please leave the city.

Paul and Silas didn’t leave right away. They went back to the home of Lydia and encouraged the believers in Christ. They then left the city.

Thessalonica

Paul's Team in Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-10 #240a

Leaving Luke in Philippi, Paul and Silas and their group traveled to Thessalonica. They spent three weeks reasoning with the Jews, explaining how Messiah needed to come and suffer and then rise from the dead. They said, "Jesus is this Promised One."

Some of the Jews accepted Christ, as well as a large number of Greeks. This upset the other Jews. They became so angry they decided to destroy the movement. They went into the agora (marketplace) and gathered a group of thugs. Together they organized a mob against the Christians.

Soon the entire city was in an uproar! They couldn't find Paul, so they took several other believers and pulled them out into the street. They led them to the city officials and said, "A group of men are causing trouble throughout the entire world. They're not loyal to Caesar but say they have another king, a man named Jesus. Now these troublemakers have come to our city, and these men have welcomed them into their homes."

The officials were cautious and said they would investigate the matter. They made the believers pay a large bail before releasing them. That night, the Christians sent Paul and Silas to Berea.

Trials and Persecution 1

1 Thessalonians 1:1 – 3:5 #241a

Silas, Timothy, and I thank God for you constantly. We pray for you night and day. We remember how you accepted Christ in the storm of conflict. We didn't preach with flattering words, but you knew what we said was anointed by the Holy Spirit. You proved our worth and accepted our message. Now everyone talks about how you turned from idols to serve the living God, and how you patiently wait for the return of Christ.

You graciously received us, just like you received the gospel. We watched over you, as a nursing mother with her child. We took jobs to pay our own way, to make it easier for you. Our love for you was like that of a devoted father, helping you to learn how to walk with God.

Now the gospel is working inside you. People hate you because they hate the gospel. I wanted to be there during this time of trial, but Satan stood in my way. Hear what I say—You're my hope; You're my joy; You're my crown of boasting before the Lord!

When I realized that I couldn't be with you, I left Timothy and came here. I told him to help you as you faced this persecution. For a long time, I didn't get news on how you

were doing. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. I sent word to Timothy and asked about you.

He personally came and told me the good news of your faith and love in Christ. He told me that you want to see me as much as I want to see you. Praise God! You're standing firm in your faith. Oh, how I long to be with you and teach you more about walking with the Lord.

Now listen. Continue to live a life that pleases God. Stay away from immorality. Don't be like those who are enslaved to uncontrolled passions That is a lifestyle that hurts everyone involved. It also offends the Spirit of God who lives inside you. Don't forget, God severely judges people who live with such filth.

Instead, let your love be godly. But why am I telling you this? God has taught you how to love one another. I just ask that you do it even more.

Trials and Persecution 2

1 Thessalonians 3:6 – 5:28 #241b

Timothy told me that you're concerned about those who have died recently. Don't worry about them. Remember, Jesus also died, but God raised him from the dead! He'll do the same with those who have put their trust in him.

When Jesus comes back to earth, he will first raise those who have died in him. Then the rest of us will meet him in the air. Don't be discouraged like those without our hope. Instead, comfort each other with these words.

Of course, we don't have a schedule as to when this is going to happen. Still, we are to prepare ourselves as if it will happen today.

When it does, those who live in sin will be caught off guard. They're like people who lock their doors at night and think they're safe. Suddenly a thief breaks into their home!

The coming of our Lord Jesus will be like the labor pains of a woman about to give birth. People will suddenly find themselves standing before God to be judged. But Jesus Christ died so we can live with him forever. Encourage one another with this truth.

Here is how you are to function as a church until the Lord comes:

- Honor those who meet your spiritual needs.
- Get along with one another.
- Don't put up with laziness.
- Be patient with those who are discouraged.
- Help the weak.
- Don't seek revenge when people wrong you.
- Always do that which is good.

Here are the three parts of living a spiritual life:

- First, rejoice, pray, and give thanks. This is God's will for you.
- Next, listen to God's Spirit when he speaks to you through others, but make sure it's from God.
- And finally, hold on to that which is good and stay away from evil.

My dear friends, we're a family, so pray for me and keep your fellowship sweet. Share this letter with everyone in the church. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Berea

Paul's Team in Berea

Acts 17:10-15 #240b

The Jews at Berea welcomed the message of Christ and searched the Scriptures to see if it was true. Therefore, many Jews and Greeks received Christ. News of this got back to the people at Thessalonica. So, the Jews there went to Berea to continue their fight against the movement. The attacks became so severe that the Christians sent Paul to Athens by boat. The plan was for Silas and Timothy to stay at Berea and join him later.

Athens

Mars Hill

Acts 17:16 – 18:1 #240c

Paul arrived at Athens and waited for his companions to join him. As he walked through the city, he was shocked to see all the idols. Finally, he went to the agora (marketplace) and told people about Jesus. They were fascinated with this talk of a man being raised from the dead. So, they took Paul to a place called Mars Hill and let him talk to the crowd.

He said, “Men of Athens! I can see you’re extremely religious. I even found an idol called ‘To the Unknown God.’ Let me tell you about the God you don’t know.

“He is the Lord of Heaven and has made everything on earth. He doesn’t live in things made by people. In the beginning God created one man, and all the nations of the earth have come from him. Everything you have comes from God. He is the reason you live.

“God has been patient with you in the past, but now you’re to repent. He’ll judge you by Jesus, the one who rose from the dead.”

Some of the men laughed when they heard that Jesus rose from the dead. Others wanted to hear more some other time. A few people believed and put their trust in Christ.

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth to wait for Silas and Timothy.

Corinth

Mob in Corinth

Acts 18:1-22

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he met a Jewish man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They were also tent makers, the same as Paul, so they decided to work together. Each week Paul went to the synagogue and talked to the Jews. He explained to them that Jesus was the Messiah.

Silas and Timothy finally rejoined him and told him about how the Christians in Thessalonians were standing strong amid strong persecution. He wrote them two letters.

Sometime later, the Jews rejected Paul's message. They even blasphemed the name of Christ. With that, Paul said, "My conscience is clear. I told you the good news that Messiah had come. I explained how we have salvation through him. You've rejected it. Therefore, your blood is on your own heads. I'll give this message to the Gentiles."

A few of the Jews believed in Christ, including the head of the synagogue. At the same time, a great number of Gentiles put their faith in Jesus.

The Lord encouraged Paul in a dream. He said, "Don't be afraid. Keep talking about me. No one will hurt you here because I have many people in this city." So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching and preaching God's Word.

One day, the Jews selected a new leader, who organized an attack against Paul. A mob grabbed him and took him to the judge saying, "This man is making our people worship God in ways that are the opposite of our law."

Before Paul could defend himself, the judge yelled at the Jews. "How dare you come to me with this. I don't care about your law! I spend my day punishing criminals, not arguing over words and names. Don't waste my time!" He then drove them out of the court.

A mob grabbed the leader of the synagogue and beat him in front of everyone. The judge didn't even look up.

When Paul thought his work in Corinth was done, he decided to go back to Antioch. Aquila and Priscilla went with him as far as Ephesus. Paul preached at the synagogue there, and the people wanted him to stay longer and teach them. But he refused, saying, "If God wills, I'll come back." He then left and went to Jerusalem and on to Antioch.

Church Fights

1 Corinthians 1-4 #245

I praise God for you constantly. It's obvious to all that God has enriched you with spiritual gifts so you can serve him until Christ comes again.

I'll get right to the point. I understand there are divisions among you. I've heard that some say, "I follow Paul," or "I hold to the teachings of Apollos," or "My Christianity comes from Peter." Still others say, "I don't follow anyone except Christ."

Why are you wasting your time with such bickering? When I was with you, I totally focused on giving you the simple gospel. I didn't allow myself to be distracted from the cross of Christ. I didn't care that others thought preaching about the cross was ridiculous. I knew it was the power of God.

This fighting comes from your pride. Don't you realize God uses foolish things to show his wisdom? Remember I came to you in weakness. I didn't display myself as a great person with flowing words. No, I stood among you trembling with fear. I totally relied on the Spirit of God to do his work in your lives. And he did! Your faith was born in his power. It didn't come with human reasoning. Apollos and I didn't teach you God's wisdom. The Spirit of God taught those things to you.

I know how to teach the wisdom of God to those who are mature in their walk with the Lord. But I fed you with milk, because you were babies in the faith. Obviously, you still can't be fed like mature Christians. You fight among yourselves. You're jealous of each other. When one says, "I'm of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," you're acting like you don't even know Christ.

Who are Paul and Apollos anyway? They're slaves of Christ! They were told to work with you. God said, "Paul, go plant the seeds of faith. Apollos, water the plants. Now leave them alone. I'll make them grow." We're just slaves doing our assigned jobs. God is the one who planned it all.

Take a closer look at those of us who are called apostles. We're like the prisoners of war, being paraded through the streets until they're finally killed. We're fools for Christ, weak and hated. We're homeless, and our constant companion is hunger. We have to work hard just to stay alive.

We have to bless those who curse us. We have to be patient with those who abuse us. When people slander us, we have to say nice things about them. We're the "garbage" of the world! Still, I'm your spiritual father and you're to imitate me.

Church Life and Marriage

1 Corinthians 5-7 #245

There are a few issues that have to be taken care of right away. First, I've heard that there is a man in the church who is sleeping with his stepmother? I can't believe you're

allowing this disgusting sin. Remove that man from your fellowship—immediately! Sin is like yeast. Given time it'll take over the entire batch of dough.

I've also been told you're taking one another to court to stand before non-Christian judges. Aren't there godly people in the church that can pass judgment on these things? Listen, the day will come when you will judge angels. You'll also judge the people of this world. Surely you can take care of these small matters between brothers. If there's no one in the church to judge between you, simply endure the injustice! Allow yourself to be cheated!

There is also the issue of immorality. The simple fact is this. Your body was not made for sexual impurity. God made people for himself and—as a Christian—your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. When he paid for you, the Spirit of God took possession of your body. You're no longer your own. You're to glorify God in all things.

Sexual needs are to be fulfilled within marriage. God has given me the ability to stay single, but not everyone has this gift. Therefore they should get married rather than live with burning frustration. Once a couple is married, they need to be conscious of each other's needs.

I know some of you are married to someone who doesn't know our Lord. Stay with that person with the hope of winning them to Christ. If they leave you ... well, there is nothing you can do about that.

Accept the situation in life that God has given you. Of course it's all right to improve yourself when you can, but don't be burdened down with trying to fight against the place where God has put you. He'll perfect your ministry right where you are.

Principles & Public Worship

1 Corinthians 8-11 #246

You asked about several things, so I'll answer each of them. The first deals with eating meat that has been offered to an idol. Of course we know that an idol isn't really a god. It's just a piece of wood or stone. Still, eating this type of meat may offend someone who has just come out of idolatry. We should never sin against a fellow Christian. Therefore, I've determined not to do anything that causes a brother to stumble in his faith.

Here is another rule to live by. Do whatever is lawful to win others to Christ. You've seen my example. I've set aside many privileges and have become all things to all people so I could win some. It's like a runner who does whatever it takes to win a race. This requires self-control in every area of life. He doesn't do anything that slows him down—and all of this for an earthly prize! My reward is eternal. Therefore, I do whatever it takes to win.

God will make sure you're not tempted in any way that's beyond your ability to resist. You'll always find a way of escape if you look for it.

All of this has to do with eating meat served to idols. Focus on helping others and establishing their faith. When someone invites you over for a meal, eat it without asking questions. But if they say it was offered to idols, leave it alone. What you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for God's glory—and don't offend others.

I've heard some disturbing news. Some of you are using the Lord's Supper as an occasion to eat your own supper. Certain members are having big meals while others are sitting there hungry. How can you embarrass your fellow believers this way?

Remember, the bread and the cup represent the body and blood of our Lord. Don't be guilty of abusing these symbols. Disrespect for our Lord's body is the reason why some of you are sick, and yes, some have died. Therefore, examine yourselves when you come together around the Lord's Table. Show reverence and show consideration for one another.

Spiritual Gifts & Resurrection

1 Corinthians 12-16 #246

You asked about spiritual gifts. Remember this. The Spirit of God deals with Christians differently. He gives each of us gifts for the purpose of serving others. This is like the human body. Each part works for the good of the whole. It's the same with the body of Christ. One part doesn't say to another, "I don't need you." No, no! We all need each other's gifts. The gifts are different, but they all come from the same Spirit.

Still, our gifts are useless without love. It's love that makes our gifts work for the benefit of others. Love makes you patient and kind instead of focusing on yourself. It prompts you to act properly with others and not be quick tempered or selfish.

Love embraces truth but doesn't keep track of what others have done wrong. It's always supportive and believes the best about others. Remember, our gifts are wonderful, but they're only temporary tools. Love will never pass away.

Before I finish this letter, I want to make the gospel clear to you. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead. The apostles and others were witnesses of his resurrection. Finally, he appeared to me, the most unworthy of all the apostles because I persecuted the church of God. Yet, God's grace works in me.

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith. If he's not alive, then those who die no longer exist. If Christ didn't rise from the dead, there's no hope in the world, and all we have is this life.

But the good news is this: Christ did rise from the dead. And because he did, we will too. Christ will rule over this world and abolish death itself. The last trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise with their glorified bodies. Then the bodies of those who are still alive will be changed. This takes the sting out of dying, and death is no longer victorious. Don't you see? God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'll end this letter by reminding you that the Christians in Jerusalem need our financial help because of the great famine. Each of you should set some money aside to help

them. Give according to how God has prospered you. Collect offerings, and then I will send some of you to Jerusalem with your gifts.

Stand firm in your faith and be strong. Do everything with love. Oh, Aquila and Priscilla told me to send you their greetings.

I'm asking God to give you the grace of our Lord Jesus. And my friends, I want you to know that I love you.

ROME

Storm at Sea

Acts 27 #255

Paul was on trial in Israel when he saw the need to appeal to Caesar. So, since he was a Roman citizen, arrangements were made for Paul to travel to Rome on cargo ships. He was put in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius. He was kind to Paul and allowed his friends to visit him whenever they were in port.

Travel was slow because of storms. After many stops and changing boats several times, they eventually arrived at Fair Haven on the island of Crete. It was illegal in Roman law to travel on the Mediterranean during the winter, So, they had to stop since it was close to winter.

Still, the captain wanted to sail a few miles up the coast to a better port. The weather had cleared and there was now a gentle breeze. Paul said to Julius, "Tell the captain to stay here! If he doesn't, he'll lose the ship and its cargo, and some people may die." The Roman officer thought about what Paul said but decided to allow the captain to move on to the other port.

They left Fair Haven and started sailing along the coast. Suddenly a fierce wind pushed the ship out into deeper water. The crew struggled to fight the wind, but the storm grew more intense. Finally, the captain stopped fighting the wind and allowed it to drive the ship along.

After several days in the storm, the crew threw the cargo overboard. A couple of days later they threw the ship's gear overboard. In time, everyone knew they were going to die. They hadn't seen the sun or stars for days and they hadn't eaten anything.

Paul stood before the men. He said, "I told you not to leave the harbor. You didn't listen, but now I have good news for you. An angel appeared to me last night with a message from God. He said, 'Don't be afraid! You'll stand before Caesar. No one on this ship will die.' What God says is true. We'll all live, but the ship will be destroyed."

They were in the storm for a total of fourteen days. About midnight on the last day, the sailors realized they were approaching land. They quickly let down an anchor to keep from running into the rocks.

Some of them started to let down the lifeboat so they could get off the ship. Paul shouted, "You will all die if these men leave the ship!" Immediately soldiers cut the lines and let the lifeboat fall into the water. Everyone prayed that morning would come soon.

Paul talked to the crew just before daylight. He said, "You haven't eaten for fourteen days. Eat something because you'll need your strength to go to shore today." He then picked up some bread, gave thanks to God, and started eating. Everyone on the ship ate some food.

Shipwreck and Rome

Acts 28 #256

When it was light, they could see land through the storm. It was the island of Malta. The captain spotted a bay with a beach. He decided to run the ship toward the beach as far as it would go. They pulled up the anchor and hoisted a sail. The fierce wind drove them toward the beach until the ship struck a sandbar. It jammed in the sand, and then started breaking up because of the waves.

The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners so they wouldn't escape. Julius stopped them because he wanted to save Paul's life. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard and get to shore. Everyone else had to find planks from the ship and use them to float ashore. Soon everyone was in the water, and they all reached land safely.

The local people came out and started helping the men from the ship. They built a fire because of the rain and cold. Paul helped by gathering wood. As he was putting some on the fire, a poisonous snake bit him on the hand. Paul dropped the wood, but the snake hung from his hand. The local people said, "Ah, he is a terrible murderer! He escaped dying at sea, but now the gods are bringing justice to him."

Paul shook the snake into the fire, and everyone waited for him to swell up and drop over dead. After some time, they finally realized he wasn't going to die. Then they said, "He's a god!"

The governor of the island opened up his home and made provisions for those who were shipwrecked. Paul learned that the governor's father was sick in bed. He went and placed his hand on the man's head. Instantly he was healed. News of this spread throughout the island, and people started bringing others to Paul so he could heal them.

They stayed on Malta until the winter months were over. Julius then booked passage for them on a cargo ship that was going to Rome. As they prepared to leave, the people of the island brought them everything they needed for the trip.

When they arrived in Rome, Paul was taken to a house where he stayed until his trial before Caesar. There was always a soldier next to him, but he was free to have friends come and visit. The Christians in Rome graciously received him and encouraged him.

Paul stayed in the house for two years waiting for the trial. During that time he received many guests and preached Christ to them all. No one tried to stop him.

Life With and Without Christ 1

Romans 1-3 #249a

I hear about your faith everywhere I go. I praise God for you all the time. I want to come and invest in your spiritual walk. God made me obligated to share his message with Gentiles everywhere. Therefore, I share the Gospel with those who are cultured and with those who are barbarians. It doesn't matter if they are smart or simple minded.

I'm proud of the Gospel because it's the power of God to those who believe, no matter who they are. People can only get to God by faith. Without it, they must face his judgment.

So why is that? It's because people are wicked! God reveals himself to them in many ways. Everything around them talks about God. But they've closed their minds.

There are two types of people in this world. One type worships what God has made. They think this makes them wise, but they become fools in the process. By excluding God, they sink into moral perversion. Their sins destroy their minds. They carry death with them everywhere they go. They become good at doing evil, and they enjoy seeing it in others.

The other type of people in this world are those who create their own righteousness. They brag about their good works and think they're experts in what's good and bad. They judge others for the evil they commit, while doing the same type of sins behind the scenes. They think that judging others will help them avoid God's judgment.

All of us find ourselves in one of these two groups, and God's anger is hot toward both of them. Both groups are sinners. They argue about who is better, but the truth is that the whole world is totally given over to sin. There's not one person who is righteous, not even one. We all stand guilty before God's judgment.

That's why God sent his son, Jesus Christ. He provides his goodness to those who put their faith in him. It doesn't matter who you are. Everyone is a sinner in need of redemption.

Life With and Without Christ 2

Romans 4-6 #249b

The Jews are the most confused about God's redemption. They claim that Abraham is their father. Yet if you look closer, he's really the father of faith. He didn't have a relationship with God based on his own goodness. No, he simply believed God, and God was pleased.

The Jews hold David up as their great king. But he delighted in God's goodness, not his own. Both men were righteous because they believed God.

In the same way, we're made good only by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him, we have peace with God and access to his grace. This is how we can be happy even in our trials. We know God is using them for our good.

Now here is my point. Christ did this for us when we were wicked! This shows how much God loves us. Christ died for us when we were disgusting sinners. With that in mind, how much will he do for us now that we're pure in his sight?

Think of it this way. We all came from one man, Adam. We're all sinners because of him. Death and judgment are on the head of everyone who has ever lived—because of him.

Now there is another man—Jesus. Because of him, we can be made righteous. Because of him, we can have grace and eternal life.

I can hear someone saying, “So, if our good works have nothing to do with our being pure before God, then we can sin as much as we want.” Absolutely not!

Baptism is a picture of this truth. Going under the water shows how we die to sin and are buried —just like Jesus died for our sins and was buried. When he rose from the dead, he left sin behind. Our coming out of the water is a picture of his resurrection, but it is also a picture of us leaving sin behind. We’re to live a new way of life.

We stay away from sin because it enslaves people. When you give in to it, you become a slave to it. In the same way, when you submit yourself to the grace of God, you become his slave.

Either way, you’re not free to do what you want. So you have to choose. Which one will you submit to? Sin brings death, but God gives you eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Life With and Without Christ 3

Romans 7 – 8: #249c, #250a

Someone is bound to ask, “Wasn’t the Law of God given as a way to make ourselves righteous?” You must be kidding! It’s impossible to obey the Law. It was given to reveal our sinfulness, so we’d know that we’re hopeless and in need of help.

When I look to the Law for help, I suddenly have a problem. I want to be good but don’t know how. I don’t want to do evil but find that I’m doing it all the time. I’m a slave and have no choice. I cry out, “How can I get free?”

Praise God! We’re free through Jesus Christ who died for us. We’re no longer condemned, and we have the power to resist sin.

Salvation in Christ gives us several benefits. First, we’re adopted into a new family. God is our Father. His Spirit lives within us, and we inherit everything that belongs to Jesus.

As a member of the heavenly family, we have peace about what happens to us in this life. We might suffer here, but that’s nothing compared to the glory that is waiting for us in heaven.

The second benefit is what the Spirit of God is doing in our lives. He is making us ready for heaven. He helps us pray. He changes our thinking. He makes sure all our trials are good for us. He shapes us to be more like Jesus.

The third benefit is that God is now our Father! That means we’re important to him! He won’t let anything happen to us that he doesn’t think is good for us. Nothing can separate us from his love.

Life With and Without Christ 4

Romans 9 – 12:2 #250b

Even with all these benefits, I still have one great heartache. I wish the Jews weren't missing out on what God is doing with us. They're my earthly family, and I'd give anything for them to have salvation. I'd give up my own salvation, if they could have it.

Still, I understand that their rejection of Christ doesn't change God's promises to Abraham. I must always keep in mind that God's promises aren't to those who happen to be born into a particular family. God has always selected a people for himself from among the crowd.

The Jews can blame only themselves, because God has made his plan simple. People are saved if Jesus is their Lord and they believe that God raised him from the dead. Anyone can be saved if they call upon the name of the Lord.

Don't you see? The fact that Israel is rejecting their Messiah is your opportunity. You can now be brought into God's family! It's like cutting a branch off from a tree and grafting in a wild branch. Israel has been cut off temporarily, so that the Gentiles can know God.

But don't get too proud! If a natural branch can be cut off, how much easier it would be to cut off the grafted-in branch. The time will come when the Day of the Gentiles will be over. At that point, God will turn the tables, and Israel will accept salvation.

Take advantage of God's mercy while you can. Give your bodies to him as a living sacrifice. Put aside sin and live a life pleasing to him. Change the way you think and act.

Life With and Without Christ 5

Romans 12 - 16 #250c

Now, here is a list of things you are to do while you live for God on earth:

- Work in concert with your fellow believers. Everyone has their special gift from God. Together you make up one body.
- Have a high standard of living and focus on what God wants you to do.
- Submit to civil authorities. Just because you have a heavenly home doesn't mean you aren't responsible to earthly government officials. When you resist them, you're resisting God.
- You're not to owe people money. Instead, you owe them your love. Pay it with interest.
- Always live like your time of service is about over.
- Don't be distracted by fleshly desires and lust. Instead, start acting like Jesus would act.

Listen, God deals with each of us differently. So, honor each other's walk with the Lord. One person is obeying God by setting aside a particular day, or not eating certain foods. Someone else obeys God by treating everything the same. What does that matter to you? The Lord has an individual relationship with each believer.

Having said that, you should also be conscious of the fact that some people are still weak in their walk with God. You're at liberty to follow your own convictions about things, but you're not at liberty to trip up a fellow Christian. Your job is to build them up—not tear them down by the things you do. Those who are strong in the faith have a responsibility to watch over those who are weaker.

Well, here are my plans. I am going to Jerusalem to deliver the offering that was taken by the churches here. When I'm done, I plan to stop by Rome on my way to Spain. I have wanted to meet you for so long!

Greet all my friends in the Gospel. They have faithfully worked with me throughout the years.

Oh, one more thing. Watch out for those who make a big deal out of little things. Avoid them. Their smooth talking can hurt weaker believers.

Everywhere I go, people tell me about your obedience to Christ. Everyone here wants to send greetings to you.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.



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