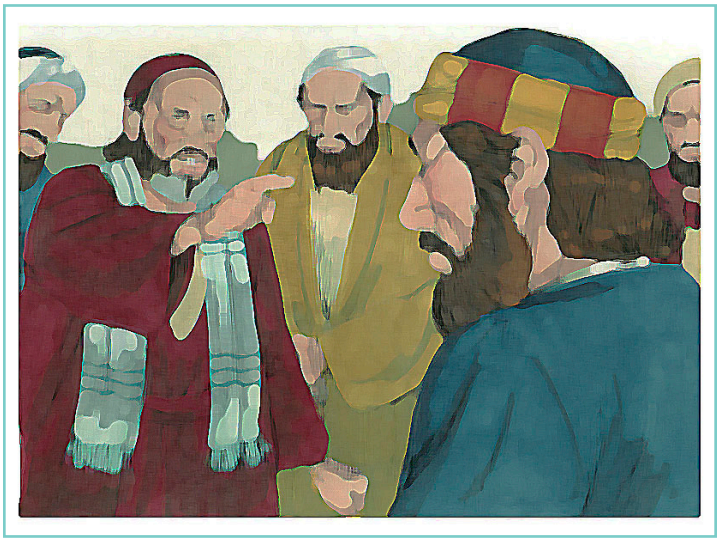
Lesson 6: Conflict



Introduction

Paul wrote letters to the churches that he had founded to keep in touch with believers and encourage them in their faith. Churches often had questions and problems with which they needed help. They looked to Paul for advice and instruction, especially in times of conflict.

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:1-25

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?



Where in the Bible?

The letters comprise most of the second half of the New Testament.

The New Testament: Churches

The first Apostles sent letters to believers in various towns and regions. The majority of these letters were written by the Apostle Paul to congregations he helped get started. Eventually, these writings were collected and became part of the New Testament.

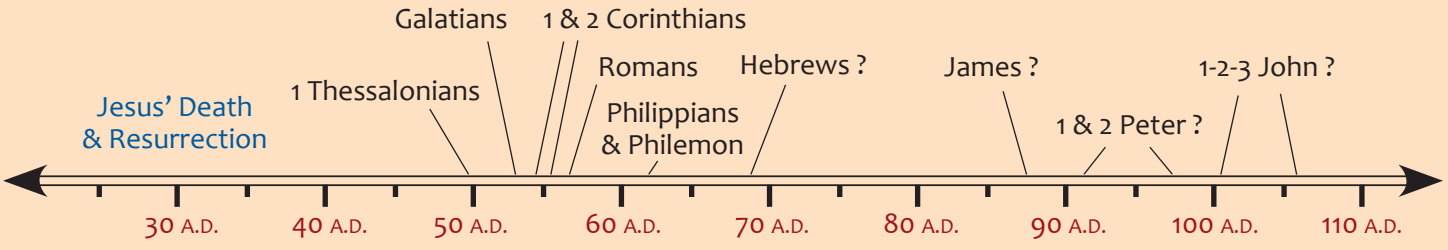
Biblical Background

Sometimes we look back on the early church and imagine it to be a "golden age" of faith and fellowship — in contrast to our own, where it is easy to see how the problems of the world seem to find their way into the Church and our relationships with others. But Scripture shows us that even in biblical days, Christian congregations experienced strife and conflict.

In some ways, it is reassuring to see that the early believers were sinners just like us and they didn't always agree. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit was at work in their lives together, just as the Spirit is for us.

When in Time?

The many letters collected in the New Testament were written over the decades following Jesus' death and resurrection. Since there are no actual dates of authorship listed within the Bible itself, scholars must make inferences based on internal references and external historical data. The timeline shows what some scholars believe is the order in which they were written.



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Discuss: 1 Corinthians 1:1-25

1. Scholars suggest that Paul wrote his letter from Ephesus, in Asia Minor. From what you read in 1 Corinthians 1, how did it appear that Paul learned of what was going on back in Corinth, Greece?

2. Read Acts 18:1-11, where Paul's initial visit to Corinth is described. Who are some of the people Paul met there? Do you get the impression that there were few or many believers in that city?

3. How would you describe the way Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians? Do they appear to have a good relationship? Why do you think they brought their questions to Paul, so far away?

4. Why does Paul say (v. 14) that he's glad he didn't do many baptisms in Corinth? Does this mean Paul was against baptism? What point is Paul making here?

5. In Galatians 5:20, Paul refers to factions (rivalries, dissensions, divisions) as evidence of human sin. What causes people to break up into groups or opposing parties? Why does this happen even in the Church?

6. In verses 16-17, Paul transitions from talking about disagreements to the subject of wisdom and the "foolishness" of the Gospel. What do these things have to do with each other? What is Paul getting at?

7. In what sense is the word of the cross "folly"? Why would Paul say this? What is he telling us about ourselves? What is he saying about the way God works among us?

8. Read Proverbs 1:2-7. The psalmist says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." How would you argue that we can't have true wisdom apart from faith?

Where in the World?

The Apostle Paul traveled all around the ancient world, spreading the message of Jesus in the lands around the Mediterranean Sea that were part of the Roman Empire. Shown on this map are some of the many cities Paul visited in his missionary travels.

a) Circle the cities shown on this map to which Paul sent his biblical letters. (For a hint, look at the names of New Testament books.)

b) Paul was originally from the city of Tarsus. Mark that city on the map with an **X**.

c) Connect with a line the two cities that are mentioned in today's Bible lesson.



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