

LETTERS OF SAINT PAUL

LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Introduction

Probably at Corinth Paul decides to write and send a letter to the community of Rome.

The letter is a strong, stable and tense structure between two poles: fidelity to Judaism and to the universal vocation. And it presents a capital point of the Christian faith. Some authors call it soteriology or the doctrine about salvation.

The letter to the Romans is one of the documents that have influenced more in the history of the Church

Life of the Spirit

8 ¹⁴All those who walk in the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God. ¹⁵Then, no more fear: you did not receive a spirit of slavery, but the Spirit that makes you sons and daughters and every time we cry, 'Abba! (that is Dad!) Father!' ¹⁶the Spirit assures our spirit that we are sons and daughters of God. ¹⁷If we are children, we are heirs, too. Ours will be the inheritance of God and we will share it with Christ; for if we now suffer with him, we will also share Glory with him.

Norms about Christian life

12 ⁹Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil and hold to whatever is good. ¹⁰Love one another and be considerate. Outdo one another in mutual respect. ¹¹Be zealous in fulfilling your duties. Be fervent in the Spirit and serve God.

¹²Have hope and be cheerful. Be patient in trials and pray constantly. ¹³Share with other Christians in need. With those passing by, be ready to receive them.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not wish evil on anyone. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who are joyful, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in peace with one another. Do not dream of extraordinary things; be humble and do not hold yourselves as wise.

¹⁷Do not return evil for evil, but let everyone see your good will. ¹⁸Do your best to live in peace with everybody. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but let God be the one who punishes, as Scripture says: *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.* ²⁰And it adds: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; by doing this you will heap burning coals upon his head.* ²¹Do not let evil defeat you, but conquer evil with goodness.

FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

Introduction

In the past Corinth was a cosmopolitan commercial empire. Its two ports, at East and West, opened it up advantageously and made of it a center for cultural communication. Paul founded there a Christian community, composed to a great extent by low class people. The church at Corinth was a prosperous pluralistic community, exposed to the contamination of the pagan environment and undergoing internal tensions.

Starting from concrete life situation, Paul rises up to great principles and Christian vision.

Superior wisdom

2¹When I came to reveal to you the mystery of God's plan I did not count on eloquence or on a show of learning. ²I was determined not to know anything among you but Jesus, the Messiah, and a crucified Messiah. ³I myself came weak, fearful and trembling; ⁴my words and preaching were not brilliant or clever to win listeners. ⁵It was, rather, a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might be a matter, not of human wisdom, but of God's power.

Agape and Eucharist

11²³This is the tradition of the Lord that I received and that in my turn I have handed on to you; the Lord Jesus, on the night that he was delivered up, took bread and, ²⁴after giving thanks, broke it, saying, 'This is my body which is broken for you; do this in memory of me.' ²⁵In the same manner, taking the cup after the supper, he said, 'This cup is the new Covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.' ²⁶So, then, whenever you eat of this bread and drink from this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes.

²⁷Therefore, if anyone eats of the bread or drinks from the cup of the Lord unworthily, he sins against the body and blood of the Lord.

²⁸Let each one, then, examine himself before eating of the bread and drinking from the cup. ²⁹Otherwise, he eats and drinks his own condemnation in not recognizing the Body. ³⁴The other instructions I shall give when I go there.

Charisms

12¹²As the body is one, having many members, and all the members, while being many, form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³All of us, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, have been baptized in one Spirit to form one body and all of us have been given to drink from the one Spirit.

¹⁴The body has not just one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, 'I do not belong to the body for I am not a hand,' it would be wrong: it is part of the body! ¹⁶Even though the ear says, 'I do not belong to the body for I am not an eye,' it is part of the body. ¹⁷If all the body were eye, how would we hear? And if all the body were ear, how would we smell?

¹⁸God has arranged all the members, placing each part of the body as he pleased. ¹⁹If all were the same part where would the body be? ²⁰But there are many members and one body. ²¹The eye cannot tell the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor the head tell the feet, 'I do not need you.'

Hymn to Christian love

13 ¹If I could speak all the human and angelic tongues, but had no love, I would only be sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

²If I had the gift of prophecy, knowing secret things with all kinds of knowledge, and had faith great enough to remove mountains, but had no love, I would be nothing. ³If I gave everything I had to the poor, and even give up my body to be burned, if I am without love, it would be of no value to me.

⁴Love is patient, kind, without envy. It is not boastful or arrogant. It is not ill-mannered nor does it seek its own interest. ⁵Love overcomes anger and forgets offenses. ⁶It does not take delight in wrong, but rejoices in truth. ⁷Love excuses everything, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love will never end. Prophecies may cease, tongues be silent and knowledge disappear. ⁹For knowledge grasps something of the truth and prophecy as well. ¹⁰And when what is perfect comes, everything imperfect will pass away. ¹¹When I was a child I thought and reasoned like a child, but when I grew up, I gave up childish ways.

¹²Likewise, at present we see dimly as in a mirror, but then it shall be face to face. Now we know in part, but then I will know as I am known. ¹³Now we have faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

Resurrection of the death

15 ³In the first place, I have passed on to you what I myself received: that Christ died for our sins, as Scripture says; ⁴that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures; ⁵that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. ⁶Afterwards he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters together; most of them are still alive, although some have already gone to rest. ⁷Then he appeared to James and after that to all the apostles. ⁸And last of all, he appeared to the most despicable of them, this is to me. ¹¹Now, whether it was I or they, this we preach and this you have believed.

¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is empty and our belief comes to nothing.

²⁰But no, Christ has been raised from the dead and he comes before all those who have fallen asleep. ²¹A human being brings death; a human being also brings resurrection of the dead. ²²All die for being Adam's, and in Christ all will receive life.

SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

Introduction

New happenings have appear in Corinth since the first letter. Some people have arrived questioning Paul's authority. Paul reacts with passion.

In this way the letter becomes a vital treatise about the apostolic mission.

The faith criterion

5 ¹¹So we know the fear of the Lord and we try to convince people while we live openly before God. And I trust that you know in your conscience what we truly are. ¹²Once more, we do not try to win your esteem; we want to give you a reason to feel proud of us, that you may respond to those who heed appearances and not the reality. ¹³Now, if I have spoken foolishly, let God alone hear; if what I have said makes sense, take it for yourselves.

¹⁴Indeed the love of Christ holds us and we realize that if he died for all, all have died. ¹⁵He died for all so that those who live may live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them. ¹⁶And so from now on, we do not regard anyone from a human point of view; and even if we once knew Christ personally, we should now regard him in another way.

Boasting about a fake fool

11 ¹⁸As some people boast of human advantages, I will do the same. ¹⁹Fortunately you bear rather well with fools, you who are so wise! ²¹What a shame that I acted so weakly with you!

But if others are so bold, I shall also dare, although I may speak like a fool. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are they ministers of Christ? (I begin to talk like a madman) I am better than they.

Better than they with my numerous labors. Better than they with the time spent in prison. The beatings I received are beyond comparison. How many times have I found myself in danger of death! ²⁴Five times the Jews sentenced me to thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with a rod, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked, and once I spent a night and a day adrift on the high seas.

²⁶I have been continually in hazards of traveling because of rivers, because of bandits, because of my fellow Jews, or because of the pagans; in danger in the city, in the open country, at sea; in danger from false brothers. ²⁷I have worked and often labored without sleep, I have been hungry and thirsty and starving, cold and without shelter.

²⁸Besides these and other things, there was my daily concern for all the churches.

Revelations and shortcomings

12 ¹It is useless to boast; but if I have to, I will go on to some visions and revelations of the Lord.

²I know a certain Christian: fourteen years ago he was taken up to the third heaven. ³Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows. But I know that this man, whether in the body or out of the body—I do not know, God knows—⁴was taken up to Paradise where he heard words that cannot be told: things which humans cannot express.

⁵Of that man I can indeed boast, but of myself I will not boast except of my weaknesses. ⁶If I wanted to boast, it would not be foolish of me, for I would speak the truth. ⁷However, I better give up lest somebody think more of me than what is seen in me or heard from me. Lest I become proud after so many and extraordinary revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a true messenger of Satan, to slap me in the face. ⁸Three times I prayed to the Lord that it leave me, ⁹but he answered, ‘My grace is enough for you; my great strength is revealed in weakness.’

Gladly, then, will I boast of my weakness that the strength of Christ may be mine.

LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

Introduction

Paul had preached in the Roman Province of Galatia. There he started some communities of converted pagans. Some time later some judaizers appear there preaching that Christians had to be circumcised and observe certain Mosaic prescriptions.

The letter is a vibrant declaration in favor of Christian freedom, citing autobiographical traits and anecdotes.

Paul's vocation

1 ¹³You have heard of my previous activity in the Jewish community; I furiously persecuted the Church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴For I was more devoted to the Jewish religion than many fellow Jews of my age, and I defended the traditions of my ancestors more fanatically.

¹⁵But one day God called me out of his great love, he who *had chosen me from my mother's womb*; and he was pleased ¹⁶to reveal in me his Son, that I might make him known among the pagan nations. Then I did not seek human advice ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. I immediately went to Arabia, and from there I returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Later, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to meet Cephas, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. ¹⁹But I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰On writing this to you, I affirm before God that I am not lying.

²¹After that I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²²The churches of Christ in Judea did not know me personally; ²³they had only heard of me: 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he tried to uproot.' ²⁴And they praised God because of me.

Paul and the other apostles

2 ¹After fourteen years I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and Titus came with us. ²Following a revelation, I went to lay before them the Gospel that I am preaching to the pagans. I had a private meeting with the leaders—lest I should be working or have worked in a wrong way. ⁷They recognized that I have been entrusted to give the Good News to the pagan nations, just as Peter has been entrusted to give it to the Jews. ⁸In the same way that God made Peter the apostle of the Jews, he made me the apostle of the pagans. ⁹James, Cephas and John acknowledged the graces God gave me. Those men who were regarded as the pillars of the Church stretched out their hand to me and Barnabas as a sign of fellowship; we would go to the pagans and they to the Jews. ¹⁰We should only keep in mind the poor among them. I have taken care to do this.

LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Introduction

Philippos, a small city with a great aura. Founded by Philip, father of Alexander Magnus, a Roman colony in Greek territory and juncture of communications. It is the first city in European territory evangelized by Paul.

And the highlight: the hymn to Christ, humbled and exalted, model and hope of Christians, and vastly used in the liturgy. We select it as a jewel of Christian tradition.

Christian love and humility of Christ

2⁵Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ had:
⁶Though he was in the form of God,
he did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking on the nature of a servant,
made in human likeness,
and in his appearance found as a man.
⁸He humbled himself by being obedient to death,
death on the cross.
⁹That is why God exalted him
and gave him the Name which outshines all names,
¹⁰so that at the Name of Jesus
all knees should bend
in heaven, on earth and among the dead,
¹¹and all tongues proclaim that Christ Jesus
is the Lord
to the glory of God the Father.

LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Introduction

The text is presented as a letter written by Paul, a prisoner in Rome, to the community of Colossos, in Phrygia, Asia Minor. The occasion is a great danger of heresy that threatens that community.

A critical examination of the theme, language and style, suggests that the letter is written by a disciple of Paul, of the next generation, able to imitate well the master and using Paul's authority.

3¹²Clothe yourselves, then, as is fitting for God's chosen people, holy and beloved of him. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience ¹³to bear with one another and forgive whenever there is any occasion to do so. As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵May the peace of Christ overflow in your hearts; for this end you were called to be one body. And be thankful.

¹⁶Let the word of God dwell in you in all its richness. Teach and admonish one another with words of wisdom. With thankful hearts sing to God psalms, hymns and spontaneous praise. ¹⁷And whatever you do or say, do it in the Name of Jesus, the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY

Introduction

Given the topic and style three writings are gathered together with the title of pastoral letters, because Paul addresses them to persons responsible of a local community, giving them norms of government for their use and of Christian conduct for the community.

The addressees are Timothy and Titus. Timothy was closely united with Paul; he was his companion on trips and mission, a man of trust for important and delicate assignments.

2⁸Remember Christ Jesus, risen from the dead, Jesus, son of David, as preached in my Gospel.

¹¹This statement is true:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;

¹²If we endure with him, we shall reign with him;

If we deny him, he will also deny us;

¹³If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself.