

# **Adult Catechism Class February 8, 2016**

## *The Epistles of Saint Paul*

### **Part 1: Scripture Readings:**

**Romans 5: 18-21:** Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Romans 13: 9-10:** The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

**1 Timothy 2: 1-7:** First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

**Part 2: Who was St Paul?:** Saint Paul is one of the most important and influential of all the saints. Many of his writings are contained in the Canon of the Bible and have influenced the growth and development of the Church since the first century. St. Paul was originally known as Saul, and he was a Roman citizen and a Pharisee. Saul of Tarsus, known to Christians as St Paul, grows up in a strict Jewish family in the port of Tarsus, in what is now southern Turkey. As part of Asia Minor, this is a Greek-speaking town. It is also within the Roman empire, and this family is distinguished enough to have been granted Roman citizenship.

A Greek-speaking Jewish Roman citizen is well equipped to have influence in the wide and stable Mediterranean world of this period, benefiting from the Pax Romana of the new Roman empire. But the boy's father, who arranges for him to go to Jerusalem to study among the Pharisees, would certainly be surprised and shocked to know in advance the details of his influential son's career - in the service of a small radical Jewish sect, which as yet has not even been formed in Palestine. After studying with a leading rabbi in Jerusalem, Saul becomes closely linked with the religious authorities in the city and zealously helps to suppress the Jewish heresy which is being spread by the followers of the crucified Jesus. He watches with full approval the stoning of Stephen, a leading Christian, and then he sets off to Damascus to seek out and arrest any Christians in that city. However, Saul experienced a powerful vision that caused him to convert to Christianity while on the road to Damascus. He was duly baptized and took the name Paul. Paul traveled the world, first to Arabia then back to Damascus. He also visited Jerusalem to see St. Peter, the first pope and pay homage to him. During these travels, he preached

ceaselessly, often drawing criticism and ire from those who rebuffed his message. Jews, in particular, hated his preaching as they saw him convert people to Christianity from Judaism.

Eventually, Paul returned to Tarsus, where he was born. He preached there until he was called by Barnabus to come to Antioch. After a year spent in Antioch, a famine occurred in Jerusalem and the pair was dispatched to the city with alms. They accomplished this mission, and returned to Antioch. Paul and Barnabus then went forth on a mission to Cypress and throughout Asia Minor. They established several churches in their travels. After establishing his churches, Paul remained in communication with the faithful, often writing letters to answer questions and resolve disputes. The letters that have survived have become part of the Bible. It is believed that Paul wrote other letters, which were lost even before the Bible was established by the Church. Paul's writings are important because they provide good advice for how Christians should live. Paul traveled throughout much of Europe, particularly in Macedonia, Greece, and Italy. While preparing for a missionary trip to Spain, he was imprisoned in Caesarea by the Jews for two years. He traveled again, was shipwrecked in Malta, and was imprisoned for another two years for preaching in Rome. Despite these imprisonments, Paul continued to preach. Paul eventually made his way to Spain, then returned to the East, and finally returned to Rome once again. In 67 AD, Paul was arrested in Rome for a second time and this time he was beheaded under the insane Emperor Nero. According to John Chrysostom, Nero knew Paul personally.

**Part 3: The Theology of St. Paul** Paul is among the most famous, intelligent and influential of the apostles. There are some who argue that he was the leader of the apostles, but this is not supported by the evidence. Instead, he likely preached at the request of St. Peter, who was pope. St. Paul is the patron saint of missionaries, evangelists, writers, journalists, authors, public workers, rope and saddle makers, and tent makers. His feast day is on June 29 when he is honored with Saint Peter, although he is also honored on other days throughout the year. The key to the theology of St. Paul is his personal encounter with the glorified Christ on his way to Damascus. That revelation, in which he was blinded for three days, changed Paul into a new man. The persecutor of Christ was changed into a zealous apostle to proclaim that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Christ, that he is Lord (Kyrios), and the Son of God. Because he saw the glorified Christ, and listened to him, he was transformed from a Jewish rabbi, to a Christian rabbi. Paul saw Christ, he heard him, he was called by him, and he was sent by him to convert the world. In carrying out his calling and sending, he was destined to suffer much for the sake of Christ—rejection, hatred, scourging, shipwreck, imprisonment and, finally, beheading by the Romans.

Christ is the key to St. Paul. His theology is Christocentric. The Gospel according to St. Paul is that the Son of God became man in Jesus Christ, in order to reconcile all mankind to God the Father, by his life, passion, death and resurrection. For Paul, Christ is the glorified Christ, now reigning gloriously in heaven, and seated at the right hand of the Father.

Here are some of the main points in the theology of St. Paul: 1) Because of the sin of Adam, and each one's personal sins, all men are sinners and in need of redemption (Rom. 3:23; 5:12-21). 2) In order to save mankind, God sent his Son into the world, born of a woman (Rom. 4:4), to make a fitting satisfaction for sin. 3) That Son is Jesus Christ, who communicates his grace, and justifies all who believe in him, and are baptized. 4) The grace of Christ includes the sending of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the believer as an adopted child of God, a member of the body of Christ, and an heir of eternal life. 5) Christ Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament, and has established a New Covenant to replace that of Moses; therefore, Christians are not bound by the ceremonial and dietary

laws, and circumcision, contained in the Law of Moses. This means that one does not have to become a Jew in order to be a Christian. This insight of Paul made Christianity into a religion open to all peoples (see 1 Tim. 2:4).

St. Paul argues—in most of his letters towards the end of his life—that faith in Christ demands a moral way of life based on the Ten Commandments, the law of nature, and the commandment of love of God and neighbor (Rom. 13:9-10). Here, he mentions regulations for bishops, elders, old men, old women, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. Christians are to avoid sexual immorality, idolatry, and other vices of the pagans. They are to give good example, in word and deed, to all. He often insists on purity of doctrine, preaching and defending the deposit of faith from the Apostles, and refuting the errors of false teachers (1 & 2 Tim.; Tit.).

St. Paul is a giant among Christians. In most of his letters, he is thinking of the Second Coming of Christ. He urges all to be prepared for it, and to hope for it. It means that all those who share in the life of Christ, will enter into the heavenly Jerusalem, and be happy with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever, when Christ comes again in glory.

#### **Part 4: The Letters of St Paul:**

**Romans:** The letter to the Romans was written by St. Paul from Corinth sometime at the end of the fifties of the first century. It is one of the most formal and detailed expositions of the doctrinal teaching of St. Paul that we have. It is not one of the easier parts of the scripture to understand without careful study. In this letter, the apostle Paul writes about the relationship of the Christian faith to the unbelievers, particularly the unbelieving Jews. The apostle upholds the validity and holiness of the Mosaic law while passionately defending the doctrine that salvation comes only in Christ, by faith and by grace. He discourses powerfully about the meaning of union -with Christ through baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He urges great humility on the part of the gentile Christians toward Israel, and calls with great pathos and love for the regrafting of the unbelieving Jews to the genuine community of God which is in Christ Who is Himself from Israel “according to the flesh” (9:5) for the sake of its salvation and that of all the world. The end of the letter is a long exhortation concerning the proper behavior of Christians, finally closing with a long list of personal greetings from the apostle and his co-workers, including one Tertius, the actual writer of the letter, to many members of the Roman Church, urging, once more, steadfastness of faith.

**First Corinthians:** The first Christian community in Corinth, was noted neither for its inner peace and harmony, nor for the exemplary moral behavior of its members. The two letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians which we have in the New Testament, written in the mid-fifties of the first century, are filled not only with doctrinal and ethical teachings, the answers to concrete questions and problems, but also with no little scolding and chastisement by the author, as well as numerous defenses of his own apostolic authority. These letters clearly demonstrate the fact that the first Christians were not all saints, and that the early Church experienced no fewer difficulties than the Church does today or at any time in its history in the world.

After a short greeting and word of gratitude to God for the grace given to the Corinthians, the first letter begins with St. Paul’s appeal for unity in the Church. There are deep disagreements and dissensions among the members of the community, and the apostle urges all to be fully

united in the crucified Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit in Whom there can be no divisions at all (1-3) He then defends his apostleship generally and his fatherhood of the Corinthian Church in particular, both of which were being attacked by some members of the Church. (4) Next, he deals with the problem on sexual immorality among members of the community and the matter of their going to court before pagan judges. (5-6) After this comes St. Paul's counsel about Christian marriage and his advice concerning the eating of food offered to idols. (7-8) Then once again he defends his apostleship, stressing the fact that he has always supported himself materially and has burdened no one.

The divisions and troubles in the Corinthian community were most concretely expressed at the Eucharistic gatherings of the Church. There was general disrespect and abuse of the Body and Blood of Christ, and the practice had developed where each clique was having its own separate meal. These divisions were caused in no small part by the fact that some of the community had certain spiritual gifts, for example, that of praising God in unknown tongues, which they considered as signs of their superiority over others. There also was trouble caused by women in the Church, who were using their new freedom in Christ for disruption and disorder.

In his letter St. Paul urges respect and discernment for the Holy Eucharist as the central realization of the unity of the Church, coming from Christ, Himself. He warns against divisions in the Church because of the various spiritual gifts, urging the absolute unity of the Church as the one body of Christ which has many members and many gifts for the edification of all. He insists on the absolute primacy and superiority of love over every virtue and gift, without which all else is made void and is destroyed. He tempers those who had the gift of praising God in strange tongues, a gift which was obviously presenting a most acute problem, and calls for the exercise of all gifts and most particularly the simple and direct teaching of the Word of, God in the Church. He appeals to the women to maintain themselves in dress and behavior proper to Christians. And finally he insists that "all things should be done decently and in order." (10-14)

The first letter to the Corinthians ends with a long discourse about the meaning of the resurrection of the dead in Christ which is the center of the Christian faith and preaching. The apostle closes with an appeal for money for the poor, and promising a visit, he once again insists on the absolute necessity of strength of faith, humble service and most especially, love.

**Second Corinthians:** The entire second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians is a detailed enumeration and description of his sufferings and trials in the apostolate of Christ. In this letter, the apostle once again defends himself before the Corinthians, some of whom were reacting very badly to him and to his guidance and instruction in the faith. He defends the "pain" that, he is causing these people because of his exhortations and admonitions to them concerning their beliefs and behavior, and he calls them to listen to him and to follow him in his life in Christ.

Of special interest in the second letter, in addition to the detailed record of St. Paul's activities and all that he had to bear for the gospel of Christ, is the doctrine of the apostle concerning the

-relationship of Christians with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church. Worthy of special note also, is the apostolic teaching about the significance of the scriptures for the Christians (3-4) and the teaching about contributions, of money for the work of the Church. (9)

The closing line of the second letter to the Corinthians, which, like all epistles, forms part of the Church's lectionary, is used in the divine liturgies of the Eastern Churches during the eucharistic canon: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God (the Father), and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all". (2 Corinthians 13:14)

**Galatians:** The letter of St. Paul to the Galatians, most likely the southern Galatians (Lystra, Derbe, Iconium), was sent from Antioch in the early fifties. In this most vehement epistle, the apostle Paul expresses his profound anger and distress at the fact that the Galatians, who had received the genuine gospel of Christ from him, had been seduced into practicing "another gospel" which held that man's salvation requires the ritual observance of the Old Testament law, including the practice of circumcision.

The heart of this letter to the "foolish Galatians" (3:1) is St. Paul's uncompromising defense of the fact - that his gospel is not his but Christ's, the gospel of salvation not by the law, but by grace and faith in the crucified Savior Who gives the Holy Spirit to all who believe. The apostle stresses the fact that in Christ and the Spirit there is freedom from slavery to the flesh, slavery to the elemental spirits of the universe, and slavery to the ritual requirements of the law through which no one can be saved. For the true "Israel of God" (6:16) in Christ and the Spirit, there is perfect freedom, divine sonship and a new creation. Those "who are led by the Spirit... are not under the law." (5:18) One famous passage from Galatians that we use in our Liturgy is: "For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:27)

**Ephesians:** The letters of St. Paul to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians are called the captivity epistles since they are held to have been written by the apostle from his house arrest in Rome around 60 A.D. In some early sources, the letter to the Ephesians does not contain the words "who are at Ephesus," thus leading some to think of the epistle as a general letter meant for all of the churches. St. Paul's purpose in the letter to the Ephesians is to share his "insight into the mystery of Christ" (3:4) and "to make all men see what is the plan of the for ages in God Who created all things..." (3:9) In the first part of the letter, the apostle attempts to describe the mystery. He uses many words in long sentences, overflowing with adjectives, in his effort to accomplish his task. Defying a neat outline, the main points of the message are clear.

The plan of God for Christ, before the foundation of the world, is "to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10) The plan is accomplished through the crucifixion, resurrection and glorification of Christ at the right hand of God. The fruits of God's plan are given freely to all men by God's free gift of grace, to Jews and gentiles alike, who believe-in the Lord. They are given in the One Holy Spirit, in the One Church of Christ, "which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all:" (1:23) In the Church of Christ, with each part of the body knit together and functioning properly in harmony and unity, man grows up in truth and in love "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (4:12-16) He gains access to God the

Father through Christ in the Spirit thus becoming “a holy temple of the Lord... a dwelling place of God” (2:18-22), “filled with all the fullness, of God.” (3:19)

In the second part of the letter, St. Paul spells out the implications of the “great mystery... Christ and the Church.” (5:32) He urges sound doctrine and love, a true conversion of life, a complete end to all impurity and immorality and a total commitment to spiritual battle. He addresses the Church as a whole; husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. He calls all to “put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (4:24)

**Philippians:** As has been mentioned, the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians was written at the time of his confinement in Rome. It is a most intimate letter of the apostle to those whom he sincerely loved in the Lord, those who were his faithful partners in the gospel “from the first day until now.” (1:5) In this letter, St. Paul exposes the most personal feelings of his mind and heart as he sees the approaching end of his life. He also praises the Philippian Church as a model Christian community in every way, encouraging and inspiring its beloved members whom he calls his “joy and crown” (4:1) with prayers that their “love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment,” so that they “may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with all the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ for the praise and glory of God.” (1:10-11)

Of special significance in the letter to the Philippians, besides the mention of “bishops and deacons” (1:1), which hints at the developing structure of the Church, is St. Paul’s famous passage about the self-emptying (kenosis) of Christ which is the epistle reading for the feasts of the Nativity and Dormition of the Theotokos in the Eastern Churches: “Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant (slave), and being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name...” (2:5-9)

**Colossians:** It is believed that the letter of St. Paul to the Colossians, written, as we have said, from Rome, was expressly intended to instruct the faithful in Colossae in the true Christian gospel in the face of certain heretical teachings which were threatening the community there. It appears that some form of gnosticism and angel worship had crept into the Colossian Church. Gnosticism was an early Christian heresy which, in all of its various forms, denied the goodness of material, bodily reality, and therefore, the genuine incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in human flesh. It made of the Christian faith a type of dualistic, spiritualistic philosophy which pretended to provide a secret knowledge of the divine by way of intellectual mysticism. Gnosis, as a word, means knowledge.

In his letter, St. Paul stresses that he indeed wishes the Colossians to be “filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9), and that indeed it is

true that in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (2:3) The real point of the Christian gospel, however, is that in Christ, through whom and for whom all things were created (1:16), “the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily.” (2:9) It is only through the incarnation of Christ and His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, in the most real way, that salvation is given to men. It is given in the Church, through baptism; the Church which is itself Christ’s “body.” (1:24, 2:19)

Thus, the apostle insists to the Colossians that Christ is superior to all angels, having “disarmed the principalities and powers (i.e., the angels)... triumphing over them” on the cross. (2:15) He warns them, therefore “to see to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to human traditions, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ.” (2:8) He warns as well that they should “let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind...” (2:18)

The content and style of the letter to the Colossians is very similar to Ephesians. Following the doctrinal instructions of the letter, their spiritual implications for the believer are spelled out with moral exhortations for a life lived in conformity to Christ and in total service to Him.

**Thessalonians:** It is generally agreed that St. Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians are the first of the apostle’s epistles, and are also the earliest written documents of the New Testament scriptures. They were most likely sent from Corinth, at the end of the forties, in response to the report brought from Timothy that certain difficulties had arisen in the Thessalonian Church about the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

In both of his letters to the Thessalonians, St. Paul repeats the same doctrine. He urges patient steadfastness of faith and continual love and service to the Lord and the brethren in the face of the many persecutions and trials which were confronting the faithful. He affirms that the Lord will come “like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2) when all satanic attacks against the faith have been completed. But in the meantime, the Christians must continue “to do their work in quietness” (2 Thess. 3:12) without panic or fear, and without laziness or idleness into which some had fallen because of their belief in the Lord’s immediate return.

Concerning the resurrection from the dead, the apostle teaches that as Jesus truly rose, so will all “those who have fallen asleep.” (Thess. 4:14) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven... and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord. (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

**Timothy:** The letters of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus are called the pastoral epistles. Although some modern scholars consider these letters as documents of the early second century, primarily because of the developed picture of Church structure which they present, Church Tradition defends the letters as authentic epistles of St. Paul from his house arrest in Rome in

the early sixties of the first century. The two letters to Timothy are of similar contents, having the same purpose to teach “how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15)

In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul urges his “true child in the faith” (1:2), who was in Ephesus, to “wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.” (1:18-19) He urges that prayers “be made for all men” by the Church (2:1) and that “good doctrine” be preserved and propagated, most particularly in times of difficulties and defections from the true faith. (4:6, 6:3) In the letter, the apostle counsels all in proper Christian belief and behavior, giving special advice, both professional and personal, to his co-worker Timothy whom he counsels not to neglect the gift which he received “when the elders laid their hands” upon him. (4:14) The main body of the first letter to Timothy describes in detail the requirements for the pastoral offices of bishop, deacon and presbyter (priest or elder), and offers special instructions concerning the widows and slaves. The rules concerning the pastoral ministries have remained in the Eastern Church, being formally incorporated into its canonical regulations.

Of special note in the first letter to Timothy is St. Paul’s confession of sinfulness which has become part of the pre-communion prayers of the Eastern Church: The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am first. (1 Timothy 1:15)

In his second letter to Timothy, St. Paul again urges his “beloved child” to “rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.” (1:2,6) He stresses the absolute necessity for “sound doctrine” in the Church, calling for a firm struggle against “godless chatter” and the “disputing over words” (2:14,16) particularly in “times of stress” when the gospel is attacked by men of “corrupt mind and counterfeit faith” who are merely “holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.” (3:1-8) As in his first letter, the apostle specifically mentions the need for the firm adherence to the scriptures. (3:15) The expression of St. Paul in this letter, that the leaders of the Church must be found “rightly handling the word of truth” (2:15), has become the formal liturgical prayer of the Eastern Churches for its bishops.

***Titus:*** St. Paul’s letter to Titus in Crete is a shorter version of his two letters to Timothy. The author outlines the moral requirements of the bishop in the Church and urges the pastor always to “teach what befits sound doctrine.” (1:9, 2:1) It tells how both the leaders and the faithful members of the Church should behave. Sections of the letter to Titus about the appearance of “the grace of God ... for the salvation of all men ... by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (2:11-3:7) comprise the Church’s epistle reading for the feast of the Epiphany.

***Philemon:*** In his letter to Philemon written from his Roman imprisonment, St. Paul appeals to his “beloved fellow worker” (1:1) to receive back his runaway slave Onesimus who had become a Christian, “no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother ... both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

(16) He asks Philemon to “receive him as you would receive me” (17) and offers to pay whatever debts Onesimus may have towards his master.