Sunday, April 26, 2015—I Corinthians: Introduction, Part 2

Introduction/Review

- Last week, in part one of our introduction to the book of I Corinthians, we considered two major points: 1) the geographic, political, economic, religious, and culture life of the city of Corinth, and 2) the authorship and date of the book.

- While dates for the authorship of I Corinthians very in study Bibles and commentaries (Scofield—59 AD, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts*—56 or 57 AD) we concluded that Paul wrote the book in Acts 19:21-22 before he sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia. Based upon I Corinthians 4:17 it is reasonable to view Timothy as the one whom Paul entrusted to deliver the epistle to the Corinthians.

- This week in part two of our introduction I want to consider the following points: 1) the place of I Corinthians in the New Testament cannon, and 2) present an outline of the book.

Place in the Cannon

- It is a well understood fact among Bible students that Paul's epistles are not found in the New Testament cannon in the chronological order in which they were written.

Chronological Order	Canonical Order
Galatians	Romans—16 chapters
I Thessalonians	I Corinthians—16 chapters
II Thessalonians	II Corinthians—13 chapters
I Corinthians	Galatians—6 chapters
II Corinthians	Ephesians—6 chapters
Romans	Philippians—4 chapters
Philemon	Colossians—4 chapters
Colossians	I Thessalonians—5 chapters
Philippians	II Thessalonians—3chapters
Ephesians	I Timothy—6 chapters
Titus	II Timothy—4 chapters
I Timothy	Titus—3 chapters
II Timothy	Philemon—1 chapter

- Most Evangelical Christians believe that Paul's church epistles (letters addressed to churches not individuals) are simply arranged in descending order from longest to shortest in terms of length and that there is no significance to their order.

- Meanwhile, some mid-Acts Pauline Dispensationalists view Paul's epistles as comprising a rigid "curriculum" that must be studied in canonical order to get the proper "sense and sequence" of doctrine. On this view believers must pass through certain "check points" before advancing to more complex material.

- In my view, both of these positions represent two extremes while the correct view resides in the middle.

- II Timothy 3:16-17—according to Paul all scripture of profitable for four things:

  - Doctrine
  - Reproof
  - Correction
  - Instruction in Righteousness

- It is recognizing these four applications of scripture as well as the overall theme and purpose set forth in each one of Paul's church epistles that the significance of their canonical order comes into focus.

- In 1960, Christian author J. Sidlow Baxter wrote a book titled *Explore the Book*. In this book Baxter carried forward some ideas first set forth by E.W. Bullinger in both *The Companion Bible* and *The Church Epistles* (1898) regarding the canonical order of Paul's letters addressed to the churches.

- According to Baxter, these 9 books are divided into "a quartet, a trio, and a pair." "The first four cohere; so the do the middle three; so do the final two. In the first four the emphasis is on Christ and the Cross. In the middle thee it is on Christ and the Church. In the final two it is on Christ and the Coming. In each case the order in which truth is presented corresponds with the order of the wording in II Timothy 3:16." (Baxter, 93)

  - Doctrine—Romans
  - Reproof—I & II Corinthians—Christ and the *Cross*
  - Correction—Galatians

  - Doctrine—Ephesians
  - Reproof—Philippians—Christ and the *Church*
  - Correction—Colossians

  - Doctrine—I & II Thessalonians—Christ and the *Coming*

- Thus with respect to the quartet of Romans, I & II Corinthians, and Galatians Baxter writes:

  - ". . . we find *doctrine* in Romans; *reproof* in Corinthians; *correction* in Galatians. Reproof always has to do with wrong practice. Correction always to do with wrong doctrine. The Roman epistle sets the *norm*. The Corinthian epistle expose *fault*. The Galatian epistle counters *error*." (Baxter, 93)

- Baxter is quick to concede that there is doctrine in all the epistles on account of the fact that they all teach Christian truth. Therefore, the doctrine, reproof, correction structure is *characteristic* not *absolute*.

- That being said, Baxter really does see characteristic differences between the various books. For instance:

    o ". . . in Romans one subject is developed thesis-like form beginning to end, whereas in Corinthians there is a variety of topics provoked by way of reproof or reply. In Romans the doctrinal pronouncements are formal and didactic; in Corinthians they are only incidental to the replies which Paul is writing to requests and reports from Corinth. The Romans epistle is dogmatic; the Corinthian epistles are apologetic." (Baxter, 93-94)

- Romans 3:27—doctrinally all boasting is excluded from the salvation

    o I Corinthians 1:29-31—this theme reappears to reprove those who were glorying in men.

- Romans 5:13; 7:7-13—demonstrates in doctrine form that "the strength of sin the law."

    o I Corinthians 15:56—the same doctrine taught in Romans remerges to enhance the prospect of resurrection-victory.

- Romans 5:12-21—doctrnally set for the contrast between the first Adam and the last Adam (Jesus Christ).

    o I Corinthians 15:21, 22, 45—the same contrast recurs as incidental to the great resurrection argument and exhortation.

- Romans 14—constitute an entire section on general Christina liberty in things debatable around the principle "that no man put a stumbling block in his brother's way."

    o I Corinthians 8:12—the doctrine set forth in Romans is applied reprovingly to the Corinthians.

- In Romans doctrine is *stated* whereas in Corinthians it is *related* to specific situation and circumstances. According to Baxter, "In Romans evangelical truth is stated as doctrine to be learned and received. In Corinthians it is rather seen as truth already taught and departed from. In Romans we have the *norm*; in Corinthians the *sub*-norm; in Galatians the *ab*-norm." (Baxter, 94)

- I Corinthians is a book full of reproof for practical errors in life and walk. There is reproof for:

    o Divisions, envyings, and contentions (Chapter 1-4)

- o Unjudged sexual sin (Chapter 5)

- o Selfish litigation between believers (Chapter 6)

- o Inconsiderate use of Christian liberty in doubtful practices (Chapter 8)

- o Quarrelsome questioning of Paul's apostleship (Chapter 9)

- o Disorders in public meetings (Chapter 11)

- o Errors in the use of spiritual gifts (Chapter 14)

- o Wrong attitudes toward the coming resurrection (Chapter 15)

Outline of the Book

- After considering many interesting and valid was of outlining I Corinthians, I decided to use Baxter's outline presented below with some of my own modifications.

FIRST EPISLTE TO THE CORINTHIANS

JEUS CHRIST MADE UNTO US WISDOM

Introductory 1:1-9

REPROOF—CONCERING SCHISMS (Chapters 1-6)

The Corinthians were factiously glorying in men—1:12

- Chapter 1—man-exalting schisms (v. 10-17) are wrong because salvation by the Cross sets aside man's wisdom altogether (v. 18-31).

- Chapter 2—man-exalting schisms are wrong because true wisdom is imparted by the Spirit, not by man (v. 5-13)

- Chapters 3-4—man-exalting schisms are wrong because human teachers are only stewards: power is of God (3:5-6, 21; 4:1)

- Chapter 5-6—such "glorying" (5:2) are a mockery (5:6) while flagrant evils are condoned—incest, law-suits, and impurity!

REPLIES—CONCERNING PROBLEMS (Chapters 7-16)

The Corinthians has written Paul about problems—7:1

- Chapter 7—reply concern marriage and celibacy.

- Chapters 8-10—reply concerning meats. The principles (Cp. 8); Paul's example (Cp. 9); Scriptures warning (Cp. 10); the issue (10:23 through 11:1)

- Chapter 11—reply on sex propriety in the assembly (v. 2-16) and general behavior at the Lord's Table (v. 17-34)

- Chapters 12-14—reply concerning spiritual gifts. Dispensed by the Spirit (Cp. 12); Temporary and poor without love (Cp. 13); Orderly functioning of the gifts, prophecy is best (Cp. 14)

- Chapter 15—reply concerning the resurrection of Saints. Relation to Christ's (v. 1-19); the prospect (v. 20-34); the body (v. 35-49); the "mystery" (v. 50-58)

- Chapter 16—supplementary and conclusion.