



UNIT D: Applied Theology – the letters of Paul

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Unit D Applied Theology – The Letters of Paul

Aims of the Module:

- To introduce Paul and his Letters
- To begin to read the Letters as “Applied Theology”.
- To explore some of the specific issues addressed by Paul in his Letters
- To think about how Paul’s Letters can help us apply the gospel to our own issues and circumstances.

Introduction to the Unit

This unit will enable you to look at some of Paul’s letters to the recently formed Christian communities. You are encouraged to read – or listen to- the whole letter each week. You will be familiar with parts of them from the short passages read in church. Reading the whole letter will help you see these passages in context and give you a better of idea of Paul’s intentions.

The sessions will not be looking at each epistle in the order in which it was written: we cannot be sure of that in any case. They will, instead, tackle the subjects which the young church had to resolve:

The relationship with Judaism – the letter to the Galatians

The expectation of Jesus’ return – the letter to the Thessalonians

The identity of Jesus Christ – the letter to the Colossians

How to live a Christ-like life – the letter to the Corinthians *and*

Pulling it all together – the letter to the Ephesians.

If you have further time after reading the letter you may want to look at some of the recommended reading and further study. BUT REMEMBER, the believers who first received Paul's letters did not have access to commentaries on them! Some of them will have known some of the Jewish Scriptures - what we call the Old Testament - and they will have heard accounts of Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection. They may have heard preaching and teaching from Paul or other Church leaders. But that's all.

Do make sure you read Paul's letters first, and think about the questions raised, before you turn to any other background reading.



Resource Section: Please read the following introduction to Paul before Session 1

1. Paul wrote letters to churches and to individual Christians, and in the New Testament we have copies of many (perhaps most) of the letters he wrote. The letters are also called 'epistles' from the Greek for letter.
2. In the letters, Paul answers particular situations, and his theology emerges as he does so. As we read, we see him applying the gospel of Christ to the practical issues faced by the churches. A letter is often a response to a particular situation, and Paul didn't set the agenda.
3. We don't have copies of everything Paul wrote. "First" Corinthians refers to an earlier letter – "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons" (1 Corinthians 5.9). In the letter to the Colossians he asks his readers to "See that you read also the letter from Laodicea" (Colossians 4.16).
4. Paul was brought up as a Greek speaking Jew and trained as a Pharisee. He is from the Diaspora, the Jews dispersed throughout the known world. He describes himself as "circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless". (Philippians 3.5-6). Elsewhere he writes: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors." (Galatians 1.14)
5. Paul had an experience of the risen Christ. The most well known account of this is not by Paul, but comes from Acts. "As he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." (Acts 9.3-6). Paul's own references to this are much less explicit: "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (1 Corinthians 15.9).
6. Paul claimed to be an apostle. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (Romans 1.1); "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1 Corinthians 1.1); "Paul an apostle -- sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (Gal 1.1).
7. Neither the Letters or the Gospels are dated. This makes it difficult to put them into chronological order, and any suggested ordering is based on numerous deductions and assumptions.

The following timeline is one possible reconstruction.

30	Crucifixion of Jesus
32	Conversion of Paul
35	Paul's first visit to Jerusalem
40s	Paul's mission and teaching in Antioch
48	Jerusalem Council (Gal 2 / Acts 15)
50-52	Paul's mission to Corinth and the Aegean 1 & 2 Thessalonians Galatians
52	Jerusalem visit
53-55	Paul's mission to Ephesus and the Aegean 1 & 2 Corinthians <i>Philippians, Colossians and Philemon? Or later.</i>
56	Further mission in the Aegean Romans
57	Paul arrested in Jerusalem
57-59	Paul in prison in Caesarea
59-60	Journey to Rome
60-62	Paul in prison in Rome <i>Philippians, Colossians and Philemon? Or earlier.</i> <i>Ephesians – or later</i>
62-63	<i>Possible temporary release and further mission?</i>
62-64	Probable date of Paul's execution <i>Ephesians? Letters to Timothy and Titus?</i>

There is no consensus view on when the Gospels were written. There are disagreements about which was written first, though it is generally accepted that John was the last to be completed.

If Mark is the earliest, then possible dates would place

Mark	in the 60s or early 70s AD
Matthew	in the 70s or early 80s
Luke and Acts	in the 80s
John	in the 90s.

Whatever date is chosen for the Gospels, what is clear is that most of the Letters, by Paul and others, were written BEFORE the Gospels

The uncertainty about the date of Paul's Letters is reflected in similar uncertainty about the date of his journeys. The following maps are one reconstruction and are taken from <http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN092MAPS1.htm>.

Paul's First Missionary Journey



Paul's Second Missionary Journey





Before Session 1, please read the letter to the Galatians. *If* you are short of time please read **Galatians 2.11-21 and Galatians 5. 1-6, 13-14.**

Ask yourself: why does Paul believe he needs to write to the Christians in Galatia?

Additional notes: “It seems that there was a very strong movement among the followers of Jesus to convert Gentiles [non-Jews] into Jews. Jesus was a Jew and had attracted many Jewish followers. Following Christ was a Jewish movement; he was a Jewish Messiah. Surely these new converts would want to live the life that God had said was pleasing to Him!

But Paul believed that the Gentiles were alive with the new life of forgiveness, acceptance and transformation and that that they didn't need to obey the Jewish Law. So he brought this idea to the leaders in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem council agreed that Gentiles could become Christians without becoming Jews first (Acts 15).

You can get some idea of Paul's passion when you read the letter in Galatians. A group of his converts had decided that they want to be circumcised and Paul is absolutely furious about this because he feels it compromises their very nature as Christians.”

From: Mark Goodacre, University of Birmingham)
http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/paul_1.shtml

Paul's letters contain a substantial amount of criticism of "works of the law" (e.g. Galatians 2.16). Since the Reformation, Protestant and Reformed Churches have usually understood "works of the law" as referring to human effort to do good works in order to meet God's standards.

In the 1970's an alternative interpretation emerged. Some scholars argue that the phrase "works of the law" was used by Paul to refer to the practices adopted by Jews as signs of the covenant between God and Israel. According to this view, the "Law" that Paul has in mind is the Law of Moses, as recorded in the Torah. And the "works" (practices) Paul is concerned about are circumcision, dietary laws, and the observance of special days. (You can compare this view with Paul's words in Romans 7:7).

According to this view, in Galatians Paul is arguing that Gentile converts can be accepted as Christians without circumcision and the other requirements of Torah. He pointed out that if these regulations were necessary, this would imply (i) that faith in Christ were not sufficient (ii) the gospel is not for all, but only those who become Jews.

In this Letter, Paul declares as "the truth of the Gospel" (v14) that "a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (v16). He then applies this gospel principle to the situation in Galatia.

SESSION 1 The Letter to the Galatians - Law and Faith



Opening worship



Tutor Input / Introduction

Your tutor will introduce the session, explaining why the relationship with Judaism was such a live issue for the young church.



Group Work

In small groups, try to answer some of the following questions. Tutors may wish to choose which questions to concentrate on, and/or allocate questions to each group.

Galatians 2.11-21

11 But when Cephas¹ came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; **12** for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. **13** And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. **14** But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" **15** We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; **16** yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. **17** But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! **18** But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. **19** For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; **20** and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. **21** I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

¹ Cephas is Peter, in Greek.

- a. Paul accuses Cephas (Peter) and Barnabas of hypocrisy because “I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel” v14. Can you spell out precisely why Paul made a stand against Peter and the others?
- b. What do you think is the key verse in Galatians 2.11-21? Try to spell out clearly why you have chosen a particular verse.
- c. What do you think it would mean to one of the Galatians to be “crucified with Christ” v19 ?
- d. What does it mean to you?



Refreshments



Paul is quite clear that Christians do not need to obey the whole Jewish Law. Instead, “the only thing that counts is faith working through love.” (Gal 5.6). At the same time, he insists: “do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence” (Gal 5.13).

Again, try to answer some of the following questions. This can be done by the group as a whole, or in pairs or small groups.

Read Galatians 5.1-6, 13-14

1 For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. **2** Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. **3** Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. **4** You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. **5** For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. **6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. **14** For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."



Before next week, please read the first and second letters to the Thessalonians. *If* you are short of time please read 1 Thess. 4.13-5.11 and 2 Thess. 3.6-15

In these passages we read Paul's responses to some issues in the Thessalonian church. What do you think were the questions?

Additional Notes: Some scholars believe that the two Letters to the Thessalonians are the earliest of Paul's Letters to have come down to us. According to Acts 17.1-2 Paul had visited Thessalonica only briefly, preaching in the synagogue "for three Sabbaths" before moving on. Later he sent Timothy to visit the Christians there (1 Thessalonians 3.1-5). His first Letter is written after Timothy has returned and reported back to Paul.

In the first three chapters Paul writes about his thanksgiving and prayers for the Thessalonian Christians. He praises them for their faith and love:

- "in every place your faith in God has become known" (1.8)
- "Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love" (3.6)

But the Letter is not only a letter of thanksgiving. In the second half of the Letter Paul seeks to reassure the Thessalonian Christians about the fate of those who have died in Christ. They had been, it seems, expecting Jesus to return to earth in the very near future. Paul writes about the coming of the Lord, and links this to the need for Christians to grow in holiness.

- "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (4.13)
- "May he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (3.13)

But it seems that the Letter may have raised as many questions as it answered. A second Letter follows shortly after the first, and gives further advice about the issues that troubled the Church.

SESSION 2

The Letters to the Thessalonians – Waiting for the coming of the Lord



Opening worship



In pairs or small groups

- Without looking at any notes or reference materials, can you remember what is said in either the Nicene Creed or the Apostles Creed about the return of the Lord?
- Can you recall any other texts, e.g. words from services or from hymns or worship songs, that say something about the return of the Lord?



In small groups, try to answer some of the following questions. Tutors may wish to choose which questions to concentrate on, and/or allocate questions to each group.

1 Thessalonians 1.9-10

9 For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, **10** and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.11

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. **14** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. **15** For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. **16** For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! **4** But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; **5** for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. **6** So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; **7** for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

a. What does Paul say in 1 Thessalonians 1.9-10 about the (future) coming of Christ?

b. What does this Letter say about those who have died in Christ?

c. Paul says his teaching comes "by the word of the Lord" (4.15). It is not entirely clear what he means, but it may refer to a vision or prophecy. The language he uses is very vivid – trumpets, clouds, labour pains, light and darkness. Do you think this sort of visionary language is poetical and metaphorical, or should we understand it as a more literal description of what will take place?

d. Try to summarise Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.11 using 20 words or less!



Refreshments



Before Session 3, please read the letter to the Colossians **if** you are short of time please read Colossians 1.13-20 and 3.1-17.

Introduction to Colossians

Both the account of Paul's conversion in Acts and his own comments in his epistles suggest that a change in his attitude to the identity of Jesus Christ was crucial to his change of heart. In Acts 9:5, we read that when the light appeared from heaven and the voice spoke to him Paul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" and the reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." It is the person of Christ that first confronts him.

From his conversion onwards, Paul regarded himself as a witness of the risen Christ: "Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Hence Jesus was not a past prophet — much less an impostor — but a present Lord and Saviour. Any thoughts about Jesus as a 'pretender', or as someone misrepresented or misunderstood by his followers, gave way to an unconditional acceptance of his Messiahship. "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer" (2 Corinthians 5:16).

For Paul, the person of Christ is central to Christian life and faith. In the Letter to the Colossians, Paul writes about who Jesus is (this is known as 'Christology') and goes on to explain how this can be applied to his readers' lives.

SESSION 3 The Letter to the Colossians – Who is Jesus Christ?



Opening worship



Make a list of *at least* ten names for Jesus, such as shepherd, friend, saviour. The tutor will lead a reflection on how each provides a different way of understanding who Jesus is.



Group Work

The group work for this Session is in two parts. We will first look at Colossians 1. 13-20, then 3.1-17.

In the first passage the focus is mainly on the Person of Christ. Paul wants his readers to be able to answer the question: Who is Jesus? The second passage focuses on our Christian life. How does what we believe shape how we live?

In small groups, try to answer some of the following questions. Tutors may wish to choose which questions to concentrate on, and/or allocate questions to each group.

Colossians 1.13-20

13 God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; **16** for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. **17** He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18** He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The language Paul uses can be quite “dense”, with a lot of information in a few words. It can be helpful to focus on the verbs in the passage (God has **rescued** us and **transferred** us, for example), or on the nouns (the Son is the **image** of the invisible God, the **firstborn**).

In Chapter 1 of Genesis we are told that God said, "Let us make humans, male and female in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion... (Gen 1:26). **“Col 1. 15 says that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God.** What does this tell us about Jesus – and about ourselves?”

a.

b. What does v 19 tell us about “Who Jesus is’ ?

c. What answer are we given in verses 19 and 20 to the question “Why did God become a human being?”

d. How might you re-phrase verses 19 and 20, if you wanted to explain the significance of Jesus to a friend or neighbour?



Refreshments



Again, try to answer some of the following questions. This can be done by the class as a whole, or in pairs or small groups.

Colossians 3.1-17

1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, **3** for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. **5** Put to

death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). **6** On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. **7** These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. **8** But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. **9** Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices **10** and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all! **12** As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. **13** Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. **14** Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. **15** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. **16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. **17** And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- a. We have looked at what Colossians tells us about “who Jesus is”. What does 3.1-10 have to say about the implications of this for our personal behaviour?

- b. What does 3.11-17 have to say about the implications of “who Jesus is” for our life together?

- c. We have said that Paul’s Letters are examples of Applied Theology. See if you can identify a pair of verses, one from each of our two passages Colossians 1 13-20 and 3.1-17, that show how a theological statement can be applied to an issue of personal or community living:

Examples of a statement: He has rescued us from the power of darkness 1.13

Of the application: Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly 3.5

<i>Colossians 1 13-20</i>	
<i>Statement</i>	<i>Application</i>
<i>Colossians 3.1-17</i>	
<i>Statement</i>	<i>Application</i>



Closing worship



Before Session 4 please read the first letter to the Corinthians. If you are short of time, please read 1 Cor 12: 12-27 and 1 Cor 15.

Background Notes on Corinth

Paul spent a relatively long term in the sea port of Corinth – up to 18 months. He had gone there “in weakness and with much fear and trembling” (1Cor. 2:3) but when he arrived he had a vision from God: “Do not be afraid speak and do not be silent. I am with you and no one shall harm you by any attack; I have many people in this city’ (Acts 18: 9).

Paul had reason to fear that his mission would be hard. Corinth was an ancient city of Greece, long established and with a centuries-old reputation for luxury and imorality. As a commercially successful port it attracted a wide variety of people from many countries to trade and to enjoy themselves. There was a synagogue there, which Paul visited to begin his work and there may have been a few followers of Jesus already. After the synagogue authorities decided they didn’t want Paul preaching there anymore he declared that he will go only to the Gentiles (Acts 18: 6). The fellowship of Christian believers in Corinth which Paul established was mostly Gentile.

After he left them, there were several letters sent and received between Paul and the young church. There is one letter of Paul’s that has not survived, which he refers to (1Cor 5: 1-11). Then he had a communication from ‘Chloe’s family’ so the letter we know as the first letter to the Corinthians appears to be a response to the news contained in that.

‘It has been brought to my notice by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you.’ (1 Cor 1: 11)

What were these quarrels about?

Beliefs: 1 Cor 1:18-25 and 3: 1-23 In this vibrant port city there were plenty of travelling speakers, new ideas and alternative lifestyles. The young Christian community had to work out who to believe. Paul claims that the Christian faith is different from all the other religious and philosophical ideas. It is founded by Jesus Christ crucified. Paul warns the Corinthian believers about being impressed by the latest ideas: in fact they have inherited every good gift and are immensely valuable in God’s eyes. They don’t need to try to compete with the other citizens of Corinth or with each other.

One area of belief is highlighted by Paul as extremely important – belief in the resurrection of those who had died and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15: 1-58). Paul writes that no compromise is possible: Jesus has been raised in bodily form and so will they. “Stand firm and immovable! (1Cor 15: 58)”

Relationships 1 Cor 5 1–13 What should be done if a member of the Christian family acts in exactly the ways that non believers in the city are behaving? Paul is in no doubt – “have nothing to do with any so called Christian who leads an immoral life, or is extortionate, idolatrous, a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler; with anyone like that you should not even eat (1Cor 5: 11-13). These young Christians must realise that deciding to follow Jesus means a change in lifestyle as well as in beliefs.

There was an opposite extreme: some in Corinth appeared to think that because of the sexual immorality that was prevalent in the city it was better that they remained celibate even within marriage (1 Cor 7: 1). But Paul does not agree with them and argues that within marriage husband and wife might refrain from sexual relationships for a time, for prayer, for instance, but their bodies belong to each other and they should not deny each other pleasure. (As in other cases Paul is remarkably even-handed, treating men and women alike).

Paul's words about the appropriate headwear at worship ends with the words; "Judge for yourselves: is it fitting for a woman to pray to God bareheaded (1 Cor 11: 13)?" Men, he says, should uncover their heads while women should cover them. He wrote as though the meaning of these customs are obvious to those who listened to his words. Some have interpreted passages like this to be binding on them, while others had said that such instructions only apply when the customs which they describe are also practised in their own culture. There is no doubt, however, of Paul's condemnation of the practice of bringing food to the Lord's supper and of eating it before the poorer members, probably those who had longer hours to work, have arrived. This demonstrates contempt of the Church of God (1 Cor 11:22).

How to live the Spirit filled life The new believers had to learn how to balance that freedom they had discovered in Christ such as equality between men and women, the freedom from some cultural conventions and the exciting experience of the power of the Holy Spirit with the responsibility of being Christ's witnesses in this city.

The issue of whether or not to eat food which had been offered to idols was a real one in this pagan city. The meat from animals which had been slaughtered in the temple could find its way back onto the market or a Christian might be invited to a neighbour's house and not know where the food had come from. Paul echoes Jesus' injunction to the 70 disciples to eat what is set before them wherever they are offered hospitality when giving advice to a Christian invited to a meal in a non-Christian home (Luke 10: 8).

Paul treats the issue of eating this food as one of care and concern for fellow believers. After all, Christians will know that there are no other gods and an idol has no real existence (1Cor 8:4). But if a less experienced or more scrupulous believer was worried it was right and proper to avoid the meat out of concern for them. Attendance at the temple was another matter. How, Paul asks, could someone join in the table of the Lord one evening and the table of a demon another evening (1Cor 10:21)? In the context of Corinthian society this might mean that a Christian believer would have to turn down invitations to events at the temple which could have become useful business or social contacts.

Some Corinthian believers appeared to have thought that the clearest sign of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was the spectacular signs such as the impressive gifts of speaking in tongues. Paul once again encourages the community to consider the needs of others and to aspire to possess the gifts which help the community. So, rather than seeking gifts which indicate their own relationship with God, such as speaking in tongues, they are to seek those fruits which build up the community: faith, hope and charity. The passage about love (1 Corinthians 13), is to be read in the context of Paul's encouragement to this young community to see themselves as part of the Body of Christ, the fullest expression of the

presence of God on earth. They were no longer to act as individuals responsible solely for their own lives but consider the good of the whole fellowship.

It is in this context that the practical matter about raising money for the believers in Jerusalem arises. The Christians had asked Paul how they could help contribute to the fund that Paul was organising amongst the Gentiles. The Jerusalem church was largely Jewish and this expression of support for them signified the unity that each found in Jesus Christ despite their disagreements about Christian practice.

Session 4 First letter to the Corinthians – Faith and everyday life



Opening Worship



Group Work: In what ways does the description of Corinth in the preparatory reading sound like the societies in which members of the group live and work?



Tutor input Paul refers to Jesus and his ministry more often in this letter than on any other occasion and there are several references given in the preparatory reading. He also gives a clear account of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ with a summary of the occasions on which had appeared after his death (1 Cor 11:23-26, 1 Cor 15:3-7). The tutor should look at these passages with the group and summarise Paul's teaching about resurrection in 1 Cor 15.



Group work The Corinthian Christians found it hard to hold on and defend these beliefs in the surrounding culture. In small groups identify any parts of the beliefs that the tutor has outlined which are difficult to believe or defend now.

Refreshments



The tutor will look at 1 Cor 12: 12-27 with the group.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this.



Before next week: Please read the letter to the Ephesians. *If* you are short of time please read Ephesians 2.14 - 3.6.

Ask yourself: For what kind of people will this be good news?

Additional notes

According to Acts, Paul first visited Ephesus for three months (Acts 18:19–21.) He returned a year later, staying for three years (Acts 19), teaching in synagogues and lecture halls (Acts 19.8-9). Ephesus became a centre of missionary activity (Acts 19.26).

Paul is widely believed to have written the Letter to the Ephesians when he was a prisoner under house arrest in Rome. The other “Prison Epistles” are Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. (Colossians shares many themes with Ephesians).

Some early manuscripts of the Letter are missing the reference to Ephesus in 1.1. Some scholars believe this is because “Ephesians” was a circular letter, copies of which were also distributed to several other early Christian churches.

Our study of Galatians showed us some of the problems that arose in the early Church between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Church in Ephesus also included both Jewish and Gentile Christians, and an important theme in the Letter is unity in Christ.

In his Letter to the Ephesians Paul spells out what God has done for both Jews and Gentiles in Christ. He then applies this by providing some practical guidelines for Christian living. The language of Ephesians is vivid, and includes some memorable images, such as the Church as Christ’s body (Ephesians 4.4-6), and the “armour of God” (Ephesians 6.11-12).

Some of the advice given to husbands and wives is controversial (Ephesians 5.22-33). Perhaps Paul intended his teaching to be provoke controversy among the recipients of his letter? The pairings in chapter 6 are equally challenging. Husbands, parents and slave owners are lulled into a false sense of security - and then challenged hard!

Paul did not himself write all the letters that bear his name. A clear example is the letter to the Romans. “I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.” (Rom.16.22). In the ancient world, it was not unusual to use a scribe to write on your behalf. Some letters name more than one person as the author e.g. the letter to the Philippians begins “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1.1).

In Paul’s time it was common for someone to write under the name of someone else. This was not seen as deceitful, but as a mark of respect for the authority for the named person. Some scholars think that the letter to the Ephesians, which is a well-developed summary of Paul’s theology, may have been written by one of his companions or proteges.

SESSION 5

The Letter to the Ephesians – The Church as the body of Christ



Opening worship



Tutor Input / Introduction. There are several strong images in the letter to the Ephesians, including the armour of God and the Body of Christ. The tutor will lead a reflection on the use and power of figurative language



Group Work In small groups, try to answer some of the following questions. Tutors will select which questions they want to concentrate on, and may allocate questions to each group.

Ephesians 2.14-16

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— **12** remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. **15** He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, **16** and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

- c. Given that Christian holiness is connected with the “body” concept in this passage what would you say to someone who says ' I can follow Jesus' teaching on my own. I don't need to mix with other Christians'?

 The tutor may lead a consideration of what the unit has taught group members about how to apply theology to practical issues?



Closing worship

ASSIGNMENT – Modules C and D

You can choose to do an assignment on either this module (Applied Theology – the Letters of Paul) or the other New Testament module (Continuing examination of the Old Testament and developing knowledge of the Gospels).

Choose ONE of the following:

Using the material studied in Unit C-

1. Imagine that the sermons for the next 6 weeks in your church will be on one of the Gospels and will be delivered by 6 different preachers. Prepare, in bullet points, a guide to this Gospel that describes how it is distinctive from the others and outlines the main themes.
2. Prepare a short talk, lasting approximately 10 minutes, on an encounter that Jesus had with one or more of the Jewish religious groups present in his day. Your talk should explain the beliefs of members of this group and explain the words spoken and actions that take place. It can be in the first person, but doesn't have to be. Your talk may be presented as either a transcript or an mp3 recording.
3. Produce a portfolio, combining up to 12 images, poetry and your own reflections, to illustrate Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God in Matthew 13.
4. Write an essay of between 1500 and 2000 words explaining why "The Son of Man must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Luke 9: 22

Using the material studied in Unit D-

5. Prepare a leaflet that describes in words (and pictures if you like), who Jesus is. The leaflet is for someone who has no knowledge of Jesus. It should cover two sides of A4 paper, folded in half or as a trifold leaflet.
6. "We are the Body of Christ." Prepare a talk for your PCC on how this phrase, often used to introduce the Peace during worship on Sundays, can be lived out during the rest of the week. Your talk should last for approximately 10 minutes and may be presented as either a transcript or an mp3 recording.
7. Write an essay of between 1500-2000 words on the question: 'What have you learned from Paul about the relationship between what we believe and how we act?'
8. Write an essay of between 1500-2000 words on the question: 'How would the church be different today if we didn't have Paul's letters?'

Unit E – Living Spirituality

Introductory Notes

This unit is different from the others in that it focuses on offering resources on the theme of Spirituality. Students are invited to explore different approaches, but none of the unit is assessed.

There will be background source material and you are encouraged to experience a different way of prayer and reflection each week. The group sessions will give you an opportunity to talk about your reactions to this and to learn from others.

The title of this unit is '*Living Spirituality*'. We have seen already that the Christian faith is a living and loving relationship with God as Trinity. We are invited into that dynamic relationship, at the heart of which is the love which draws Father, Son and Holy Spirit together in an intimacy which neither excludes nor possesses. 'Spirituality' is a word which is used a lot today, but in this unit, when we speak of spirituality, we mean the various ways in which we express a relationship with the living God.

Christian spirituality includes a number of things, particularly:

- The beliefs we hold about God and our relationship with him
- The way we express our care for ourselves in mind, body and spirit.
- The understanding we have of the earth, and human relationships
- The practices and disciplines we pursue such as worship, prayer and reading the Scriptures
- The values which our daily lives reflect at work, at home and in our communities.

'Spirituality' is something that we live. It is not a set of beliefs prescribed by the Christian faith, or a set of religious rules which we are supposed to keep. It is the way in which we integrate every part of our lives, from prayer to diet and exercise; from the way we speak to our neighbours to the leisure pursuits we choose. Spirituality is the lifeblood of our daily choices and priorities and the 'spectacles' through which we interpret everything around us. Our spirituality is what gives life its distinctive perspective; it is the light by which we see, the music we dance to, the place of integration in which we make sense of the direction and purpose of our lives.

Many people find the idea of spirituality attractive but have no idea how to build it into their lives. They know that they are looking for a faith which is not just about beliefs but about ways of living. For some, the practices and disciplines which the church engages in may not seem immediately accessible, helpful or relevant. For those who have no experience of prayer, Scripture, or liturgy, the world of the church can seem more like a foreign culture than an invitation to intimacy with God.

Can we discover a 'spirituality' which draws us into that intimate encounter with God? Can we look at the practices which the church has developed and find in them, not a set of rules, but an invitation to an integrated life? That is, a life where faith in God and the daily world of choices, work, and relationships are not in separate compartments but flow together seamlessly, so that faith renews daily life, and daily life expresses and demonstrates faith.

How does the unit work?

This unit invites you to look at the ways Christians have expressed 'spirituality' and it suggests lots of practical ways you can explore these for yourself. You will gain the most from this unit if you put aside for now, the idea of learning as studying and gathering information. Give yourself time to learn about prayer by praying, to engage with the disciplines of spiritual life for yourself. You can do this whether or not you have a clear idea of what you believe about God. Anyone can pray, there is no entrance exam! Experiment and explore, try some new things and most of all, think about how far your life is truly integrated. Can you identify ways in which the things you believe in and hope for are not truly reflected in the way you live? Christian spirituality invites us to a life in which we are being healed by the love of God of the fragmentation and dissonance which we so often experience.

We hope that since you began your journal in the first unit, you have been keeping up with it and continuing to record your reflections, prayers and questions. Now is a good time to review what you have recorded so far. And during this unit, because you will be learning from your experiences, it will be particularly important to include your reflections and insights. Don't forget you can include quotes, pictures, poems, or anything at all which is meaningful to you as you continue your own spiritual journey.

What is in this unit?

Introduction and Introductory Worksheet

Session one:	Living Journey:	Knowing my own story
Session two:	Living Prayer:	Learning a Relationship
Session three:	Living Word:	Engaging with Scripture
Session four:	Living the Life:	Being a Disciple
Session five:	Living the Life:	Answering the Call

Preparation for Session 1:



One of the themes that appear again and again in the Bible is 'Journey'. Even if you have thought about this theme before, it is always worth revisiting, for surely such a rich image will never be finally exhausted, but will continue to offer us its treasure.

To prepare for the first week of this unit, we invite you to take a look at the journey of Joseph. You can find this in the book of Genesis, chapters 37 – 50. Don't be too daunted, you probably know the outline of Joseph's life already, and this is an opportunity to read a complete story. It tells of many journeys, since it is not just Joseph who travels, but members of his family too. And taking 'journey' as a metaphor, there are those who 'travel' in the sense of moving from one way of understanding to a new place of faith and belief. Can you see, for example, some journeys from pride to humility?

Read the story in a modern translation, in one sitting if possible. First, read right through these chapters without stopping to take notes. This will give you a sense of the flow of the whole story. Then, look at the questions below and reflect on what you have read. Review the story if you need to and note some brief responses to the following questions.

1. What physical and geographical journeys are recorded? Who travels, and where do they go?

2. Do you notice any inner journeys in the story? Are there people who are changed in the way they see things? Their outlook, attitudes and perhaps their faith may be transformed by their experiences.

2. Have you experienced a journey, real or inner that has changed you? You can record this in your private journal, and will not need to share this unless you wish to.