

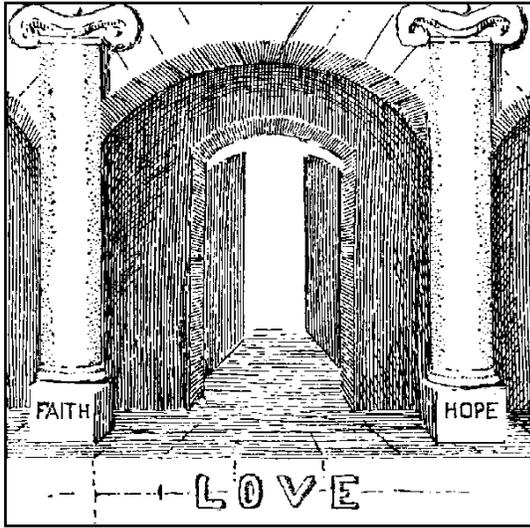


Part 33: The Love Letter



Opening Quotes

Word ALIVE



“I belong to Paul’... ‘I belong to Cephas’... ‘I belong to Christ’... has Christ been divided?” 1 Cor 1:12

“God’s folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men.” 1 Cor 1:25

“It has not even dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Cor 3:9

“Every other sin is outside the body, but fornication is sin against ones own body.” 1 Cor 6:18

“If I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” 1 Cor 13:2

“Love is patient, love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love’s forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails.” 1 Cor 13:4

“When I became a man I put childish ways aside. Now we see dimly. Then we shall see face to face.” 1 Cor 13:11

“There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.” 1 Cor 13:13



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: To present Paul’s first letter to the church he founded in Corinth, a large metropolitan city famous for its debauchery. The Corinthians were into Christian theology, but not its morals!

AUTHOR: Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

DATE: Paul lived in Corinth when he founded the Church there around 50 - 52.

STYLE: The first letter is mostly a response to questions posed by the leaders of the Corinthian community. Paul’s responses to these theological and doctrinal topics (morals, marriage, assemblies, the Eucharist, relations to pagans, etc.) sound less like a theological discourse and more like a deep theological witnessing to the profound truths of Christ (true liberty, the sanctification of the body, the primacy of love, and union with Christ).

the BIG PICTURE		LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		key covenants in our Father’s plan	
12 Periods	Plot	Other books related to period		stories in each period	
BC	THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah’s ark, Tower of Babel	
1850	THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek	
1250	EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus	
1200	JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua	
1100	THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel	
1030	KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple	
1000	THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile	
721 587	BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, “major” prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)	
538	THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs	Cyrus, 2nd temple, 2nd Law, “minor” prophets, new writings	
163 63	THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)	
AD	JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection	
33 70	APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ	



The Story of Part 33: The Love Letter



To “live like a Corinthian” meant to live in debauchery. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city exposed to all sorts of philosophies and lifestyles. Paul started the local Church there and would later write two letters which give us a peek at the issues of his time, some of them still relevant today. He opens the letter calling to mind the fact that Christians are saints in the making. We are called to holiness, and nothing less. The first order of business was dissensions that had arisen. Here is a paraphrase of Paul’s letter:

Why do some of you say you belong ‘to Paul’ or ‘to Apollos’, and others ‘to Cephas’, or ‘to Christ’? Is Christ divided? I know this city is well known for its wisdom and philosophy, but we need to recognize our unity in the cross of Christ, who died for us all. The cross is an obstacle to both Jews and Greeks. Jews have always wanted signs, and Greeks have always wanted the answers to life and death and suffering. But all the signs of the old covenant point to the cross. And on the cross Jesus Christ answered the problem of suffering and dying – by suffering and dying himself! Since he was raised, death itself been defeated. To join him in his victory means to embrace, not evade, suffering.

I know that many of us followers of Christ are not exactly what Corinth considers upper-class citizens. But who cares? We’re children of God! He chose you to show the worldly that they are wrong in living life as if this was all there is. You should be proud, not of social status, but of the Lord. It won’t be because of any eloquence on my part that you’ll come to know this, but because of the Holy Spirit inside of you. What a place God has prepared for us in the real life! Until then, he’s given us everything around us. All is ours, we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

(Paul continues.) Now I know some of you are bond to judge me because I mention certain things that rub you the wrong way. No offense, but I’m trying to please God, not you! Only God can judge me, and the day will come when he reveals everything hidden in our hearts. Now is the time to make a clean start and stop judging one another. Remember, you and I have been bought, and at a great price.

Now, here’s one of those things I have to talk about since it’s been brought to my attention – sexual morality. And keep in mind, a lot of what I’m saying here is not God talking, but me, Paul, talking. I’m just trying my best in this letter to answer your questions.

(Paul then addresses fornication – sex outside of marriage.) Don’t you realize that sex is literally the joining of two people into one flesh? And don’t you realize that ever since Adam and Eve, God intended this union for marriage? Avoid fornication. Every other sin takes place outside the body, but this sin is different, because it involves your very being. The “It’s my body and I’ll do what I want with it” attitude makes no sense!

God gave you your body, so glorify him in it! You’re a part of Christ’s body now. Can you join his body to a prostitute’s, for instance? No way!

Now if anyone thinks that we think sex is dirty, they’re wrong. Sex is a beautiful gift of God. I will even say that your spouse has more of a right to your body than you do. So please each other, by all means, and don’t withhold that “marital privilege”! The only time you should abstain is when you agree together to spend a period of time in prayer, so that you not only grow closer to God, but you can learn to control your passion, instead of letting it control you.

Now, you all know that I myself chose a celibate lifestyle. I consider this even better than marriage because it lets me concentrate on serving God. And if you’re married, let’s face it, you’ll be busy trying to please each other, and your time will be too divided to try to minister full time like I do. But that’s okay. We all have our calling, some married, some single. Whether you’re single, married, or widowed, all of these are vocations from God. So if anyone tells you one of these lifestyles is wrong, *they’re* wrong. Of course, if you’re divorced, it’s better to stay separated or be reconciled than to remarry. And if you’re single and you can’t control yourself with your fiancé, get married! Don’t burn because of your passions!

(Paul also mentioned certain practices in this letter that he would repeat to the Romans.) Now, I hear there are sexual practices going on there as bad as, if not worse than, the pagans’! You know what I’m talking about – sex that deviates from the *natural* husband-to-wife relationship. And women and men are doing these things. Stop worshiping your own bodies as if they were God. The reason God abandoned the pagans to their depraved minds and passions is because they decided to forget God and worship themselves. But you belong to Christ! Avoid these things for his sake.

(Paul then defines real love in the famous passage used at weddings.) Love is patient, love is kind. It isn’t jealous, it doesn’t seek self-pleasure. It isn’t prone to anger, it doesn’t hold grudges. It rejoices in the truth. There is no limit to its forgiveness, its trust, its hope, and its power to endure! (How does society’s view of love compare with God’s?)

Love is *everything*. It is the fulfillment of the law. You may as well take all my words and crash cymbals over them, if I have no love. I can preach, feed the poor, and move mountains, but if I don’t have love, I’m nothing. When I was a child, I thought like a child. But now that I am a man, I need to give up childish ways and realize that God loved me so much, that he died to buy me back from this world. I come to him like a child so that I can face this world like a real man. Faith, hope, and love are all that matter in the end. And the greatest of these, is love.



Defending the Faith: Sexual Morality

"Why does the Church always lay a guilt trip about sex, if sex is a God-given gift of nature?"

When Pope Paul VI forbade contraception and abortion in his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, he became the laughing stock of a sexual revolution that hailed contraception as the answer to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. The Pope declared (#17) that contraception and abortion, once allowed, could lead to marital infidelity, a general lowering of moral standards, the demeaning of women, and warned that the private family matter of how many children to have could even fall into the hands of the government.

Now that the sexual revolution is forty years old, we have the advantage of hindsight to see who was right. Forty years ago, you were teased if you lost your virginity. Today you're teased if you're a virgin. Divorce has quadrupled, with a corresponding rise in broken homes, wife abuse, child abuse, and suicides. Unwanted pregnancies have gone *up*, not down, and so have sexually transmitted diseases. "Protection" and "safe sex" have not even slowed down AIDS, which kills a million people a year, or abortion, a legal "choice" which kills 1.6 million babies a year. If you live in China today, the government controls the number of children you can have by enforcing abortion!

How did the Pope know? According to *Humanae Vitae*, the Church simply can't evade the duty imposed on her by Christ of proclaiming the moral law, both *natural* and *evangelical* (#18). Let's look at these two facets of the moral law, starting with the natural.

God implanted in our natures two strong appetites – one for food and one for sex. One guarantees the sustenance of life, the other, the creation of life. The pleasure associated with food and sex *is* natural and God-given (not to mention awesome!). But when the pleasure is *forced apart* from its function, it becomes

unnatural. Consider the forced separation of eating and digestion by forced vomiting in order to enjoy more food. Who would argue that Graeco-Roman vomitoriums and modern day bohemias are unnatural and unhealthy? The same natural principle applies to sex (1 Cor 6:13). Contraception and abortion answer the unnatural demand for sex without babies by forcing apart the pleasure and the purpose of sex. Sex becomes unnatural when sought *for its own sake*. (Sodomy is also unnatural because God designed the male sex organ for the female sex organ. A condom cannot prevent internal rupturing which can allow human waste to enter the bloodstream, for instance.)

And there is also the evangelical aspect of the moral law. The Catholic Church practically stands alone on clear biblical principles that even professed "Bible-believers" have abandoned – divorce (Mt 19:4-9, 1Cor 7:10), abortion (Jer 1:5, 2 Macc 7:22), homosexual acts (Lev 20:13, Rom 1:26-27), refusing conception (Gn 38:9-10), celibacy as a vocation (Mt 19:12), and premarital sex (1 Cor 6:18).

"But it's so hard to resist! Don't we have the right to do whatever we want with our bodies as long it doesn't hurt anyone else?" Since when do unwanted pregnancy, disease, and death not hurt anyone else? Real love doesn't expose a lover to these risks. And, yes, it's hard! *Humanae Vitae* (20, 25) concedes that it can even seem impossible, and that it takes a firm resolve to cooperate with God's grace. But even if we fail, even if sin refuses to let go, we're not to lose heart. God knows what we're up against, and offers us his constant mercy. Read Romans 7:14-25. Is there any room for a guilt trip in light of this good news? Courage! God knows our will, even when we fail.



Expressing the Faith: I Don't Know How to Love Him

From Jesus Christ Superstar, Mary Magdalene grapples with a higher love than the one she's used to.

*I don't know how to love him,
What to do, how to move him.
I've been changed, yes really changed.
In these past few days when I've seen myself
I seem like someone else.
I don't know how to take this.
I don't see why he moves me.
He's a man, he's just a man,
And I've had so many men before in very many ways.
He's just one more.
Should I bring him, should I scream and shout?
Should I speak of love, let my feelings out?*

*I never thought I'd come to this. What's it all about?
Don't you think it's rather funny
I should be in this position?
I'm the one who's always been so calm, so cool,
No lover's fool, running every show. He scares me so.
I never thought I'd come to this. What's it all about?
Yet, if he said he loved me,
I'd be lost, I'd be frightened.
I couldn't cope, just couldn't cope.
I'd turn my head, I'd back away.
I wouldn't want to know. He scares me so.
I want him so. I love him so.*

↗ **Next time: "Every Rose Has Its Thorn"** ↖