PAUL'S LETTERS TO CHURCHES

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians

THREAD



HOW DOES THIS TYPE OF LITERATURE FIT INTO THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE?

Immediately before Jesus' ascension, He told His disciples to be witnesses throughout the world (Acts I:8, echoing Matthew 28:18-20) and the disciples accomplished this by planting churches in cities across the greater Mediterranean region and the rest of the known world (Acts I-28). Paul, the apostle and church planter, then wrote letters to the churches to nurture, encourage, instruct, and correct their errors in theology and lifestyle. These letters help churches not only make sense of "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), but also apply robust theology to their lives in practical ways.

HOW DO WE READ PAUL'S LETTERS TO CHURCHES NORMALLY?

These letters, often called "epistles," were written by Paul to actual first century churches or groups of churches. Paul's writing follows a logical progression with carefully crafted arguments, typically with three common parts, I) a greeting, 2) the body and 3) the closing. Epistles are not merely abstract essays on religious philosophy. Rather, the letters addressed specific circumstances churches faced such as immoral living in Corinth, division in Phillipi, or false teachers infiltrating congregations like Galatia or Colossae. Understanding the specific situations Paul's was responding to and reading letters in their entirety, (instead of just isolated statements) helps readers trace the flow of Paul's thoughts, empowering better interpretation and application.

HOW DOES THIS PART OF THE BIBLE POINT TO JESUS?

Paul is abundantly clear that Jesus is the head of the church, which is His body (Colossians I:18), thus Christian life begins and centers around who Jesus was, what He has done, and what He taught. Life in Christ's body finds Christians crucifying sin and living for God (Romans 6:6-10), understanding the magnitude and implications of His grace, and being built up toward mature faith and knowledge for the purpose of knowing Jesus and making Him known (Ephesians 4:11-13).

HOW DO PAUL'S LETTERS TO CHURCHES FIT INTO OUR LIVES TODAY?

If you've placed your trust and allegiance in Jesus Christ-the one who lived the life we perpetually fail to live and died the death we deserve-then pay attention here. These letters call each of us, they call the Church, to be unified in Christ. When you think about sex, Paul's letters calls to you. When you think about worship, Paul's letters call to you. When you think about death, Paul's letters calls to you. When you think about family, Paul's letters call to you.

It could be said that Paul's letters to these new "Jesus communities," although written to first century churches, are for us. So, consider the context of the first century ancient middle east. Consider that the women and men in these churches are the Church, just as much as we—if we consider ourselves to be followers of Jesus–are the Church.