

The Third Letter to the Corinthians

As its name suggests, *3 Corinthians* is a letter pseudonymously penned in Paul's name, ostensibly to the Christian community that he founded in Corinth. Near the end of the second century, the letter came to be included in the narrative of Paul's missionary travels known as the *Acts of Paul*. The letter itself, however, may have been in circulation at an earlier date. It addressed theological issues known already to have been debated during the first half of the second century, and many of its views are reminiscent of those advanced by the Pastoral Epistles at the end of the first century and by Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second. The letter may have been composed, then, sometime in the early part of the second century.

Within the *Acts of Paul*, *3 Corinthians* represents Paul's response to a letter sent to him by the Corinthian congregation, in which they express their concern over the views of two false teachers in their midst, Simon and Cleobius. These heretics have led members of the church astray into a form of gnostic teaching that maintains that the true God did not create the world or inspire the Jewish prophets, that there is to be no future fleshly resurrection, and that Jesus himself was not a fleshly human being, born of a human mother.

In opposition to these teachings, *3 Corinthians* emphasizes the fleshly nature both of Jesus and of the salvation that he brings; the flesh is not destined for annihilation but for redemption. Thus Jesus really was "born to Mary," after the Holy Spirit came into her from heaven (v. 5; cf. vv. 12–14); Jesus came into this world "to redeem all flesh through his own flesh" (v. 6; cf. vv. 14–15); and there is to be a resurrection of all flesh from the dead (vv. 6, 24, 17, 33).

All these things had been taught, according to the author, through the Jewish prophets (vv. 9–10), the earliest apostles (v. 4), and Paul himself. Those who accept this teaching will "receive a reward" by being raised bodily from the dead for eternal life (v. 36); but those who turn away from it are destined for the destruction of fire (vv. 37–38).

1 Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, to the brethren at Corinth—greeting! 2 Being in many afflictions, I marvel not that the teachings of the evil one had such rapid success. 3 For my Lord Jesus Christ will quickly come, since he is rejected by

those who falsify his teaching. 4 For I delivered to you first of all what I received from the apostles before me who were always with Jesus Christ, 5 that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of Mary of the seed of David, the Father having sent the spir-

it from heaven into her 6 that he might come into this world and save all flesh by his own flesh and that he might raise us in the flesh from the dead as he has presented himself to us as our example. 7 And since man is created by his Father, 8 for this reason was he sought by him when he was lost, to become alive by adoption. 9 For the almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, sent the prophets first to the Jews to deliver them from their sins, 10 for he wished to save the house of Israel; therefore he took from the spirit of Christ and poured it out upon the prophets who proclaimed the true worship of God for a long period of time. 11 For the wicked prince who wished to be God himself laid his hands on them and killed them and bound all flesh of man to his pleasure. 12 But the almighty God, being just, and not wishing to repudiate his creation had mercy 13 and sent his Spirit into Mary the Galilean, 15 that the evil one might be conquered by the same flesh by which he held sway, and be convinced that he is not God. 16 For by his own body Jesus Christ saved all flesh, 17 presenting in his own body a temple of righteousness 18 through which we are saved. 19 They who follow them are not children of righteousness but of wrath, who despise the wisdom of God and in their disbelief assert that heaven and earth and all that is in them are not a work of God. 20 They have the accursed belief of the serpent. 21 Turn away from them and keep aloof from their teaching. 24 And those who say that there is no resurrection of the flesh shall have no resurrection,

25 for they do not believe him who had thus risen. 26 For they do not know, O Corinthians, about the sowing of wheat or some other grain that it is cast naked into the ground and having perished rises up again by the will of God in a body and clothed. 27 And he not only raises the body which is sown, but blesses it manifold. 28 And if one will not take the parable of the seeds 29 let him look at Jonah, the son of Amathios who, being unwilling to preach to the Ninevites, was swallowed up by the whale. 30 And after three days and three nights God heard the prayer of Jonah out of deepest hell, and nothing was corrupted, not even a hair nor an eyelid. 31 How much more will he raise you up, who have believed in Christ Jesus, as he himself was raised up. 32 When a corpse was thrown on the bones of the prophet Elisha by one of the children of Israel the corpse rose from death; how much more shall you rise up on that day with a whole body, after you have been thrown upon the body and bones and Spirit of the Lord. 34 If, however, you receive anything else let no one trouble me, 35 for I have these bonds on me that I may win Christ, and I bear his marks that I may attain to the resurrection of the dead. 36 And whoever accepts this rule which we have received by the blessed prophets and the holy gospel, shall receive a reward, 37 but for whomsoever deviates from this rule fire shall be for him and for those who preceded him therein 38 since they are Godless people, a generation of vipers. 39 Resist them in the power of the Lord. 40 Peace be with you.