

colaborate
Presbyterian Confirmation
Leader Guide

Presbyterian History & Doctrine

Sampler

SPARK
HOUSE

colaborate

Leader Guide

The Colaborate Leader Guide gives you everything you need to lead a confirmation class—and then some. Created by experienced youth workers, the leader guide equips you to head into each session feeling informed, supported, and ready to walk with your students as they explore their questions about the Bible, Presbyterian history, and what it means to be a Christian.

Each session dives into the topic with deep scholarship so you can feel confident about your content. We also understand the realities of youth ministry—constant time constraints, last-minute volunteer changes, unpredictable head counts. The leader guide makes it easy for anyone—regardless of theological training, regardless of lead time—to facilitate a class. We provide the Bible verses, the theological background, and lots of creative ideas to guide leaders as they work through each lesson. Leaders truly can pick up the guide, spend a few minutes prepping, and start a class, just like that.

The leader guide features embedded images of the student handbook so you can walk through the lesson with your group in real time. It offers expanded discussion questions, additional activities, and tips for adapting the content to the size and dynamics of your group. Need to use up some time? We can help. Only two kids this week instead of ten? Colaborate has you covered.

Easy to use, easy to follow, and easy to hand off to a volunteer, the Colaborate Leader Guide helps you turn confirmation into a time of rich engagement with the Bible, Presbyterian doctrine, and—most importantly—your students.

**LESSON:
REFORMED AND ALWAYS
REFORMING**

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The church is old-fashioned and never changes.

TAKEAWAY

The Reformed tradition is always evolving according to the Word of God.

BIBLE PASSAGES

Acts 15:1-21
Romans 10:17

KEY VERSE**Acts 15:16-17**

“After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.”

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Bibles
- Handbooks
- DVD
- Pens
- Pencils
- Paper
- Butcher paper
- Markers
- Tape

Background Information

Our Reformed tradition encourages us to be rooted in Scripture. Theologian Karl Barth famously said, “Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.” Our tradition also encourages us to learn from previous generations of Christians. How did they understand the Bible and God in their time and place? How do we follow their example to ensure we are faithful in our efforts to understand God in our context? And how do we listen for the Holy Spirit’s guidance as we do all of this? It’s a delicate process, to be sure.

Honoring both Presbyterianism’s belief in the centrality of the Bible and its recognition that we are always interpreting Scripture through the lens of our current context is admittedly challenging. This is what it means to be “reformed and always reforming.” We aren’t reinventing our faith with every generation—we are grounded in a text and a tradition. But we also recognize that we aren’t beholden to the past when the present asks us to interpret our faith differently.

The notion of always being reformed according to the Word of God is an invitation for confirmation students to receive the core of the faith as understood by those who have come before them, while noticing what aspects of the church’s life and faith need to be critiqued, corrected, and reformed today.

What Students Need to Know . . .

- While the previous lesson focused on the theological roots of our tradition, this one unpacks the movements and people who steered the church through times of conflict and change. It’s an opportunity for students to discover how individuals have contributed to the church, and inspire them to do the same!
- The contexts and cultures of the Bible are important. The events we read about in the Bible happened in particular times and places, times and places that are different from our own. What was understood in one culture, circumstance, or setting might not necessarily apply directly to another. That doesn’t mean we can dismiss it as irrelevant. There are timeless truths in the Bible that stand above and outside of context—who God is, who Jesus is, etc. But it does mean that as Presbyterians, we come to the Bible critically, conversationally, and in a spirit of reformation, knowing it can speak to us in unique ways.
- The Reformed tradition doesn’t call for change for change’s sake—new isn’t always better. So the constant question for a community of faith is this: What is the most authentic and faithful way of following Jesus Christ right now?
- Our tradition is robust. In spite of the changes and conflicts in our history, we are part of a faith that has been told, retold, ritualized, written, preached, and lived for thousands of years. We will make mistakes, but we seek to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and commit ourselves to honoring the truth of the past while correcting injustices and adapting the faith to our present and future life.
- Reformation is a communal effort. While we are always growing and changing in our personal faith, the reformation this lesson focuses on has to do with how points of personal growth flow back into our communal efforts at reform—and vice versa. We don’t do any of this alone.

Where They Might Struggle . . .

- Many students will wonder how we know what to keep and what to change. This is a struggle for many churches and denominations. While it is a good and honest question, there isn't a definitive answer. The best response is to say that, as Christians, we believe we are called to listen and watch for the Spirit moving in the world and to follow that Spirit.
- This doesn't give us permission to start over with our theology or pick and choose the parts we like. Many components of our biblical and theological history were true during the time of the disciples and remain true for us today. When we find ourselves bumping up against an idea or a belief, that's an opportunity to dig deeper, ask questions, and seek the support of our community as we explore how our faith might grow and change as a result of this idea.
- The church has gotten it terribly wrong sometimes in the past. Many parts of the Presbyterian Church in the nineteenth century used the Bible to perpetuate and defend slavery, causing the North-South split in the denomination. This is a shameful part of our history, one from which we must all learn. It's important not to brush over the times when the church has failed or even wronged groups of people in the name of God. It reminds us that we are always in need of reform.

About the Video

If you were to take a casual look at the history of the Presbyterian Church, it might seem like we haven't been able to agree on anything (The map at the end of the video? Yeah, that's real). Presbyterians have always worked to figure out the best way to be the church, and that path has never been smooth.

Lesson Notes . . .

Framing the Problem

STORY TIME!

1. Choose a one- or two-word story prompt such as *tree house*, *road trip*, or *reunion*. You could also pick a familiar Bible (or other) story as your source material.
2. Have students form a circle in the room.
3. Going around the circle, create a story together by having each student provide one word to keep the narrative moving. Don't worry about the story—even a Bible story—making sense or holding together. Part of the fun is seeing where it goes!
4. Once you're done, talk about the challenges of telling a story when you don't know the outcome. This conversation can help students get ready to learn about the twists and turns of the Presbyterian Church story—not only where it's been, but where it's going.

Into the Story

Look up Acts 15:1-21. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Then discuss the following questions and any others that come up:

- The first verses of this passage remind us that conflict has always been a part of the church. But conflict doesn't always lead to negative results. When can conflict be a good thing for the church? When have you seen conflict lead to something positive?
- A yoke is a harness that's attached to farm animals to make plowing easier. In verse 10, Peter calls the law (in regard to circumcision) a "yoke." Is this a positive or a negative interpretation of God's law? Why? Do you agree with Peter?
- The differences between Jews and Gentiles were a big deal. The Jewish people believed they were God's chosen people who were in a special relationship with God. God letting others into the fold was a huge controversy! What does it tell you about God that new people were invited into God's family?

Have a volunteer read Romans 10:17. Discuss:

- When was the last time somebody told you something that surprised you? When has somebody changed your mind?
- It can be easy to forget that God is constantly at work and transforming the world. How can we pay more attention to what God is up to? Where have you seen God at work?
- How do we figure out when the Holy Spirit is moving us to change, and when it's just our own interests at work?

Questions to Get the Conversation Going . . .

- Is it possible for the church to change after nearly 2,000 years?
- Who decides what can be reformed and what can't?
- Do you think it's better for a church to never change, or to change constantly? Why?

The Presbyterian Church has gone through a lot of changes since it was founded. And it's almost guaranteed to change again as we follow God's movement in the world and try to live faithfully. So the big question is, what part will you play in helping the church to keep moving forward?

Sometimes it feels like the church is just stuck. Flat tires. An engine that leaks oil. Unable to keep up with the times, it's going nowhere. In a perfect world, the church would be the first to promote change. So why isn't it?

If you have students who haven't spent much time in church, get them thinking about their faith in general instead.

Reformed and Always Reforming

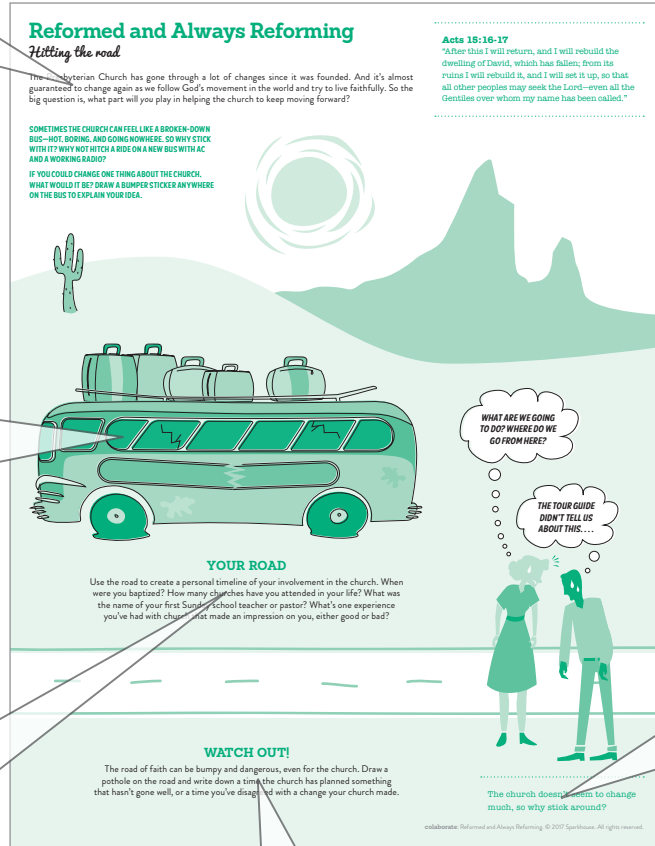
Hitting the road

The Presbyterian Church has gone through a lot of changes since it was founded. And it's almost guaranteed to change again as we follow God's movement in the world and try to live faithfully. So the big question is, what part will you play in helping the church to keep moving forward?

SOMETIMES THE CHURCH CAN FEEL LIKE A BROKEN-DOWN BUS—HOT, BORING, AND GOING NOWHERE. SO WHY STICK WITH IT? WHY NOT HITCH A RIDE ON A NEW BUS WITH AC AND A WORKING RADIO?

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE CHURCH, WHAT WOULD IT BE? DRAW A BUMPER STICKER ANYWHERE ON THE BUS TO EXPLAIN YOUR IDEA.

Acts 15:16-17
"After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—driven all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called."



YOUR ROAD

Use the road to create a personal timeline of your involvement in the church. When were you baptized? How many churches have you attended in your life? What was the name of your first Sunday school teacher or pastor? What's one experience you've had with church that made an impression on you, either good or bad?

WATCH OUT!

The road of faith can be bumpy and dangerous, even for the church. Draw a pothole on the road and write down a time the church has planned something that hasn't gone well, or a time you've disagreed with a change your church made.

The church doesn't seem to change much, so why stick around?

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Have a student read the pivot statement located at the bottom of the page, and gauge the group's thoughts on where the lesson might go. Remember: You want tension! Allow your students to live with the questions posed on the first page until after the video has played and you begin exploring the infographic.

Encourage students—especially students who might not have a lot of experience with the church—to think about the church in broad terms. What do they hear people say about Christians? What assumptions do people make? What does the church get blamed for?



There's a lot of information on this spread! But don't let it intimidate you. The highway will take your group through a brief overview of Presbyterian Church history, stopping at some of the defining moments. The bus will introduce students to a handful of people who have jump-started reform along the way. So start at the 1789 sign or start with the bus. Either way, your students will have a better understanding of not only how our church has been reforming through the years, but also why.

Students might disagree as to whether an issue important enough to go on top of the bus. If this happens, ask the group how they think the church should go about deciding which problems to confront.

Students will likely name the visible leaders of your church or the broader community. This is great! It might be helpful to also think about—and name—the ways people lead behind the scenes. Who are the faithful servants in your community?

Our History, Our People
While it may seem like the church is sometimes stuck or even broken down, our history is filled with people who took on the challenge of pushing the church out of its ruts and repairing its broken places.

AS WITH ALL DENOMINATIONS, PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY IS MARKED BY ARGUMENTS, MOMENTS OF PROPHEPIC INSIGHT, TIMES OF GROWTH, TIMES OF BAD JUDGMENT, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO CORRECT PAST BLIND SPOTS. THANKFULLY, OUR FOUNDERS GAVE US A ROADMAP FOR KNOWING WHEN TO TURN AROUND AND WHEN TO KEEP MOVING, OUR NOT TO BE "REFORMED AND ALWAYS REFORMING." THAT MEANS WE'RE CONSTANTLY LISTENING FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE TO DIRECT OUR CHURCH AND OUR LIVES.

1789
PRESBY-WHATERY?
In 1789, the first grouping of Reformed churches in the United States, called a presbytery, is formed in Philadelphia. The idea was that a group of churches could make better decisions and be stronger in mission and service together than individually. The PC(USA) is still organized in this way.
What are the pros and cons of churches working together instead of working independently?
Discuss your thoughts with a partner.

Big Check
If you're going on a long trip, you'd better bring some supplies. As the PC(USA) has reformed—and always reformed—it has captured its history in practices, and in its structure. You'll learn more about some of these over the course of confirmation and discover how they equip the church to handle the challenges that come next.
Think about the issues facing the world right now. What should the church be thinking about? Where should we be working? Write your thoughts on the blank suitcase.

Who's on the Bus?
A church is more than a building. It's people. And our history is filled with people who have made the church to grow and change, even when it was difficult. Take a look at the passengers on the bus to get to know a few of them.
In the empty windows, draw some of the people you know who are working to make things better in your church or community. Maybe it's you!

JOHN WITHERSPOON: THE ONLY CLERGYPERSON TO SIGN BOTH THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION.

MARGARET TOWNER: FIRST WOMAN ORDAINED AS A PRESBYTERIAN PASTOR, 1946.

EUGENE CARSON BLAKE: STATED CLERK OF THE OLD NORTHERN CHURCH FROM 1961 TO 1966. HE BROUGHT PRESBYTERIAN SOCIAL JUSTICE THEOLOGICAL FOCUS THROUGH HIS EFFORTS AT DESEGREGATION AND HIS SPEECH AT THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON IN 1963.

REFORMATION IN YOUR CHURCH
OUR PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY TELLS US THAT WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INVOLVED IN MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. WORK WITH A PARTNER TO THINK OF SOME WAYS YOUR CHURCH IS INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY. HOW COULD YOU JOIN IN WITH THESE ACTIVITIES?

YOUR TURN
As a part of the PC(USA), you are a part of the "reformed and always reforming" tradition. The church needs you, the way it needed countless people before you, to help guide it into the future.
What's one need you see in the world right now? How can the church help? Write the current year in the blank sign and list some of your ideas on the road ahead.

Take this opportunity to plan a service project with the group. Put these ideas into action.



Want More?

- Connect your students with an adult Sunday school class in your congregation, and see if you can interview the participants about their experience of the church. Have the students ask the adults about problems they've seen in the church and how the church has handled those issues. Have your students summarize their findings and talk about them together in confirmation class.
- Host a movie night and show Disney's *Remember the Titans*, a great movie about the process of evolving, both personally and as a community.
- The passengers on our bus are a tiny sample of the many, many people who have been part of reforming the Presbyterian Church. Consider holding a "Biography Day" and having students do a little research on other people who helped shape the church—maybe even your own congregation! Encourage them to find people who represent their gender or ethnicity or national origin, to learn more about the variety of voices who have called for change.

When you face a difficult decision, is it better to do what's right even if it means losing friends, or to compromise in order to keep the peace? How could you do both?

1861 THE BIG SPLIT
The church splits into the Northern church and the Southern church over the issue of slavery. The Northern church wanted to abolish slavery; the Southern church did not.

1951 A NATIONAL PROFILE
The Presbyterian Church is the first denomination to support desegregation, the landmark Supreme Court ruling, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. Eugene Carson Blake keeps the church in the national spotlight as he works for racial justice and reconciliation. Why would the church be concerned about racial justice? Write your thoughts on the road.

What we call Presbyterianism began in Scotland in 1560. When Scottish Presbyterians came to the United States in the 1700s, they established new churches. In 2010, there were more than 15 million active members of the PC(USA).

ALWAYS A REBEL
KING GEORGE III OF ENGLAND ONCE CALLED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION "THE PRESBYTERIAN REBELLION."

2014 ALWAYS REFORMING
The PC(USA) votes to allow people of all gender identities and sexual orientations to be ordained as ministers of word and sacrament. What are some ways this decision might have been difficult for some leaders in the church? What does it tell you about what it means to be "always reforming"?

1983 BACK TOGETHER AGAIN
After 122 years of separation, the old Northern and Southern churches are reunited at a joint General Assembly in Atlanta, Georgia. After long ago denouncing slavery, the churches finally resolve other differences and come together as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

THE VEL COMPANY

THE BOOK OF ORDER

BIBLE

Governance

DENISE ANDERSON AND JAN EDMISTON: FIRST MODERATOR PAIR IN WHICH BOTH WERE WOMEN, ELECTED IN 2016.

JOHN GLOUCESTER: STARTED THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U.S., 1811. JOHN B. PINNEY: FIRST FOREIGN MISSIONARY OF THE PC(USA) GOES TO LIBERIA, 1838. WILLIAM SPEER: STARTED THE FIRST CHINESE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U.S., 1853. KAROLINA KWONG ABALON: FIRST ASIAN-AMERICAN WOMAN ELECTED AS VICE-MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 2014.

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Depending on your church, this could be the first time your students have thought about the church's role in confronting racial injustice. Or it could be a continuation of an ongoing conversation. Either way, this is an opportunity to empower your students to think and act.

- Make an acrostic using the word *REFORM*. For each letter, have students brainstorm a way they see their congregation evolving.
- If your students enjoyed the icebreaker activity, grab some paper and pens and play Exquisite Corpse (sometimes called The Drawing Game). The rules are easily found online.
- Print out some recipes and pass them out to your students. Have them think about what would make the recipe better. What would they add? What would they take away? Is there anything necessary for the recipe—something it couldn't do without?

LEADER TIP

Repair Kit. In this activity, it's essential that students be allowed to call things as they see them. They should be respectful, of course. But encourage real conversations about the issues they see in their faith community.

Every church has challenges. This activity gives students an opportunity not only to speak to an issue they identify but, more importantly, to brainstorm solutions.

LEADER TIP

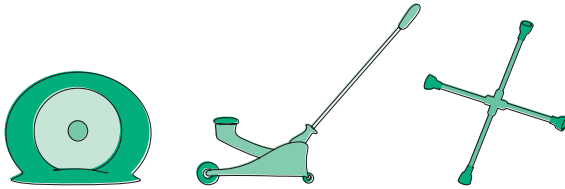
Faith Journey Timeline. Students will likely gravitate toward low-risk additions at first. After they feel comfortable, encourage some deeper dives. Leave the timeline up throughout confirmation, and encourage students to add new (or remembered) events in later weeks. Be sure all students are contributing to the timeline to show that everyone brings something to the journey.

Confirmation is a chance for students to see where they've come from, but also where they're going. This timeline is a great chance to catalogue the class's big moments.

History Moves On

Our Presbyterian history is full of twists and turns, reminding us that we stand on the shoulders of faithful people who have done amazing things in the name of Jesus Christ and the Presbyterian Church. But it's not just their work. It's also your work.

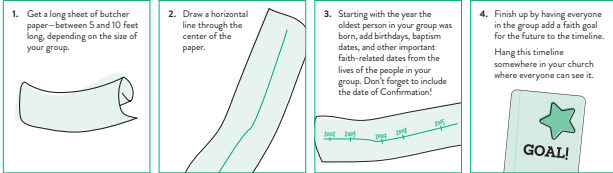
Option 1: Repair Kit
There will always be things in the church that need fixing. As part of a faith community, you can either sit around and wait for someone to fix them or get busy and help! On the flat tire, write a problem in your church or community that you'd like to see fixed. On the jack, write out the names of people who might help make this change happen. On the lug wrench, write some of the skills or passions or gifts you can offer to help solve this problem.



Option 2: Faith Journey Timeline
Supplies: butcher paper, markers, tape, stapler


Using the personal timelines from the first page for reference, make a timeline for the entire group. This one will trace not only the important events in your life, but also the important events in the lives of your classmates.

1. Get a long sheet of butcher paper—between 5 and 10 feet long, depending on the size of your group.
2. Draw a horizontal line through the center of the paper.
3. Starting with the year the oldest person in your group was born, add birthdays, baptism dates, and other important faith-related dates from the lives of the people in your group. Don't forget to include the date of Confirmation!
4. Finish up by having everyone in the group add a faith goal for the future to the timeline. Hang this timeline somewhere in your church where everyone can see it.



1. Think 2. Share 3. Discuss

What do you hope future generations will say about today's church?



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What do you hope future generations will say about today's church?

Into the World

How could our group help guide this church into the future?

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Presbyterian History & Doctrine

LESSON TITLE	PROBLEM STATEMENT	KEY VERSE
WELCOME TO CONFIRMATION	I thought faith was personal. So I don't understand why I have to do this in front of the whole church.	Hebrew 12:1-2
THE BEGINNINGS	I don't understand what makes Presbyterians unique.	1 Peter 2:4-5
REFORMED AND ALWAYS REFORMING	The church is old fashioned and never changes.	Acts 15:16-17
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD	Is God in control of all things?	Isaiah 40:21-23
SIN AND HUMAN NATURE	I don't know what's sin and what's not.	Genesis 3:2-3
JESUS IS LORD	If Jesus is Lord, does that mean I'm not in charge of my life?	Philippians 2:11
JESUS IS SAVIOR	I don't know what Jesus is saving us from.	Matthew 19:25-26
WORD AND RESPONSE	I don't know what to do with the Bible	John 1:1
THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS	I don't know what my church believes.	1 Peter 1:21
STATEMENTS OF FAITH . . . SO FAR	I don't know what I believe.	Psalms 119:30
POLITY	There are too many rules in this church.	Acts 2:44
WORSHIP	I don't understand what's happening in worship.	Psalms 95:1-2
THE SACRAMENTS	Of all the things we do in church, I don't understand what makes baptism and communion so special.	1 Corinthians 11:26
A LIFE OF FAITH	I know a lot about God. Now what?	Philippians 4:6
WELCOME TO THE CHURCH	Confirmation seems like graduation from church.	Ephesians 4:4-6

Old Testament

LESSON TITLE	KEY VERSE
CANON	2 Timothy 3:16
THE HEBREW BIBLE	Deuteronomy 6:6
GENESIS	Genesis 1:27
EXODUS	Exodus 33:17
LAW	Deuteronomy 5:2
JUDGES	Judges 6:24
RUTH	Ruth 1:16
KINGS	1 Samuel 8:7
BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY	Jeremiah 25:7
PROPHETS	Deuteronomy 18:22
PSALMS	Psalms 1:2
WISDOM	Proverbs 2:6
JOB	Job 1:22
ESTHER	Esther 4:14
THE RISE OF ROME	Ezra 1:3

New Testament

LESSON TITLE	KEY VERSE
MAPS	Acts 14:27
THE NEW TESTAMENT	John 12:50
JESUS	Philippians 2:5-7
MATTHEW	Matthew 1:22-23
MARK	Mark 1:15
LUKE	Luke 2:49
JOHN	John 14:10
ACTS	Acts 1:8
PAUL AND THE EARLY CHURCH	Acts 9:15
PAUL'S THEOLOGY	1 Thessalonians 1:8
ROMANS	Romans 1:16-17
1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS	2 Corinthians 5:17
GALATIANS	Galatians 1:6
LETTERS	1 Timothy 1:5
REVELATION	Revelation 21:3-4

