



# Connect to the Bible

## Leader's Guide

### Week 6

#### *Topic week 6: The Letters and Revelation*

**PREWORK: Before class read the full leader's guide and watch the videos on the website. Note the time of the videos so you can plan well.**

**Study these teaching points covered in the video (*refer to week 6 in the participants guide*)**

- 1) Paul and his letters
- 2) The General Epistles
- 3) Revelation
- 4) How to start reading the Bible

**Speaker: Pastor Shawn Allen**

#### ***Transcript\*\*\*\****

Well, welcome back. We have made it to the final week of our overview of the entire Bible. Last week we finished John and Acts. And this week we're going to be getting into the letters and finishing out the New Testament. Then we'll talk a little bit about where do we go from here.

After Acts, what we have for the majority of the New Testament then are letters, or sometimes they're called epistles, and these are letters that were written to churches, to individuals, or just generally. These established the theology that the church is built on. These are generally the oldest documents of the New Testament. First Thessalonians is sometimes dated before 50 AD. Which seems a little weird. You would think the Gospels were what were written first. Actually, some of these letters predated the Gospels. Thirteen of the letters are attributed to Paul, who we talked about last week with the conversion of Saul to Paul. The book of Hebrews, we really don't know who wrote. And then there are seven that are attributed to the Apostles, Peter, John, James, and Jude. Sometimes you'll hear discussions of whether or not somebody actually wrote the book that's attributed to them. That happens sometimes with Paul's books. Don't worry about that because sometimes there are people who worked with Paul or followers of Paul that may have written it. And in those days, when you did that, you would write in a person's name. Worry more about the content, which is consistent. And there's a reason why it was included within the Canon. There are some letters that as you read through,

for example, in 1st and 2nd Corinthians, he's talking about letters that were previously written. We don't have all of those. So sometimes you will see a reference to another letter. These aren't the only letters that were written, but they do encompass a great deal of what we have from that time. And this is the theology established by the early church.

There is a certain style to a lot of the letters. You especially see this in Paul's letters. These are Hellenistic letters. They start with an introduction to say who they are, who they're writing to, hope you're doing well, just like we would. Then there's the body of the letter. And that's why the letter was written and what you are to do with it. Sometimes that will be divided in half. And you will see, Paul does this a lot where he will give the teaching, the theology at the beginning, and then he will shift to how you then apply that. A lot of times you'll notice a word like therefore in Romans 12, therefore in Galatians five, and Ephesians four you see a shift from, here's what I'm teaching you to now here's what you're going to do with it in your life. And that's the way a lot of Paul's letters are written. And then there's a closing, which is more personal as you'll see. It talks about certain people or, other people that maybe, he was associated with things like that before they closed. You'll see that commonality in a lot of the letters.

I have a map here and I think you'll be possibly getting the PowerPoints, but generally, we talked about Paul taking four journeys in Acts. Here we are in Jerusalem, down here in the corner, these are the journeys of Paul. So, what you see is how vastly Paul expanded the Gospel. And so as you look through, you will see, here's Galatia. These were the letters written to the churches of Galatia, which are Galatians, here's Ephesus, which is Ephesians, there's a Philippi, the Philippians, Thessalonica, which is Thessalonians, Corinth – Corinthians, obviously Rome, up in the corner for Romans. So, you see, he was writing all of these churches across this entire region. Paul's journeys were instrumental in the expansion of Christianity.

Let's talk a little bit about Paul. Paul was a Pharisee, he was a Jewish leader. He was very high up, he was not a good guy, as we talked about, and then he's converted on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. And then even though he is Jewish, much of his missional work is to the Gentiles. He's the biggest advocate on getting the message to the Gentile population. He argued to be free of the Jewish law, to no longer be bound by the law, but to, as we will see, he talks about the importance of grace. That it's grace and not works that are the basis of our salvation. He also wrote very much on the importance of the Holy Spirit in our life. His message is that Christ is universal. So, I picked from Galatians 3:28. "There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female for you are all one in Christ. Jesus." If you read Ephesians, for example, he talks about the unification of the Jews and the Gentiles, of everybody being together because of Christ.

Now he provided lessons for the structure of the church. We'll look at those, there's some letters called the pastoral epistles, where he guided on how to develop churches. And then you have to remember that there are times when Paul is addressing certain situations directly. So, as we'll talk about these letters, he is dealing with a problem in Galatians that's being

addressed. These messages are still applicable to us today. This is where some of the more controversial writings in the New Testament related to the role of women, can come into play. And what you have to remember is the context in which those are written. Obviously, Paul also talks about women who are his associates, his teachers. So those aren't general messages in which he's applying, those are situational. He wrote letters to churches or to groups of churches in the first section of the letters. They're not chronological, it's important to note, but they're based largely on, size. Romans, one of the more famous ones that more people have read, you definitely hear a lot about in our church. Romans 12 being one of the more famous chapters in probably the entire New Testament, addresses the problems in the church. As I said, there were problems, there were disagreements, and he's talking about the differences between following the law versus faith. He's talking about divisions between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. He gives advice on how to live the correct life.

I and II Corinthians were another book that was written with a purpose. Corinth was like Vegas. It was a port city, which Vegas isn't, but it was a hedonistic locale. He's talking about the difference between being bound by the worldly standards or the standards set forth by Christ. So obviously it's a different context, but these are very applicable in our own lives. In Galatians, you see a frustration. One of the interesting things about these letters is you will see how Paul is feeling. He's not too shy about expressing his emotion and in Galatians he's frustrated because he's taught them the correct Gospel, and then they've allowed somebody else to come in, and teach an incorrect gospel, and they're starting to follow it. So, he is correcting them. And he's frustrated that they've moved away from the true gospel. Once again, he talks about the incorrect teaching and then how to live. And this is where we get the fruit of the spirit, which is a famous verse, Galatians 5:22 & 23.

Ephesians has a different tenor. He's very proud of the Ephesians, he's very supportive. He talks about how great their faith is, but then he still says, I can still give you advice. Nice. And he does! He talks about faith and not works. There's the basis of grace and that we all do share in God's blessing. And then once again talks about how we live both in our own lives and with each other.

Philippians, another book, thanking the church for what they've done, and then talking about how we share in Christ's suffering. In Colossians he addresses people teaching Jewish law. This was a problem. You'll see in some of the other things as well, that there were teachers out there teaching bad theology. That's not unique to our day. That's been going on since the beginning of time that somebody has been teaching incorrectly. So once again in Colossians he is talking about not following the Jewish law and the universality of Christ.

Then finally in Thessalonians, he is thanking the church, teaching on morality and to be prepared for the coming of Jesus. And then the second one is, basically informing them that that has not already come, which was an issue of the day. Then we get to Paul's letter to individuals.

There are three books that are called the Pastoral Epistles. There are I and II Timothy and Titus. These tell us how to govern a church. These are letters to individuals, guiding them. Timothy is a companion of Paul. He's mentioned in other books. It also talks about church governance, true and false teachings, and church order. This is where we get the historic episcopate of the bishops and priests. It does have some controversial teachings as far as roles of women. Second Timothy is a little bit more of him handing on his wisdom, telling Timothy to be bold, and talking about what he's suffered and how Timothy will suffer. This is the handing off of wisdom of the elder to the younger. Titus is specifically related to the ministry at Crete, talking about some of the problems with the church there. The final book, that Paul wrote, Philemon, is a very short but interesting book. Paul is in prison at the time and he has come into contact with a slave that had run away and he is writing to find Philemon and asking him to please release him from being a slave. This is a book that that's interesting because it's gotten some, I would say, bad press. It was used in congressional arguments prior to the civil war, as a justification that Paul supported slavery. I don't think that's the correct reading of it in any way, but just know that sometimes this book has been treated that way, incorrectly. It's a great book, very short.

Then we get to Hebrews and we don't know who wrote Hebrews. It used to be attributed to Paul though. Most people kind of questioned that. And since then, they've gotten away from that. It's a very well-written book. It's written to an audience that's been persecuted and fallen away. It explains to them how Jesus is superior to the Jewish law, and it is heavily reliant on the Old Testament. Fifteen percent of it is quotations from the Old Testament, which is the highest percentage of any book of the New Testament. And it's kind of divided, talking about the superiority of Jesus, the Son, Jesus, as High Priest, the superior of Jesus's ministry, and then the necessity of faithfulness in our lives. This is for Christians who were being persecuted. And so, this would be sort of the letter to those that maybe were being persecuted and fallen away to get them back on track.

Next, we come to the General Epistles which are not written to a person or a church like Paul's were, they're just general theology. Now they may have been sent to a specific group, but not intended just to be to them. There is James, known for the practical wisdom. There's a lot of parallels with Proverbs in there. He has great advice on suffering. He has some great discussion of faith and works and how you can't really have faith without works. And I think that's a really interesting read to understand that dichotomy between the two. Taming the tongue, which is something obviously we could all use at all times.

I and II Peter is to everyone. This is the universal church. Sometimes this along with Jude are known as the Catholic Epistles. Catholic, meaning universal, not, big C Roman Catholic, called a Holy living, suffering for your faith and once again, rejecting false teaching. This is a commonality we're going to see in I, II, and III John, how to live and love, and to reject the false teachings that deny the resurrection. And then Jude, which is how to fight for the faith and maintain morality.

Finally, (this isn't a letter) the last book of the Bible is Revelation. This is known as apocalyptic literature. This is John's vision of the end of judgment. And so it's also known as the apocalypse of John. This is very different than anything else you read. It was late being added to the Canon and is controversial, but it was added and it can be interpreted many ways. It can be a literal prophecy. This is actually going to happen. It could be that there's current hope that was given to the people for their suffering. And it can be symbolic for every time in place that there can be a universe that is transferred.

So, there we have the 66 books! We've gone through them very quickly and unfortunately, we could not go into details that I would like to do but that gets us started. So, then the question is, where do we go from here? And if the question you're asking yourself is, should I read the Bible? Hopefully from this, the answer you've gotten is yes, I really should! I should read it to understand the fullness of my faith. So how do you do that? Reading the Bible can be intimidating. The hope is that we took away some of the intimidation factor. Obviously, you can just start and read the Bible in order. That is one way a lot of people start. They read Genesis, and maybe they get through Exodus, and that's about where they stop. And I think that that may not be the best way. The Old Testament is difficult and sometimes I think it can seem overwhelming and it's easy to stop. Another way is to read the Bible in chronological order. Now this was the way I did. You can find an app on your phone. There are a lot of different ones. You can find a chronological Bible you can buy and an app that will tell you what to read each day and do it in a year. Obviously, this starts with the old Testament as you would expect, but it also layers them a little bit more. And especially as you get into the histories, we talked about that overlap with the prophets. It kind of compares them, which is nice. And then a third option, I would not recommend, bouncing all over the place, reading a chapter here, and a chapter there. I think you'll lose the continuity. But I do think that you could choose --I just picked 12 for example -- and say, I'm going to read these 12. The ones I picked are Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy from the Torah, Job, Joshua (so you see them coming into the promised land - first book of history) Job and Psalms, Isaiah. And then either Matthew or Luke, one of the synoptic gospels. I left Mark out only because these are a little more comprehensive. John, as we talked about last week to get the more spiritual aspect of Jesus's ministry, Acts to get the history, and then Romans and Hebrews two books, we talked about today to get a feel for the letters. This will get you really far down the road. I mean, what you'll see as you've only read 12 of the 66, but this is probably over half of the New Testament. And there's still a lot of books that are pretty short that you can kind of add in there.

Now for me, this a Bible checklist, you can pull this anywhere off the internet and it has all the books and has a little square for all the chapters. So ,when you read one, you block it off. Now, if you're like me, if I have a to-do list and I do something, that's not on it, I write it down on the list and then check it off. So, I feel like I've done something because it makes you feel accomplished. When I read the full Bible for the first time I had this and I, colored in the squares and as I did it, I started to see it became less and less intimidating because I was filling up more and more. You can find this anywhere. I do think this is a good thing to have, but there's no

wrong way. If you're reading the Bible, you could just read the New Testament. You could start with the New Testament and work through it. You might miss some of the context as we talked about because you didn't have some of the Old Testament back there. So, hopefully over the course of these six weeks, this has encouraged you to read the Bible. Hopefully this has given you an idea on how everything fits together. This is one story. There's a lot of little books, but it is one story. And I hope that you choose to be a part of it. Thank you.

*End Script\*\*\*\**

**Tough questions prep:**

**Why does Paul not speak out more vocally against slavery?**

It must be remembered that it was an entrenched part of Roman society; and the Christians were an outsider group that were often persecuted. Paul was more subversive than revolutionary, because to do more may have hindered his ability to spread the broader message. Thus, Paul taught that slaves should be treated humanely and with kindness because they are also brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Why does Paul teach that women should have a subordinate role in the church?**

There are many conflicting opinions on the meaning and application of Paul's teachings. First, it is likely that the teachings were contextual; and may have been dealing with specific issues. Second, it should be read in the entirety of Paul's canon. He also speaks about several women that he taught with and lead house churches.

**Key Scriptures to review prior:**

Galatians 3:28, 5:22-23

1 Corinthians 14:33-35

1 Timothy 2:11-15, 6:1-2

2 Timothy 3:16-17

***Class Timeline:***

	Estimated time
1. Introductions	15 min
2. Teaching Video	Pastor Shawn Allen, 19 min
3. Discussion Questions	20 min
4. Takeaways	1 min
5. Prayer	1 min
6. Invitation for next week	1 min

### **1. Introduce the content and video for this class (say in your own words):**

The letters (or epistles) represent instructions, support, correction, and rebuking of early churches and individuals. Paul was a former Pharisee that was converted by God. He became one of the greatest theologians, disciple makers, and writer of the early church. The majority of his letters were directed to churches that he was discipling, either in person, or through his followers.

The “general epistles” were written by a variety of authors; and they represent instruction to the Church (and its members) as a whole.

### **2. Play the teaching video.**

### **3. Discussion questions:**

1. Are there any teachings that you have a problem with, or that seem to only apply within the context of the time?
2. What issues were being faced by the church that are similar to what we see today?
3. How does Paul’s example of discipleship translate into your life?

### **4. Closing / takeaways in your own words:**

The letters present much of the theology of the Church. This is the application of the Gospel to the lives and problems of those that were following Christ. Many things that Paul writes about are analogous to what people deal with today. People may no longer argue about the requirement of circumcision, but the dichotomy between the teaching of Christ and the teaching of the world is as prevalent as ever.

1) God can use anyone. Paul was a Pharisee who oversaw the persecution of Christians. Through a relationship with Christ, he became an early leader of the church; and the primary force behind spreading the message to the Gentiles.

2) The things that keep us away from a genuine relationship with Christ have changed little in the last 2000 years. While the worldly teachings have changed, their existence has not. Read the letters with an introspective look at how the things and people the writers are warning about are still prevalent today.

### **Close in prayer Use the PRAY model as we teach them to pray:**

P = praise – praise God for who He is and what he has done. Use attributes to describe Him.

R = Repent – helps us confess any sins and change the way we think or feel

A = Ask – petition your request for this group to our Father in Heaven including their understanding of the Bible

Y = Yield – Submit to God’s will and let go of our will.

<b>PRAISE</b>	Matthew 6:9	"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'"
<b>REPENT</b>	Matthew 6:12	"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
<b>ASK</b>	Matthew 6:11&13	"Give us this day our daily bread."  "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]"
<b>YIELD</b>	Matthew 6:10	"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

6. Invite them to the next class in the Connect Series .... Connect to the Mission! And also discuss the possibility of the class joining together to do a 1 year bible reading plan. There are many available. Shannon Mullins, a member of Mount Pisgah, does a 1-year chronological plan that can be found online at [shannonmullins.com](http://shannonmullins.com)