

OUR *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

Lesson 75

Paul's Letters to the Corinthians

The Scripture Lesson *I and II Corinthians*

Very soon after Paul left Corinth, many problems began to arise in the church in that city.

When Paul heard about these things he was very sad. He wanted to help the Corinthians, of course, but he was far away. So he decided to teach them by *letters*.

Two of the letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians have been preserved for us in the Bible. Paul probably wrote many letters on his missionary journeys. That was a long time ago, however, and some of them were lost. Others were *not* lost. Do you know why that was? It was because God saw to it that they were saved, so that they could later become part of the Bible. He therefore gave those Scriptures by "inspiration." He inspired the writers. That is, He worked in them by His Holy Spirit so that what *they* wrote was *His Word*.

And that is how it went with Paul. He wrote a letter to the Corinthians about the problems in their church. *Paul* wrote the letter. But *God* worked in him so that when he was finished, it could be said that this is God's Word. And God did not let that letter become lost.

What did Paul write in that epistle to the Corinthians? There were many interesting things. Let us look at just one of them. Paul rebuked the

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Corinthians for how they used spiritual gifts. God gave many special gifts to the Corinthian believers — gifts like prophecy, wisdom, working of miracles, speaking in tongues. And the Corinthians liked that. They liked it especially much when they had gifts that everybody could *see* (like tongue-speaking), for they could then show off that gift before others. Those who had the gift wanted so much to use it that, at worship services, they would all begin talking at the same time, in other languages, to the profit of nobody.

Paul told them in his letter that this is very wrong. To make that clear, he pointed them to the human body. The body is made up of many parts, each part working for the good, not of itself, but of the whole body. The eye, for example, sees, not for its own good but for the benefit of the whole body. The same thing, Paul said, is true of the church. Every believer has a special place and special gifts. And he must use those gifts, not for *himself*, but for the good of his fellow believers.

The Corinthians needed that instruction. Do we, too? Do we not often wish that we had the kind of gifts that would make other people look up to us? We are as proud as the Corinthians. Paul has something to say to us. That is why his inspired letter was preserved by God to be part of our Bible.

Paul's Work in Asia

Acts 18:18-19:20

In our story today, Paul is on his way once more to the church in Antioch of Syria. It was this church, you remember, that had sent Paul on both of his missionary journeys. Paul had been gone for about two years, and he wanted to go back and report what great things God was doing among both the Jews and the Gentiles in faraway lands. Silas and Timothy were with him now, as were also his good friends Aquila and Priscilla.

On the way, they stopped for a short time in the city of Ephesus, which was the capital of the Roman province called Asia. There were many Jews living here. So Paul went to the synagogue to tell them about the coming of their Messiah. And they liked it. They asked him to stay with them *longer*. Paul couldn't do that. But he promised that, if the Lord willed, he would return to them after going to Jerusalem and Antioch.

Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, to wait there for him to return. And he himself, with Silas and Timothy, continued on their way to Jerusalem, and then to Antioch. Just a few weeks in Antioch was enough for Paul. He was eager to start another missionary journey — his third one. And, true to his word, after traveling through Asia Minor, he headed straight for Ephesus.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for three full years. And the fruit of his work there was astounding. He preached. He taught. And after teaching men in Ephesus, in the school of Tyrannus, he sent them out to preach in neighboring cities, so that soon Christian churches were springing up throughout the whole province of Asia!

Miracles helped the spread of the gospel. *Special* miracles they were, wrought by the hand of Paul in all of the neighboring cities — even though Paul himself stayed in Ephesus! They were miracles of *healing*. Paul would give one of his handkerchiefs or aprons to one of his helpers, and when that handkerchief or apron was brought to a sick person, that person would be made better — in an instant. Only *God* can do that. Paul must therefore be a man of God. His word must be *true*. So people *believed*.

Paul himself did miracles in Ephesus. He cast out devils. That was especially interesting to some Jewish magicians, exorcists, who cast out devils — for money. They pretended to have special magical powers. But then they saw Paul cast out demons — in the name of Jesus. They could see right away that Paul's power was far greater than *theirs*. And they figured that it must be because he used that name "Jesus." So they decided to try it themselves.

One day seven of these exorcists, all sons of Sceva, came to a man who had an evil spirit. Speaking to the evil spirit they said, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth, to come out of this man. But the evil spirit did not obey them. Instead the spirit said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" The evil spirit, you see, knew that he had to obey Paul, because Paul came with the authority of Jesus Christ. But that spirit did not have to obey these seven sons of Sceva, for they came not with *Christ's* authority, but with their *own*. So the spirit refused to come out of the man. And not only that, he gave to the man great strength so that he leaped on the seven and fought them so violently that they all fled from him, naked and wounded.

Soon everybody in town heard about what had happened to the Jewish exorcists. And they were all afraid. The experience of the sons of Sceva made it very clear that the name of Jesus could not be played with. And believers who still had books of magic realized how wicked it was to have anything to do with that kind of thing; so they came together and burned all of their books with fire.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

II Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Group B

II Timothy 3:16a "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. In I Corinthians, Paul gave the church at Corinth instruction concerning various problems that had arisen there.
- ___ 2. In the first part of I Corinthians 14 Paul urged all of the believers to exercise the gift of tongue-speaking when they gathered for public worship.
- ___ 3. In the last part of I Corinthians 14, Paul also had to tell the Corinthians that women should keep silent in the churches.
- ___ 4. In the beautiful 15th chapter of I Corinthians, Paul had to tell the Corinthians that there really will be, someday, a resurrection of the dead.
- ___ 5. Aquila and Priscilla, Paul's good friends in Corinth, went with him to Antioch at the end of his second missionary journey.
- ___ 6. On his third missionary journey, Paul returned soon to the city of Ephesus.
- ___ 7. During the time of Paul's labor in the province of Asia, sick people were cured when a handkerchief from Paul was brought to them.
- ___ 8. The seven sons of Sceva learned that they too had more power over demons when they cast them out in the name of Jesus whom Paul preached.
- ___ 9. After the sons of Sceva were put to shame, the Christians in Ephesus sold all of their books of magic.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. Can you give just one of the problems that arose in the church at Corinth after the apostle Paul left? How did Paul try to help the Corinthians with their problems?
2. What is the name of the New Testament book that contains Paul's answers to the problems in the church in Corinth? What do we mean when we say that the books of the Bible are given

to us by "divine inspiration"?

3. How can the church *today* be helped by reading a letter written about problems in a church almost 2,000 years ago?
4. Paul told the Corinthians that they were not using in a proper way their gift of speaking in other languages. Can you tell how Paul used the example of the human body to show how they *should* use their spiritual gifts?
5. Why did Paul want to go back to Antioch of Syria?
6. At what important city in the province of Asia did Paul stop on his way back to Antioch? What did he promise the Jews who lived there? What two friends did he leave in that city?
7. After a short visit to Jerusalem and Antioch, Paul returned to Ephesus. What was unusual about the miracles Paul worked at that time? How did those miracles help the spread of the gospel?
8. What did Jewish exorcists claim to be able to do? Why did they decide to try to use Paul's method in casting out demons? What happened when they did that?
9. What did many Christians do when they learned what happened to the seven sons of Sceva?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. On his missionary journeys Paul went from city to city preaching the glorious gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul must sometimes have been disappointed, as for example in Athens. At other times, as in Corinth, he had reason to be greatly encouraged; for there was rich fruit on his labors of 18 months in that city. Soon after he left, however, Paul was informed of a number of problems that had arisen in the Corinthian church. Unable to go to the Corinthians immediately to help them, Paul wrote to the saints in Corinth several letters, two of which we have in our New

Testament Scriptures. From I Corinthians we learn about some of the problems in the church at Corinth. There were _____ among them, with one group boasting to be of the party of Paul, another saying, I am of _____, another I of _____, and still another I of Christ. "Is Christ _____?" Paul asks. "Or was _____ crucified for you?" (I Cor. 1:11-13).

There were members of the church who would sue fellow Christians — brother going to _____ with _____, and that before the _____. "Why do ye not rather _____ wrong?" Paul asked (I Cor. 6:6, 7).

There were those in the church who would eat of things _____ in sacrifice unto _____, insisting on using their liberty even if it was a _____ to the weak. For himself, Paul said, "if meat make my _____ to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world _____" (I Cor. 8:4, 9, 13).

The Corinthians, said Paul, were "zealous of spiritual gifts"; but the gifts they liked best were those that they could use to show off how good they were. They enjoyed, for example, speaking in tongues — even though no one could understand what they were saying. Paul therefore admonished them to seek to excel to the _____ of the church. I would rather, Paul said, speak _____ words with my _____, that I might _____ others, than _____ words in an _____ tongue (I Cor. 14:12, 19).

There was controversy over whether women ought to have a voice in church affairs. Paul had to warn them that women must keep _____ in the churches (I Cor. 14:34).

There were even some in the Corinthian church who taught that there was no _____ of the dead. Paul declared to them that if the dead rise not, then is _____ not raised. And if Christ be not raised, then your _____ is vain; ye are yet in your _____ (I Cor. 15:12, 16, 17).

All of these things troubled the apostle Paul, so that he could testify to the Corinthians that he

had written to them out of much affliction and _____ of heart, with many _____ (II Cor. 2:4).

2. The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians thus gives us a vivid picture of life in one of the congregations of the early church. More importantly, however, it is filled with instruction that is applicable to the church in the entire new dispensation. That letter, along with the rest of the Scriptures, was given by _____ of God, and is therefore profitable for _____, for reproof, for _____, for instruction in _____, that the man of God may be _____, thoroughly _____ unto all _____ works (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

3. When Paul left Corinth, his good friends Priscilla and _____ went with him. And when he came to _____ he _____ them there. Perhaps they established themselves in business in Ephesus, with a view to Paul's return to that city. For though Paul insisted that he must by all _____ keep the _____ that cometh in _____, he promised the Jews in Ephesus that he would _____ again to them, if _____ will (Acts 18:18-21).

4. Paul's ship then brought him to Caesarea, the Mediterranean port of Palestine, and after Paul went up and _____ the church in Jerusalem, he went down to _____, the calling church for this missionary to the Gentiles. Since Paul had been away on his second journey for more than two years, he had much to tell the church in Antioch. But after what was probably only a short time there, Paul again _____, thus beginning his third missionary journey. He took the land route into Asia Minor this time, and revisited the churches in _____ and Phrygia in order, _____ the disciples (Acts 18:22, 23).

5. At this point in Luke's narrative we are brought back to the time shortly after Paul left Ephesus in order to go to Jerusalem. At that time a certain _____ named Apollos, who was born at

_____ in Egypt, an _____ man and mighty in the _____, came to Ephesus. He was one who _____ diligently the things of the Lord; but he knew only the baptism (that is, the teaching) of _____. He knew nothing therefore of the great significance of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. When he came to Ephesus he began soon to speak _____ in the _____ (Acts 18:24-26).

6. Aquila and Priscilla, who were living then in Ephesus, must have been pleased to hear the truth being preached in a Jewish synagogue. But, having themselves been instructed by Paul, they understood very quickly that this gifted teacher still had some important things to learn. So they invited him into their home and _____ unto him the way of God more _____. Soon afterwards Apollos was for some reason _____ to pass into _____. There, too, Apollos was a great help to the believers; and, besides, he mightily _____ the Jews, in the synagogues, showing by the _____ that Jesus was _____ (Acts 18:26-28).

7. Paul, meanwhile, arrived again in Ephesus. Shortly after his arrival he found certain _____ (that is, people who confessed Christ) who, like Apollos, needed instruction in the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, and of His coming again in the Spirit at Pentecost. After Paul taught them and laid his _____ on them, the _____ came upon them and they spake with _____ and prophesied (Acts 19:1, 6).

8. For the space of _____ months Paul was able to speak boldly in the _____ in Ephesus, disputing with the Jews the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were _____ and spake _____ of that way before the _____, Paul separated the disciples from the synagogue, and he began disputing _____ in the _____ of one Tyrannus. The activities of Paul and his assistants were not, however, limited to the city

of Ephesus. The city served as a base for missionary work throughout western Asia Minor, so that, after the space of two _____, all who dwelt in the province of _____ heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and _____ (Acts 19:8-10). In writing to the Corinthians Paul declared concerning this field that "a great _____ and effectual is _____ unto me" (I Cor. 16:8, 9).

9. During Paul's two years in Ephesus God wrought _____ miracles by the hands of the apostle. The miracles of healing were extraordinary not so much in the cures themselves as in how they were worked. Paul was not himself able to travel all around western Asia Minor. But his assistants did. And, to add authority to the instruction they brought from Paul, they also worked miracles in such a way that they were clearly connected to the apostle. For from Paul they brought to the sick _____ or aprons, and the _____ departed from them, and the _____ went out of them (Acts 19:11, 12).

10. The miracles that were worked by the hand of Paul, either from a distance or in his presence, were always attributed to the power of the Lord Jesus. Noticing this, some wandering Jewish exorcists concluded that there must be some mysterious power in the name of Jesus. They therefore decided to attempt it themselves. When one who was afflicted with an evil spirit was brought to them, they tried to cast out the demon by saying, "We _____ you by _____ whom Paul _____." The evil spirit however replied, "_____ I know, and _____ I know; but who are _____?" To make matters worse for the seven sons of _____, the man who had the evil spirit _____ on them and _____ them so that they fled out of that house naked and _____ (Acts 19:13-16).

11. What happened to the seven sons of Sceva was soon known to all the Jews and Greeks dwelling at _____. And _____ fell on them all, for it was clear that Paul alone, in

the name of Jesus, had command over the world of spirits. Among the general population, therefore, the name of the Lord Jesus was _____. But the incident also had its effect on believers. Apparently many of them, after their conversion, had not abandoned their superstitions and their interest in magic arts. Now they were ashamed. So they took their books of magic formulas and _____ them. Counting the price of all the books, they found it to be fifty _____ pieces of silver. So _____ grew the Word of God and _____ (Acts 19:17-20).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What was the purpose of Paul in writing I Corinthians?
2. If I Corinthians is really *Paul's* attempt to answer the problems in the church in Corinth, how can it still be true that I Corinthians is *God's* Word?
3. In I Corinthians 5:9 Paul refers to an earlier epistle that he had written to the Corinthian Christians. Why was I Corinthians preserved for us in the Bible, while that earlier epistle of Paul was not?
4. Read I Corinthians 8:13. No longer today do we have to think about meat offered to idols. Can you think of a way in which we can nevertheless follow the good example Paul sets for us in that verse from I Corinthians?
5. What problem in the church of Corinth was Paul correcting by his admonition in I Corinthians 14:27? If tongue-speaking has ceased, does this admonition of Paul have any meaning for us today?
6. What did Paul mean when he wrote to the church in Corinth, "Let your women keep silence in the churches"? Does that rule still hold today?
7. Read I Corinthians 15:36, 37. Can you explain how that illustration demonstrates the foolishness of those who, according to verse 35, scoff at the idea of a resurrection of the body?
8. What indication is there in II Corinthians 1:1 that, during the 18 months Paul spent in Corinth, the missionaries did not limit their labors to the city itself?
9. A stopover in Ephesus was probably a necessary part of a trip from Corinth, by sea, to Caesarea. But we learn from Acts 18:19 that Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus. Does that, do you suppose, give any clue as to Paul's advance plans for a third missionary journey?
10. A learned Jew like Apollos, in a city like Alexandria, must have heard about Jesus of Nazareth, about His death and reported resurrection. Can you explain, then, what the limitations of his knowledge were if he knew "only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25)?
11. When Paul returned to Ephesus he found there "certain disciples" (Acts 19:1). What can we say about the faith, or beliefs, of these 12 men if they are called disciples?
12. Read Acts 19:2. Does the answer of these 12 disciples mean that they did not know the doctrine of the Trinity?
13. The church at Colosse was very likely founded during the time of Paul's stay in Ephesus. What evidence do you find in Colossians 2:1 that Paul did not establish the church there personally?
14. Read I Corinthians 16:8, 9. Read also Acts 19:10, and then find the province of Asia on a map showing Paul's third missionary journey. What, now, can you say about the extent and fruit of Paul's labors during the two years he spent in Ephesus?
15. What purpose do you think was served by cures wrought through Paul's aprons?
16. Can you explain why the people of Ephesus would be filled with "fear" (see Acts 19:17) when they heard about what happened to the seven sons of Sceva?
17. How does the book-burning, of Acts 19:18, 19, show that the experience of the sons of Sceva served also for the good of Christians in Ephesus?