

SECTIONS AND READINGS FOR TRAIL XI

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HTB XI .1-7

THE EARLY APOSTOLIC PERIOD (30 to 59 A.D.)

ACTS (1:1-21:26), JAMES, GALATIANS .1 & 2 THESSALONIANS, I & 2 CORINTHIANS,
ROMANS

COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION

What were the basic elements of the Christian gospel/ good news as proclaimed by the earliest Christians? How can it be articulated clearly and relevantly today in your own cultural setting?

MODULE XI: EARLY APOSTOLIC PERIOD (30-59 A.D.)

INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Acts of the Apostles was probably written by Dr. Luke, St Paul's occasional traveling companion, as the continuation of his chronological account of the rise of Christianity from its beginnings in his Gospel, Luke (Ac 1:1). Here he follows the spread of the gospel from the centre of the Jewish world, Jerusalem, to the center of the Roman Empire, Rome itself, as it emerged from within the framework of the Jewish people to engage the Gentile world. Every stage of this development he attributes to the working of God's Holy Spirit. Luke's own personal involvement in the story is evident at the points where he narrates in the 1st person plural — the "we sections".

The book's theme is disclosed in the opening section (1:1-11), wherein Luke draws attention (a) to the continued activity of the risen and ascended Jesus, the Messiah, (b) to the apostolic leaders Jesus had chosen, (c) to the promised Holy Spirit as the source of the Christian's power and (d) Jesus' plan for the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

The book's abrupt ending two years into Paul's Roman house-arrest suggests a date of about 64 A.D. for its completion. This second volume of Luke's history may well have been written to be a part of Paul's legal defense before the emperor. If so, then the "Theophilus" to whom both volumes are addressed (Lk 1:1; Ac 1:1), may well have been an honorary Greek title [= Lover of God] for a Roman official interested in a full account of the work of Jesus, the Messiah, and his apostles, especially as it engaged with the Roman empire. This would account for Luke's great care to tie his narrative into contemporary history directly and indirectly at many points. Many of the details of Luke's account have been confirmed by modern historians so often, that the default tendency today is to take Luke's historical integrity for granted even where we still have doubts about some of the historical details. Such accuracy would have been necessary to bear the critical scrutiny of a Roman investigator who had much better access to first century records and customs than we could now have without a "time machine".

Luke, however, is far more than a mere historian of Christianity and an apologist for the Christian faith and for the apostle Paul, for he is in effect writing a fifth gospel, one about the continuing activities of the risen Messiah and God's Holy Spirit. Without his account, we would know much less about how Jesus founded and built his church. We would also be missing most of the knowledge of the context of early Christian community need to interpret the many New Testament letters. Thus, in many ways the Acts of the Apostles is the central book of the New Testament, bridging between the gospels and the epistles, and providing the background for the latter.

ANALYSIS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

1:1-5:42	Birth of the Church:
1:1-26	Introduction:
1:1-14	Ascension of Jesus,
1:15-26	Replacement apostle for Judas chosen.
2:1-47	Happenings on the Day of Pentecost,
3:1-4:31	Healing at the temple and the apostles charged before the Sanhedrin,
4:35-5:11	Mutual sharing within the early community,
5:12-42	Apostles charged a second time before the Sanhedrin.
6:1-9:31	Persecution in Jerusalem leads to expansion in Syria:
6:1-7	Selection and appointment of first "deacons"
6:8-8:1a	Deacon Stephen's ministry and martyrdom,
8:1b-40	Deacon Philip's missionary activities,
9:1-31	Conversion and earliest ministry of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor.
9:32-12:25	Apostle Peter's early ministries in Syria
9:32-43	Peter's acts in western Palestine,
10:1-48	Conversion of the-Gentile centurion Cornelius,
11:1-18	Peter's defense of his response to Cornelius,
11:19-30	Jewish & Gentile Christian church in Syrian Antioch,
12:1-25	Herod Agrippa's attack on the church.
13:1-14:28	Apostle Paul (Saul)'s 1st missionary journey:
13:1-3	Apostles Barnabas and Saul called to a new ministry,
13:4-12	Ministry in Cyprus,
13:13-52	Ministry in Pisidian Antioch,
14:1-23	Ministry in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (south Galatia),
14:24-28	Their return to report to the sending church in Syrian Antioch.
15:1-35	Council of Jerusalem:
15:1-5	Agitation by Judaizers in Syrian Antioch,
15:6-29	Meeting of the church council in Jerusalem,
15:30-35	Apostolic letter from the council received in Syrian Antioch.
15:36-18:23	Apostle Paul's 2nd missionary journey:
15:36-41	Separation of Barnabas and Paul,
16:15	Paul and Silas minister in south Galatia,
16:64	Crossing into Macedonia and ministry in Philippi,
17:1-34	Ministry from Thessalonica to Athens,
18:1-17	Ministry in Corinth,
18:18-23	Paul visits Jerusalem while returning to Syrian Antioch.
18:24-21:17	Apostle Paul's 3 rd missionary journey:
18:24-28	Apollos' ministries in Ephesus and Corinth,
19:1-41	Paul's ministry in Ephesus,
20:1-6	Paul's ministries in Macedonia and Greece,
20:7-21:17	Paul's return to Jerusalem.
21:18-26:32	Apostle Paul in Judea:
21:18-23:30	Paul arrested and tried in Jerusalem,
23:31-26:32	Paul imprisoned and tried in Caesarea.
27:1-28:31	Apostle Paul's voyage to Rome and house arrest there:
27:14	Paul's voyage and shipwreck,
28:1-10	Paul's winter on Malta,
28:11-28	Paul in Rome.

TRAIL XI -- SECTION 1: Acts 1:1-26.

1. According to the brief summary in v. 3, what were the important general activities of the risen Jesus with his disciples during the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension? How does this summary fit with the more detailed accounts in the four gospels? In continuing his teaching on the kingdom of God, why did Jesus not answer his disciples' burning last question (1:6)? How important does that and similar questions seem to be to Christians that you know today? Do you think Jesus would have answered these questions any differently?
2. What promises does Jesus make to his disciples at this point? How relevant is each of them to Jesus' church today? Which of these promises have you seen fulfilled so far in your life? Which ones do you still long to experience? What difference might this make to your own Christian mission and hope?
3. Who were present in the upper room after Jesus ascension? What was special about those who are specifically mentioned by name? Why might one think that all the same people were directly involved also in the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God ten days later on the Day of Pentecost (1:4; 2:17)? Would this have happened in the same house (2:1 f)? How much do either of these latter issues matter?
4. At this prenatal stage of development of the Christian church, how did Peter seem to understand the criteria and role of the twelve apostles? Would these criteria and role also apply to any later additional apostles? If there could be apostles in the Christian church today, how would they be identified? What would be their special role? How much of their general calling is common to all Christians? How about to you?
5. Why do you think the apostles employed the process and procedures they did to discern God's replacement for Judas (Lv 16:8; Js 14:2; 18:6, 10f; 1 S 10:20f; 14:41f; Ne 10:34; 11:1; Pr 16:33; Ps 16:5; Ac 6:3, 6)? How applicable are these same methods for Christians and Christian congregations today?
6. What does this first chapter of Acts teach directly and indirectly about God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and their interrelationships? How could you keep track of and summarize the data about the Trinity scattered throughout the rest of your readings in Acts and the intersection letters of James and Paul?
7. What does the ascension mean to the early disciples? What does it mean to you? [*Not in most recent MS*]

TRAIL XI SECTION 2: Acts 2:1-47.

1. In the context of 1st century Judaism's understanding of their Passover festival as commemorating God's great salvation of his people in the Exodus and their festival of Pentecost, 50 days later, as commemorating God's giving of the Mosaic law at Mt. Sinai, how significant might the first Jewish Christians' view the timing and ordering of God's long-promised outpouring of his Spirit (Jl 2:28f; Is 32:15; 44:3; Jr 31:31-34; Ek 39:29), being poured out publicly on the first Day of Pentecost following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection at Passover? How meaningful is this timing to you and to your congregation?
2. How do the three phenomena accompanying the coming of the Spirit here fittingly portray what John the Baptist had earlier prophesied as characterizing the Messiah's baptizing (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16) and also what Jesus had told his disciples about the Spirit's coming (Jn 3:8; 16:7; Ac 1:8)? How were the same symbols used in the Old Testament to describe divine visitations? How does your Christian congregation regularly celebrate the feast of Pentecost? Do you, like some Christians, pray fervently for a *new* Pentecost today? What might that involve?
3. In what ways did those who witnessed this dramatic outpouring of God's Spirit respond? Are these all equally appropriate responses? How might you, your fellow Christians, your family members and your neighbours respond, if that spiritual outpouring happened today? How might you explain to others what was really happening? Why was it important that this great and dramatic out-pouring of God's Spirit should happen when there was such a large international crowd of Jewish pilgrims assembled in Jerusalem (Jl 2:28; Mt 28:19f; Lk 24:47-49; Ac 1:8)? How important do you think the special form [*zenoglossia* = speaking in known languages] of *glossolalia* [=speaking in other languages] was in launching this? What common message did everyone present then hear in their own language? How is that good news related to the Christian gospel you would present? Can every people on earth today yet hear the good news about what God has done in Christ/ Messiah (2 Co 5:19f) in their mother-tongue? Why? How might such a hearing contribute to national and ethnic reconciliation (Gn 11:1-9; 2 Co 5:19-21)?
4. How would you paraphrase Peter's first sermon in your own words? Is his gospel the same as yours and your congregation's today? Why? How does Peter express the nature of God and the relationships of God the Father, the Son and the Spirit? How do they accord with your own understanding? Why did Peter fill his sermon with so many Old Testament references? What sorts of references might be more appropriate for your community? Would you include biblical references at all? Why? What did Peter' recommend as the appropriate responses to his message? Should we expect similar responses and results to sermons today?
5. According to 2:42-47, what were the characteristic features and activities of the participants in the earliest Christian community? What emotions marked this earliest church? Which of these features, activities, emotions and relationships should be the authenticating marks of any Christian fellowship in any age? Would they take exactly the same form in every context? How well does your own congregation measure up to such criteria? How could it improve? How well did the first Christian congregation relate to their wider community? How important is that for any congregation's discipling mission (Mt 28:19f) as well their church's growth (Ac 2:41, 47; 5:13f)?

TRAIL XI SECTION 3: Acts 3:1-4:31.

1. What can we learn about our Christian ministry to needy people that we encounter in our daily life from the apostles' healing ministry with the lame beggar? How can we respond when we ourselves don't seem to have what needy people are asking for? What if we only have enough of that for our own needs and/or for those immediately dependent upon us (Mk 12:41-44; Lk 21:2-4; 2 Co 8:12-14; 1 Ti 5:8)? Do the needy usually ask for what they need most? Why? Would it be wise to up-grade Jesus' Golden Rule (Mt 7:12) with a better "Platinum Rule": Do to others whatever they say that they want you to do for them? Have you sometimes focused so much on what people were asking for that you missed discerning and serving their real needs? How can you as a Christian be more sensitive to people's real needs?
2. Does the statement of Peter to the lame man in 3:6 suggest that Christians should take very seriously non-monetary ways of supporting God's work? What particular type of abundance has God provided you with? What obvious needs could you contribute to out of that abundance? Would Peter's reply in 3:12f also apply to all truly Christian services to others (1 P 4:10f)? Why is it important for both the giver and the receiver to remember this?
3. How would you paraphrase in your own words Peter's two addresses; to the people in 3:12-26 and to the leaders in 4:8-12, 19f? What do the two addresses have in common? How do they differ? What can we learn from these similarities and differences, about how to communicate the Christian message to different audiences? What are the diverse groups that you need to communicate the gospel to? What different challenges do they pose to you as you seek to convey the good news about what God has done through Jesus Christ (2 Co 5:19-21)? How can God's Spirit help you too deal with such challenges (4:31)?
4. What do 2:30; 3:21, 24 and 4:25 say about Old Testament prophecy? What does 4:12 say about the way of salvation (Jn 14:6)? How do you respond to those who insist that there must be many equally valid ways to God? What does 4:8 and 13 say about the potential for effective Christian ministry by laity then and - now? How relevant to your own Christian ministry today is Peter's final response in 4:19f (5:29) to the Jewish authorities' question (4:7) and command (4:17f; 5:28)?
5. What were the varied responses to the ministry of healing here? How similar would the responses be today to such an event? How important are signs and wonders in Christian evangelism today (Ac 2:22, 43; 3:9f; 4:14, 16,30; 5:12, 15f)? What has been your experience here?
6. In what circumstances might the Christian's prayer in 4:24-30 be an appropriate model for Christians' prayers today? What results might you expect from such a prayer? Why? Do you, like the apostles, need such a prayer to be bold in evangelism (4:31; Ep 6:19; Cl 4:3)? Who is addressed as "Lord" in this prayer? Does this particular designation obtain everywhere throughout the entire New Testament? How could you tell? Whom do you address as "Lord" in your own prayers? Why?

TRAIL XI --- SECTION 4: Acts 4:32-5:16.

1. How central was the theme of Jesus' resurrection to the early church's evangelism (Lk 24:46-48; Ac 1:22; 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10,33; 5:30; 10:40; 23:30, 33f, 37; 17:3)? In how many different contexts? How important is it in the extant teachings of the apostles (Ro 1:4; 4:24; 6:4; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Co 6:14; 15:15; 2 Co 4:14; Ga 1:1; Ep 1:20; Cl 2:12; 1 Th 1:10; He 13:20; 1 P 1:21)? How essential is it in your congregation's evangelism and teaching of Christianity?
2. How might the communal economic practice of the earliest church in Jerusalem (2:44f; 4:32-35) have anticipated Karl Marx's basic economic principle: "from each according to ability; to each according to need"? Might Marx's have derived it directly or indirectly from the New Testament? How well does this principle also apply to the broader economy of spiritual gifts and ministries in the early church (Ro 12:4-8; 1 Co 12:4-27; 2 Co 8:12-14; Ep 4:11-16; 1 P 4:10f)? What common metaphor for the church illustrates this principle? How well does this basic principle work out in your congregation guiding the mutual giving and receiving of the gifts and ministries of God's love?
3. What connection can you see between the powerful preaching of the apostles and the resultant sharing of essons by the early believers? Why do you think Barnabas' example was singled out here? How does it with what we learn later about his character and actions (Ac 4:36; 9:27; 11:22-26, 29f; 13:2f; 15:36)? What does his action reveal about this motivation (v. 32)? How does this motivation defend against both authoritarianism and the love of money and possessions (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13; 1 Ti 6:10)?
4. What is the point of contrast between the examples of Barnabas and Ananias and Soppkira? What about their behaviour was so serious? What was Peters' role here (5:3f, 8f)? Who actually exercised the severe discipline? What were the internal and external responses and consequences of their sin and its severe discipline? How has this type of sin impacted the credibility of the church, historically and recently? How is it related to religious hypocrisy (Ro 12:9) and its impact?
5. Are all sins equally serious? How can we discriminate between them? Which sins should Christians today take most seriously? Should they be the same as those our society takes most seriously? How important is the scrupulous practice of our professed Christian values to the credibility of our witness in our society? Is it fair for our society to expect us Christian, especially our recognized leaders, to practice what we preach? How can appropriate Christian discipline be applied here? By whom?

TRAIL XI SECTION 5: Acts 5:17-6:7.

1. How would you specify and evaluate the motives and rationales that moved the various Jewish leaders to action and inaction here? How similar are they to those of political and ecclesiastical leaders today? What are their consequences? How can people's motives be transformed (Ro 12:2; 1 Jn 4:18)? How does any of this apply to you?
2. What seem to be the roles of the angels encountered in the Book of Acts (5:19; 1:10f; 7:38, 53; 8:26; 10:3,7; 12:7-11,23; 27:23)? How does this compare to their roles in the gospels (Mt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; 4:11; 28:2, 5-7; Lk 1:11-20, 26-37; 2:9-14; 22:43)? What do you think about angelic involvement in our world? Are they still active today? How so? How important is this in your Christian life?
3. What motivated the disciples to reject and openly disobey the explicit orders and threats of the Jewish officials (4:18-20; 5:28)? Would the same motives move you to civil disobedience today? What resources are given to the apostles and to you that would enable you to live by the apostles' maxim in 5:29 (5:30-32; Mt 28:18-20)? What tends to inhibit your own public Christian witness? What might liberate you?
4. How significant was it that this same well-respected, moderate Pharisaic rabbi, Gamaliel the Elder, was once Saul's teacher (Ac 22:3)? What other recent messianic claimants does Gamaliel refer to in his argument? What light does this throw upon the religious and political climate of Judea in the early 1st century, and upon Jesus' great care in speaking of himself as the Messiah? Does his counsel warrant several later Christian traditions claim that this Gamaliel became "a brother in the faith" or was "baptized" as a Christian? How do Peter's words in 4:18f and 5:28 fit with Gamaliel's reasoning and advice? How helpful would Gamaliel's policy be for Christian congregations to follow today? Why?
5. In your own words, what message were the apostles preaching and teaching publicly? How well does the gospel you hear Christians proclaiming today fit with this apostolic message? How much does the truth of church's historic claim to be "apostolic" depend upon the continuity of its gospel with that of Jesus' earliest apostles? Is that what your church usually means by "apostolic succession"?
6. What was the first sign of a division developing between the Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking Christians? What could Christian leaders today learn from the apostles' creative response to the crisis? What significance do you see in the facts that all the chosen men were Greek-speaking Jews and had Greek names? What could your congregation learn from the process and criteria for choosing, appointing and commissioning these new church servants? Why might this new type of leaders have needed each of the listed qualities, even for their initial practical public role? Do the presence of these characteristics, explain why early, apparently mundane, Christian ministries often eventually lead to other, apparently more spiritual ministries, as with Phillip and Stephen? Do your all your congregation's leaders need these same qualities? Why?

TRAIL XI -- SECTION 6: Acts 6:8-8:1a.

2. What light does 5:17; 6:7 and 6:9 throw upon the variety of Jewish groups, parties and synagogues in the mid-1st century A.D. in Jerusalem itself? How might Jewish Christian synagogues have fit into that mix (6:1)? How different is the Jewish and Jewish-Christian mix today? What accounts for the wide variety of Christian congregations and communions today, even in Jerusalem? Is this variety good among God's people? How is that compatible with their unity? What should unify this diversity? What unity should there be even among all the world religions that historically stem from Abraham? What might that mean for you?
3. What were the trumped-up charges against Stephen? How similar were they to the false charges against Jesus himself only a few years earlier (Mt 26:59-62; Mk 14:55-60)? What spirits were still at war with one another between the Jewish leaders and Jesus and his disciples? How have the battle lines and tactics changed today? Are the motivations for the public charges against Christians today any different than they were then (6:10f)? How does this reflect the deeper spiritual warfare (Ep 2:2; 3:3, 10; 6:12)?
4. How would you outline in your own words Stephen's long defence? What aspects of his account of his teachings might have seemed to his accusers to justify their initial charges? Did he, then, really deserve to be stoned by serious followers of the teachings and traditions of Moses? What do you think really enraged them most (7:54) in their official encounter with Stephen?
5. Why does Luke give such an unusually detailed summary of Stephens' account of his teaching? Who might have been Luke's source(s) for such verbatim details (7:58-8:1; Co 4:14; 2 Ti 4:11; Ac 21:17; 27:1f; 28:16; Jn 7:50-52; 19:39)? At what points does Stephen's account of God's acts in Israel's history seem to supplement the account of the Old Testament text as we now have it? How substantial are these additions? How can we account for them? Might the mediating role of angels in 7:30, 35, 53 (Ga 3:19; He 2:2) merely reflect the further Jewish thinking of the intertestamental period, as evidenced in LXX translation of Dt 33:2 (CEBM) and He 2:7? Might what Moses' thought in 7:25 and 35 (Ex 2:11-15) only seek to understand his response to Yahweh's call to lead his people out of Egypt in Ex 3:10f and 4:10? Does 6:10 also apply to everything Stephen said to the Jerusalem Council (e.g. 7:16; Gn 50:13f; Js 24:32)?
6. Why did Stephen's description of his final vision aggravate matters even more (7:54-58; Dn 7:13f)? What similar predicaments had Jesus faced (Lk 4:28-30; Jn 8:53-59; 10:30-33, 39)? How did both of them handle them (7:59f; Lk 23:34, 46; 1 P 2:23; 4:19)? How do you account for the similarity? Do Stephen's brief prayers here (7:59) encourage Christians to pray to Jesus himself? How many prayers in the New Testament are clearly directed to Jesus rather than to the Father? To whom are your church's Communion/ Eucharistic prayers addressed? Why? To whom do you pray? Why?

1. In these circumstances, would you have dared to have been one of the Christians who buried Stephen? Why did they draw such attention to what they were doing (4:19; 5:29f)? What might be a comparable situation for Christians today? How and why would you support such fellow Christians (1 Co 12:26; Ro 12:15)?
2. Why might the deaths of early Christian martyrs like Stephen have prompted Tertullian of Carthage, a 2nd -3rd century Christian apologist, to declare that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" (9:4f 11:19f)? Why do you think the church of Jesus Christ often fares better, both quantitatively and qualitatively, when it is rejected and persecuted than when it is accepted and endorsed by its contemporary culture? However, does God also sometimes use times of cultural tolerance and ease to build up his church (2:47; 5:13f; 9:31)? What historical examples can you think of for both of these scenarios? How can you and your congregation use the opportunities of the easy or tough times that you are now facing to grow in numbers and maturity?
3. How important is it for you and Christians that you know to remember that Philip baptized both men and women alike (8:12; Ga 3:28)? How would you describe the evangelism strategy of the apostles (8:25) and of Philip (8:40)? What could you and your congregation learn from them for your situation (Mt 28:19)? What important dimension is added in 8:26 and 29? How can you be just as sensitive to God's specific guidance in evangelism as Philip was?
4. How did the wondrous things done by Simon the Great and Philip differ? Who discerned the difference most clearly? What did it take for everyone to notice the true difference? How can Christians today discern when it is really God's own Spirit who is working through someone (1 Co 12:3; 13:2)? How might the agent's use of money help us recognize their true interests (5:3, 8f; 8:18-22; Mt 6:24; Lk 6:13)? Does the church have to contend with people like Simon even today? How can they be exposed for what they truly are and dealt with appropriately?
5. Why did the apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to Samaria even though Philip was already ministering there? What does this imply about the relationship between Christian baptism and "receiving k̄the Holy Spirit" (2:38; 9:17f; 10:47f)? What further may be learned about baptism in the earliest Christian church from 8:36-38? How much does it matter to you and to your congregation that the very clear baptismal confession of faith of 8:37 does not seem to have been included in the earliest manuscripts of Acts, even though Irenaeus of Lyons refers to it late in the 2nd century?
6. What might motivate people to read the Bible on their own, like the traveling Ethiopian (8:27)? What often seems necessary for them to help them understand it (1 Co 2:12-16)? How did that help come about in this case? What can you learn from Philip's approach? Would you be able to start wherever someone were reading in the Bible and point them to Jesus (Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39; 1 P 3:15)? What would you need to be better prepared for such an important and timely ministry? Where would you find that help?

1. How closely were the early Christians associated with Jewish synagogues? In this context, why do you think they church called themselves "The Way" (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; Jn 14:4-7)? To where did their "Way" lead? What about God, Jesus and themselves did it affirm? Could the same self-designation be employed profitably by Christians relating to Jews today? What about for Christians relating to Muslims? How might the same name also have a connection with the Great Commission of Mt 28:19? Is it as characterization of Christianity that more Christians might consider using today?
2. Why does God convert some people as dramatically as he did Saul/ Paul here? What details of Paul's conversion experience might have had special symbolic significance for him? When did you become a disciple/ follower of Jesus, the Messiah/ Christ? Was it as sudden and dramatic as Paul's turnaround? How did it involve your turning around towards God and his way revealed in and through Jesus? How was the way that God employed to apprehend you, appropriate to who you are? What details of that process were particularly important then and still remain significant? What differences has it made to your life's orientation and lifestyle? Like Saul, has it eventually called you to share in the Messiah's continuing ministry? To whom has Jesus sent you as his representative/ ambassador/ apostle [sent one]/ witness (Mk 5:18-20; Lk 8:38f; Ac 1:8; 2 Co 5:18-20? Are you going to them? As you go, how are you obeying his great commission (Mt 28:19)?
3. Why might God have decided to meet Paul's need through one of the very Jewish Christians that he had come to persecute in Damascus? How would God have persuaded you to undertaken Ananias' vital mission? Why are early ministries for very new Christians so important? How were you helped as an infant Christian? Whom might you help as they begin to walk Jesus' way? What might they need? How could you help them? Why might such important ministries often have to remain hidden?
4. How did God prepare both Ananias and Saul for this mission to be successful? Why is it always necessary for God's Spirit to be working in both those who serve and in those who are being served for Christian ministry to be effective in accomplishing God's spiritual purposes? How significant was it that both of them were conversing with God? How vital is prayer for you? Why?
5. How would you describe Saul's earliest thinking about Jesus as a new-born Christian sharing his newfound faith? How does it compare with your recollection of your own earliest understanding of Jesus? To whom did Paul direct his early witness? To whom did you (Ro 10:10)? Why did his fellow Christians soon pack Saul off out of both Damascus and Jerusalem? Does that often happen to enthusiastic young Christians? For whose good does it seem to have been done (9:31)? Is that always the case? How so?
6. What do we learn in 9:26-43 about the wide diversity of ministries in the early church? What important a role did each of these different ministries play in the life and mission of God's people? How might Saul's experience of this have helped him later view the basic ministries of the church as the diverse loving functions of Christ's Body (1 Co 12:4-11; Ro 12:4-8; Ep 4:7, 11-16)? What crucial ministry role did Barnabas play for Saul and the church here? How was that ministry related to his nickname (4:36; 11:23)? How needed is this particular ministry today? How important today is Dorcas' type of ministry? How visible can such ministries be and still be effective? Yet how can they be fostered and valued?

TRAIL XI -- SECTION 9: Acts 10:1-11:18.

1. How do the initial responses of Cornelius and Peter to their respective vision compare? Why do you think Peter's vision and command had to be repeated three times? What made Peter harder for God to convince than a hardened Roman military officer? How providential was God's timing of Peter's vision and the messengers' arrival in Peter's correctly interpreting his strange vision? When have you had to consider the significance of the timing of events and circumstances as more than just fortuitous? Did you, like Peter, still need further instruction from the Lord to see the significance of the strikingly "coincidental" events? Why would Peter be such a stickler about observing kosher Jewish dietary laws, when he seemed unconcerned about the possible ritual uncleanness of lodging with a tanner (9:43; 10:6, 32) who would be forced to live at or beyond the edge of the ritually clean Jewish community in Joppa?
2. Could John Mark's interpretive comment in Mk 7: 19b (Mt 15:11) have been derived from Peter's apt recollection of the heavenly command (Ac 10:15) during one of Peter's oral accounts of Jesus' teaching on a similar subject (Mk 7:1-23) which Mark had overheard while taking notes for writing his gospel? How might there be many such behind-the-scenes links between the different strands of the New Testament writings? Would such possible connections authenticate or devalue the text's accounts for you?
1. How would you paraphrase Peter's basic message to the gathering in Cornelius' home? How differently did Peter and Cornelius prepare for the meeting (10:23f)? Why was that? How significant is it that Peter began his message to the gathered Gentiles by vulnerably sharing what was pertinent about what God was still in the process of teaching him? How does Peter also draw upon what his audience already knew about Jesus, before introducing his own personal witness and the significance of Jesus for everyone? How relevant is this basic approach to sharing your understanding of Jesus with interested people? Might your friends and/or relatives be interested in gathering in your home to here and interact with a basic presentation of Jesus and his significance for them? How could this come about? Who might help you do this?
2. In what ways was Cornelius quite like some people in your own society? What sorts of misconceptions about God and his messengers (10:25f) might they well have? Yet, in spite of this, could these very people truly be praying to God and experiencing God's answers? How much is God at work in people's lives long before they come to a clear consciousness of him? Whom is God willing to welcome to himself (10:35f)? What more would their coming to know God through Jesus bring them (10:42-44)?
3. What convinced Peter and his Jewish Christian colleagues that Cornelius and his companions should also be baptized as Christians without further ado? How did Peter recognize that even raw Gentiles could receive God's Holy Spirit? Does text's underlining (10:45,47; 11:15-17) of its striking similarity to the earliest Christians own dramatic experience of the gift of God's own Spirit (2:4) suggest how momentous this event was, a second Pentecost for the Gentiles? How was this different than the earlier Christian conversions of Hellenistic (Greek—speaking) and other Jews of the dispersion (2:10; 6:1; 11:19-21), Jewish proselytes (2:10; 8:27, 36-38), and even Samaritans (8:5, 12-17, 25)?
4. How did Peter manage to convince the other apostles and the leaders of the Jewish church in Jerusalem that God wanted Gentiles evangelized directly, without first compelling them to conform to Jewish cultural laws as Jewish proselytes? What cultural patterns and behaviours do we western Gentile Christians sometimes seem to want to impose on new converts from other cultures? What range of Christian subcultures could God welcome today (Mt 25:32; 28:19; Lk 24:47; Ac 10:28, 34f; Rv 5:9; 7:9)? Could they even include Christian sub-cultures of our own society? How widely might the expressions of their discipleship differ without being more or less Christian (Mt 28:19f; in 21:20-23)? What, however, would they all have to have in common to be Christian (10:35-43, 47; 11:16f)?

1. Why do you think that the new wave of evangelism in the Roman province of Syria north of Herod's kingdom initially still focused exclusively upon Jews, in spite of Peter's enlightening experience in Joppa and the temporary silencing of objections in Jerusalem church to the direct evangelization of Gentiles (11:18)?
2. What particular group of Jewish Christians focused upon evangelizing Greek-speaking Jews to the north of Herod Antipas kingdom, in Antioch, the capital of the Roman province of Syria, the primary meeting-point of Greek and oriental civilizations with its large Jewish quarter? When news of the success of their initiative reached the Jerusalem church, why did the home church send an envoy to Antioch? Why was Barnabas a very suitable legate to send (4:36f; 9:27f)? How would you describe his follow-up ministry? What could Christian congregations learn from him here?
3. How often today do you hear of a Christian leader in a burgeoning ministry quickly initiating a search for a suitable partner to share the ministry? How far did Barnabas have to look? What seemed to have impressed him about his earlier experience Saul (9:20-30) to motivate him to go and invite him to become his partner in this new ministry? How similar was the evangelist Guillaume Farel's fetching of John Calvin to help him consolidate the Protestant Reformation in Geneva in 1536? What did they focus upon for an entire year in Antioch? How important is such a discipleship program (Mt 28:19)? For whom is that focus still needed today? What significance can you find in the two facts of 11:26: namely, (a) that it was these new disciples [learners/ followers] who were first nick-named "Christians", and (b) this happened first in Syrian Antioch, not in Jerusalem?
4. What can we learn about prophecy in the early church from Agabus' prophecy here? What seem to have been the motives, principles and policies involved in the charitable response of the church in Antioch to the anticipated plight of their fellow Christians in Judea? What seems to have been the character of the relationships between churches in Jerusalem, Judea and Syrian Antioch at this early stage? Why might the Christians in Antioch have chosen to send their contribution to the Judean elders in charge of Barnabas and Saul? What lessons could we Christians today learn from all of this?
5. In what ways can you identify with Peter in his imprisonment and deliverance? What might you have felt at each stage? Who all seemed to be surprised by the answer to their prayers? Why were they surprised? How can you identify with each of them? What connections does this incident suggest that exist between Christian faith, intercessory prayer and God's involvement in dealing with our very practical problems (2 Co 1:8-11; Ep 3:20f)? How does this help you approach the major and minor challenges of your life?
6. What insights do we get here into the character of Herod Agrippa I, who had used his friendship with Emperors Caligula and Claudius to add to his small inherited kingdom most of the remaining wider territories of his grandfather, Herod the Great? How did God go well beyond thwarting his nefarious plans for Peter and the church? What hope does this offer to the many Christian living under despotic regimes today? What sorts of prayers would you as a Christian honestly be able to pray for a sovereign like Agrippa (1 Ti 2:1-5)? How would you submit to political authorities like him and the totalitarian Caesars of the period (Ro 13:1-1; 1 P 2:13-17)? What about Luke's description of Herod's last hurrah, bears the stamp of historical authenticity?

1. How diverse was the leadership of the early Antiochian church (13:1)? Would such diversity be appropriate in many Christian churches today? How normative for Christians even today are the steps in the process used in 13:2-4 to select and commission a mission team to be sent out from a congregation? Would most of its elements apply also to new ministers within a Christian congregation? Might the process even be applicable to the ministry that God has gifted and equipped you for in your church's life and mission? At what other levels of church structure might the process also be applicable?
2. Why do you think the Christian missionaries launched their mission in each new centre in the local Jewish synagogue? Whom besides the Jewish families were present at those synagogues to hear the missionaries' gospel message (13:16, 26, 43)? Why would they in particular be the likeliest prospects to recruit as disciples of Jesus, their Jewish Messianic Saviour?
3. In what ways did the opposition to the missionaries in Cyprian Paphos and in Pisidian Antioch differ? What motivated the opposition in each case? How did the missionaries handle each case? How did God accomplish his good purposes in each setting? However, what happened when the opposition seriously deepened (13:45-50)? How did the missionaries respond then (13:51f Mt 10:14)? What factors seem to have been involved in people entering or not entering God's kingdom? What can Christians in all ages learn from this?
4. How would you outline Paul's speech/ sermon to the mixed congregation that first Sabbath in Pisidian Antioch? What similarities did it have with Stephen's defense (ch. 7)? How does Paul articulate and demonstrate the good news of God's graciousness well before any New Testament books were written? Why does he refer to the Old Testament so extensively in that particular context? How important is the Old Testament for a proper Christian understanding of the gospel even today? How important is it to you? How familiar are you with its contents, themes and unifying story?
5. How do you think Paul came to know about what John the Baptist had said (13:25f Jn 1:20, 27; Mt 3:11; Mk 1:7; Lk 3:15f)? Is it really necessary to suppose that Luke is here putting into Paul's mouth some of the findings of his own later Judean research into the context of Jesus' early ministry (Lk 1:1-4; Ac 21:17-27:1)? What earlier sources might Paul himself have had? Could he even have heard John himself (Ac 22:3; 23:16)?

1. In light of their recent experience in Pisidian Antioch, why would the missionaries again launch their mission in the prosperous commercial city of Iconium in the local Jewish synagogue (13:13-16, 42f)? Why and how was opposition stirred up against them, both in Iconium and Lystra (14:1f, 4-6, 19)? What was new this time? Yet how could the missionaries later give such a positive summary report of mission back to their sending church in Syrian Antioch (14:27)?
2. How significant is it to you that the Christians in the earliest churches called each other "brethren", i.e., siblings (Jn 21:23; Ac 1:15; 6:3; 9:30; 10:23; 11:1, 12,29; 12:17; 14:2; etc.)? Does that necessarily imply that there were always peaceful relations between siblings in the Christian family (Ph 4:2)? Is that why the siblings were regularly enjoined by the apostles to practice patience and "brotherly love" (Greek = "*philadelphia*", Ro 12:10; 1 Th 4:9; He 13:1; 1 P 1:22) and even to add to that Christian love (Greek = "*agape*", 2 P 1:7)? What do you call each other in your Christian congregation? What sort of love do you seek to practice?
3. Why do you think the less Hellenized inhabitants of rural Lystra responded as they did to the healing ministry of Paul and Barnabas? In your own words, what are the five elemental truths about God that Paul set forth for them? How did he want them to apply these truths? To what sort of audience might this basic Christian message be quite relevant today? What adjustments might have to be made to fit it for people in your own setting?
4. How meaningful as a witness to the truth of the Christian gospel would signs and wonders be in a scientifically sophisticated community today (14:3, 9f)? Why are such signs and wonders not always understood in a Christian way even in unsophisticated times and places? What misinterpretations might they be given by certain mindsets, then and now? Nevertheless, what value do they still have as a witness to the existence and character the living God, Yahweh?
5. Why would it be important that the missionaries return at least briefly to Lystra after the near fatal stoning of Paul? What made it also important that they return to all the other cities where their work had been opposed? How did their actions in doing this, reinforce what they had been teaching the new converts about God's kingdom? How well do your actions express the same theme that you have been declaring in words to others? Why is this so important in any Christian witness (Ja 2:14-26)?
6. How was the itinerant ministry of the missionaries different than the more settled ministry that they appointed in the new congregations which they had planted (14:23)? Why are both types of ministry necessary, both then and now? How do the two types relate to one another? How should both types of appointed ministry relate to the practical grassroots loving ministries of each and every member of Christ's Body (Ep 4:7, 11-16)? How does your particular ministry fit in and engage with the others?

INTRODCTION TO JAMES.

James is quite unlike any of the other books of the New Testament. It barely touches on the great theological themes of the apostles' preaching. It does not even hint at the passion of Jesus/and only mentions him twice by name, the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1; 2:1). It emphasizes the practical (teaching) aspects of Christianity, but in ways that appear to be a "baptizing of the religious attitudes of contemporary rabbinic Judaism", focusing on such themes as temptation, law, faith and works, riches, wisdom, and the end times.

Although it purports at the outset to be a letter/ epistle (1:1), it seems rather to read more like brief extracts from a series of synagogue sermons modeled on contemporary Jewish homilies [*haggadah*]. Readers are frequently addressed as "brethren" as in 1st-3rd century A.D. Judaism; dialogue is employed to introduce possible objections; it treats multiple subjects; it touches on eschatology [last things] near its conclusion, and it frequently uses alliteration in the Greek text.

Because its Greek and literary style are among the best in the New Testament, many biblical scholars have rejected its traditional attribution to James, the half-brother of Jesus, who headed the Jewish church in Jerusalem (Ac 12:17; 15:13; 21:28; 1 Co 15:7; Ga 2:9, 12). There are, however, evident also Semitic syntactical influences in the book: its vocabulary follows the 3rd century B.C. LXX Greek translation of the Old Testament even more closely than does the rest of the New Testament and also reflects the colour of the rural countryside of Palestine and the fishing businesses of Galilee. Greek seems to have been widely diffused in 1st century Jewish Palestine, and any leader of the church in Jerusalem would have to communicate well with the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) synagogues as well as with the Hebrew/ Aramaic ones.

Furthermore, there are striking similarities between the book's language and James's speech and pastoral letter in Ac 15. Its contents are quite compatible with the historic record concerning the life and character of Jesus' half-brother, and the author knows and depends upon Jewish traditions.

The book wasn't cited as scripture until the 3rd century A.D., even though earlier authors seem familiar with its contents. Perhaps its late and universal acceptance by the churches was due to its Jewish character during a period of increasing separation between the Christian and Jewish communities, its non-theological contents, its apparent non-Pauline perspective on faith and works, and especially its lack of an explicit claim to apostolic authorship.

A literal reading of the book's superscription (1:1), suggests that it was addressed to Jews living beyond Palestine. Its contents, however, except for 5:1-6, speak primarily to Christian Jews. The social conditions of Jewish society and organizational structure of the church revealed in the book suggest a date before the destruction of Jerusalem, as does its immanent eschatology. A date before the Council of Jerusalem (Ac 15) is suggested by the author's concept of faith, similar to that in the synoptic Gospels, and by his evident familiarity with peoples' misunderstanding of Paul's early teaching among the Gentiles on justification by faith. Yet it couldn't have been written long before that council, for signs of apathy had already appeared in the church by time it was written. We are, therefore, considering it just before the Jerusalem Council (48 A.D.).

ANALYSIS OF JAMES

1:1	Salutation.
1:2-8	Trials and prayer.
1:9-11	Poverty and wealth.
1:12-18	Trial and tribulation.
1:19-25	Reception of the word.
1:26f	True religion.
2:1-13	Social distinctions and the royal law.
2:14-26	Faith and works.
3:1-12	The human tongue.
3:13-15	The two wisdoms.
4:1-10	The world and God.
4:11-f	Judging.
4:13-17	Self-confidence.
5:1-6	Judgement of the unscrupulous rich.
5:7-11	Patience until Christ returns.
5:12	Oaths.
5:13-18	Prayer.
5:19f	Reclaiming the sinning brother.

1. What does James' ways of referring to himself in 1:1 indicate how he now sees himself related to Jesus of Nazareth? What does 2:1 add? How would you imagine it was like to grow up with God's Messiah in your family; seeing his everyday life as he matured; hearing about and watching his popular public ministry; experiencing the shame of his official public execution as a criminal; hearing his disciples claim that he was alive again; encountering his risen brother personally (1 Co 15:7); thereafter, joining those very disciples; experiencing the out-pouring of God's Spirit with them, and now sharing the senior leadership of the new Way to God through Jesus for Jews, for Samaritans and now even for Gentiles (Mt 12:46-50; 13:55; Mk 3:31-35; 6:3; Lk 8:19-21; Jn 7:3-5; Ac 1;14; 2:1f 12:17; 15:13-29; 1 Co 9:5; 15:5; Ga 1:19; 2:9, 12)? How long did his journey of faith take? What similarities can you find in your journey of faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ/ Messiah? What are the implications of your acknowledging Jesus as Lord and as Messiah?
2. According to this passage (1:2-4, 12-18), how would you distinguish between various trials/ tests with respect to (a) their origins, (b) their purposes and (c) their possible chains of causes and effects? What are your attitudes to trials and temptations? How can you count them a joy, let alone "all joy" (1:2)? What Christian resources are available to you to help you both cope with them and even find joy in/ through them?
3. How much does the wisdom of 1:19f and 26 draw upon the ancient wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures (Pr 10:19; 17:27; 16:32; Ec 7:9; Ps 39:1; 141:3)? How helpful have you found this wide source of wisdom personally? Who can obtain such wisdom (1:5)? How (1:5-8)? How hard is this for you? What further point does James make in 1:22-25? How well is James following Jesus' teaching here (Mt 7:f, 24-27)? Can you see yourself in James' illustration (1:23f)?
4. What characteristics of God are referred to throughout this section? How are they related (a) to asking God for wisdom (1:5, 17, Mt 7:9-11), (b) to ones' trials/ tests (1:2, 13-15), (c) to balancing mercy and judgement (2:13; 5:11). and (c) to God's expectations of his true devoted worshipers (1:27)? How are God's expectations related to his "perfect law", "law of liberty/ freedom" or "royal law" (1:25; 2:8, 12)? What resources mentioned here are given to help you live up to God's expectations (1:6, 18, 21, 25)? How is partiality a fundamental denial of this royal law (2:8f)?
5. How much do we need James' teaching on economic discrimination today? How have you witnessed this need? What are James' main arguments against such distinctions? In what ways do they depend upon God's existence and character (Ex 34:6; Ps 86:15; 103:8)? How persuasive are such arguments, then, in our materialistic culture, both inside and outside the church? Why is this matter such a serious one for Christians (2:4-7)? How is both human and divine judgement connected to this issue? How can you and your congregation counteract this discrimination? How could the maxims in 2:12f, 4:11f; Mt 5:7; 18:32f and Lk 6:36f help?

1. In 2:14-26, how does James's view faith and actions as related? How do each of his illustrations clarify this relationship? If this relationship holds for "faith" when it is understood as trust [in accordance with the Hebrew roots for the New Testament's Greek usage following the LXX Greek translation's usage] how much more would this be true for the post-Enlightenment's cognitive use of "faith" as credence/ belief that something is the case? How does even demons' faith in God (2:19) go well beyond mere Jewish creedal orthodoxy (Dt 6:4), yet differ sharply from the appropriate expression of Jewish and Christian trust in Yahweh (Dt 6:5)? What range of actions should express Christian faith/trust? In his discussion of Abraham's faith and actions (2:21-24), does James really confuse the temporal order of Gn 15:6 and Gn 22? How so? How does James' discussion flow from his maxim in 2:13 (5:11: Ex 34:6)?
2. From what you know so far from Acts about Paul and his gospel, what do think he would say about James' discussion of faith and actions? What might be his concerns, especially for the Gentiles who were readily responding to his gospel?
3. What makes teaching such a dangerous ministry even for Christians (3:1)? Why might teachers be more prone to the evils of the tongue than other Christian ministers? How illuminating for you are James' analogies? What other ones might you use to make the same point? What is the point in your own words? What could James' strong language in 3:8 indicate about his own experience with this issue? How helpful might his advice in 1:19-21 prove here? Can you think of ways to help fellow Christians who have speaking ministries deal with the inherent challenges with their tongue? How might what Peter says in 1 P 4:10f - also help everyone with a speaking ministry?
4. How consistent should our ways of speaking of and to God and human beings be according to 3:9-12? What implications might this have for your Christian faith and practice? In 3:9, does James actually ground basic human rights in our being made in God's likeness/ image (On 1:26f; 9:6)? If so, how relevant would that be for sinful humans, if God's image/ likeness was completely lost when Adam fell into sin? Is Ps 8:2 a theological corrective?
5. In your own words, what is James' contrast between wisdom from above and from below (3:13-18)? Why does each type wisdom of manifest itself as James suggests? Have you experienced this? How might you get more of this wisdom (1:5-7; 19-21)? Does James imply that all human wisdom is from below and therefore at best useless for Christians? How so?
6. According to 4:1-10, what are the three general sources of conflict among people? How applicable is this to Christians? What appropriate strategies are recommended for dealing with each one of them? How is God involved in each of them? Why is that so important? Would all this apply only to Christians? How so? How significant is the advice given in 4:6-8 to those Christians who seek to engage in "spiritual warfare" (1 P 5:8; Ep 6:10-18)?

TRAIL XI SECTION 15: James 4:11-5:20.

1. Why might slandering or judging fellow Christian siblings (4:11; 5:9) be called judging the law, according to James' reasoning? Which particular law might James have in mind (1:25; 2:8, 12)? How fundamental is that law for Christians (Mt 19:19; 22:37-40; Jn 13:34; Ro 13:9f; Ga 5:14; 1 Th 4:9; He 13:1; 1 P 1:22; 1 Jn 4:7f, 11)? For you? Why is such judging one another especially foolish in the last days (5:3,7-9)? Would that include today? How relevant to you as a Christian is the prospect of immanent sf divine judgement (Am 4:12; 2 Co 5:10; He 9:27)? Nonetheless, why should Christians also patiently and expectantly await the coming of the Lord? What kind of judgement is actually appropriate for Christians to be involved with (2:1-6; 5:19f; 1 Co 12:10; 14:29; Ph 4:9; He 5:14; 1P 4:8; 1 Jn 4:1ff)?
2. What seems to be James' reasons for thinking that all human planning -- not only economic -- is quite pretentious and arrogant (4:13-17)? Should Christians, therefore, neither plan nor count the costs of their decisions (Lk 14:25-33)? What, then, might James be saying here? Does our experience of our ultimate human dependence upon God's will, warrant viewing him as inscrutable, fickle and arbitrary, rather than completely faithful to his purposes, promises and commands (Ex 34:6f Dt 7:9; 32:4; Ps 31:5; 89; Is 49:7; Mi 7:20; Jr 18:6-10; Ro 9:22f; 11:22f, 28-33; 1 P 4:19; 1 Jn 1:9)?
3. Is James citing or propounding a general principle about sin in 4:17? How might it relate (a) to its preceding context, (b) to such general statements as those in Ro 5:13; 7:7-9; 1 Co 15:56 and 1 Jn 3:4, (c) to the one in 1 Jn 5:17, on the one hand, and on the other hand (d) to the further statement in Ro 14:23 (1 Co:8:9-12)? How might you summarize all this in your own words? How relevant is it you and your sinning?
4. How generally applicable do you think 5:1-6 is to rich people in your economic culture? How many poor people today would appreciate James' diatribe? Why do you think that he ties his critique tightly by a "therefore" to a strong call for Christian patience in waiting for the coming of the Lord (5:7)? How might this particular Lord's coming impact those who oppress and those who are oppressed (Ep 6:9)? How closely are patience, resolve, steadfastness and endurance connected here? Whose example of this motivates you more, the prophets' or of Job's? Why? Does 5:8 rule out all Christian opposition to economic oppression and exploitation? After almost two millennia, how immanently should we Christians today expect the Lord's coming to be? How soon might some of us have to answer to our Lord's evaluation (Jb 27:8; Lk 12:20)?
5. What are the conditions of effective congregational intercessory prayer according to 5:13-18? What might it mean for your Christian congregation to practice such prayer regularly? How might you begin? How closely are confession and forgiveness of sin connected to healing for James (Mt 9:5f)? How could such mutual confession and forgiveness of sin be practiced in your congregation? What might be learned from how Christians in the past have tried to practice this?

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

Whether we view this as Paul's first letter or not, depends upon who the Galatian churches that he is addressing really were. Unfortunately "Galatia" (1:2) is an ambiguous designation in the 1st century A.D. Geographically and ethnically it referred to ethnic Galatia, the northern area of the central plateau of Asia Minor settled in the 3rd century B.C. by immigrants from Gaul, an area Paul did not visit, unless it was the "Galatian region" (Ac 18:23) on his third missionary tour of 52-57 A.D. In that case, the letter couldn't have been written before his long stay in Ephesus (Ac 18:19-21). However, "Galatia" could equally well be interpreted politically to refer to the whole Roman province of Galatia, which included not only the ethnically Galatian territory in the north but also a southern section including Lyconia and Pisidia which Paul had earlier visited on his first (47 A.D., Ac 13:14-14:20) and second (49-52 A.D., Ac 16:1-6) missionary journeys just before and just after attending the Council of Jerusalem (48 A.D.). Both destinations and dates of the letter have had strong scholarly advocates, but both also face some difficulties given the present state of our limited historical knowledge. Because of the great relevance of the letter's main theme to the Council of Jerusalem (48 A.D.), we are here following the early dating of the letter to the congregations of south Galatia, shortly after his first short first visits to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derby and before the ecumenical council.

Whichever date is preferred, the particular situation with which the letter deals must be borne in mind, if its argument is to be understood. Paul had preached the gospel of salvation by God's graciousness through trusting in Jesus, the Messiah, to the Gentiles in part of Galatia. They had welcomed his message with enthusiasm and many had believed (4:14). Later they had been visited by Jewish-minded Christian teachers who had told them that it was not enough simply to trust in Jesus as the Messiah. To really become good Christians they must also become Jews culturally, by being circumcised and keeping the law of Moses. They also cast doubt on the authenticity of Paul's apostleship, seeking to undermine his authority. With mingled sorrow and deep indignation, Paul refutes the teachings of these legalists and defends his apostleship and the truth of the gospel of God's grace which he preached. This same debate about the character of the Christian gospel for the Gentiles was the issue at the Council of Jerusalem. Paul, however, in his letter to the Galatians makes no reference to that important council or its pastoral letter to Gentile Christians, though he presented that letter to the south Galatians on his second missionary journey (Ac 16:4). Therefore it seems quite likely that Paul wrote to the Galatian churches before that council.

This book became very important to the emerging churches in the Protestant Reformation era (16th century A.D.), when again much hung on how to understand the apostolic gospel of salvation (justification and sanctification) by grace through faith alone. It remains very relevant still today, especially to converts who have a prior strong religious and ethical tradition, but also to any Christian who takes seriously the ethical injunctions of the Old and New Testaments. Is fulfilling those injunctions to be considered a precondition of receiving God's gracious salvation, or a loving response to God's grace which is engendered by welcoming God's grace through faith?

ANALYSIS OF GALATIANS:

1:1-9	Introduction of the issues.
1:10-2:21	Defense of Paul's apostleship:
1:1-17	Based upon God's actions in his life,
1:18-24	Not upon the other apostles,
2:1-10	But freely acknowledged by them.
2:11-21	Paul's correction of Peter's conduct.
3:1-5:1a	Salvation by grace apart from legal works:
3:1-5	True of the Galatian Christians themselves,
3:6-9	And of Abraham.
3:10-14	The law carries a curse,
3:15-18	And can't invalidate God's earlier promise.
3:19-4:7	The purpose of the Mosaic law,
4:8-11	Therefore, no reason to be in bondage to it.
4:12-20	Let's return to cordial relations.
4:21-5:1a	Allegory of the two covenants.
5:16-6:15	Appropriate Christian living through the Holy Spirit:
5:1b-12	Liberty,
5:13-15	Love,
5:16-26	The fruit of the Holy Spirit,
6:1-10	Helpful service,
6:11-15	Separation from the world.
6:16-18	Conclusion.

TRAIL XI SECTION 16: Galatians 1:1-2:10.

1. How would you put into your own words the good news which Paul says in 1:1-9 that he has been concerned to preach? How did the Protestant reformers express that same gospel? In what ways might it be expressed today to communicate better to the people whom you know best (Jn 3:16; Ep 2:8f)?
2. How does Paul make it clear that his gospel/ good news comes directly from God via Jesus Christ, rather than from any merely human source? Why was that fact so important to his argument here? How relevant is it also to your own appreciation of his gospel and its application to your life? Do people today care where we Christians get our gospel from? What is your own source of good news? Why, however, did Paul eventually go and submit his version of the gospel to the scrutiny of the Christian authorities in Jerusalem church (2:2)? How important does Paul think it is to get the good news right? What might be the consequences of getting it wrong, even today? Who do you think should check out the accuracy of your version of the Christian gospel? How so? How might you respond to their corrections?
3. How do you fit the details of Paul's account of his early Christian life into Luke's account in Ac 9:1-30; 11:20-30; 12:25-13:4)? Why was it important to his argument to review this history in this context?
4. What issue came into clear focus on Paul's second visit to Jerusalem (Ac 11:30; 12:25)? Why did he at that time resist circumcising the Greek Christian convert, Titus but was very willing to remember the needs of the poor thereafter (2:10)? In what respects did he value their evaluation (2:6-9)? How positive was it from Paul's point of view? How are each of these two types of good works — circumcision and alms --related differently to the gospel of grace and faith that Paul preached (Ep 2:8-10)? Would Paul agree with those Christians today who decry all talk of a Christian's good works as antithetical to the Pauline gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. Why (Ep 2:8-10)?
5. How does Paul describe those who were calling his gospel into question (1:6-9; 2:4)? On the other hand, how does he characterize the recognized leaders of the Jerusalem church? What does this difference imply about the relationship between his critics and those Jewish Christian leaders? Does 2:3-9 indicate more than a general division of mission foci between Peter and Paul? Is there any hint of hostility between Paul and Peter yet?

1. What happened later when Cephas/ Peter visited the now mixed Jewish and Gentile Christian church in Syrian Antioch, the home base for the Paul's and Barnabas' 1st Christian mission to the Gentiles (Ac 10 :19-26; 13:1f; 14:27)? In light of his earlier experience with Gentiles becoming Christians (Ac 10:9-11:18), why was Peter's behaviour so surprising? Nevertheless, what might have motivated his change of behaviour here (Ga 2:7-9; Ac 11:2, 19; 15:1f; Ro 14:13-21; 1 Co 8:9, 13; 9:19-22; 2 Co 6:3)? Where does the record of Paul's original argument with Peter end, at 2:14 or 2:21? How would you paraphrase that whole argument? How valid do you find it? Do you think the confrontation began in public (2:11; Mt 18:15-17; Ga 6:1-5; 1 Ti 5:1)? What eventually meant that the confrontation had to become public (2:13f)? How hard would it have been for Paul to have to confront his colleague Barnabas too? In light of the cooperation of Paul, Barnabas and Peter soon afterwards at the Council of Jerusalem (Ac 15:2, 7-12), who eventually must have won over whom in Antioch? Is there any hint in the New Testament of any continuing hostility between Peter and Paul (2 P 3:15)?
2. How would you express in your own words the great truth that Paul contends was at issue here (2:16, 20)? Why is it so difficult for many religious people, even some Jews and Christians, really to trust in this fundamental truth (Ro :20; Ps 143:2)? What is so important that Paul is willing to excommunicate anyone who distorts its truth (1:6-9; 2:14, 21)? Does your Christian congregation take this truth seriously enough? Why do some Christians take 2:20 as their life's verse? Might you too?
3. How would you unravel and express in you own words the four-fold argument — (a) from experience (vv. 2-5), (b) from Scripture (vv. 6-13), (c) from the meaning of Jesus' death (vv. 13f) and (d) from temporal priority (v. 17; Ja 2:21-24) — that Paul develops in 3:1-18 to defend his main thesis about the truth of the gospel (2:16)? How might his argument have cut the ground out from under the teachers who had presented Christianity as simply a continuation of Judaism, i.e., as a Jewish sect? Yet why was it important to present Christianity's true Old Testament roots rather than present it to Gentiles as a totally new and separate religion? How seriously do you and the members of your Christian community take your Old Testament Christian roots?
4. How would you describe how Paul uses and interprets the scriptures in his argument (Gn 15:6; 12:3; Dt 27:26; Hb 2:4; Lv 18:5; Dt 21:23; Gn 13:15; 17:8)? How do you think Paul came up with his interpretations? Would you have been likely to have come up with similar interpretations on the basis of the Old Testament text alone? What help might Paul claim to have had (Lk 24:32, 45; Ac 1:3; 1 Co 2:10-16; Jn 1:18)? Would you expect Christians and Jews, and even Muslims, to have the same interpretations of the Old Testament? Why?
5. How do the two questions of 3:2f relate to 2:20f and to Paul's later summary of the gospel in Ep 2:8-10 (Ga 5:6; 1 Co 1:29-31)? How important is working of the Spirit of God within you in your becoming a Christian, in your growing in faith (trust), and in your exercising your Christian ministry (3:3, 5, 14)? How aware are you of these activities of God's Spirit?

TRAIL XI -- SECTION 18:Galatians 3:10-5:1a

1. As noted earlier [in HTB XI.6.Q.4] on Ac 7:38 & 53, early Christians thought that Yahweh's past involvement with his people and their leaders had often been mediated by angels, even when that mediation was not actually specified in the Old Testament. How often do Yahweh and the angel of Yahweh seem to merge into each other in the Old Testament (Gn 16:7ff; 18; 22:11ff; 24:7,40; 31:11ff; 32:24ff; 48:15f; Ex 3; 13:21; 14:19; 23:20ff 32:34-33:17; Js 2:1-5; 5:13-6:2; Jg 2:1-5; 6:11ff)? Could it be that both 1st century A.D. Jews and early Christians took Ex 33:20 and Is 6:5 quite seriously, even literally (Jn 1:18; 6:46; 12:45; 14:7-9; 1 Ti 1:17-6:16; 1 Jn 4:12; He 2:7)? Should we too?
2. What purposes does Paul give here for the law of Moses (3:19-4:2)? To what extent is each of these purposes quite relevant to Christians, both then and now? Which of these roles can the Mosaic law play in your Christian life, without subverting the graciousness of God? How might the law even further the gracious purposes of God in you (Ro 13:8-10; Ep 2:8-10; Ga 5:6)? Is that a good enough reason for you as a liberated child of God's gracious promises (3:16-18) to seek to learn from the principles and even the details of that ancient law code in the 21st century A.D.? How could you do this without becoming legalistically enslaved to the law as much as Paul worried that the Galatian Christians would be under the teaching of the new gospel (4:8-10)?
3. How revolutionary even today is Paul's general principle in 3:28? Does it justify the equal sharing of all types of Christian ministries between men and women? Would it require the elimination of slavery? Would it break down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles (Ep 2:11-22)? Even the ones between Jews, Christians and Muslims as children of Abraham (3:29)? Are there biblical limits to this equality in relation to Christ? Could there be Jewish churches, Christian synagogues, Islamic churches, Christian mosques? How so (Ac 21:21-26; 1 Jn 4:2f)?
4. Which aspects of Christian freedom are discussed by Paul in ch. 4? How free are you in each of these respects as a Christian? What brings about your Christian liberation? How do you know that you are free (4:6; Ro 8:14-16)? How can you enter more fully into these freedoms? Which of Luther's two great theses about Christian freedom [1520 A.D.] — "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none." "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." -- seems to have been inspired by this passage?
5. What sort of relationship did Paul seem to have with the Galatian Christians (4:11-20)? How does he use this to bring home his main point? How also does he employ the story of Abraham's family to make his point (4:21-5:1)? What do you think of his use Jewish rabbinical biblical interpretive techniques here? What might be their possible dangers of general usage of such methods of interpretation by Christians? Should Christians use them today? How so?

TRAIL XI -- SECTION 19: Galatians 5:1b-6:18.

1. In ch. 5, what two quite different ways by which Gentile Christian might lose their Christian freedom are critiqued? What alternative approaches to Christian freedom are advocated? How relevant are these warnings and recommendations to you personally? How might Luther's other thesis on Christian freedom (Trail XI.18.Q.4) be rooted here? How are his two apparently paradoxical theses compatible? How so?
2. How does this description of true Christian freedom form the context in which the three cardinal Christian virtues of Christian freedom flourish (5:5f; 1 Co 13:13)? How are these three virtues related to each other here? What are the implications of the fact that the Christian action that really matters in God's value system is "faith working thorough love" rather than religiously keeping prescribed laws (3:16, 21), rites (5:6) and seasons (4:10)? How much are Paul and James, therefore, really in agreement about faith and actions (Ro 13:10)? Does the basic Christian gospel, then, consist not of two key words — grace and faith (Ep 2:8f)— but three essential words: grace, faith and love, and in that dynamic order (Ep 2:8-11)? How does that avoid subverting or diluting God's grace (Ro 12:2; Ph 2:12f)
3. What does "flesh" mean here (5:19f)? How do different translations render the term [Greek = "sarx"? How common are the many deeds of the flesh even among Christians today? How serious are all such practices (vv. 5-21)? What role does human competition seem to play (5:15, 26; 6:3f)? How should "the flesh" to be dealt with by Christians (5:13; 6:10)
4. How might all the varieties of the fruit of the Spirit (5:22f) be intended by Paul to be construed as aspects of Christian/ Christ-like (Jn 13:34; 1 Co 13:4-7) loving? What, indeed, is the "one word" that fulfills the whole law (5:14; Mt 7:12· 22:39f; Ro 13:8-10)? What does each of the evidences/ fruit; Mt 12:33; Lk 6:44) of the Spirit's involvement in a life mean to you? How significant is it that even the Greek's ideal, "self-control:" is included (2 Ti 1:7)? According to the Letter to the Galatians what essential roles does the Holy Spirit play in our whole Christian life (3:2f, 5, 14; 4:6,29; 5:5, 16-18, 23f, 25; 6:1, 8)? What does all this mean to you?
5. What does the context suggest that "the law of Christ" (6:2) is (1 Co 9:21; Ja 2:8)? How does it apply to a Christian's dealings with fellow sinners (6:1-5; Lk 17:3f)? What important note does 6:5 sound? Would that warrant Luther's view that Christians should not let the weak remain weak, but help them to become stronger? How important also are the warnings of 6:18 & 3f? Does all this apply only within the Christian community? How can this work out more effectively in your life and that of your congregation?
6. In the context of the whole letter to the Galatians, who do you think Paul is referring to as "the Israel of God" in 6:16 (3:7,29; Ro 9:6f; Ph 3:3)? Are they to be contrasted with "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Co 10:18)? Is there still hope for the Jews (Ro 11)? How does this relate to Jesus?

TRAIL XI SECTION 20 Acts 15:1-35

1. Why was the issue of Gentiles' direct conversion to Christ without their having to conforming to Jewish customs, still far from being settled for many Jewish Christians, despite the apparent silencing of critics after the Peter's report to the church about his ministry with Cornelius (11:17f)? What factors were working against full, direct acceptance of Gentile believers (6:7; 11:2-4, 19f; 13:12, 14f, 42-50; 14:1-5, 19, 27; 15:5)? How had the conflict escalated recently (15:3f; Ga 1:6-9; 2:11-13)? How might such acceptance of Gentiles affect the Jewish majority in the early church, the culture of congregations, and the common Jewish approach to Gentile evangelism (Mt 23:13, 15)? Could the same or a similar issue arise today as more and more people from other religious, or no-religious, backgrounds become Christians, not only abroad but even in traditionally "Christian societies"? Where do the majority of Christians live today? But what was the real issue according to Paul (Ga 2:14-16, 19-21; 3:1-5; 5:2-6)?
2. What were Paul's, Peter's and James' contributions to the council's deliberations? How consistent are they with their previous teachings (Ga 2:1-5, 15f; Ac 14:27; 15:4, 12; Ac 11:15-17; 15:7-11; Ja 2:13; 5:1; Ac 11:18; 15:14-21)? How do their contributions support one another on the main issue? What was contributed to the discussion by the evidence of the amazing working of God's Spirit among the Gentiles, and by the fact that this concurred with the prophecy of Am 9:11f? How many other prophets would his Jewish audience recognize that he could also cite about God raising up a people for himself from the Gentiles (Gn 12:3; Is 42:6; 49:6f; 60:3; 65:10; Mi 1:11, 14)? What Hebrew scriptures might the opposition have been able to cite in support of their case for circumcising Gentiles (Ex 12:48; Ek 48:8f)? Why does Luke's summary of the council's proceedings not make mention of the opposition's biblical and/ or experiential case? Could it not have even been presented? Why?
3. What can be learned from the council's pattern of reasoning in deciding what to do in a new situation by seeking both to remain faithful to the teachings of scripture and to respect one's experience of the contemporary working of God's Spirit? How difficult is it to keep a balance between these two revelations of God's will on a matter? Which revelation should prevail, if the two can't be reconciled or balanced? What do you do when the evidence of either scripture or experience is not itself uniform? What issues being faced by the church today might benefit from this mode of reasoning? How might it help you or the church decide what to do?
4. To what extent was the continuing unity of the Christian church at stake in this 1st ecumenical council's deliberations? What are the issues that tend to divide the universal/ catholic/ ecumenical church today? What is the likelihood that a similar ecumenical council today would be able to decide any of those issues? What would it take to reestablish the unity of the church universal?
5. On what did the council agree with respect to the main issue? How do the works of faith that both James (Ja 2:17-26) and Paul (Ga 5:6; Ep 2:10) had been insisting upon for all Christians differ markedly from the works of the law Mosaic law that the Pharisaic Jewish Christians were insisting upon (15:5)? Which type of works are the essentials of James' concluding judgement/ decision and of the council's encyclical (15:20, 28f)? What do you think the encyclical's particular abstentions were considered to be essential (15:28) for (15:21)? Would that be true of every one of them in any age and culture? How is each of them treated in the later teaching of the apostles' according to their extant epistles?

1. What was the sharp disagreement here between Paul and Barnabas about? Who was correct? Why (Plm 24; Cl 4:10; 1 Ti 4:11; 1 P 5:13)? Can Christians disagree, even profoundly, without separating? How so? Might some sorts of differences require separation (Ga 1:8f; 1 Co 5:1-13; 2 Co 6:14-18)?
2. What recommended Silas and Timothy to Paul as his partners on his 2nd missionary journey (15:22, 25, 32; 16:1-3, 37f)? How do you choose your partners in Christian mission? Given that Paul firmly opposed circumcising Gentile believers, why did he circumcise Timothy (1 Co 7:20; 9:20; Ga 5:6; 6:15), but not Titus earlier (Ga 2:1, 3)? For Paul, what principles were involved? How could they be relevant today?
3. What were Paul's activities while revisiting the congregations that he had founded on his 1st mission (16:4f)? How important are such activities for young Christians and new congregations today (Mt 28:19f)? What connection do you see between the first and second halves of 16:6? What general church growth principle might be involved here? Why was it also important that the Jerusalem encyclical was delivered to those particular congregations (13:14, 42-50; 14: 1-7, 19f; 15:1f, 21,24; Ga 2:12)? What other principles of church growth may be involved here (Jn 17:11, 14-18, 20-23, 26)?
4. What are the indications here that God does not always lead his people where they expect? In what ways does God show the missionaries where to go next? Which of them have you experienced? Do you welcome each of the equally as from God? Did God really not want the gospel preached in the Roman provinces of Asia and Bithynia (Ac 2:9, 16:9f; 18:19-20:1; Rv 1:11; 2:1-3:22)? Did God change Paul's guidance later on (18:19-21; 19:1-20:1)? In this section, what might the narrator's first change in person from "they" (16:8) to "we" (16:10ff) indicate? What would subsequent similar changes of person also indicate? Can you keep track of them?
5. Why does it seem the Paul's usual mission strategy of beginning with the local Jewish synagogue didn't work in the Roman military retirement community of Philippi? How did he respond to the new circumstances? How much of his evangelistic success came through his readiness to take advantage of unpredictable events, opportunities and encounters? Does this suggest new general strategies for personal evangelism (2 Ti 4:2, Cl 4:3· 1 P 3:15-17)? How do they compare to the great evangelistic programs of recent times? How crucial always is the inner working of God's Spirit in effective Christian evangelism (16:14; 1 Co 2:13f)? Is it possible to assure, facilitate, predict, recognize, or acknowledge his activities (Jn 3:3-8)?
6. What implications might follow from how baptism was administered by Paul in Philippi (16:15f, 30-33)? How essential for the rite of baptism to be appropriate and effective are the requisites Peter set forth at Pentecost (2:37-41)? How can they include young children and infants? Why is confirmation linked to baptism in Christian communions that practice infant baptism? What does your baptism mean to you? Does it include your ordination into Christian ministry (1 Co 12:13)?

TRAIL XI - SECTION 22: Acts 17:1-18:17

1. How does the development of the Christian mission in Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, compare to that in the small town of Berea with respect to (a) the mission strategy, (b) the message, (c) the time of openness, (d) the response, and (e) the responders? How does the response to the gospel in your congregation compare to that of the Jews in Berea? How does your own response compare to theirs?
2. How did the Thessalonian Jews distort Paul's message in making their case against him? How reminiscent is that of the methods of the Sadducees with Jesus (Jn 19:1-4, 12-22)? What basic distortions of the Christian message have you personally encountered so far? How have you responded? What happened? Are such people actually aware that they are dealing with distortions of the Christian message? What motivations might be involved?
3. What circumstances led to Paul's arrival in Athens (17:13-16)? Is there any hint that Paul had been planning to visit Athens the citadel of Greek philosophy (1 Th 3:1)? What then might have made him feel so distressed (provoked, outraged) in this particular city so full of idols? Why was such an intellectual population so religious (17:21)? How true is that often today? Why didn't Paul confine his mission here to the Jewish synagogue (17:17; I Co 9:19-23)? Should Christian missionaries today follow Paul's example by taking their message right into the marketplace of ideas? Where would that marketplace be in your society? How much might a Jew from Tarsus know about the teachings of the popular Stoic and Epicurean philosophers? Can you, like Paul (17:28b [quoting Epimenides of Crete and Aratus of Cilicia]), make relevant connections between the Christian gospel and the popular thinkers of your own culture? If you can, should you do so? What dangers might need to be avoided in making connections with non-Christian writers? Does Paul's use of these pagan writers indicate that he meant to endorse what they literally said, let alone what they meant in their own context? Should his quotations, then, ever be interpreted as deep insights into Paul's own Christian view of God, the world and humanity?
4. How would you paraphrase Paul's speech to the Areopagus (17:22-31)? How does Paul adapt his usual message to communicate to the intellectually curious Greeks? What can Christian apologists today learn from Paul's approach here? Why might Paul's teaching on Jesus' resurrection from the dead have been a problem for the Athenians (17:18, 23)? Would intellectuals today have the same problem? How much can you assume your secular contemporaries really know about the Christian gospel? How successful was Paul's brief mission in Athens? Why do you think Luke specifically names two of the few Christian converts in Athens? What special interest does Luke seem to have in women who were converted (1:14; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:2, 18) and their ministries (Lk 8:1-3; Ac 9:36; 16:14f; 18:26)? Nevertheless, why do you think there is no record of a Christian church being founded in Athens by Paul? Should Christians today give up trying to evangelize intellectuals? How so?
5. In spite of his many earlier experiences, why do you think that Paul again launched his Corinthian mission in the Jewish synagogue (3:26; 13:44-51; 17:1-12, 17; 18:4-6; Ro 1:16; 2:9)? Why would there have to be a new leader of the synagogue (18:8, 17)? How might this have helped to fan the Jewish public opposition to Paul's teaching? Could the location of the new venue for his teaching ministry also have been an aggravation (17:7)? What are the many different ways in which God encouraged, supported and reassured Paul during his challenging eighteen months of ministry in Corinth, the sexually-notorious capital of the Roman province of Achaia? How challenging is the context of your own Christian ministry? How does God encourage, support and reassure you in that ministry and context? What further support do you feel that you need? Where might you find it?

INTRODUCTION TO 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS.

These two short letters were certainly among the earliest New Testament books to be written. They were written on Paul's 2nd missionary journey, not long after the founding of the church at Thessalonica in 50 A.D. Paul's initial stay there may have been somewhat longer than the three Sabbaths that Luke records (Ac 17:1-10), for there were many Gentile converts (Ac 17:4; 1 Th 1:9). Furthermore, while there Paul seems to have worked for his living (2 Th 3:8f) and also received aid more than once from Philippi, 3 days journey east on the great Egnatian Way (2 Th 4:16). The 1st letter was written either (a) shortly after Timothy's return to Paul in Athens from a brief return visit from Berea to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage their new-found faith (Ac 17:13-15; 1 Th 3:2, 6) or (b) early in Paul's eighteen-month stay in Corinth. The 2nd letter was sent at the most only a few months later, while Paul was still in Corinth.

These two letters give insight into the life of a newly-founded local Greek Christian congregation within about 20 years of Jesus' Passion. Among the most personal of Paul's letters, they present a vivid picture of himself and his readers, while revealing the marvelous results of the Christian mission in the great commercial and military seaport which served as the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia. The 2nd letter makes much more use of Old Testament language than the 1st, perhaps to take into account the Jewish persecution of Christians there (Ac 17:2-9, 13).

The apostle was greatly encouraged by Timothy's report of the church's steadfastness under persecution and of its continued progress in the Christian faith. But there were some matters of concern, especially some misunderstandings of the Messiah's second coming. Although the letters are brief and not theological treatises, they contain allusions to almost every cardinal truth of the Christian faith, especially the return of Christ (1 Th 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23; 2 Th 1:5-10; 2:1-12). Paul's great aim for himself and his converts is summed up in 1 Th 3:13.

ANALYSIS OF I THESSALONIANS:

1:1	Greetings.
1:2-3:13	Personal relations:
1:2-10	Thanksgiving for their faith and steadfastness,
2:1-16	Explanation of Paul's recent response to his Jewish critics;
2:17-3:10	Narrative of events since Paul left Thessalonica.
3:11-13	His prayer for an early reunion with them.
4:1-5:11	Church problems:
4:1-12	Holy living and brotherly love,
4:13-18	The state of dead Christians,
5:1-11	The Messiah's return.
5:12-22	Exhortations.
5:23-28	Conclusion.

ANALYSIS OF 2 THESSALONIANS:

1:1,2	Greetings.
1:3-12	Thanksgiving and encouragement:
1:3f	Praise for progress,
1:5-10	Promise of the Lord's return,
1:1 1f	Prayer for the church.
2:1-12	Events preceding the Day of the Lord.
2:13-17	Paul's confidence in them.
3:1-15	Appropriate exhortations.
3:16-18	Conclusion.

TRAIL XI - SECTION 23: 1Thessalonians 1:1-3:13

1. How are Christian faith, hope and love (a) similar, (b) different and (c) interrelated in 1 Th 1:3; 3:6; 12; 4:13f; 5:8, 10? What is added to this elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Co 13:13; Ro 15:4, 13; 2 Th 1:2f; He 11:1; 1 P 1:21)? Is this so in your Christian experience? How are faith, hope and love related to the persons of the Trinity throughout ch. 1? How is Christian joy also connected with them (1:6; 2:19f; 3:9)? Is it for you too? How so?
2. What characterizes the model (1:7), but not yet perfect/ mature (3:1f; 4:1,10; 5:11, 23) Christians in Thessalonica (1:6-10)? How would you measure up to Paul's standards? How did the Thessalonian Christians' situation compare with that of the earliest Jewish Christians in Judea (2:14-16)? How might their vital Christian living be linked to their challenging circumstances? Which do you think stimulates Christian growth more, times of ease or of adversity (Ja 1:2-4; Ro 5:3-5; 1 P 1:6)? How true have you found this in your life?
3. What general picture is painted in 1 Th 2:1-3:13 about Paul's personal relationship to the new converts in Thessalonica? How was this expressed (a) in how he first conducted his ministry with them, (b) in his goals and hopes for them, and (c) in how he continued to try to relate to them? How happy was he with their Christian growth? How might his approach to ministry with them and their subsequent growth be related? What could Christian leaders today learn from this?
4. How would you summarize the contents of Paul's prayers here for the Thessalonian converts (1:2-10; 3:11-13; 5:23, 28)? How helpful do you find his prayers as examples of how you might pray for other Christians? Whom do you pray for regularly? What do you pray for on their behalf? Would you like other Christians to pray for you regularly? About what? Who might be willing to do so? Could you ask them to do so (Ep 6:19; Cl 4:3ff; 1 Th 5:25)? Why? Is Paul's characterization of Timothy as God's fellow-worker [Greek = "*synergist*"] in the gospel of Christ (3:2) true of all Christian ministers/ servants (Mk 16:20; 1 Co 3:9; 2 Co 5:20-6:1)? How does this apply to you and your Christian ministry?

1. In what areas of life does Paul want his readers to pursue his general goal (4:1) for them (4:1-12)? What reasons and motivations does he offer in each case? In what respects could you yourself be living more consistently as a Christian? What impact might your more consistent Christian living have upon the people around you and your vocation?
2. In 4:13-15, what is taught about the Messiah's return and the resurrection of Christians? What do 1:10; 2:19f; 3:13 and 5:23 add? What difference is inferred about the diverse impact of these events for Christians and non-Christians? How might these future events have practical implications for your present Christian living?
3. In 4:16f, what direction is the Lord heading in his return? What implications might this have for where the Lord and all those who are united with him are then going? How might this be connected with God's future purposes for and on the earth (5:10; Mt 6:10; Rv19:6-9; 11-16; 21:1-20; 22:5)? Where do you envision your ultimate future as a Christian? With whom?
4. In this section, note the many ways the metaphor of sleep is used. What general implications might this have for interpreting biblical metaphors? Can we ever say that any metaphor always means the same thing? What other biblical metaphors can you think of that has different applications?
5. What practical behavioral implications for your basis Christian hope (4:13; 5:11) and way of life (4:112) follow from taking seriously all the continuous commands/ imperatives of 5:11-28? Which behaviours seem hardest for you to practice regularly? Which of these behaviours do you think are most needed in your own life, among your fellow Christians, and in your wider community? How can you employ the human and divine resources mentioned here to help you grow in these areas of practice?

1. How well do Paul's prayers of thanksgiving (1:3-10) and intercession (1:11f) for the Thessalonian Christians complement each other? What purposes/ goals for Christian living are implicit in these prayers? How do these goals/ purposes intersect with your own as a Christian? What do you pray about for your fellow Christians? Do you let them know about these prayers? Why?
2. What do you think and feel about Paul's view of God's righteous judgement (1:5-9)? How does it accord with understandings of justice and judgement in your society? Who today might appreciate such justice most? However, whose benefit does Paul focus upon? How will Christians be involved? How well does the punishment here fit the crime (1:8f)? What is the timing of this divine vindication? Will that satisfy everyone? How does this prospect motivate you now?
3. Does the apposition of the phrase "object of worship" to the word "god" in 2:4 suggest Luther's worship-related definition of "god" as "whatever one worships as one's ultimate concern"? How many gods could there then, be? Furthermore, how would anyone be able either to determine which god was true/ real or to distinguish any gods from mere idols?
4. How do the evil one's triumphant deportment and claims in 2:4 related to humanity's original temptation (Gen 3:5) and to the extravagant claims of the ancient kings of Assyria (2 Ch 32:10, 13-15, 19-21), Babylon (Is 14:13-15,22; Dn 5:18, 20, 27f, 30) and Tyre (Ek 28:2,6)? What recent human beings have made similar god-like claims? Why might even their great signs and wonders be unclear evidence of divine activity (2:9; Mt 24:24; Ac 8:9-24; 13:8; 19:11-17; Rv 13:13-15; 19:20)? What then should be our Christian attitude be to them as indicators of God's involvement (Lk 16:30f; Jn 3:2; 4:48; 9:31-33; 10:37f; 14:10f; Ac 2:22; 10:38)? How can we Christians distinguish between authentic and inauthentic signs and wonders (2:10, 12f; Ex 34:6f; Jn 1:14, 17; 14:16f, 21; 15:26)? How relevant is this in a scientific age? How can both Satan and God be involved in false miracles (2:9-12)?
5. What has provoked Paul's response in 2:1f? How is the return of God's Messiah connected with the forces of evil and the "man of lawlessness"? Who is this "man of lawlessness"? What characterizes him and his lawlessness? How does this fit with what Jesus says about lawlessness in Mt 24:9, 12, 45-51? How rampant is lawlessness day in your society? What restrains the lawless one and the forces of evil then and now (2:6-8; Gn 15:16; 2 P 3:8-10)? What hint is there here that human beings, even Christian ones, can influence the timing of Christ's return? What might that mean for you?

1. According to 2:13-3:5, in what ways does God take the initiative in helping people to come to know him and to continue to know him through Jesus, his Messiah? What human activities does God use in achieving his good purposes in and through us? Which ones would you most like to see God realizing in, and even through you? Dare you pray for this?
2. Does Paul suggest in 2:15 and 3:6 that all Christian tradition is equally worth following (1 Co 11:2, 10:13, 16)? How does this apply to the many diverse traditions that have been developed by Christian churches during the centuries since Paul's day? How would you identify which of these many traditions are essential Christian ones to continue to follow (Ac 2:42; 1 Co 15:3-8)? Which ones does your Christian congregation follow? For what reasons?
3. According to Paul, what is the place of honest daily work in a Christian's life? Why is this truth so important (3:8, 11f)? What attitudes are appropriate to the particular work and role that God has given us (1 Co 7:17-24; Cl 3:17)? How might your daily work connect with your particular spiritual gift for loving others? Do you thank God regularly both for your work and your loving ministry? Why?
4. What important balance can you see in the Christian discipline that Paul recommends in 3:14f? What evils may be perpetrated if this balance is lost one way or the other? What Christian disciplines does your congregation practice? How could they be better balanced?
5. As you trace on a map the last leg of Paul's third missionary journey from Corinth to his home base in Syrian Antioch (Ac 18:18-22), why do you think Luke said so little about so many months of travel? Do you think there was no significant Christian ministry along the way? What was so important about the few people, places and events that Luke does in fact mention? Although little might be recorded about the work done by most Christian ministers, both ordained and unordained, how important might their contributions be in God's economy for his church and his world? When will their true worth be revealed and valued? What does this mean to you (1 Co 15:58)?

TRAIL XI - SECTION 27: Acts 18:23-19:41

1. In this section, what evidence is there of Paul's shorter-term and longer-term mission strategies (18:4-7; Ro 15:19, 23f)? What were some of their elements and methods? How successful were they? Should Christians today try to plan their ministries? What will make them prosper?
2. If it is Luke's practice to list first the dominant member of a mission partnership — as with Paul and Barnabas after 13:7 — who seems to be the dominant member of the married pair of Paul's fellow-workers, Priscilla and Aquila, during this period of ministry (18:2, 18, 26; Ro 16:3; 1 Co 16:19)? How did they seem to work together well as a team? What light does this throw upon the role of women in God's service in the Bible (Jg 4:4-9; 13:2-24; Ac 9:36-42; 16:14f; 21:8f; Ro 16:1)? What implications might there be for women in ordained and unordained Christian ministries today?
3. What might there be about Apollos that would make him a suitable candidate for ministry in your Christian congregation? How serious was the one shortcoming presented here? Who helped him and his converts make progress in the Christian faith? How did they do so? How could you learn from them about how to help your own congregation's minister(s)? What sort of help is needed there?
4. Do you yourself know much more about the Holy Spirit's nature, character and activities than did the disciples of Jesus that Paul met at the beginning of his ministry in Ephesus? What, then, might you be missing in your Christian life and ministry? Does what happened to these disciples, suggest that it is God's intention that Christians should have to wait to discover the Holy Spirit later in their Christian lives? What might be considered the normal timing for Christians to discover the inner working of the Holy Spirit, according to Ro 8:9 and Ac 2:38?
5. What can we learn from 19:11-20 about the differences between true miracles, false miracles and magic? How does God demonstrate his truth and power through Christian ministries today? Would more miracles be helpful or unhelpful in propagating the Christian gospel today? Why?
6. From the riot in Ephesus, what can Christians today learn about (a) the possible economic and political impact of the true Christian way, (b) some of the common motives people have for opposing the spread of Christianity, and (c) how to deal with public challenges to our Christian faith? How applicable is this even in traditionally Christian countries today? Should religious clashes ever come to secular courts? Why?

INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS

This letter was probably written by Paul in A.D. 56 or 57 from Ephesus (1 Co 16:8f, 19) during his 3rd missionary journey. Paul seems to have already written them an earlier letter (5:9). Corinth, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, was a very busy metropolitan, cosmopolitan, political and athletic centre astride the narrowing of the isthmus linking north and south Greece. Thus, it was central for disseminating the gospel message throughout the Roman world. It was famous throughout the empire not only for its cultural life, but also for its rampant immorality and idolatry.

The letter is not a systematic theological or ethical treatise, but rather a collection of Paul's answers to a series of questions that had been sent to him by the Corinthian Christians (7:1; 8:1; 12:1), plus his responses to distressing news he had heard (16:17) about factions (1:11, 11:18f), sexual scandal (5:1), Christians challenging one another in secular law courts (6:1) and even perversions in their practice of the Lord's Supper (11:18, 20). It is largely concerned with issues of practical morality, which are not dealt with psychologically or even ethically but spiritually, as matters of a Christian's personal relationship with God. The Christian principles that inform and guide Paul's teachings here have been valuable for Christians confronting very similar spiritual issues in various forms in later ages and circumstances. Some of the most memorable passages in the whole New Testament are found here: e.g., Paul's description of Christian love (ch. 13) and of the church as Christ's body (ch. 12-14), as well as his defense and explanation of bodily resurrection (ch. 15).

Few biblical critics have rejected this as an authentic Pauline letter. It is quoted by Clement of Rome in his own pastoral letter to the church in Corinth before the end of the 1st century A.D., perhaps because some of the same issues that Paul addressed still prevailed there then.

ANALYSIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS:

1:1-9	Introduction.
1:10-4:21	Factions in the church:
1:10-2:16	The spirit of factions rests on spiritual pride,
3:1-4:8	Ministers of the gospel are all servants of God,
4:9-21	The apostle's own example and authority.
5:1-6:20	Moral disorders in the church:
5:1-23	Discipline of a notorious sexual offender,
6:1-11	Litigation between Christians,
6:12-20	The spiritual basis for pure life,
7:1-40	Marriage and celibacy.
8:1-11:1	Meat offered to idols:
8:1-13	Christian liberty must be tempered by love,
9:1-27	Application of these principles to Paul's own life,
10:1-11:1	No Christian compromise with idolatry.
11:2-34	Abuses in Christian church worship:
11:2-16	Conduct of women in worship,
11:17-34	Profanation of the Lord's Supper.
12:1-14:40	Spiritual gifts, ministries and workings in Christ's church:
12:1-31	The church functions as Christ's body,
13:1-13	The loving that ministries are all about,
14:1-40	Choosing which ministries to exercise in the church.
15:1-58	The resurrection: the Messiah's and ours.
16:1-4	A financial collection for our Christians in Judea.
16:5-12	Conclusion.

1. What qualifies the Corinthian Christians to be called God's holy people (1:2; Ex 19:4-6; Dt 14:2; 7:6-8; 1 P 2:9f; Ga 3:26, 29)? To whom else could this appellation apply (1:2)? Why would it be appropriate to address all such people as brothers and sisters (1:10)? What do both appellations mean to you?
2. What had Paul to thank God for about the Corinthian Christians (1:4-9)? Which of these features would apply to your Christian congregation? How often do you thank God for them? With which others could you pray God to bless your congregation? Why not ask him to do so right now?
3. Why were the divisions in the church at Corinth quite incompatible with the gospel of their Lord Jesus Christ? What form did the factions take in the Corinthian church? What divisions are there in your congregation? Are they any less serious? What do you think Paul and Jesus might think and say about them?
4. What did the cross usually signify in the Roman Empire? Why was the cross of Jesus, God's Messiah, both a stumbling block to Jews, and folly to Greeks (1:18-25)? Is the cross a scandalous or ridiculous symbol in your culture? Why? What other Christian symbol might play the same role in your culture that the cross played for Christians in the 1st century? If Paul really wanted to communicate the Christian gospel effectively to both Jews and Greeks, why did he insist upon centering his preaching on a crucified Messiah, rather than on some more attractive aspect(s) of the Christian good news that his audiences might highly value? What other approaches would many Christian apologists and evangelists today recommend? However, how central is the cross of Jesus to your Christianity? For Paul, how did the Messiah's crucifixion represent the true power and the true wisdom of God? How are they antithetical to mere human wisdom and power? How have you found this to be true? How so?
5. Was it really because the vast majority of Paul's audience in Corinth were not really wise or powerful people by human standards (1:26), that he approached them in weakness through preaching (1:20-22) rather than with powerful miracles and the wisdom of eloquent arguments (2:1-5; Ac 17:23-31) or even baptism (1:18)? What were his reasons according to 1:27-31 and 2:5-9 (1:4; Ep 2:8f)? What aspects of our Christian salvation stem from God's own action of uniting us with his crucified and risen Messiah (1:30)? What does each of these aspects mean to you?
6. How is God's wisdom so very different from human wisdom (2:6-9)? How then can humans come to understand God's thoughts (2:10-16), even as expressed in his Messiah (1:24) and in the scriptures? Does it help you to distinguish several roles of God's Spirit here, along with some theologians, namely, revealing [unveiling/ disclosing] God's thoughts (2:10-12), expiring [breathing out] the appropriate words for speakers and writers to express God's thoughts (2:13; 2 Ti 3:16), and illuminating [making clear the relevance] of those thoughts and words to hearers and readers (2:13-16)? Is all this divine activity so necessary because of our mere humanity (2:9, 16) and/or because of our sinfulness (2:14-16)?

1. Why did Paul have to speak to the Corinthian Christians as if they were still "babes in Christ" (3:1f) rather than mature (2:6), in spite of their many spiritual gifts (1:7)? What were the signs of their spiritual immaturity? Why was this so important a matter? How does he clarify and correct the problem? How prevalent is this issue in Christian congregations that you know best? Why should Christians be expected to behave differently in this respect than humans generally do (3:3)?
2. Why do Christian congregations prize some of their ministers/ servants more than others? Should they do so? How many different types of ministries and ministers might God need to accomplish his complete work in a particular congregation? Are all Christian ministers, not just apostles and ordained clergy, "God's fellow workers" [synergists] (3:6) and "stewards of the mysteries [secret things] of God" (4:1)? Who, nevertheless, is always the church's prime minister deserving the main credit for whatever is accomplished? Who will evaluate all churches and their ministries? When? According to what criteria? In what, then, should Christian congregations and ministers take their pride?
3. How do the metaphors Paul used elucidate the nature of the church and its development (3:9; Mk 4:3, 14, 26-29; Mt 7:24-27) differ? Which metaphor seems to fit your congregation better? How does it help illuminate your congregation's true nature, dynamics, ministries, and priorities? Would it also be helpful to try the other metaphor on for size too? Why is it often more helpful and safer to have more than one metaphor for the same thing? How might Paul's warning in 3:13-15, both motivate and reassure you?
4. How does 3:16-20 develop the metaphor of God's building (3:9)? How significant might it be that Paul's first use of the term 'temple of God', seems to be applied not to individual Christians, but to the church as a whole (3:16f; 1 P 2:5)? What makes it so holy? How might this truth lead to the wisdom that Paul concludes this discussion with (3:18-23)?
5. What strong passions does Paul express in 4:1-13? How does this enrich your view of Paul as a person? To whom is he speaking and why (4:14f), even with such stark rhetorical sarcasm (4:7-10) and personal realism (4:11-13)? Is there anyone to whom you minister in a similar capacity whom you might feel like addressing a similar way? Would it be appropriate to follow Paul's example here, and do so (4:16)? Which Christian ministries necessarily involve some measure of loving discipline (4:14f, 19-21; He 12:7-13)? Do you have anyone like Timothy (4:17) with whom you can share this difficult caring ministry?
6. Have you ever had Christian teachers/ tutors whom you could regard as fathers or mothers in the Christian faith (4:15)? Why them in particular? Would it be appropriate also to imitate them (4:16; 11:1; Ph 3:17; 4:9; 1 Th 1:6; 2 T 3:9)? Would you want learners/ disciples (Mt 28:19f) to imitate your Christian theory and practice (4:1f; Ja 3:1f) How would you help them do so?

1. What attitude did the Corinthian church have towards the sexual immorality of one of their members? How was this practice viewed by the liberal-minded citizens of their city, notorious as "the sex-capital" of the Roman Empire (5:2, 6)? How might your society view such a practice within your congregation? Why did Paul deal with it so decisively? What were the purposes of his discipline (5:2, 5)? What point is made by his Old Testament reference to leaven and the Passover (5:6-8; Ex 12:33f, 39; Dt 16:1-4)? How might the same point be expressed in your society's idiom? For what other types of Christian sinners did Paul consider the same discipline to be appropriate (5:9, 10)? Would the Christians you know today agree? Why should non-Christian sinners be treated quite differently from the Christian ones (5:9-13)? Do you think Jesus would agree (Jn 17:14-18; Mt 9:10-13; Mk 2:15-17)? What would be the consequences of Christian reversing Paul's treatment of Christian and non-Christian sinners? How then might non-Christians view the church and Christians? What would it take to correct things? How relevant is this to the church in your society today?
2. What could the reference to Satan's role in disciplining Christian sinners mean (5:5; Jb 1:6-12, 22-2:7; Mt 4:1; Lk 22:31; 1 Ti 1:20; He 12:7-11)? What helpful roles might the evil one play in God's economy? How could that be possible (Hb 1:14)?
3. How are serious disputes between fellow Christians to be settled? Why? How does this accord with Jesus' advice in Mt 18:15-17? Do know Christians who have resorted to civil law courts to settle their mutual dispute? How would they have welcomed their congregation's arbitrating a settlement (Mt 5:9; Ja 3:18)? How well would they live together in the same congregation thereafter, especially when one or both parties felt the church's arbitrated settlement was unjust or somewhat less than fully biblical? Who are the wise Christians who could function as judges in your context (6:5)? What qualifications and attitudes should you look for in such Christian judges (6:5; Ex 18:13-28; Ga 6:1; Ph 2:4)? What role should higher church courts play here? If Christians are dissatisfied with the judgments of church courts, should they appeal further to civil courts? What if the judgments of civil courts and church courts differ? Which should prevail for Christians? What do you think of Paul's recommendation in 6:7? Is he simply referring Christians to God's ultimate court (Ro 12:19-21; Rv 20:13)? Would that, last, apply to Christians' disputes with a non-Christians as well? What do you make of Paul's curious statements about saints/ Christians judging the world and angels (6:2f, Dn 7:8, 22, 27; Mt 19:28; Lk 22:28-30; Rv 20:4, 6)?
4. In 6:9-11, is Paul indirectly claiming ["such were some of you"] that God has delivered/ transformed each of this whole broad range of sinners? What might such change involve in each case? Would all these transformations have had to be instantaneous (Ro 12:2; Ph 1:6; 2:12f)? Is God still able and willing to deliver that same range of sinners today in your society? Does your society think that all such people even need to be transformed? Why? Does your Christian congregation? Why? What might be the implications of your congregation's decision (a) for your congregation's mission in your community and (b) for your congregation's fellowship with Christian congregations that take a different stand on this issue? Does Paul think all the listed sins ultimately equally serious (6:10)? Do you? Why?
5. What principles does Paul offer in 6:11-20 for dealing appropriately with your physical body as a Christian? How can you apply them personally? How important is your body to your Lord (6:13)? Does 6:18 suggest that bodily sins are worse than other sins? Does your society? Can you think of other bodily sins that Paul could well have included in 6:18? In a culture that routinely used temple female and male temple prostitutes to unite worshipers with the spirits of their deities to obtain their favours, how radical is Paul's statements in 6:15-17?
6. How do the references to individual Christian's bodies being "members of Christ" (6:15) and "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (2 Co 6:16), relate to Paul's corporate use of the body metaphor for the church of Jesus Christ throughout 1 Corinthians (1 Co 3:16f; 10:16f; 11:29; 12:12-27) and elsewhere (Ep 1:22f; 2:16,21; 3:6; 4:4, 11-16; 5:23, 30,32; Cl 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15)? Can both uses of the metaphor be equally valid? Is one use more primary than the other? How so?

1. Whom, do you think, Paul is quoting in 7:1? In your own words, what is Paul's practical teaching here about marriage (7:1-5, 10f, 39f)? How does it fit with his theological understanding of marriage in Ep 5:22-33? What then are his reasons for staying single like himself (7:1, 7f, 25-38, 40)? Would he himself have been a bachelor, a divorcee, or a widower? Do Paul's reasons for Christians staying single still valid today? How has your marital status affected your dedication to the Lord (7:22-35)? What do you think Paul would have thought (1 Ti 2:11-15; 3:4f) about Clement of Alexandria's (200 A.D.) dictum: "Count no man holy until he be married"? What do you think Clement meant by that? Would you agree? Why?
2. When Paul speaks of singleness (7:7-9) and divorce (7:10f) might he have in mind an early oral version of what Jesus says in Mt 10:3-12? How careful is Paul to distinguish the sources for the views he expressed on marital and sexual relationships? Why do you think this is? Does that mean that Christians much more seriously than others? How relevant are each of the things he says to your society today?
3. Would Paul advocate Christians strategically contracting mixed Christian and non-Christian marriages as an effective means of evangelism (7:12-16, 39; 2 Co 6:14-18)? What are your observations of such relationships? What could your congregation gain by rediscovering Paul's perspective on mixed marriages? What special supports should congregations provide for Christians in such family relationships? What grounds are there in 7:14 for viewing children of at least one Christian parent as suitable candidates for infant baptism?
4. How general and widely applicable is the principle that Paul repeats in 7:20, 24 and 26? How does he apply it in each case here? What reasons does he give (7:19, 22, 26, 28, 40)? What exceptions are appropriate (7:21, 26, 39)? How was 7:29-31 relevant to this issue then? How apt is this today?
5. How would you articulate the facets of Paul's view of slavery on the basis of what he says in 7:20-24? How does this fit with what he says elsewhere on slavery (Re 6:15-23; Cl 3:22-4:1; Ep 6:5-9; Phm 1-25)?
6. According to ch. 8, how does a true understanding of the interrelationship between knowledge, love and freedom guide the actions of stronger Christians towards their weaker Christian siblings? How can a more mature Christian honour a sibling's weaker conscience without limiting his/ her own freedom in Christ and without keeping the weaker sibling weak by limiting his/ her growth (10:23-33)? How strictly should Paul's maxim in 8:13 be applied to food and other things? Should all Christians try to become vegetarians or even vegans (Gn 1:29; 9:3)? What condition is clearly added? How might you apply this principle and its motive in your life and relationships, especially in doubtful areas?

1. What seems to be the criticism Paul is facing in 9:1-12? According to Paul, what economic rights do Christians in ministry have? Why (Dt 24:14f; 25:4; Nu 18:8-13, 20-24; Mt 10:9f; Lk 10:7; 1 Ti 5:18)? How would this work out for ordinary Christian gifted and called by God to exercise a ministry within and/ or on behalf of Christ's body (1 Co 12:6f, 11, 18; Ep 4:7, 16)? What motivates Paul himself to waive his economic rights? How might this apply to you? Might it include human, civil and Christian rights too?
2. What does the fact that it is the same word [*exousia*] in the Greek New Testament that is translated into English sometimes as "right" and sometimes as "authority" (Mt 28:19; Jn 10:18; Ac 5:4; 2 Th 3:9; 1 Co 7:37; 8:9; 9:4f, 12, 18; Ro 9:21; He 13:10; Rv 13:5, 22:14), indicate about the New Testament basis for a general Christian view of rights? On what grounds can such rights be waived? By whom? Where do all authorities and rights come from (Ro 13:1)? What are their purposes (Ro 13:4,6f; 1 Ti 2:2-4; 1 P 2:13-17)?
3. What parallels does Paul see between the experiences of people of God in the Old Testament and Christians with respect to their involvement with God's Messiah/ Christ (10:1-4)? What sorts of lessons, therefore, should wise Christians learn from the behaviour God's Old Covenant people (Ro 15:4)? How much do Christians you know learn from the lives of people in the Old Testament? Why?
4. Within the general warning of 10:12 and the general encouragement of 10:13, how should Christians live with perennial human temptations? Do they apply even when the pressures your life sometimes seem quite beyond your own strength, as they did occasionally for Paul himself (2 Co 1:8-11; 2:4)? Are Christians better equipped to handle such pressures and temptations better than other people are? How so? What has been your own experience with stress as Christian so far? What Christian resources could you draw more upon (10:6, 11; 2 Ti 3:10-17; Ro 8:9-11, 26; 12:1f)?
5. Within Paul's continuing discussion of how to deal with food offered to idols/ gods (10:1-33) — i.e., much of the meat consumed in the Roman Empire -- how does he draw upon part of what is involved for Christians in participating in the Lord's Supper/ Holy Communion/ the Eucharist (10:16-18)? How does this illuminate the sacrament/ ordinance for you? What are the essential differences between such Christian sacramental sharing and pagan participation in their sacrifices to idols (10:20f; Dt 32:16-18)? What does he think about mixing and matching religious practices and beliefs? How does he apply the distinction between lawful /permitted and profitable/ beneficial behaviour? How does he himself apply the fundamental loving (13:5) principle of 10:24 (Ph 2:20f Ro 15:1f)? With what goal in mind? Is his approach the same as that of recent situational ethics? What role does conscience play for you and those with whom you interact? How helpful would it be for you to seek to follow Christ's loving example (Jn 13:14f, 34) by following Paul's own example (11:1; 4:16; 1 Th 1:6)? How so?

1. According to the context of ch. 11, what traditions was Paul referring to in 11:23? Does that affirmation of traditions offer a general justification for some groups of Christians today to follow their own traditions as much or more than the scriptures themselves on many issues? How should tradition and scripture relate to one another as authorities for Christian faith and practice (15:1-4)?
2. In the middle of Corinth, --[reputedly the Roman Empire's sex capital, dominated by the "Corinthian girls", the temple prostitutes of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, who catered to the many sailors and merchants crossing the narrow isthmus between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas] — how might the fledging Christian church have found Paul's teaching in 11:4-15 helpful, especially after they had had withdrawn from the cultural environment of Corinth's Jewish community (Ac 18:5-11)? How much might Paul's instructions about the specifics of head covering have been culturally conditioned by the clash of Greek, Roman and Jewish customs in Corinth? Nevertheless, what biblical principles did he feel were at risk, especially on the issue of authority (11:3, 10)? How does what he teaches here fit with what he has previously said about male-female relationships (7:3-5, 14; 11:11f; Ga 3:28; 1 Ti 2:9-15; 5:1-3)? What core of his arguments is still valid for churches in our totally different cultures today? In such matters, how much should Christian tradition trump everything else for the church's practices (11:2, 16)?
3. What has Paul taught earlier in 10:16f about Christians' involvement both with Christ and also with each other as symbolized in their partaking together of the one loaf of bread in the Lord's Supper/ Eucharist/ Holy Communion? How much does your regular sharing in that sacrament/ ordinance remind you of both of these vital relationships? Do you give thanks for both of them then?
4. What was so wrong with how the Corinthian Christians had been celebrating the Lord's Supper? What clues are there in the immediate context to help us understand what Paul meant in 11:27 and 29? What "body" of the Lord does he have in mind here? What implications might this have for who should have access to this holy meal? How does this relate to your congregation's practice? Even if your congregation always quotes 11:23-26 during the communion liturgy, what more could be done during the service to express the intent of Paul's final practical suggestions (11:33)?
5. In 11:31f, what is Paul saying generally about the sort of judging that Christians should be practicing? How does that contrast with the sorts of judging the Corinthian Christians were engaging in within their fellowship? What sorts of judging are you and your fellow Christians practicing? With what results? Can they all be justified as loving?

1. According to Paul's introduction of his new theme on the dynamics of spirituality (12:1-3), how can Christians be assured that they are dealing with God's own Spirit rather than with some dangerous one? How central is the lordship/ sovereignty of Christ to your spirituality? What are its practical spiritual implications for you?
2. How many distinct but related characteristics of the-normal dynamics of a Christian church's ministries can you enumerate on the basis of Paul's sketch 12:4-11? Where had Paul himself been able to witness these ministry dynamics in Christian communities (Ac 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 9:19-22, 26-30; 11:25f, 30; 12:24; 13:1-4; 14:26-28)? What creates the ministering church's unity and diversity? How are its many spiritual gifts, ministries and activities related? What roles do the persons of the Trinity play? How many Christians are intended to be ministers? How widely are Christian ministries dispersed, even those which seem to need each other to function properly (vv8-10)? Who should receive all complaints about the allotment of ministries? Whose lordship is at stake? How can thinking of the ministering church metaphorically as the body of Christ help you to remember all of these important characteristics (12:12)?
3. In 12:13, how does Paul see the sacraments/ ordinances of baptism and the communion as contributing to your involvement in Christ's body and its ministries? How inclusive is this for Paul? Would Luther, then, be right in talking about the baptismal ordination of every Christian to ministry? How would it be appropriate to speak of the ministerial implications of your regular partaking of the communion cup?
4. Why is it inappropriate for any Christian to believe, act or claim that his/ her ministry is quite unimportant to the proper functioning of the church of Jesus Christ (12:14-19)? Why is it equally inappropriate for any Christian to claim that he/ she doesn't really need the ministry of another Christian (12:20-26)? In both cases how would you express each of Paul's reasons? To which of these two quite prevalent inferiority and superiority complexes are you prone? In what way does each complex hinder the giving and receiving of God's gifts? How well does Paul help you see the practical importance of this spiritual dynamics? How much does this apply to your own Christian congregation? What about your own giving and receiving of Christian ministries?
5. What evidence is there that in 12:27-30 Paul meant to arrange Christian ministries hierarchically, rather than merely to remind the spiritually proud Corinthian Christians (1:7) of the historical order God's Spirit had chosen for introducing spiritual ministries? What does the fact that all the questions in 12:29f are in Greek rhetorical ones requiring a negative answer, say to the popular notion that there is a ladder of spiritual ministries up which Christians should strive to climb one rung at a time (12:31)? How would a hierarchical ladder of ministries fit with the Paul's teaching about Christian ministries earlier in the same chapter? In this context, then, which seems to be the most appropriate way of reading the ambiguous Greek verb in 12:31a and the equally ambiguous Greek conjunction connecting 12:31a and b: (a) traditionally as a command, "Earnestly seek/ *strive* for the greater gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way" or (b) as a statement, "*You seek* the greater gifts, but I will show you a more excellent way"? When Paul does get around to discussing how to decide which of two possible gifts someone should exercise in a public contexts, what criteria does he employ in 14:1-12? What has that to do with a hierarchy of gifts and ministries?
6. According to 13:1-3, what does "the still more excellent way" of 12:31b imply for all Christian ministries? Is loving just the oil that helps each ministry function better, or is it what each Christian ministry is intended to do in its own functional way? What 14:1a suggest? Why are all the amazing gifts and actions in 13:1-3 worth nothing without love? Might there be just as many types of loving Christian ministries as there are needs for the kind love of Christian described in 13:4-7? How does it link the ministries of the Spirit and the fruit of the spirit?

1. How do the characteristics of love that are presented in 13:4-7 reflect the character of Yahweh as he revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7? How are these same characteristics of the living God incarnate in Jesus, God's Messiah, as portrayed in the four Gospels (Jn 1:14, 17)? Which of these characteristics seem least incarnate in you as a Christian? Can a Christian really be expected to love as God does (Mt 5:44-48; Lk 6:35f; Ep 4:32-5:2; Jn 13:34; Jn 4:7-21)? How is this genuine Christian love being expressed through the ministries of your Christian congregation and in your ministries? What more should be possible? How so?
2. What does Paul mean when he says that spiritual gifts and ministries will cease (13:8)? Does 13:12 specify when that will be? Why will it happen (13:9-12)? Why do some Christians believe that it already happened for some of the dramatic spiritual gifts of the New Testament? Does the ending of spiritual ministries mean that there will then no longer be any need for loving, hoping and trusting? Why do you think love is the greatest of these three?
3. What is the primary criterion for publicly exercising a spiritual gift in the church (14:12, 3-5; Ep 4:12)? What does prophecy do that makes it so important for the church (14:3, 24f, 29f)? What is suggested to be the relationship between your mind and your spirit when you are worshipping together? In ch. 14 what light is thrown upon deciding which spiritual ministry it is appropriate to exercise in a particular situation, and how best to do so? How might feedback (14:19) from members of your local congregation help you evaluate your and others' ministries?
4. What Christian ministries need to work together for the common good (12:6; 14:13, 27f)? To what other groupings of ministries might this principle apply? Why, then, does God's Spirit deliberately distribute such interdependent gifts/ ministries to different people (12:8-10, 29f)? What guidelines are given in 14:26-40 about how to share various ministries of love when meeting together? How important is orderly worship? Should this stifle spontaneous ministry contributions (14:30)? How might 14:32 apply to your ministry? How diversified and extensive a participation of ministries in public worship is envisioned here? Would this hold for Jewish Christian congregations as well as for Gentile Christian ones? What are the proper uses of speaking in tongues?
5. What problems had developed in the Corinthian church's worship, as indicated in ch. 14? How does Paul recommend solving each of them? Why does he insist that women remain silent in church meetings (14:34f), even though he had already indicated that they were permitted to pray and prophesy (11:5)?

1. According to 15:1-11, what are the basic elements of the traditional Christian gospel that Paul had received and passed on to others including the Corinthian Christians? How closely does the gospel you have received and pass on fit with this original apostolic one? Is close conformity to this apostolic gospel a necessary condition for any church truly to claim being in "apostolic succession"? How so? At what points could the facts of the apostles' gospel be verified in 56-57 A.D. (Ac 13:31)? Which gospel element does Paul stress the most here? Why? What other elements has he stressed earlier in this letter (1:18-25)? What are the apostolic gospel's benefits? How are they to be appropriated?
2. What were the similarities and differences between the appearance of the risen Messiah to Paul on the road to Damascus (Ac 9:3-9; 22:6-10; 26:12-19) and to many of his disciples during the forty days following his resurrection (Mk 16:1-8; Mt 28:1-20; Lk 24:1-53; Jn 20:1-21:24; Ac 1:1-9)? Does Paul emphasize the similarities or the differences here? Why?
3. For Christians, what are five far-reaching consequences of denying that anyone can rise from the dead (15:12-19)? Can you think of others? What makes the view that death is the end of everything for individuals so attractive to many people even today (15:32)? Why is that shortsighted view inadequate (Mt 16:27; Ac 17:31; Ro 2:6-8, 16; 2 Co 5:10; 1 P 4:5; Rv 20:11-13)? What made life after death so important to early Christians (15:19, 32, 57f)? How important is it to you?
4. What is the primary ground for Christians to believe in the resurrection of the dead? What other grounds are there? How persuasive are they to you? How different is the resurrection of the dead spoken of here (a) from the resuscitation of Lazarus (Jn 11), (b) the immortality of the soul, and (c) from the reincarnation of souls? How are the advice and admonitions of 15:33f & 58 relevant to everyone who believes in the resurrection of the dead? How important is the great assurance of 15:58 to everyone who is, therefore, actively pursuing their lord's work (Is 49:4; Ps 127:1)?
5. What light does 15:23-28 throw upon the events of the end times and upon the authority relationship between the Father and the Son within the Trinity (Ph 2:11; 1 Co 3:23)?
6. Which illustration of what the resurrection body is like (15:35-49) do you find the most helpful? How similar to the Jesus' resurrection body will it be (15:49; Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2)? What do the earlier eyewitnesses' accounts tell us about what Jesus' resurrection body was like (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:15-17, 29-31; 36-43; Jn 20:19f, 25-27; 21:12-14; Ac 1:30)? Why is a new kind of body necessary (15:42, 50, 53; 13:12; Dn 12:2f; Ex 20:18f; 33:18-20; Dt 5:23-26; Jn 12:15; Rv 21:3; 33:4f)? Does this excite or alarm you? How so? When and for whom will this transformation take place? Does the newness and incorruptible nature of this spiritual body accord with the Platonic view that the human soul is inherently immortal (15:53f; Jn 5:21, 25-29; Rv 20:14f; 21:4, 6-8; 22:14f)

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

The letter was written by Paul from Corinth during his three month stay in Achaia (Ac 20:2f; AD 56/57). Since it was being sent to a church that he hadn't founded, but hoped to visit soon, its purpose seems to have been to set forth a reasoned account of the gospel that he preached plus some of its main practical implications for Christian living. Since there was a large Jewish community in Rome with which the Christian church there was still at least loosely connected (Ac 28:17-28), he included an extensive discussion of Jewish unbelief and the relation of both Jews and Gentiles to God's salvation through Jesus, the Messiah. Paul also indicated that he hoped to use Rome as his base for future ministry in the western half of the Roman Empire. For this he desired their fellowship and co-operation.

Despite the lengthy introduction (1:1-15) and concluding greetings and exhortations (15:14-16:27) so relevant to a letter of introduction, the body of the letter reads more like a treatise than a personal letter. Here Paul makes much greater use of Old Testament quotations and terminology to make his points than he does in his other extant writings. Hence, the vocabulary of Romans is rich in biblical and theological terms. Though the first preaching or doctrinal section interacts with anticipated Jewish objections from time to time, the tone is irenic rather than polemic as in Galatians. Perhaps this is because the basic issue of justification by grace through faith alone had been settled for the whole church at the Council of Jerusalem. Paul's letters to both the Galatians and the Romans played decisive roles in the Protestant Reformation and have continued to be the favourite biblical books for many Protestants.

ANALYSIS OF ROMANS:

1:1-15	Opening greetings and introduction.
1:16-11:36	The gospel Paul preaches:
1:16f	Summary of its main theme,
1:18-3:20	Universal human sinfulness:
1:18-32	Indictment of the Gentiles,
2:1-3:18	Indictment of the Jews,
3:19f	Therefore all people are guilty.
3:21-5:21	God's way to righteousness:
3:21-31	Righteousness is God's gift,
4:1-25	Righteousness reckoned to Abraham through faith,
5:1-21	Righteous now offered to everyone through faith in Jesus, the Messiah.
6:1-8:39	God's way to holiness:
6:1-23	New life in union with God and his risen Messiah,
7:1-25	God's righteous law and weak human flesh.
8:1-39	Abundant living with God's Spirit.
9:1-11:36	Characteristic Jewish and Gentile responses to God's grace:
9:1-29	God's gracious sovereignty in his election,
9:30-10:21	Human responsibility in responding,
11:1-36	God's gracious purposes for Jews and Gentiles.
12:1-15:13	The implications of this for practical Christian living:
12:1-21	Christian loving:
12:1f	Real worship: Loving God appropriately,
12:3-8	Real self-understanding: Loving ourselves appropriately,
12:9-13	Real loving our fellow Christians.
12:14-21	Loving our enemies.
13:1-7	Christian living with the state,
13:8-14	Christian living in the present age,
14:1-15:13	Balancing liberty and love in the Christian community.
15:14-16:27	Concluding greetings and exhortations.

TRAIL XI - SECTION 37: 1 Corinthians 16:1-24; Acts 20:1-3; Romans 1:1-17.

1. What practical instructions does Paul give the Corinthian Christians about how to raise, oversee and deliver funds for the Christian poor in Jerusalem and Judea (16:1-4)? What could your congregation learn from these? What does 16:2 suggest about an appropriate Christians mode of giving? What flexibility seems to be in order with respect to amounts and delivery? In what way do you set aside monies for God's work? How do you ensure that your gifts are used the way you intend them to be? How might "giving in kind" (Ac 3:6; 4:32) also be arranged?
2. Why does Paul want to wait awhile before leaving the church in Ephesus to go via Macedonia to Corinth (16:8f; Ac 20:1)? How might such circumstances and similar motives influence your decisions to stay or move along in your own Christian ministries or fellowship?
3. How does 16:3f sum up this letter? What insights do we get in 16:10-20 about Paul's relationships with his fellow workers? What do you think has driven him to his denunciation and prayer in 16:22? How can you identify with him in each of these relationships?
4. In his lengthy introduction to his letter to the Romans (1:1-6), what does Paul say about his gospel's origin, content, purpose, dynamic, and propagation? What does 1:16f add to this?
5. How do you think Paul had heard of the faith/ faithfulness of-the Christians in Rome (Ac 18:1-3, 18f; Ro 16:3-15)? How does he link his gospel with their faith/ faithfulness (1:15-17)? Why did he personally feel so obligated and eager to visit the Christians there? What does he hope to accomplish while there (1:11-13)?
6. How often have you, like Paul, have had to wait quite a while before God willed that you do what you had hoped to do in his service? How might Paul's attitude here help you in the interim period of waiting for God's timing? How might the method God choses to realize your hopes be as different as it was for Paul? How could you handle that?

1. How does the conjunction of 1:17 and 1:18 suggest that the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel involves disclosing both God's salvation and God's wrath? What might that suggest about the nature of God's love?
2. According to Paul in 1:19f, what important qualities of God, spite of their being invisible, can be clearly seen ever since the creation of the world? How can they be so evident to humans as to render us fully responsible for our responses to such "natural" knowledge of God? What two appropriate responses does God reasonably expect from us (1:21)? How does the second appropriate response relate to God's revealed graciousness (Jn 1:14; Mt 5:44f; Ac 14:14; 17:25-27)? What human responses, however, does God receive? How does 1:21b-23 clarify how we respond? How characteristic is this "human wisdom" of the nature-worshiping religions and worldviews that humans generate? Why might we humans prefer such a great lie, rather than appropriately acknowledge the evident truth about God? How applicable is this in a culture that insists on trying to understand all of life and the whole cosmos without any recourse to a transcendent and gracious deity? Do you see any parallel to the story of humanity's choice of autonomous wisdom in Gn 3?
3. What are the aspects of God's response to humanity's inappropriate responses to his "natural" self-revelation (1 :24-32)? What are the profound consequences for humanity of each of God's responses? How many of the spin-offs of this characterize your own culture today? Does your society evaluate all of these phenomena the same way Paul does here? Do you? Are they all equally serious in God's sight? How should Christians relate to the commonly accepted mores and behaviour patterns of their culture? How does your Christian community do so? Why?
4. By what standards will God evaluate Jews and Gentiles? What basic principles guide his just judgments (2:1-16)? In what ways are these judgments retributive? What role is played by one's conscience (2:15; 9:1)? How does God deal with all self-righteous people, whether Jews or Gentiles? How would you paraphrase in your own words Paul's lengthy critique of Jewish self-righteousness (2:1-29)? How well might this critique also apply to the self-righteousness of some professing Christians today? What about it could also apply to the self-righteous practitioners of other religions? However, what sort of righteousness does God himself praise (2:28f)? What does that mean for you?
5. If 2:9-16 is universally true for human beings, including God's own people, what saving advantage do Jews have over Gentiles (3:11)? Would this also apply even more so to Christians (Jn 1:14, 17; He 1:1-4)? Yet how well have they and we taken advantage of God's self-revelations (2:13; Mt7:24-27; Jo 1:22-25)? Can our human failures and their consequences really subvert God's faithfulness to righteousness and judgement? Should we then deliberately practice evil so that God will be able to bring good out of it? Why do you think some people were accusing Paul of teaching such a perverse strategy (3:8)? How clear should it have been to Jews from their own scriptures that all human beings are sinful (3:10-18), especially those who seek to live under the sinful revelations of God's law (3:19f)? Does that mean that we are as sinful as possible? Why do we all, both Jews and Gentiles, need a much more effective way of salvation (Ac 15:10f; Ga 2: 16)?

1. According to 3:20-24, what is the basic way for humans to be accredited as righteous by God, something much more fundamental than our knowing and even our keeping God's revealed law? How are human faith/ trust and God's faithfulness/ trustworthiness intended by God to be related (3:22; 1:17)? How well should this basic relationship have been well known from the Old Testament (Gn 15:6; Hb 2:4; Ps 71:22; 86:15f; 89; 100:4f; 115:1; 117:1f; etc.)?
2. What is the secular source (Jg 20:16) of the spiritual metaphor in 3:23? How does the Hebraic synonymous parallelism in 3:21a & b specify the fundamental nature and failure of even the least serious type of human erring (Pr 19:2)? In what ways are the more degenerate human behaviours in 1:28-32 related to it? Is there, then, really no fundamental distinction between both all sins and all sinners (3:22f)?
3. What's new about the righteousness of God that Paul is declaring (3:21f)? How can guilty sinners be viewed as just in God's sight, and thus ultimately spared their just recompense, in such a way that God himself remains both everyone's righteous and impartial judge and also the one who graciously declares sinners righteous (3:23-26; Rv 20:13-15)? How well do the ransom/ redemption metaphor of 3:24 and the sacrificial one of 3:25 help you understand the inner dynamics of what is involved in making God's gracious gift of right relationship with him possible and actual? Does the necessary role of Jesus being resurrected by God in 4:25 make matters even clearer for you? Do you think God's gracious gift deals with future human sinning as well as past and present sinning (3:25f)? How is God's great gracious/ free gift received/ appropriated by sinners (3:22, 26-28, 30)? What more is involved in "believing/ trusting in Jesus" (3:22, 26) beyond "believing about Jesus" and even believing correctly about the dynamics of his saving activity? Whose faithfulness makes all this possible (3:22, 25, 27f)? For whom (3:30)? How does all this impact you personally?
4. How do the historical examples from the life of Abraham and the witness of David cited in ch 4, support Paul's related claims in ch 3: (a) that "no human being can be justified in the sight of God by keeping the law" (3:20), (b) that "a man is justified by faith/ trust quite apart from works of the law" (3:28), and (c) that "God will justify both circumcised and uncircumcised people through faith/ trust" (3:30)?
5. How much, do you think, Abraham knew and understood about God and his plan of human salvation when Yahweh reckoned/ credited his faith/ trust as righteousness (4:3; Gn 15:6)? What does this suggest about the amount of correct theology necessary for people to trust in God's gracious forgiveness through Jesus' faithfulness? What many implications does Paul draw from the fact that Abraham's being counted righteous because of his trust occurred well before he was circumcised (Gn 17) and therefore was under the law? Do you consider Abraham your ancestor? How is your personal faith/ trust in Yahweh like his? Does the fact of Jesus' resurrection make Abraham's quality of faith easier for you as a Christian than it was for him? How does this Paul's insistence that Abraham's sort of trust in God's faithful promises (4:21f) involved no meritorious works (4:40, fit with James' claim that Abraham was really "justified by works" (Ja 2:21-23, 26; Ga 5:6; Ep 2:8-10)? Does 4:24 suggest that saving faith must include a belief in the fact of Jesus' resurrection?

1. What results follow from a person's being made right with God through trusting in what he accomplished in his Messiah (5:1f)? What does each one mean? How important is each one to you? Does that make you rejoice/ take pride?
2. How does this secure relationship with God enable you appreciate the coordinated external and internal processes God has engineered to realize in practice his glory/ honour/ reputation (3:23; 5:2: 8:30) in and through you? Do you value your troubles/ sufferings, endurance, and character development as much as God does? What simultaneous new internal divine resource makes the realization of God's amazing hope for you possible (5:5; 8:14-17, 35; 15:30; Ek 36:26f; Mt 28:20; Ro 8; Ga 2:20)? How aware are you of this reality? Can you see any signs of God's progress in realizing his good purposes in and through you?
3. How does God's love in Jesus, his Messiah differ from ordinary human love (Is 65:1; Jn 14:12-14)? How do you respond to a God who graciously initiates loving those who are weak, trapped by sin and don't know him yet, even his enemies (Is 65:1; Mt 6:45; Ac 14:17)? How does the love of God, as demonstrated in his Messiah's death, enable you (a) to live proudly/ joyfully in the present as rightly related and reconciled with him and (b) to face the future without fear of the righteous wrath of God's final judgement (5:9-11; 2 Co 5:10, 14-21; Rv 20:13, 15; 21:27)?
4. How similar and different does Paul view the Adam's and Jesus' singular acts and their consequences for humanity (5:12-21)? Are their consequences equally pervasive (5:12, 15, 18f)? What are the implications of your answer? Are the sets of consequences automatic? What difference would it make whether the last clause of 5:12 is read as causal, "because all sinned".(3:23) [NASB, CEV] or casually "as a result all sinned "[CEB]? Would any of Paul's reasoning here make any sense to a culture that viewed human beings as fully autonomous/ self-contained individuals rather than as the Hebrews did persons-in-community (Gn 18:23; Js 7:10-26; 2 S 24:10-26; Mk 2:5)? How much does the application of the saving consequences of the Messiah's unique act depend upon humanities connectedness?
5. What roles does God's gift of the Mosaic law play and not play in all this (5:13f, 20)

TRAIL XI -- SECTION 41: Romans 6:1-7:25:

1. What aspects of what Paul was arguing at the end of ch.5, raised again (3:8; 6:1) the question about Paul's apparent advocating continuing to sin so that grace might multiply? How does Paul's vehement answer develop the theme he began to introduce in 5:10f? How well does the symbolism of Christian water baptism help you understand the personal spiritual realities involved in your being intimately connected with the Messiah in his death and resurrection? Does that not also involve a "persons-in-community" understanding of your humanity? Did your public baptism mean this for you when it took place? Can it mean that for you now? Would employing a full immersion mode of Baptism make your spiritual death and resurrection/ regeneration (2 Co 5:14f, 17) any clearer for you?
2. What, therefore, has fundamentally changed for Christians in their relationship to sin and its power? Does this mean that now Christians (a) are no longer able to sin, (b) no longer do sin, (c) no longer need to be concerned about sinning, (d) no longer must continue sinning or (e) what? Does this apply in our present lives or only after our bodily resurrection (6:5, 8)? What things does Paul advise that Christians should do to take full present advantage of our changed relationship to sin and its power (6:11-14, 19)? Are you following his advice? How can you both begin and continue to do so [as the variety of Greek imperatives here suggest]?
3. Have Christians really been set free from all the demands of God's revealed law (6:14f)? How so? Are we, therefore, free from any obligation to serve God and his good purposes? Could we even become re-enslaved to sinning? How worthwhile would that be? What new slavery is more far more advantageous? Are you interested in its consequences (6:16, 19, 22)? Is this new slavery strictly required (6:17) or simply optional (6:19) for Christians? Could it become habitual? Are we in danger of pressing the details Paul's admittedly human terms/ analogy (6:19) somewhat too far? Why does eternal life have to remain "God's gift" rather than our "wages" (6:23; 4:4; 11:6; Ep 2:8f)?
4. What is Paul's point in his illustration about the law at the beginning of ch. 7? How does it relate to his theme in ch. 6? How are the law and the power of sin connected (5:13, 20; 1 Co 15:56)? What are the various relationships between God's holy law and human sinning? Which of these relationships have changed for Christians? How have you experienced that? What does Paul's contrast in 7:6 between the letter and the spirit/ Spirit mean (Ek 36:26; Ro 2:26)? How are being "of flesh" and being "in bondage to sin" connected for Paul (6:6; 7:18, 23, 25; 8:7f)?
5. Is the inner struggle of 7:15-25 that Paul personally witnessed, one that is, should be, or could be over now that he has become a Christian (7:24; 8:2f, 9)? To what extent can you personally identify with Paul's struggle to obey the perfect law of God? How would you describe its dynamics in your own words and metaphors? Why do you think that many people who do not generally agree with Paul's Christian thinking, do celebrate his psycho-moral realism here? What could rescue you as a Christian from such a futile struggle? Would such a rescue mean that you would never sin again? Why?

TRAIL XI - SECTION 42: Romans 8:1-39

1. What does Paul mean by saying that the life-giving law of the Spirit sets people free from the law of sin and death (8:2)? How is he now going beyond the inner struggle of ch. 7 (8:1, 3f)? To whom does this liberation apply? Is Paul here drawing deeply upon what he said in ch. 6 about the liberating consequences of a Christian's involvement in the Messiah's death and resurrection? What was God's purpose in such a deliverance (8:4)? Does this mean that God's just law is totally irrelevant for Christians (8:4)? How does this apply to you as a Christian?
2. How would you describe in your own words the stark contrast Paul draws between living in the "flesh" [your human self-sufficiency (REB) or selfishness (CEB)] and living in the Spirit (8:4-8)? How is such spiritual living made possible for God's people (5:5; 8:9-13)? Which of Paul's several ways of saying this communicates best to you? How important is it for you to remember this?
3. How closely connected is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to really being a Christian (8:9)? How is this clarified by the many ways Paul names the Holy Spirit right here (8:9-11)? What are the many practical benefits of having God's own Spirit living within you (8:10-17, 23, 26f)? With which of these are you (a) already familiar and (b) still unfamiliar? Does God's Spirit help you deal with your self-sufficient tendencies (8:12f) and your preoccupation with bodily deeds (8:13)? Do you "hear" God's indwelling Spirit regularly affirming that you are indeed God's beloved child and, therefore, inviting you to address Yahweh (the LORD) as your "Daddy" [Aramaic = the "Abba" of a young child] (8:15; Ga 4:6), even as Jesus, God's only begotten Son did during his greatest challenge (Mk 14:26)? Have you experienced the Spirit's help to continue praying even when you feel too weak to pray, don't know what or how to pray, and all human words and ideas seem totally inadequate (8:26f)?
4. Why is the future hope of God's creation linked to the revealing of God's human children (Gn 1:26, 2:15, 19f; Ps 8)? How deeply had humans' caring relationship with creation been broken, with what disastrous results for humanity and creation (Gn 6:12f, 17; 7:21f)? Yet how much did God still care for his creation and its designated caregivers to make a fresh beginning (Gn 8:15-17, 21f; 9:9-17)? How important to God still is his physical creation and its present and future plight (Ro 8:19-21)? What is the character and purpose of creation's suffering (8:22)? What evidence do we have today of the groaning and suffering of creation? Does 8:17 really suggest that the sufferings of Christians and of creation are connected to both of their involvements in God's Messiah's own suffering and glorification (He 2:9-11, 17f)? What does God's liberation look like for creation and for our bodies (8:21, 23)? What is the hope that Christians wait patient expectation to see (8:18f, 21, 23-25, 29f; He 2:10; 1 Co 15:50-54; Rv 20:4-6; 21:1-5)? What sign has God given that he is willing and able to realize this great hope (1 Co 15:20-23; Ep 1:18-21)? How eagerly are you awaiting that hope?
5. How many distinct reasons does Paul give in 8:28-39 for Christians to rejoice in hope, even though now everything may seem to be going wrong and the world seems to be falling apart? Do you have confidence in what Paul claims to know in 8:28? For the same reason (8:29-30)? What sorts of deterministic views of God might passages like vv 28-30 have suggested (10:6-23)? Do you share Paul's great confidence in God's faithful commitment to support, acquit and abundantly bless everyone for whom he gave his Son up to die, to be raised, to reign, and to intercede (8:31-34)? Does that include you? Why do Christians so frequently read 8:35-39 at funerals? When else would it be appropriate to be encouraged by such a great affirmation of faith and hope in God? How has this affirmation enriched in your own faith and hope?

1. What further light is thrown in 9:1 upon how Paul understands the relationship between his conscience and God's indwelling Holy Spirit (2:15; 8:16)?
2. According to 9:4-5, what special privileges did the Israelites have? In what way is Christians' relationship to God similar to theirs? What elements are shared (8:15; 9:4)? Might Jews also be included in the redemption of the body referred to in 8:23 (Ac 23:6-8, Dn 12:18)? How did Paul feel about the present spiritual state of his fellow kinsmen (9:2f)? Have you ever felt that way about the spiritual state of your relatives or your fellow church members? Why?
3. How does Paul answer the underlying question posed in 9:6-13: if God rejects the Jews who rejected his Messiah, hasn't he broken his Old Testament promises to his people, Israel (Is 44:21-23; 43:1, 25; 62:1-12; Ps 94:14)? Similarly, has God broken his New Testament promises through Jesus (Mt 16:18; 28:20; 2 Ti 2:11-13), if he abandons individual Christians (He 10:26-31, 2 Jn 2:24), and even their congregations (Rv 2:4f) and communions that have rejected the Lordship of his Messiah?
4. What basic considerations seem to be involved in God's erection of particular individuals and peoples according to Paul (v. 15; Ex 33:19; 18:19; 34:6f; Ep 2:8-10)? How are they just (9:14)? Are all human complaints ruled out of order? Why (9:19, Dt 4:35; 2 Ch 20:6; Jb 9:12; Is 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jr 18:16)? According to the scriptures (Gn 3:8; 12:3; Is 42:6; 43:10, 12; 44:8; 49:6), what are the fundamental purpose of God's election of Israel to be a special people for himself (Ex 19:5f; Dt 7:6-10; 14:2,21; 26:16-19)? Does this also apply to Christians collectively and individually (Mt 28:19f Lk 24:47f; Ac 1:8; 2 Co 7:1; 1 P 1:15f, 2:4-9)?
5. What parallels do you see between the spiritual state of many Jews in Paul's day and some Christians today (10:2)? How easily can religious people, zealously seeking to please God with their own righteousness, fail to recognize and embrace the right relationship with himself that God is offering to those who put their trust in him and his Messiah (9:30-10:4)? Why, then, does God's Messiah have to become the end/ goal of the righteous law of God for religious people? What makes it very difficult for religiously enthusiastic people to continue to keep a proper balance between pursuing good works and trusting God's graciousness (Ga 3:1-3; Ep 2:8-10)? How have you experienced this?

1. Do Old Testament passages like Lv 18:5; Ek 20:11, 13, 21 and Ne 9:29 really teach that right relationship with God depends on keeping God's law? What does the phrase "by which one will live" mean in each of these passages' contexts? What action of God came first (Ex 20:2; Dt 5:6; 6:20-23)? What came next (Ex 19:4-7; 24:1-3; Dt 29:9-15)? What followed thereafter (Ex 20:2ff; IX 5:6ff; 6:24f)? What response did God look for (Ps 78:7f)? How does that fit with the gospel-order in Ep 2:8-10? How did Moses understand the purpose of his law (Dt 6:4-7, 20-25; 7:6-11; 30:16-20)? According to Paul, how close was Moses to the righteousness based on faith (Dt 30:11-14)? What did it take for Paul himself to discover this purpose of the law (Ac 26:4f, 9-20)? What has it taken you to discover it?
2. In the gospel of Grace that Paul was now/preaching, what responses are necessary to receive salvation _x and right relationship with God (10:8-10)? How are these responses connected to Jesus' lordship and resurrection, and they to each other (1:4; 14:9)? Why is faith-based righteousness just as applicable to Jews as to Gentiles (10:11-13; 11:32; 18:32; Ac 15:10f)? In spite of this good news of God's graciousness being so accessible (10:8), why did people still need to be told about it (10:14-17)? Who does God send to as messengers/ambassadors of his salvation by grace through faith (2 Co 5:18-20)? Could this include you? However, can these gospel messengers expect their auditors to trust in God any more readily than people did in response to the Old Testament's gospel (10:16)? Why?
3. According to Paul, has God now finally completely rejected his people, Israel (11:1-6)? Why (11:5f, 29)? Why shouldn't God himself be blamed for his people's poor faith-responses to his graciousness (11:7-10; Ne 9:26-10:29)? How can God use even his people's general rejection of him to accomplish his original gracious purpose through them (10:19; 11:2-16; Gn 12:3; Dt 32:31; Is 42:6; 51:4; 60:1-3; Ga 3:8)?
4. What important teaching of about God's continuing gracious plans for Israel, does Paul think the Gentile Christians need to hear (11:11-32)? How is that grounded in God's revealed character and purposes (11:22; Ex 34:6f; Jr 18:1-11)? What warnings to the Gentile believers are also included? Why might some Christians today need to hear these teachings and warnings? What implications might follow for how Gentile Christians should present Jesus and the gospel of God's graciousness to Jews today? Need Jews cease being good Jews in order to become Christian (Ac 16:1-3; 21:21-26; Ro 3:31) any more than Gentiles need to become observant Jews to become full members of God's people (ac15:7-11, 19-29; 21:25; Ga 2:3)? Why? Might this even apply to Muslims? How so?
5. Should either or both of 11:29 and 11:32 be construed as stating general propositions about how God deals graciously with all human beings? How universal does Paul seem to intend their application to be? How can you tell? What other scriptures might confirm this interpretation (Jn 3:16; 4:42; 1 J 2:2; 4:14; 2 P 3:9; 1 Ti 2:1-7; Rv 20:11-15)? How might such amazing graciousness of God call forth the Old Testament-based (Is 40:13f; Jb, 41:11) doxologies of 11:33 and 36 from a proud Jewish Christian like Paul? How meaningful are these doxologies also to you as a Gentile Christian?

1. In 12:1, what specific logical connection is made between the practical imperative teaching [Greek = "*didake*"] section which follows (12:1-15:13) and the indicative preaching [Greek = "*kerugma*"] section which precedes (1:16-11:36)? What does this relationship imply for the themes of both sections of Paul's letter? Just as the preaching section began with a brief abstract of his gospel's main theme (1:16f), how does 12:1-13 present an abstract of his gospel's practical implications? What also might we expect to be spelled out in most of the rest of the book?
2. Of the many mercies of God delineated by Paul in ch. 1-11, which are the most pertinent to you? How are they rational [KJV; NRSVM; Greek = "*logikos*"]/ spiritual [NIV; NRSV] grounds for dedicating your whole embodied life to God's worshipful service (12:1; 6:13, 16, 18f, 22)? What four characteristics of that worship are specified as appropriate? How did these find full expression in Jesus' own worshipful service of his loving Father? How might his example (8:29f) indicate some of what could well be involved in so serving God in any era, including our own?
3. How does 12:2 spell out the continuing aspects of this full dedication to God and his values rather than to the cultural values of your own age/ era? What negative and positive, active and passive roles are Christians called to play in this ongoing renewal process in partnership with God's indwelling Spirit (Ro 5:5; 8:9-13)? Why does true spiritual renewal have to proceed from the inside out (Mt 12:34-37; Lk 6:45f)? What will be the results for both you and God himself? Do you want those results?
4. If 12:1f can be viewed as Paul's summary of what is involved in keeping the 1st of the greatest commandments, to love God with our whole being (Dt 6:5), then how could 12:3-8 be construed as his summation of what is involved in keeping the 2nd of the greatest commandments, to love our Christian neighbour as ourselves (Lv 19:18; Mt 22:36; Mk 12:8-31)? How can you appropriately love your neighbour as you love yourself, if you do not love yourself very appropriately? In this respect, why is it important to have a sober/ sane/ sound/ proper estimate of yourself? What examples of warped self-love have you witnessed? How have they unwittingly hurt other people? How does 12:4-8 suggest that God provides an appropriate standard for measuring each of the various divinely-gifted ministries/ functions of Christ's body? Do you think Paul's list of Christian ministries here, are meant to be exhaustive (1 Co 12:8-10, 28-30; Ep 4:11f)? Should 12: 5b suggest to you that a full understanding of yourself would necessarily include your functional relationships(s) with fellow Christians? What are your own relationships for giving and receiving of God's love within Christ's body? Is that how your "faith works by loving" (Ga 5:6; 1 Th 1:3) in response to God's great loving mercies (12:1; Ep 2:8-10)?
5. Try reflecting upon a more literal translation of 12:9-13's series of paired present [continuous] participles — not unrelated imperatives/ commands as rendered in most English translations -- spelling out what unhypocritical/ genuine/ real love of other Christians involves practically:
 - (v. 9) *Continually loathing all forms of evil,*
while always being thoroughly committed to whatever is good;
 - v. 10) *Feeling affectionate towards fellow Christians as true brothers and sisters should,*
while always honouring others by esteeming them more highly than oneself;
 - (v. 11) *Continuing to be diligent rather than indolent in serving the Lord*
by keeping your spirit on the boil;
 - (v. 12) *Continually rejoicing in your hope, even while remaining under pressure,*
by being busily engaged in prayer
 - (v. 13) *Continually sharing with God's people in need,*
while also striving to care for strangers.

How could each characteristic enrich your particular ministries of love? Which challenges you most? How important is hospitality [Greek = love of strangers] to you and to your Christian community? How does this very concrete characterization of genuine Christian love relate to the much more famous and abstract description of love in 1 Co 13:4-7? Why might each type of description be the most appropriate one for its own particular literary context? Which one has more impact on you? How can you keep both characterizations of Christian love in balance. How might this help to counter the common complaint about Christian hypocrisy?

1. As Paul begins his series of applications of practical Christian loving in 12:14-21 to a variety of common contexts and situations (12:14-15:13), why does he start with a Christian's relationship with his/ her persecutor? Whose example is he following (Mt 5:43f; Lk 23:34; 1 P 2:21-23; 4:19)? How hard is it for you to "leave room for God's wrath" (12:19)? What implications does this have for human retributive justice? Would the motto "never attack others, never defend yourself" adequately summarise everything Paul advises here? Why? How can Christians use good to defeat evil (12:14-18, 20f)? How is such loving possible for Christians (Mt 5:44-48; 1 P 4:16, 19; 1 Jn 4:19)? Is this what Paul had in mind in 8:34- 37?
2. Does the source of all authority in 13:1b apply to all types and levels of authority? What is Paul's view of the government in 13:1-7 Is this where God's retributive justice (12:19) is fully realized (Rv 20:13-15; 2 Co 5:10)? How much of his analysis of the role of governing authorities would be applicable to modern democratic governments? How might a rediscovery of your government's role as "God's servant/ minister for good" help renew its practices and your attitude towards it and its just taxation? How similar to Paul's understanding here is Peter's somewhat later view of government in 1 P 2:11-25? Does 13:9f suggest that this view of government is a second contextual practical application of genuine Christian loving (13:8)?
3. How is fully paying up all our debts also another practical situational application of genuine Christian loving of others (13:8)? What sort of special debt/ owing is our obligation to love others? What might the disjunction here of paying our debts and our continuing debt to love others, imply about whether Christians should try to fulfill the latter obligation at the expense of fulfilling the former one? How are the law of love and the Mosaic law (13:8-10) connected in Paul's mind (Lv 19:18; Ga 5:14)? Would Jesus have agreed with him (Mt 7:12; 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-31)? Did even some 1st century Jewish rabbis and scribes (Mk 12:32-34; Lk 10:25-28)? Do you? How does this fit into the general Pauline teaching about our being made right in God's sight by grace through faith rather than through works, even works of love (Ep 2:8-10; Ga 5:6)?
4. Is Paul's negative interpretation of Lv 19:18 here in 13:10 exactly equivalent to Jesus' positive interpretation in Mt 7:12? Which interpretation is more challenging for you? How does Jesus go even further in his teaching about how his Christian disciples should love in Jn 13:34f and 15:12? How might many non-Christian basic ethical maxims that you know about, agree with one or other of these interpretations of Moses' general law? How can Christians live up to both Jesus' stronger positive interpretation and also the extra dimension(s) that Jesus added to this generally acknowledged human moral obligation (1 Jn 4:19; Ro 5:5; Jn 15:1-12)?
5. What about the present time should motivate 21st century Christians towards more consistent Christian loving, according to 13:11f? In what respects might many Christians today seem to be asleep? What is coming for which it would be a loving act to awaken them (2 Th 2:2-12)? How can Christians prepare both negatively and positively (13:12-14; 8:3-11; Ga 3:27; 5:16f, 24; Ep 4:24; Cl 3:10, 12-14; 1 P 2:11)? Are you prepared?

1. What is the issue being addressed in ch. 14 to which the practical character of Christian loving is again being applied? Is it only about foods and special days? To what contemporary disputed matters would Paul's discussion be most relevant for you and your congregation? What underlying attitudes are being scrutinized? How do Paul's arguments depend upon God's character, standards, and purposes? How crucial in these matters is (a) the maturity of each Christian's relationship with God, (b) Jesus' purposes for him/ her (Jn 21:20-23), and (c) the goodness and knowledge necessary to admonish one another in love (15:14; Ga 6:1-5; Ep 4:15, 25)? What is said here that might help you develop a more non-judgmental attitude towards fellow Christians? How important is this in our multicultural society and churches?
2. What parts of Paul's discussion here might have suggested to Luther his two great principles of Christian freedom: "a Christian is a most free lord of all, subject to none" and "a Christian is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all"? According to Paul's teaching here about walking according to love (14:14f, 22; 15:1f), how are these two principles compatible? Who should Christians really live for (14:6-8; 2 Co 5:14f)? In what spheres might Luther's principles help guide your living for God?
3. In this passage who are the weaker Christians (14:2, 5, 14)? How should the weak and strong treat each other (14:3; 15:1f, 8f)? How might this be much harder for the weaker ones than for the stronger ones, especially given how very closely a person's convictions and sins are tied (14:5, 16, 22f)? How could you "help weaker Christians become stronger" as Luther mandates (15:2)? In what areas of life might you need to make changes to order walk in love with fellow Christians (14:15,20) and to build up rather than tear down your Christian community (14:15, 20)? How important to pursuing such changes is bearing in mind the maxims of 14:4, 19, 21 and 15:1f and the primary values of God's kingdom (14:17-18)? If 14:26 were lifted out of this context and applied generally, when might it sometimes become problematic?
4. Which of the basic divine blessings/benedictions in 14:17; 15:4f, 13,33 and 16:20, would you like to receive? How are hope, joy and peace related? Which of the aspects of God's character appealed to in these benedictions are most central in your relationship to God? How might your view of God adjust, if you took more seriously the other aspects of God's character appealed to here? How has your understanding of God and your relationship to him matured over the years that you have been a Christian? How would you hope to mature in relation of God even more? How so?
5. How seriously do you take Paul's view of the value of the scriptures of the Old Testament expressed in 15:4 (1 Co 10:11)? How could you benefit more from them?

1. How does what Paul says about the Messiah's own ministry in 15:3-12 form a bridge between his theme in ch. 14 and his presentation of his own ministry to the Gentiles (15:14-21)? How does Paul describe his past, present and future ministries here? Which characteristics might your own ministries have in common with Paul's? Could you, like Paul (15:16), claim to be a public servant of Jesus Christ and a priest of God's gospel (16:16; Ex 19:6; Is 61:6; 1 P 2:5; Rv 1:6; 5:10; 20:6)? How are Christian ministries a partnership with God, Father, Son and Spirit (15:17-19)? Would it be appropriate for more of Christian ministers today, whether clergy or lay, to adopt Paul's ministry goal and rationale in 15:20f and 23? Where might such "new" ministry opportunities be found in our times? Who might be called of God to serve him there? How about you?
2. What applications for today can you think of for the basic spiritual economic principle in 15:27 (1 Co 9:11)? Might it apply in your own congregation? How does it accord with the equally important spiritual economic principle of Ac 4:32-35 and with the diversity of gifts for ministry in Christ's body, the church (1 Co 12; Ro 12; Ep 4; 1 P 4)?
3. Are both 15:17-19 also 15:30 clear evidences of Paul's willingness to affirm his firm belief in the Trinity even while writing to the Christian church in Rome that was still quite closely linked to the monotheistic Jewish community there (Ac 28:16-31)? What does Paul think of the Christian church in Rome that he has not yet even visited (1:7-14; 15:14f, 24, 30, 32; 16:17-20)?
4. What further information do we glean in Ro 16:23-27 and Ac 20:4 about the great collection Paul was assembling for the poor Christians in Jerusalem? Why do you think he is so keen to have the Roman Christians praying for his coming visit to Jerusalem (15:30-32)? What sort of reception does Paul seem to expect from the Christians in Rome (15:32)? According to Ro 16 what many ties seem already to exist between Paul and Christians in Rome? What variety of ministries are referred to or implied in Paul's many comments here? How many women seem to be involved in significant leadership roles? Why, then, has it taken Christians of later eras so long to rediscover gender-parity applies to Christian ministry? How does this passage witness to the rapid expansion of the Christian church throughout the wider Roman world and to the great variety of Christians involved in that?
5. From Paul's final doxology (Ro 16:25-27), what can be learned about (a) his view of God, (b) what he hopes that God will accomplish in his readers, (c) how he hopes God will do that and (d) how revelation, manifestation, knowledge, secrets and mystery are all related? How important might a serious study of the many New Testament doxologies be as a source of insight for us into the early Christians' views of God? How many biblical doxologies does your congregation use? Do you think that you mean the same things by them that the early Christians seemed to have? How so?
6. What insights can be gained into the early church's worship patterns from Ac 20:3-12? How similar and different is your congregation's regular worship pattern? What renewals might help your congregation recapture some of the vitality of the early church's worship? Who might welcome such renewals? Is the reference in Ac 20:7 & 11 (Ac 2:42) to Holy Communion (the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper) or to an Agape-meal (love-feast)? Could the latter be similar to a drop-in "pot-luck" dinner, especially considering the length of time mentioned? Might you have responded as young Eutychus did to such a long sermon, even by the great apostle Paul?

INTRODUCTION TO 2 CORINTHIANS

This letter seems to have been written from Macedonia (2 Co 2:3; 7:5; 8:1; 9:2-4), probably from Philippi, after Paul had left Ephesus (Ac 20: 1f), either just before or just after his brief visit to Greece, including Corinth, (Ac 20:2) during which the letter to the Romans had been written. Thus, 1 Co, 2 Co and Ro are all written within the space of a year, if not within a few months. If the most recent brief visit to Corinth was indeed the painful one referred to in 2 Co 2:1f, then this letter was written after Ro. Paul had met Titus returning from a brief special mission to Corinth, and his report to Paul greatly relieved his anxieties (2 Co 12-17), especially about the Corinthian Christians' response to the severe letter he had written to them (2 Co 2:3f, 9; 7:8, 12). Some biblical scholars have questioned the unity of 2 Co as it now exists, arguing that all or parts of the earlier severe letter survives in 2 Co 10-12. Others think that these three chapters belong to a unified letter. They were necessary, both because there was still a minority in the Corinthian church which opposed Paul and because their influence had been strengthened by the arrival of Jewish Christians claiming to be apostles and making false insinuations against Paul and his apostolic authority. Both groups of scholars, however, agree that all of 2 Co was written by Paul, whether in parts or as a unified whole.

The extant letter vibrates with strong feelings: glowing with love weighted down with sorrow, and burning with indignation. Thus, it is the most personal of Paul's letters to individual churches, for he had been deeply wounded by the doubts cast upon the validity of his apostleship, upon the genuineness of his love for his converts, and even upon his personal integrity. Because he firmly believed that in all these attacks upon him his enemies were really trying to strike at the validity of his basic gospel, he is vehement in his self-defense. Since Paul is evidently concerned throughout for his converts' spiritual health, even though the worst might well be over, this letter is perhaps even more pastoral than his later pastoral letters to individual fellow ministers of the gospel (Phm, 1 Ti, 2 Ti & Tt). Consequently the Pauline authorship of 2 Co is rarely questioned, even by those who doubt his authorship of the personal pastoral letters. Although this letter, unlike Paul's 1st one to Corinth, is not quoted before the end of the 1st century A.D. by Clement of Rome in his letter to Corinth, it is quoted by Polycarp early in the 2nd century and later in that century by both the letter to Diognetus and by Irenaeus.

ANALYSIS OF 2 CORINTHIANS

1:1f	Paul's greetings.
1:3-2:17	Paul's recent experiences:
1:3-7	The Christian message and ministry of encouragement for sufferers,
1:8-11	Paul's own providential deliverance,
1:12-2:17	Pastoral reasons for postponing his planned visit to Corinth.
3:1-7:16	Paul's Ministry:
3:1-18	Old and new ministries,
4:1-15	Human weaknesses, but divine glory,
4:16-5:10	Earthly decline, but heavenly renewal,
5:11-6:10	The Christian message and ministry of reconciliation,
6:11-7:1	Avoid all unholy attachments,
7:2-16	Paul's renewed confidence in the Corinthian Christians.
8:1-9:15	The love-gift for the Jerusalem Christians:
8:1-24	The collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem,
9:1-15	Principles of Christian financial support.
10:1-13:4	Paul's apostolic authority:
10:1-18	Paul's credentials,
11:1-33	Misrepresentations of Paul and his replies,
12:1-13	Paul's experiences of both glory and weakness
12:14-13:4	Paul's plans to visit Corinth a third time soon.
13:5-13	Paul's final charges and encouragements.
13:14	Paul's benediction: "The Grace"

1. What is the significance of the relatively common phrase, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", for understanding the internal dynamics of the Trinity (1:3; 11:31; Ro 15:6; Ep 1:3, 17; 1 P 1:31)? How is that significance further illuminated by the risen Jesus' own similar language in Jn 20:17?
2. What is taught in 1:3-11 about how the Christian ministry of comfort [the Greek word also means encouragement, consolation, exhortation, depending on the context] is related (a) to God's own character and action, (b) to individual human affliction [Greek = "being under pressure"], patience, endurance and hope and (c) to intercessory prayer? What connections does Paul make verse by verse (1:3-7, 10) to reveal the pattern involved: (d) from comfort's origin, (e) through its spread, (f) its relation to Christ's suffering, (g) its value, and (h) the source of hope? How true have you found these connections in your life with God? Through whom does God usually plan to care appropriately for those under pressure? How might this divine economy in and of itself be an encouragement to those presently living under the stress of some particular pressure? How prevalent and important is this vital Christian ministry in your congregation? How could it be further enhanced and appreciated in light of God's design for it here?
3. What double blessings is Paul referring to in 1:15f? Is 1:15 by itself, therefore, adequate grounds for some Christians' belief that there should be two distinct and successive gracious experiences of God's Spirit in every Christian's normal life? What blessings do they refer to? What other New Testament evidence is there that those particular spiritual blessings are indeed distinct, successive, and even the only blessings God wants to bestow on as many Christians as possible? Are we encouraged in the New Testament to order God's gracious activities into a clearly demarked spiritual maturation process? How so?
4. In 1:19-22, how does Paul describe the nature and activities of each person of the triune God as they relate to humanity for their good? How do their activities apply to your own Christian life and ministry? What practical implications might this also have for your worship and prayer life?
5. How did Paul view the interplay of motives, attitudes, feelings, goals, models, and methods of his challenging apostolic pastoral ministry with the Corinthian Christians (1:24-2:11; 1 Co 3:5f; Mk 10:42f)? How is he practicing what he discussed in 1:3-7? How much of this should be applied to your own giving and receiving of Christian ministries? How much of it is peculiar to an apostle's special ministry? Who might have such apostolic ministries in your Christian congregation and communion? What warning remains implicit in 2:11?

1. What delayed Paul from going back to Corinth as soon as he had planned (1 Co 16:5f; 2 Co 1:15f, 23-2:1)? What concerns did he prefer to present in a "severe letter" (1 Co 5:1-13; 2:3-11), probably delivered by his envoy Titus (2:13; 7:6)? Why is forgiveness so important (2:1f)? Why do you think was Paul so upset when he didn't meet Titus in Troas as they had planned (2:12f)? Yet, while in Troas, how was he encouraged that God was still working through his ministry (2:12-17)? How might God be working even when you feel inadequate in or for ministry?
2. How does Paul's reflection in 3:1-18 on the contrasts between the old and new covenants' ministries, further help him to assess his feelings of inadequacy as a Christian minister? Wherein lay his ministry's true adequacy? How might that encourage you also, to have hope and boldness in your particular Christian ministry?
3. What do you think Paul meant when he says that those to whom he is ministering are his "letter of Christ" written by God's Spirit (3:1-3)? How does this compare with the letter of the law given to Moses (3:2f, 7)? Can you apply this statement to those to whom you minister? What makes Christians confident to qualify as ministers/ servants of God?
4. How well does the aphorism, "the written law condemns to death, but the Spirit gives life" (3:66 NEB), summarize what Paul had taught in greater detail in Ro 7 & 8 about the respective roles of God's law and Spirit in a Christians life?
5. As Paul reflects upon Moses' experience with Israel and Yahweh (3:7-16), as recorded in Ex 33:434:10, 29-35, how does he see the advantages of the experience of God in the new covenant over the one in the old one? What does he mean by "glory"? How does Paul account for so many Israelites not discovering the gospel of God's graciousness in the old covenant? What does "the veil" symbolize for him? Does something similar play the same role for many people today, even some good church members, in preventing them from seeing God's goodness and graciousness even in the new covenant (4:3f)? How can the truth of God's gracious character and purposes be revealed to them (3:16)? What is the result then (3:17f)? How does the metaphor of a mirror compare to that of a veil? Yet what will ultimately be even better than such a mirror (1 Co 13:12)?
6. How would you paraphrase 3:17f in your own words (4:4, 6)? How might this transformation relate to what Paul said about Christian discipleship in Ro 8:29 and 12:2? Who is "the Lord" and who is "the Spirit" in 3:17 according to the context (3:3, 6, 8, 16, 18; 4:4)?

1. While still reflecting on Moses' face-to-face experience of God, what connection does Paul make in 4:17 with his own initial revelatory experience of God through Christ (Ac 26:13-18)? What does 4:2 suggest about the nature of the light he is talking about here (4:4, 6)? Yet why does a veil still exist for some people (4:3f, 6)? Have you encountered this? How does your experience of God through Christ enlighten you?
2. Have you ever lost heart (4:1, 16) in your Christian service? Why shouldn't you? Who does your ministry present to others anyway (4:5)? How so? Why did God decide to work through such finite, weak and fallible human creatures (Gn 1:26-28; Ps 8:4-6; He 2:6-10; 1Co 1:27; 2 Co 12:9f; 13:4)? How does the ministry of God work itself out in the rough and tumble of your daily life? What is meant to be the outcome? How is this really possible even through you?
3. How do the difficulties in your Christian life and ministry compare with those that Paul faced (4:8f)? Do you respond to them as Paul did? How do the two interwoven through-death-to-life motifs of both 4:7, 10f, 16f and of 4:12, 14f, help you understand God's purposes through these hardships both for those who serve and for those who are served? What results did Paul anticipate, both in the present life and in the life to come? On what basis (4:13f)? Can you also hope for similar results? In order not to be depressed about the difficulties of the present process (4:16), upon what is it so important to focus (4:16-18)? How important to God is the hidden present process of building our Christ-like character for eternity (Ro 5:1-5; 8:28-30 35)?
4. How does Paul pick up the theme of 4:14 and develop it in 5:1-10? With Moses' experience of God in the wilderness still in mind, how appropriate is Paul's metaphor of our present body as just a tent? How might his Jewish and Greek Christian readers each respond to the prospect of being reclothed with an eternal and heavenly house? What role does God's Spirit play here (5:5; 1:22)? Does that make you as confident as Paul was (5:6-8)? Would you prefer the same home now that he does (6:8)? Why? Whether tented or housed, is your goal the same as Paul's (8:9)? Even if 5:10 (Ro 14:10-12) is also true for you?
5. If 5:10 presents a Christian version of the truism "there's nothing as certain as death and taxes", what and when are God's taxes? Does the context suggest that Christians are exempt from such taxes? What, therefore, would be a wise approach to living now (5:9)? How do such present works compatible with Paul's later gospel summary in Ep 2:8-10, and even v. 7's walking by faith rather than by sight? Does the phrase, "in the body", in v. 10 imply that everyone must be resurrected bodily in order to receive the just consequences for their present deeds in the body (Rv 20:4f, 11-15)?

1. To what does the "therefore/ so" in 5:11 refer? In what ways might that motivate you to follow Paul's example in persuading others (5:20)? In such persuasion, how vital is it both to be transparent both (a) with God, (b) with one's audience (5:11f), but (c) also to avoid unnecessarily offending that audience (6:3ff)?
2. What kind of pride is Paul talking about in 5:12? How is it connected to transparency (5:11)? Yet, what might give rise to the criticism of 5:13 (Ac 26:23-25)? Who stands to benefit from Paul's evangelistic enthusiasm (5:13; Ac 26:29)? How does 6:3-10 contribute to his defense?
3. In your own words, what is Paul's line of reasoning in 5:14-17? How does it compare with what he said in Ga 2:20? Is this new creation a past, present or future reality (Ro 6:3-14)? In what ways has it already happened to you? How does this Christian transformation radically change your self-understanding, your relationships, and your life? What roles do one's mind/ understanding and will play in this new life (Ro 6:3, 6, 11-13, 16, 19; 12:2)? What sense of the "love of Christ" is meant in 5:14: (a) your love for the Messiah (Jn 4:15, 21, 23), (b) his love for you (Jn 13:34; 1 Jn 4:10f, 19; Ep 5:2), or (c) the quality of his loving (Mk 10:45; Jn 10:11; 15:13; Ro 5:8-10; Ep 5:2)? Does it matter? What does it mean to be "in Christ" (5:17)?
4. According to 5:18-6:2, how has God reconciled the world to himself? How did he accomplish that? How would you put the message of reconciliation (5:19, 21) in your own words? How inclusive is this reconciliation (in 3:16; 4:42; 1 Ti 4:10; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:14)? Does 6:1b imply that people can fail to receive/ welcome God's graciousness (Jn 1:11f; Ro 11:12-15; Ep 2:8f)? What is the appropriate response to God's reconciliation (5:20)? When is the most appropriate time to respond (6:2)? Exactly when is that? Does that exclude responding after death (1 P 3:19; 4:6)?
5. What connections are made here between (a) God's grace (6:1), (b) God's reconciliation of 5:18-20, (c) our regeneration of 5:14-17, (d) our justification/ being made righteous (5:21), and (e) Christ's death on our behalf in 5:14f and 21? How easily can they be understood separately?
6. 6; Whom does God chose to be his partners as messengers and ambassadors of his reconciliation (5:18, 20; 6:1)? What general pattern does God employ in making this choice (2 Co 1:3f)? What does it mean to you to be included in this divine-human partnership (6:1; Mk 16:20; 1 Co 3:9; 1 Th 3:2)? How does this vocation as ambassadors of God's gracious reconciliation fit both (a) with God's original decision for humans to be his representatives in and for his creation (Gn 1:26-28; 2:15; Ps 8) and (b) to partner with his Spirit (Ac 1:8) in the perennial missionary calling of God's chosen people (Gn 12:3; Is 42:6f; 43:10; 44:8, 26; 49:6; Ac 13:47)? What seems to be the purpose of Paul's lengthy description of the circumstances attending his own experiences as a representative of Jesus Christ (5:20; 6:3-12)? Which of these also describe some of the experiences of the ministers that you have known? What aspects of these have you found in your own Christian ministry so far? Are you prepared to face what may still lie ahead? Where can you expect to find support and encouragement in dealing with them?

1. In 6:11-13, who and what does Paul say are responsible for the restraints that the Corinthian Christians feel that they are under in relation to Paul? What needs to be opened up to improve the relationship (7:2f)? How multi-lateral are all human relationships in your own experience? How can they be healed?
2. How does Paul apply the metaphor of "the temple of God" in 1 Co 3:16f and 2 Co 6:16? Which one of these applications is more basic than the other (1 P 2:4-10)? Why should Christians not be tied up equally with unbelievers (6:14-16; 7:1)? To what spheres of human life should this apply? What would the commands in 6:17 (Is 52:11) and in 7:1 involve in each of these sphere of life? Do they mandate groups of Christians to separate from one another over contentious issues of faith or practice in order to become holier (7:1)? Would moving into a segregated, believers-only, "Bible City" help Christian become more holy/ sanctified (Jn 17:11, 14-19; 1 Co 5:9-10)? How else is becoming more holy, dedicated to God, possible (1 Co 1:30; He 2:11; 13:12-14; 1 P 2:2)? How do we participate in the process of our becoming holy (2 Co 6:17; Mt 7:12; Jn 13:34f; 1 P 1:13-16; 3:15)? However, why must even our individual and corporate holiness ultimately be God's work (2 Co 6:16-18; Lv 26:12; Ex 29:45; Ek 37:27)?
3. What encouraged the stressed and depressed Paul (7:5f) at Titus' return (7:6f)? Why did Paul now rejoice (7:9-11)? What else gave him joy (7:13-16)? How do the godly sadness and change of mind and heart that are involved in true repentance work themselves out in a person's life (7:10f)? How are forgiveness and reconciliation often necessarily also involved in repentance (2:5-8; Mt 5:23f)? What can help repentance be without regret (7:10; 6:11-13; 7:2; Ga 6:1-5; Ep 4:15, 25f, 32)?
4. Which of the reasons in ch. 8 might motivate you to be more generous in supporting God's work financially: (a) examples of amazing generosity like that of the Macedonian Christians (8:1-6); (b) Christ's own unique giving (8:9; 9:15; Lk 21:2-4); (c) Paul's rationales for generous giving (8:5-8, 10-15, 24; 9:1-15; Pr 11:24f; 22:9)? What principles can you find here to guide individual giving and receiving (Ez 2:69; Ac 2:44f; 4:32-35)? How might these principles apply to "giving in kind" (Ac 3:6) and to the giving and receiving of the variety of loving ministries in and through Christ's body (1 Co 12:7-17; Ro 12:6-8; Ep 4:11f, 16; 1 P 4:10f)? What makes Christians' financial support actually a gracious work of God (6:1; 9:6-9, 14; Ro 12:6, 8)? What contemporary works of God do you think really need more financial support? Why?
5. How should Christians today take as great care of the contributions of fellow Christians as Paul did then with the great collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem (8:16-24; 12:18)? Why (Mt 6:24; 1 Ti 3:3; 6:9f)? How do both divine and human oversight have to be taken into account (8:21)? What improvements could your congregation make here?
6. When do you pray the equivalent of 9:15? How important is thanksgiving to God (Ps 136:1-26; Ro 1:21; 2 Co 4:15; Ep 5:20; Cl 2:61; 3:12-17; 4:2; 1 Th 5:18; 1 Ti 2:1; Rv 7:11f; 11:16)?

1. What sort of Christian ministry is Paul talking about in 10:3-6? How needed is this ministry today? Who exercises it today? Is Paul claiming in 10:5 that only through Jesus, God's Messiah can God be truly known (Ro 1:19-21; Ac 14:15-17; 17:17-32; Ps 8:1, 9; 14:1; 19:10)? What normative role does the unique self-revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth play (He 1:1-4; Jn 1:4f, 10-14, 16-18; 14:6-11; Ac 4:12; 1 Jn 1-4)?
2. To what charges against himself does Paul seem to be responding in 10:1, 10; 11:6f, 11, 16, 21f; 12:13 & 16? Why did he respond to them at all? About what did he think he really had to boast about? How does this boasting fit with his denunciation of boasting in Ep 2:81? In what ways can you identify with Paul?
3. What is the primary purpose of authority in the church of Jesus Christ (10:8; 12:19; 13:10; 1 Co 10:23; 14:3f, 12, 17, 26; Ro 14:19; 15:2; Ep 4:12,29)? According to Ep 5:1f, why should this also be generally true of every proper human authority (Ro 13:1f; 1 P 2:13-15; 1 Ti 2:1f), especially those exercised by Christians (Gn 1:26-28; 2:15; Ps 8:6-8; Mk 10:42-45)? How has this caring authority been expressed in your Christian ministry and congregation? Does all such authority bring with it associated responsibilities and concerns (11:28f)? Why? Would this apply even to God's authority (Ps 23; 103)? What main positive and negative concerns did Paul have for the church in Corinth? How can the concerns you have for your congregation be addressed constructively, perhaps even by employing irony as Paul does (11:4, 19-21 & 12:13)?
4. How does 11:2 fit with the metaphor describing Christ's relationship to his church in Ep 5:25-33 and Rv 19:7; 21:2, 9f? Does this metaphor also have a legitimate biblical application to an individual Christian's relationship to Christ? When have you heard it applied individually? What does that mean to you? How does this accord with some Old Testament prophets' view of Yahweh's relationship to his people, Israel (Ho 2:19f; Is 62:4f)?
5. How important is it, even today, to remember Paul's warning in 11:14 (Ep 6:12)? How does this accord, with (a) the last request in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:13), (b) Jesus' rebuke of Peter in Mt 16:23 and (c) Peter's own characterization of the evil one in 1 P 5:8? How does Paul apply his warning in the context of 1 Co 11? What applications have you personally encountered so far? How can you be prepared for similar future encounters (Ja 4:7f; 1 P 5:9)?

1. Why do you think Paul felt compelled to speak about visions and revelations in 12:1-5, 7 (11:4f)? What point was he making (12:5)? Was the heavenly experience his own (12:4)? If so, why wouldn't he describe it? What, if anything, can be indirectly learned about the nature of the heavens from this and from similar biblical texts (Dt 10:14; Ps 148:4; Lk 24:51; Ac 1:9-11; Ep 4:10; He 4:14)? Who else may have had a similar experience, even with similar reactions (Dn 12:3f, 8f)? Is Paul encouraging Christians to seek mystical experiences? How so?
2. Why didn't God remove Paul's "thorn in the flesh", in spite of his repeated pleas for deliverance (12:7f)? Whose power/ strength and whose weakness are in view (12 :9f)? Is the same point being made as in 4:7 and even in 1 Co 1:18-2:5? How widely applicable is God's answer in 12:9 (Ps 8)? what major lesson about God's ministry through himself had Paul already drawn from this in 1:3-7? How does he continue this theme in 13:3f? How might this truth also apply to you and to your Christian ministry? How might it also relate to the theme of Ro 5:3-5 and Ja 1:2f?
3. What point is Paul making about a real minister of Jesus Christ with his reference to children and parents in 12:14-16? How true is this about your congregation's ministers and your own ministry with others? How well do you as a parental minister (a) use your God-given gifts and authority to build up and equip your people (12:19; 13:9-11; Ep 4:12, 16), (b) seek their right conduct rather than your approval (13:7) and (c) pursue the truth (13:8; 1 Co 13:6; Ep 4:15)?
4. Which of the variety of problems that Paul feared that he might find in the Corinthian church on his third visit, might be found now in your own Christian congregation? How much do you think you might personally contribute to such problems? How important is it to follow the Mosaic principle of credible evidence (13:1; Dt 19:15) that Jesus endorsed (Mt 18:16) in assessing and addressing alleged evils? How is it evident to you and to others that you are "in the faith" with (13:5; Jn 13:34f; 1 Co 11:17-22, 27f)?
5. In what contexts have you heard or recited "The Grace" benediction with which this tough letter closes (13:14)? What does this blessing mean to you personally? How well does it sum up the essence of our Christian gospel? How does it characterize the distinctive characteristic relationships to God's people of each of the persons of the Trinity? What might it add to remember that "fellowship"/ "communion" [Greek= "*koinonia*"] means "partnership"?

1. Why do you think that Luke, the probable author, included incidental details such as those in Ac 21:13-17? What might they indicate about the authenticity of the account that he is writing?
2. Why do you think Paul was so keen to be in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (57 A.D.)? Have you ever been convinced that you had such an important appointment with God to keep, that you would persevere in keeping it despite dire warnings by your friends and companions? When have you heard the Holy Spirit speaking through your friends (20:23)? Yet, how persuasive should friends' advice be in Christian decision making (21:10-13; Mt 16:21-23)? How can saying, "The Lord's will be done" (21:14b), be more than a copout, or a mere capitulation to fate, or a routine pious formula for you? What was it for Jesus himself (Lk 22:14)? Which sense of this clause is in your mind when you pray Mt 6:10?
3. What principles guided Paul's ministry with the Ephesian church, and which determined his departure for other service? What great claims did he make about his ministry with them? What were the basic elements of his teaching among them? What parting advice, warnings and hope does he offer the church's leaders? How much of this address might provide a model or framework for a Christian pastor's farewell address to his congregation? Why were the Ephesian elders so disturbed? What has concerned you most about the departure of a beloved minister? What important roles can group prayer play on such occasions? When has it done so in your experience?
4. Does the parallel between the terms "elders" [Greek = "*presbuteroi*"] in 20:17 and "bishops/ overseers" [Greek = "*episkopoi*"] in 20:28, suggest that in the earliest Ephesian church those two titles designated the same officials? Were then leadership roles likely modeled on those of the earliest Christian church in Jerusalem (Ac 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22f; 16:4; 21:18)? In how many of the earliest churches founded by Paul were elders appointed (14:23)? What about in the somewhat later churches served by Paul's envoy Titus (Ti 1:5-9) and also those that Peter wrote to (1 P 5:1-4)? Might the absence of the term "elders" and the apparent distinction between bishops/ overseers and deacons [Greek = "*diakonoi*"] in 1 Ti 3:1-10, however, indicate a development of a greater diversity of official church leaders? Should these and other deacons (Ro 16:1) be connected with the additional church officers appointed very early on in the Jerusalem church (Ac 6:1-6)? What indications can you discern that suggest that a tripartite hierarchy of church leadership roles — bishops, elders/ priests, deacons -- was developing within the apostolic era?
5. How do you think Paul learned about Jesus' dictum, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (20:35), which is unrecorded in any of the extant gospels but here reported to have been cited by Paul well before any of those gospels were written (1 Co 11:23-25; 15:3-7; Ga 1:12; Jn 20:30)? How did Paul's own approach to his Christian life and ministry illustrate this dictum's great truth? Have you too discovered its truth? How so? How might you live and serve differently, if you believed it more?
6. How serious was the common Jewish criticism of Paul (21:21) and how necessary was it to counter it Jerusalem at Pentecost, in light of (a) the multitude of very observant Jewish Christians in the early churches both in Jerusalem and in the dispersion, (b) their strong family ties with their fellow Jews all over the Roman world, and (c) the frequent Jewish pilgrimages to Jerusalem for their three annual traditional festivals (Ac 2:5-11; 6:9; 20:16; 21:27)? How much should the pressure of cultural circumstances influence Christian behavioural decisions today? In following James' pro-Moses strategy, how well was Paul himself behaving according to his own basic principles (Ac 20:21; 1 Co 8:13; 9:20-23; 10:32f; Ro 15:2)? Where and why, however, did Paul draw a firm line on compromising with his Jewish and Jewish Christian critics (Ga 1:10; 1 Th 2:4; 2 Co 13:8; Ep 2:8-10)? How flexible are you and your congregation in reaching your basic Christian life and ministry goals in your cultural context?

WRITE UP YOUR ANSWER TO THE COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION FROM YOUR NOTES.