

PART FOUR THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Syllabus Objectives	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be familiar with characteristics of one of the first Christian communities. <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trace the development of the understandings of Jesus and the meaning of his life • be aware of the historical nature of Christianity and the role of the cultural context in the shaping of belief and practice from ancient times to the present day • understand the relationship between faith and culture • have an insight into the nature of Christian community life and ethical vision. <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise moments of adaptation and reform in the Christian tradition • analyse these moments in the light of Christian origins. <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of the place of cultural context in the preaching and development of Christian traditions • appreciation of the significance of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the first Christians, for Christians today, and for the wider community.
---------------------	---

Topic: 4.1 *The first Christian communities as seen through one of the writings of Paul*

Procedure

Description of content:	<p><i>One community to be chosen from Corinth, Thessalonica or Philippi and studied under the following headings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>geographical location</i> • <i>expressions of Christian belief and patterns of behaviour</i> • <i>difficulties within the community and in relation to the wider culture.</i>
--------------------------------	--

Research / Scripture Assignment: The first Christian community in Philippi

Look up maps / scripture references to answer the following questions:

<i>Scripture reference:</i>	<i>Questions:</i>
	<i>Where was this community located?</i>
Philippians 4:8	<i>How did it give expression to Christian beliefs?</i>
1:28-30; 2:3, 15	<i>What difficulties did the community face?</i>

Or Research / Scripture Assignment: The first Christian community in Thessalonica

Look up maps / scripture references to answer the following questions:

<i>Scripture reference:</i>	<i>Questions:</i>
	<i>Where was this community located?</i>
1 Thessalonians 1:9; 4:11; 2:9	<i>How did it give expression to Christian beliefs?</i>
4:13-18; 4:11-12; 5:14	<i>What difficulties did the community face?</i>

Or Research / Scripture Assignment: The first Christian community in Corinth

Look up maps / scripture references to answer the following questions:

<i>Scripture reference:</i>	<i>Questions:</i>
	<i>Where was this community located?</i>
1 Cor. 13:1-13; 12:1-31	<i>How did it give expression to Christian beliefs?</i>
1 Cor. 1: 11-12; 26-29; 7:21; 11:22; 16:15.	<i>What difficulties did the community face?</i>

When students have completed their assignment take feedback with reference to the following if necessary:

<i>Corinth Questions:</i>	<i>Where was this community located?</i> Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. It had access to both the Aegean and the Adriatic seas, making it an important crossroads between East and West. It was a port city, rich in commerce, with a thriving economic life. It had an immense volume of trade, and huge numbers of travellers passed through it. Many of the colonists were former slaves or freedmen. The city was noted for the Isthmian games, celebrated every second year, and second in importance only to the Olympic games.
1 Cor. 13:1-13; 12:1-31	<i>How did it give expression to Christian beliefs?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul writing from Ephesus emphasises the priority of love as the authentic life in Christ and the church as the one body of Christ.
1 Cor. 1: 11-12; 26-29; 7:21; 11:22; 16:15.	<i>What difficulties did the community face?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of the community were not from the upper social stratum of the time, i.e. those who were 'wise... powerful... of noble birth'. Some were slaves at the time of their calling, and Paul refers to some in the community as 'those who have nothing'. • There were serious divisions in the community. The unity of the church was being threatened by actions and attitudes the Corinthians didn't seem to even notice.

<i>Philippi Questions:</i>	<i>Where was it?</i> Ten miles from the Aegean
4:8	<i>How did it give expression to Christian beliefs?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are values in the culture that they can embrace e.g. Paul exhorts them: 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, think about these things' • Paul proposes Jesus' own way of life as their model.
1:28-30 2:3, 15	<i>What difficulties did the community face?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community is faced with considerable antagonism from their fellow citizens. • Paul calls upon them to be 'children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation' • Internal divisions, caused by self-seeking and pride

<i>Thessalonica Questions:</i>	<i>Where was this community located?</i> Capital of Macedonia and one of the larger cities in the Roman Empire
1 Thessalonians 1:9; 4:11; 2:9	<i>How did it give expression to Christian beliefs?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reference to having turned from 'idols' indicates that this is a predominantly Gentile-Christian community. • The theme of manual trades may suggest that the majority of church members belong to the working (middle or lower) class. Paul himself worked at his trade at a shop in the market place. • They are to focus on Jesus' triumph over death and the future coming of the Lord, the parousia.
4:13-18; 4:11-12; 5:14	<i>What difficulties did the community face?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community is living in a hostile environment, needing Paul's pastoral care and guidance • The Thessalonians are lacking in hope especially in the face of the painful experience of the death of some of their members • The idleness of some in the community is bringing hardship to others

Discuss: Is the chosen community Jewish, Gentile or mixed?
How was the life and faith of this early Christian Community shaped by living in a Greco-Roman city?

Outcomes:

- give an account of an early Christian community from either Corinth, Thessalonica or Philippi that includes
 - its geographical location
 - the main features of Christian belief and how that belief impacted on the lifestyle of believers
 - tensions within the community and any tensions with others outside the Christian community.