

Epistles

Compiled by
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Charles and Linda Lemons have attended Christian Life Center in Stockton, California, for twelve years. Reverend Nathaniel Haney is their pastor. They enjoy going to General Conference on their vacations.

They stated, “Since we can’t go, giving to foreign and home missions is our way of being a part of winning souls. Maybe someday someone will make it to Heaven because of our contribution to spread the Word. May you be as blessed as we have

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Preface

In the early 1970s, Margaret Calhoun, Donna Fisher, E. L. Holley, and C. E. Lott wrote *Epistles* for the Overseas Ministries Training Course. Based on notes collected over their years of study and teaching, these men and women developed extensive outlines that were used to teach the epistles in Overseas Ministries Bible schools around the world. It has been my pleasure to take these outlines and other supplemental material and adapt them to a manuscript format. (The epistles to the Romans and Hebrews may be studied in separate books available through Overseas Ministries and the Foreign Missions Division.)

This book contains two parts. Part 1 arranges the Pauline Epistles chronologically according to the dates cited by Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert in *An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume Two: The Pauline Epistles*. (Much of the other background material for the Pauline Epistles also has been gleaned from Dr. Hiebert.) Part 2 follows the canonical order of the General Epistles. Unless otherwise noted, parenthetical Scripture references in each chapter relate to the epistle discussed in that chapter.

While this book is only a primer, I hope that it will whet your appetite for an ongoing and exhaustive study of the inspired writings of Peter, Paul, James, John, and Jude. May your study be as rewarding as mine.

—Dorsey L. Burk

Part 1

Pauline Epistles

Chapter 1

First Thessalonians

Authorship and Background

From Hellenistic times down to the present day, Thessalonica, modern day Thessaloniki (Salonika), has been one of the main cities of Macedonia. It came into prominence about 315 BC when Cassander, who named the city in honor of his wife, the half-sister of Alexander the Great, enlarged and strengthened it. Augustus Caesar later rewarded Thessalonica for its loyalty by making it a “free city.” In New Testament times, Thessalonica was a seaport of political and commercial importance, situated on a land route that put it into a direct stream of traffic.¹

Although the majority of the Thessalonians were native Greeks, Romans and Orientals added to the population. Because of the attractive commerce, the city hosted, likewise, a large Jewish colony.

Paul established the church at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17). The city was the second in Macedonia to hear the gospel. Paul stayed there at least three weeks, for Acts records that he spent three Sabbaths speaking to the Jews in the synagogue (Acts 17:2). When the Jews ousted him from the synagogue, he went to the house of Jason. The Philippians sent Paul two offerings while he was in Thessalonica.

Paul probably wrote this epistle to the Thessalonians from Corinth in early fall, AD 50. It is probably the earliest of the Pauline Epistles.

Purpose

Paul wrote to answer questions the Thessalonians had posed to him. The report from Timothy was the immediate cause for the writing of the epistle (3:6-7). Paul had established the church under severe persecution. No doubt he had heard that the persecution continued, and he was justly concerned over the new believers.

First Thessalonians concerns the last things. Its theme is the second coming of the Lord, and it contains one of the fullest elaborations on this hope of the church. Each chapter ends with a reference to the Second Coming, thereby indicating the importance of clinging to the hope. Since Paul wrote the book little more than twenty years after the resurrection of Christ, it provides a direct link between the Gospels and the later teachings of the church. Both hark back to the divine self-revelation in Christ Jesus.

Outline

INTRODUCTION—I Thessalonians 1:1

- I. PAUL’S MINISTRY—I Thessalonians 1:2-2:19
 - A. An Exemplary Church (1:2-10)
 - B. An Exemplary Ministry (2:1-19)
- II. THE LORD’S COMING—I Thessalonians 3:1-5:25
 - A. Paul’s Concern (3:1-13)
 - B. Call to Holiness (4:1-18)
 - C. The Day of the Lord (5:1-25)

CONCLUSION—I Thessalonians 5:26-28

Commentary

Introduction

I Thessalonians 1:1

Paul opened his letter by saluting the church at Thessalonica, which was in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. He also included Silas and Timothy with him in the salutation. Paul desired that the Thessalonians would be blessed with the grace and peace of God.

I. Paul’s Ministry

I Thessalonians 1:2-2:19

A. An Exemplary Church

Paul was thankful for the way the Thessalonians had accepted the gospel and lived by it (1:2-10). The power and conviction with which he preached (1:5) caused the Thessalonians to respond by:

1. Following “us” (Paul and his co-workers) and the Lord (1:6);
2. Receiving the Lord in persecution with the joy of the Holy Ghost (1:6);
3. Being examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1:7);
4. Spreading the gospel abroad (1:8).

Despite persecution from the Jews, they had turned from sin to God. Many of these converts were Gentiles, for they had served idols (1:9). In spite of—or perhaps because of—the extreme circumstances surrounding its birth, the church at Thessalonica was strong and was an example for all Macedonia. Yet Paul reminded them that their hope was in the coming of the Lord.

B. An Exemplary Ministry

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica had the desired results (2:1-3). He had preached with openness and frankness in spite of opposition. He held himself responsible to God, with no thought for what people would say or do (2:4-6). He preached the gospel with this responsibility in mind, and his ministry was not in vain.

Paul dealt with the Thessalonians gently and affectionately, as with a child (2:7-9). His ministry was above reproach, just, and unblameable (2:10-12). The Thessalonians witnessed this fact and gave of themselves in love and tenderness. They received the gospel message openly, in spite of persecution (2:13-18). They accepted it as truth—the Word of God—not just the word of man. Paul stated that though their persecution was great, their love for God was greater.

The Thessalonians' ultimate joy will be their catching away (2:19-20). It will be Paul's also.

As exemplified by Paul, characteristics marking a devoted ministry include:

1. Self-denial and personal sacrifice for the good of others and the furtherance of the gospel (2:9);
2. A blameless life (2:10);
3. Fatherly love and patience in instructing and comforting (2:11);
4. The hope of establishing converts so that they walk worthy of God (2:13).

II. The Lord's Coming

I Thessalonians 3:1-5:25

A. Paul's Concern

Paul, concerned for the spiritual welfare of the church, sent Timothy to establish and strengthen the saints in the face of tribulation (3:1-8); for he knew it was possible to fall away from the faith or to become apostate. He rejoiced in their steadfastness. He gave thanks to God that they had been faithful (3:9-13). He promised to continue to pray for them that they would abound in love one for another and appear “unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (3:13).

B. Call to Holiness

Paul admonished them to maintain a consistent Christian walk as he had taught them (4:1-12). They were called to holiness, a life set apart unto God. This life includes abstinence from sexual immorality, such as adultery (4:3-5). The Lord is the one who has called the believer unto holiness (4:7). His authority is behind the prohibition, and He has given His Holy Spirit to enable the believer to live a holy life (4:8).

Brotherly love characterizes holy living also. Paul stated, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” (4:9-10).

He likewise urged the Thessalonians to quietness, industry, responsibility, and honesty (4:11-12). Paul reassured the Thessalonians about the Christians who had died (4:13-18). They also will rise at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, they will rise first, and then those who are alive in Christ will rise. We shall all then be together with the Lord. That is our comfort and hope.

C. The Day of the Lord

To unbelievers, the Day of the Lord will come as a thief. There will be no escape (5:1-3). To us who believe, that day should not overtake us unaware (5:4-11). We, the children of light, know to watch and to be prepared.

Paul gave several practical exhortations for preparedness:

1. Respect and love those who are over us (5:12-13).
2. Support and encourage those around us (5:14-15).
3. Never cease to be joyful, prayerful, and thankful (5:16-18).
4. Quench not the Spirit or despise prophesying, but prove all things (5:19-21).
5. Abstain from the very appearance of evil (5:22).

Paul then prayed that God would keep the Thessalonian believers and admonished them to pray also for him and his fellow laborers.

Conclusion

I Thessalonians 5:26-28

Paul closed by stating that all the brethren should be greeted with a holy kiss. (It was the custom in that culture and time for men to greet men and women to greet women with a kiss on the cheek.) Then he charged that the letter should be read to all the brethren. His final benediction was, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (5:28).

Note

- ¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. II: The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 33-34.

Chapter 2

Second Thessalonians

Authorship and Background

Paul wrote II Thessalonians from Corinth, probably a few months after he sent his first epistle to this church. Evidently the bearer of the first letter had remained at Thessalonica long enough to ascertain the conditions there and then had reported back to Paul. Paul commended the Thessalonians in some areas while reprimanding them in others. False teachers had come in and misinterpreted Paul's first letter.

Purpose

Paul wrote to clarify what he had stated in his first letter. Apparently some Thessalonian believers felt that the coming of the Lord was so imminent that they quit their jobs and were simply waiting for His return. Second Thessalonians is a supplement to I Thessalonians. Both deal with the second coming of the Lord.

Outline

SALUTATION—II Thessalonians 1:1-2

- I. CONFLICT AMID PERSECUTION—II Thessalonians 1:3-12
- II. THE DAY OF THE LORD—II Thessalonians 2:1-17
- III. PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING—II Thessalonians 3:1-15

CONCLUSION—II Thessalonians 3:16-18

Commentary

Salutation

II Thessalonians 1:1-2

Paul greeted the Christians with benedictions of grace first and then peace (1:1-2). He included Timothy and Silas, his fellow workers who were with him at Corinth, in the salutation.

I. Conflict amid Persecution

II Thessalonians 1:3-12

Paul expressed his thanks for the Thessalonians (1:3-5). He was thankful they had been stable in the midst of persecution—even abounding in the work of the Lord. The Christian growth that resulted from their trials was making them fit for the kingdom of God.

God will recompense tribulation (1:6-10). He will punish with everlasting destruction those who do not know Him and do not obey the gospel of Christ, even though they presently seem to have the upper hand. Paul included here the hope of the saints—their being with the Lord because of their adherence to the gospel.

It was Paul’s desire that they would continue to be worthy of the calling of Christ Jesus by their steadfastness (1:11-12). By doing so, their lives on earth would glorify the name of Jesus Christ.

II. The Day of the Lord

II Thessalonians 2:1-17

The end time was Paul’s theme as he began the second chapter. Various interpretations of this passage attempt to correlate it with Paul’s statements in the first epistle. Probably it refers to two phases or aspects of the Second Coming.

The Thessalonians believed apparently that their persecution signaled the Day of the Lord, and some perhaps believed that they had even missed the Rapture. This belief was erroneous. Paul pointed out that before the Day of Lord dawned, apostasy must first come. It was Paul’s desire for them to be ready. The apostle encouraged them to be strong, not shaken in faith, as many others would be. He reminded them that the Antichrist would make himself known. The *Twentieth Century New Testament* translation of II Thessalonians 2:7 states that lawlessness now works in secret—but in secret only, until he who restrains it is removed.¹ When the wicked one comes, he will be destroyed as well as those who have not loved the truth. God will send a lie for them to believe; it will bring them destruction.

Paul again expressed appreciation because the Thessalonians were strong in the Lord (2:13-17). He wanted them to remember to live the truths they had been taught. He urged them to stand fast and prayed that Christ would comfort them with the hope of eternal life and establish them here.

III. Practical Christian Living

II Thessalonians 3:1-15

Paul desired the prayers of the Christians at Thessalonica (3:1-5). He expressed the need for the prayers of the saints to keep him free and bold in spreading the gospel. He assured them

that the Lord would keep them and establish them. The Lord would direct their hearts in His love and patience.

Paul admonished the Thessalonians to withdraw from those who had turned away from the gospel (3:6-15). The apostle reminded them of his own example and teaching.

Even though the Lord's coming is imminent, we must keep working and be responsible Christians. We should be aware of those who are not following the truth. We must try to help them as brothers, not condemn them as enemies.

Conclusion

II Thessalonians 3:16-18

Paul desired that the Lord of peace would grant peace always by all means to the Thessalonians. Paul also pronounced the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" upon all of God's people. The closing salutation in his own penmanship attests to the authenticity of the letter.

Note

- ¹ *Twenty-six Translations of the Bible, Vol. III*, Curtis Vaughn, editor (Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1985), 952.

Chapter 3

Galatians

Authorship and Background

Paul addressed this epistle to the churches of Galatia. *Galatia* was used in two different senses during the first century. Geographically, it designated an area in the northern part of Asia Minor's central plateau. Politically, it designated a large province of the Roman Empire. Consequently, scholars dispute the actual area and the churches to which Paul wrote. Most modern authorities agree that Paul used *Galatia* to indicate the Roman province and that the churches included those of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.¹

As the identity of the addressees is in dispute, so is the date of the writing. Some authorities, including Hiebert, cite AD 52, near the close of Paul's third missionary journey. Others argue that Paul wrote this epistle about AD 58.²

Purpose

Some of the Jews were trying to press Judaic law on the Gentile Christians. This false doctrine influenced the Galatians and thus undermined Paul's gospel and authority. Paul therefore wrote to refute the doctrinal errors that caused the Galatians to fall from grace. These errors included:

1. Obedience to the law of Moses is necessary for salvation.
2. The keeping of the law makes the believer perfect.
3. God did not give Paul apostolic authority.

Paul's letter to the Galatians may be called the Magna Carta of the church. It argues for Christian liberty in opposition to the teachings of the Judaizers. These false teachers insisted that observance of the ceremonial law was an essential part of the plan of salvation.

The theme of Galatians is that justification and sanctification are by faith, not by works of the Law, by which Paul meant the law of Moses. Of course, fruits and works are expected of those who claim salvation.

Outline

SALUTATION—Galatians 1:1-9

- I. PERSONAL—Galatians 1:10-2:21
Paul Vindicates His Authority

- II. DOCTRINAL—Galatians 3:1-4:31
 - Exposition of Justification by Faith
 - A. The Abrahamic Covenant (3:1-18)
 - B. The Purpose of the Law (3:19-4:31)
- III. PRACTICAL—Galatians 5:1-6:17
 - Christian Liberty

CONCLUSION—Galatians 6:18

Commentary

Salutation

Galatians 1:1-9

As with many of his other epistles, Paul began his letter to the Galatians by stating his apostleship (1:1-3). He was an apostle by the *will of God*. He found it necessary to vindicate his authority to the Galatians since the Judaizers had influenced so many. The Judaizers argued that Paul could not be an apostle since he had not seen Christ raised from the dead and had not been with Him from the beginning. (See Acts 1:15-26.)

We should note the omission of Paul's usual commendation to the reader. Galatians is the only Pauline epistle that contains no thanksgiving for the reader. He did not even call the Galatians "saints in Christ." Instead, Paul's tone is severe. He marveled that they were so easily turned away from the gospel (1:6-7). The gospel he preached was from God, and Paul sought only to please Him. Anyone who preached a gospel other than the one Paul preached was accursed (1:8-9).

I. Personal

Paul Vindicates His Authority

Galatians 1:10-2:21

Paul certified that the gospel and salvation he received were from God (1:11-14). He himself had once been a foremost protagonist of the Judaism that his legalistic foes were trying to mix with the gospel, but the revelation he now had came directly from God.

Paul also reminded the Galatians that he did not owe his knowledge of the truth to the other apostles (1:15-24). He had spent the first three years following his conversion in Arabia. The only apostles he had seen were Peter and James, and he had spent only fifteen days with Peter.

Paul privately conferred with the other apostles to confirm his own revelation (2:1-6), lest he had run in vain. They accepted him and did not even compel Titus to be circumcised. They recognized that the gospel for the uncircumcised Gentiles had been committed to Paul while the

gospel for the circumcised Jews had been entrusted to Peter (2:7-10). It was the same gospel from the same Lord. Thus, Barnabas and Paul received fellowship from the other apostles.

By his reference to the council of Acts 15, which decided that Gentile Christians did not need to be circumcised, Paul asserted that he had no less authority than Peter or any other apostle (2:11-14). He was their equal. Paul reminded the Jewish Christians that not only he but they themselves had accepted salvation through Christ because the Law could not save or justify them (2:15-18). For them to claim justification by Christ and then once again try to justify themselves by the Law was to build again what the new birth destroyed.

Paul then stated his own position in Christ (2:19-21). “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God” (2:19). He was crucified with Christ that the life of Christ could have free course to live through him, which occurred by faith. If Christ’s work did not atone, then His work and His death were in vain.

II. Doctrinal

Exposition of Justification by Faith

Galatians 3:1-4:31

Paul questioned how the Galatians had received the Spirit (3:1-5). Was it by works or by faith? Of course, the Christian experience had begun in faith, and therefore it must continue in the same. The workings of the Spirit came by faith, not by keeping the Mosaic law. The Galatians’ lapsing from grace into legalism was senseless. They were deluded or bewitched by its spell. To show the importance of his message, Paul contrasted the Law with grace, works with faith, and flesh with Spirit.

A. The Abrahamic Covenant

God gave the Abrahamic Covenant four hundred years before the Law (Genesis 15:6). If Abraham was counted righteous four centuries before the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, then obviously such a reckoning could not be based on obedience to the Mosaic law. Abraham’s righteousness was imputed by his faith. Likewise, the New Testament children of Abraham must be so by their faith.

All the Gentile nations were blessed through Abraham by their faith. (See Genesis 12:3.) In Greek, *nations* and *Gentiles* are the same word.

The Law’s shortcoming was its inability to justify (3:10-17). Paul argued that the just must live by faith! (See Habakkuk 2:4; Leviticus 18:5; Isaiah 32:15; Joel 2:28.) The Law cursed, for by breaking just one law the person became guilty of violating the whole Law. Christ brought redemption from the curse of the Law.

B. The Purpose of the Law

If the Law could not justify, what was its purpose? Because of transgression, God gave the Law as a stopgap measure, an external control (3:19-21). The Law was not against God, yet the Law was not enough. We were imprisoned under the Law, waiting for faith to be revealed and to free us (3:22-23).

The Law was a schoolmaster (3:24-25). The term *schoolmaster* signifies the household slave who acted as a guardian over the younger members of the family. He chaperoned the child, made sure he attended school, and reported any wrongdoing to the father. The father would then administer the correction and instruction.

As far as liberties, the child was no different from the servant. When the child reached maturity, however, the schoolmaster was removed, and the child was accepted as an adult with adult privileges and responsibilities.

The Mosaic law served as a spiritual tutor in charge of us to lead us to Christ so that we could be justified by faith in Him. When the right time came, the inheritance was given—through Christ—to the sons of full stature.

The Galatians had come from the bondage of paganism (4:8-12). They had worshiped false gods. To go back to the Law for justification would take them back to a type of bondage again. Consequently, Paul feared for their souls.

In spite of Paul's bodily weakness, the Galatians had received him in times past as one sent from God and would have done anything for him. Why did they now count him as an enemy because he told them the truth? Paul warned against the selfish motives of the Judaizers, who wanted all the attention. He emphasized his parental concern for the souls of his converts.

To emphasize further his message of grace versus law, Paul used an Old Testament story to contrast the two covenants. (This was the only time the apostle used such a story in this manner.) He reminded the Galatians that Abraham had two sons. The first, Ishmael, was born after the flesh (of Hagar); his children were in bondage. The second son, Isaac, was the child of faith (of Sarah); his children were free.

As God gave Abraham the promise of a seed before the giving of the Law, the Law could not annul the promise. For the Galatians to claim to be of Abraham was valueless unless they were also children of faith. "But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise" (4:23). Consequently, Hagar and Ishmael (the Law) were cast out into the desert so that Isaac (grace) might take his rightful place.

Because of the war between the natural and the spiritual life, as between Ishmael and Isaac, the carnal nature must be crushed. Children of liberty must stand fast and not become entangled again in bondage.

III. Practical

Christian Liberty

Galatians 5:1-6:17

Circumcision means nothing in Christ (5:1-10). Insisting on this portion of the Law binds a person to the whole Mosaic law, making Christ of no effect. Faith working by love, however, avails much. Therefore, falling back into the Law is not of God. Those who have done so will be judged for it.

Paul's greatest persecution came from the Jews (5:11-12). The offense of the Cross was that the Law was finished.

Paul cautioned the Galatians not to allow liberty to lead them into license (5:13-18). Walking in the Spirit rules out fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh strive against each other. One will rule; one will be suppressed. To those who live and are led by the Spirit, the Law is of no effect.

The works of the flesh come from the lower, carnal nature (5:19-21). Some of the works listed in this passage can slip in without being realized. These subtle evils are listed along with gross crimes—all identified not as faults, but as sins! Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The fruit of the Spirit contrasts with the works of the flesh (5:22-25). The life of the Spirit violates no law; rather, it brings a rich harvest. This fruit comes to those who have denied the flesh, who have crucified its affections and lusts with Christ.

The *fruit* of the Spirit is singular. Thus, to D. L. Moody the one fruit of the Spirit is love, with the other qualities listed being attributes of this single fruit:

Joy is love rejoicing.
Peace is love resting.
Longsuffering is love enduring.
Gentleness is love in kindness.
Goodness is love in action.
Faith is love trusting.
Meekness is love stooping.
Temperance is love restraining.³

Life in the Spirit will produce proper attitudes toward Christian brethren. A Christian must not seek to lift himself up and thus bring strife (5:26). If he has not fallen, he should bear with those who have, for all are subject to temptation (6:1). He must bear the burdens of others and in this way carry out the law of God (6:2).

We deceive ourselves if we think we are above others (6:3-5). We must judge ourselves by our own works. When we have done our very best, then we have cause to rejoice. We are responsible for our own souls.

Those who minister spiritual things should be repaid with temporal blessings (6:6). (See Romans 15:27.) God's law of the harvest is immutable (6:7-10). It has been His law from the beginning and cannot be changed. A person can reap only what he sows. Therefore, he should sow good seed, for though the season be long, the harvest will come.

Paul's final word to the Judaizers was that their motives were selfish (6:11-13). While they would avoid much persecution from the Jews if they compelled the Gentiles to be circumcised, they did not keep the whole law. They only wanted to glory in the subjection of the Galatians to external rites.

Paul gloried only in Christ (6:14-17). Nothing avails in Christ except a new nature. To those who follow this way come peace and mercy.

Paul affirmed his authority by the marks of his servitude to Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

Galatians 6:18

Paul closed with his usual words—that the grace of God be with the believers.

Notes

- ¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament Vol. II: The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 88.
- ² Hiebert, 82; Merrill Unger, *The Hodder Bible Handbook* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 513.
- ³ C. W. Slemming, *The Bible Digest* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1971), 709.



Chapter 4

First Corinthians

Authorship and Background

At the time of Paul's writing, Corinth was a large city of six or seven hundred thousand people. Located near the southern end of the narrow Grecian isthmus, Corinth stood approximately fifty miles west of Athens. Although it was a comparatively new city—the Romans had rebuilt it about 46 BC—it had a long and illustrious past. In ancient times it had been a very wealthy city. When Paul visited the city about a hundred years after its restoration, it was again the metropolis of the area. Only Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch surpassed Corinth in population.

The Corinthian population was cosmopolitan with many Greeks and a large colony of Jews. Yet the city was strongly Roman due to the influence of the Roman colonists Julius Caesar had planted there. About two-thirds of the inhabitants were slaves.

Corinth was a wicked city with immorality fostered by the degrading worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. Her temple stood on the summit of the Acrocorinth, where a thousand prostitutes served as priestesses. To be “a Corinthian” was to be shamelessly dissolute. “To corinthianize” meant to engage in prostitution.¹

Paul visited Corinth during his second missionary journey. During his year-and-a-half stay (3:6, 10; 4:15), he labored as a tentmaker with Aquila and Priscilla and founded the Corinthian church. (See Acts 18:1-18.) This period provided ample time for him to be well aware of the degradation of the city's paganism. When Paul sailed from Corinth, he left a church with a good-sized membership. Paul had won some Jews, including Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue. Nevertheless, Gentiles formed the majority of the members. The congregation included slaves as well as freemen (7:21-22; 12:13). A few believers were wealthy, but the majority were poor (11:21-22).

According to most biblical scholars, Paul wrote this epistle from Ephesus about AD 57.

Purpose

Paul had a twofold purpose in writing this epistle:

1. To correct disorders in the church
2. To answer questions the Corinthians had submitted

In I Corinthians 5:9, Paul referred to an earlier letter he had written, but which is no longer preserved. His former instructions had been misunderstood. In this letter he sought to correct the confusion.

The letter clearly reveals the apostle's desire for the Christian to apply the cross to every problem in his life. Even though the epistle is extremely practical, it contains important doctrinal passages.

Outline

INTRODUCTION—1:1-3

- I. REPROOF—1:4-6:20
 - A. Division in the Church (1:4-4:21)
 - B. Discipline in the Church (5:1-13)
 - C. Disputes in the Courts (6:1-8)
 - D. Defilement in the World (6:9-20)

- II. INSTRUCTION—7:11-16:12
 - A. Marriage (7:1-40)
 - B. Christian Liberty (8:1-10:33)
 - C. Church Ordinances (11:1-34)
 - D. Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)
 - E. The Resurrection (15:1-58)
 - F. Offerings (16:1-12)

CONCLUSION—16:13-21

Commentary

Introduction

I Corinthians 1:1-3

Paul began this epistle to the Corinthians by identifying himself as an apostle by the will of God. He frequently had to vindicate his apostleship. He addressed the letter to the church of God in Corinth and then to all Christians everywhere. The word *church* comes from the Greek *ekklesia*, which means a “called-out people.” It is sanctified, cleansed, and set apart for the use of God. It is separated from the world and separated unto God.

Paul prayed that God would bless them first by grace and then with peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul made the distinction so that people could associate the man Jesus Christ (human) with the eternal God the Father (Spirit).

I. Reproof

I Corinthians 1:4-6:20

A. Division in the Church

Following the salutation, Paul expressed his thanksgiving for God's enrichment of the Corinthians in utterance, knowledge, and spiritual gifts (1:4-8). God had blessed them, but they were now full of spiritual pride. This pride had led to divisions.

The church's need to be cleansed from party divisions, man worship, and glorying in human wisdom prompted Paul to write verses 10-13. The people had divided into groups, rallying behind various preachers who had brought them into the church. Instead of stressing the message, the Corinthians emphasized the messenger. Paul showed the fallacy of this division by reminding them that Christ had been crucified for all of them and that they were all baptized in His name.

Verses 14-17 give an account of Paul's ministry in Corinth. Paul had baptized only a few in the city. This was not because he considered baptism unimportant, but knowing the mind of the Corinthians, he took a humble position. He refused to take pride in being able to name large numbers that he had personally immersed. He willingly preached and allowed others to administer the gospel. He preached simply, so as not to glorify himself, but so that the cross would be effective. He considered himself crucified with Christ.

Paul's manner of preaching and its results are the theme of verses 18-31. To the world, the preaching of the gospel is foolishness (1:18). That one person could live through the death of another, that the condemnation of one could justify another, that one could receive blessings because another was accursed is foolishness to the person who thinks himself wise. The cross was a stumbling block to Jewish thought and foolishness to the cultured Greeks. Nevertheless, to those who are saved, it is the power of God. The gospel is not just the historical death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; it is a continuing experience in our day. The new birth is for all generations.

Human wisdom is nothing in the eyes of God; God Himself makes it look foolish (1:19-21). All of man's intelligence cannot bring him to God. God glories in the simple, seemingly foolish method of preaching to save souls.

The Jews looked for a conquering, ruling king (1:22-23). The suffering, lowly Savior caused them to stumble. They could not accept Him. To the cultured and learned Greeks, the gospel's simplicity conflicted with their ideas of wisdom.

To those who believe, Christ is the wisdom and the power of God (1:24)! God's "foolishness" is above the wisdom of man (1:25).

Although man considers many to be wise, influential, or noble, God does not consider them wise. Instead, He deliberately chooses what the world considers to be foolish to confound the wise. He chooses those whom the world calls weak to put the strong to shame (1:26-27). God chooses those considered to be lowborn, insignificant, and contemptible by the world, so that they cannot glory in themselves. They are rather to glory in His transforming power in their lives (1:28-29).

God has become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—so our glory is in Him (1:30-31). His righteousness should be manifest in our lives. One of the greatest proofs of the gospel's power is the result seen in our lives.

Paul brought to the Corinthians the testimony of the gospel plainly and simply (2:1-4). It was not with enticing words of human wisdom, for he made no display. He did not use flowery speech that would cause them to miss the message and meaning of the gospel. He preached only Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He could have spoken eloquently, for he had the training and ability. However, knowing they were a proud and haughty people, he realized that such a display would depreciate the value of his meaning. He wished to get the message across, not himself. Consequently, Paul declared the testimony of God in weakness, fear, and trembling—and in demonstration of the Spirit of power!

Paul's preaching was a demonstration, not a performance. The word translated *demonstration* means "legal proof presented in court."² Paul used this method so they would put their trust and faith in God, not in man (2:5). He spoke with fear and trembling because of his responsibility as a steward of God. In Christ's stead, he stood. And in Christ's stead, we stand.

The perfect can discern spiritually the wisdom of the mystery (2:6). By *perfect*, Paul meant "complete, mature, full grown in Christ"—not necessarily one without error. What Paul spoke was wisdom to a mature person in Christ, for it would make sense to him. If what Paul said seemed foolish, then the one boasting was not as mature in Christ as he believed.

Our physical senses, such as seeing and hearing, do not perceive the things of God (2:7-16). The things of God are received spiritually, not in a material, natural sense. It takes the Spirit to search the deep things of God. The church age, with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, was a mystery that the prophets did not fully understand.

Only the Spirit of God can reveal the spiritual aspects of a Christian life. We can know and understand our natural self only by our natural spirit. Likewise, the only way we can know about spiritual things is by the Spirit of God. By divine revelation, we know things unknown to the patriarchs of old (2:9). We have received the Spirit so that we might "know the things that are freely given to us of God" (2:12). This is why the natural man cannot know the things of God. Nevertheless, God has given to His own the "mind of Christ."

The carnality of divisions showed that the Corinthians were still infants in Christ (3:1-8); therefore, Paul was unable to bring the Corinthians the deeper things of God. They had not yet attained a mature understanding of the things taught them by Paul, but instead they believed that

he taught beneath their high intellectual level. (This admiration for philosophy and “vain discussions” was prominent in Greek society.)

The Corinthians were drawing away from the pureness of the gospel because of its very simplicity. They wanted something to tickle their ears and inflate their pride, yet their envy and strife proved that they were still carnal and not mature Christians. Paul did not give them spiritual meat, not because he was incapable, but because their immediate needs guided him.

Paul asserted that he, Apollos, and other preachers were mere men who were not to be enthroned. God is the one who gives the increase; therefore, men are not to be exalted. God expects preachers and saints alike to follow what He has appointed them to do.

We work together in winning souls, and yet the work is actually of God by His Spirit (3:7-8). God will reward each of us according to the work that we have done—according to our faithfulness.

The seed that is planted is the Word of God, and God confirms His Word. He hates divisions in His body (3:9-21). We are to work together, “closely fit” as the Spirit wills to put us. We are the temple of God. *Temple* points to the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwelt on earth. We are now the place where people can meet God on earth. We, as the church, have a function here in the world; we must work together to perform it.

Paul’s task was to lay a foundation. Everyone should take heed how he builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ, for there are various types of building materials. Some are indestructible, such as gold, silver, and precious stones. Others are temporary, such as wood, hay, and stubble. This metaphor compares lasting and temporary values.

Paul clearly distinguished between salvation and rewards. The fire of judgment will reveal what kind of building materials each saint uses (3:13-15). Some people will be saved, while their works, being of no lasting value, will be burned. Some people will be saved and also rewarded because of their works. In either case, however, a person’s works will not purchase salvation.

A person builds of temporary material if his motives are temporal or earthly, but he still may be saved as one snatched from a burning fire. He ought to have one end or goal in all that he does—the saving of souls. Selfish motives lead to works that will be burned. Each person must take heed how he builds.

We must not defile or tear up the temple of God, which we are. God will destroy us if we do (3:16-17).

Man’s wisdom is not wisdom in God’s eyes (3:18-20). The wise in the world must become fools (in Christ) if they are to gain real wisdom.

In I Corinthians 3 Paul taught that the glorying of the Corinthians had been in men. They were to remember that whatever they had, even their outstanding teachers, was from God and not men. Everything they needed was theirs as followers of Christ, for He provided them.

Paul gave three pictures of the church in this chapter. Using these analogies, he pointed out what the ministry is supposed to accomplish: The church is a family; the goal is maturity (3:1-4). The church is a field; the goal is quantity (3:5-9a). The church is a temple; the goal is quality (3:9b-23).³

First Corinthians 4 begins with the believer's position in Christ. We are His stewards, held accountable for the gospel that we know. God requires us to be faithful. (God did not say that we must be successful, but faithful.)

As a minister of the gospel, Paul cared but little about human judgment (4:3-5). He was not aware of anything in which he could condemn himself. Nevertheless, he could not become self-satisfied, knowing it was the judgment of God that counted.

As people do not know the intents of another's heart, they should not judge. God judges according to the heart. He will reveal the hidden motives and intentions, and those who are worthy will receive praise from Him.

Paul used himself and Apollos as examples, or illustrations, to teach the Corinthians to think of men properly (4:6-7). He did not want the Corinthians to be inflated with pride, boasting of one minister against another. The Corinthians had no reason to boast, for they had nothing that had not come from God. They were boasting in themselves, as if they had earned their spirituality.

With a note of irony, Paul compared what the Corinthians thought they were and what Paul and other ministers were (4:8-13). He then vividly described what a true follower of Christ may have to endure. Paul warned them out of love, speaking to them as a father or a shepherd, and not as a hireling who only watches the sheep for pay. In time of danger or peril, a hireling is apt to forsake the flock, unwilling to endanger himself for them. Paul urged the Corinthians to follow him, their father in the gospel, and not hirelings.

Paul sent Timothy to remind them of the conduct and lifestyle that Paul taught all the churches (4:14-17). His message was the same everywhere, for the gospel was and is the same for all people.

Paul intended to see if they had the power of which they boasted. Some dared to boast because he was not there, but he was coming to test them. Did they desire him to come as a father of correction or as a father of love and meekness? If they did not reform, he would have to correct them.

We can draw a close parallel between Paul's coming to Corinth and Christ's return to earth. Christ's people must be ready if they do not want Him to come in judgment.

B. Discipline in the Church

There was a case of incest in the church (5:1-2). This commonly known situation was more shocking than sins among the heathen. The Christians were actually proud that this individual sat in their midst, when they should have been remorseful. Perhaps they were puffed up because of their tolerance or because the man charged with this sin possessed high learning and culture. While there was a demonstration of spirituality in their midst, their reaction showed their lack.

Naming the punishment, Paul advised the Corinthians regarding this condition (5:3-5). They were not to harbor this man but were to excommunicate him. They were to take him out from under the shelter of the church and remove him from the blessings of God that are in the church. Jesus gave the church the authority to take this step (Matthew 18:15-20). Through excommunication, they would cut the offender off from the church, delivering him as it were to the chastening hand of Satan in order that he might find repentance. (See Job 1:12; II Corinthians 12:7.) Second Corinthians 2:6-8 indicates that the offender did repent after the church excommunicated him.

The term *spirit* is synonymous with *soul* in most of Paul's writings, and *flesh* usually means the carnal human nature. A person must subdue the carnal nature if he is to live in the Spirit. *Body* refers to the natural man, which becomes the temple of God. The body must be in subjection to the Spirit.

A little sin can bring a whole group into sin because of its deadly influence (5:6-8). It spreads like leaven. Thus, we must get rid of the flesh (wrong attitudes, carnal lusts) in the church. Paul admonished the Corinthians to be a new lump of dough in Christ, free from these terrible things in the church. He showed the difference between the leaven of sin (malice and wickedness) and the new lump. The new lump will be free from the leaven of sin, having only sincerity and truth.

There is a method for ridding the church of unrepentant sinners (5:9-13). We cannot completely avoid being around sin. To do so, we would have to leave the world. However, there are occasions when a brother who sins must be put out of the fellowship of the church. By this he will feel the weight of his sin and perhaps repent. We do not judge those who are without, but we can help those who are in the church. God alone is the ultimate judge of all sinners.

C. Disputes in the Courts

Continuing to reprove sin in the church, Paul addressed the subject of litigation among brethren. Church members in Corinth were suing their brethren in heathen courts. Paul rebuked those who dared to do such a thing. As the saints will one day judge the world, it is inappropriate for them to take their problems to the world to judge. Saints should be able to work out their problems among themselves. If they are to judge angels, those who are least in the church should be able to judge things in this life.

Thus, Paul gave three important reasons why Christians should not take their disagreements to worldly courts:

1. They are to judge the world in the future.
2. They are to judge angels.
3. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom—they cannot judge.

A brother should suffer wrong from another rather than take his grievance before the world and show any disharmony in the church.

D. Defilement in the World

In the remainder of I Corinthians 6, Paul described the defilement in the world. Verse 11 states that we are washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. This statement parallels Acts 2:38.

A Christian should only participate in things that are beneficial (*expedient* in 6:12 means “profitable, necessary, helpful”) and live by the law of self-denial. Some things are legally right but still unprofitable, and the Christian should avoid them. Moreover, a person must not let things control him. When lawful things become his law, they can ruin him. He must control them. Although many things are lawful and legitimate, he must not let them possess him.

We must keep our bodies clean, for we are members of the body of Christ. We are not our own; we are the temple of the Holy Ghost (6:13-20). This is the privilege and consecration of each born again soul. (See also Romans 6:9; Philippians 3:21.) As members of the body of Christ, our bodies are to glorify Him. This is why a Christian lives a holy life.

II. Instruction

I Corinthians 7:1-16:12

As shown in the outline, I Corinthians falls into two main sections. In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul first reproved them for sin in the assembly. He then began answering a series of questions the saints had posed to him.

A. Marriage

Chapter 7 deals with the paramount claims of the spiritual life, yet the immediate question concerns marriage. (Considering that the Corinthians were so tolerant of the incestuous man, it is surprising that they were so bothered about the legality of marriage.) Paul had more to say concerning marriage in other epistles. Much of what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 7 has been grossly misunderstood. As a result, he has been pictured as a warped and twisted man who hated women and despised marriage. Yet two facts should be kept in mind:

1. The apostle was not dealing with the subject of marriage in general, but was specifically answering direct questions the Corinthians had previously addressed to him.
2. The instructions Paul gave were in light of special conditions existing at that time and place.⁴

There are proper conditions for Christian marriages (7:1-9). Marriage is an honorable state and pleasing to God, yet the spiritual life must come first. God must be first in our affections. Paul remained single for the sake of his spiritual ministry and wished that all could be as he. If a believer is married to an unbeliever, they should remain together. This injunction contrasted with ancient Israel. In ancient Israel, if a Jew married a pagan, the union was considered unholy, and he was ordered to put the wife away. (See Ezra 10.)

Verse 14 does not teach that the unbelieving mate is saved by the Christian spouse. Salvation is based on each individual's acceptance or rejection of the provisions of Calvary. However, the godly example of the believing spouse should convince the unbeliever of the validity of the gospel. Likewise, the godly influence and instructions of the believing spouse may lead the children to Christ. The believer's responsibility is to maintain peace. If the unbeliever leaves, however, the believer is not under bondage to try to follow.

In I Corinthians 7:17-24, Paul taught that a person should continue in whatever station, state, or condition of life he was in when God called him. The principle Paul laid down was this: Even though Christians are all one in Christ, each believer should remain in the same calling he was in when the Lord saved him. For example, Gentiles should not try to become Jews or Jews, Gentiles. Neither should slaves demand their freedom from their masters based on their equality within the church. The same principle applies to Christians married to unsaved mates.

Because of "the present distress," Paul advised those who could to remain single. Yet if they chose to marry, this was their right. Paul felt it was easier to serve God in the single state, particularly through those troubling times of persecution, for a single person could serve the Lord without distraction or responsibility to another (7:25-35).

In the first century, a father could force his daughter to marry or to remain single (7:36-40). Paul advised that either state—married or single—was right before the Lord. Verse 38 states that the father who does not give his daughter in marriage makes the better choice. Verses 39-40 give permission for widows to remarry within the church, but cautions that they will be happier remaining as widows.

B. Christian Liberty

The Corinthians had written a number of questions to Paul, including one about eating food offered to idols (8:1-4). In some heathen religions, the only food acceptable to eat was that offered as a sacrifice to a god. Some of the Corinthian believers who had been saved from heathenism felt free in their conscience to accept invitations to feasts in idol temples, for they reasoned that the idol was nothing and had no real existence.

Although Christians should have known that idols were nothing, and there is only one true God, some did not have this knowledge. Thus, for the sake of the conscience of others, Paul taught they should forgo eating food that they knew had been offered to idols, even though they were at liberty to eat according to their own conscience. If they caused a weaker brother to follow their example against his conscience, they could cause him to sin and fall. Then they would be accountable for the soul of one for whom Christ died.

Not all Christians today face the question of eating food offered to idols, but all face questions regarding Christian liberties. We must govern our Christian liberties by considering the influence our actions may have on a weaker brother. If we cause a brother to fall, we sin against Christ.

Paul also gave four principles regarding the questionable areas of the Christian life:

1. Knowledge must be balanced by love (I Corinthians 8).
2. Authority must be balanced by discipline (I Corinthians 9).
3. Experience must be balanced by caution (I Corinthians 10:1-22).
4. Freedom must be balanced by responsibility (I Corinthians 10:23-33).⁵

Paul needed no credentials to prove to the Corinthians that he was an apostle. They themselves were the proof, the work of his ministry. He had a right to expect support from them and the liberties they gave to other apostles. Yet in order that the gospel might be more effective, he did not use these privileges.

Paul gave five reasons why a gospel minister may expect support of his ministry:

1. Man in the natural shares in the results of his toil (9:7).
2. The Law ordained it (9:8-9).
3. In return for giving things of eternal value, the least that a man deserves is his physical support. For the Corinthians' sakes, Paul had supported himself, although he had a right to expect support from them (9:11-12).
4. According to the Jewish custom, priests were supported (9:13).
5. The Lord ordained it so (9:14).

Paul supported himself for their sake (9:15-23). He did not preach in order to earn a living, but because God compelled him to preach. He refrained from using all of his liberties so he would not abuse his power in the gospel. Although he was free, he became a servant to all in order to win them. He became as one of them, but not a partaker. Because of the situation, he did that which was expedient rather than that which was lawful. He could have claimed support, yet his actions in this regard demonstrated the four principles concerning Christian liberties listed above.

The way a person strives in his walk with the Lord is important (9:24-27). Paul illustrated this point with references to a footrace and boxing, two events in the Isthmian Games. Although all run in a race, only one gets the prize. Spiritually, each individual ought to run (live) as though there were only one prize, one that he himself must obtain. He is striving to win an incur

ruptible crown. He must keep himself in subjection; he must not allow his physical desires to cause him to be a castaway.

Israel had had a great experience with God (10:1-12). They had experienced His supernatural guidance and protection and a form of baptism that brought them under obligation to the Law. And yet the majority of them perished because of their willful sins. These things happened and were recorded as examples that we might be admonished and learn how to act before God.

God has made a way of escape for every temptation (10:13-14). He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. Any temptation that might befall us belongs to the common human experience. God is faithful to help us, if we want to overcome. Therefore, we must shun any form of idolatry. Idolatry is loving or venerating anything more than God or instead of God.

In partaking of communion, we eat at the Lord's table; therefore, we should not partake of what is sacrificed to idols (10:16-24). Though Christians might feel free to indulge in some liberties, they should consider whether such action makes for edification of all believers.

When purchasing meat in a market, a Christian was not to inquire whether the meat had been offered to idols. In this way, he would avoid disturbing his conscience unnecessarily. Nevertheless, if a Christian accepted an invitation to dine with an unbeliever and he was told that the food served had been offered to idols, he was not to touch it. Partaking of it under those circumstances would leave the impression that he was condoning idolatry. His action would be a stumbling block to many. He should do everything to the glory of God, not giving offense to others, so that they might be saved.

C. Church Ordinances

Before correcting the Corinthians concerning church ordinances, Paul complimented them on the ones they had kept. He desired that they would follow Christ as closely as he.

Paul then gave a divine progression: God, Christ, man, woman. A man praying with his head covered dishonors Christ. A woman praying with her head uncovered dishonors man. It is disgraceful for a woman to have her head shorn or shaved. Her shorn and shaved head shows that she has not submitted to God's authority. Man is the glory and image of Christ, while the woman is the glory of man. Nature itself teaches that a woman is to be covered and a man uncovered. God gave the woman her hair for a covering (11:15). Thus, the church has no custom of a woman's cutting her hair or any reason for contention in this matter.

The Corinthians were holding love feasts (fellowship meals) at the meeting places and concluding them with the Lord's Supper (11:17-22). Those who had abundance, however, were not sharing with those who had little, and yet they had the temerity to take communion jointly with them.

Paul had received a revelation of the truth concerning the Lord's Supper (11:23-26). The cup represents the shed blood of Christ, while the broken bread symbolizes His broken body.

They are emblems or symbols; they do not become the literal body and blood of Christ. These emblems have no virtue themselves. Paul gave no guidelines on how often we should observe the communion, only that it was not to become commonplace. In observing the Lord's Supper, we look back to Calvary and forward to His coming. In this manner, we show "the Lord's death till he come." Remembering the Cross and the Second Coming are the highlights of the Christian age and provide a motive for holy living.

To partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner, each person must examine himself, face himself as he is, and then confess and acknowledge his weakness. He who thinks he is worthy himself is not, for no one is actually worthy of anything the Lord has done. It is better for us to examine ourselves than for the Lord to judge us later, for then He will chasten. The death of Jesus provides both salvation and healing. We should understand and accept both. Jesus bore our sicknesses and our sins.

We must come together in love, without factions, in order to partake of the communion.

D. Spiritual Gifts

The Corinthians had been heathens, carried away into idolatry (12:1-3). Now they were not. They could acknowledge Jesus as their Lord only through the Holy Ghost, and Paul did not want them ignorant of the workings of that Spirit within them.

There are different manifestations of this Spirit (12:4-7), yet it is the same Spirit that does all the work. These diversities of manifestation or distribution must work toward unity. All of the different manifestations are given to profit the church of God.

Paul listed nine spiritual gifts (12:8-11). The same Spirit works in all, distributing gifts to every person as He wills. All the saints are needed in the church, and all must work together. Likewise, all of the manifestations or gifts of the Spirit are needed and not just those that seem more spectacular.

All of the members make up one body, no matter who they are, because all have been baptized into the body by the same Spirit (12:12-14). Each part of the body is necessary, even the seemingly insignificant. Each has a place that no other member can fill (12:15-20). There is no need for any member to feel superior to another (12:21-24), for even the seemingly most important parts depend upon the lesser ones. No one has the right to feel superior to any other member, for some of the least spectacular are very important.

The many members of the body must work together to avoid a schism in the body (12:25-31). All work together, suffer together, and bear one another. All the different offices make the body of Christ complete, whole, and coordinate. All are essential.

The Christian should seek for the best from God. He should desire to be in a place where God can operate through him. And he must learn to operate all spiritual gifts in love.

Two Greek words are used for *love* in the New Testament. One is *agape*, the highest form of love. This is the kind of love God has for the world. It is a sacrificial love, such as the love of a mother for a wayward son. The other word is *phileo*, love given in a mutual relationship in which one loves the lovable. First Corinthians 13 uses the former word to describe the kind of love that Christians should possess.

Love is vital (13:1-3). Without love, a person is nothing, even if he possesses all other positive attributes. Love should govern all the operations of the Spirit.

Love suffers long and is kind (13:4-8a). It is possible to be longsuffering without being kind, but real love is both. Love does not envy. It will be manifested without speaking of itself. It is not conceited or proud. It does not act with rudeness or indecency. It is polite. It is not selfish and does not insist on its own rights. It never becomes irritated or exasperated.

Love is not mindful of wrongs and never harbors evil thoughts. It does not remember wrongs. It does not rejoice over sin. It is happy in the truth. It can overlook faults. It is full of trust, eager to believe the best. It is void of suspicion. It hopes and endures all things.

The spiritual gifts will one day cease, but love will always remain (13:8b-13). The gifts are given for the building of the church of Christ and will end when the church is perfected at the coming of the Lord. (See Ephesians 4.) Now we have only the earnest of our inheritance, but when we become perfected, these gifts will no longer be needed. When a child grows to manhood, he puts away those things that helped him grow up. Likewise, the gifts of the Spirit will no longer be needed when we are caught up from this world. Three virtues remain—faith, hope, and love—and of them, love is the greatest.

A desirable spiritual gift is prophecy, which means speaking under the unction of the Holy Ghost in a known tongue. It parallels the gift of tongues but is in a language understood by the hearers. Its message must coincide with the Scriptures. Prophecy is for edification of the hearers.

Speaking in tongues has several functions. First, the Book of Acts shows that tongues are the initial evidence of the infilling of the Spirit. After that, the Spirit-filled person will produce the fruit of the Spirit. There is also a distinct *gift of tongues* that God may impart after the infilling or baptism of the Holy Spirit. A believer may speak in tongues for his personal edification, or he may give a public message in tongues to be interpreted for the edification of the whole church.

Prophecy in the church is for edification, exhortation, and comfort (14:1-21). The person who prophesies speaks to others. The hearers cannot understand tongues, however, which is prayer to God, and what a listener does not understand does not help him. For example, a trumpeter must give a definite sound, with clear meaning, if he is to prepare and call others to battle. When someone prays in tongues, the Spirit prays, but the human understanding is unfruitful. Only the speaker is edified. If there is an interpretation, then everyone is edified.

In a public worship service, everything must be done with the intent of building up the church. Those who do not understand what is taking place cannot give thanks or be edified. While we should be children with regard to evil, we should be adult in our understanding of spiritual things. We must learn how to use spiritual gifts properly in public worship.

Speaking in tongues in a public service provides proof to unbelievers of the Spirit and the power of God in the midst of the church (14:22-25). Continual tongues without interpretation, however, will leave the impression that the congregation is insane. Prophecy is for believers, although it can convict an unbeliever of his sins and convince him of truth.

All things should edify (14:26-40). Two or three messages in tongues, with interpretation, are enough in one service. If no one interprets, people should not continue to give public messages in tongues. The manifestations of the Spirit must be controlled, not confusing.

Paul also taught that women were not to be disruptive in church. If they had questions or did not understand what was said, they were to ask their husbands at home. The need for this instruction is easily understood when we realize that in New Testament times, men and women sat on opposite sides of the church.

We must seek the best gifts and keep our services decent and orderly.

E. The Resurrection

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (15:1-4). Verses 1-2 show that we are saved by the gospel. Verse 2 also strongly opposes the doctrine of eternal security: we are saved “if [we] keep in memory the gospel.”

The death and burial of Jesus were indisputable facts. Many people, however, questioned the Resurrection. Paul affirmed the fact of the Resurrection and cited three proofs (15:5-11):

1. The experiences of the Corinthians verified it.
2. The Scripture bore witness to the fact.
3. There were eyewitnesses of Christ’s resurrected body.

Moreover, Paul himself had a vision of Christ, which was conclusive evidence for him.

Some Corinthians believed there was no resurrection of the dead (15:12-19). If there is no resurrection, Paul reasoned, then Christ has not risen. And if He has not risen, then Christianity is in vain and we are liars. If we have no hope beyond this life, where will we be?

Christ was the first to arise from the dead (15:20-28). He arose so others can do likewise. As death came by one man, Adam, so resurrection came by the man Christ Jesus. We now live through Jesus as our mediator, and we shall do so until the end. Then we shall be changed, and mediator will no longer be needed. Christ’s mediatorial work as such will then be completed.

Apparently some Corinthians were erroneously being baptized by proxy for their dead loved ones (15:29). Paul did not approve of this practice but cited it to demonstrate his teaching. He asked if there were no resurrection, why were people engaging in this practice? Moreover, why should Paul put his life at peril if there were no hope of a resurrection? (See 15:30-34.) Paul knew what it was to face danger for the hope of the resurrection.

We must be careful and watch who our companions are, for they will influence us. We who know God must not sin.

Paul anticipated some questions about the resurrection and answered them, using analogies (15:35-57). God gives the body to the grain that is planted; only the seed is planted, but the plant comes up with a new body. So our mortal bodies will be planted through death and will be resurrected with a new body given by God.

The new body will be a spiritual body, for we shall be changed from mortal to immortal. Some of the saints will not die but will be alive at the Lord's return; nevertheless, all will be changed. At the last trumpet, we will be instantly transformed. Then we shall have victory over death and triumph over the grave. The sting of death is sin, which comes by the Law. Through Christ, however, we can be victorious over sin and death.

In the light of the promise of the resurrection, we must hold fast to what we believe (15:58). It is worth it.

F. Offerings

The church in Jerusalem was suffering financial hardship, and the other churches were helping by collecting offerings to aid the poor in Jerusalem. The "foreign mission fields" were sending money back to the home church. Paul advised the Corinthians to collect money at the beginning of each week and to choose someone to deliver it to Jerusalem. He himself would not do it.

Paul told the Corinthians of his plans for the future and advised them to respect his sons in the Lord who assisted him in the ministry.

Conclusion

I Corinthians 16:13-21

Paul concluded this epistle to the Corinthians with closing greetings and messages.

Notes

- ¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. II: The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 101-6.
- ² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 28.
- ³ Wiersbe, 39.
- ⁴ G. Coleman Luck, *First Corinthians* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1958), 53.
- ⁵ Wiersbe, 86.

Chapter 5

Second Corinthians

Authorship and Background

Second Corinthians is a sequel to I Corinthians. First Corinthians deals with sin and answers questions put to Paul by the Corinthians. Because he had written in such firmness, he had misgivings as to how the letter would be received. He had intended to go to Corinth and see them, if the Lord was willing. Until then he sent Titus to help them untangle their doctrinal errors. From Titus, whom Paul had met in Macedonia, he learned that the church as a whole had received the letter well. Nevertheless, some had become indignant and questioned Paul's right to interfere in their affairs.

In response to Titus's report, Paul penned this follow-up letter. It was written from Macedonia, not many months after I Corinthians. It is the most autobiographical of Paul's writings. Its tone is very personal. In some places it is joyous and affectionate; in other places it is stern and rebuking.

Purpose

Paul wrote II Corinthians to vindicate his authority as an apostle. He desired to comfort and commend those who had received his instruction and to reprove those who opposed his apostolic authority. Before his arrival in Corinth, he was trying to put the church into the frame of mind that would be necessary for him to work among them unto edification.

Paul's theme was his ministry, including its motives, sacrifices, responsibilities, and effectiveness. Judaic opposition to Paul was now stronger than when Paul wrote I Corinthians, and the Judaizers were trying to undermine Paul's authority.

Outline

INTRODUCTION—II Corinthians 1:1-2

- I. PAUL AND HIS COMMISSION—II Corinthians 1:3-5:21
 - A. Paul Defends His Motives (1:3-2:17)
 - B. Paul Defends His Message (3:1-5:21)
- II. PAUL AND HIS CONVERTS—II Corinthians 6:1-9:15
 - A. Their Faithful Partnership in the Gospel (6:1-7:16)

B. Their Financial Partnership in the Gospel (8:1-9:15)

III. PAUL AND HIS CRITICS—II Corinthians 10:1-13:10

- A. His Personal Appearance (10:1-18)
- B. His Proven Apostleship (11:1-12:13)
- C. His Passionate Appeal (12:14-13:10)

CONCLUSION—II Corinthians 13:11-14

Commentary

Introduction

II Corinthians 1:1-2

Paul began this epistle with his customary greeting (1:1-2). He asserted that he was an apostle by the will of God, and he wished grace and peace for the church. He wrote to all the saints in lower Greece (Achaia).

I. Paul and His Commission

II Corinthians 1:3-5:21

A. Paul Defends His Motives

Paul gave thanks for the comfort that comes from God (1:3-7). *Comfort* (*paraklesis*) comes from the same Greek root word as *Comforter* (*parakletos*) in John 14 and *advocate* in I John 2:1, which means “one called alongside to help or assist.” The word is stronger than mere consolation; it means to “hold up.” While God encourages, He also supplies a foundation for encouragement, much as a lawyer for a plaintiff. The benefit of suffering is that it produces a Christian capable of assisting others.

Paul’s personal obstructions were for the good of the church (1:8-11). He devoted his life for the salvation of others. (See Acts 19:23-41.)

Paul had a clear conscience (1:12-17). His testimony was true even though some Corinthians charged that he had not kept his word in visiting them. His “conversation”—his entire conduct—was right in God’s sight. He had given out only the truth. In the light of this confidence, he had sincerely planned to visit them again, the Lord willing.

Paul stated that the gospel was a positive message (1:18-22). God had established Paul, anointed him, and filled him with His Spirit. Thus, Paul could preach only the irrefutable truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul refrained from coming in order to spare the Corinthians (1:23-2:4). He did not want to come in heaviness, but in order to help them. He wrote, not to cause sorrow, but to lead them to the truth in love. He desired that they know his love for them.

Second Corinthians 2:5-11 appears as an insertion concerning the immoral man in their midst, of whom Paul wrote in his earlier epistle. Paul now advised a change of attitude toward the repentant man. Paul desired that they would not exclude him forever from their fellowship in Christ.

As the believer lives in Christ, he is a sweet savor, pleasant unto God Himself (2:12-17).

B. Paul Defends His Message

To those around us, we are the epistle of Christ (3:1-5). We are nothing in ourselves, but our “sufficiency is of God.” We must not be legalistic ministers of the gospel (3:6-12). Instead, we should minister in the spirit of the message.

The Spirit does not take away from truth but rather puts life into it. This life draws men to truth.

The Law, though truth, brought death instead of life. If it was glorious, how much more shall our life-giving ministry be glorious! The glory of the old is completely overshadowed by the glory of the new.

Moses covered his face so Israel could not see the glory that showed on it, but that glory was only temporary (3:13-18). There is a fadeless brilliance in the new covenant, yet we do not need veils. The Lord alone can remove “the veil” from the minds of those who do not yet see the fading of the old and the exceeding splendor of the new.

Receiving this power should make us strong (4:1-7). (See Isaiah 6:9-10.) Satan blinds the minds of those who do not believe the gospel. Their rejection blinds them to the truth, while acceptance of the light reveals the truth. We are only earthen vessels so that the glory may be God’s, not ours (4:7-12). Satan tries to use the weaknesses of our humanity to destroy our spiritual lives with God, but as long as we allow God’s power to keep us, Satan’s power cannot conquer us. The Spirit of Christ, which transformed His body into immortality, will also keep us in this life and give us eternal life (4:13-18). The outward afflictions that we face here are nothing, because our inward man is strengthened by the power of God. Therefore, we have a hope beyond this life.

Our hope is eternal life. This thought is carried over in chapter 5. Paul compared what we have now, our earthly tabernacle (mortal life), to what we will have, a building of God (eternal life) (5:1-10). We who have this hope are anxious and desirous to put on our lasting domain. We are not unclothed when we die; instead, we are newly clothed. Death is a promotion. The Holy Ghost is a sample of our full inheritance (5:5). (See also Ephesians 1:14; II Corinthians 1:22.) Therefore, we strive earnestly to be well pleasing to God, for everyone will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

The fear of the Lord—reverential respect for Him—is the motivating power of the ministry (5:11-16). The terror of the Lord moves many people to make a start with Him. As Christians, we are now new creatures, reconciled to God (5:17-21). The word *reconcile* means “to renew a friendship, to make at peace again.” We are Christ’s ambassadors, bringing the message of reconciliation to sinners. (See Ephesians 2:11-19.)

II. Paul and His Converts

II Corinthians 6:1-9:15

A. Their Faithful Partnership in the Gospel

Second Corinthians 6:1 reveals that it is possible to fall away from grace, exploding the doctrine of unconditional eternal security. In every way God’s workers must be servants, enduring hardships and approving themselves in the ministry (6:2-10). As such a minister, Paul expressed concern for the Corinthians’ lives (6:11-13).

God calls Christians to a life separate from the world (6:14-7:1). There is no place of real fellowship or companionship between light and darkness. To those who will separate themselves from the world and unto Him, Christ has promised to be their Father and to receive them as children. They must abstain from filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness.

Paul desired that the Corinthians receive him in their hearts (7:2-7). Paul loved them deeply. He now rejoiced in his tribulation, for God had comforted him and sent Titus to him. Titus had visited Corinth and had reported back to Paul, and Titus and Paul were rejoicing in the Corinthians’ new attitude. Paul had had misgivings, but now he was not sorry he had written in such a severe tone (7:8-11). He was glad it brought them to repentance. Theirs was a godly sorrow, not the sorrow of the world; thus, the result of their sorrow was real repentance.

Paul had not written to condemn anyone or to take sides with anyone. Instead, he wrote so that they might know his love for them all (7:12). Titus’s joy over them comforted Paul. They had proven to Titus, and he had reported to Paul, that they were willing to make right their wrongs.

B. Their Financial Partnership in the Gospel

Paul informed the Corinthians that the Macedonians had suffered and yet gave more than they could actually afford (8:1-5). This was because they first gave themselves to the Lord. Paul desired that Titus would finish in Corinth that same grace that the Macedonians had demonstrated (8:6-8). As the Corinthians had abounded in everything else, they should excel in this offering also. Paul spoke because of the liberality of others and to prove their own love.

Paul reminded them that Christ gave all He had to make them rich in Him (8:9). They should follow Christ’s example. They had been willing to do so a year ago (8:10-12). Now it was time to act. Those of Judea had ministered spiritually. If the Corinthians ministered to their needs

in return, there would be an equality of burden (8:13-15; Exodus 16:18), for God judges what a person gives by what he has and what he has left.

Paul expressed gratitude for Titus's willingness to work in this matter and for the success of the brother whom Paul sent with him (8:16-23). Paul had sent a church member with Titus to help take care of the money and thereby reduce criticism. Both men were upright, and Paul urged the church members to give their offerings to them.

Paul challenged the believers to prove his trust and boasting of them by giving their offering willingly from their hearts (8:24-9:5). He desired that they collect the offering before the brethren arrived in order to avoid giving because of a feeling of obligation.

God's law of sowing and reaping is always in effect (9:6-7). The motive of giving is what God judges. He is able to supply all needs, whether spiritual or material (9:8-15). The Judeans, being supplied materially by the Gentiles, abounded spiritually. That richness of spiritual life had gone into prayer for the Gentiles. Thus, the Christians were equal in their giving.

III. Paul and His Critics

II Corinthians 10:1-13:10

A. His Personal Appearance

Paul's opposers had used satire against him. He, likewise, began II Corinthians 10 with satire (10:1-2). He stated that he was not being bold to them as he had been to some. His warfare was not one of carnal weapons and fleshly strife (10:3-6). The enemies were not fleshly either, but were of the spirit. This battle against Paul was not something to be settled in a carnal way. Paul's opponents had accused him of being harsh in his letter while soft and weak in person. Paul stated, however, that he would be in presence just as he had been in his letters (10:7-11). He would be just as firm.

We can often feel good by comparing ourselves to someone else, but it is not wise to do so (10:12-18). We must measure ourselves by God's Word and His principles. Paul measured his work by God's rule. God had helped him reach the Corinthians with the gospel. Paul did not intend to boast of someone else's work. He desired to continue to reach others. He did not concern himself about the measure of other men or being recommended by them. God had called him and had commended him. This was the important approval.

B. His Proven Apostleship

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to bear with him because of his great concern for their souls (11:1-4). He was jealous for them, not for his own personal concerns. He desired that they stay in the simple, unadulterated truth of the gospel. If someone came along with a different gospel, they might listen and tolerate it. When someone came subtly, perverting the truth, they might easily fall for the deception. Paul exhorted them to beware.

Paul reminded them that he was on the same level with other apostles and asked if he had been wrong to preach to them without taking support from them (11:5-10). He had received money from others, but he had preached to them without recompense so that he would not be a burden to them.

Paul warned against Satan's messengers (11:11-15). Paul did this because he loved the Corinthians, so that there would be no occasion for fleshly glory. He cautioned that there were false apostles who pretended to be real, superior apostles. As their father, Satan, came as an angel of light, this was only to be expected.

If false prophets had reasons to boast, Paul certainly did (11:16-21a). If the "wise" Corinthians put up with fools, perhaps they would tolerate him—at least as a fool, if nothing else. As a servant of Christ, Paul declared that he excelled above all of those false apostles. He bore not only physical suffering, but also the mental burden of the churches' care. He would glory only in what he had suffered for the cause of Christ. And even that glorying was not necessary.

Paul now came to visions and revelations he had had (12:1b-6). And even in this, he did not glory. His life lived before them was enough to prove his apostleship. Glorying in oneself is foolish, for no one has anything within himself of which to glory or boast.

To keep Paul's own self down, God had given him a thorn to bear (12:7-10). Some commentators have speculated that this "thorn" was a bodily affliction (such as eye trouble), but verses 7 and 10 indicate that the thorn was Satan's constant buffeting of him—for Christ's sake. Nevertheless, God's grace was sufficient for the opposition that he encountered everywhere he went. The thorn showed Paul's weakness but also the strength he had in Christ.

There should have been no need for Paul to commend himself (12:11-13). He had shown himself to be equal to the other apostles in every way. The Corinthians were inferior to other churches only in that he had taken nothing from them. Moreover, the brethren that he sent to them took nothing either.

C. His Passionate Appeal

Paul did not want to find any improper conduct among them. He desired that their lives be Christ-like (12:20-21).

Paul spoke of his letters as visits and hence he referred to his present epistle as a third visit (13:1). If he came again, he warned them, he would seek justice. The power of God that operated in his life would vindicate his authority (13:2-10). He exhorted them to self-examination, to be sure they were guiltless before God.

Conclusion

II Corinthians 13:11-14

Paul concluded the epistle with final instructions, greetings, and a benediction.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE CŌ-LŌS'-SIĀNS.

CHAPTER 1.

postle thanketh God for their faith, &c.

UL, "an apostle of Jē'-sūs Christ by the will of God, and noth'-ē-ūs our brother,

To the saints "and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Cō-sē: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and Lord Jē'-sūs Christ.

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jē'-sūs Christ, saying always for you,

"Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jē'-sūs, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, wherof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world: and bringeth forth fruit as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and know the grace of God in truth:

As ye also learned of Ep'-phras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you "a faithful minister of Christ:

Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

For this cause we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spir-

A. D. 64.

° Eph. 6. 12.
° 2 Pet. 1. 11.
° Eph. 1. 1.

Gr.
the Son of
his love.
° Eph. 1. 7.
° 1 Cor. 4. 17.
Eph. 6. 21.

Gal. 1. 3.
° Heb. 1. 3.
° Rev. 2. 14.

° 1 Cor. 1. 4.
Eph. 1. 16.
° Heb. 1. 2.

° Eph. 1. 22.
° Philom. 5.
° Rom. 4. 30.
° Eph. 1. 21.
° Heb. 5. 10.
° 1 Tim. 4. 8.
° John 1. 5.

° 1 Cor. 11. 8.

° Mat. 26. 34.
° Mark 16. 15.
° Luke 9. 8.
° John 16. 16.
° 1 Cor. 1. 5.
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13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14 "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of the creature:

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, dominions, or principalities, powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17 And he is before all things, by him all things consist:

18 And he is the head of the church: who is the firstborn from the dead:

in all things he might have preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell:

20 And, having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him, they be things in heaven.

21 And you, the alienated and separated mind by wickedness, hath he reconciled

22 "In the body of his flesh, to present

23 blameless and

24

25

Chapter 6

Colossians

Authorship and Background

Located near the upper end of the Lycus Valley, Colossae lay approximately one hundred miles east of Ephesus in Asia Minor. Nearby sat Laodicea, the chief city of the district. Although most of the residents of Colossae were native Phrygians, a strong Greek influence manifested itself through the prevailing Greek language and customs. Colossae and Laodicea had large numbers of Jews as well. By the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, Colossae had already lost most of its former greatness and had dwindled to a third-rate town.

The epistle indicates that Paul did not found this church and possibly never even visited it. Nevertheless, it was probably started by one of his converts, Epaphras, and resulted because of Paul's work in Ephesus.

The membership of the Colossian church consisted principally of Gentiles (1:27; 2:13). There were Jewish Christians among them, however, for references in the epistle indicate that the readers were quite familiar with Jewish customs and teachings.

Paul was a prisoner at the time he wrote this epistle (4:3, 18). It was most likely written in the summer of AD 62 during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. It is safe to assume that Paul wrote this epistle about the same time as the ones to the Ephesians and to Philemon, for Tychicus carried all three.

Purpose

Paul had three goals in writing to the Colossians:

1. He sought to stabilize the saints and to confirm their belief in the gospel that they had received.
2. He desired to crush the heretical teaching that was arising in Colossae.
3. He wanted to teach concerning the Christian life.

All that is definitely known about the nature of the heretical teaching at Colossae must be learned from Paul's incidental statements concerning it in this epistle. Apparently it was a blending of various religious systems with Jewish elements, Oriental mystic beliefs, and early forms of Gnostic speculation. Basic to this false teaching was the idea that God is holy and matter is evil and that between spirit and matter is a great gulf. According to this view, the holy God could not

span the gulf between Himself and sinful man; thus He created a whole order of intermediate beings, or angels. One of the questions that arose was where to place Christ in this system.

Paul did not consume much space in denouncing the false teachers or expounding their heretical views. Instead, he set forth the great burden of his message—the nature and mission of Jesus Christ. He affirmed the truth instead of merely attacking the error. As Paul presented so perfectly Christ’s complete sufficiency for all human needs, the supreme value of this epistle is as the antidote for any and all heresy. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9).

Outline

INTRODUCTION—Colossians 1:1-14

- I. THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST—Colossians 1:15-29
 - A. His Deity (1:15-19)
 - B. His Death (1:20-22)
 - C. His Demands (1:23-29)
- II. COMBATING HERESY—Colossians 2:1-23
 - A. Experiencing Truth (2:1-7)
 - B. Exposing Error (2:8-23)
- III. THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN—Colossians 3:1-4:6
 - A. Our Relationship with God (3:1-17)
 - B. Our Relationship with Others (3:18-4:6)

Commentary

Introduction

Colossians 1:1-14

Verses 1-2 contain Paul’s usual salutation. He identified himself as the author and then greeted the readers. In the verses that follow, Paul introduced himself (1:3-8), for he was not the founder of the church. His words indicate that he had not been to Colossae and did not know the saints there. Yet he asserted his love for them and his thankfulness for their faith and steadfastness.

Epaphras apparently founded the church in Colossae, and he ministered as Paul’s representative. In Colossians 1:7, the *American Standard Version* refers to Epaphras as “a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,” while the *Twentieth Century New Testament* reads, “who, as a minister of Christ, faithfully represents us.”¹ Therefore, Paul considered the church as his own.

Paul continued to pray for the Colossian saints, just as he did his other converts. Although Paul was a stranger to these people, they were his children in Christ and thus he loved them. He

desired for them to have a more complete Christian walk and for them to be strong in the power of God. He reminded the Colossians that they had been redeemed by the blood of Christ and accepted into His kingdom. Paul stressed redemption through the blood of Christ in contrast to the Gnostics, who stressed legalism and discounted the sacrifice of Christ.

I. The Preeminence of Christ

Colossians 1:15-29

A. His Deity

Colossians 1:15-19 presents Christ as the creator and upholder of the world, a power that can belong only to deity. Hebrews 1 and John 1 contain parallel passages. Christ is the head of *all* things. Christ is the head of the spiritual kingdom as well as the material world. He began it. He is the fullness of it. He will complete it. In Him dwells all the fullness and all the attributes of deity. He is truly God.

B. His Death

Because of His sacrificial death, Christ is able to reconcile all things to Himself (1:20). His work reaches out to the whole world. We were enemies but now are reconciled and are at peace (1:21). We are no longer alienated. By the grace of God, we are not what we once were. We have reconciliation through the death of the fleshly body of Christ (1:22).

The Cross and reconciliation are designed to meet mankind's four basic emotional needs.² The Cross attests that we are *loved*. It is a reminder that we are *forgiven*. It is the foundation of our *assurance*. It is the source of our *hope* for the future.

C. His Demands

We were reconciled that Christ may present us holy, unblamable, unproveable, and perfect in the sight of God, a condition totally impossible in our natural state. We remain reconciled as long as we continue in the faith of the Lord Jesus, established and not easily moved (1:23).

The mystery hidden in times past is Christ dwelling within us. Paul was made a minister of this mystery. His proclaiming this mystery of reconciliation was the cause of his suffering. In spite of everything, Paul sought everywhere to give this message to the lost that all may be at peace with their Creator, whether Jew or Gentile. (The Gnostics claimed exclusive knowledge of mystical truths and understanding.)

II. Combating Heresy

Colossians 2:1-23

A. Experiencing Truth

Paul desired that the Colossians would be one in the Spirit of Christ and that He would give them the full knowledge and wisdom of His kingdom and of the mystery of God (2:1-7). Even though Paul could not be present, he wanted them to know he was concerned that they have the riches of the knowledge of the mystery of God. He desired that they would be stable in their faith and that they would experience the full depth of truth in Christ.

B. Exposing Error

In attacking the Gnostic error, Paul wanted the saints to understand that no deeper wisdom exists than what God has given in His Word (2:8-10). Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the one true God in all His fullness. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9). In writing about this passage, Lloyd Ogilvie stated:

The word *fullness* is the same as we considered in Colossians 1:19: *pleroma*, plenitude, the entire fullness of the Godhead. All we can or need to know about God, He has made known in Christ. No need for speculation or to search for other answers. Christ is the full and final revelation of God and man as He was intended to be. (See Hebrews 1:1-3.) God dwelt in the flesh in Christ, made His home in Him, and now continues to dwell in Him as His persistent approach to us. What else do we need? Why search for our meaning for life elsewhere?

Why create additional intermediaries or intercessors? That’s what Paul wanted the Colossians to settle once and for all. And so must we, too.³

Without a doubt, we are complete in Him; He is sufficient for every need. The Gnostics stressed legalistic adherence to the Law. Paul used a three-prong attack against this error.

1. Old Testament circumcision was a token of the covenant between God and man (2:11-13). Circumcision pertained to the Abrahamic covenant and not the Mosaic law. The New Testament contains a circumcision of the heart. Paul compared physical circumcision to putting off the sins of the flesh in water baptism and rising to walk in new life (in the Spirit).
2. Christ fulfilled the ordinances (2:14-15). Christ did not bring anything contrary to the Law. He blotted out the Mosaic law in that He fulfilled it. He triumphed over it, abolishing any need for it.
3. The ceremonies of the Law were not for salvation (2:16-17). They foreshadowed the One to come who would bring salvation. They were the shadow cast by the object—Christ. He was more than the shadow, and now that we have Him, we do not need the shadow.

Mysticism was another part of the Gnostic error (2:18-19). Mysticism, which involved angel worship, taught that people could rise above the teachings of the Bible. Nothing, of course,

supported this teaching. It was purely a doctrine of man's imagination. Paul cautioned the Colossians to remember that Christ was the head of all things.

Asceticism, another element of the Colossian heresy, taught that salvation comes by severe self-denial and rigorous self-discipline. True holiness involves a separation from worldly activities but not self-punishment. It is the result of grace, not a means of earning salvation. Severe self-denial shows only a worship of the willpower of man. There is no honor or virtue in asceticism.

III. The Life of the Christian

Colossians 3:1-4:6

A. Our Relationship with God

Our minds must be on things above if we are resurrected with Christ (3:1-4). We are dead to the world and alive unto Christ.

Paul contrasted past and present relationships (3:5-17). Negatively, we must put off the old man when we come under the new relationship with God. We must kill the carnal members, the lower nature. Paul had to remind even church members to stay dead to self. Positively, we must put on Christ and His attributes in place of what we discarded. We will be made in the image of Him who created life.

Charity (love) is the *bond of perfectness*. Above all things, we must put on the love of God. We must do all things in His name.

B. Our Relationship with Others

A proper relationship with God affects our relationships with others. Wives must be submissive to their husbands, yet husbands must not take advantage of their position of leadership. They must not be bitter, but loving (3:18-19). Children must be obedient to parents in order to please God. Fathers must be loving, not a discouragement to their children (3:20-21). Servants are to work diligently, and masters are to treat them fairly (3:22-4:1). Children of God must remember to pray for others and to walk wisely and prudently for the sake of those who will observe their lives (4:2-6).

Conclusion

Colossians 4:7-18

Paul closed this epistle with personal messages. He stated that Tychicus, who carried the epistle, would reveal his condition. Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, is listed as a faithful and beloved brother. Paul reminded the Colossians that Epaphras continued to intercede for them. Paul himself wrote the closing salutation (4:18).

Notes

- ¹ Curtis Vaughn, editor, *Twenty-six Translations of the Bible, Vol. I* (Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1985), 915-16.
- ² Lloyd John Ogilvie, *You Are Loved and Forgiven: Paul's Letter of Hope to the Colossians* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1977), 56-57.
- ³ Ogilvie, 103.

Chapter 7

Philemon

Authorship and Background

Paul's brief letter to Philemon is unique among the epistles. While not strictly a private letter, it concerns a personal problem. It provides remarkable insight into the apostle's dealings with personal affairs as they touched the lives of his converts. Through the letter Paul revealed his devoted love to individual souls—one of the secrets of his success as a missionary.

Philemon resided in Colossae. Paul's letter indicates that Philemon was a faithful, respected, and wealthy lay member of the church. It may seem strange that he owned slaves. In his day, however, slavery was universally accepted, and slaves were much like hired domestic servants today. Sometimes both master and slave were Christians (I Timothy 6:1-2). Because of this situation, Paul included instructions for Christian slaves as well as Christian masters when writing to the Colossians and Ephesians.

Slavery conflicts with fundamental Christian principles, but instead of seeking to overthrow the social structure of his day, the inspired apostle focused on individual lives and interpersonal relationships. As verse 16 states, Christian masters were to treat their slaves as brothers, and the ultimate outcome of this radically new approach was that Christians began to free any slaves they had. Indeed, it appears that Paul hinted at this very thing to Philemon (13-14, 21).

Evidently Paul wrote to Philemon about the same time he wrote to the Colossians and Ephesians. As Tychicus accompanied Onesimus and bore the letters to these two churches, Paul undoubtedly wrote the letter to Philemon while imprisoned in Rome.

Purpose

The occasion for this brief yet impressive note to Philemon is obvious from its content. Onesimus, a runaway slave who had apparently robbed or defrauded his master, had come in contact with the gospel and had been converted. He was very helpful to Paul, and Paul grew to love him. Paul recognized that he had truly repented, but Onesimus had not made restitution. Paul felt that the slave must return to his master in accordance with the demands of the law. Onesimus agreed to do this, knowing full well the possible dire consequences, but also knowing it was necessary to prove the reality of his conversion.

Outline

SALUTATION—Philemon 1-3

- I. PAUL’S PRAYER FOR PHILEMON—Philemon 4-7
- II. PAUL’S CONCERN FOR ONESIMUS—Philemon 8-17
- III. PAUL’S PLEDGE TO PHILEMON—Philemon 18-21

CONCLUSION—Philemon 22-25

Commentary

Salutation

Philemon 1-3

In his greeting to Philemon, Paul described himself as “a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” He viewed his imprisonment as the will of God. He called Philemon “our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer.” Paul referred to “the church in thy house,” citing the apostolic practice of believers meeting in homes for services. He also mentioned Timothy, Apphia, and Archippus.

I. Paul’s Prayer for Philemon

Philemon 4-7

Paul had great confidence in Philemon’s Christian character and the fact that he manifested the love of God toward his brethren (4-9). He was thankful for the life that Philemon lived and prayed that his faith would be effective.

II. Paul’s Concern for Onesimus

Philemon 8-17

Paul assured Philemon of his high regard for both the master and slave and sought to persuade Philemon to receive, forgive, and reinstate Onesimus. This was to be done because of the new relationship that now existed between them. Onesimus was no longer a mere slave, but now something more than a slave—a beloved brother (16). Paul asked Philemon to grant this request as his partner.

III. Paul’s Pledge to Philemon

Philemon 18-21

Paul obligated himself to Philemon for the debt of Onesimus and closed his appeal with the confident assertion that Philemon would do even more than he was asking.

Verse 21 may be interpreted to suggest that Paul wanted Onesimus freed, or it could be merely an expressed assurance that Philemon would do all that was right. Philemon was not asked to release Onesimus, but to love him—a far more difficult thing.

Conclusion

Philemon 22-25

Paul concluded this epistle by

- asking Philemon to find him lodging, thus showing Paul anticipated his release as a result of prayers of the saints,
- giving personal greetings from several friends and fellow laborers, and
- praying, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Chapter 8

Ephesians

Authorship and Background

Ephesus, a large and prosperous city in the ancient province of Lydia, stood on a plain at the mouth of the River Cayster on Asia Minor's western shores. As the western terminus of the overland trade route to the Euphrates, Ephesus ranked with Antioch and Alexandria as one of the three leading trade centers in the eastern Mediterranean.

Ephesus was also the religious metropolis of this part of Asia and its unofficial capital. The city's chief glory was the magnificent temple dedicated to Diana, the mother goddess of the earth. This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Inside it stood a statue of the goddess that the Ephesians claimed fell from Heaven (Acts 19:35). Because of the forms of worship associated with Diana, Ephesus was filled with occultism.¹

Paul visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey and left behind Priscilla and Aquila. The Ephesian church apparently received its definite organizational beginnings with Paul's ministry during his third missionary journey (Acts 19).

Paul began his ministry in Ephesus in the Jewish synagogue. When fierce opposition arose, he organized the believers as a separate and distinct group and moved his ministry to the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). His gospel message and ministry so profoundly impressed the city that the magical arts practiced in Ephesus suffered a great reversal (Acts 19:18-19). Finally, after three years, circumstances forced Paul to leave (Acts 20:31). Apparently he returned for another visit after his release from his first Roman imprisonment (I Timothy 1:3).²

The church in Ephesus consisted mainly of Gentile converts, although the membership included a number of Jewish Christians. After Paul's farewell in Acts 20, the church continued under the leadership of its own elders. When Paul left Ephesus to go to Macedonia, apparently after a later visit, he left Timothy in charge (I Timothy 1:3).

The Ephesian church was the mother church to others in the province and long retained her position of leadership among them. (It is conceivable that Paul intended for this letter to be read to the "daughter churches" in the surrounding area.) Ultimately "the candlestick" was removed out of its place (Revelation 2:5), and spiritual darkness settled over the place of former enlightenment.

As Tychicus bore the letter to the Ephesians and also carried epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, Paul must have written all three letters about the same time. Therefore, he wrote

them while he was in prison (Acts 28:30). Generally accepted dates for these writings fall between AD 62 to 64.³

Purpose

Ephesians may be considered the most sublime and loftiest of the Pauline Epistles. In it Paul set forth God's purpose of summing up "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (1:10). He emphasized the place that the church, as the body of Christ, holds in the universal program.

Ephesians is also the most impersonal of Paul's writings. He did not deal with any definite controversial elements in this letter. The *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* notes:

The converted Jews in the early churches were inclined to be exclusive and separate themselves from their Gentile brethren. This condition of affairs in the church at Ephesus may have led to the writing of this epistle, the keynote of which is Christian unity.⁴

Key words in this epistle are *in* (used about ninety times), *grace*, *Spirit*, *body*, *Heaven*, and *mystery*.

Outline

SALUTATION—Ephesians 1:1-2

- I. THE BELIEVER'S POSITION IN CHRIST—Ephesians 1:3-3:21
 - A. Child of God (1:3-1:23)
 - B. Member of the Body of Christ (2:1-18)
 - C. God's Building (2:19-3:21)
- II. THE BELIEVER'S WALK BEFORE GOD—Ephesians 4:1-6:20
 - A. The Christian Walk (4:1-6:9)
 - B. The Continual Conflict (6:10-20)

CONCLUSION—Ephesians 6:21-24

Commentary

Salutation

Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul opened this epistle by stating his apostolic authority (1:1-2). He gave greetings of grace and peace.

I. The Believer's Position in Christ

Ephesians 1:3-3:21

A. Child of God

Paul's first point of emphasis was the believer's position in Christ. First, the believer is a child of God (1:3-23). He is chosen and adopted in Christ by the Father. He is redeemed or purchased by the sacrifice of Christ's blood. And he is sealed by the Spirit.

God planned salvation before the foundation of the world (1:3-7). It was a predestination of the church and not of individuals. Man makes his choice by free will. As God sees where a man's choice will lead him, He foreknows the results in his life, yet the individual has not been predestined.

We are adopted. Through Christ we are accepted into the body of Christ. Through Him we have our redemption—through His humanity and death. Our foundation was from the beginning.

God has now revealed His mystery (1:8-12). It is that all should freely partake of His salvation. Together, we are all one body. We have obtained an inheritance in Him, whether we are Jew or Gentile.

We are sealed (1:13-14). The Old Testament Sabbath is a type of the Holy Spirit. It was God's seal on the Israelites as His own. It was a stamp. Likewise, the Holy Spirit in our lives is an affixing of the official stamp. When it is there, we are approved of God. To keep it there, we must keep that document in the same condition, unchanged. The Holy Ghost is a title to the inheritance that we had lost, eternal life. When we are received into Heaven, we shall receive the fullness of it. When we have been redeemed from sin, body, and soul, we shall be in Heaven. Our souls enjoy new life now, but our bodies have not yet been glorified (Romans 8:19-22).

Paul prayed for God to do the following for the Ephesians:

1. To give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation
2. To let them know
 - a. the hope of His calling
 - b. the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints
 - c. the exceeding greatness of His power toward us

God's power works in us by the death of Christ. Christ is above all things, at the right hand of God, which is the place of authority. (The phrase "right hand of God" is a metaphor of power and authority. As a Spirit who fills all space—the definition of omnipresence—God does not have a physical "right hand" apart from the body of Christ.)

B. Member of the Body of Christ

Second, Paul showed that the believer is a member of the body of Christ (2:1-18). He contrasted what the Ephesians once were with what they had become (2:1-7). They had been dead in sin, fulfilling works of the flesh. Through Christ they were resurrected to life and knew the works of life. They were now in heavenly places; Christ had showed them the exceeding riches of His grace.

We are saved by God's grace and not by anything we can do (2:8-10). He saves us, and then we do good works. He created us; we are His workmanship. We were strangers and aliens, without hope. Now, in Christ, we are brought into His family. He has done away with the wall that separated us from God and that separated Jews and Gentiles (2:15-18). Jesus fulfilled the Law and reconciled all of us to God. He has made peace and made us all a part of the family of God. We are one in Christ.

C. God's Building

Third, Paul likened the believers to a building (2:19-3:21). Although a building consists of individual bricks and mortar, it is one building. The foundation of the spiritual building is the prophets and apostles, and Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. This building, closely joined together, becomes the habitation of God through the Spirit.

The metaphors of the body of Christ and the temple emphasize the mystery of Christ (3:4). The mystery of Christ, hidden in the Old Testament but now revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets, is that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs with the Jews of the riches of God. Paul was given the ministry of revealing the mystery and giving the gospel to the Gentiles. There is fellowship in this mystery. In this mystery, the eternal purpose in Christ, all can put their confidence, both Jew and Gentile.

Paul desired the believers to be strong in the Spirit so that they would experience

- triumph at tribulation (3:13);
- being established in Christ (3:16-18);
- knowing the fullness of the boundless love of Christ (3:19).

God's love is fathomless. In breadth, the Jews and Gentiles are brought into one body, for God's love embraces all. In length, love fills the fullness of time. In depth, it goes from the pit of sin from which the saints were taken to where they are. And in height, it ascends to the position that the church is to occupy, heavenly places. Praise be to Him who can keep us and meet our every need!

II. The Believer's Walk Before God

Ephesians 4:1-6:20

A. The Christian Walk

In response to God's love for him, the believer should walk worthy of his exalted position as a child of God in Christ. To do so, he must first have the proper attitude. Verses 2-3 describe this way of living or vocation.

Second, he must have sound doctrine (4:2-6). Sound doctrine underlies proper conduct and shows the unity of the Christian vocation. There is one body, the church, with Christ as the one head. There is one Spirit, the Spirit of God. There is one baptism, the baptism into the body of Christ.

It takes repentance, water baptism, and the infilling of the Spirit to put us in that body. Without the proper doctrinal understanding of the "one Lord," it would be difficult to comprehend how the Father could be in us (4:6), when Colossians 1:27 states that Christ dwells in us and I Corinthians 3:16 declares that the Spirit of God dwells in us.

Third, God grants each of us grace and gifts to enable us to live worthy of our high calling and position in Christ. Among these gifts are the ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These ministries are to perfect the church, the body of Christ, and to present it holy and blameless to Christ. As we take heed to these ministries, we will become mature Christians, measuring up to the standard of Christ. We will be steadfast in doctrine. We will know truth and proclaim it out of love. We will be a body that works harmoniously and effectually.

Paul gave two instructions to promote a life worthy of our position as believers in Christ. First, we are to put off "the old man," the unregenerate person who is ruled by his carnal, fallen nature. Ephesians 4:17-22 describes his conduct. He lives only to himself, for himself, and fulfills only his own carnal desires. Second, we are to put on "the new man," the one who has been born again with a new nature and in whom Christ is formed. We should put on those attitudes, acts, thoughts, and communications that are godly and Christ-like (4:23-32).

As Christians we must walk in love and purity, following the example set by Christ (5:1-7). In doing so, we will cleanse ourselves of the works of the flesh. These evil works will not be present in the life completely yielded to God. We will walk in light (5:8-14). The light of God exposes the unfruitful works of darkness. We will walk circumspectly, filled with the Spirit (5:15-21). We must walk wisely for our own sake and for the sake of those without.

The Christian walk directly relates to those around us. For example, husbands and wives have responsibilities to each other as children of God (5:22-33). Paul used the church and Christ as an example, showing that as Christ (the groom) loves the church (the bride), so ought a husband to love and treat his wife. Paul listed similar duties for children, fathers, servants, and masters (6:1-9). Children and fathers must respect each other. Children should honor their parents

and obey them. The instructions given concerning servants and masters can be applied today to employee-employer relationships.

B. The Continual Conflict

Although believers have an exalted position in Christ and sit in heavenly places, spiritual conflict is still a reality. Paul urged the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord, the source of their strength. They were to put on the whole armor of God, which Paul described in terms of a Roman soldier's battle dress (6:10-20). This divine armor would protect them in their time of testing.

Conclusion

Ephesians 6:21-24

Paul concluded this epistle by stating that he was sending Tychicus, who would inform the Ephesians of Paul's affairs, and by giving a benediction.

Notes

- ¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. II: The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1977), 255.
- ² Hiebert, 256.
- ³ Hiebert, 265; Charles Smith Lewis, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. II* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 957; Charles W. Slemming, D.D., *The Bible Digest* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1960), 713.
- ⁴ Frank Charles Thompson, "The Epistles to the Ephesians," in the "Analysis of Books," *The Thompson Chain Reference Bible* (Indianapolis, Indiana: B. B. Kirkbridge Bible Company, 1982), 217.

Chapter 9

Philippians

Authorship and Background

Philippi, a fortified Macedonian city, was about eleven miles north of the Aegean seaport of Neapolis. It stood where the Via Egnatia, a major east-west highway of the Roman Empire, ran through a pass in the Balkan Mountains. The city was named for Philip II of Macedonia, who enlarged and fortified the place in 356 BC.

In 42 BC, the forces of Octavian and Mark Anthony won a decisive battle at Philippi over those of Brutus and Cassius. Because of the victory, Octavian (afterward Augustus Caesar) elevated the city to a colony. Consequently, Philippi enjoyed all of the privileges of a Roman colony.

Romans, native Macedonians, and Orientals comprised the city's population. Because of its location on the Via Egnatia, strangers visited the city daily. Because the city was a military and agricultural center instead of a commercial one, few Jews were attracted to Philippi.¹

Paul established the church at Philippi on his second missionary journey. (See Acts 16.) The people affected by the gospel were representative of the population. Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira, was probably a Jewess or a proselyte. The slave girl was most likely a Macedonian. The jailer was undoubtedly a Roman.

In Philippi, more than in any other place, Paul used his Roman citizenship. His refusal to leave the city quietly after his miraculous release from jail may have been designed to protect the new congregation from further attack. His obstinance forced the officials to recognize that Roman citizens were legally preaching the gospel and that the new congregation was not part of a clandestine movement.

Paul visited the Philippian church at least twice and maintained a close, intimate relationship with them. Paul's receiving an offering from them indicates that they were friends of deep love, for Paul ordinarily made his own living.

Purpose

Paul wrote Philippians during his first Roman imprisonment, around AD 64. The church at Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to minister to Paul's needs and to take an offering to him. Paul wrote to express appreciation for their concern for him.

The theme of the epistle is the joy of the Christian life and service manifested under all circumstances. Sixteen times the words *joy* and *rejoice* appear in the book. Christian joy is more and better than mere happiness because it does not depend on what happens.

Outline

INTRODUCTION—Philippians 1:1-11

- I. PAUL'S EXPERIENCES—Philippians 1:12-30
 - A. His Joy in Tribulation (1:12-20)
 - B. The Secret of His Joy (1:21-30)
- II. PAUL'S EXAMPLES—Philippians 2:1-30
 - A. The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ (2:1-18)
 - B. The Service of Timothy (2:19-24)
 - C. The Sickness of Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
- III. PAUL'S EXHORTATIONS—3:1-4:20
 - A. The Power of Proper Theology (3:1-21)
 - B. The Power of Positive Thinking (4:1-9)
 - C. The Power of Perpetual Thanksgiving (4:10-20)

CONCLUSION—4:21-23

Commentary

Introduction

Philippians 1:1-11

Paul began his epistle to the Philippians by identifying himself and Timothy and the addressees, the saints in Jesus Christ at Philippi. In doing so, he established his position in life as a servant of Jesus Christ. He saluted the saints with the grace of God and then peace, the result of God's grace.

Joy characterized Paul's remembrance of and prayer ministry for the Philippians. His relationship with them was very intimate. He desired this relationship and their good fellowship with God to continue. He had great esteem, love, and confidence toward them. He was confident that they would grow in Christ and be steadfast unto the end.

I. Paul's Experiences

Philippians 1:12-30

A. His Joy in Tribulation

Paul had suffered because of the gospel, but it had been for the glory of God. The gospel had been advanced rather than hindered. His imprisonment in Rome had inspired a fearless confidence in many to preach the Word. Even though some men preached with the wrong attitude, others preached with love and sincerity. Paul rejoiced in that Christ was preached.

B. The Secret of His Joy

The secret of Paul's confident joy was his Christ-centered life. He wrapped his hope and expectations in the gospel and in his salvation. He wanted always to be bold in preaching. His longing to be with the Lord and his desire to preach the gospel, which would be more beneficial to the rest of the world, tore at him. For the gospel's sake, he was content to stay on earth to be a witness.

Paul advised the Philippians to let their conversation—their conduct or their actions—be godly, to be unified in their efforts to win souls, and to keep the faith. He told them not to fear their adversaries. Even though these enemies thought they were doing harm, they were actually bringing the salvation of the saints closer.

II. Paul's Examples

Philippians 2:1-30

Christians must keep the proper spirit in relationship to other saints. First, they must be unified. Second, they must be humble and meek. Third, they must not be puffed up. To emphasize the importance of maintaining the proper attitude in adversity, Paul cited three examples.

A. The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

Paul's first example was Jesus Christ's sacrifice (2:5-11). God displayed the supreme spirit of humility in taking upon Himself the status of humanity. He, as deity, could never be humbled unless He did it Himself. He did so by coming in the flesh as Jesus Christ. Through the Incarnation, Jesus was glorified, however, and His name was exalted above all others.

Obtaining salvation for eternity is a serious matter. It is to be considered with fear and trembling. Paul admonished the Philippians to live blameless lives—not to justify themselves, but because they had been justified (James 2:18). If they remained faithful, Paul's work among them would not have been in vain.

Paul rejoiced in them enough that if he were to give his life for them, he could still rejoice (2:17-18).

B. The Service of Timothy

As a second example, Paul cited Timothy's service (2:19-24). Paul planned to send Timothy to the Philippians soon. He knew that Timothy would care for them in the same way that he would.

C. The Sickness of Epaphroditus

Paul gave Epaphroditus's sickness as his third example (2:25-30). The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Rome to minister to the imprisoned apostle. Before he returned, he became ill and had to stay in Rome until he recuperated. Paul advised them to be thankful for the consecration of this servant of Christ.

III. Paul's Exhortation

Philippians 3:1-4:20

A. The Power of Proper Theology

Paul warned against those who taught the necessity of a literal circumcision for salvation, calling them "dogs." He reminded the church that they were of the circumcision of Christ, which is of the heart and not the Law. Salvation is a work of the Spirit.

Paul could have boasted of more in the flesh than these false teachers. Paul excelled as far as education, rank, intelligence, zeal, and culture (3:4-6). Yet Paul gladly gave up all he had for the cause of Christ (3:7-14). He had been stopped by God in his climb in the world. He could not claim perfection in Christ, as he could in the world. Nevertheless, he pressed toward it. He strove to live completely in Christ—knowing and being acquainted with His suffering, death, and resurrection.

To be perfect, we must press toward the mark as Paul did. We must keep going upward and onward (3:15-17). We must keep what we have attained and press on. Unfortunately, some do not, and their end is destruction (3:18-19).

B. The Power of Positive Thinking

Christians have the hope of being changed, glorified, and made like Christ. Therefore, they must be strong and steadfast. Constant perseverance will heal personal rifts and cause Christians to agree with each other in the Lord. Paul gave some personal messages and general admonitions to be moderate, joyful, thankful, and prayerful (4:1-7).

In Philippians 4:8-9, Paul focused on the mental life of Christians. They are to think on things that are true, honorable, just, righteous, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. They are to practice the things that Paul taught and exemplified. The result will mean not only possessing "the peace of God" but also "the God of peace."

C. The Power of Perpetual Thanksgiving

Paul had learned to be content in every situation. Whether abased or abounding, Paul knew the joy of giving thanks. He was thankful for the Philippians' liberality. And he had learned in the gospel work that he could depend upon God for every need. He could be content in Him. He assured the Philippians that God would also supply their needs: "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (4:19).

Conclusion

Philippians 4:21-23

In closing, Paul saluted the saints at Philippi. Likewise, he extended the greetings of those with him, especially those who belonged to the emperor's household.

Note

- ¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. II: The Pauline Epistles*



(Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 282-90.

Chapter 10

First Timothy

Authorship and Background

First Timothy is the first of Paul's three pastoral epistles, so called because they were written to young ministers, instructing them concerning church government. The other pastoral epistles are II Timothy and Titus.

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. (See Acts 16:1.) From his childhood, his mother and grandmother had instructed him in the Hebrew Scriptures (II Timothy 1:5; 3:15), and he embraced their earnest faith.

Acts 14:8-20 and I Timothy 1:1-2 indicate that Timothy was one of Paul's personal converts, won while Paul was at Lystra on his first missionary journey. During Paul's second missionary journey, he invited the young but active and faithful Timothy to accompany him. Paul ordained Timothy to the ministry, and he became one of Paul's most constant companions. As a concession to the Jews, Paul circumcised the young minister (Acts 16:3).

In contrast to forceful Paul, several passages of Scripture indicate that Timothy may have been timid, retiring, in uncertain health, and perhaps even nervous due to his youth (4:12; 5:23; I Corinthians 16:10-11). Yet Timothy had Paul's confidence, as is evident from Paul's delegating difficult and delicate tasks to Timothy during the course of their prolonged association (1:3; I Thessalonians 3:1-2; I Corinthians 4:17).

Paul showed his love for Timothy through the two letters addressed to him. The young minister was one of Paul's most intimate friends. When Paul's end drew near, it was Timothy whom he yearned to have with him and for whom he specially sent (II Timothy 4:9, 13). After Paul left for Macedonia, he addressed this epistle to Timothy, who was stationed at Ephesus (1:3). The actual date of the writing is uncertain. It was apparently after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome in the spring of AD 63.

Purpose

As the letter was personally addressed to Timothy, its purpose was, first of all, to aid him in the formidable tasks assigned by Paul. The letter certified that he labored as Paul's representative. Paul counseled him not to allow his youth to intimidate him (4:11-13).

In writing, Paul also had the larger interests of the churches in mind. Timothy had been left behind to check the evil influence exerted by certain would-be teachers (1:3-7). These false

teachers were apparently Gnostic Judaizers. Because of the evil effects of their teaching (1:4; 6:4-5), the welfare of the church necessitated that these teachers be refuted. Consequently, Paul instructed Timothy concerning his work in the church.

Outline

SALUTATION—I Timothy 1:1-2

- I. SOUND DOCTRINE—I Timothy 1:3-20
- II. PUBLIC WORSHIP—I Timothy 2:1-15
- III. CHURCH GOVERNMENT—I Timothy 3:1-16
- IV. ADVICE TO TIMOTHY—I Timothy 4:1-6:19

CONCLUSION—I Timothy 6:20-21

Commentary

Salutation

I Timothy 1:1-2

Paul greeted Timothy as “my own son in the faith.” This shows the close relationship between the apostle and the young minister.

I. Sound Doctrine

I Timothy 1:3-20

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to oversee the church and to deal with any false doctrines that would arise. The principal errors confronting him were possibly an early form of Gnosticism (1:4) and legalism (1:5-11). Gnosticism denied the deity of Christ and substituted endless genealogies and theories about celestial powers and mediating angels. These theories and genealogies caused strife and were to be avoided. Legalism denied the atoning power of Christ’s death and taught that salvation came through strict adherence to the Mosaic law. But the Law was given to convict the sinner of his evil deeds; it was not intended as a means of salvation.

Paul used himself as an example to show that salvation is the result of God’s grace (1:12-17). Paul, who considered himself to be the chief of sinners, had blasphemed and persecuted the church through ignorance. Yet God in His endless mercy saved him that he might be an example or pattern to those who would believe in Christ in the future. Paul’s joy because of his salvation caused him to burst forth in praise, declaring that the God who saved him is the only God, eternal, immortal, invisible, wise, and worthy of honor and glory forever.

Paul charged Timothy to fight a good fight, to keep the faith, and to maintain a good conscience, for a good conscience is to be cherished (1:18-20). Paul mentioned two men who had given up the faith and who had been delivered to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme.

II. Public Worship

I Timothy 2:1-15

Paul urged that prayer be made for all men, especially for kings and others in authority (2:1-4). God accepts these supplications, for it is His will that all should be saved. Christians know that they can depend upon God to hear and accept their prayers and thanksgiving, for they have one God and a mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (2:5-7).

A person's attitude in public prayer is important. Men are to pray, lifting up clean hands, free from sin, and having hearts free from secret grudges and unbelief (2:8). Women are to dress modestly, adorning themselves with good works instead of the gaudy fashions of the world (2:9-10). They are also to remember God's order for the sexes and not to usurp a man's authority (2:11-15).

III. Church Government

I Timothy 3:1-16

Paul listed several qualifications for a bishop. He must be blameless, self-controlled, the husband of only one living wife, sober-minded, of good behavior, given to hospitality, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not quarrelsome, not greedy for money, patient, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, and one who is experienced. He must have a good reputation among those outside the church in everything.

The apostle gave similar qualifications for a deacon. (See also Acts 6.) The deacons, the ones who care for the secular needs of the church, must be grave, straightforward, not given to wine or love of money, and keepers of the faith. They must be proven for a time; then they can be appointed if they are found blameless. Deacons must have only one wife and rule their homes well. A deacon's wife or a deaconess must also be grave, sober, faithful, not slanderous.

Paul wrote so that the saints would know how to behave in the house of God (3:14-15).

The mystery of godliness, or God making Himself man, is in contrast to the mystery of iniquity, or man making himself God (3:16). First Timothy 3:16 is an important verse in its relationship to the Godhead, for it clearly identifies Jesus as God. In writing on this verse, R. V. Reynolds stated:

Here Paul burst into a hymn of praise with a poetic statement of truth declaring the deity of Jesus. It is clear that the apostle was referring to Jesus, emphasizing the incarnation in harmony with the doctrine of the virgin birth. It should be noted that Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh. By the presence of the Spirit, Christ's ministry was vindicated and proven true in all His claims. The final vindication of Christ was His resurrection

and ascension. This song of praise absolutely proves the deity of Jesus. He is very God, and at the same time, perfect man.¹

IV. Advice to Timothy

I Timothy 4:1-6:19

Paul warned against heretical teachings (4:1-5). There are, were, and will be those who try to pervert the truth with ordinances of man and of Satan; believers must be wise and follow the leadings of the Spirit of God.

Paul commissioned Timothy to preach the truth (4:6-8). Timothy was told not only to refuse false teachings himself, but to make certain that he preached the truth to others. He was to practice godliness, for it was profitable in all things.

Paul reminded Timothy that even a young person can be a profitable worker for the Lord and that he should not allow others to despise or think less of him because of his youth (4:9-16). He was to be an example for the believers in every phase of his life, giving attention to keeping himself close to the Lord and to doing His will.

Paul instructed Timothy regarding his relationships as a young minister with members of the church (5:1-25). Elders should be treated as fathers, with all respect; younger men should be honored as brothers. Older women should be esteemed as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, with all purity. Some of the elder widows were supported by the church, possibly serving as deaconesses (5:3-16). This practice was not encouraged for the younger widows, who would become idle. Paul advised that they marry and raise families. If a widow had Christian relatives, they were to assume the responsibility of caring for her rather than the church. A widow was to be over sixty years of age before being enrolled as one of those whom the church supported.

Double honor was to be given to those elders (pastors) who led well (5:17-21). Timothy was not to be partial or quick to believe accusations made against elders.

Paul admonished Timothy to take proper care of his own body for his health's sake and to keep himself pure (5:22-25). Even as a man's evil works follow him, so also do his good works.

In the early church, there were cases where masters and slaves were in the same congregation. They were to treat each other as brothers in the Lord (6:1-2).

Those who refuse the true doctrine of Christ will fall into all manner of false teaching and practices. Worldly gain is one of the greatest weaknesses and temptations to fight against. We should learn to be content with godliness, which is great gain.

Paul charged Timothy to keep himself from the things of the world—without spot or wrinkle (6:11-19). He was to charge the rich not to be arrogant or to trust in riches.

Conclusion

I Timothy 6:20-21

Paul concluded this epistle to Timothy with a final charge to keep what was committed to him.

Note

- ¹ R. V. Reynolds, *International Alpha Bible Course: Epistles II* (Hazelwood, Missouri: Overseas Ministries Publications, 1983), 12.

Chapter 11

Titus

Authorship and Background

This pastoral letter is addressed to Titus, an intimate friend of Paul. While he is not mentioned in Acts, various references in the epistles show he was one of Paul's capable and devoted companions, a trusted worker for the Lord.

Titus was a Greek (Galatians 2:3), and he apparently converted to Christ directly out of heathenism. He successfully handled the delicate tasks assigned to him by Paul, including dealing with the Corinthian church (II Corinthians 7:5-7; 8:6, 10). Paul later left him on the island of Crete to organize the church there. This epistle was addressed to Titus while he was in Crete.

Crete is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, and it lies southeast of Greece. It is the home of an ancient civilization.

During Paul's days, the Cretans were noted as daring sailors and famous bowmen, but they were also notoriously immoral (1:12-13). Even nonbiblical writers such as Livy and Plutarch attested to their evil character. "To Cretize" meant "to lie." The emphasis upon worthy Christian conduct in the epistle implies that moral conditions even in the churches were not what one would desire. Many false teachers, apparently mostly Jewish (1:10), also plagued the church.

The date of the writing is uncertain. Hiebert suggests AD 63.¹ R. V. Reynolds states that Paul wrote this epistle at the same time he penned I Timothy.² Other scholars date the letter as late as AD 64-66.³

Purpose

Paul's writing to Titus accomplished several goals.

1. The epistle provided Titus with the needed authorization for his work on Crete. It placed in his hands written instructions to which he could appeal to prove that he was acting in accordance with apostolic directions.
2. The letter gave Titus specific instructions concerning his work in the churches.
3. It imparted information to Titus personally, including a message of commendation and instruction to him concerning Zenas and Apollos (3:13).
4. It informed Titus that Paul was sending a replacement and wished Titus to join him in Nicopolis.

Outline

SALUTATION—Titus 1:1-4

I. TITUS'S RESPONSIBILITY—Titus 1:5-16

II. SOUND DOCTRINE—Titus 2:1-15

III. PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS—Titus 3:1-11

CONCLUSION—3:12-15

Commentary

Salutation

Titus 1:1-4

Paul stated he was first a slave to God and then an apostle. He recognized God's ownership of his life because of Calvary and acknowledged his submission to God's will for his life.

I. Titus's Responsibility

Titus 1:5-16

Titus was sent to Crete to set the church in order and to organize the work there by ordaining elders in each city. To help him, Paul set forth the qualifications of a bishop (1:6-9). A bishop must live a blameless life, be pure before God and man, and be above reproach. This passage parallels I Timothy 3:1-7.

Titus's responsibility to the people of Crete is outlined in 1:10-16. The Cretans were wild by nature and tradition and known for their immorality. Paul charged Titus to preach the truth to them and bring them to a Christ-like life.

II. Sound Doctrine

Titus 2:1-15

Sound doctrine is necessary for all Christians, for it deals with every aspect of Christian living. It will make the older men sober, grave, temperate, and sound in faith, charity, and patience (2:1-2). Aged women are charged to hold sound doctrine so that their lives will be godly (2:3). The younger women are to follow the example of the older and to be sober, discreet, chaste, keepers at home, and obedient to their own husbands (2:4-5). Young men have a great responsibility as Christians to live lives that cannot be condemned and to serve as a pattern to all (2:6-8). Servants too must behave as Christians, obedient to their masters (2:9-10).

The work of God's grace is for all men (2:11-15). Grace will motivate us to holiness and prepare us in this life for the blessed hope of the Second Coming. Christ has imparted grace to us

and separated us exclusively unto Himself. Paul charged Titus to use his authority and proclaim the message of God's grace to all.

Paul's reference to the "appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2:13) teaches that Jesus Christ is both the great God and Savior. It also emphasizes that the hope of the church is the return of Jesus for His saints and that the purpose of His dying for us was to redeem us from all sin.⁴

III. Practical Instructions

Titus 3:1-11

Paul told Titus how he should live in view of what God had already done for him. He was to teach the church to obey civil authorities. He was to avoid unprofitable arguments and controversial ideas that would only cause division.

Good works on our part are but small recompense to God in the light of the mercy that God has bestowed upon us. We can do nothing to save ourselves. Salvation comes through God's grace and mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, not by human works or righteousness.

Conclusion

Titus 3:12-15

In closing, Paul gave final instructions to Titus and informed him that he was sending his replacement to Crete. Titus was to join Paul in Nicopolis. Paul also extended greetings to those who helped him in the work of the Lord.

Notes

- ¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. II: The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 344.
- ² R. V Reynolds, *International Alpha Bible Course: Epistles III* (Hazelwood, Missouri: Overseas Ministries Publications, 1983), 33.
- ³ Merrill F. Unger, *The Hodder Bible Handbook* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 569.
- ⁴ Reynolds, 35-36.

Chapter 12

Second Timothy

Authorship and Background

In July of AD 64, a great fire broke out and destroyed most of Rome. Rumors whispered that Emperor Nero started it. To divert attention from himself, Nero accused the Christians and persecuted them. From that time on, it became far more dangerous to preach Christ.

Paul was arrested again about AD 66. Many who could have come to his defense refused to do so out of fear for their lives (1:15). Paul boldly rose to his own defense and was initially successful. He was placed in prison, and the case was adjourned for further study by the court (4:17).

His circumstances now were far less pleasant than during his first imprisonment. During his first imprisonment, Paul lived in his own hired home, enjoyed a circle of friends, and was treated well by the Roman authorities. This time he was actually confined in prison, virtually alone, except for the help of a few brave souls such as Onesimus. Under these conditions, he wrote again to Timothy.

Purpose

Paul had several reasons for writing to Timothy. First, he wished to comfort him and encourage him to remain loyal to the Lord in the face of fierce persecution and apostasy. Second, prompted by his deep loneliness, he craved human sympathy and understanding while awaiting the hour of his martyrdom. He yearned to see Timothy and John Mark once more. Third, he had physical needs and desires. He asked for his cloak and a number of books and parchments to comfort him. Timothy could bring these things to him.

The epistle also afforded Paul an opportunity to leave a concluding testimony of his victorious years of service to Jesus Christ. This epistle has a unique appeal as it is the last recorded words of a great man who was soon to die. This final epistle is the most personal of all that Paul wrote.

It is not known if Paul ever saw Timothy again.

Outline

SALUTATION—II Timothy 1:1-5

I. EXHORTATION TO FAITHFULNESS—II Timothy 1:6-2:26

II. THE LAST DAYS—II Timothy 3:1-4:8

CONCLUSION—II Timothy 4:9-22

Commentary

Salutation

II Timothy 1:1-5

Paul began his last letter with the standard form of salutation (1:1-2). In verses 3-5, Paul expressed his desire to see Timothy.

I. Exhortation to Faithfulness

II Timothy 1:6-2:26

Paul admonished Timothy to be constant (1:6-18). As the Lord had given him a spirit of boldness and of a sound mind, and not one of fear, he ought to be bold in Him. As the Lord had redeemed him and given him a holy calling, he should hold to sound doctrine and be steadfast.

This admonition was given in light of those of Asia who had turned away from Paul to apostasy, most notably Phygellus and Hermogenes. Timothy was to use the Spirit God had given him. As an example, Paul cited his own experience. He stated, “For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (1:12).

In contrast to Phygellus and Hermogenes, Paul reminded Timothy of Onesiphorus and his ministry to Paul at Rome and Ephesus.

Paul exhorted Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul gave seven analogies of a gospel minister:

1. A steward (2:1-2)

Timothy had been entrusted with the gospel of Christ. He was responsible to impart it to faithful men who could teach the truth to others.

2. A soldier (2:3-4)

As a good soldier forfeits all claim to anything in a material or natural sense, Timothy was to be wholly given over to his Commander-in-Chief.

3. An athlete (2:5)

Just like an athlete, Timothy would have to strive lawfully if he were to gain in this world.

4. A husbandman (farmer) (2:6-7)

If Timothy would work hard, he would be paid well. It is the hardworking farmer who is able to be the first partaker of the fruits.

5. A sufferer (2:8-13)

Paul had suffered, but he endured for the sake of the ones who saw his example. The Lord is faithful and cannot deny Himself. Paul stated, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2:12).

6. A student (2:14-19)

As a wise student, Timothy was exhorted to avoid arguments and foolish talk, which was unprofitable. Instead, he was to study God’s Word diligently.

7. A servant (2:20-26)

Timothy was to separate himself from contaminating and corrupting influences and to follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace. As a minister, he was never to have a fighting spirit, for “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2:24-25).

II. The Last Days

II Timothy 3:1-4:8

In the last days people will be ungodly, thinking first and always of themselves and their desires (3:1-9). Their fate is destruction, and their folly will be made known to all.

Paul contrasted his life and his goals to those people just mentioned (3:10-13). He had endured much for the sake of the gospel, as all who live for Christ will, yet he had not refrained from preaching. Everyone knew his manner of life, doctrine, and purpose. Nevertheless, evil people will not be stopped, but will become worse.

Paul advised Timothy that if he would retain what he had learned and would keep the Word of God, these things would make him wise unto salvation (3:14-15).

God inspired all Scriptures for a definite purpose (3:16-17): teaching (doctrine), reproof of sin, correction, and instruction in righteousness. If a person will follow God’s Word, he can be sure of salvation. It will guard him against apostasy.

Paul’s final charge to Timothy is moving (4:1-5). He admonished the young minister to be faithful and constant in his Christian life. Even though many would turn away from the truth, Timothy must prove himself faithful and make full proof of his ministry.

Paul gave him nine imperatives in verses 2 and 5:

1. Preach the word—There is a difference between preaching the Word and preaching about the Word; Timothy was to preach the Word.
2. Be instant—Be ready when it is convenient and when it is not.
3. Reprove—Convict; convince.
4. Rebuke—Charge; correct.
5. Exhort—Earnestly beseech or entreat; encourage. These things are to be done with all longsuffering (patience) and doctrine (instruction).

6. Watch in all things—Be alert and sober.
7. Endure afflictions—Endure hardships.
8. Do the work of an evangelist—Preach the gospel to the lost.
9. Make full proof of thy ministry—Completely fulfill the duties of your ministry.¹

Second Timothy 4:6-8 is one of the most victorious passages in Scripture. Paul was sure of his reward. He felt that he was near the end of his journey. Since he had been faithful, he knew he would receive a prize. With a proclamation of triumph, Paul assured this reward to all who look forward to the coming of the Lord and are faithful.

Conclusion

II Timothy 4:9-22

Paul was almost alone. Some of his helpers had turned back into the world. Others, excepting Luke, were not able to be with him. With this situation as a backdrop, Paul instructed Timothy regarding his property that he had left at Troas. He then greeted those who had labored with him in the gospel.

Note

¹ R. V. Reynolds, *International Alpha Bible Course: Epistles III* (Hazelwood, Missouri: Overseas Ministries Publications, 1983), 28-29.

Part 2

General Epistles

The seven epistles penned by James, Peter, John, and Jude are often called General Epistles. Unlike Paul, who addressed his epistles to specific churches or individuals, these writers wrote to believers at large. (John did address two small letters to individuals, however.)

Chapter 13

James

Authorship and Background

The New Testament mentions three prominent persons who were named James: an apostle who was the brother of John (Matthew 10:2), an apostle who was the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3), and the half brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19). Most scholars conclude that the Lord's half brother authored this epistle.¹

James was an unbeliever during the Lord's ministry. Following the Resurrection, he remained in Jerusalem with Mary, his mother, and saw Jesus (I Corinthians 15:7). James was among the 120 in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). He pastored the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17) and moderated the first church council (Acts 15:13, 19).

He was called James the Just because of his sterling character. It is reported that he spent so much time in prayer that his knees were calloused like a camel's knees. According to Josephus, the renowned Jewish historian, James was martyred at Jerusalem in AD 62 or 63.²

Scholars consider the Epistle of James to be the first of the Christian letters even though its date is uncertain. James wrote from the standpoint of a Jewish Christian, probably in AD 48 or 49, before the council at Jerusalem.

Purpose

James addressed the Jewish Christians who were scattered abroad in the Dispersion. These Jewish Christians were targets of intense persecution from their fellow countrymen and Gentiles. James wrote to encourage them, to correct disorders in the assemblies, and to combat the tendency to separate faith from works.³

The Epistle of James is a book of Christian ethics. It contains little direct doctrinal teaching but is full of practical instructions. It deals more with religion than salvation. One can be religious and not be saved, but it is impossible to be saved without being religious. (Religion may be thought of as outward or public worship while salvation concerns the inward results of faith.) The epistle emphasizes the need of living, active faith and goes back to the Sermon on the Mount in demanding real works of Christian living.

Because of his stress on works, many people contend that James differed with Paul concerning the teaching of grace. A careful analysis of the inspired writings of both men, however, shows a harmony of theology but a difference in emphasis.

Outline

SALUTATION—James 1:1

- I. TRUE RELIGION—James 1:2-27
 - A. Shown by Patience (1:2-11)
 - B. Shown by Right Attitude in Trials (1:12-18)
 - C. Shown by Personal Conduct (1:19-27)
- II. TRUE FAITH—James 2:1-3:12
 - A. Shown by Impartiality (2:1-13)
 - B. Shown by Works (2:14-26)
 - C. Shown by Words (3:1-12)
- III. TRUE WISDOM—James 3:13-5:20
 - A. Shown by Conduct (3:13-18)
 - B. Lack Shown by Friendship with the World (4:1-10)
 - C. Lack Shown by Errors of Ignorance (4:11-5:12)
 - D. Shown by Prayer (5:13-18)
 - E. Shown by Soulwinning (5:19-20)

Commentary

Salutation

James 1:1

Although he was “the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19) and an influential leader of the church in Jerusalem and Judea, James humbly identified himself simply as “a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He addressed the letter to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” His greeting helps to destroy myths about the so-called ten lost tribes and British Israelism. The Jewish remnant that returned to rebuild Jerusalem under Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel contained members of each tribe. During New Testament times, the Israelites were still familiar with the tribes to which they belonged. However, the Roman general Titus destroyed all official records and dispersed the nation in AD 70 by his destruction of Jerusalem.⁴

I. True Religion

James 1:2-27

A. Shown by Patience

James wrote to a persecuted church. In spite of persecution, he maintained that true religion is shown by patience (1:2-18).

Temptations come to all. They are pressures that try a person's faith in God. In 1:2 *temptation* signifies trials or external forces such as persecution, famine, illness, sorrow, and death. In 1:14 James spoke of the temptations that arise from personal lusts. These temptations are internal pressures generated by man's own fallen nature and base desires.

Having the proper attitude toward trials will help Christians prepare for them. James therefore urged them to rejoice when they were tested. Why? He listed three reasons:

1. Testing gives knowledge and experience.
2. Knowledge and experience result in patient endurance.
3. Patient endurance leads to full or complete Christian maturity.

Understanding the reasons for testing enables the believer to regard temptation as an opportunity to grow in grace. James certainly was not suggesting that a temptation or trial is joyful in itself. Rather, joy comes from the result of the trial: the patience to endure, which in turn brings a glorious and victorious life in Christ.

If anyone lacks this understanding regarding temptations, divine wisdom is available (1:5-11). All he needs to do is ask God. God has no desire for people to be ignorant concerning Himself or the devil. This is why He has given His Word and His Spirit to the believer to lead and guide him into all truth. When a person asks for wisdom, he must ready himself to receive it.

B. Shown by Right Attitude in Trials

Understanding why trials arise should result in a Christian having the proper attitude during his testing and knowing how to handle temptation (1:12-18). God has promised a crown of life to all who patiently endure temptation. It is assured to "them that love him." This phrase makes a pertinent connection between loving the Lord and enduring temptation.

God does not tempt the believer to sin, but He allows him to be tried by Satan. Many temptations arise from the believer's own sinful nature (1:14). Being tempted is no sin, but entertaining temptation leads to sin. If a person's inner desires are not resisted, they give birth to sin, which ultimately brings death.

Under pressure from trials and temptations, it might be easy to lose sight of God's goodness to mankind (1:15-18). Nevertheless, His gifts show His goodness. The greatest gift, of course, is the new birth, which leads to eternal life in Christ.

C. Shown by Personal Conduct

True religion is shown by personal conduct (1:19-27). External religious practice must be accompanied by internal godliness to be genuine.

Unchecked anger leads only to unrighteousness and heartache (1:10-20). To be eager to hear and slow to speak is an excellent pattern for cooling the coals of anger.

Doing and hearing go hand in hand (1:21-25). The believer must lay aside all filthiness of flesh and spirit. With worldliness trimmed from the trunk of his life, the Word can be engrafted into the heart and life, actually becoming a part of the person. Likewise, seeing himself in the mirror of God's Word causes him to take his first steps toward God. This faultless mirror reflects the image of his soul. James urged the Christian to look in it and then do what is necessary to obey it.

An unbridled tongue indicates a vain, empty religion (1:26-27). True religion involves acts of charity and mercy. Persons in distress are the Christian's responsibility. Moreover, a person who has been cleansed from the filth of this world is to keep himself unspotted.

II. True Faith

James 2:1-3:12

A. Shown by Impartiality

Impartiality is a sign of true faith (2:1-13). Partiality, the sin of displaying undue respect or disrespect for certain persons, is inconsistent with the pattern of the Lord. As brethren, Christians must never have "respect of persons" or prejudice (2:1-4). Having the mind of Christ, they must see all people in the same light. Each person is an eternal soul in need of a Savior.

God's choice was not made on the basis of financial rating (2:5-7). He chose those who were "rich in faith." For the most part, these people were the poor of this world.

Obedience to the royal law safeguards the heart against the sin of partiality (2:8-13). To ignore it and have respect of persons is to sin, and God will judge sin.

B. Shown by Works

Christianity is more than a set of theological concepts and creeds. It is a lifestyle that grows out of an understanding of the Word of God. Therefore, works are also an indication of true faith (2:14-26).

The position of the man who claims faith without any accompanying works as a result of salvation is vain. True faith is evidenced by works. James was not speaking of earning salvation but of the attitude and action of a person who is saved. To illustrate, James offered two Old Testament examples:

1. Abraham's faith would have been imperfect (incomplete) without the act of offering up his son Isaac.
2. Rahab was an alien to the hope of Israel. Her faith, however, and her resulting action became the means of justification.

Consequently, as a body without spirit is dead, so is faith without works. Faith can benefit a person only when it is put into action and lived out.

C. Shown by Words

Another form of works is a person's language. Words then manifest true faith (3:1-12). James warned those who desire to teach (3:1). Their influence is largely a result of what they say. Their verbal instructions will either lead a person on to eternal life or leave him in his sins. A grave responsibility is placed upon those who minister the Word of God, both in teaching and preaching.

While it is one of the smaller members of the human body, the tongue has been described as the most treacherous thing a person possesses. It can bless or curse. The person who can bridle his tongue can control his whole personality.

To illustrate the power of the small tongue, James gave three analogies:

1. The bit controls a horse when placed in its mouth.
2. A slight movement of the helm changes a ship's course.
3. A tiny spark ignites a raging inferno.

An unruly tongue is incompatible with the Christian profession (3:9-12). The point is plain: How can a person with an unruly tongue profess to be an adherent of the true faith? To praise or bless God and to curse people is inconsistent. True faith is manifest by a person's words. Having godly motives helps control the tongue.

III. True Wisdom

James 3:13-5:20

A. Shown by Conduct

It is only logical that if works demonstrate genuine religion, then a person's conduct shows true wisdom (3:13-18). When motivated by bitter envy and strife, a person can only produce factions, selfish ambitions, hatred, and every other work of the flesh.

True wisdom produces good fruit (3:13, 17-18). Not desiring to appear wise, the wise man "with meekness of wisdom" uses his knowledge to the edifying of the kingdom of God. James enumerated the characteristics of true or heavenly wisdom. The result of true wisdom is righteousness. "Them that make peace" sow the seed (Word) in hope. In the soil of "peace," it will grow and yield the fruit of righteousness.

B. Lack Shown by Friendship with the World

Friendship with the world indicates a lack of wisdom (4:1-10). The motives and methods of the world result from lusts (4:1-4). The big battleground is in the heart of the individual. If motivated by carnal lusts, a person will adopt worldly methods to attain his goals. He must guard both his motives and his methods.

God gives grace to overcome fleshly lusts. For this grace to work freely, a person must humble himself and submit himself to God (4:7-10). He must actively resist Satan, and when he does, Satan will flee. Cleansed lives and pure hearts will draw people near to God.

C. Lack Shown by Errors of Ignorance

In contrast to true wisdom, some sins are committed out of ignorance, with the sinner not recognizing the source or the results of his actions.

1. Slandering and judging others (4:11-12)
Among the most familiar manifestations of the spirit of strife and bitter envying is unjust criticism and slander of the brethren.
2. False confidence and self-will (4:13-17)
The attitude described in this passage is actually a form of practical atheism. Without regard for God's will, a self-willed person plans the future as though it were his. In his pride, he rejoices, and such rejoicing is evil.
3. Deception of riches (5:1-3)
Viewed in the right light, riches are destructive, deceitful, and perishing. The Christian cannot trust in wealth.
4. Results of dependence on money (5:4-6)
The love of money will cause a person to perpetrate injustice on his fellow man. Living lush, self-indulgent lives on the earth is another error of the ignorant. Self-indulgence, or selfishness, can cause someone to accuse righteous people falsely and can actually cause the destruction of a righteous life.
5. Impatience and grudging (5:7-11)
The Christian should exercise patience and not grudge against one another. James cited the examples of the suffering, affliction, and patience of the prophets and Job.
6. Sin of swearing (5:12)
Trials that test patience can cause a person to speak unadvisedly. A person's word should always be true; he should not have to resort to oaths to persuade others of his honesty. He should not bind himself by an oath lest he come under condemnation.

D. Shown by Prayer

The sick shows his faith by calling for the elders of the church to pray for him (5:13-18). (The word *elder* is synonymous with *bishop* or *pastor*.) When called, the elder is to respond by going to pray for the sick person. James instructed the elder to anoint the sick with oil in the "name of the Lord." The elder demonstrates his faith by his deed. Both must put their faith in God.

In addition to healing, the sick person has the promise of forgiveness of sins that he may have committed. Confession of faults and fervent prayer for one another carry the promise of healing.

In God's divine pattern, prayer is limitless in its efficacy. For example, Elijah's prayer had no ulterior, selfish motives. God heard and answered his earnest prayer.

E. Shown by Soulwinning

True wisdom is also manifested by soulwinning (5:19-20). An erring soul who is brought back to God by a loving, diligent brother is saved from death. When the sinner realizes the error of his ways and repents, a multitude of sins is hidden. Soulwinning is a noble work, and only the wisdom of God qualifies someone for such a task.

Notes

- ¹ Merrill F. Unger, *The Hodder Bible Handbook* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 605; Myer Pearlman, *Through the Bible Book by Book, Part IV* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1935), 77.
- ² William Whiston, translator, *The Works of Flavius Josephus, Vol. IV* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1974), 140.
- ³ Pearlman, 79.
- ⁴ G. Coleman Luck, *James, Faith in Action* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), 15.

Chapter 14

First Peter

Authorship and Background

The apostle Peter, also known as Simon, the son of Jonas, authored the two epistles that bear his name. He was one of the Twelve and was called to discipleship from the fishing industry. Though Roman Catholics attempt to establish that he wrote his first epistle from Rome and referred to “Babylon” figuratively (5:13), it is entirely possible that he actually wrote from ancient Babylon. Both Philo and Josephus attested to the large Jewish community at Babylon on the Euphrates during the apostolic era.¹

The epistle was probably written between AD 63 and 67.

Purpose

Suffering and persecution were the lot of the saints when Peter wrote. Their response to these circumstances would determine their eternal destiny. Peter wrote to comfort them in their day of trouble and to strengthen their bonds of faith by explaining their role in the kingdom and how they should act before God and man. He cited their hope as an incentive to fidelity.

Peter referred to suffering at least fifteen times and used eight Greek words to do so.

Outline

SALUTATION—I Peter 1:1-12

- I. CONDUCT BEFORE GOD—I Peter 1:13-2:10
- II. CONDUCT BEFORE MEN—I Peter 2:11-4:19
- III. CONDUCT IN THE CHURCH—I Peter 5:1-11

CONCLUSION—I Peter 5:12-14

Commentary

Salutation

I Peter 1:1-12

Peter referred to himself simply as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” in writing to the Christians scattered abroad. They were the elect, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. They were made holy “through the sanctification of the Spirit.” Christ had come into their hearts and lives and allowed them to share in His divine nature because they had simply yielded and accepted salvation on God’s terms.

Peter expressed thanks to the Savior for salvation through His mercy. Through everything, Christians can rejoice in the thought of their conversion. The first result of the new birth is hope. Their inheritance is laid up, reserved in Heaven, unmarred, and undefiled.

Christians are “kept by the power of God” (1:5). This phrase comes from a Greek military term that means to “keep a city safe with a garrison.” Through faith in Christ, Christians are guarded by the power of God until He comes and delivers them from this present world.

They rejoice because their trials of faith—which Peter said is more precious than gold—are perfecting (maturing) their faith to the glory and honor of God. Testing can be considered a divine training course to prepare the child of God to rule and reign eternally with Christ. Thus they can rejoice in the midst of suffering.

The Christians’ present faith is based upon their experience with God. Keeping that faith as it was imparted is essential in order to receive the ultimate salvation of their souls. That salvation is what the prophets longed to see and what they wrote about (1:11-12).

I. Conduct Before God

I Peter 1:13-2:10

Salvation came at a high cost—the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. As Christians are redeemed by His precious blood, their conduct before God should testify to their holy estate. Peter cited five spiritual incentives for holy living:

1. God’s glory (1:13)

Because of the glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, Peter instructed the saints to pull themselves together and prepare for their task. They are to cut off loose thinking and speculations, and bring their minds into a compact state of preparedness. With such an attitude, they can live holy lives in this world and have the “mind of Christ”—a mind that is single in purpose.

2. God’s holiness (1:14-15)

God’s holiness is the example that all believers should emulate. Because He is holy, they should be holy “in all manner of conversation.” *Conversation* means “conduct” or “behavior.” Their whole life must be permeated by holiness.

3. God’s Word (1:16)

God’s Word teaches that believers should live holy lives.

4. God's judgment (1:17)

The fact that God will judge everyone's works should prompt people to live uprightly, passing "the time of your sojourning here in fear." The fear urged on the Christian is not a state of terror but the reverential awe a son has for his father. He must realize that God will require an accounting for all sins. This kind of fear is not a negative element; it brings positive results and is a safeguard for holiness. Godly fear is composed of awe, wonder, and respect. If the believer loses his godly fear, he lacks a vital element of his worship.

5. God's love (1:18-21)

God manifested His great love for the world by the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary (3:18). The sacrificial death of our Lord was foreknown. He chose to die for our sins. His death was not an afterthought, but predetermined.

The redemptive act of sacrifice was completed on the cross. Yet Peter reminded the believers that the Resurrection and Ascension are the basis of faith and hope. Recognizing the price of redemption evokes love in the hearts of the redeemed.

Peter gave the order of Christian conversion: truth, obedience, regeneration, purity, love of the brethren (1:22).

He reminded them of the brevity of life and the fading quality of human glory. Their entire attention should be upon God's Word that endures forever and not on human glory that withers and fades. He referred to the gospel message that was preached at the first statement of faith. The "word" that is preached is translated from a Greek term meaning "speech" or "discourse" (1:25).

The thought of regeneration is carried on with the expression "as newborn babes" (2:2), and the new birth solicits both a positive and a negative response. Negatively, the child of God should lay aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisies, envies, and evil speaking. These sins are notably destructive to brotherly love and unity. The word *all* carries the thought of "every form of." Positively, the child of God should desire the "sincere milk of the word." The convert is a new creation and must have the proper food—the Word—to grow.

Peter led the readers to the "Living Stone" (2:4), a Greek term denoting a precious stone or a stone used for a specific purpose. As Peter developed the metaphor of a spiritual house, he kept before their minds the idea of a corporate body. Christians themselves are the building material, and only as they are joined together can they actually become the building God desires.

To the believers who come to Him, Jesus Christ is precious, but to the disobedient, He is a stone of stumbling. Verse 8 does not infer predestination; rather, the penalty of disobedience is decreed. By the grace of God, Christians are the "holy nation" of a holy God—a people with a divine purpose (2:9). They are a royal priesthood—an impossibility in the Old Testament under the Mosaic law.

II. Conduct Before Men

I Peter 2:11-4:19

Peter reminded the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor that they were not at home in this world. The terms he used touched on the relationship between the Christian and the pagan society in which they dwelt. He exhorted them to remain pilgrims and strangers (2:11), abstaining from fleshly lusts. “Fleshly lusts” in the Greek includes all the desires that originate in man’s corrupt nature and the degenerate appetites of the body.

Christ’s life demonstrated that humility and submission are not signs of weakness but strength. Similarly, much of a Christian’s conduct before men centers around the theme of submission. Thus, Peter taught submission to the following:

1. Civil authority (2:13)

God has ordained authority, and it plays a definite role in His economy. Consequently, the Christian is admonished to follow the example of Christ with regard to civil government. Following His example results in honor to those in authority and respect for the institution of civil government. The position should be respected even if the officeholder cannot be because of impropriety.

2. Masters (2:18)

While actual slavery is no longer a societal practice—at least in most places in the world—the fact that a slave was instructed to be submissive teaches what the Christian’s attitude should be toward those in authority—even those who would take advantage of him. In Peter’s day, some of the slaves assumed that their spiritual freedom guaranteed personal and political liberty as well. Their attempt to exercise these rights brought serious problems.

The same principles that Peter applied to slaves and masters may be applied to employee-employer relationships. The Christian worker may have to suffer wrong for doing right. In this context, Peter cited the example of Christ, who patiently endured suffering, although He was innocent of any wrongdoing (2:21-25).

3. Husbands (3:1)

In the home, the husband and father is the head by divine appointment (Genesis 3:16). The wife is to be submissive to her husband—even if he is an unbeliever. Peter reasoned that if the wife retains the submissive attitude God intended, her conduct will be the means of winning the unsaved husband to God. Even in Peter’s day, beautification of the physical body by various means was an advanced art. Personal adornment was carried to the extreme. Christian women, Peter taught, were not to seek worldly adornment but to adorn themselves by a meek and quiet spirit (3:3-6). The example of Sarah and Abraham is set forth as a pattern of holy women in submission to their husbands.

The husband is to be considerate of his wife and to render the honor due her (3:7). He is to love his wife as the Lord loves the church. He is under as heavy an obligation to lovingly carry out his responsibility while submitting to Christ as his wife is to acknowledge his authority.

Realizing the difficulty of living harmoniously with others in times of trial, Peter listed several qualities that should exist among Christians: unity of mind, compassion, love, courtesy, and mercy.

Peter then quoted Psalm 34:12-15 to describe the life Christians should live in order to be blessed. (Psalm 34 shows what “good days” really are in God’s economy.) Life refers to the earthly life (3:10). In every situation, the Christian should pray, “Lord, let me learn the lesson that these circumstances can teach me.” Each experience will profit him and enable him to be heard of God.

The children of God should be set apart, or acknowledge God as Lord in their hearts (3:14-17). Their answers to unbelievers about their faith should be seasoned with reasonableness, humility, and a calm boldness without belligerence. Their answers will go no farther than their conduct in Christ will project. Sometimes they will have to suffer for doing good, as Christ did.

Peter drew a parallel between the eight souls in the ark and our salvation (3:18-22). The blood of Jesus is brought into water baptism by calling on His name. (See Acts 22:16.) Baptism is essential to salvation, along with faith, repentance, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Peter again referred to the suffering of Christ as an example for Christians to follow (4:1-2). He instructed them to arm themselves with the high resolve that caused Christ to be willing to suffer patiently according to the will of God.

People unjustly accused the Lord, and His disciples should expect to suffer injustices (4:3-5). Those who inflict such are actually persecuting the Lord Himself and shall give account to Him.

Judgment is inevitable, for all must stand before God without excuse (4:6-7). Those who are now dead had their opportunity also, and will be judged according to the light available during the age in which they lived. Peter urged believers to prayerful activity, not unbalanced speculation.

Love expresses forgiveness, prompts forgiveness, and makes a path to the atoning sacrifice (4:8-10). Thus, Christians are to have fervent love.

Those who minister to others in the spiritual realm should do so faithfully and diligently that God may be praised (4:11).

“Fiery trials” are for a purpose, not to be counted as strange, but to be expected and even rejoiced over (4:12-16). They test one’s faith, and tested faith emerges stronger and purer. This teaching corresponds to James 1:2-4.

Suffering comes to the Christian by the permission of God, and God allows it for a purpose (4:17-19). Therefore the Christian should commit the keeping of his soul to God, who is faithful.

III. Conduct in the Church

I Peter 5:1-11

Peter urged pastors to feed (pasture or tend), guide (provide godly leadership), and protect the flock of God. He also listed some of the perils involved in taking oversight of the flock:

- doing so by constraint (those engaged in pastoral labors for any reason other than a divine summons should not be there),
- being motivated by filthy lucre (they must not be greedy),
- being lords over God's heritage (they must lead by example and not by dictatorial methods), and
- forgetting that the Chief Shepherd shall appear to reward them.

Peter reminded all Christians to put on humility—let it cover all their lives—in order to keep God's face turned toward them. They are to cast their cares upon Christ. *Care* refers to anything that would cause them worry, alarm, or uncertainty. The Christian will be kept by the power of God, but he must remain alert, for Satan will take advantage of an unguarded moment. The Christian must be steadfast in resisting Satan. The word *steadfast* implies a solid firmness. Only a faith based in and on the Rock can be of this quality. It will cause the devil to flee. And the Christian's suffering will help to strengthen and establish him.

Conclusion

I Peter 5:12-14

Peter urged believers to stand fast in the true grace of God. He closed with the same greeting with which he opened his letter—peace.

Note

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *The Hodder Bible Handbook* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 621.

Chapter 15

Second Peter

Authorship and Background

The apostle Peter wrote II Peter three or four years after his first epistle to answer specific needs that had arisen in the church.

Scholars assume that II Peter was written shortly before Peter's martyrdom. Traditional teaching declares that Peter was martyred in Rome. Consequently, II Peter could have been written from there, but there is no substantial evidence to support this claim.

Purpose

First Peter was written to encourage the church in the face of an external threat—persecution. Second Peter was written to warn the church of an internal threat—false doctrine. The church, threatened by heresies and apostasies, needed the steadying strength of the knowledge of truth. Thus, II Peter deals with the inward perils of heresy and apostasy.

Knowledge is a key word in II Peter. The words *know* or *knowledge* occur at least thirteen times. *Know* is used to mean a living participation in truth in the sense that the Lord used it in John 17:3: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Outline

SALUTATION—II Peter 1:1-4

I. CHRISTIAN GROWTH—II Peter 1:5-21

II. FALSE TEACHERS—II Peter 2:1-22

A. Their Conduct (2:1-3)

B. Their Future (2:4-9)

C. Their Characteristics (2:10-22)

III. THE LORD'S COMING—II Peter 3:1-13

CONCLUSION—II Peter 3:14-18

Commentary

Salutation

II Peter 1:1-4

Peter addressed his second letter to “them that have obtained like precious faith.” This phrase included the same widely scattered community of believers he saluted in I Peter.

Peter touched heavily on the epistle’s primary theme in his salutation. He stated that grace and peace can be multiplied “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Someone cannot be a partaker of righteousness without knowing what is right. Every gift is given through knowledge—through the knowledge of Him the child of God receives precious promises. Through these promises he obtains a twofold blessing: leaving the corrupt way of life and becoming a new creation through a spiritual new birth.

I. Christian Growth

II Peter 1:5-21

Peter reminded his readers that through diligence they make progress and assure their preservation, for spiritual growth is not automatic. Faith is the root from which all the succeeding graces flow. To be an active and fruitful Christian, these virtues are necessary. The believer will either press onward to the heights of the Christian life or sink back into a darkness where he even forgets from what he was saved.

To help ensure spiritual growth, Peter cited seven basic steps to spiritual fruitfulness based on the foundation of faith. To their faith, the believers are to add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. The sum of these attributes equals fruitfulness in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though Peter said his readers were “established in the present truth” (1:12), he saw the need to remind them of these things. He was aware of his coming death, for his words reveal the urgency of a dying man to dying men (1:13-15).

The Jesus that Peter preached was the “Lord of all,” and there was no doubt of what he, James, and John had witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration (1:16-18). Nevertheless, God’s Word, forever settled in Heaven, is the greatest authority anyone can refer to or rely on (1:19-21). No one can interpret the Scripture according to his own whims and preconceived notions and please God. The Word of God emanated from God through men. When men recorded it, God made sure that it was written as He desired.

II. False Teachers

II Peter 2:1-22

Even though the Word of God is true, Peter hastened to warn the church concerning false teachers. False teachers were prevalent in the early church just as false prophets existed during the time of the kings of ancient Israel.

A. Their Conduct

Peter cited the more obvious conduct both of false prophets and false teachers:

1. They bring in “damnable heresies.”
Truth means little or nothing to such men. Destructive deviations from the truth destroy their souls while they are pleasing the ears of the listeners.
2. They “follow their pernicious ways.”
This phrase speaks of laxity of morals—an unrestrained life. But any “success” they might have only brings the retribution that they have earned.
3. They “make merchandise of you.”
In their perverted code, “gain” is godliness; their primary object is personal gain.

B. Their Future

The doom of these false teachers is certain. Peter pointed to three examples of divine retribution (2:4-10):

1. The angels (2:4)
The angels, the mightiest of God’s creation, were cast down when they sinned.
2. The antediluvians (2:5)
The antediluvians were not spared. The only ones saved in the Flood were Noah and his family.
3. Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6-10)
The cities of the plains were turned into ashes. The purpose of the example here is to show the nature of divine judgment, the desolation that followed it, and the surety of God’s Word. In addition to showing the judgments of God, the story of Lot is an example of the divine deliverance of the godly.

C. Their Characteristics

Second Peter 2:10 speaks of presumptuous people who deliberately follow the lusts of the flesh, who despise authority and scorn control. The child of God must not be deceived into a lax attitude by the persistent pressure toward looseness. *Presumptuous* carries the thought of daring—arrogantly bold. Such people will reap what they have sown!

Without godly fear, these self-styled great teachers are eager to rush in where angels fear to go. In ignorant conceit, such men talk disparagingly of circumstances, situations, and things that they know little or nothing about. In many instances, they step on others in order to elevate themselves.

They take pleasure in *riot*, which means luxurious or delicate living. To use Paul's words, they are "lovers of pleasures"; they are spots and blemishes. They teach others and derive much pleasure in persuading unstable souls to lower their standards of holiness, but the stable souls will not be enticed by such teaching. Therefore, this epistle was written to establish believers in the "knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" and to warn against false teachers who habitually pursue personal gain.

Three major points are covered in these verses:

1. The doctrine of false teachers is unprofitable.
2. They invariably lead men away from God.
3. Once people are led away in this manner, their latter end is far worse than their status before they knew God.

III. The Lord's Coming

II Peter 3:1-13

Second Peter 3 warns against perils within the church. If a Christian retains his walk with God, it will be by "way of remembrance . . . of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord."

In the last days "scoffers" will come, who deny the Second Coming. The Greek word used here, *empaiktes*, means "a mocker." Scoffers ridicule the authority of the Word of God in order to tear it down (3:3-4).

Peter's reply to such scoffers was twofold. First, just as the Word of God was fulfilled in Noah's day, so shall it be in our day (3:5-10). Second, God does not count time as humans do. The passage of time does not weaken the promise of His return; it strengthens it. The seeming delay is not slackness but an extension of grace and mercy to a fallen race.

Christians must live noble, holy lives in view of the certainty of the horrible calamity to come (3:11-13). Peter again pointed to the Christian hope as an inspiration and incentive to holy living. He admonished believers to beware by being knowledgeable.

Conclusion

II Peter 3:14-18

Peter closed the epistle with the exhortation to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Growth in grace and knowledge is a struggle; but this inner growth is God's plan for the saints—perseverance.

Chapter 16

First John

Authorship and Background

There is little doubt that the writer of I, II, and III John is the same apostle who penned the fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation, for many themes in these books are closely related.

There is no real evidence of the place or date of John's writing of these three epistles. However, it is known that Ephesus was John's chief abode during the latter years of his life. It may be assumed, then, that the epistles were written there between AD 80 and 95.

Purpose

The apostle gave four reasons for writing this epistle:

1. To add to the readers' joy (1:4)
2. To guard them against sin (2:1)
3. To warn against false teachers (2:26)
4. To strengthen their faith in Christ and assure them of eternal life (5:13)

Profound thought expressed in simple language characterizes this epistle. It opens with a positive statement of experiential knowledge of Christ: "we have heard," "we have seen," "we have looked upon," and "our hands have handled."

Outline

INTRODUCTION—I John 1:1-4

I. GOD IS LIGHT—I John 1:5-2:29

II. GOD IS LOVE—I John 3:1-5:12

CONCLUSION—I John 5:13-21

Commentary

Introduction

I John 1:1-4

First John contains no salutation as such. This epistle was evidently written to the church at large.

In a single sentence, John presented the subject matter of the epistle (“Word of life”), the declaration of the Incarnation (“the life was manifested”), and the intent of his writing (“declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us”) (1:1-4). The full joy of discipleship comes through understanding and believing the doctrines of God our Savior that were delivered unto us by the apostles.

I. God Is Light

I John 1:5-2:29

John explained that the nature of God is light (1:5-2:6). *Light* refers to God’s absolute holiness. There is not the slightest taint of sin; there is not the slightest shade of darkness.

Darkness depicts all that is false, foul, and evil—all that leads to decay and death. Darkness is the absence of light. Plainly, true Christian fellowship depends upon all parties concerned “walking in the light.” There is no fellowship with God apart from the light, for He is the light (1:5-7).

Forgiveness and cleansing from sin come after confessing and forsaking sin (1:8-10). As long as the Christian is in the flesh, he will be susceptible to failure. As long as he realizes that God empowers him to live clean and free from sin, he will rely upon and trust Him for his salvation.

There is a remedy for sin—the mediatorial role God assumed in the Incarnation (2:1-6). As a human and by the sacrifice of His life, Jesus Christ became the sinner’s advocate. He is not a God who speaks to another God on our behalf, but He is the one God seeing us through His own human experience and forgiving us on the basis of the Cross. Believing this, we can come with thankful hearts and know God will have mercy on us. This relationship causes us to keep His commandments. If we claim to *abide in Christ*, we ought to walk as He walked.

The commandment to love the brethren is an old commandment the believers received from Christ at the beginning of their Christian experience (2:7-14). It is new because of their fresh, vital life in Christ. Since Jesus said to love one another, “as I have loved you,” it would be inconsistent for someone to say he is in Christ and have hatred for a brother. Having hatred excludes a person from being in the light, just as walking in the light excludes a love for the world.

John warned of the immoral pursuits and evil tendencies toward which the carnal nature is inclined (2:15-17). He cited the origin of carnality: it “is not of the Father, but is of the world.” He identified worldliness as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes (which includes covetousness, and impure desires arising from sight), and the pride of life (which includes pretentiousness of fashion and display, and the desire to gain credit that does not rightfully belong to one).

Walking in the light excludes opposition to Christ’s doctrine in any degree (2:18-29). John made it clear that those who pervert the teaching of Jesus are opposing Him and, therefore, antichrists. Someone is either for or against Christ. If a person accepts Him as He is, he is “complete in Him.” True believers can be led into gross error by seductive methods if they are not aware of where a “small” deviation from the true pattern will lead them.

True believers will be led by the Holy Spirit within them and not by false teachers. John did not mean that the church does not need teachers, for Christ has placed teachers in the body because they are needed (Ephesians 4:11-13). Of course, the Holy Ghost is the teacher, and those used of God in this capacity are mere instruments.

Instead of following false teachers, John urged believers to abide in Christ.

II. God Is Love

I John 3:1-5:12

God is love. Our relationship with God is that of a son to a loving father. This means that one day we will be as He is and where He is (3:1-3). Since we have this hope, each of us should desire to be pure. This desire is an evidence of true sonship.

“Sin is the transgression of the law.” *Transgression*, as used here, denotes a state of being and not an action only (3:4-5). It conveys the thought of man’s inner refusal to accept divine control, a state of lawlessness. It is God’s purpose to convert or change the inner desire of a person so that he will be like his Lord and Savior. In sharp contrast, “he that committeth sin is of the devil.” The child of God is freed from the old sinful life and lives victoriously over the world, the devil, and the flesh. But the child of the devil cannot do this. We should notice the emphasis on *doing* righteousness. The righteous do right and urge the wicked to change. As Cain did, the wicked attempt to destroy what they cannot share in their corrupt and disobedient state.

John shifted to the relation between love and hate, life and death (3:11-18). Love is an evidence of the life into which we have been born, while hate is equivalent to murder. Christ’s love was evidenced by the giving of Himself for us. Our love must be evidenced by giving ourselves for the brethren—in deed and in truth.

These verses point out the beneficial results of exercising true love in our lives. We have the assurance that God understands, and we are freed from the misery of a condemning heart (3:19-21). Only someone who has an untroubled inner conscience can know the resultant joy.

To recognize the true source of sonship, we must discern the spirit of error and the spirit of truth (4:1-6). The gullible will accept anything and everything that comes in the name of God. To try the spirits, we must go to the Word of God and measure the false prophet according to the Word.

John pointed out one distinguishing hallmark of the Spirit of God—God’s Spirit will acknowledge the Incarnation—the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. If we are of God, we will be able to separate truth from error. If there be any doubt as to our status in God, we are in no position to reach others.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, John showed the inseparable connection between loving one another and being “born of God” (4:7-16). Love is not a mere attribute of God, but His very nature. Therefore, those who do not love do not know God!

The love of God reaches its most developed state when it is active and alive in the Christian’s heart and life. Our confession of Jesus as the Son of God is a witness to our relationship with God. To dwell in God is to abide in love. To claim to dwell in love and fail to declare what we have seen is inconsistent. Truth and love are inseparable.

The perfection of Christian love is the absence of fear (4:17-19). We can be confident because of our likeness to Christ. The presence of fear indicates an imperfect love.

Returning again to the inconsistency of claiming to love God while hating a brother, John asked: If someone cannot love those whom he has seen, how is it possible to love God, whom he has not seen? (4:20-21).

John asserted that believing in the Incarnation is associated with being born of God, as is loving all the children of God and keeping God’s laws (5:1-5). Faith is our means of overcoming the world, and the love of God causes us to utilize that means and accomplish the task.

First John 5:6-12 deals primarily with the witness of God that believers possess. Jesus accomplished His atoning work through water and blood, and His Spirit bears witness of His work. Likewise, the Spirit, the water, and the blood agree in one today. They all are made manifest in the world in the salvation of the believer. The witness is in the life of Christians through faith.

Conclusion

I John 5:13-21

Eternal life through faith in the incarnate God is discussed further, “that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” We are to have a firm faith in God based on the settled, established Word of truth.

We should pray for a brother who sins a sin that is not unto death.

In closing, John expressed three certainties that are a vital part of Christian faith. First, those who are born of God do not live a sinful life. Holiness is the norm; God intends for us to be right and to know we are right. Striving for this goal is not presumption; it is faith. Second, the Lord gives understanding so that we can know truth. Finally, Jesus is the true God and eternal life. In order to be loyal and faithful to the true God, we must remain separate and apart from all false gods.

Chapter 17

Second John

Authorship and Background

Second John is an intimate note written to an unidentified, godly mother and her children. Some scholars maintain that the “elect lady” is a local church and her “children” are the believers. While the truths contained in the epistle are applicable to a local church, the general style of the letter points to it being written to an individual.

Purpose

The apostle John wrote to warn “the elect lady” against false teachers. If she entertained such instructors in her home, she would be identifying herself with their heresies.

Outline

- I. INTRODUCTION (II John 1-4)
- II. EXHORTATION (II John 5-11)
- III. CONCLUSION (II John 12-13)

Commentary

I. Introduction

II John 1-4

From John’s opening remarks and salutation, it is obvious that to him truth was not a mere opinion or a theory about God, however accurate. Truth was God Himself, who had become a man that believers might know Him and be partakers of His life. Truth was the principle of their life and thereby life itself. He rejoiced because he found the elect lady’s children walking in truth.

II. Exhortation

II John 5-11

Love and obedience must be combined to fulfill the will of God (5-6). Verse 6 clarifies that true love consists of active and unremitting obedience.

John warned against false doctrine (7-9). Obedience motivated by love will keep a Christian from being led astray. “Look to yourselves” commands an alertness of the heart against losing what one has gained. The full reward of verse 8 is nothing less than God Himself. Verse 9 says that those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ do not have God. Whoever goes beyond revealed truth, claiming to teach something “deeper” or more profound is going beyond God and thereby losing Him.

Having a false charity for evildoers or promoters of false doctrines is dangerous (10-11). These verses do not suggest that a child of God should be rude or inhospitable to anyone. They do teach, however, that he should not sanction or countenance false doctrine in any manner. To do so is to share in the responsibility for teaching it.

III. Conclusion

II John 12-13

John planned to see the elect lady and her children in order that he could share his thoughts on other things as well.

Chapter 18

Third John

Authorship and Background

The apostle John addressed his third epistle to Gaius. Someone named Gaius is mentioned three other times in the Scriptures—Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23—but as Gaius was a common name, we do not know if these passages refer to the same person.

Purpose

The apostle wrote to commend Gaius for entertaining Christian workers who were dependent on the hospitality of believers and to denounce the inhospitable and tyrannical attitudes of Diotrephes. The letter stresses the significance of truth. The word *truth* is used in five verses in this brief epistle (1, 3, 4, 8, 12).

Outline

- I. COMMENDATION OF GAIUS—III John 1-8
- II. CONDEMNATION OF DIOTREPHEs—III John 9-11
- III. REPORT OF DEMETRIUS—III John 12-14

Commentary

I. Commendation of Gaius

III John 1-8

John had heard good reports of Gaius's spiritual progress, and he desired that Gaius should have a sound body for the habitation of his prospering soul. This comment reveals the heart of a true man of God: John rejoiced at the spiritual progress of another and wished God's best for him.

Gaius was hospitable to the "brethren and strangers." His hospitality was known and witnessed to in the church. Those who received his hospitality were worthy because they had gone forth for the sake of the name.

II. Condemnation of Diotrephes

III John 9-11

Obviously Diotrephes was quite influential and was probably an elder in the assembly. His desire to occupy the limelight caused him to reject others who might outshine him. John's main point is now expressed: "He that doeth good is of God; but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." Since Diotrephes had such an evil report, no one should follow him. But Demetrius had a good report of all men and of the truth also.

III. Report of Demetrius

III John 12-14

Demetrius was probably the bearer of this letter to Gaius. He had a good reputation among the brethren. Again John expressed his desire to see Gaius in person. Until such a time, he conveyed the greetings of friends and closed the letter on a note of peace.

Chapter 19

Jude

Authorship and Background

The writer identified himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. Most authorities believe that he was the brother of the James who was the first bishop of Jerusalem. If so, the writer was the half brother of Jesus. (See James 1:1; Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3.) Some, however, identify him as the apostle Judas, also called Lebbaeus or Thaddaeus. (See Matthew 10:2-3; Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13.)¹

The date cannot be fixed. It is assumed to have been written during the last half of the first century, around AD 70. The place of writing is also uncertain.

Purpose

Jude, like Peter in his second epistle, wrote to warn the church against apostasy. Peter described apostasy as future; Jude put it in the present. The early church was troubled by early forms of Gnosticism—a trend toward such deep mysteries and knowledge that it was falsehood. The Gnostics actually denied the Lord Jesus Christ. Their view undermined the doctrine of creation also. Then, too, along with their “deeper knowledge,” they fostered a moral laxity with great zeal.

Outline

- I. SALUTATION—verses 1-4
- II. FALSE TEACHERS—verses 5-16
- III. CONCLUSION—verses 17-25

Commentary

I. Salutation

Jude 1-4

Jude urged Christians to contend for the faith, for certain persons had crept in unnoticed, perverted the grace of God, and disowned Jesus Christ. “The faith” is in the objective

sense and refers to the “things believed;” that is, the doctrine delivered once for all to the saints. In other words, we must hold fast to the doctrine of the apostles!

II. False Teachers

Jude 5-16

Jude referred to three instances of divine judgment to point out the condemnation that awaits false teachers:

1. The Lord delivered the people out of Egypt, afterward destroying those who had no faith. Even though someone is saved, he must continue in salvation or be destroyed.
2. The angelic world offers evidence that God’s judgments are sure. God tolerates no deviation from His holy will.
3. Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of God. Doctrine and morality cannot be divorced.

Jude spoke of the same scorn for authority that Peter had noted. He assured his readers that the retributive justice of God will be accomplished. Verse 9 indicates that Michael restrained himself, even when contending with Satan, leaving all judgment and vengeance to God. Again, Jude made reference to Old Testament examples:

1. Cain, an example of wickedness incarnate
2. Balaam, who spoke for personal profit at the sacrifice of truth
3. Core (Korah, Numbers 16:1-3), who contemptuously asserted himself against godly leadership

False teachers are “spots” in the church. The word *spots* could be translated “rocks.” Their immoral conduct makes them like hidden reefs on which others can be shipwrecked. They are reckless, empty, fruitless, uncontrollable, out of place. They will be brought into judgment for all ungodly deeds, speeches, and designs.

III. Conclusion

Jude 17-25

Jude exhorted us to remember the truth and to recognize scoffers. Not only must we resist false teachers, but our own personal lives need to be filled with the good, wholesome works of Christian endeavor. We must build up ourselves in the most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Jude urged us to live within the scope of God’s grace. He made reference to our attitude and relations with others in regard to their salvation.

He closed with a remarkable reference to our Savior: He is the “only wise God”! Amen.

Note

- ¹ Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 680; C. W. Slemming, *The Bible Digest* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1960), 878.



Missionary Spotlight: Wilma Ruth Nix

By Harry Scism

Former General Director of Foreign Missions
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A Child of the King

In recent months, someone asked Sister Wilma Ruth Nix as to her desire regarding a title for her in a publication. She responded that being called “Reverend Nix, Pastor Nix, or Sister Nix” was not of importance to her, but she wanted to be called “a child of the King.” How typical of this dedicated servant of God who pioneered two fields for the

United Pentecostal Church, establishing churches and a Bible school in both.

In 1966, at thirty-four years of age, Wilma Ruth Nix applied for missionary appointment to Zimbabwe (formerly known as Rhodesia). She was appointed in 1967 and arrived in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in December 1968. After spending some twenty years in Zimbabwe, having a part in the establishing of many churches as well as a beautiful Bible school, she went to Mafikeng, Bophuthatswana, to open this new field.

On August 17, 1986, a beautiful new church building was dedicated to the glory of God by Brother L. E. Westberg in Mafikeng. There are now five congregations in Bophuthatswana. A lovely Bible school was also started.

On November 1, 1996, when returning from Johannesburg to Mafikeng, Sister Nix was involved in a very serious automobile accident. Though eventually she was flown to one of Johannesburg’s best medical facilities, she never recovered and was promoted to her eternal home with Jesus on November 22, 1996.

On November 27, a funeral service was held for her in Mafikeng in the very building just dedicated. A second service was held in Houston, Texas, on November 30, at which Brother N. A. Urshan, Brother H. E. Scism, and many other officials expressed the great appreciation and admiration for this valiant soldier of Jesus Christ.

Her cousin, Brother William Nix, superintendent of the Michigan District, played a very important role in making the missionary ministry of Sister Wilma Ruth Nix very successful. At the time of her critical condition in the hospital, he was by her side in prayer and support.

The Nix family, the Foreign Missions family, and indeed the United Pentecostal Church will greatly miss this precious lady. Her commitment to God and His kingdom was second to none.