



**OUR DAILY BREAD**  
Resources for Spiritual Questers

# *Foundational Teachings in Paul's Letters:*

## *Week II*

A 10-Week Online Course by Rev. David J. Fekete, Ph.D.



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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Apostle Paul was crucial to the spread of Christianity all over the Mediterranean region. His place in the history of the Christian Church is unparalleled by other Apostles--at least so we can infer from his letters.

But aside from spreading the gospel message among the gentiles, his preserved letters have provided Christianity with some of its most powerful doctrines and teachings. Paul was a preacher, and most of his letters are doctrinal arguments. (Paul's style draws on schools of philosophy called Cynic or Stoic.) So Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity, has drawn on Paul's letters to construct doctrines about who Jesus was, and how the process of salvation works. If Paul doesn't interest us for our own religious edification, Paul merits our attention because of the powerful influence he had on the history of Christian thought.

We will look at Paul from a Swedenborgian perspective. As a Swedenborgian, I am interested in truth wherever I find it. Although one can find disparaging passages in Swedenborg's writings about Paul, we need not assume prejudice against Paul, ourselves. As countless Christians affirm, in Paul there is beauty and truth. We will attempt to be a fair reader of Paul and of Swedenborg. When we find doctrinal opposition, we will lay out both sides of the argument. In this way, one will be able to see how and where Swedenborg's theology differs from Paul's, and where the two are in accord.

There is another problem one confronts when reading Paul. There is Paul as we find him in his letters, and there is Paul as Christianity has interpreted him. Some of the most problematic Pauline doctrines, from a Swedenborgian perspective, come from Paul as Protestant Christianity has interpreted him. But Paul is such a capacious writer that often doctrines that Protestants derive from Paul—such as the doctrine of the atonement or of salvation by faith alone—do not agree with other passages in Paul. In short, these doctrines are taken from sections of Paul's letters, while ignoring other passages that contradict such doctrines. Furthermore, some of these doctrines derive from an incorrect reading of Paul.

So we will read Paul as he appears in the letters, but with an eye to the history of the interpretation of Paul. We will also compare Paul with Swedenborg. Finally, Paul may not have

written all the letters attributed to him. Scholars now agree that some of Paul's letters were written by the church a generation after Paul. These letters are called the "deutero-Pauline letters," among which is a sub-category called the "Pastoral Epistles."

While we will emphasize the genuine Pauline letters, we will also consider the deutero-Pauline letters. For in the history of Christianity, and in Christianity today, many religious denominations do not distinguish between genuine and deutero-Pauline writings.

The chart below lists the genuine Pauline letters and the deutero-Pauline letters.

#### GENUINE PAULINE LETTERS:

Romans  
 1 Corinthians  
 2 Corinthians  
 Galatians  
 Philippians  
 1 Thessalonians

#### DEUTERO-PAULINE LETTERS:

2 Thessalonians  
 (Colossians)  
 Ephesians  
 Pastoral Epistles:  
 Philemon  
 1 and 2 Timothy  
 Titus

# SYLLABUS

## **WEEK I: Paul's Authority and Biography**

Readings: Acts 9:1-19; Philippians 3:4-10; Galatians 1:1-2, 11-24; 2:20; 1 Timothy 1:8-12; Philippians 1:7, 12-13; Colossians 4:3; 2 Corinthians 11:1-33; 12:1-6, 9-10.

## **WEEK II: Christology**

Readings: Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9; Philippians 2:5-11.

## **WEEK III: The Doctrine of Reconciliation and Predestination**

Readings: 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, 21; Romans 5:6-11; 8:3, 34, 28-30; 1 Timothy 2:5-7; Ephesians 1:3-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

## **WEEK IV: Faith Part 1**

Readings: 1 Corinthians 8:1-7, 10-13; 10:25-29; Galatians 2:3, 11-13, 15-17; 4:10; 5:2, 3, 12; 6:12; Romans 4:1-8; 1:17; 3:20-25; Titus 3:3-8; Philippians 2:12-13.

## **WEEK V: Faith Part 2**

Readings: Galatians 3:6-14; James 2:14-26.

## **WEEK VI: The Life of the Spirit**

Readings: Galatians 5:13-25; 6:9-10; Romans 2:6-10, 13-14; 7:7-25; 8:1-4; 12:9-21; 13:8-10.

## **WEEK VII: Old Self/New Self**

Readings: Colossians 3:5-17; Ephesians 4:22-5:2, 8-14; Titus 1:5-9; 2:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24; 2 Timothy 2:22-26.

## **WEEK VIII: Love**

Readings: Romans 5:9-10; 8:31-32; 5:1, 11; 5:5; 8:37-39; 13:8-14; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

## **WEEK IX: Sin**

Readings: Romans 8: 1-17; 7:7-25; 6:1-2, 12-13; 5:12-19; Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 6:1-2, 12.

WEEK X: Women in Early Christianity

## **WEEK II**

## **CHRISTOLOGY**

As I have said before, Paul was not a systematic theologian. His letters are usually arguments against divisive issues in the churches he had founded. So we do not have a systematic development of who Jesus was. Paul is more interested in saying how Jesus functions to save us than he is in talking about the nature of Jesus.

But there are passages in which Paul mentions the nature of Jesus almost in passing, while treating other issues. Colossians 1:15-20 is one such place. There we have almost a unitarian view of Jesus. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." Here, we find the passage Swedenborg cites to explain his own view of the trinity. Colossians 1:19 says that, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." And more specifically, Colossians 2:9 says, "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily." I take this to mean that Jesus is the physical incarnation of the infinite God.

Paul, though, claims that the Person of Jesus, the Second Person of the trinity, existed from all time with the Father. "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Paul also says that Jesus created all things, "By him all things were created." This doctrine is currently held by most Christians, namely that creation was effected by the Second Person of the Trinity. We find this teaching in the Nicene Creed, to which most Christian Churches assent:

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

Paul also here, and in Ephesians 5, uses the image of the human body to talk about our relationship to Jesus. He states that Christ is the head and the church is the body. Swedenborg finds the idea that Jesus existed before creation problematic. He says that Jesus didn't exist until

He was born of Mary. God did have a humanity--the Divine Humanity--but God was not incarnated in the flesh as Jesus until His birth on Christmas.

There is a beautiful hymn to Jesus in Philippians 2. It appears to originally been a hymn to Wisdom. Everyone in the Greek world knew of Wisdom as a woman--Lady Sophia. Yet the hymn to Jesus is playful with that idea. The writer calls specific attention to the idea that Jesus as wisdom was a Man!

“Who, being in very nature God  
 did not consider equality with God  
 something to be grasped,  
 but made himself nothing,  
 taking the very nature of a servant,  
 being made in human likeness.  
 And being found in appearance *as a man* (italics mine).”

At the conclusion of the hymn, we find language identifying Jesus with Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. In Greek, Jesus is called "Lord" which is how the Israelites spoke of Yahweh, since the actual name of Yahweh was considered too holy to utter.

“...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *Lord*.”