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## Paul's Communities and Controversies

### I. Thessalonica and I Thessalonians

#### Thessalonica

Capital city of Macedonia on the Egnatian Way

City in the Roman Empire with cult of Roma and of the emperor, amongst others

Paul visits in the late 40s/early 50s

Paul writes to this city, most likely from Corinth, first around 50/51 CE

#### I Thessalonians: Community

No scriptural quotations: does this suggest a Gentile audience? (I Thess 1.9)

Paul as a manual labourer (I Thess 2.9; 2 Thess 3.8)

Paul preaches the gospel and as a result some accept: Paul as apostle (I Thess 1.9; 2.1); God's word (I Thess 2.13); and the Spirit (I Thess 1.6)

A letter of friendship and/or exhortation and encouragement

#### I Thessalonians: Controversies

Written to address a specific situation about which Paul only knows from:

1. rumours, 2. Timothy

Possible temptation/conflict could be from:

1. social pressure, 2. persecution, 3. other missionaries

Three main issues in the Thessalonian community that Paul seeks to address:

1. concern for the death of loved ones before the Parousia

*Parousia (παρουσία) simply means arrival or presence and is a word used by Paul to describe Christ's return.*

2. idleness and poor attitudes towards work

3. misunderstanding of Paul's teachings

One overarching purpose of the letter is to restore hope (4.13)

The Parousia plays a prominent role in this letter: 1.10; 2.19; 3.13; 4.13-5.11; 5.23

## 2. Corinth and the Corinthian Situation

### Corinth

Corinth's Geography: Isthmus connecting mainland Greece/Achaea with Peloponnese  
Roman: massive Acropolis and Latin inscriptions (and language)  
Temples to Roman and Greek gods as well as a "synagogue of the Hebrews"  
Destroyed in 146 BCE after rebellion  
Refounded by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE and became capital of Achaea  
Trade route north/south by road and east/west by boat (*diolkos*)  
Large influx of non-Roman, Greek speaking migrants  
Host of the Isthmian Games  
Paul spent time in Corinth around 50/51 and again around 55/56 CE  
Initially travelled to Corinth via Athens  
Was a tentmaker, connecting with Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila who were Jews from  
Rome, expelled after the Edict of Claudius (49 CE) – I Cor 16.19; Acts 18.2-3  
Stayed initially for 18 months  
Paul brought before Proconsul Gallio (who served 51-52 CE per Delphi inscription)

### Corinthian Correspondence: Community

Paul's community was diverse and met in homes for meals and worship  
(I Cor 11.17-34; Rom 16.23)  
Size of the church thought to be 30-50 but as many as 100  
Paul names 17 individuals within the Corinthian community  
The social status of the community is much debated, see I Cor 1.26-28  
Varied backgrounds: synagogue leader/patron (Crispus); owner of large home  
(Gaius); *oikonomos* (Erastus); Jews (Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus); Romans  
(Fortunatus; Gaius, Titus Justus; Quartus); Greeks (Stephanus, Erastus,  
Achaicus)

### Corinthian Correspondence: Controversies

Key issues: unity and reconciliation  
Between Corinthian divisions and between Paul and the Corinthians  
Relation between divisions in 1-4 with the issues raised in chapters 5 and following  
A closer look at the Lord's Supper in I Corinthians (ch 11)  
A closer look at the issue of idol meat in I Corinthians (ch 8)  
Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians are called:  
"super apostles" (2 Cor 11.5; 12.11); "false apostles" (2 Cor 2.1; 7.2); and  
"ministers of Satan" (2 Cor 11.15)

### 3. Galatia and Galatians

#### **Galatia**

Circular letter to a region and not a city/town

Dating: two major questions:

1) location of Galatian churches and 2) relationship of 2.1-10 to Acts

Relation to Acts 11 (13-14) or to Acts 15, e.g. the position of the Jerusalem/apostolic council

South Galatia hypothesis (Acts 13 and Galatians composed 49-53 CE)

North Galatia hypothesis (Acts 15 and Galatians composed 50-57 CE)

#### **Galatians: Community**

Paul perhaps visited once before (4.13) and experienced physical illness/infirmity

He was warmly received (3.15; 4.12-20; 6.1)

Most likely addressed to Gentiles

Paul's Gospel to the Galatians: Adoption as people of God through Abrahamic faith in Christ

#### **Galatians: Controversies**

“Agitators” have come into the community, undermining Paul's teaching and authority (1.7; 5.10)

Identity of the agitators is much debated:

They are likely:

gifted rhetoricians and interpreters of Scripture;

claim close connection with Jerusalem church;

preach a form of Christianity which fronts Abrahamic descent in conjunction with the Mosaic law. They urge circumcision (6.12-13) and observance of Jewish days, months, etc (4.10; 21)

#### **Gobbet Practice: I Corinthians 1:10-13**

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

#### **Next Week: Paul's Christology**

Longer quotes from Paul's letters in the lecture:

**I Corinthians 1.26:** "Consider your own call...not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth..."

**I Corinthians 11.17-22:** "Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it." He continues: "When you come together it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry, and another goes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in, or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?"

**Galatians 6.12-13:** "Those who would pressure you into circumcision are merely interested in superficial conformity, in order that *they* may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ".

**Galatians 1.13:** "You have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the Church of God and tried to destroy it."

**Galatians 1.23:** "The Churches of Christ in Judaea only heard it said, He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith"

**Galatians 5.11:** "If I still preach persecution why am I still persecuted"

**Galatians 4.29:** "At that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit: it is the same now."