



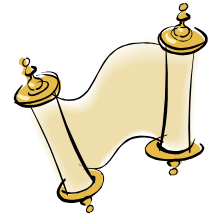
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Third in the Series

Division of  
Evangelization  
and  
Catechesis

Archdiocese  
of  
Baltimore

Three things can be said about St. Paul without any question or doubt. He was a constant traveler, gifted speaker, and prolific writer. Thirteen “books” in the Christian Scriptures are attributed to Paul. Almost every Sunday we hear a reading from one of these “books”. We know, of course, from the introduction each time they are read, “A reading from the letter of Paul to...”, that these “books” are actually written letters from Paul to the churches he founded and often to friends. They were probably hand delivered by disciples of Paul, read by that community, some were then passed along to another church. Most, however, were kept by the churches for repeated reading and ongoing instruction in living the faith. Just like we do today.



**Authorship**

How the collection of works that we call the Bible came about is something that has always been a strong argument over the centuries. There is total agreement, however, on the composition of the Christian Scriptures. But there is great discussion of who wrote Paul’s letters and when they were written. The Canon (the official list) of books in the Christian Scriptures was first agreed upon in the fourth century as the result of the work of St. Athanasius and several Councils of the Church. This canon was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in the 16th Century. The list includes the thirteen letters from Romans to Philemon as given to us by Paul. Of the thirteen, seven are ascribed to Paul directly (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon). Three books are ascribed to disciples of Paul writing from his teachings (2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, and Colossians). The last three are called Pastoral Letters drawn from Paul’s teaching and example written much later (1-2 Timothy and Titus).



**First Letters**

The oldest written contribution to the Christian Scriptures is St. Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians written around 50-51 A.D. “The letter provides the oldest literary evidence of the significance attached to the death and resurrection of Jesus by the early Christians.” (JBC,46:9) The Thessalonians were dear to Paul. According to the Acts of the Apostles, he spent several weeks with them on his Second Missionary Journey and they responded with enthusiasm to his preaching. As we read this letter it is heartening to note that the converts to Christianity of that time were struggling with the same questions on how to follow Jesus that we are faced with to-

day, patience, charity to one another, kindness, mutual encouragement, avoidance of everything that is evil.

### Reflection

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24. 2. Of the various commands, which ones do you feel you are practicing very well? Which ones will you work on doing something about?



### More Communities. More Letters

Paul stayed connected with the communities he visited and often wrote to them to correct their errors in following Jesus or to further their instruction. It was not uncommon for Paul to write responding to questions that were sent to him seeking clarification. From his Conversion in 33A.D. until his martyrdom in 64A.D. , Paul attempted through writing to shepherd his flocks. Fr. Raymond Brown, S.S. in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* provides the following list as possible dates for when the various letters were written and distributed to the various churches. 1 Thessalonians - 50-51; 2 Thessalonians either 52 or very questionable dates; Galatians - 54; 1 Corinthians - 55; 2 Corinthians - 56; Philippians - 56; Romans - 58; Philemon - 60; Colossians - 70; Ephesians - 80; 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus - as late as 100.

### Church in Corinth

Corinth was a very cosmopolitan city in Greece that gave Paul more than one anxious night worrying about them and trying to guide their faith. Scripture scholars will tell us that Paul more than likely wrote four letters to this church but we have only two listed in the NT. These two letters appear to have parts of the four letters in them. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains words of correction and encouragement. In chapter 13 we read his famous discourse on love that almost every bride and groom has chosen to be read at their wedding. It is a core teaching of Paul that we should follow the second great commandment in everything we do to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt22:39.) It is also in this letter that we see written for the first time the words we hear during each Mass at the Consecration (1 Cor 11:23-26.)

### Reflection

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Of the gifts listed in this reading, do any of them have your name on it? How do you use your gift for the good of the whole Church?

### Prayer

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and  
kindle in them the fire of your love.**

**Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you will renew  
the face of the earth.**

**Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit, you have taught the hearts of  
your faithful.**

**In the same Spirit, help me to relish what is right and always rejoice  
in your consolation. I ask this through Christ the Lord.**

**Amen.**

