

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the New Testament
Story of God



SESSION 11

Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians

NOTICE TO CLT PARTICIPANTS AND EDUCATORS

This is a contract. By using these materials you accept all the terms and conditions of this Agreement. This Agreement covers all Leader's Guides, Student Guides, and instructional resources included in the Continuing Lay Training (CLT) website.

Upon your acceptance of this Agreement, Continuing Lay Training grants to you a nonexclusive license to use these curricular materials provided that you agree to the following:

1. USE OF THE MODULES.

- You may distribute educational materials in electronic form to students or other educational providers.
- You may make and distribute electronic or paper copies to students for the purpose of instruction, as long as each copy contains this Agreement and the same copyright and other proprietary notices pertaining to the Module. If you download the educational materials from the Internet or similar online source, you must include the CLT notice for the Module with any online distribution and on any media you distribute that includes the educational content.
- You may translate, adapt, and/or modify the examples and instructional resources for the purpose of making the instruction culturally relevant to your students. However, you must agree that you will not sell these modified materials without express, written permission from CLT.

2. COPYRIGHT.

The material is owned by CLT and is protected by United States Copyright Law and International Treaty provisions. Except as stated above, this Agreement does not grant you any intellectual property rights in the Module.

3. RESTRICTIONS.

- You may not sell copies of these educational materials in any form except to recover the minimum reproduction cost of electronic media or photocopy expense.
- You may not modify the wording or original intent of the educational material for commercial use.

THANK YOU

Continuing Lay Training would like to thank Clergy Development for granting permission to modify and adapt their course of study materials for our educational purposes. Their willingness to partner with us is sincerely appreciated.

Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Art of Letter Writing: Romans and Corinthians

The Letter to the Romans

The Letters to the Corinthians

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- gain an understanding of the types of letters written in the first century.
- know the purpose and main content for Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians.

Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION



Paul was a prolific letter writer who made use of and modified patterns and styles of correspondence that were common in the Greco-Roman world. We briefly studied Stanley Stowers' review of the types of letters learned in school and used by literate people of the first century. As we go through these letters of Paul, as well as the General Letters, we will review some of these types of letters and how they are used in the specific letters we are studying.

The types of letters in the following section are reflected in Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians. Romans is considered to represent the most thorough depiction of Paul's theological understandings relating to God, humanity, and salvation. First and Second Corinthians, perhaps, best demonstrate the wide range of topics and controversies which Paul faced as a pastor among the churches that he left behind in his missionary endeavors. We will survey Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians using our now familiar exegetical questions Who, What, Where, When, and Why.

THE ART OF LETTER WRITING: ROMANS AND CORINTHIANS



NOTES

LETTERS OF FRIENDSHIP

As indicated earlier, ancient traditions and proverbs asserted that friendship required the sharing of all things between socially and morally equal people, including affection and companionship. When being together was impossible, friendly letters were said to provide a suitable substitute for actual companionship. Friendship in the first-century world was possible only between equals. Letters between male and female, slave and free persons, or people of different classes would not be considered friendship letters.

The family letters were not friendship letters, but were used to maintain family relationships when the family was separated. Although there are no letters of friendship in the New Testament, some letters employ language from the friendly letter tradition. The phrase absent in body but present in spirit occurs in 2 Cor. 5:3, 10:1-2; Col. 2:5; and 1 Thess. 2:17. The theme of “longing to be with the loved one” appears in 2 Cor. 1:16; 1 Thess. 3:6-10; Philem. 22; 2 John 12, and 3 John 14. The following may also be related to the friendship genre: “yearning for the loved one” (Phil. 1:7-8); “sharing in one another’s feelings” (Phil. 2:17-18); and “letter writing as a conversation” (1 Cor. 10:15).

LETTERS OF PRAISE AND BLAME

Praising and blaming were fundamental activities through which the social construction of the ancient world was maintained. Praise legitimated and effected social structures and the societies, constructions of reality. In a society where there is deep agreement about the way things ought to be, those who give praise and blame work to locate each person and thing in their proper place by bestowing honor and causing shame.

Some philosophical groups and Christians might challenge the accepted structure of honorable and dishonorable behavior, but they did not challenge the system of honor itself or the process of praise and blame through which the system was sustained. Letters of praise and blame, then, are perhaps the most basic and most ideal of the types. The ancients defined one of the three departments of rhetoric, epideictic, as the speech of praise and blame that demonstrated the honorable and shameful.


NOTES

Although no pure letters of praise exist in the New Testament, Paul makes significant use of praise in certain parts of his letters. He characteristically includes a word of praise for the recipients in his thanksgiving (Rom. 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:3-4; and Philem. 1-4). In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul balances praise and blame in the service of giving advice (cf. 11:2, 17, 22). Chapter 13 of the same letter is comparable to passages in Greco-Roman literature that praise virtues.

Six of the seven letters in Revelation 2-3 mix praise with something else, such as blaming, threatening, consoling, or promising. In good epistolary form, they begin with praise and then turn to blaming or threatening.

LETTERS OF EXHORTATION AND ADVICE

Letters of Advice. Advice differs from paraenetic letters, which we will discuss in the next session, when a specific course of action is called for. Paraenesis only seeks to increase adherence to a value or to cultivate a character trait. Advice, however, calls for action. Paul very skillfully mixes paraenesis and advice in 1 Corinthians. Advice is found especially in 7-8 and 10-14.

Protreptic Letters. No theorist ever defined the protreptic letter in antiquity. It was neither a recognized type nor a widely used kind of letter. Nevertheless, it is important for those who have an interest in early Christian letter writing. Protreptic writings are those exhortations to take up the philosophical life. Protreptic works urge the reader to convert to a way of life, join a school, or accept a set of teachings as normative for the reader's life. In both form and function, Paul's letter to the Romans is a protreptic letter.

LETTERS OF MEDIATION

One person makes a request to another person on behalf of a third party. These may be divided usefully but somewhat artificially into letters of introduction and other kinds of intercessory letters. Sometimes the purpose is to reestablish a broken relationship or to petition someone in authority on behalf of the third party. Since travel and hospitality were extremely important in earliest Christianity, it is not surprising that letters of introduction are mentioned several times in the New Testament (Acts 9:2, 18:27; 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor 3:1-2). Philemon is an intercessory letter on behalf of the runaway slave Onesimus.

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS



NOTES

Romans is a protreptic letter in that it is exhorting the Romans to take up the Christian life. It is also epideictic, in that it uses praise and blame to locate ideas and people within their proper place in the Christian worldview.

WHO?

Author: Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who is a converted Jew.

Audience: Christian Church in Rome, most likely made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul has never been to this church, but knows a few people whom he greets at the end of the letter.

WHEN?

It was written about AD 57, near the end of Paul's third missionary journey. It is a very mature letter, the result of Paul's thinking and experience over his Christian life and ministry.

WHERE?

Author: Paul was in Greece, probably Corinth.

Audience: Readers were in Rome. Paul commends Phoebe as the person who carried his letter from Corinth to Rome. Her home church was Cenchræ, a small town eight miles from Corinth (16:1).

Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. It was the city where the emperor lived and has been called the greatest city of classical antiquity in the west. This city controlled an empire that included approximately 100 million people. Christianity probably came to Rome first with Jews who heard Peter's preaching at Pentecost in Jerusalem.

According to Suetonius, Emperor Claudius evicted Jews from Rome in AD 49 because of disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus. Scholars have interpreted *Chrestus* to refer to Christ. Apparently the Jewish community was rioting over the issue of Christ as the Messiah as early as AD 49.


NOTES
WHAT?

Paul was concerned about the health of the Church in Rome. Until Peter and Paul get there, because of their imprisonments, we do not hear of a prominent Early Church leader being in Rome. We find Paul's personal hopes and aims recounted as well as his passion to see his Jewish kinsmen accept their Messiah (9-11). Paul is also interested in getting their support for his mission to Spain (15:24).

The letter to the Romans is a summary of Paul's gospel or theology for a group of people, some of whom knew Paul, but most of whom did not know him. So Paul has to be as clear and comprehensive in this letter as he can, since he was writing to people who had not heard him preach before. Most of Paul's other letters are follow-ups to his personal ministry.

Any understanding of Romans must take into consideration the key thematic text in 1:16-17. It reads: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" (NRSV). In this text, we discover primary terms and phrases such as gospel, power of God, salvation, faith, righteousness of God, and live by faith which are treated in the rest of the letter.

WHY?

Paul starts out defining the human problem as sin (Rom. 1:19-3:20). He begins with the obvious sins of the Gentiles, but then includes the Jews and their sins as well. The hope for sinners is justification by faith in Jesus Christ rather than good works (Rom. 3:21-8:17). This goes counter to the common religious ideas of both the Gentile and Jewish populations.

Paul tells them the redemption by grace involves the whole created order, both seen and unseen. God assures the victory (Rom. 8:18-11:36). True to form, Paul does not just leave the audience with generalized theological statements; he gets down to the basics and describes how we should live as Christians (Rom. 12:1-15:13). This new type of life does not involve a new type of legalism, but rather a new way of living that derives from a new way of being. In Rom. 12:1-2, Paul uses the language of transformation to stress this point. These verses state: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect."

 **NOTES****THE IMPORTANCE OF ROMANS**

Paul's letter to the Romans has greatly influenced the development of Christianity and some scholars claim it was instrumental in the development of Western individualism. St. Augustine (354-430) found new life and freedom from the bondage of his sins and desires when he read Romans. Rom.1:17 convinced Martin Luther (1483-1546) that salvation was by faith and not by works of penance. He then helped to set in motion the Protestant Reformation in Germany, and it spread across Europe.

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley in England attended a church meeting and listened as the leader read from Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans. Wesley reported, "While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) wrote his commentary on Romans (1919) that helped to break the dominance of liberal theology for a while and began the neo-orthodoxy movement in theology. Although Romans is not truly a systematic theology, it is Paul's major work on what he believed and why he believed it. The principles Paul gives us in this book are vital for understanding many of his other letters, which seem to be much more occasional in the sense that they are addressing very specific problems and issues.

THE LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS



NOTES

These two books give us our first encounter with Paul's letters that deal with specific problems in a church. Paul uses friendship terms common to the friendship letters, but these letters are primarily a mix of letters of exhortation, advice, praise, and blame. Paul is anxious to help this primarily Gentile congregation understand the Christian lifestyle. Through praise and blame of certain persons and actions as well as direct advice, Paul is helping this congregation to understand what is proper and acceptable for a Christian.

First and Second Corinthians are also *paraenetic* in that Paul spends a lot of time reminding them of what he had already explained to them when he was with them.

WHO?

Author: Paul, the apostle

Audience: Christian Church in Corinth, both Jews and Gentiles, but probably mostly Gentiles

WHEN?

AD 55/56. Midway through Paul's third missionary journey.

WHERE?

Paul probably wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus and 2 Corinthians on the road to the church in Corinth. Corinth was the largest city in first-century Greece and the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Other items of interest include:

- Corinth was an important city of commerce and social interchange. It was known for its prosperity, trade, and materialism. Most shipping heading to or from Rome passed through Corinth because it was located on a narrow isthmus (3.5 miles wide) where cargo was unloaded from large ships, transported across the isthmus, and loaded onto another ship.
- Corinth also controlled the two harbors: Cenchreae leading to Asia and Lechaeum to Italy.
- It was a city of self-made people, descendants of the initial colonists who had turned it into a thriving city in two generations.


NOTES

- It was also notorious for its immorality, especially in the early years of the colony. Its Greek culture exhibited a low sexual morality compared to Jewish standards. Their socially accepted morality included temple prostitution as well as use of street prostitutes and *heterae*, female entertainers for banquets. In more current language, the city has been referred to as sin city.
- The city was known for its worship of Aphrodite, the supreme goddess of love and fertility.
- The citizens of Corinth prided themselves on their philosophical and literary culture. According to Ralph Martin, this trait is evidenced by the phrase, Corinthian words, which were used with reference to the Corinthian's polished and cultivated speech.
- Corinth had a large community of Diaspora Jews, which grew larger after the Roman emperor, Claudius, expelled Jews from Rome in AD 49.

WHAT?

We have only two of the letters sent to Corinth; it seems at least four were written by Paul. Outlines of these books reveal the varied nature of the issues Paul deals with. It is only possible in this session to introduce you to the variety of subjects covered in these two letters.

WHY?

1 Corinthians: The Church at Corinth was dividing into groups, each group elevating a certain individual such as Apollos, Cephas (Peter), or Paul as their ultimate spiritual authority (1:10-13). Paul condemns all such allegiances that divide the community. Through treatment of the topic of human wisdom, Paul puts all leaders into proper perspective (1:20-25).

Paul tells the church they are divided as a result of listening to human wisdom rather than divine wisdom (2:1-16). They think they are divided because they each have what they think is the truth, along with a champion of their position (parties of Apollos and Paul). Paul calls them worldly, mere infants in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1) and urges them to follow the foolishness of the gospel.

Other specific issues in 1 Corinthians include:

- The Church at Corinth was not only tolerating, but embracing open immorality in their church community. In fact, they were allowing a practice that was not even acceptable in the Greco-Roman world. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a


NOTES

kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living (having a sexual relationship) with his father's wife (likely his step-mother). And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this thing would have been removed from among you?" (1 Cor. 5:1-2, NRSV). Why would the Church take such a position?

Some scholars relate this stance by the Church to the standards of morality most of these Christians were coming from. It took some time for them to understand and adjust to the high (Jewish) sexual standards set by Paul. Other scholars see a faulty theological understanding of justification by faith as being at work. Some persons (libertines) had interpreted the idea of justification by faith and not by works as giving license to live as they please (see Romans 6 for Paul's treatment of such a perspective).

- Paul answers specific questions on marriage, divorce, and celibacy (7). Most of his comments here need to be seen within the context of 7:26 (present crisis) and 7:29 (time is short). Paul's seemingly negativity on marriage has to do with the fact that the church community is in some kind of crisis, and he expects Jesus to return at any time. So they need to be focused on getting as many people into the Kingdom as possible, not on settling down and having a family.
- Paul also answers specific questions on diet, idolatry, and personal Christian freedom (8-10). His basic thought here is that these issues are not important. If what we do hinders people from coming into the Kingdom or weakens their resolve to remain Christians, then we should adjust our actions.
- Paul answers their questions about worship, spiritual gifts, and congregational order (11-14). Here he is encouraging them to bring some order to their worship style. Their worship style was probably reflective of the mystery religions many of them had been a part of before becoming Christians. Paul does not condemn their worship style, but he does encourage order which probably reflects his concern that seeking Jews would be offended by the wildly expressive worship of this particular church, thus not having an opportunity to come into the Kingdom. Throughout Paul's address of these internal issues of this church we see expressed his evangelistic or missionary concerns. Nothing else is more important than getting people to know Christ as their Savior and/or Messiah.
- Paul also answers questions about resurrection and the age to come (15). These are recurring themes whenever there was a dominant Gentile contingency. Resurrection was just not a part of the Gentile worldview and so was very difficult for them to understand.

 **NOTES**

2 Corinthians: Paul's theme is: The way to glory is the way of the Cross. The Corinthians saw Christ as a way to better themselves, a way to power and affirmation by peers. Paul taught them about the constructive outcome of suffering and that his suffering is evidence that his ministry is legitimate. Specific issues in *2 Corinthians* include:

- Paul has to defend his apostolic authority because the Corinthians were setting aside his teachings, even though he was the founder of the Corinthian church.
- Paul is encouraging the church to be generous in giving money for the Jerusalem church (8-9). He commends them for being very excited about the project at first and encourages them by comparing what the Macedonian churches had done to what they could do.
- Paul appeals for complete reconciliation (6:1-7:4). He says he has not withheld his affection from them, but they have withheld theirs from him.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Read Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians in two different translations. Look for answers to the five hermeneutical questions Who, What, Where, When, and Why. How do your findings correspond with those presented in this session? Any new insights?
2. Rom. 1:16-17 (NRSV) reads: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’”.

Using information from this session and study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, or Internet websites (Biblical Studies Foundation <http://www.netbible.com>; Blue Letter Bible <http://www.blueletterbible.org>; or Crosswalk.com Bible Study Tools <http://bible.crosswalk.com>), research and study the following words and phrases (from Rom. 1:16-17): gospel, power of God, salvation, faith, righteousness of God, and live by faith. How are these concepts developed in the remainder of Romans? How do these concepts help shape our basic understandings of God’s saving activities and our relationship with Him and others?

EXAM



NOTES

1. In the Greco-Roman world, friendships developed among persons of all strata or levels of society. All types and forms of letters were used as people conversed with one another.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. _____ are perhaps, the most basic and most ideal of the types of letters in the Greco-Roman world. They were helpful in a society where there was deep agreement about the way things ought to be.
 - A. Letters of advice
 - B. Letters of praise and blame
 - C. Letters of friendship
 - D. Mediation
3. Protreptic works urge the reader to convert to a way of life, join a school, or accept a set of teachings as normative for the reader's life. In both form and function, Paul's letter to the Romans is a protreptic letter.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. The Letter to the Romans is a summary of Paul's gospel or theology for a group of people who, for the most part, Paul knew well.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Romans 1:17 convinced _____ that salvation was by faith and not by works of penance.
 - A. St. Augustine
 - B. Martin Luther
 - C. John Wesley
 - D. Karl Barth
6. Upon listening to Luther's preface in his commentary on Romans, _____ refers to his heart as being strangely warmed.
 - A. Karl Barth
 - B. John Calvin
 - C. St. Augustine
 - D. John Wesley

 **NOTES**

7. In all likelihood, Christianity first came to Rome with Jews who heard Paul's preaching in the cities of Asia Minor.
 - A. True
 - B. False

8. In view of their overwhelming rejection of the gospel, Paul reluctantly gave up hope for his own people accepting Jesus as their Messiah.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Paul's seemingly negative views on marriage as presented in 1 Corinthians 7 may be understood as deriving from his expectation of the soon coming of Christ and the evangelistic mission that was at hand.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. Paul viewed the church in Corinth as providing a positive role model for what Christian life is like.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Early in his letter to the Romans, Paul describes the basis of the human problem as being _____.
 - A. the need for better education
 - B. a lack of good leadership in society
 - C. a lack of the necessities for a healthy life
 - D. sin

12. Paul's theme in 2 Corinthians is: The way to glory is the way of the Cross.
 - A. True
 - B. False

13. For the Gentiles of the Greco-Roman world, a hope for resurrection from the dead was one of the most attractive aspects of the Christian message.
 - A. True
 - B. False

14. In writing to the church at Rome, Paul has to defend his apostolic authority.
 - A. True
 - B. False

**NOTES**

15. For Paul, if what we do hinders people from coming into the Kingdom or weakens their resolve to remain Christians, then we should not rest until we have convinced them of our perspective.
- A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. When you have to communicate with someone about a certain subject, how do you decide what form that communication will take? Phone? In person? E-mail? Letter?
2. What other items affect your choices in communication and presentation?
3. Why do you think Paul emphasizes salvation by faith versus salvation by works?
4. For Paul, what is the relationship between good works and salvation?
5. Discuss this statement and its implications for our contemporary setting: If what we do hinders people from coming into the Kingdom or weakens their resolve to remain Christians, then we should adjust our actions.