



THE
GOD
WHO
SPEAKS

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St Paul's Travelogue

THE LETTERS

In the New Testament 13 letters are attributed to St. Paul in the following order: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

This arrangement reached its final shape over time but was definitively established in the 4th century. Most commentators agree they are not now in the order in which they were written. The principle of the ordering was based on the length of the books beginning with the longest, Romans. The list also seems to make a distinction between the letters that were written to a community, and those written to an individual. Sometimes the letter to the Hebrews also appeared in the list, but even by the 4th century there was a doubt as to whether Hebrews was written by Paul.

*I, Paul,
write this greeting with my own hand.
This is the sign of genuineness in every
letter of mine; it is the way I write."
(2 Thessalonians 3:17)*



*See with what large letters
I am writing to you with my own hand.
(Galatians 6:11)*

St Paul's Travelogue

THE LETTERS

There is some debate among scholars as to whether Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians were written by Paul, even though the texts say that Paul wrote them. They may have emerged from within groups familiar with Paul's teaching who wanted to preserve his legacy and keep it updated for new situations. Likewise, scholars question whether the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) were written by someone else as they claim to have come from Paul but there is no signature, so to speak.

These debates rest on details such as vocabulary and style, theology and the matters being discussed. Given that they are all read as part of the Church's lectionary, they are included here.

We have therefore grouped them according to their clusters since in every case there is a continuity and development of theme between the first and second letters to a particular church.

4	1 & 2 THESSALONIANS
8	1 & 2 CORINTHIANS
12	GALATIANS
16	ROMANS
22	PHILIPPIANS
26	COLOSSIANS
30	EPHESIANS
34	PHILEMON
36	1 & 2 TIMOTHY
40	TITUS
43	QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

The First Letter to the Thessalonians



*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)*

This is the earliest surviving letter from Paul that we possess, possibly written in Corinth in 51 CE. Paul's second missionary journey, according to Acts, had brought him to Thessalonica, an important port city situated on the Via Egnatia, a key trade route to Italy from the Aegean Sea.

Acts 17:1-15 recounts that the Jews gave Paul a hard time in Thessalonica. But Paul chooses to focus on the positive reception to the preaching of the gospel on the part of this small Gentile community who up to this time did not believe in the one God.

Paul is sensitive to the fact that he comes as a stranger and that the Gentile Thessalonians do not know the Hebrew Scriptures. So, he speaks directly to their circumstances from his experience of gratitude at encountering the good news of Jesus Christ. Yet despite their unpromising background, he tells how they accepted his message 'not as a human word but as the Word of God.' Impressed, he celebrates their faith and the community life they have developed. So inspired was Paul by this community and so grateful for the way they responded to his preaching that he writes not one but three thanksgivings to God in the first part of the letter (1:3-10, 2:13-16, 3:9-13) and does not reach the body of the letter until chapter 4.

Paul feels supported by them in his own ministry while being aware of the potential danger they face from Pagan and Jewish opposition. Paul was concerned for their safety and that persecution might destroy the work he had done among them, but because of his affection for the Thessalonian community and the closeness he felt for them through their common suffering, he longed to see them again: '... we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face...' (3:10). This was impossible as Paul was now in Athens and had to remain there.



ROMAN FORUM OF THESSALONIKI

*"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."
(1 Thessalonians 5:11)*

The main problem the Thessalonian community faced was that some of their members had died since Paul was with them, so they were worried that these believers would not now rise from the dead. Paul had passed on Jesus' teaching about the Second Coming or Parousia when his faithful disciples would be welcomed into heaven. Here he re-affirms hope in the salvation Christ will bring to the living and the dead and (4:17) and at the same time the need for always being alert and vigilant in this 'in between' time.

The early Jesus Movement expected this return of the risen Jesus to be imminent hence we find an emphasis in Paul's teaching on being ready above all else. As the time stretched and it became clear that the eschaton, the final day, might be further off, he engages at a new level with the ongoing life of the church, and with the daily reality of families and marriage. Here, Paul reiterates his teaching in such a way as to relieve the concerns of the community without encouraging complacency if there is a delay in Jesus' coming.

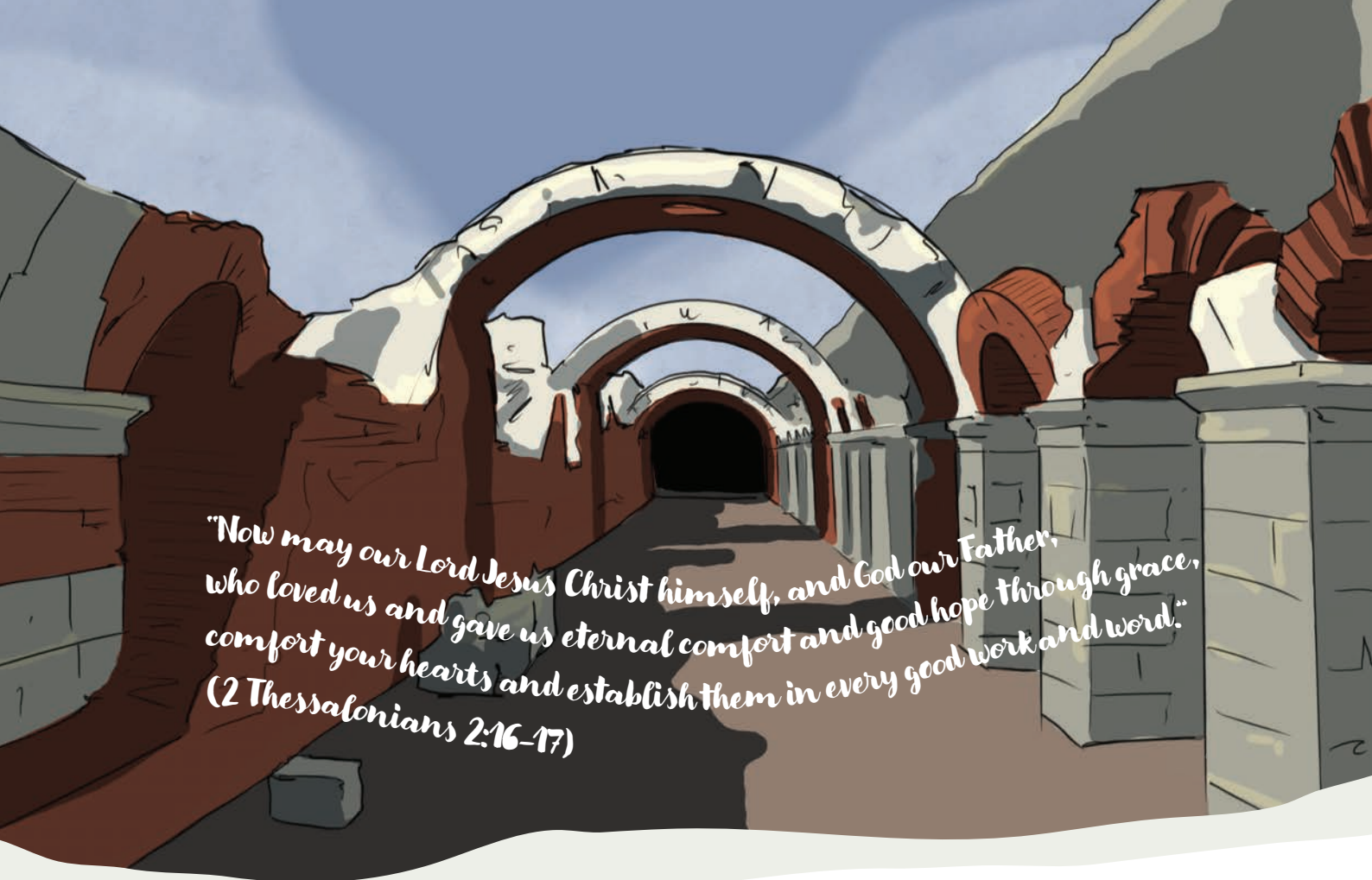
The Second Letter to the Thessalonians



2 Thessalonians differs in style and vocabulary from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Although it ends in 3:17 with a claim that it is written 'with my own hand', many scholars think it was more likely to have been written by an anonymous disciple of Paul after his death to maintain Pauline traditions, perhaps in the last two decades of the first century (cf. 2:13).

On the other hand, there is a continuity of theme that unites the two letters and supports Pauline authorship. It is not unknown for a writer to adopt a different style and vocabulary at a different time or in different circumstances. In continuity with the first letter, Paul holds this community in high esteem, commending particularly their resilience in faith despite persecution and suffering, and their resistance against those (Gentiles) who would lead them astray.

The major problem that Paul responds to in both letters is the date of the Parousia, the final coming of Jesus which the community awaits (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). The Greek word Parousia literally means 'presence'. In secular language Parousia could refer to the visit of the emperor or an important political personality. In the first letter Paul reassures those whose relatives have died. They fear that their loved ones will not be able to experience Christ's Second Coming. The background to the second letter is that the persecutions have increased and intensified, to the extent that many of the community believe that the wrath of God which was expected to immediately precede the Parousia of Christ had already arrived. The wrath of God (1 Thessalonians 1:10), an aspect of divine judgement, is an apocalyptic image found in Isaiah 66:14-16. God's saving of his servants will be experienced by his enemies as his anger.



*"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."
(2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)*

Paul's main message is that the Parousia has not yet arrived (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2), but the community are not to be alarmed about this apparent delay. Drawing from images used in apocalyptic Jewish literature, he explains that certain things must happen first, especially the coming of the 'the man of lawlessness' (2 Thessalonians 2:3), an Antichrist figure who will claim to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Lawlessness is already at work on earth, in the deceptions of Satan (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10), but these figures who oppose Christ will ultimately be defeated by his power (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Paul therefore counsels the community to hold fast to what they have been taught, have confidence in the Lord Jesus, and have nothing to do with those who are so inclined to cause trouble that they have given up any daily work. These people are described as 'idlers' but the Greek *ataktos* and its cognates can mean a people or an activity (or lack of) that is out of order or is destructive. Such people, however, are not to be treated as enemies but as believers who need to be warned and encouraged (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). The concluding verses encourage the community to discern the Spirit of God at work within it (or them), and to continue building up one another in love and peace until the Lord does return.



Question for Reflection

How do you sustain your faith amid both trials and in the ordinary everyday moments?

The First Letter to the Corinthians

A stylized map of Greece with land in yellow and sea in blue. A black dot marks the location of Corinth, with the word 'CORINTH' written in bold black capital letters below it.

CORINTH

Corinth was a large cosmopolitan city with two ports controlling the land bridge - the Isthmus, between the north and south of Greece.

Corinth was a large cosmopolitan city with two ports controlling the land bridge - the Isthmus, between the north and south of Greece. Many of Paul's community must have benefitted from the wealth that came to the ports and the sense of independence that it gave them. The inhabitants of the city were notorious in the ancient world for their independent spirit, ambivalent attitude to authority and widespread promiscuity cultivated in the devotion to their main goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The Greek verb 'Corinthianise' came to mean to live a promiscuous life.

Compared with the community at Thessalonica, the disciples at Corinth were a difficult group for Paul to handle. They were mostly Gentiles with some Jews and were socially divided by wealth and status. That characteristically Corinthian sense of freedom and independence also created divisions among themselves as they fell under the spells of rival preachers who proposed more attractive doctrines than did Paul. Gradually, these problems were reported back to Paul.

Paul responds around the year 56 CE to several ethical and practical issues that had arisen in Corinth, including incest and other forms of sexual immorality (chapters 5 and 7); community members taking out lawsuits against one another (chapter 6); the participation of some members in practices associated with idol worship (chapters 8 and 10); the role of women in the church (chapter 11); proper celebration of the Lord's supper so that divisions between social classes are not highlighted or reinforced (chapter 11); and the misuse of spiritual gifts (chapters 13 and 14).

Paul's theological starting point for his advice is that Christ is risen and alive in the community (1 Corinthians 15:3-28), and therefore, all members of it are touched by divine holiness. When they act in a way that is not loving towards others or that shows disdain towards those who are poor and weak, they are desecrating the holy Body of Christ. Paul opposed the opinion of some within the church, shaped by the wider Greek culture, that the body is inferior to the mind and therefore any sexual activity or extreme asceticism was lawful because the body did not really matter.



TEMPLE OF APOLLO, CORINTH

In chapter 12 he develops his theology of the community as the Body of Christ by unpacking a metaphor that was often used by ancient philosophers. He applies the harmony of the whole body, with its many parts to the church. In effect he is saying: 'You have already been made holy by Christ. Be what you now are by conducting yourselves in love'. Paul sums up his pastoral strategy in the beautiful 'Hymn to Love' in chapter 13 '... love is patient, kind, not envious, boastful or arrogant...'. This approach is evident in his response to all the ethical issues he discusses. In the case of eating meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols, for example, he treads gently, aware of the fact that much of the food available in Corinth would have come from the local temples. Eating it, therefore, was for many people neither a moral nor immoral act, but a necessary part of life. What he asks of those members of the

community who feel free to eat such meat, then, is sensitivity to others who may be worried that this involves participating in idolatry (1 Corinthians 8:7-13). It is this loving concern for the whole body that must guide all the actions of the believer: 'But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.' (1 Corinthians 8:12).

**"... love is patient,
kind, not envious,
boastful or arrogant..."
(1 Corinthians 13)**

The Second Letter to the Corinthians



By his own acknowledgement Paul wrote three letters to the Corinthians - (1 Corinthians 5:9; 2 Corinthians 2:3-9 and 7:8-12 - known as the 'tearful' letter) before writing this one, perhaps in the autumn of 57 CE. Whereas the focus of 1 Corinthians was mainly on helping the community overcome their rivalries with one another and develop their understanding of the message of Christ, in this letter Paul is on the defensive. Hostility to Paul had already been in evidence in chapter 8 of the first letter when he had to defend his claim to be an apostle and his freedom to refuse to take any money for himself from them, although he would have been fully entitled to do so. This fraught relationship between Paul and some influential members of the community at Corinth continued, despite his two visits and previous letters to them (2 Corinthians 2:1-4).

The thanksgiving section (2 Corinthians 1:3-7) sets the tone for the letter. Paul addresses God as 'the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation'. He acknowledges the pain suffered on both sides, and the process of consolation that God has already begun which is the ground of his hope for reconciliation. Referring to the great jeopardy caused by this breakdown of relationships, he describes the experience on his part as a 'sentence of death', 'so that we could rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead' (2 Corinthians 2:9). Paul sees the death and resurrection of Christ not merely as an event in the past but as a dynamic principle at the heart of the life of the church as it goes forward. In his first letter Paul had written, 'The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1 Corinthians 1:18). Perhaps by now, some of the Corinthians were beginning to understand the implications of the truth that Christ 'died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them' (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).



*"Put things in order, listen to my appeal,
agree with one another, live in peace,
and the God of love and peace will be with you"*
(2 Corinthians 13:11)

In the course of the first seven chapters Paul continues to assure his audience of his sincerity (2 Corinthians 1:12 - 2:11) and to persuade them of his authority to preach and teach as an apostle of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1- 6:13).

In chapters 8 and 9 Paul asks for funds for the mother church in Jerusalem. His appeal to the Corinthians' generosity is based on the generosity of God and Jesus Christ, who 'though rich, became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9). It was in humility that Jesus exercised his divine status, not in the seeking of riches and power (cf. Philippians 2:5-11).

In the final chapters Paul again seeks to refute the criticisms made of him by his opponents at Corinth and explains his plans to make another visit to them, at which point these issues can perhaps be straightened out (2 Corinthians 12:14-13:10).

He concludes this difficult letter with the words, 'Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you' (2 Corinthians 13:11).



Question for Reflection

How does Paul help us to be inclusive in our worship so that everyone can share in the Body of Christ?

The Letter to the Galatians



Galatia was a large Roman province in what is now Turkey. The inhabitants of the northern part were Gentiles, Celtic in origin.

The question of Paul's original intended audience for this letter, and its date, has long been debated. Galatia was a large Roman province in what is now Turkey. The inhabitants of the northern part were Gentiles, Celtic in origin. The southern part included towns mentioned in Paul's first missionary journey in Acts 13-14. There are no clear pointers to the date the letter was written but it could well have been around the time of the events Paul described in his second letter to the Corinthians, in the mid-fifties CE. As we have seen in the letters to Corinth, Paul's main concern was the unity of the Church but the immediate circumstances that created this concern are different.

The converts Paul addresses were not Jewish, but they may have included people who in Acts were known as 'God-fearers', people who had not been circumcised but were sympathetic towards the Jewish religion. In Acts 13:16ff, Paul's sermon addresses both 'Israelites and God-fearers', assuming both share a common story and that the God-fearers were well positioned to hear the Gospel message. When Paul first brought the gospel to the people of Galatia, he did not see any need for them to be circumcised or to be bound to observance of the Law of Moses. He had argued this forcefully before the other Apostles (cf. Galatians 2:1-14). The heart of the Gospel was Jesus Christ, whereas the Law of Moses was an antecedent to the gospel. At the beginning of the letter Paul claims that the gospel he preached came to him from divine revelation (Galatians 1:12). His gospel, while new, was also in radical communion with all the acts of God that had formed his people and given them hope in the coming of a Messiah.

*"For freedom Christ has set us free;
stand firm therefore, and do not
submit again to a yoke of slavery."
(Galatians 5:1)*



TEMPLE OF AUGUSTUS IN ANKARA, GALATIA

Among those who received the gospel message were Jews who had practised the Law of Moses all their lives.

The rite of circumcision and the observance of the dietary laws of Moses in particular, separated them from the Gentile idol-worshippers. While Jews could associate with Gentiles in the public squares, it was a different matter to eat with them in their homes as the food they would be offered would be non-kosher. In practice, this would have made it impossible for them to join with Gentiles at the Eucharist which originally was celebrated in the context of a meal (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:17ff).



When Paul set up the communities in Galatia there were no such tensions, but soon after he left these 'Jewish Christians' began to persuade the Galatians that they ought to be circumcised and follow the traditional dietary laws. Paul was amazed at this turnaround, so much so that he did not include the thanksgiving he would normally write and addressed them as 'You foolish Galatians' (Galatians 3:1).

Paul responds by reflecting on the core issues involved in this debate. By opting to be circumcised, the Galatians have refused God's greatest gift and have put themselves back in the position they were in before the coming of Christ. Paul sums up their predicament in two questions, 'Did you receive the Spirit, by doing the works of the Law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?' (Galatians 3:2)

Paul's point is that in the death and resurrection of Christ, God had given his Spirit to those who believed, miraculously enabling them to participate in the same power that had animated Christ. It would be by believing in Christ and following his way of life that they would receive salvation, because in dying and rising Christ had overcome sin. Their only hope was not in human observances, but in believing in Christ and receiving God's Spirit by being spiritually incorporated into his body.

That was not to say that the Law did not have a purpose. The Law was a temporary remedy for sin (Galatians 3:19) but it could not, of its power, turn anyone away from sin or give them the motivation not to sin. Paul described the Law as a 'paidagogos'. This Greek term refers to the household slave whose task it was to bring the boys to school and if necessary, discipline them by force along the way, but he was not a teacher. Likewise, the purpose of the Law was a disciplinary one, to point out sin and punish accordingly, but at a deeper level to lead people towards Christ and the possibility of being 'justified' by faith in him. This then brought them under the power, no longer of sin, but of his Spirit.

*"There is neither Jew nor Greek,
there is neither slave nor free,
there is no male and female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
(Galatians 3:28)*



Justification (Greek: *dikaiosune*) is an important word in Paul's vocabulary. Literally it means being acquitted in a court of wrong-doing or of breaking the Law. The person who is justified has been restored to friendship with God and has become a child of God. While the Law was unable to bring about this justification, Paul searched through the Scriptures and found an ancestor of the Jews who had been justified, not through the Law but through faith. That ancestor was Abraham, 'who believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness' (Galatians 3:6; cf. Genesis 15:6: LXX/Septuagint translation).

Another translation of *dikaiosune* is righteousness, or the state of having been justified. Those who express their faith in Christ by being baptised are heirs to the promise made to Abraham 'and his offspring' and are guided by the Spirit to fulfil 'the law of Christ'. The law of Christ is not to be found in observing laws as such, but in the fruits of the Spirit – 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23).



DIKAIOSUNE

DIKAIOSUNE –
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Question for Reflection

How can we enable our communities to be open and welcoming especially to seekers and strangers?

The Letter to the Romans



Rome, like Corinth, was a cosmopolitan city. The Christian community there was divided into several 'house churches', composed of Gentile converts and some people who had been brought up as Jews.

Paul's letter to the Romans is the longest and arguably the most difficult to understand of all his writings. As a result, it has often been misunderstood and reduced to soundbites such as 'faith alone', or 'justification by faith', to support different agendas. Across the centuries readers have approached this rich and dense text as a theological source with answers to their questions. Meanwhile they ignore the context in which this letter was written, the issues Paul's ministry had thrown up and the concerns of the communities he was addressing.

Paul wrote this letter sometime between the mid to late 50s CE, possibly when he was staying in Corinth and waiting for a boat to take him in the direction of Jerusalem. He intended to give the community there the collection he had raised for the 'mother church'. His plan was that the next part of his missionary journey should take him to Spain. Just as at the beginning of his travels he needed a base in Antioch, so to go to Spain he would need a base in Rome.

Rome, like Corinth, was a cosmopolitan city. The Christian community there was divided into several 'house churches', composed of Gentile converts and some people who had been brought up as Jews. In the beginning this was a community comfortable with its Jewish inheritance, and it continued many of the customs and practices of Judaism. Unusually here, Paul does not address the letter to the whole church/ekklesia (Greek = assembly). This may indicate that the Jewish and Gentile members gathered for the Eucharist in their respective groups.

The communities must also have included at least a small number of people who would be able to support Paul's mission financially and even travel with him on the next part of his journey. Significantly this was a community that Paul had not founded himself, nor visited, though the final chapter suggests that Paul knew several people living in Rome who had previously worked with him (Romans 16:1-23).



THE COLOSSEUM, ROME

*"Owe no one anything,
except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."
(Romans 13:8)*

But the community also knew people who would undermine Paul and his teaching (Romans 16:17-20). Jewish groups in Rome and Jerusalem would have kept in contact with one another, and word had got around suggesting that Paul was no longer a real Jew, because he did not promote obedience to the Law of Moses. Indeed, according to Tacitus' Annals 15, by this time the Emperor Claudius (41-54 CE) had already expelled the Jews from Rome because of riots instigated by an agitator called 'Chrestos', most probably a reference to Jesus Christ. However, the edict lapsed on the emperor's death. The 'Messianists' in the Roman communities seem to have put distance between themselves and the mainstream Jewish community and taken cover with the Gentile membership. Then some representatives of Jerusalem or perhaps returned exiles must have put pressure on the Gentile community to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law, as had happened in Galatia.

Polemical argument tends to over-simplify this situation. Paul writes to set the record straight diplomatically and allay any tensions between Jewish and Gentile members. So, the underlying theme of Romans is a reflection on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the extension of the people of God that had been brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Specifically, Paul writes to address the disputes about obedience to the Law of Moses which threatened to undermine not only the community but the very meaning of the gospel and its power to bring about salvation.

After an opening address focussing on what Paul has to offer - the gospel of the Son of God, crucified and risen from the dead - he states his vocation as an apostle to the Gentiles and gives a thanksgiving. After this he develops the body of the letter in four parts.

Paul begins the first part (Romans 1:18-4:25) by defining what the Gospel of Jesus Christ actually is. It is good news revealing the power of God to save both Jews and Gentiles who receive it with faith. This good news has relevance beyond the community, affecting the whole world wherever there is wickedness, wrongdoing and rebellion against God. Using the technique of a debate with an imaginary opponent or opponents, he describes this power as the 'wrath' of God against sin, from which no one is exempted, Jew or Gentile.

No one then can judge the other without condemning themselves, since as the letter unfolds, Paul makes it clear that sin is not just about what individuals do but rather about the whole human race, which is infiltrated, so to speak, by the power of sin, from which it needs to be rescued and redeemed (cf. chapter 7).

The Jews have a certain advantage, having received the law of God from Moses, but the Gentiles have their own law, a law written on their conscience, which teaches them how to live. However, the fact is that both Jew and Gentile disobey their law, because both are under the power of sin (Romans 3:9). This power, the root cause of humanity's sins, finds its way into the hearts not only of those who disobey the Law of Moses, but even into those who appear to observe its commandments outwardly. So, the observance of the Law on its own does not guarantee a good relationship with God.

THE APPIAN WAY, ROME





But there is another way to access salvation, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. The grace of Jesus Christ is a force that can overcome the power of sin within people, but this requires faith, an active trust that manifests itself in the concrete following of Christ.

Paul explains to the Jews, using Genesis 15-17, how they already have a model of such faith in Abraham, who lived, and was circumcised, before the Law was given. Abraham then becomes the father in faith to both Jews and Gentiles.

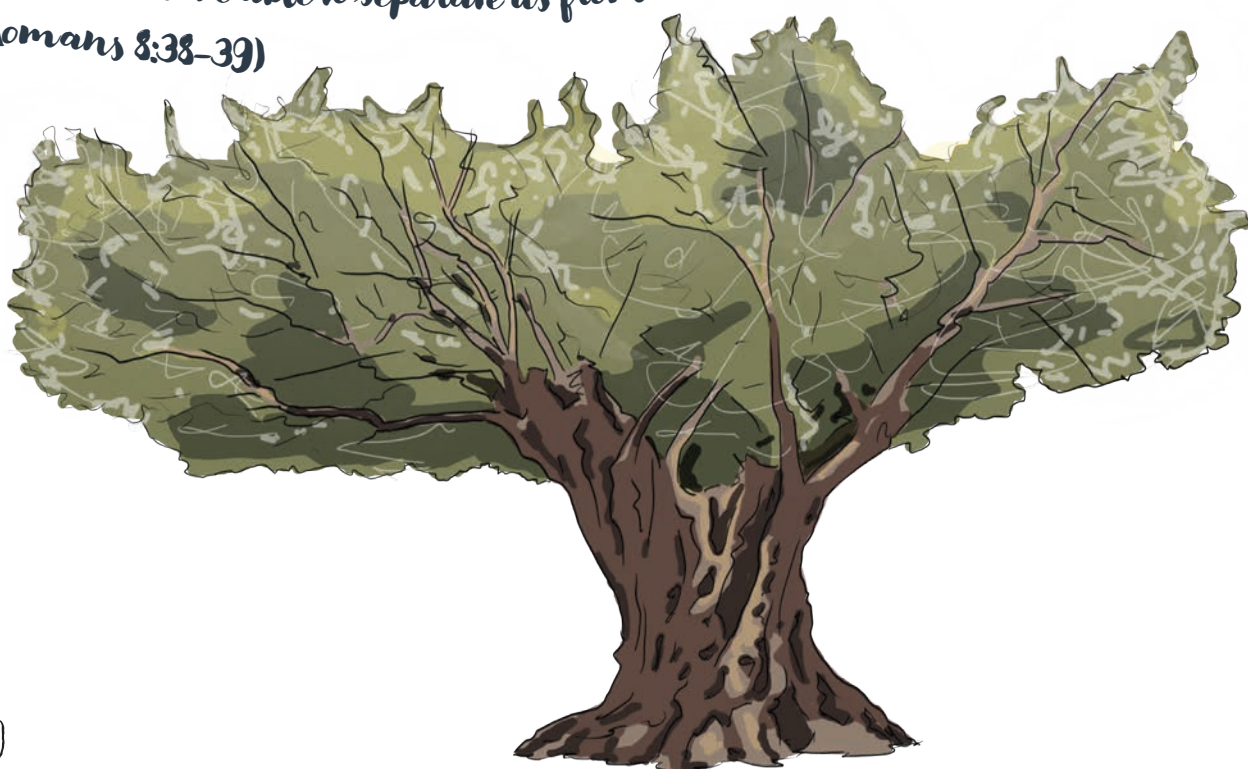
In the second part of the letter in 5:1-8:59 Paul goes deeper into the implications of the divine justice/righteousness that has been revealed in Christ. In the death of Christ, undergone not just for good people but even for his enemies, God reveals a love which no law, let alone the Law of Moses, can create of itself (Romans 5:8). It is grace - a freely given gift of God which can be received by anyone who believes in Christ. Then the Spirit of God will be in them, leading to a new life (Romans 8:13), the opposite of the life that Adam - the first man - bequeathed, which was little more than life leading to death. This new state Paul describes is like the transfer of the ownership of slaves. Believers in Christ are transferred from being slaves of iniquity to the 'slavery' of divine righteousness which will show itself as freedom.

That does not mean that sin and its destructive power has gone away. But Christ's victory over sin and death brings the person of faith back from alienation from God, the state of Adam, to a new relationship of being a child of God who can join with Christ in calling God 'Abba' meaning Father. (Romans 8:15). In this lies the ground of our hope that the overwhelming power of divine grace compared with human sin will find its fulfilment in our sharing in the resurrection of Christ.

In the third part of the Letter, chapters 9:1-11:36, Paul moves on to discuss the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the context of the history of salvation. The sub-text here is Paul's experience of rejection on the part of his fellow Jews. Despite their preparation through the covenants, the Law and the other gifts of God throughout history, many of them reacted as if the death of Christ was a stumbling block designed to cause offence rather than an act of God, a gift to be received in faith.

Though Paul does not try to conceal his emotional connection with the Jewish people among whom he first came to know God, he responds here theologically, with the help of scripture, to the questions which must have arisen in his own mind as well as exercising his enquirers – was God unjust? Had God's word failed? Had God rejected his people? To all these questions Paul answers 'No'. His problem though is that 'Israel' (as reflected in his opponents) continues to pursue righteousness through observing the Law without understanding that with the death and resurrection of Christ all has changed. They reject God's astounding work of mercy. In seeing God's action as offensive they failed to see both their and God's solidarity with the whole human race. However, for Paul, this does not mean that God has rejected Israel. A remnant of Israel remains, an olive tree to which a wild olive root (the Gentiles) has been grafted (Romans 11:24).

*"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 8:38-39)*





Then Paul concludes by addressing the Gentiles, 'So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery. A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so, all Israel will be saved'. 'They are beloved (of God). ... the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable....' (Romans 11:25, 28, 29). He ends with a prayer of praise to God, for his wisdom, knowledge and inscrutable ways (Romans 11:33-36).

In the final section of the body of the letter (Romans 12:1-15:13) Paul changes style with an ethical exhortation known as parenesis. He presents the whole of Christian life as a kind of 'rational worship', in which 'a truly renewed mind' no longer conformed to the world is transformed to discern the will of God – 'what is good, and acceptable and perfect' (Romans 12:1-2). All the commands of the Jewish Law are summed up and fulfilled in the command to love, which must be the norm of relating to those both within and outside the community. Paul exemplifies how this love works by ending with practical advice for those who will hear this letter being read.



Question for Reflection

How does Paul's understanding of the ongoing importance of God's call to Israel shed light on our use of the Jewish scriptures in our prayer and worship? (e.g. The Psalms)

The Letter to the Philippians



Paul does not provide us with enough information to fix the date of the letter with any precision. He tells us that he is in prison, but according to 2 Corinthians and the Acts of the Apostles, he was imprisoned several times and even after a careful reading of these sources, we are not able to arrive at a clear picture of exactly when and where Paul was imprisoned.

Philippi was a Roman colony on a major trade route, the Via Egnatia, which linked the eastern provinces of the empire with Italy. The inhabitants included large numbers of retired soldiers, and there was no Jewish synagogue in the city. The small community there would appear to have been of Gentile origin.

Imprisonment in the Roman empire was usually the fate of those awaiting trial, or of those who had been condemned to death. Paul is aware that his imprisonment may lead to his death, but he holds onto the hope that he will be able to visit Philippi again. (1:21-24). Paul's letter can be described as a letter of friendship and encouragement from one who is suffering for his faith to a community which is also suffering (1:29).





ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF PHILIPPI

The earliest traditions suggest the letter was written in Rome, in the late fifties or early sixties. This was a long way from Philippi, making regular correspondence difficult. However, some scholars speculate that Philippians and Philemon date from the time of Paul's earlier imprisonment in Ephesus, perhaps in the mid-fifties. References in 1 Corinthians 15:32 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 to difficulties in the Roman province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital, combined with the shorter distance between there and Philippi, perhaps make this location more likely.

*"I can do all things
through him who strengthens me."
(Philippians 4:13)*

There is an on-going debate among commentators about whether Philippians is in fact one letter or is made up of three pieces which were written some time apart and later woven together. The argument for three letters is partly based on the observation that 3:1 seems to be indicating a conclusion, but suddenly and abruptly engages in an attack on some opponents, without mentioning who they were. Similarly, what looks like another conclusion in 4:8-9 is followed by lines which could be interpreted as belonging to a formal opening 'Thanksgiving section' of a new letter. However, against this argument is weighed the similarity of language and theme across the whole text.



It is noteworthy that friendship has certain qualities in Paul's time. Friendship then was not primarily about close private or personal relationships as we experience it today. It was a category at home in the world of business, politics and institutions. Friendship enabled people to work together for a common goal. In 1:5 Paul thanks God for the Philippians' 'sharing (Greek: *koinonia*) in the gospel' (i.e. in the preaching of the gospel not just by evangelisation, but by their lives and their suffering). *Koinonia* expresses relationship, so the members of this community have become 'partners' (*sunkoinonoi*) with Paul (1:7).

This reflects the style of ancient letters of exhortation written by an experienced partner to a less experienced one to help them come to stand on an equal footing. We get a real sense of the deep and lasting bonds that Paul was able to create with some of his house churches from his warm words for the Philippians here: 'I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for you all... how I long for all of you with the compassion of Jesus Christ...' (Philippians 1:3-4, 8).

KOINONIA (Sharing)
SUNKOINONOI (Partners)



At the heart of the letter is the text often referred to as the 'Christ Hymn' (Philippians 2:6-11). Paul was not its author, but quotes it as part of his parenesis, his exhortation, to remind the community of what they already know. The hymn strongly suggests the pre-existence of Christ in heaven in equality with God, although the language is somewhat ambiguous. It speaks of his descent to earth as an act of great humility, even to the point where he suffered death as a slave, as a condition of his exaltation to heaven and his worldwide rule. Paul is putting before the community at Phillippi the example of how God's grace works through the humble self-emptying of Christ.

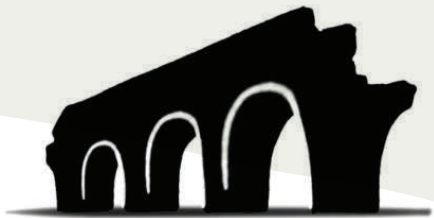
The hymn provides the foundation for Paul's exhortation throughout the letter. Christ renounced his divine status and privilege to identify with the lowly, even at the risk of his life. Paul sees his own life and ministry, and the life of the Philippians, as an imitation of Christ. The humility of Christ must be a model for their continued behaviour. And even if Paul and other members of the community should die, Christ will transform them bodily from humiliation to glory along with himself (Philippians 3:21).



Question for Reflection

What is the most challenging aspect for you when you read the Christ Hymn?

The Letter to the Colossians



Colossae was an ancient city in what is now Turkey. A significant city from the 5th century BCE onwards, it had dwindled in importance by the time of Paul, and was notable for the existence of its local angel cult.

Although Colossians bears Paul's name, scholars question whether Paul actually wrote the letter. The early Church assumed so, but since the mid-19th century scholars have noted differences of vocabulary, theology and style from Paul's other letters. These suggest that while Paul may not have composed the letter himself, it might have been written by one of his close missionary companions or someone who wanted to perpetuate his legacy, such as Timothy, or even Epaphras (Colossians 1:1,7, 2:1), who is presented as the one who founded the church in Colossae.

Closely associated with the question of authorship is the matter of dating. On three occasions the author refers to himself as being in prison (Colossians 4:3,10,18). Paul's final imprisonment was in Rome (61-63 CE) before his execution. Was it from Rome that Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon in Colossae and asked him to prepare a guest room (see Colossians 4:9; cf. Philemon 22)? That would have been an extremely long and arduous journey. Perhaps, then Paul might have been imprisoned in nearby Ephesus, in the early sixties, given that he was at the heart of several riots there because of his preaching a few years before (cf. Acts 19)? On the other hand, some commentators argue for a much later date for the letter towards the end of the first century CE, taking their cue from what appear to be references to syncretistic beliefs in chapter 2, since we know several cults based on esoteric knowledge (Gnosticism) began to infiltrate some Christian communities.



THE ROAD FROM LAODICEA TO COLOSSAE

The author, whether Paul or not, comes across as less combative than the Paul of the earlier letters. There are still references to Jewish practices, circumcision, Sabbaths and issues relating to food and drink. However, the earlier debates about the Law and justification are no longer immediately relevant and the polemic is now generalised rather than directed against specific groups or individuals.

The theology of the author is consistent with that of the undisputed Pauline letters but shows a more developed understanding of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. This is expressed in the 'Christ Hymn' in Colossians 1:15-20 which, like the Hymn in Philippians, was already known to the community.

It has a more cosmic dimension than its counterpart in Philippians, however. Christ is described as the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Colossians 1:19). There seems to be an echo here of the way divine wisdom is presented in Proverbs 8:23-27 and in other Jewish wisdom texts. The reference to the fullness (Greek *pleroma*) of God dwelling in him implies that Christ has primacy over the whole cosmos and that the great powers considered so influential in the ancient world (such as the elemental spirits of the universe referred to in Colossians 2:8) have no real potency at all.

*"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."
(Colossians 2:6-7)*



From this perspective, Paul is no longer viewed as the humble slave (Greek: *doulos*) of Jesus Christ, imitating Jesus who suffered the death of a slave, but as the servant (Greek *diakonos*) of the divine mystery revealed in the death and resurrection of the cosmic Christ which is part of God's plan of God 'to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (Colossians 1:19-23). That 'mystery' is now being worked out in the lives of prayer and service of the believers in Colossae. The author can still speak of the local community as a 'church' (Greek: *ekklesia*), but this term now expands to encompass the larger Church, the collection of all the local churches (Colossians 1:18).

DOULOS (Slave)

DIAKONOS (Servant)

EKKLESIA (Church)

Having warned the community not to let itself be undermined by philosophies, cults and ascetic practices which were circulating at the time, the author addresses some practical matters. While avoiding vices they are to cultivate the virtues which will enhance the renewal begun in their baptism: 'Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against each other, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And above all these put on love...' (Colossians 3:12-17)

This process of growth into the image of Christ is leading to the ending of social distinctions (there is to be no distinction between slave and free, Colossians 3:11). However, the author still accommodates a code of behaviour based on the extremely hierarchical structures that existed in the typical household of the time, not just between the family and their slaves (Colossians 4:1), but even between husbands and wives. While wives must obey their husbands, husbands must love their wives and never treat them harshly (Colossians 3:18-19). Relating theological realities to real life is still a work in progress.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against each other, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And above all these put on love..'
(Colossians 3:12-17)



Question for Reflection

How does the Christ Hymn help you to reflect on Christ in his risen reality and our relationship with the rest of the world?

The Letter to the Ephesians



Ancient Ephesus was a significant Greek city located on the west coast of what is now Turkey. It was a major centre for trade, culture and religion, known for its well-preserved ruins, including the Library of Celsus, the Temple of Artemis, and the Grand Theatre.

As with Colossians, so with Ephesians the authorship and date of the letter are disputed. It is presented as coming from Paul, but unusually he does not seem to know anyone in the community. He mentions his co-worker Tychicus, as the one sent to bring news about himself (Ephesians 6:22), and no doubt to deliver the letter. Tychicus also appears in the final greeting in the Letter to the Colossians where he is commended to the community in almost identical fashion.

As in the letters to the Colossians and Philemon, Paul is described as being in prison (Ephesians 6:20), in Rome, according to tradition, sometime between CE 60-62. Some scholars however, are of the opinion that Ephesians was written later, in the last two decades of the first century. Paul and Luke, the author of Acts, wrote in the midst of the excitement and energy of the early mission. They were not anticipating the questions of future historians. So today looking back across the centuries it is sometimes difficult to reconcile the data in Paul's letters, Acts and the fragments we have from Roman inscriptions, and secular sources of the first century.



Tychicus



THE LIBRARY OF CELSUS IN EPHESUS

From a literary perspective there is a remarkable similarity between Ephesians and Colossians, to the extent that Ephesians could be described as a commentary on, or a development of, the letter to the Colossians. Just under half the verses in Ephesians have parallels in Colossians, and the two letters share various words that rarely occur anywhere else in the New Testament.

For example, Colossians and Ephesians both refer to the mystery of God, God's will, and Christ in you, the mystery revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (Colossians 1:26-27; Ephesians 1:9-10). The word 'mystery' carries the meaning of a secret plan which cannot be accessed by humanity unless God chooses to reveal it. The plan is to draw creation into unity in Christ, and the instrument of that unity is the Church, not just a collection of communities but a worldwide body that finds its unity in Christ, its head. This unity is particularly revealed in the gathering of Jews and Gentiles into the body of Christ to create a new humanity (Ephesians 2:15).

*"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."
(Ephesians 2:19-21)*



TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS, EPHEBUS

The theological development of Colossians by Ephesians can be perceived also in the exhortation to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:21-33. As in Colossians, the author of Ephesians gives practical advice to the members of the Christian household, husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and masters. The advice is given not to individuals as such, but to individuals in their relationship with a significant 'other'. The style of the exhortation owes much to the 'Household Codes' already in use in Greek and Latin households. These codes reflect the moral teaching of the time and cultural how the relationship between different groups should be ordered.

There are, however, some subtle differences between the Pauline exhortations and the Graeco-Roman codes, which tended to focus on the authority of the husband over the wife. This section of Colossians begins with the rather stark injunction 'Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord' (Colossians 3:18). This instruction does not go down well in a contemporary context and may not have been acceptable even within the community being addressed. In turn, husbands are told to love their wives and never treat them harshly. The fact that Paul had to exhort the husbands not to treat their wives harshly would suggest that such treatment was widespread.

Ephesians treats the relationship of the husband to his wife at much greater length than any of the parallel Graeco-Roman examples. The model for the husband's leadership of the family is not to be found in the norms of ancient society, but, rather, in the way that Christ exercises the power of headship over the body of the Church, nourishing and caring tenderly for his body, the Church (Ephesians 5:23). This passage is not really a comment on marital relationships, then, but an indication of how all Christians should behave towards one another in general (Ephesians 5:21). To be subject to one another out of love is the criterion for a renewed humanity, who far from lording it over one another allow Christ to be the Lord. The image of husbands caring for their own bodies (Ephesians 5:28-29) probably reflects the attitude of those males in Graeco-Roman society who had sufficient wealth and leisure to devote much time to the care of their bodies, which were regarded as indicators of their virility, courage and nobility. So, the author begins from contemporary social and structural realities and offers the possibility of transcending them in the light of the example of Christ.

The letter concludes by describing marriage as a great mystery. The author reminds his audience that marriage has already been linked in scripture to the story of the creation of man and woman into a unity (Genesis 2:24). Now he connects it to his central theme of the mystery of God's plan to bring humanity together in the love revealed in Christ (Colossians 5:30-32). In the Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, we find the Greek word *mysterion* translated into Latin as *sacramentum* - the foundation of the Church's understanding of marriage as a sacrament. Today we might wonder whether Paul received this insight while attending a wedding ceremony or from his experience of meeting people in long and faithful marriages.

MYSTERION (GREEK) SACRAMENTUM (LATIN)

*"Therefore be imitators of God,
as beloved children.
And walk in love, as Christ loved us
and gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering
and sacrifice to God."
(Ephesians 5:1-2)*



Question for Reflection

How does this letter help us to see the Church as Christ's body and to show tenderness and compassion for all who seek Christ's body in their local Church?

The Letter to Philemon



Philemon

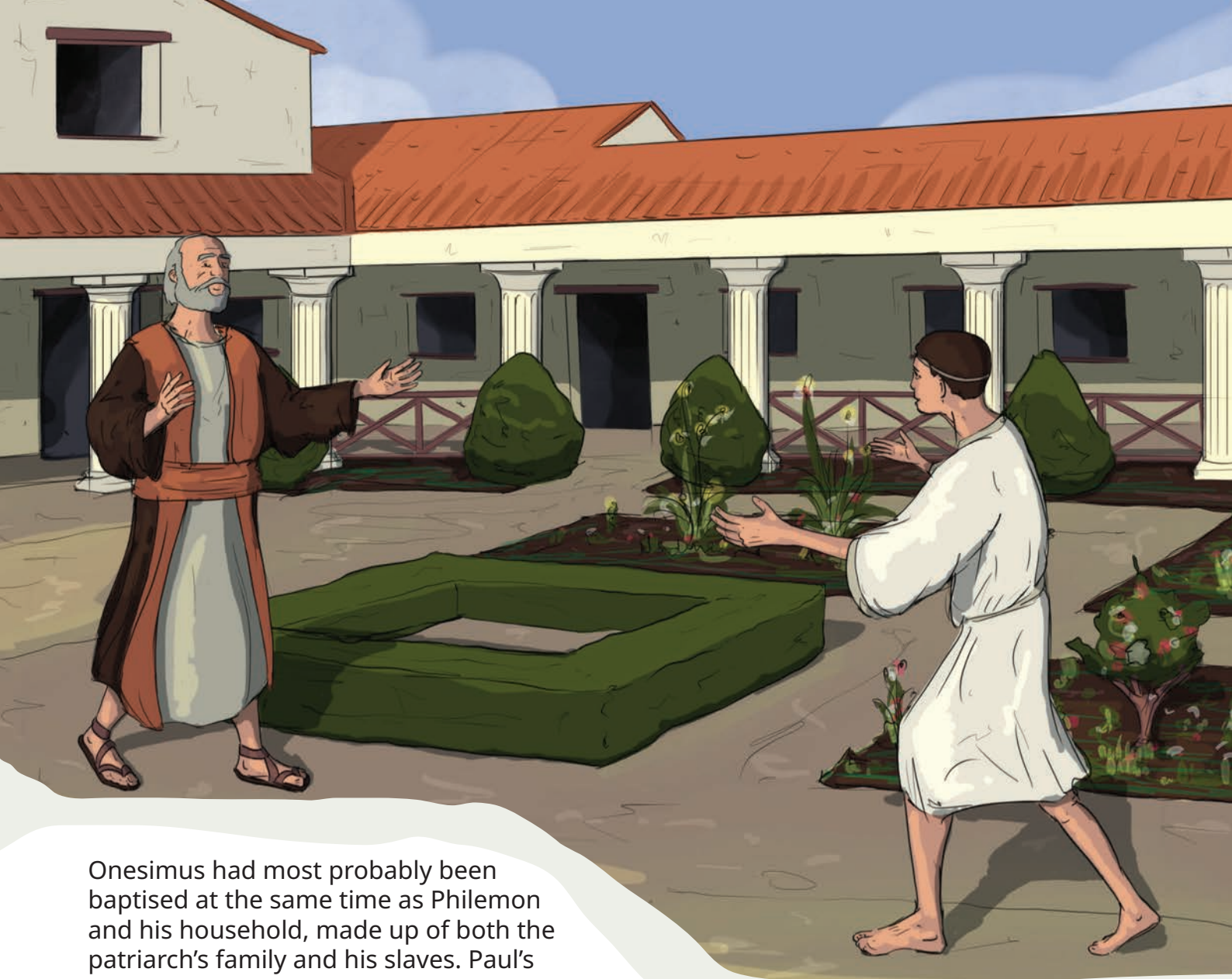


Philemon is the shortest of Paul's letters and is the last of the Pauline writings to appear in the New Testament canon. Paul is again writing from prison, perhaps from Ephesus. It was composed after the letter to the Philippians but before Colossians, suggesting a date around 58 CE.

It is presented as a personal letter to Philemon, but it is very likely that the intention was always that it should be heard by the whole community who gathered at his house. Paul writes about Philemon's slave Onesimus, who for some undisclosed reason had fled from home and become a close co-worker with Paul. He is mentioned warmly in the letter to the Colossians: 'Tychicus... is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you' (Colossians 4:9). Paul, who has valued his help, reluctantly sends Onesimus back to Philemon and asks Philemon to welcome him back no longer as a slave but as a brother.

"I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints..."
(Philemon 1:4-4)

Slavery was an accepted fact of life in Graeco-Roman society, and the letter does not formally address its abolition or the question of flawed societal structures. By sending Onesimus back, Paul is simply acknowledging the reality of life in a highly stratified society, in which the freedom that went with citizenship (which Paul enjoyed) was considered a privilege not a right. On the other hand, household slaves had a measure of security that would have been beyond the reach of many poorer people. But when Paul asks Philemon to treat his slave as a brother, he is inviting him to enter a radically new relationship which transcends existing social structures.



Onesimus had most probably been baptised at the same time as Philemon and his household, made up of both the patriarch's family and his slaves. Paul's reason for his request is indicated in verse 6, 'I pray that the sharing (Greek *koinonia*) of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ'. In this sentence, which does not translate easily from the original Greek (as is often the case with Paul's letters) we meet again an important term which Paul used also in the letter to the Philippians – *koinonia*. The root meaning of *koinonia* is a relationship that brings about active sharing in a common enterprise - in this case the creation of a relationship of love in Christ that embraces not just the individuals but includes the whole community. The Greek describes this relationship as being 'into Christ' (*eis Christon*). In other words, it is a relationship that is not yet complete but involves discovering, maturing, and growing into our true identity. This relationship begins and is sustained by faith.

Paul's previous letters all display a concern for unity and a fear of the community breaking up into unreconcilable divisions. Factional divisions destroy the growth to communal identity in Christ, which is the goal of the Christian enterprise. Growth into Christ (the new Adam) is growth into the humanity God intended us to be. We become human together, not in isolation.

Question for Reflection

How can our faith help us to discover, mature and grow into our true identity?

The First Letter to Timothy



Timothy



The following three letters are addressed to an individual who has been appointed pastor of the community, but they are clearly intended to be heard by the whole assembly. They are, therefore, given the title of the 'Pastoral Epistles'. They are also commonly referred to as 'deutero-Pauline' writings, because they were not composed by Paul himself. They were written towards the end of the first century by one or more people who had been influenced by Paul and who wanted to keep his teaching alive and relevant for new circumstances. This is indicated by changes in style, themes and context between them and the undisputed Pauline letters. Timothy is addressed here as 'my loyal child in the faith' (1 Timothy 1:2), for example, implying that his teaching is in line with that of Paul and that he bears Pauline authority.

The author does not begin the letter with an expression of gratitude for the faith of the community as is Paul's normal practice. This is probably because of his concern about the church becoming undermined by false teaching. This means that Timothy must strive to 'guard what has been entrusted to you, and avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge' (1 Timothy 6:20). What false ideas are circulating is not made specific, but the beginning of the breakdown of the Roman state religion had created a vacuum that was being filled across the ancient world by many kinds of philosophies and teachings about the meaning of life. In 1 Timothy 6:3ff, these beliefs are linked with a mind-set which slips into immoral ways of living, with the greed for wealth in particular acting as a temptation to wander away from God (1 Timothy 6:3-10).



ROCK CARVED VILLAGE OF LYSTRA

*"He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world, taken up in glory."
(1 Timothy 3:16)*

Timothy's task, then, is to 'fight the good fight' (1 Timothy 1:18) and to pass on the sound traditions that he had been taught (1 Timothy 4:6). He is instructed to lead prayer 'for kings and all who are in high positions' (1 Timothy 2:2), such as the emperor and Roman officials. These prayers are to be offered to 'God our Saviour' (1 Timothy 2:3). Three times in the letter, God is spoken of as the Saviour (1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10), an implicit challenge to the Roman emperor who declared himself saviour of the people. The young community of Jesus-followers had to live with the tension between their faith in the one God and the emperors' demands for worship, while not drawing attention to themselves for the wrong reasons (1 Timothy 3:7). Rather, they should let their Christian moral life and good works draw the attention of others (1 Timothy 5:25).

It is important, therefore, that those chosen as community leaders, namely *episkopoi* (overseers or bishops) and *diakonoi* (servants or deacons) 'be well thought of by outsiders' (1 Timothy 3:7). The model presented for their character and conduct is that of the patriarch of the Roman household. As the Christian communities originally gathered in the houses where there was sufficient public space to accommodate about 30 people, they came to be seen as households. Bishops and deacons must, therefore, manage their own household well (1 Timothy 3:4) and should not be 'lovers of money' (1 Timothy 3:3; cf. 6:17).

If God is the Saviour, Jesus Christ is at the heart of the mystery that is God's plan for human salvation (1 Timothy 3:16). This belief is expressed in the citation of a fragment of a hymn, which proclaims that Christ (who existed in heaven) was manifested on earth and (having died on the cross) was vindicated by the Holy Spirit (therefore was seen or verified by the angels) and taken up into glory. He is the source of the gospel that is proclaimed among the Gentiles and believed throughout the world. This hymn summarises the story that is the foundation of Christian faith and forms the basis for Timothy's instructions.

The Second Letter to Timothy

THESSALONIKI

CORINTH

This very personal letter of encouragement, directed to Timothy himself, is perhaps the most likely of the three pastoral letters to have come from Paul, perhaps written during his imprisonment in Rome, not long before his execution. It focuses on Timothy and his ministry rather than the wider life of the community.

The letter gives the impression that Paul is coming to the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Yet the author is thinking, not about his own death but about the future spread of the gospel (2 Timothy 4:9-13). He urges Timothy to come soon (2 Timothy 4:9), and to bring Mark as well 'because he is useful in my ministry' (2 Timothy 4:11). This would suggest that he regarded his work of evangelisation as by no means ending and that he was preparing for new travels. It may well be that the background to this letter was a setback Paul had experienced: intending to travel to Spain, Paul had written to the communities in Rome. But his hope of help from them for his new mission had come to nothing, and so at this point he is trying to get a group of his well-known and trusted companions to join him again on his travels.

Timothy was a close associate of Paul as an evangelist and teacher, and also a much-loved friend (Philippians 2:19-21). Paul sent him to Corinth and Thessalonica as his personal ambassador to strengthen and encourage the faith of these communities. But something has changed by the time this letter is written. Paul wants him to come to see him quickly. Why? The clue may lie in 2 Timothy 1:4: 'Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy'. Are these the words of a dying man wishing to see his dear friend for the last time? Or is he concerned about Timothy's faith and a possible breakdown in his morale, the reason for which is never made specific, but which may have resulted from the suffering often necessitated by faith in the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8) for which Timothy was perhaps not fully prepared?



Paul encourages Timothy by sharing his own sorrow in the desertion of many of his former friends and co-workers (2 Timothy 1:15-18). He explains that suffering is part of the preaching of the gospel, as necessary as the hardships endured by a soldier or an athlete struggling to win the prize (2 Timothy 2:4-5), but he then reminds Timothy that the Lord has rescued him from all his own persecutions (2 Timothy 3:11). As he frequently does in other letters, Paul brings Timothy back to first principles, quoting a primitive creed – ‘Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead...’ (2 Timothy 2:8), and ‘a sure saying’ – ‘If we have died with him, we will also live with him... if we are faithless he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself’ (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

Question for Reflection

How do these two letters guide us in our discipleship in the public square?

The Letter to Titus



Titus

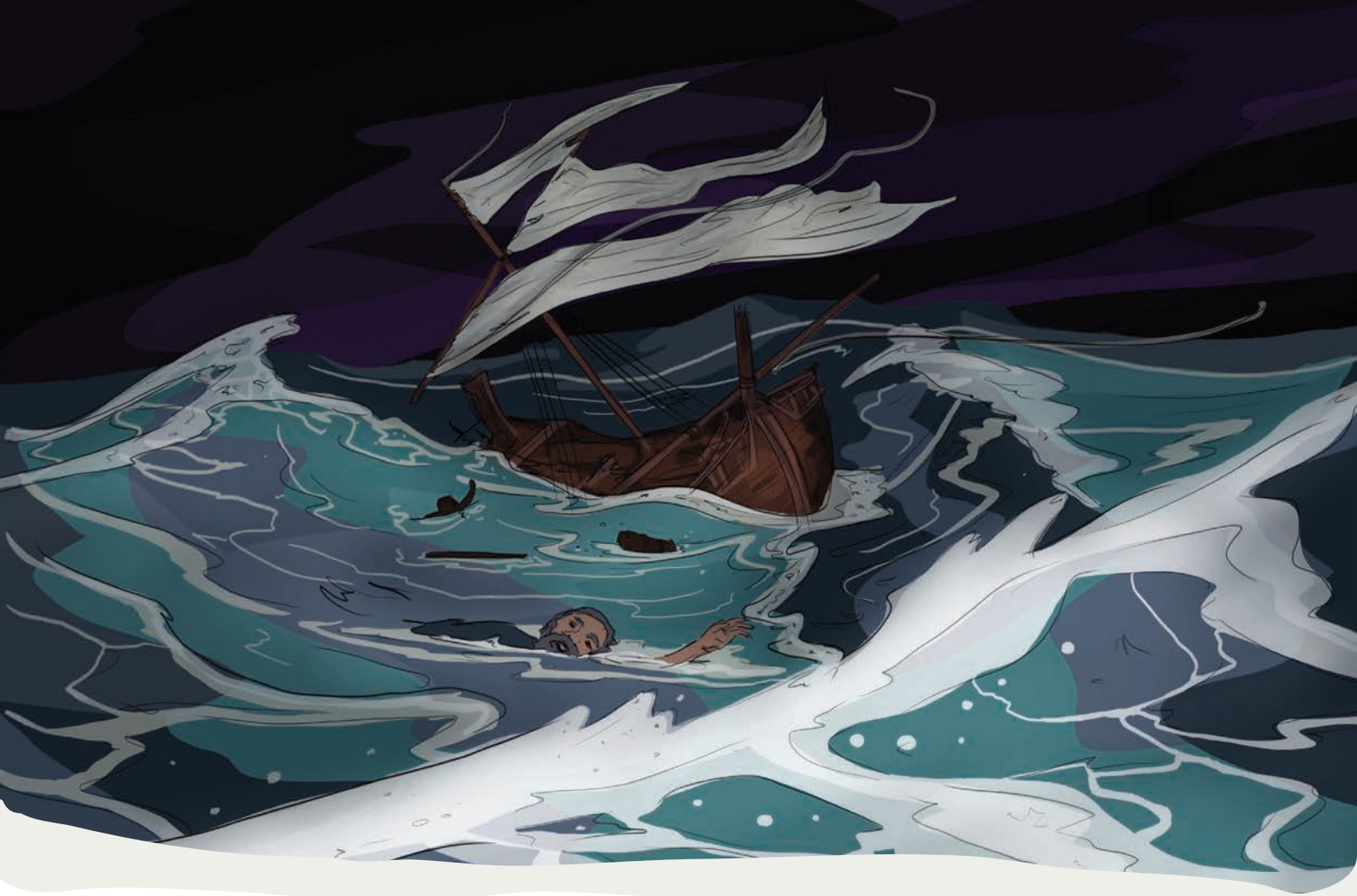


The author, Paul himself or another person recognisably from within the Pauline tradition, writes to give Titus the authority to provide instruction in the name of Paul. The tone and themes of the letter are similar to 1 Timothy. Some commentators regard the letter as having been composed in the 80s, long after Paul's death, while others place it in the early 60s after Paul's imprisonment in Rome, noting that it depicts Paul as being out of prison and arranging to travel to Nicopolis in northwestern Greece (Titus 3:12).

Titus is mentioned in 2 Corinthians as a greatly loved and highly respected co-worker of Paul, who was appointed to organise the collection for the mother-church in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:16-19). According to this letter, he has been left in Crete by Paul to help with the next phase of the development of the church there and with the appointment of elders in every town in the region (Titus 1:5). Although there is no evidence to suggest that Paul himself founded the Christian community in Crete, Acts 27:8 records him making a brief stop in a Cretan city before travelling on to Malta.

Titus' first task is to organise the leadership of the church in Crete (Titus 1:5-9).

At this stage the terms *presbyter* (elder) and *episkopos* (bishop) appear to refer to the same function, and deacons are not mentioned at all. As in 1 Timothy the qualities expected of both roles are similar to those expected of the father of a well-run Graeco-Roman household. The leader of the Christian household is to be a 'safe pair of hands.' As God's stewards they must be blameless and be able to preach 'sound doctrine'. The underlying Greek term is *didaskalia hygiainouse* (healthy teaching), the kind of teaching that would prevent the community being infected with dangerous ideas disseminated by 'rebellious types, idle talkers and deceivers' (Titus 1:10) who are accused of largely being interested in their own financial gain (Titus 1:11).



Using the model of the Household Code that has already been seen in Colossians, Ephesians and 1 Timothy, Titus is to instruct the different generations of the church 'household'. Here, particular emphasis is placed on self-control, but also on behaviour which will enhance and not destroy the reputation of the Christian family. The believers are to be deferential to rulers and respectful to all and should avoid quarrelling (Titus 3:1-2).

The basis of this instruction is 'the appearance of the grace of God bringing salvation', a reference to the epiphania or appearance of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11ff). The present, the period between Christ's first coming and his hoped-for appearance in glory, is a time for training, enabling believers to 'live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly' (Titus 2:12). These terms 'self-controlled, upright and godly' would not look out of place in the philosophical teachings of the time.

Although the letter is addressing a community that, to use a Johannine phrase, is in the world (John 1:10) where all must respect and honour the emperor and be seen to do so, as good citizens, yet it is not of the world, since the emperor is not its Lord and Saviour. Christ has dominion over all the gods of the Roman state. As the one who reveals both the past and future grace of God, in which the community finds hope and healing, Christ is now given the very name of God (Titus 2:13).

Question for Reflection

What can we learn and apply today from the Household instructions and Household Code models?

Conclusion: Paul's Thanksgiving & Prayer

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11





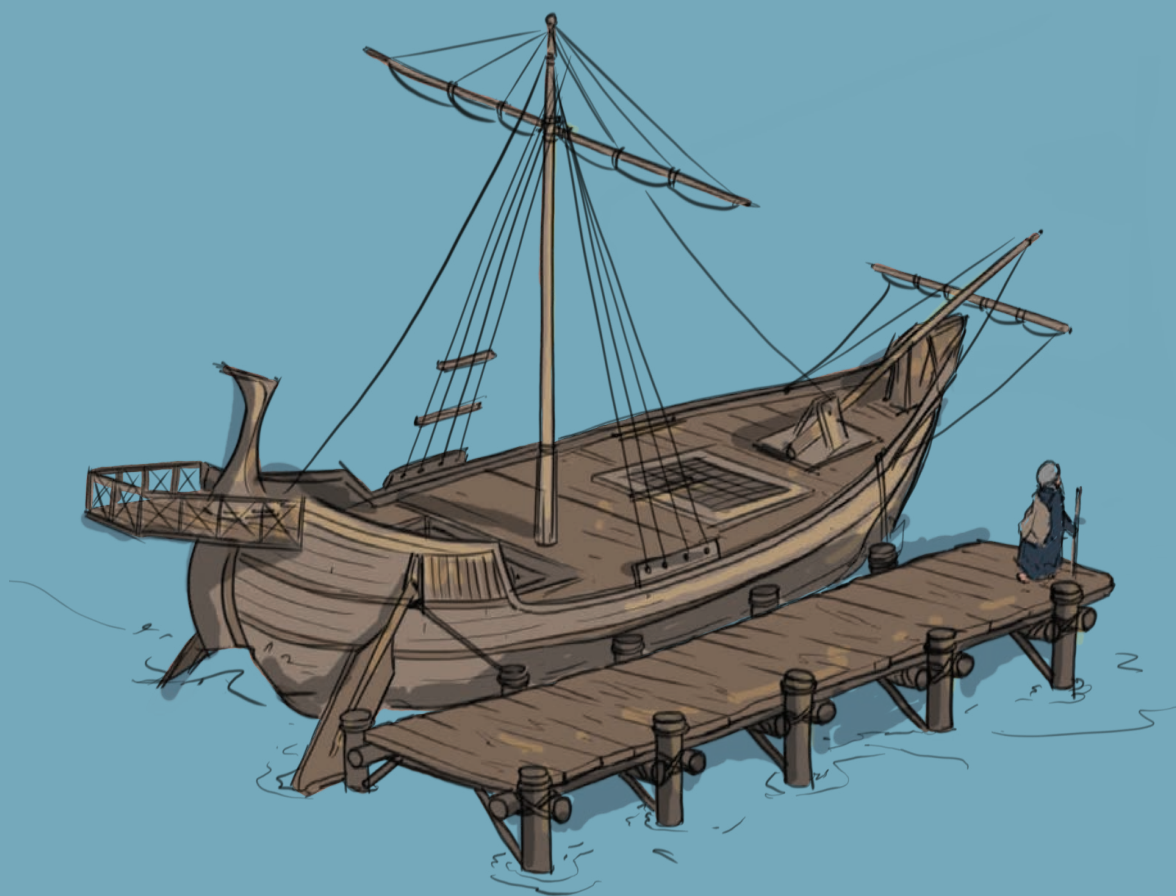
Questions for Reflection

- 1** Which of the various letters resonate most with you?
- 2** Which letters are the most challenging in today's world?
- 3** How does Paul help to deepen your faith through his writings?
- 4** How does Paul's relationship with the different churches help us to understand our own church communities and leaders?
- 5** If you were to write a letter to Paul, what would you want to say?

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