

Matthew: Christ, The King

TITLE

Matthew, whose name means “gift of God,” was credited by early church writers as the author of the book bearing his name. A tax collector before he met Jesus, Matthew was one of the twelve apostles (Mt. 9:9ff.; 10:3; Mk. 3:18; Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13). He was also known as Levi (Mk. 2:14; Lk. 5:27ff.).

BACKGROUND

The imagery of Daniel 2 summarized world history up to the time God set up His kingdom: The head of gold represented the Babylonian Empire; the breast and arms of silver, the Medo-Persian Empire; the belly and thighs of brass, the Grecian Empire; the legs of iron (with the feet a mixture of iron and clay), the Roman Empire. When the Old Testament closed, the Babylonians had been defeated by the Medo-Persians and the Jews had returned from captivity. In the four hundred years between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Medo-Persian Empire was followed by the Grecian Empire as Alexander the Great conquered the world. When Alexander died, his territory was divided four ways, into Greece, Asia, Egypt, and Syria. The land of the Jews was first controlled by Egypt, then Syria. The excesses of one of the Syrian rulers, Antiochus Epiphanes, led to the Maccabean revolt and a period of Jewish independence. This period of freedom ended when the land came under Roman domination. At that point in history, “when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4).

The first four books of the New Testament depict the life of Jesus. These four books are often called “the Gospels,” but it is preferable to think of them as “the Gospel *Accounts*,” since there is only *one* gospel (good news). These books are also often classified as “biography,” but they do not follow the standard pattern for biographies. The purpose of the four writers is not to give a chronological account of Jesus’ life from

birth to death. Rather, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, each selected events from the life of Jesus to show who He was and why He came to earth. The first three accounts are called “the synoptic Gospels,” because they are similar and were probably written about the same time. John’s account was written for a different purpose, probably many years after the first three.

Each Gospel Account seems to have a different audience in mind; each has its special emphasis. The Gospel of Matthew seems to be addressed primarily to a Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in Old Testament Scriptures. Matthew quotes over one hundred Old Testament passages (1:23; 2:6, 15, 23; etc.). He uses terms familiar to Jews, such as “son of David” (1:1). The emphasis is on Jesus as a King who came to set up His kingdom. The word “kingdom” appears fifty-five times in the book.

Because of the predictive nature of chap. 24, it is reasonable to assume that the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. According to ancient tradition, Matthew was the first Gospel Account written.

OUTLINE

- I. BACKGROUND AND PREPARATION (1—4).
- II. GALILEAN MINISTRY (5—18).
 - A. The Sermon on the Mount (5—7).
 - B. Miracles (8:1—11:1).
 - C. Parables (11:2—13:53).
 - D. Opposition and withdrawal (13:54—16:12).
 - E. Anticipating Jesus’ death (16:13—18:35).
- III. FINAL MINISTRY (19—28).
 - A. Journeying to Jerusalem (19; 20).
 - B. Triumphal entry (21:1-16).
 - C. Teaching (21:17—25:46).

TO THE TEACHER: This lesson is the first in a series called “New Testament Survey,” the second half of a one-year study of the entire Bible. You have permission to duplicate these pages for the local congregation or for those with whom you study the Bible. Before studying a lesson, you should read the entire book (or books) to be

covered in that lesson. Each lesson has two parts: (1) notes on the book or books to be studied and (2) an outline relating to those Scriptures. If you live in the U.S. and would like a cassette of the sermons based on these outlines, send \$1.50 for each sermon to Tape Ministry, Central church of Christ, P.O. Box 567, Cleburne, TX 76033.

- D. Last hours (26; 27).
- E. Resurrection and Great Commission (28).

LESSONS FROM MATTHEW

In the Gospel Accounts, we have the climax of all God had done through the years, as recorded in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. The most important lessons in the accounts are that Jesus is the Son of God and that Jesus loved us so much that He came to the earth to die for us. A logical application of these truths is that we should devote our lives to Him!

The Gospel Accounts, however, are also filled with practical teaching. This is especially true of the Gospel of Matthew, which presents Jesus as The Great

Teacher. Only Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount (5—7). Matthew also contains many parables not recorded by the other writers, such as the parable of the ten virgins in chap. 25.

Matthew is also the Gospel Account which tells us that the promised kingdom is the church (16:18, 19). Since King Jesus came to establish His kingdom, this says something about the importance of the church in the plan and purposes of God!

Matthew closes with one of the greatest challenges ever given to men. Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them. . . .” (28:19). The early church met this challenge. Are *we* meeting it?

“Seventy Times Seven” (Matthew 18:21-35)

Having a forgiving heart is an important part of Jesus’ agenda for His people. This is clearly seen in the parable of the unmerciful servant, which is recorded only by Matthew.

I. FORGIVENESS TAUGHT: Peter’s question (18:21, 22).

- A. Peter’s question (v. 21): Why “*seven times*”? Perhaps because Jesus had used the number before in speaking of forgiveness (Lk. 17:4).
- B. Jesus’ answer: “*Seventy times seven*” (v. 22).
 - 1. Jesus is not putting a limit on our forgiveness. Rather, this huge sum emphasizes:
 - a. We should get in the forgiveness habit.
 - b. Trying to “keep track” of wrongs done to us is ridiculous! (Note 1 Cor. 13:5; NIV.)
 - 2. Forgiveness was a vital part of Jesus’ plan for His church (6:14, 15; Lk. 6:37; Eph. 4:31, 32; Col. 3:13).

II. FORGIVENESS ILLUSTRATED: The parable of the unmerciful servant (18:23-35).

- A. The contrast in the parable is between the two amounts owed.
 - 1. It is impossible to be dogmatic regarding the exact amounts in today’s terms; 10,000 talents referred not to 10,000 pieces of money, but to a certain *weight* of precious metal. One hundred “pence” (KJV) referred to one hundred denarii, the amount a common laborer of that day earned in one hundred days. The important thing is not exact amounts, but the contrast. For our purposes, think of \$10,000,000 as compared to \$18! The unmerciful servant was forgiven a \$10,000,000 debt but would not forgive an \$18 debt!
 - 2. The point: We have sinned and owe a debt that we could never pay, but God gave us a “free gift” when He forgave us (Rom. 6:23). We should, therefore, be ready and willing to forgive the small wrongs done to us.
- B. The great lessons of the parable:
 - 1. The parable underlines the hopelessness of the sinner without God’s grace.
 - 2. It teaches the necessity for the forgiven to be forgiving (v. 35)!

III. FORGIVENESS DISCUSSED: Some practical matters.

- A. What does it mean to forgive? Can we literally “forgive and forget”? No. Even God does not literally “forgive and forget.” (Otherwise, we would not have the Book of Genesis, which records sins that had been forgiven.) When the Bible says God “remembers our sins no more” (see Jer. 31:34), it means He treats us as though those sins had not occurred. We can learn to do the same. Forgiveness actually takes place in two stages:
 - 1. Short-term forgiveness, or immediate forgiveness, is what our text is emphasizing. Among other things, this means:
 - a. We determine not to bring up the past; we try not to let it affect our relationships, but to “be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18).
 - b. We resolve not to take revenge, but to leave such matters in the hands of God: “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19).
 - c. We seek the best for the one we forgive; we seek his welfare. Rom. 12:20 says, “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.”
 - 2. Long-term forgiveness takes time.
 - a. We continue to work on treating the forgiven as though nothing had happened. We work on our feelings and ask God to help us.
 - b. The forgiveness process is complete when we can remember the incident without pain.
- B. What forgiveness can do for you:
 - 1. It will keep bitterness out of your heart (see Heb. 12:15).
 - 2. It will make you free. (If you let bitterness eat at your soul, you are letting the object of that bitterness control your life!)
 - 3. It will help you spiritually, emotionally, and physically.
 - 4. It will bring you contentment and peace.

CONCLUSION

Make this lesson personal. Whom does God want *you* to forgive?

Mark: Christ, The Servant

TITLE

The Gospel of Mark is named after the author. There is general agreement that the book was written by John Mark (Acts 12:25; 15:37), whose home was in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). John was his Hebrew name, but we know him better by his Roman name, Marcus.

BACKGROUND

Apparently Mark was converted by Peter (1 Pet. 5:13), probably during Peter's work in Jerusalem. Early writers say that Mark's account is "the gospel according to Peter," in which Mark (guided by the Spirit) wrote about Peter's preaching and reminiscences. Peter's sermon to the first Gentile converts in Acts 10:34-43 could serve as an outline for this Gospel Account (note v. 38). If Mark had Peter check his manuscript, as one tradition says, his account was composed before Peter's death (between A.D. 65 and 68).

Mark was Barnabas' cousin (Col. 4:10). He started with Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey, but he turned back (Acts 13:13). When Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking Mark on the second journey, Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-41). Apparently Mark regained Paul's confidence, because years later, he was with Paul in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24; see 2 Tim. 4:11).

Unlike the Gospel of Matthew, Mark's account seems to have been written for a *non*-Jewish audience. He eliminated things which would be of no interest to Gentiles, such as genealogies and (with one exception) fulfillment of prophecy. He put little emphasis on Jewish background; when he did mention Jewish tradition, he generally explained it. Many writers feel that Mark was addressing a *Roman* audience. He used Latin phrases in stories, whereas most of the other gospel writers used Greek phrases.

Matthew's emphasis is on Jesus as *King*; Mark emphasizes Jesus as *Servant*. Mark is an account of action, presenting Jesus not as One who merely teaches, but as One who *does* things to help others. A key passage is Mk. 10:45: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark emphasizes the miracles of Jesus, because in them Jesus can be seen serving people in need.

The last twelve verses of Mark are missing from several important manuscripts. Most conservative

writers believe that they belong in the text—as part of the original, as a later note added by Mark, or as an inspired footnote added by another writer (like the closing verses of Deuteronomy, Joshua, etc.; see the articles "Deuteronomy: Moses' Farewell Address" and "Joshua: Victory in Canaan!"). Keep in mind that all of the teachings of Mark 16:9-20 are found elsewhere in the New Testament; no basic truth is dependent on these twelve verses.

OUTLINE

I. THE SERVANT PREPARES TO SERVE (1:1-13):
Jesus receives His credentials.

II. THE SERVANT BEGINS TO SERVE (1:14—8:30).
A. The *commencement* of service (1:14—2:12).
B. The *criticism* begins (2:6—3:35).
C. The *challenge* of service; the *conflict* (4:1—8:30);
the *climax*: the good *confession* (8:27-30).

III. THE SERVANT PREPARES FOR THE GREATEST ACT OF SERVICE: DYING ON THE CROSS (8:31—15:47).

A. His *closing* ministry (8:31—10:52).
1. He tries to prepare His disciples.
2. He starts to Jerusalem.
B. A *crucial* time: the last week of His ministry (11:1—14:42).
C. His *crucifixion* and burial (14:43—15:47).

IV. THE SERVANT IS EXALTED BY THE RESURRECTION (16); the Great *Commission* (16:15, 16).

LESSONS FROM MARK

The purpose of Mark—like all the Gospels—is to show Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, *our Savior*. The book opens with the words "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). Mark differs from the other accounts only in approach. The book presents a concise picture of Jesus, then lets that picture speak for itself.

Mark has been called "the gospel of concern." Jesus is concerned with people's health, hunger, happiness, helplessness, and hardships. We are challenged to be like Him in *servicing* others (10:42-45).

Read carefully Jesus' Great Commission as given

by Mark (16:15, 16); then note this carried out in Acts. Jesus said that the gospel was to be preached and that the proper response was faith and baptism. When these two conditions were met, salvation from past sins would result. When the gospel was preached for the first time (Acts 2:36), people believed the message

and wanted to know what to do (Acts 2:37). Following Jesus' instructions exactly, Peter told them to be baptized, and the result would be the forgiveness of past sins (Acts 2:38). Jesus' order must be respected: Hear the gospel preached, believe, be baptized, and *then* receive salvation.

Jesus Is the Answer (Mark 2:1-12)

All of us have problems: marriage problems, financial problems, health problems, emotional problems. *Jesus* is the answer to our problems, whatever they may be. The whole New Testament declares this great truth, but for our purposes, let us look at an incident in the life of Christ found in Mark 2.

I. FOUR FRIENDS AND THE SICK MAN: JESUS IS THE ANSWER (2:1-4).

A. Setting the scene (vv. 1-3).

1. Jesus returned to Capernaum after preaching and healing in Galilee. He apparently wanted some time to recover (1:4, 5, 35), but the word quickly spread: "Jesus is back!" Soon the house where Jesus was became filled with people.
2. Four friends brought a paralytic, a man "sick of the palsy," a terrible condition.

B. Why did these four individuals bring their friend? They realized *Jesus is the answer* (v. 5).

1. They had faith in Jesus' power to help (v. 10).
 - a. This had been demonstrated previously in Capernaum and on the Galilean tour.
 - b. We may think that no one can help us with our problems, but with the Lord all things are possible (10:27)!
2. They had faith that Jesus was willing to use His power, that He cared!
 - a. On His recent tour Jesus had healed a leper: "Moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, *and touched him, . . .*" (1:41). The touch was not necessary to the healing; it was a touch of compassion.
 - b. We need to realize that Jesus is not only the answer to our problems; He *wants* to help us! He *cares* for us!

C. They could not get in because of the crowd (v. 4).

1. They did not give up:
 - a. They did the difficult. It would not be easy to get their friend up on the roof. (The text says nothing about an outside staircase.)
 - b. They did the unexpected. They tore a hole in the roof.
 - c. They did the costly. They would either have to pay for the damage or repair it themselves.
2. All of us have friends who need Jesus. Are we willing to do the difficult, the unexpected, the costly to get them to the Lord?

II. JESUS AND THE SICK MAN: JESUS IS THE ANSWER TO EVERY PROBLEM (2:5-12).

A. We shift our gaze to Jesus (v. 5).

1. Jesus did not reprimand the friends. Jesus is

always available when we have problems.

2. Jesus looked into the man's heart and saw that he was struggling with guilt (note v. 5). Jesus was not saying the man's physical problem was a result of sin (Jn. 9:1-3); He remedied the most important problem first.
- B. We need to understand that *Jesus is, above all, the answer to the problem of SIN*.
 1. Jesus did not come to bring us a new philosophy of life to enable us to deal with our problems. God could have sent a great teacher to do that. Jesus came to die for our sins (Mt. 20:28)!
 2. If you are hurting, you want relief; but *first*, ask the question, "What is my relationship with Jesus?" We are concerned about so many things that we often forget the *big* issue is that we are sinners in need of salvation (Rom. 3:23; 6:23)!
- C. In the remainder of the story, Jesus showed *He is the answer for every problem of life*, not just the problem of sin (vv. 6-12).
 1. There are always critics (vv. 6, 7). If Jesus were not God, He *would* be a blasphemer worthy of death. The next question should have been, "Could He be God?" Prejudice would not allow them to consider it.
 2. Jesus' response to their thoughts (vv. 8-11):
 - a. Certainly it is easy to *say*, "Your sins are forgiven" (v. 9).
 - b. Jesus used His ability to take care of physical problems to prove that He can take care of spiritual problems (vv. 10, 11). Since the Lord has taken care of our spiritual problem, He will also take care of every other problem (Rom. 8:32).
 3. Imagine the suspense! If nothing happened, Jesus would be proven an impostor. If the man got up, Jesus would show Himself to be all He claimed to be! (See v. 12.)
 - a. Like all New Testament miracles, this one was immediate, complete, and convincing!
 - b. It astounded them (Mt. 9:8; Lk. 5:26)!

CONCLUSION

- A. Jesus is the answer to our problems in life!
- B. If you have problems, let Jesus help you!
 1. First take care of the problem of sin (16:16).
 2. Learn to rely on Him to help you face whatever life may bring. He will not provide a physical miracle, but He *will* give you all the resources you need: His loving presence (Heb. 13:5), His Spirit to give you strength (Acts 2:38), wisdom from God (Jas. 1:5), and a caring family called the church (Acts 2:41, 47)!

Luke: Christ, The Son of Man

TITLE

The Gospel of Luke is named after the author. Many early Christian writers identify Luke “the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14) as the writer. Internal evidence confirms this position (for instance, the writer uses a number of medical terms).

BACKGROUND

One unique thing about Luke’s account is the introduction (1:1-4) addressed to Theophilus (“lover of God”). This introduction leads us to conclude that Luke himself was not a disciple during Jesus’ lifetime, but was converted later, perhaps by Paul. The introduction also shows that Luke was not a mere penman for the Holy Spirit, but undertook a personal investigation into “what really happened.” Among the sources of material available to Luke would have been the special revelation made to Paul (1 Cor. 11:23). Tradition also has it that information about the early life of Christ came from Jesus’ mother, Mary.

Another unique thing about Luke’s account is that it has a sequel: Acts (cf. 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1). The first-person passages in Acts (Acts 16:10; 20:5; 21:1; etc.) tell us Luke often traveled with Paul. Archeological discoveries confirm that Luke was an accurate historian, giving great weight to his account of the life of Jesus and subsequent events.

Like Mark, Luke apparently wrote for a non-Jewish audience. While Mark’s account, however, seems to have been directed to the action-oriented Roman, Luke’s account seems written for the intellectual, the student. Many conclude that Luke had a Greek audience in mind. If Luke himself was Greek (as seems probable; study Col. 4:10, 11, 14), he was the only non-Jewish writer of the New Testament.

The Gospel of Luke stresses the perfect *humanity* of Jesus, “the Son of Man,” in contrast with John, which stresses the *deity* of Jesus, “the Son of God.” The book is summarized in 19:10: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Since the Book of Acts ends abruptly, Luke probably concluded his writing about A.D. 62, before Paul’s first trial in Rome. If Luke wrote his Gospel Account shortly before he wrote Acts, the time of writing would have been about A.D. 60-62. Thus the three synoptic Gospels were completed by the early

60s (see the articles “Matthew: Christ, the King” and “Mark: Christ, the Servant”).

A few words should be said about the “synoptic problem.” The “problem” is different for believers and unbelievers. Those who believe in verbal inspiration struggle with why the writers *vary* in the details of the same story. In fact, this enhances their credibility as witnesses; we are suspicious of witnesses who give the same testimony word for word. For others, the “synoptic problem” is why the three accounts are so *similar*. Many theories have developed: writers copied from one another, all of them copied from a common document, etc. Similarities should present no problem, because all of the Gospel Accounts had a *common author*: the Holy Spirit of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; note 2 Pet. 1:21).

OUTLINE

- I. THE PREPARATION OF THE SON OF MAN (1:1—4:13).
 - A. His birth at Bethlehem.
 - B. His boyhood at Nazareth.
 - C. His baptism in the Jordan.
 - D. His background in history (genealogy).
 - E. His battle with Satan (the temptation).
- II. THE POWER OF THE SON OF MAN (4:14—9:50).
 - A. The ministry commenced (4:14—5:16).
 - B. The ministry criticized (5:17—6:11).
 - C. The ministry continued (6:12—8:56).
 - D. The ministry climaxed (9:1-50).
- III. THE PREACHING OF THE SON OF MAN (9:51—18:30).
 - A. Jesus sets “His face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51—13:21).
 - B. Jesus begins “journeying toward Jerusalem” (13:22—17:10).
 - C. On His way to Jerusalem, He passes through Galilee and Samaria (17:11-18).
- IV. THE PASSION OF THE SON OF MAN (18:31—23:56).
 - A. The last trip (18:31—19:27).
 - B. The last week (19:28—22:46).
 - C. The last day (22:47—23:56).

V. THE PERFECTION OF THE SON OF MAN (24).

- A. The Resurrection (24:1-49).
- B. The Ascension (24:50-53).

LESSONS FROM LUKE

Luke has the most unique material of any of the synoptic Gospels. For instance, only Luke tells of Jesus' birth and infancy. Most of section III of the outline "The Preaching of the Son of Man" is peculiar to Luke. In this section, we find one of the world's favorite stories: the parable of the prodigal son (15:11-32).

The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Remember the famous "Road" movies, starring Bob Hope and Bing Crosby: "Road to Singapore," "Road to Zanzibar," "Road to Morocco," and so on? Let us look at a "Road" epic infinitely more significant than those entertaining films: "The Road to Emmaus" (24:13-35; see Mk. 16:12, 13).

The time is late in the day when Jesus rose from the dead. The theme is "hope"—a frustrated hope: "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (v. 21). Come with me on "the road to Emmaus."

I. HOPE RAVAGED (24:13, 14).

- A. Cleopas (24:18) and another individual are going toward Emmaus, a town about seven miles from Jerusalem. They should be happy on their trip home during the spring, but they are going home from a funeral. It is not just any funeral, but the funeral of the One in whom they had placed their hope and trust—the funeral of Jesus.
- B. As they walk, they talk about Jesus' death and about the puzzle of the empty tomb (24:22-24). They talk, discuss, and reason (24:15), but they have no satisfactory answer. Hope is gone.

II. HOPE REVIVED (24:15-27).

- A. Jesus joins them, but they do not recognize Him (v. 16), maybe because of divine intervention, or perhaps because *they* had "closed their eyes" (Mt. 13:15) to the possibility of the Resurrection. Often *we* fail to see the nearness of the Lord because of a lack of faith (2 Kings 6:17).
- B. Jesus asks them why they are sad. They tell Him of their dashed hopes. Then Jesus, using the Scriptures, shows how the crucifixion was part of God's plans and purposes. Wouldn't you love to have heard that sermon, as Jesus started with Genesis and went through all of the Scriptures (such as Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22; Is. 53) explaining how they applied to Him?
- C. Their hope was revived! As Jesus "was explaining the Scriptures" to them (24:32), the fire of hope in their hearts that had been all but extinguished was rekindled and fanned into a blaze.

III. HOPE RECOGNIZED (24:28-32).

- A. When they reach Emmaus, Jesus starts to leave

The Gospel of Luke has some special emphases. For instance, it gives special attention to women in the stories of Mary, the widow of Nain, the sinful woman, etc. It also emphasizes Jesus' prayer life. It shows that in all of the major events of Jesus' life. He was praying (3:21; 6:12, 13; 9:18ff.; etc.).

It was not a superstitious peasant, but an educated *doctor* who wrote that Jesus was really born of a virgin, that Jesus really healed people's bodies, that Jesus really died on the cross (He did not just faint), and that Jesus was raised *bodily*. We can trust the Gospel Accounts and all they record!

them. (He never forces Himself on anyone.) It is a crucial time for the disciples. If they let Jesus leave, they will never know that they have seen the resurrected Lord; but they *urge* Him to spend the night with them. Jesus comes into their home; He *wants* to come into yours also. He stands at the door and knocks, waiting for you to hear His voice and open the door of your heart (Rev. 3:20).

- B. It is usual for the owner of the house to act as host at the meal, but apparently they ask Jesus to fill that role. When He gives thanks for the bread (as He had on so many occasions: 9:16; 22:19), something in the way He does it speaks to their hearts, and they recognize Him (24:35). This is Jesus! He is not dead, but alive!
- C. Immediately He vanishes! He wanted them to know—and us to know—that He is no longer limited by the flesh. He can be anywhere; He can be everywhere (Mt. 28:20). When hope is at its lowest, He will be by your side!

IV. HOPE REHEARSED (24:33-35).

- A. The gospel message is meant to be shared! These men have a story to tell! They run seven miles back to Jerusalem, in the middle of the night, to tell the other disciples they have seen Jesus!
- B. Then Jesus appears in the room among them . . . and the disciples must be convinced. We must close our lesson there, with two individuals who started on "the road to Emmaus" with their hope dead and finished that trip with their hope alive!

CONCLUSION

- A. During this ordinary meal with ordinary bread in an ordinary house, extraordinary things happened! This can be an extraordinary day for you, if only you will "open your eyes" to the blessings the Lord has for you and respond to Him!
- B. Just knowing about bread will not satisfy your hunger. Just knowing about water will not quench your thirst. Just knowing about botany will not fill your nostrils with the perfume of flowers. Just knowing about the Resurrection will not give you hope of life everlasting. *Believe* in the Resurrection, and *show* your faith by obedience to the gospel (Rom. 6:3, 4)! Allow the Lord to make this day extraordinary for you!

John: Christ, The Son of God

TITLE

The Gospel of John takes its name from its author. Both internal and external evidence point to the apostle John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (21:20, 24), as the author. “John” is a shortened form of a Hebrew word that means “Jehovah has been gracious.”

BACKGROUND

This is the fourth and final account of the life of Christ. Why are there four separate accounts of the life of Jesus? The Old Testament occasionally has *two* accounts of the same event, but *four* is unique in the Bible. Here are some possible reasons why God gave us four accounts: (1) These accounts show the importance of the life of Christ. (2) They establish beyond doubt the truthfulness of these accounts. *Two* or *three* witnesses “establish” a thing; *four* is even better. (3) Because of the many-faceted nature of Jesus, one writer could not do Him justice as King, Servant, Son of man, and Son of God.

John was a fisherman (Mk. 1:19, 20; Lk. 5:10) who was called by Jesus to follow Him. After his selection as one of the Twelve (Mt. 10:2), John became one of the inner circle of three (Mk. 5:37-40; 9:2; 14:33). He had a special relationship with Jesus (21:20, 24) and was entrusted by Jesus to care for His mother as Jesus was dying on the cross (19:25-27). A strong tradition says that John later worked in Ephesus; this agrees with John’s exile on the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:9), off the coast of Asia, not far from Ephesus (note Rev. 2:1). The same tradition says that John returned to Ephesus when he was old and that he died there. It is reasonable to guess that the Gospel of John was written in Ephesus.

John probably wrote the book in the 90s, much later than the accounts by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Since the synoptic Gospels had been circulating thirty or so years, John does not duplicate most of their material. His account is largely supplementary to the first three accounts.

The Gospel of John has its own special emphasis. Many erroneous concepts had arisen (see notes on “Gnosticism” in the background notes of the article “Colossians: The All-Sufficiency of Christ”). Some taught that all flesh is evil. Therefore, they concluded, the Jesus who walked on the earth could not be “the Christ.” They taught that the Christ, who was spirit,

controlled the fleshly Jesus, but was *not* Jesus (see the article “1 John: The Certainty of Eternal Life”). John, therefore, begins his account by telling us that “the Word became *flesh*, and dwelt among us” (1:14).

John’s emphasis is on the deity of Jesus; he presents Jesus as “the Son of God.” In 20:31 John gives his reason for writing his account: “These [signs] have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” To confirm that Jesus is the Son of God, John has two main thrusts: (1) the claims of Jesus, embodied in the seven “I am” statements (6:35; 8:12, 58; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1), and (2) the miracles of Jesus. John’s special word for miracles is “signs”: The miracles were signs from God that Jesus’ claims were true (2:23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14). Seven signs of Jesus are recorded in John (2:1-4; 4:46-56; 5:1-9; 6:14, 26, 30; 6:16-21; 9; 11).

The proper response to the proof of Christ’s Lordship offered in John is belief. The word “believe” occurs almost one hundred times in the book. If we do not believe, we have no hope. Jesus said, “Unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins” (8:24). Regarding his audience, John’s account has been called “the universal gospel,” directed to all men everywhere for all time.

It is common to say that Jesus’ personal ministry lasted three years. This is an educated guess based on the fact that John mentions at least three Passovers during Jesus’ ministry (2:23; 6:4; 13:1).

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION (1:1-18).

- I. THE SON OF GOD AND HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY (1:19—12:58).
- II. THE SON OF GOD AND HIS DISCIPLES (13—17).
 - A. The matchless farewell discourse (13—16).
 - B. The Lord’s forgotten prayer (17).
- III. THE SON OF GOD AND ALL MEN (18—21).
 - A. Christ’s betrayal and trials (18:1—19:16).
 - B. Christ’s death and burial (19:17-42).
 - C. Christ’s resurrection and explanation (20; 21).

LESSONS FROM JOHN

John's Gospel Account is both simple and profound. The Greek in John is so simple that the book is used to train beginning Greek students. On the other hand, the book is in many ways the most profound of all the Gospel Accounts. It can hold a reader's attention for a lifetime.

One of the many thought-provoking sections in John not found in the synoptics is the teaching on the new birth in Jn. 3. It is easy to show from 1 Pet. 1:22, 23 and other passages that being "born again" is another way to speak of the conversion process; it means basically the same as Peter's instructions: "Repent, and . . . be baptized" (Acts 2:38). To dismiss the

concept of a new birth in that fashion, however, is to miss the impact of *the radical change* implied in this terminology. The best commentary on Jn. 3 is John's first letter, where he often speaks of *the results* of being born again: 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4.

Another section not found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke is Jn. 14—17. The section begins with "the matchless Farewell Discourse" given by Jesus to His disciples, to prepare them for His death. It is climaxed by Jesus' marvelous prayer in chap. 17: a prayer for Himself (vv. 1-5), a prayer for the apostles (vv. 6-19), and a prayer for all believers (vv. 20-26). We all need to do our part to answer Jesus' prayer for unity in vv. 20-23!

Lessons of the Towel (John 13:1-17)

Jesus was keenly aware of the timetable of His life. During His personal ministry it was repeatedly stressed that His time had not come (2:4; 7:30; 8:20). Now the time had come (12:23; 13:1; 17:1). He had so many things He wanted to say to His disciples before His death! Before they were ready for His great Farewell Discourse (14—17), however, they needed the lessons of the towel.

I. THE LESSON OF HUMILITY (13:1-5).

A. Jesus picks up the towel.

1. Instead of washing each other's feet, the disciples were arguing regarding who was the greatest (Lk. 22:24).
2. Jesus became a servant as He began to wash their feet (Phil. 2:7, 8; Mt. 20:28; Lk. 22:27).

B. We, too, need to "pick up the towel."

1. The world seeks for exaltation; the Christian seeks an opportunity to serve.
2. We need to learn to humble ourselves. Jesus said, "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Mt. 23:11, 12)!

II. THE LESSON OF HOLINESS (13:6-11).

A. When Jesus washes Peter's feet, He stresses the need not only for physical cleanliness, but also for spiritual cleanliness.

1. The end of v. 10 obviously refers not to physical cleanness, but to spiritual cleanness (note v. 11).
2. Jesus is not merely washing feet; He is also teaching a lesson about how to be clean within.
 - a. Unless we are washed (in the blood of Jesus), we have no fellowship with Him (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5).
 - b. Once "bathed" (in the blood), we still need constant "foot" cleansing (1 Jn. 1:9—2:1).

B. The context emphasizes that, if we would be clean, we must learn to be *submissive*.

1. *Pride* kept Peter from being submissive to Jesus. If we would be constantly washed in the blood, we must live the obedient lifestyle described in 1 Jn. 1:7: "But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with

one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

2. This made an impression on Peter (note v. 9; 1 Pet. 5:5, 6)!

III. THE LESSON OF HAPPINESS (13:12-17).

A. Jesus stressed that His followers should also be willing to "wash feet."

1. This does not refer to a ceremony during the worship service.
 - a. There is no record in the New Testament or in early Christian writings of any such ceremony.
 - b. The only reference to foot-washing relating to the church is 1 Tim. 5:10.
2. This refers to His followers' being willing to serve others, even if it involves the most menial of tasks.

B. *This*, Jesus said, is the way to be *happy*. Note v. 17: "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

1. The world is searching for happiness in getting more, having more, and being served. Jesus said happiness comes through giving, sacrificing, and serving.
2. The most miserable people are those who think that they are being neglected and that others should be serving them.

CONCLUSION

If you wish to have part with Christ and in the salvation which he offers to you, you must develop in yourself a servant's heart. You must practice the attitude displayed by Christ: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, . . ." (Phil. 2:3-7).

It is not easy to be a servant, but Jesus challenges each one to "take up his towel" and follow Him!

Acts:

Establishment and Spread of the Church

TITLE

The title of this book in most versions is “The Acts of the Apostles.” It does not, however, give *all* of the acts of *all* of the apostles, but *some* of the acts of *some* of the apostles. Specifically, the first part of the book records some of the acts of Peter and the last part, some of the acts of Paul.

BACKGROUND

Acts is generally classified as history; it is the only book in that category in the New Testament. Matthew through Acts provides the historical framework for the New Testament as Genesis through Esther does for the Old Testament. Many of Paul’s letters fit into the chronology of the second and third missionary journeys and Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome.

The introductions to the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts (Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1) make it clear that Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Both were written by Luke the physician. As you read the journeys of Paul, look for the “we” passages which indicate that Doctor Luke has joined Paul’s party (see the article “Luke: Christ, the Son of Man”).

Luke and Acts overlap. The Gospel of Luke closes with the ascension of Jesus. The Book of Acts begins shortly before the Ascension, while Jesus is still with His disciples, giving the background for the dramatic events of Acts 2.

Acts 2 is a pivotal chapter in the Bible. Jesus said the kingdom, or church, would come with power (1:6-8; Mk. 9:1). On the first Jewish Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus, the power came (2:1-4) and the kingdom was established (2:47; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28). Many prophecies were fulfilled on that day (Lk. 24:46-49; Is. 2:2, 3; Dan. 2:44; Joel 2:28ff.; etc.). The gospel was preached in its fullness for the first time (2:14-36), people were told what to do to be saved (2:37-41, 47), and the new Christians began meeting and functioning as the Lord’s church (2:42-47).

From the beginning, the work of the Holy Spirit was important to the establishment and spread of the church. The apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:5) on the Day of Pentecost (2:1-4), which enabled them to perform miracles (2:4ff.; 3:1-10ff.; 5:12). The apostles, in turn, laid their hands on Christians and gave them miraculous powers (6:5, 6, 8; 8:6,

7, 13-18ff.). These miracles confirmed the inspired message about Jesus (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:4). In addition to this miraculous work of the Spirit, all who were baptized in water were promised the Holy Spirit as a gift (2:38). This non-miraculous gift is essential to living the victorious Christian life (Rom. 8:13).

The inspired preachers were witnesses first in Jerusalem (1—7), then in the area around Jerusalem (8—12), then “to the end of the earth” (13—28). In the first two of these divisions, Jerusalem was the focal point. Beginning in chap. 13, Antioch became the center of activity.

Acts can be dated with some certainty at about A.D. 62 (see the article “Luke: Christ, the Son of Man”). The book covers about thirty years of history. An excellent summary of the book appears in 1:6-8.

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION (1).

- I. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND EARLY SPREAD OF THE CHURCH (2—12).
 - A. The church in Jerusalem (2—7).
 - B. The church in Palestine (8—12).
- II. THE SPREAD OF THE CHURCH THROUGHOUT THE CIVILIZED WORLD (13—28).
 - A. Paul’s first missionary journey (13; 14).
 - B. The council in Jerusalem (15:1-35).
 - C. Paul’s second missionary journey (15:36—18:22).
 - D. Paul’s third missionary journey (18:23—21:14).
 - E. Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Caesarea (21:15—26:32).
 - F. Paul’s trip to Rome and two-year imprisonment (27; 28).

LESSONS FROM ACTS

The heart of the book is in its sermons. Start with Peter’s masterful discourse in Acts 2 and carefully read each sermon to see how all exalt “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Notice the difference in approach when the apostles addressed Jewish audiences and when Paul stood before a crowd of Greek philosophers in Acts 17. (For the one sermon delivered to a Christian audience, see 20:17-35.)

The Book of Acts has been called “the book of conversions.” It is filled with accounts of people converted to Jesus: the Jews on Pentecost (2), the Samaritans (8), the Ethiopian eunuch (8), Saul (9; 22; 26), Cornelius and his household (10; 11), Lydia and her household (16), the jailer (16), and the Corinthians (18). Although incidentals vary in these accounts, the essentials remain the same: They heard the gospel,

believed it, repented of their sins, were baptized, and thus became a part of the church, the body of people saved by the blood of Jesus (20:28),

An interesting way to study Acts is to notice the factors that made the early church grow so rapidly: boldness in preaching, every member sharing the gospel, dependence on God, etc. Especially note the dependence on *prayer*: 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4; etc.

How 3,000 Were Saved (Acts 2)

In Acts 2 we have the establishment of the church, the first gospel sermon, the first converts. For such an occasion, God sets the stage with care. The time chosen is the Jewish feast of Pentecost, a time when the most can be reached. The personalities chosen are the twelve apostles (1:26—2:1), whom Jesus had prepared for this moment. The place chosen is the temple (Lk. 24:52, 53), where any manifestation would immediately attract attention.

The story begins with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4). The apostles speak in tongues, languages they had not studied (2:6, 8, 11). The crowd gathers, dumbfounded (2:6, 7, 12). Everything is ready; Peter steps to the front (Mt. 16:18, 19). Follow the sequence of events to see “how 3,000 were saved” on that day.

I. BY HEARING ABOUT CHRIST (2:14-36).

A. He who denied Christ a few days before now proclaims Him. Peter’s theme is “*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Notice his masterful discourse:

1. Introduction.
 - a. A call for attention (v. 14).
 - b. An explanation of the miracle (vv. 15-21).
 - c. *Thesis sentence* (vv. 22-24). Three proofs are introduced:
 - (1) Jesus’ miracles prove He is divine (v. 22; note Jn. 3:2).
 - (2) The fulfillment of prophecy proves He is divine (v. 23).
 - (3) The *Resurrection* proves Him divine (v. 24). The body of the sermon is concerned with this.
2. *The Resurrection foretold* (vv. 25-31).
 - a. King David had predicted the Resurrection from the dead, using first person (vv. 25-28).
 - b. David could not have spoken of himself, for his body was still dead and buried (v. 29).
 - c. David often spoke in first person when prophesying of the Messiah. If he was not speaking of himself, he must have been speaking of the Christ (vv. 30, 31).
3. *The Resurrection a reality* (vv. 32-35).
 - a. The witness of the apostles (v. 32; see 1 Cor. 15:1ff.).
 - b. The proof of the miracle they were witnessing (vv. 33-35).
4. Conclusion: The evidence cannot be denied; Jesus is the Christ (v. 36)!

B. “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” is the hub of salvation and should be the hub of all preaching!

II. BY BELIEVING IN CHRIST (2:37).

A. They are “pierced to the heart”! Obviously they *believe* what Peter says.

1. Faith comes from the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). God’s Word is a sword that can cut to the heart (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12)!
 2. Only when people are thus touched can the gospel be the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16)!
- B. They demonstrate their faith by asking “life’s greatest question.”
1. It has to do with the soul.
 2. It has to do with eternity.

III. BY OBEYING CHRIST (2:38-41a).

- A. For the first time, the answer is given with Christ’s authority (v. 38).
1. “Repent”—change your attitude about sin and resolve to change your life.
 2. “Each of you”—no exceptions.
 3. “Be baptized”—be immersed in water.
 4. “In the name of Jesus Christ”—by His authority.
 5. “For [unto] the forgiveness of your sins”—to remove the guilt that is tearing you apart.
 6. “And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”—God’s Spirit to help you live the Christian life.
- B. This is so important that Peter exhorts them further (vv. 39, 40).
- C. Then, those who had honest hearts *do* what Peter has told them to do (v. 41a)!

IV. BY OBEYING CHRIST IMMEDIATELY (2:41b).

- A. They were baptized *that day*.
- B. When you know what to do, never put it off!

V. BY BEING ADDED TO CHRIST’S CHURCH (2:41, 47).

- A. When they were baptized, thus saved from past sins, God *added* them to His church.
- B. The church we read about in the New Testament is the body of people saved by the blood of Christ. You, too, can be a part of the church by obeying the gospel. God will add you to the church, and He will not add you to the wrong one.

VI. BY CONTINUING WITH CHRIST (2:42).

- A. After we are baptized, we need to live the life Christ wants us to live (1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10).
- B. Continuing in special expressions of our life in Christ:
1. “The apostles’ teaching”—the teaching found in the New Testament.

2. "Fellowship"—our joint participation in the life and work of the church (including the contribution).
3. "The breaking of bread"—in this context, our sharing in the Lord's Supper. Do not neglect it (Heb. 10:25).
4. "Prayer"—constant communion with our Lord (1 Thess. 5:17).

CONCLUSION

- A. How exciting to think of three thousand being baptized that day! However, there were hundreds of thousands present that day. Why weren't more saved? They did not do the things we have talked about!
- B. You can be saved today—today—just as the three thousand were saved!

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Romans: Justification by Faith

TITLE

This is the first of Paul's epistles, or letters. All are named after the recipients. This letter is addressed "to all who are beloved of God in Rome," specifically those who were "saints," or Christians (1:7).

BACKGROUND

Paul wrote thirteen or fourteen letters (see the article "Hebrews: A Word of Encouragement"). His letters can be divided into letters to *congregations* (Romans—2 Thessalonians) and letters to *individuals* (1 Timothy—Philemon or Hebrews).

Romans is placed first among Paul's epistles not because it was the first written, but because it is acknowledged as Paul's masterpiece. Unlike many of Paul's letters, Romans does not respond to specific problems in a congregation; rather, it is "a concise statement about Christianity, from root to fruit."

The first and last of Romans (1:9-13; 15:22-32; 16:1, 23) give some background for the book. Paul was in Achaia (specifically, Corinth). He had completed collecting the funds for the poor saints in Jerusalem, so the time was the end of his third missionary journey. Paul probably wrote the letter during his three-month stay in Corinth before starting to Jerusalem (Acts 20:2, 3; note Rom. 16:1 and remember that Cenchræa was the main seaport for Corinth). The time would probably have been late A.D. 57 or early 58.

Paul had long desired to go to Rome (note Acts 19:21). His plan was to go first to Jerusalem, then to Rome, and from there to Spain. When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he knew that he might die when he reached Jerusalem (see Acts 20:22-25; 21:13, 14). Therefore, he had several motives for writing: If he made the trip to Rome, this letter could pave the way for a profitable visit. If, however, he were prevented from going, this epistle could accomplish much of what he hoped to accomplish by a visit (1:11).

The book divides itself naturally into two parts: The first eight chapters are the "doctrinal" section and the heart of the book; the last eight chapters are the application section, dealing with practical matters that relate to the truths presented in the first eight chapters (see outline).

The theme of the book is "justification by faith." Paul states his thesis in 1:17 by quoting Hab. 2:4: "As it is written, 'But the righteous shall live *by faith*.'"

Romans expands a number of thoughts first found in an earlier letter, Galatians (see the article "Galatians: Liberty in Christ"). Parts of Romans are hard to grasp (2 Pet. 3:15, 16), but it is a book that pays great dividends for the struggle to understand it. As one teacher used to say: "If you get Romans, God gets you!"

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION (1:1-17).

I. DOCTRINAL (1:18—8:39).

- A. Condemnation (1:18—3:20).
 - 1. Gentiles.
 - 2. Jews.
- B. Justification (3:21—5:21).
- C. Sanctification (6; 7).
- D. Glorification (8).

II. PRACTICAL (9—16).

- A. Explanation (9—11). Justification by faith reconciled:
 - 1. The promises made to Israel.
 - 2. The faithfulness of God.
- B. Application (12:1—15:13).

CONCLUSION (15:14—16:27).

LESSONS FROM ROMANS

The doctrine of justification by faith is one of the most comforting in the Bible. God does not look for perfect obedience (if He did, all would be lost: 3:23; 6:23). Rather, He looks for *faith*; if He finds faith in our hearts, He *counts it* as if we were righteous (5:4). It should be stressed, however, that Paul does not teach "salvation by faith *only*." He begins and ends this letter noting that the faith he speaks of is an *obedient* faith (1:5; 16:26). In 10:16 he uses the concepts of *faith* and *obedience* interchangeably.

Romans has been compared to a beautiful ring with chap. 8 as the diamond in the ring and v. 28 as the sparkle in the diamond. Rom. 8:28 is one of the greatest passages in the Bible on the providence of God. It does not say everything *is* good, but that God *works all things together* for good. God is alive and working in the world to bless His children.

There is no more practical section in all the Bible than Rom. 12. Learn it; then live it!

What the Holy Spirit Does (Romans 8)

When we are baptized, God gives us the Holy Spirit as a gift (Acts 2:38; see Gal. 4:6). The purpose of this Gift is not to enable Christians to perform miracles (all Christians had this gift in New Testament times; but not all could perform miracles). What *is* the purpose of this Gift? What does the Holy Spirit do for us today as Christians?

The Christian has something the alien sinner does not have. The Holy Spirit does not do *everything* for the Christian, but He does do *something*. In Phil. 1:19 Paul refers to "the provision of the Spirit." The Greek word translated "provision" means "*abundant provision*." God has abundantly provided for us through His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works today in Christians in at least three ways: through the Word (Eph. 6:17; 2 Pet. 1:21); in His indwelling capacity (8:9, 11; 2 Tim. 1:14; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 1 Jn. 3:14; 4:13); and providentially, as one of the Godhead (8:28). As we study passages about what the Spirit does for Christians, we cannot be dogmatic regarding how He performs each function. The *how* is not as important as knowing (and believing) that He works on our behalf!

A great passage on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians is Rom. 8. In the first part of the chapter, the Spirit is mentioned eighteen or nineteen times! Let us survey the chapter to gain insight into what the Holy Spirit is doing for us as Christians.

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN GIVE US VICTORY OVER LIFE (8:1-10).

- A. The "therefore" of v. 1 refers to chap. 7, which spoke of *defeat* (note 7:15, 18, 19, 24).
- B. A new element has been added: The Holy Spirit of God (vv. 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10)! Through the Spirit, instead of defeat, we can have *victory*!

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN GIVE US VICTORY OVER DEATH (8:11).

- A. Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God. Even so, we will be raised by the Spirit that dwells in us.
- B. Note: Since *all* will be raised, whether good or evil (Jn. 5:28, 29), Rom. 8:11 must refer to a resurrection to *eternal life*.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN GIVE US VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION (8:13).

- A. Rom. 7:24: "Who will set me free from the body of this death?" Answer: Through the Spirit, we can "mortify" ("put to death") the deeds of the body! We are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3:16, 20).
- B. Occasionally someone says, "As soon as I can live the Christian life, I'll be baptized"; but one cannot live the Christian life without *being* a Christian and having the help of God's Spirit!

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN GIVE US VICTORY OVER INDECISION (8:14a).

- A. In the Bible, God is said to "lead" His people. In this text, the Spirit is said to "lead" Christians. Two extremes must be avoided: claiming that the

Spirit is responsible for *every* decision we make and denying that the Spirit has *any* influence in our lives. The Spirit might lead us in various ways:

- 1. Most definitely (and most distinctly) through the Bible He inspired.
- 2. Other possibilities:
 - a. Providentially (through "open doors"; see 1 Cor. 16:9; etc.).
 - b. Through the conscience.
 - c. Through the counsel of godly friends, etc.
- B. Again, we cannot be dogmatic as to the "how." Most important is that we understand that God *is* working in our lives (see Ps. 37:23).

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN GIVE US VICTORY OVER UNCERTAINTY (8:14b-17, 23).

- A. The fact that God gave us His Spirit when we were baptized is a powerful proof that we are God's children, with all the blessings of God's heirs!
 - 1. The "first fruits" (v. 23) were a guarantee of the rest of the harvest.
 - 2. "First fruits" means the same as the "earnest" of the Spirit (Eph. 1:13, 14; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 5:5). "Earnest" means a "pledge" or "guarantee," as in "earnest money." The Holy Spirit is a "down payment" on heaven!
- B. See v. 16: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." This does not refer to "a feeling better felt than told." Neither is it limited to a promise in the Bible. Rather, as we see what God does for us through His Spirit, we are assured that He loves us and that we are His children! What confidence this gives!

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN GIVE US THE VICTORY OVER WEAKNESS (8:26, 27).

- A. We all are *weak* at times. The Holy Spirit *helps* us in our weakness. The word "helps" is from a compound Greek word, *sunantilambano*: *sun* ("with"), *anti* ("against, opposite"), *lambano* ("to take or receive"). Imagine trying to pick up a piece of furniture too heavy for one person. Someone must get on *the other side* and lift *with* you. That "Someone" is the Holy Spirit, enabling you to do what you cannot do alone!
- B. A specific illustration is given of the Holy Spirit helping us: He helps us when we *pray*. "Groanings too deep for words" are *our own* deep feelings which we cannot put into words.

CONCLUSION

- A. Do we have to understand everything about the Holy Spirit before He can work in our lives? No. The key to the Spirit's working in our lives is to "walk in the Spirit" (v. 4), in other words, to obey the instructions of the Spirit as found in the New Testament He has given us!
- B. Is the Holy Spirit dwelling in you? If not, you do not belong to Jesus (v. 9)! You need to be baptized and receive this marvelous Gift!

1 Corinthians: Struggling With Worldliness

TITLE

This book, named after the recipients, is the first of two New Testament letters Paul wrote to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1:2; see 2 Cor. 1:1).

BACKGROUND

The city of Corinth was located west of Athens, on the narrow isthmus connecting the mainland of Greece with the lower peninsula. It was a hub of commerce and was notorious, even among the pagans, for its debauchery (note 6:9-11). Noteworthy was the temple of Venus with its one thousand “priestesses,” who offered prostitution to its “worshippers.” Corinth was not an easy field, but there were people there who were tired of what the world had to offer and were ready for the gospel (Acts 18:10).

Acts tells of the events leading to Paul’s association with Corinth. During his second missionary journey, Paul received “the Macedonian call” (Acts 16:9); he thus preached in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. From Berea he went to Athens for a short while, and finally on to Corinth. Acts 18:1-17 tells of his work in that sinful city. After working there for a year and a half, Paul returned to Antioch by way of Jerusalem (Acts 18:22). He left behind in Corinth a young church, struggling for existence in a cesspool of immorality.

After a brief stay in Antioch, Paul began his third journey. After visiting churches started earlier, he went to Ephesus. While working in Ephesus, Paul maintained contact with the work in Corinth (note 5:9; 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1). Finally, during the latter part of a two- or three-year stay in Ephesus, a delegation (16:17) brought a letter from Corinth. This letter, coupled with reports that had reached Paul, prompted him to write the letter we call “1 Corinthians” (note 16:18). The first six chapters deal with reports Paul had received (1:11; 5:1). The last ten chapters are largely answers to questions raised in the letter from the church at Corinth (7:1; look for the phrase “now concerning”). The time of the writing would have been A.D. 55-57.

This letter provides one of the most graphic pictures of the struggles of the early church in a pagan society and how inspired writers dealt with the problems produced by the struggle. In a world rapidly

becoming more ungodly, the message of this book grows daily more appropriate for our society.

OUTLINE

- I. RESPONSE TO REPORTS: Correction (1—6).
 - A. Ministers; division (1—4).
 - B. Making the church pure; withdrawing fellowship (5).
 - C. Members going to law against other members (6).

- II. RESPONSE TO LETTER: Instruction (7—16).
 - A. Marriage problems and the “distress” (7).
 - B. Meats offered to idols (8—10).
 - C. Meeting (assembly) problems (11).
 1. Women and “veils.”
 2. The Lord’s Supper.
 - D. Miraculous gifts and love (12—14).
 - E. Mystery of the bodily resurrection (15).
 - F. Material assistance: giving (16).

LESSONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS

The church at Corinth was filled with problems, but it was still “the church of God”; its members were still “saints” (1:2). Do not give up on any congregation of the Lord too soon.

The theme of this letter has been characterized as “struggling with worldliness.” Perhaps we need to define “worldliness”! “Worldliness” refers to “placing too much stress on *this* world.” A common manifestation today is the problem the Corinthians had: involvement in the ungodliness going on around them. Even if *that* form of “worldliness” is not a major problem with us, is it possible we *still* place too much stress on this world, rather than the world to come? Let each examine himself.

One way to express the theme of the book is “the practical effect of the gospel on daily living.” First Corinthians is cross-saturated (1:23; 2:2; etc.). It is important to realize that the story of the cross is not just a story to stir the heart. It affects our lives.

For most people, the highlight of the book is chap. 13, the love chapter of the Bible. To appreciate chap. 13 fully, see it in context. The subject under discussion is miraculous spiritual gifts (see outline). According to Paul’s practice, he would have laid his

hands on the Corinthians to give them these gifts (1:7; note Acts 19:6; 8:18). They were misusing their gifts. Chap. 12 lists the gifts; *chap. 13 says the miraculous gifts would pass away*; chap. 14 says, in effect, “but as long as you have the gifts, here is how to use them.” The contrast in chap. 13 is between love and miraculous

gifts, especially the gift of “tongues” (speaking in languages that they had not studied).

This letter had its desired effect (2 Cor. 7:6ff.). The most important thing in dealing with people is not where they are spiritually, but whether they have hearts that can be touched by the message of God.

===== Victory Through Jesus! (1 Corinthians 15) =====

Victory! What images does this word conjure up in your mind? The end of a war or a battle? The celebration of an athletic achievement? Some personal triumph? Whatever else the word might signify, it always means *excitement*.

One of the most exciting victory passages of the Bible is found at the end of 1 Cor. 15. We do not know what prompted the writing of this chapter. Perhaps the Christians had buried loved ones and needed reassurance. Maybe Paul was aware of those who were trying to undermine his teaching (vv. 12, 35). Whatever the reason, the result was one of the greatest chapters in the Bible.

Let us go through 1 Cor. 15 to appreciate better the victory that is celebrated at its close.

I. THE VALIDITY OF THE RESURRECTION (15:1-34).

A. Paul reminds them of the gospel he preached, especially the Resurrection (vv. 1-4). He gives two proofs of the validity of the Resurrection (vv. 3-11).

1. The Scriptures (vv. 3, 4).
2. Eye-witnesses (vv. 5-11).
 - a. Reliable witnesses like the apostles.
 - b. An abundance of witnesses like the five hundred.
 - c. Remarkable witnesses like James (the Lord’s brother) and Paul; consider the change in their lives!

B. Paul then quickly notes the consequences if there is no bodily resurrection, if Jesus has not risen (vv. 12-19):

1. Paul’s preaching would be vain, useless.
2. Their faith would be vain, without purpose.
3. The apostles would have misrepresented God.
4. They would be still in their sins; they would be lost.
5. Dead Christians would have perished; they would be gone forever.
6. Christians should be pitied above all men.

C. Paul makes all those statements irrelevant with this affirmation: “But now Christ *has been raised!*” (vv. 20-34).

1. Two illustrations are given (vv. 20-23):
 - a. Christ is our “first fruits,” the guarantee of our own resurrection (note Lev. 23:9-14).
 - b. Adam brought death into the world; Christ brings life! (See Rom. 5:12-21.)
2. Death shall be destroyed (vv. 24-32). Rev. 21:4 says, “And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

a. That is why some mentioned in v. 29 were being “baptized for the dead.” (This may mean that they were baptizing people to replace Christians who had died.)

b. That is why Paul persevered in the face of unbelievable opposition (vv. 30-32).

D. An application is made: We *shall* be raised, so we must not let false teachers lead us astray (vv. 33, 34).

II. THE VALUE OF THE RESURRECTION (15:35-58).

A. We shall receive new bodies (vv. 35-50)!

1. In “explaining” the unexplainable, the Bible often uses comparisons. Paul begins with illustrations from nature (vv. 35-41). God does not attempt to satisfy our curiosity about the resurrection or the resurrection body, but He does tell us what we *need* to know!

a. The bodies we receive will be *different* from the ones we have now.

b. The new bodies will be *related* to the ones we have now. We will still be ourselves! Personality will survive the grave.

c. The new bodies will be *better*, infinitely better!

2. Paul compares the “natural” (physical) body and the “spiritual” body (vv. 42-50)! Among other things, he returns to the comparison of Adam and Christ (vv. 45ff.).

B. We will be *victorious* (vv. 51-57)!

1. What will happen when Jesus returns (vv. 51-53)?

2. This is *victory* (vv. 54-57)!

a. Victory over sin: both the guilt and the consequences.

b. Victory over death!

C. A second application is made: Because we will be raised, we should not get discouraged; we should not quit. Our labors for the Lord will be rewarded when He returns (v. 58)!

CONCLUSION

You may lose battles now, but ultimate victory can be yours if you will be “raised with Him” now from the waters of baptism and walk “in newness of life.” Rom. 6 says, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection” (vv. 3-5; see vv. 6, 17, 18).

2 Corinthians: From Paul's Heart

TITLE

The Book of 2 Corinthians is named after the recipients. It is the second letter in the New Testament addressed to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1:1).

BACKGROUND

This letter is a follow-up to 1 Corinthians. Both were written by the apostle Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1 and 2 Cor. 1:1).

After Paul sent the letter to the church at Corinth (see background in the article “1 Corinthians: Struggling With Worldliness”), he sent Titus to Corinth (12:18). A short time later, his work at Ephesus was disrupted (1:8-11; Acts 19:23—20:1). He went north to Troas, where he worked while waiting for Titus. When Titus did not come, Paul crossed over to Macedonia, where he collected funds for Jerusalem Christians (8:1-5; 9:2, 4). At last Titus met him there (2:13; 7:5-7; Acts 20:1, 2). Titus’ report was mainly favorable. Most of the Corinthians had responded to Paul’s admonition. For instance, they apparently had withdrawn fellowship from the man referred to in 1 Cor. 5 (7:6ff.).

Some (Judaizing teachers, 11:22) opposed Paul, criticizing him, impugning his motives, questioning his apostleship. As “proof,” they cited his change in plans regarding a visit to Corinth (1:15—2:1), the fact that Paul carried no “letters of recommendation” (3:1), his personal appearance (10:10), and the fact that he accepted no pay from the Corinthians while he worked in Corinth (11:7).

Paul’s response to all this is 2 Corinthians. The letter would have been written from Macedonia, several months after the previous epistle (perhaps up to a year, 8:10; 9:2).

In the letter, Paul rejoices at the Corinthians’ response and follows up on matters from the previous letter, such as the special contribution (8; 9). Most of the letter, however, is a defense of his ministry and apostleship: “. . . in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (12:11, 12; see 11:5). The first chapters are comfort for his friends; the last chapters are a confrontation with his enemies. (Because the two sections are

different in tone, some see in 2 Corinthians at least two different letters, but there is no textual evidence for such a theory.)

For subsequent events, see the background in the articles “Romans: Justification by Faith” and “Ephesians: Christ and His Church.”

OUTLINE

This is an emotional letter and difficult to outline. It is not as systematic as most of Paul’s epistles. Here, however, is a simple outline:

I. PAUL AND HIS COMMISSION (1—7).

- A. His motives (1; 2).
- B. His message (3—5).
- C. His mandate (6; 7).

II. PAUL AND HIS CHALLENGE; his collection for the poor (8; 9).

III. PAUL AND HIS CRITICS (10—12).

- A. His appearance (10).
- B. His apostleship (11; 12).
- C. His appeal (13).

LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS

The most *personal* of all Paul’s writings is 2 Corinthians. In it he gives details of his life found nowhere else: his thorn in the flesh, being caught up to “the third heaven” (12:2), etc. Of greater significance, however, is the fact that in it Paul exposes his *heart* as he does in no other letter. Paul was no spiritual Superman; he bled real blood and cried real tears.

The book has a very special message on what is involved in preaching the gospel of Christ and in serving in general. If you would know about a preacher’s *work*, study 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. If you would know about a preacher’s *life*, study 2 Corinthians.

The letter also has a special message on how to deal with adversity in life. Paul makes constant reference to his dependence upon God. He speaks of the all-sufficiency of Christ and of how God gave him strength in weakness. There are lessons here for every life!

As you read the letter, let Paul’s heart speak to *your* heart.

The God of All Comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-11)

What wonderful lessons 2 Corinthians offers to us regarding *comfort*! Second Corinthians is an epistle of comfort. The word is used twenty-nine times in the letter: eighteen times in the verb form and eleven times in the noun form. This comfort is not just sympathy. The Greek word refers to "calling another alongside to *help*." The word combines the ideas of *encouragement* and *consolation*.

God is the God of comfort. In fact, He is the "God of all comfort" (1:3). That was the Hebrew way of saying God is *the source* of all comfort.

I. WE ALL HAVE PROBLEMS.

A. Paul was a messenger of God, but he had problems.

1. He had problems of every kind (1:4-6, 8, 9a).
 - a. There are ten Greek words for trouble, suffering, and the like; *five* of the ten are used in this passage!
 - b. Paul even admitted that he got *discouraged*: ". . . we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within" (7:5). Discouragement is common to mankind; it is not shameful when it happens.
2. There was *purpose* in all of Paul's problems (Rom. 5:3; 8:28). His problems helped him:
 - a. To be qualified to help others (1:3, 4).
 - b. To be a good example (1:6, 7).
 - c. To learn to rely on God (1:9, 10; 12:10).

B. We, too, have problems (1:7).

1. The Corinthians had problems; so do we.
2. We, too, get discouraged!

II. GOD CAN COMFORT US IN ALL OF OUR PROBLEMS.

A. God comforted Paul.

1. Sometimes God saves us *from* our troubles (note Peter's release from prison, Acts 12). More often God saves us *in* our troubles.
2. God comforted Paul by *many* means. Three specific ways are mentioned in our text:

a. By Paul's confidence in God (1:9).

b. By God's providential care, as He protected Paul from danger: "Who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us" (1:10).

c. Through fellow Christians (1:11; 7:6, 13).

3. As a result Paul had great confidence for the future (1:10)! God had comforted him in the past; God was comforting him in the present; God would comfort him in the future!

B. God can also comfort *us* if we will let Him, if we will *cooperate with Him* (1:7).

1. Paul always did what *he* could in every situation.
2. God does not force His comfort, or any of His other blessings, upon us.
3. God is *able* if we are *available*.

III. OUR COMFORT IS NOT TO BE KEPT TO OURSELVES.

A. We are comforted to be able to comfort others (1:4, 6).

1. When we survive a traumatic situation with God's help, we become uniquely qualified to help others who have the same problem. In a sense, God gives us a special ministry!
2. Being comforted by God gives us a message of hope for others with problems, *regardless* of the nature of their trials!

B. In this passage, *all* are comforted (2:7; 7:5ff.).

1. Corinth comforted Titus. Thus Titus was able to comfort Paul. Paul comforted the Corinthians. Finally, Paul admonished the Corinthians to comfort the brother who had repented.
2. That is the way God's comfort is to work. It is to flow from heart to heart!

CONCLUSION

Let us be encouraged! Let us encourage others!

Paul's Apostolic Defense (2 Corinthians)

The Book of 2 Corinthians is the most *autobiographical* of all of Paul's epistles. It is intensely personal and gives an insight into the personal life and ministry of the apostle that none of the other letters give. Because of false charges brought against him, Paul is forced to reveal certain personal events and inner feelings to the Corinthian Christians. Paul's warm human character is exhibited. The letter is an emotional one, full of tears and grief.

This book is *neither doctrinal nor practical*; it is a defense. It is made up of explanations, defenses, protestations, appeals, and arguments. With the exception of his epistle to Philemon, it is the most personal and the least doctrinal of all of Paul's epistles.

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Galatians: Liberty in Christ

TITLE

The Book of Galatians is named after the recipients, specifically, “the churches of Galatia” (1:2). Galatia was a large Roman province in the heart of what is now the country of Turkey. It was bounded by the province of Asia on the west, Cappadocia on the east, Pamphylia and Cilicia on the south, and Bithynia and Pontus on the north.

BACKGROUND

On his first missionary journey, Paul established several congregations in the southern part of the province of Galatia: Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:51—14:23). On his second journey, Paul revisited these congregations (Acts 16:1-3). It was at Lystra that Timothy joined his party. Paul also visited Galatia on his third journey (Acts 18:23; see 1 Cor. 16:1, 2).

It is generally conceded that the Book of Galatians is one of the earliest of Paul’s letters, perhaps his first. If Paul was writing to the congregations established during his first journey, an early date is possible. Some, however, speculate that Paul established other congregations during his second and third missionary journeys and date the letter after those trips. We are safe in dating the writing of the letter between A.D. 48 and 55.

Galatians was written to combat a major problem faced by the early church. Some Christians with a Jewish background were teaching the need for Christians to keep the Old Testament law (Acts 15:1, 24); these are often called “Judaizing teachers.” Among other tenets of the law, they insisted that Christian men be circumcised as a religious ritual (6:12, 13). Since Paul opposed them (2:3; 5:2, 3, 6, 11; 6:15), they attacked his authority, denying that he was an apostle in the same sense Peter and the rest of the Twelve were. Thus, Paul started the letter with a defense of his apostleship (1:1).

A key theme in the letter is “freedom in Christ” (5:1). Paul stresses, however, that liberty is not license (5:13, 19-21). When we were baptized, we put on Christ (3:27); now Christ lives in us and our lives should always reflect the life of our Lord (5:22-24; 6:2)!

The letter contains some of the strongest language from the pen of Paul (note 4:16). The fact that this is the only letter from Paul to churches without

the customary “thanksgiving” passage at the beginning may indicate how agitated Paul was. Another uniqueness about the book is the addendum of a note in Paul’s own handwriting (6:11ff.; Paul’s practice was to dictate his letter to another). Perhaps this was done to impress further how serious Paul considered this matter.

OUTLINE

I. PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTLESHIP (1; 2).

II. PAUL CONTRASTS THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL (3; 4).

A. The law of Moses was temporary, being added to the promise given to Abraham (Gen. 22:18) to make men aware of their sin and need for salvation, until Jesus came (3:16, 19). We are no longer under Old Testament law (3:24, 25; 4:31; see 5:3, 4).

B. We are now justified by faith in Jesus (3:7, 11, 22; see 2:16), a faith expressed in obedience (3:26, 27).

III. PAUL MAKES PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THESE TRUTHS (5; 6).

LESSONS FROM GALATIANS

There are still Judaizing teachers with us today, who would take us back to the Old Testament to justify Sabbath-keeping, a separate priesthood, the burning of incense, mechanical instruments of music in worship, and a multiplicity of other practices. They need to listen to Paul’s conclusions. First, one cannot pick and choose from the Old Testament. Those who go to the Old Testament to justify one religious practice are obligated to keep it all (5:3). Second, one cannot be under both Old Testament and New Testament arrangements at the same time. If one chooses to justify his religious practices by the Old Testament, he removes himself from the New Testament system of grace (5:4); and without grace, one cannot be saved!

Paul’s specific teaching in this letter is that salvation is not through the law of Moses, but application can be made generally to the concept of salvation through law-keeping, regardless of what that law is. This does not mean there are no “laws” in Christian-

ity. If there were no law, there would be no sin (Rom. 5:13). Since men continue to sin (Rom. 3:23), it follows that God has laws to which men are amenable. The New Testament occasionally even uses the word “law” to refer to its principles (see 6:2). We should understand that since none can keep any law perfectly (not even a perfect law; see Jas. 1:25), none can be saved by law-keeping. This does not exclude the essentiality of “faith working by love” (5:6), believing and being baptized to become a Christian (3:26, 27; see Mk. 16:16), or living a life of love and service (5:14; 6:2). It does mean that even after we have done

our best, we have not *earned* our salvation; we still must be saved by the grace and mercy of God. Our glorying, therefore, is not in what we have done, but in the cross of Christ (6:14; see notes in the article “Romans: Justification by Faith”).

Although the book is heavy with theological implication, it abounds in practical teaching: how Christians should relate to others (5:13-15; 6:1, 2, 10), respect for God and the things of God (1:6-9; 6:6, 7), etc. When we teach and preach, there must always be “the bottom line” of how our teaching applies to the lives of our listeners.

God Keeps His Promises! (Galatians 3:6-29)

Judaizing teachers came to the province of Galatia, telling Gentile Christians they needed to be circumcised and obey other tenets of the law of Moses. Paul, who worked in that area (Acts 16:6; 18:23; 1 Cor. 16:1), was upset. He considered the Galatians to be intelligent people; he said, “Someone must have put a hex on you to make you turn from the gospel back to the old law” (3:1). Most of the book deals directly or indirectly with the fact that we are not under the Old Testament. Let us look at chap. 3, where Paul reminds them of the promise given to Abraham.

I. A TREMENDOUS PROMISE: THE SEED (3:6-18).

- A. After man sinned and fell away from God, God immediately announced His plan for man’s redemption: the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15). That same kind of “seed” promise was given to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18). The promise was repeated to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) and Jacob (Gen. 28:14).
- B. Paul emphasizes several characteristics of this tremendous promise.
 1. The *Seed* (whom Paul identifies as Jesus Christ, who would “hang on a tree”) would come (see vv. 13, 14, 16).
 2. The promise was based on the faith of Abraham (v. 6), not on the perfect keeping of law (vv. 10-13).
 3. The promise embraced all people, including Gentiles (vv. 8, 14).
 4. All men could become heirs of the promise—on the basis of faith (vv. 7-9, 14).

II. A TEMPORARY PROVISION: THE LAW (3:15-22).

- A. The law of Moses was added temporarily to the promise given to (and covenant made with) Abraham.
 1. The law came hundreds of years after the promise—about 430 years after the covenant was reconfirmed with Judah (Gen. 46:1-4).
 2. The law was inferior to the promise.
 - a. The law came through a mediator (vv. 19, 20); the promise came “face to face” with God.
 - b. The promise brings life; the law did not (v. 21).
 3. Why then was the law given?
 - a. To convict men of sin (vv. 19-22).

- b. To “lead” men (specifically the Jewish nation) to Christ (v. 24).
- B. When the law fulfilled its purpose, it was taken away.
 1. It was valid only “until the seed [i.e., Christ] should come” (vv. 16, 19).
 2. Once this happened, men were no longer under the law (vv. 24, 25).

III. A THRILLING POSSIBILITY: AN HEIR (3:22-29).

- A. The *Seed* has come, and He has died for us (vv. 13, 14, 16, 22, 24)!
 1. When He died, this was the end of the Old Testament arrangement (v. 13; see Col. 2:14ff.).
 2. When He died, this was the beginning of His covenant with mankind (vv. 24, 25; see Heb. 9:16, 17).
- B. The new covenant of Jesus is based on *faith* (vv. 22-26)—a faith expressed in baptism (v. 27). The beautiful result:
 1. We are baptized *into Christ* (v. 27).
 2. We put *on Christ* (v. 27).
 3. We are united *in Christ* (v. 28).
 4. We belong *to Christ* (v. 29).
- C. *All men* are included in the promise (v. 28); the ground at the foot of the cross is level.
- D. When we believe and are baptized, we are “*heirs* according to promise” (v. 29)!

CONCLUSION

God kept His word in the past; He still keeps His word today. You can always count on Him! Can He count on you?

The Fruit of the Spirit

Nine fruits of the Spirit are mentioned in Gal. 5:22, 23:

1. Love (agape)
2. Joy (spiritual gladness)
3. Peace (calmness and tranquillity of mind)
4. Patience (longsuffering; a long temper)
5. Kindness (gentleness)
6. Goodness (generosity)
7. Faithfulness (reliability)
8. Gentleness (gentle humility)
9. Self-control (having mastery)

Ephesians: *Christ and His Church*

TITLE

This letter by Paul is named after those mentioned in v. 1: “To the saints who are at Ephesus.” Since the phrase “at Ephesus” is not found in some older manuscripts, this may be a general letter intended for circulation among the churches, starting at Ephesus. The fact that the epistle contains no personal greetings to those in Ephesus, even though Paul spent several years in that city, lends credence to this theory.

BACKGROUND

The Ephesian letter is the first of four epistles called “the prison epistles.” All mention Paul’s bonds (see 3:1; Phil. 1:7, 13, 14; Col. 4:3, 18; Philem. 9, 13). There are many connections between the letters. Two are delivered by Tychicus (6:21; Col. 4:7). Three mention Timothy (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philem. 1). Two mention Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Philem. 10). In two, the same Christians send greetings (Col. 4:10-14; Philem. 23, 24). Probably all were written about the same time from the same place. The probable place was Rome, during Paul’s first imprisonment, about A.D. 60-62.

Paul had long been interested in Ephesus. He had wanted to go that direction near the beginning of his second journey, but God had other plans for him. He made a brief stop in Ephesus on his way home from that journey (maybe the congregation there was started then). Paul worked there for two or three years during his third journey (Acts 19). While he was there, the gospel spread throughout that region (Acts 19:10; Rev. 2:11). From Ephesus, Paul went to Macedonia and Achaia (see background in the articles “1 Corinthians: Struggling With Worldliness” and “2 Corinthians: From Paul’s Heart”), then started back to Jerusalem. On the way back he delivered a great sermon to the elders from the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17-38). When Paul reached Jerusalem, he was arrested. He was imprisoned at Caesarea for two years, then at Rome for two years. If Paul wrote this letter from Rome, the epistle was written four or five years after he had last visited Ephesus.

Though it is relatively short, Ephesians is one of Paul’s finest efforts. In a few chapters he sets forth the magnificent scope of God’s plan for man’s redemption through Christ—and the effect this should have on each person “in Christ.”

In later years, Ephesus remained a key city to the cause of Christ. When Paul was released from prison,

apparently he made a trip to Ephesus, then left Timothy there (see notes in the article “1 Timothy: A Handbook for Preachers”). Also, a strong tradition puts the apostle John in Ephesus during the last part of his life (see notes in the article “John: Christ, the Son of God”). Revelation was addressed to the seven churches of Asia, beginning with Ephesus (Rev. 2:11).

OUTLINE

- I. DOCTRINAL: What God has done for us (1—3).
 - A. Paul’s greeting (1:1, 2).
 - B. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3-14).
 - C. Paul’s first prayer (1:15-23).
 - D. God has saved us by His grace (2:1-10).
 - E. God gave us peace—with Him and with our fellowman (2:11-22).
 - F. God revealed His eternal purpose (3:1-13).
 - G. Paul’s second prayer (3:14-21).

- II. PRACTICAL: What *we* should therefore do (4—6).
 - A. Strive for unity (4:1-6).
 - B. Use the gifts God gives us to accomplish His purposes (4:7-16).
 - C. Put off “the old man”; put on “the new man” (4:17—5:20).
 - D. Learn how to *relate* to others (5:21—6:9).
 1. Husbands and wives (5:22-33).
 2. Parents and children (6:1-4).
 3. Masters and slaves (6:5-9).
 - E. Put on the Christian armor and *pray* (6:10-20).
 - F. Closing (6:21-24).

LESSONS FROM EPHESIANS

Ephesians has been called “the church letter.” It is a mini-course on the church: Christ is head over *all* things to the church (1:22; see 5:28); the church is *the* body of Christ (1:22, 23); we are reconciled to God *in* the body, the church (2:16); God’s glory and wisdom are made known by the church (3:10, 21); the church was part of God’s eternal plan (3:10, 11); there is *one* body, the church (4:4; see 2:16); God intends the church to grow (4:16); Christ is the Savior of the body, the church (5:23); the church is subject to Christ (5:24); Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (5:25, 29); Christ wants the church to be holy (5:25-27);

Christ and the church are one (5:31, 32). Can any say the Lord's church is of little significance?

The word "mystery" as used by Paul (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19) does not refer to "mysterious secrets available only to the initiated." Rather, it refers to that which in the *past* was a mystery, but *now* has been revealed (3:3-5). Paul expected his readers (and us) to

understand "the mystery" (3:4).

One of Paul's favorite phrases is "in Christ." He uses such a phrase over one hundred times in his letters; *almost one-third of these references are in Ephesians*. Watch for this phrase; mark it; think on it. What a marvelous thought that we can be *in Christ* (see the article "Philippians: Rejoicing in Christ")!

"Unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:1-6)

The first part of the practical section emphasizes unity (4:3, 13). God wants His people to be unified (Prov. 6:19; Ps. 133:1; Jn. 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 1:10-13). There are no magic formulas for unity; it takes diligent effort on the part of every Christian. Our text gives two essentials for unity:

I. UNITY OF SPIRIT AND ATTITUDE (4:1-3).

A. Our lives are to be in harmony with God's great plan and purpose (v. 1; chap. 3)!

1. This includes being one (vv. 2-6)!
2. This begins with a *spirit of unity* (vv. 2, 3)!

B. Four great necessities for getting along with others (v. 2). The KJV appears in brackets.

1. Humility [lowliness]: We are not to think of ourselves too highly (Rom. 12:3).
2. Gentleness [meekness]: This is strength under control; a spirit of submission (5:21).
3. Patience [long-suffering]: Literally this means "long-tempered"; that is, *not* short-tempered.
4. Showing forbearance to one another [forbearing] in love: We need to be aware of our own faults and "put up with" others' faults (note Mt. 17:17).

C. It takes *effort* to maintain "the unity of the Spirit" (v. 3).

1. Being diligent [endeavoring]: The NEB has "spare no effort."
2. Preserve [to keep]: Unity is from God (2:14); our job is to *maintain* it.
3. The unity of the Spirit: Note 1 Cor. 12:13. The unity we are to preserve is that which is from the Spirit of God (note that vv. 4-6 are one sentence in the Greek).

II. UNITY OF TEACHING AND PRACTICE (4:4-6).

A. There must be a balance between a God-approved spirit and God-approved doctrine.

1. We cannot forget doctrine and "just love."
2. We must be united on the basics of Christianity (1 Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:13-15; Phil. 2:2).
 - a. The "seven ones" are typical of the basics (other basics include the Lord's Supper).
 - b. Essentials, matters of faith, versus non-essentials, matters of opinion (Rom. 10:17; 14).

B. We should be united because of the things we have in common: the "seven ones."

1. Unity of organization: One body (v. 4).
 - a. The body is the church (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18).
 - b. This is not an "invisible" body, but consists of Christians (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12) who are members of local congregations (Rom. 16:16).

2. Unity of inspiration: One Spirit (v. 4).

- a. In context this is the Holy Spirit (mentioned twelve times in the book).
- b. Guided by the teachings of the Spirit (6:17), we are baptized and receive the Spirit as a gift (Acts 2:38) to help us develop the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).

3. Unity of aim: One hope (v. 4).

- a. Men teach many hopes, such as an earthly utopia.
- b. The "one hope" of the Christian is heaven (Rom. 5:2; Col. 1:5; Tit. 1:2).

4. Unity of authority: One Lord (v. 5).

- a. "Lord" means "master, ruler." The Lord of our life is *Jesus* (Acts 2:36). Jesus has all authority (1:22, 23; Mt. 28:18). We must obey Him (Lk. 6:46). We have no other spiritual master.
- b. Many are *called* "lord" (1 Cor. 8:5), but there is one God-approved Lord.

5. Unity of teaching: One faith (v. 5).

- a. This probably refers to the body of teaching we call the New Testament (Jude 3).
- b. This is a body of teaching centered in Jesus (Jn. 8:24).

6. Unity of practice: One baptism (v. 5).

- a. Literally this means "one immersion." Of six baptisms mentioned in the New Testament, only the Great Commission baptism (Mt. 28:18-20) was included in Ephesians as part of God's plan. Note the essentials of this "one baptism":

- (1) Immersion in water (Acts 8:38, 39; Rom. 6:3, 4).
- (2) People of accountable age (not babies) (Mt. 28:19, 20; Mk. 16:15, 16).
- (3) In order to be saved from sin and added to the body of the saved, the church (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:27).
- b. All need "one baptism" (Acts 19:1-5) according to the New Testament pattern.

7. Unity of worship: One God (v. 6).

- a. The ultimate source of unity is God.
- b. Christians believe this world is God-created ("Father of all"), God-controlled ("over all"), God-sustained ("through all"), and God-filled ("in all").
- c. We must strive in all things to please *God!*

CONCLUSION

Unity is every Christian's business. Are you in the body? If so, do you have the spirit of unity?

Philippians: Rejoicing in Christ

TITLE

The Book of Philippians is named after the recipients. Specifically, the book is addressed to the Christians who lived in the city of Philippi (1:1).

BACKGROUND

On his second missionary journey, in response to “the Macedonian call” (Acts 16:9, 10), Paul and his company sailed to Philippi, a Roman colony which was an important city in Macedonia (now the northern part of Greece). Though not large, Philippi was a city with historical significance. Most of us know of it because Paul went there with the gospel. Acts 16 tells of some of Paul’s work there: the conversion of Lydia and her household, the cure of a demon-possessed girl, and the conversion of a jailer.

After Paul left Philippi, he maintained a close tie with the new Christians there. They sent support to Paul wherever he traveled (1:5; 4:15, 16). He made a special effort to visit them whenever he could; he loved this church (4:1). When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he wrote several “prison epistles” (see notes in the article “Ephesians: Christ and His Church”). One was to the struggling congregation at Philippi (1:1, 7, 13, 14; 4:22) in about A.D. 60-62.

This letter was not written to present a closely-reasoned treatise on basic Christian truth, like Romans. Nor was it written primarily to correct doctrinal and moral errors, as were the letters to the Corinthians. Rather, it is a *personal letter*.

Paul mentions at least four reasons for writing. First, they had sent help to him at Rome (1:5; 2:25ff.; 4:10, 14, 18), and he wanted to thank them. Second, since help had been brought by Epaphroditus (2:25; 4:18), who had become deathly ill (2:25-30), Paul wanted to ease their minds about the matter. Third, he wanted them to know of his plans to send Timothy soon and of his long-range plans to visit (2:19-23; 1:26; 2:24; see Philem. 22). Fourth, he wanted to send them a message of love, encouragement, and edification.

Several themes run through the book. A prominent one is the theme of *joy* (4:4-7). The words “joy” and “rejoice” are found at least sixteen times in the book. This is not joy because of “a positive mental attitude.” Rather, this is joy *in Christ*. The phrase “in Christ” or its equivalent is found nineteen times in the

book. As you read the book, look for the many references to “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

OUTLINE

Since Philippians is a personal letter, any attempt to outline it must, of necessity, be artificial. One classic outline centers on Christ: Chap. 1: Christ is our *purpose* (1:21). Chap. 2: Christ is our *pattern* (2:5). Chap. 3: Christ is our *prize* (3:13, 14). Chap. 4: Christ is our *provision* (4:13, 19). Here is a list of the contents:

- I. PAUL’S SALUTATION (1:1, 2).
- II. THANKSGIVING and prayer for the Philippians (1:3-11).
- III. INSIGHT on Paul’s imprisonment and on suffering in general (1:12-30).
- IV. ENCOURAGEMENT to unity by being humble and obedient, as Christ was (2:1-18).
- V. A FUTURE PLAN to send Timothy and an immediate plan to send Epaphroditus (2:19-30).
- VI. WARNINGS against false teachers; Paul himself held up as the proper example to follow (3).
- VII. MISCELLANEOUS EXHORTATIONS for unity, joy, right thinking (4:1-9).
- VIII. GRATITUDE for their gift, with teaching on contentment (4:10-19).
- IX. CONCLUSION: personal greetings and blessing (4:20-23).

LESSONS FROM PHILIPPIANS

Even though the joy emphasized in the book is not a result *merely* of “a positive mental attitude,” Philippians does contain some of the finest material on the positive attitude that should characterize a Christian (2:5; 3:13, 14; 4:4-8).

Most of us have often heard the words “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (4:13). This can be used as a general truth, but Paul had in mind something *specific* when he penned the words: Through Jesus, he had learned to be *content* regard-

less of his financial or physical condition (4:11, 12). We can learn to be content through Jesus.

Scholars have struggled with the implications of the phrase “in Christ.” Some translations expand it to read “union with Christ” or “in Christ’s body.” Probably it is better to leave it as it reads. This relationship with Jesus is so close and so intimate that the only

way it can be expressed is to say one is “in Christ.”

Although the letter is not a doctrinal treatise, it contains a beautiful Christological passage: 2:5-11. Some think this was an early Christian hymn. It is a deep passage, but Paul uses it for a simple purpose: to teach us to give ourselves unselfishly for others. If we will, someday God will reward us!

===== *How to Be Happy in Chains (Philippians 1:3-11)* =====

Paul was imprisoned in chains at Rome. He could have spent his time in self-pity and complaint. Instead, he rejoiced and encouraged others to do the same (4:4-7). We may not be physically imprisoned, but we wear chains of varying sizes and lengths: failing health, a marriage going sour, job-related stress, children breaking our hearts. How could Paul be happy in his chains? How can we be happy in ours? Paul tells us in the “thanksgiving” section of his letter to the Philippians (1:3-11).

I. LOOK AT THE PAST WITH THANKSGIVING TO GOD (1:3-5).

A. When Paul thought about his ten-year association with the church at Philippi, he had nothing but fond memories!

1. He thanked his God for *all his* remembrance of them (v. 3)!
2. He could offer prayers for *all* of them with joy (v. 4; note also “you *all*” in vv. 7, 8).

B. Does this mean nothing but good things had happened when Paul was at Philippi—that the church at Philippi was perfect? No (4:2; Acts 16:16ff.).

1. It must mean that when Paul looked back on the unpleasant things, he could see the *good* that came from them (Rom. 8:28).

- a. His mistreatment at Philippi resulted in the conversion of the jailer (Acts 16:16-34).
- b. His leaving resulted in the gospel being preached in other places (Acts 16:39).

2. It certainly meant that Paul *chose* to remember good things about them.

a. Their “participation” in the gospel from the first to the present (v. 5).

(1) The word translated “participation” [*koinonia*] was an important word to Paul (1:7; 2:1; 3:10; 4:15). It means “to have in common” and refers to “a joint sharing.”

(2) Because of their common faith, the Philippians shared what they had with Paul (4:10, 15, 16). When we support missionaries, we *participate* in their efforts!

b. We can concentrate on bad things that have happened and end up embittered men and women, or we can remember the good things, give thanks to God, and be happy.

II. LOOK AT THE PRESENT WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD (1:6-8).

A. When Paul thought about the Philippian Christians, he was filled with love (vv. 7, 8) and confidence (v. 6a)! *Confidence* is a theme running through the book (the Greek word for “confident” occurs six times). *Why* was Paul confident?

1. First, because of who God is: God is One who works in us (v. 6b)!

a. Paul did not take credit for the beginning of the church in Philippi; he says *God* began that good work!

b. He said, “Whatever God starts, He finishes!”

2. Second, because of who the Philippians were: God was *able* to work in their lives because of their perseverance (vv. 7, 8).

a. God does not look for perfect people in whom to work; He looks for those who will *let* Him work in their lives.

b. Specifically, Paul mentioned their fellowship regarding him, the gospel, and grace (v. 7).

(1) When the gospel was attacked, they loved and defended it.

(2) When Paul was in prison, they did not turn their backs (2 Tim. 1:8), but aided him.

B. Whatever our task, if we are faithful Christians and that task is right, we do not face it alone. God is always working in our lives (2:13; see Eph. 3:20).

III. LOOK AT THE FUTURE WITH PRAYER TOWARD GOD (1:9, 10).

A. “One can look at the future optimistically or misty-optimally.” Paul was not one who ignored the realities of life. He knew the Philippians would continue to face challenges. His solution was *prayer*! Specifically, he prayed that the Philippians would continue to *mature* in the Lord:

1. Grow in *agape* love (v. 9a).
2. Grow in a knowledge of God’s Word (v. 9b).
3. Grow in the ability to decide between right and wrong (vv. 9b, 10a; see Heb. 5:14).
4. Grow in Christian character (v. 10b).
5. Grow in living “fruitful” lives (v. 11a; see Jn. 15:8; Gal. 5:22, 23).

B. If we would face the future with confidence, let us determine, to the best of our ability:

1. To live closer to God each day (v. 11b). Abide in Him. Jesus said, “He who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5b).
2. To glorify God in all things (v. 11b). Mt. 5:15, 16 says, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”
3. To leave the future in God’s hands, knowing that when Christ returns (vv. 6, 10), everything will turn out right!

CONCLUSION

We can look at the past with misgivings or with thanksgiving. We can look at the present with tearfulness or with confidence. We can look at the future with

apprehension or with prayer. We can rely on our own strength, or we can learn to rely on God. One is a sure formula for unhappiness; the other is God's formula for *happiness*.

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Colossians: *The All-Sufficiency of Christ*

TITLE

This letter is named for those to whom the letter is addressed: “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae” (1:2).

BACKGROUND

Colossae was located eighty or more miles east of Ephesus, in the Lycus Valley, near Laodicea (2:1; 4:13, 15, 16) and Hierapolis (4:13). While Paul had apparently never visited that area (2:1), he had an intense interest in the cause of Christ there. The congregations in that region were probably established when Paul was preaching in Ephesus (Acts 19:10), perhaps by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12, 13).

Colossians is a sister letter to Ephesians. Both were written from Rome by Paul at about the same time (A.D. 60-62; see background in the article “Ephesians: Christ and His Church”), and they cover many of the same topics, using similar language. The Colossian letter contains about one-fourth of the instruction given in Ephesians (cf. 1:18 and Eph. 1:22, 23; 1:20, 21 and Eph. 2:12ff.; 1:25-27 and Eph. 3:1ff.). There are, however, different emphases in the two epistles. Ephesians emphasizes the *church* of Christ; Colossians emphasizes the *Christ* of the church.

Word came to Paul (probably by Epaphras; see 1:7-9) that heresy had crept into the churches in the Lycus Valley. The false teaching was probably an early form of “Gnosticism,” which became rampant in the second and third centuries. The word “gnosticism” comes from the Greek word *gnosis* (pronounced “KNOW-sis”), which means “knowledge.” The “Gnostics” (“NOS-tics”) claimed *special knowledge*, special spiritual insight, available only to a select few. “Gnosticism” was a noxious brew of many beliefs: a little Christianity, some Judaism, much Greek philosophy. Some of the peculiarities of “the Colossian heresy” can be seen in the letter: false philosophy that claimed special wisdom and knowledge available to a few elite “mature ones” (1:27, 28; 2:3, 8); the imposition of ritual feasts and festivals (mainly from Judaism) blended with Greek ascetic practices (2:14-17, 20-23); and the worship of angels, probably as mediators to reach a supposedly distant God (2:18, 23).

Paul was concerned about the teaching of error, but most of all he was concerned because the error struck at the heart of Christianity: the nature of

Christ (see background in the article “John: Christ, the Son of God”) and the all-sufficiency of Christ. Paul is pointing out that we do *not* need Christ *plus* man’s wisdom and philosophy, but rather that Christ and His way are *all* we need.

There is a special relationship between this epistle and the one to Philemon. Philemon was a member at Colossae; the letters were apparently delivered at the same time (see notes in the article “Titus and Philemon: Putting Things in Order”).

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION (1:1-14).

- I. CHRIST’S ALL-SUFFICIENCY ASSERTED (1:15—2:5).
 - A. Made manifest by God (1:15-23).
 - B. Proclaimed by Paul (1:24—2:5).
- II. CHRIST’S ALL-SUFFICIENCY ATTACKED (2:6-23).
 - A. An attack on the sufficiency of Christ’s teachings (vv. 6-9).
 - B. An attack on the sufficiency of Christ’s baptism (vv. 10-13).
 - C. An attack on the sufficiency of Christ’s covenant (vv. 14-17).
 - D. An attack on the sufficiency of Christ’s worship (vv. 18-23).
- III. CHRIST’S ALL-SUFFICIENCY APPLIED (3:1—4:6).
 - A. All-sufficient for the Christian life (3:1-17).
 - B. All-sufficient for relationships (3:18—4:6).
 1. Relationships in the home (3:18—4:1).
 2. Relationship with God (4:2, 3).
 3. Relationship with unbelievers (4:5, 6).

CONCLUSION (4:7-18).

LESSONS FROM COLOSSIANS

Some worry about “the lost letters of the New Testament.” They refer to 4:16 and the epistle to Laodicea, among others. There are no “lost letters of the New Testament.” Yes, there were probably other letters written that have not been preserved (1 Cor. 5:9), but these were never a part of the New Testa-

ment. God providentially preserved all we need to become Christians, live the Christian life, and go to heaven (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Compare Col. 3:21 and Eph. 6:4 on the challenge of being a parent, especially being a father. "Do not provoke . . . to anger" does not mean a parent should not discipline his children lest they become upset (note Heb. 12:11). Rather, it is speaking of *the way* parents discipline. The next phrase is the key: "that

they may not lose heart." Overly harsh punishment discourages, as does neglect. Children interpret a failure to discipline as a sign that parents do not care. All discipline should be done *in love*.

Col. 1:28 is a good summary of what every preacher or teacher should strive to do: preach, warn, and teach—with divine wisdom—to help people *grow up* into Christ. "Perfect" (KJV) means "full-grown, mature" in this context (see 4:12).

When a Cult Comes to Town (Colossians)

The cult shoot-out and subsequent standoff in Waco, Texas, beginning in March, 1993, captured the attention of the world; but the Branch Davidians are just a tip of the cultic iceberg. Cults flourish around the world. In America alone, an estimated three million Americans, mostly between ages 18 and 28, are involved in cultic activity. Cults have special appeal to the lonely, to those disoriented by personal crisis, and to those who have a difficult time getting a grip on their lives.

It is hard to define a cult, but generally the following characteristics are seen: Although they claim to be Christian, usually they incorporate elements from other world views. Although they give lip-service to the Bible, usually their first allegiance is to some other authority, often a powerful personality who tells them what to believe about the Bible. Invariably there is some means of mental (and sometimes physical) control, subtle or overt.

When Paul was imprisoned at Rome, word came of cultic teachings permeating the church at Colossae. Paul's response teaches us what to do "when a cult comes to town."

I. PAUL RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY.

- A. Paul did not ignore the situation and hope it would go away. Paul could not travel to Colossae, but he could write. This letter is his prompt response to the problem.
- B. Cultism is an insidious thing that, unchecked, can quickly gain adherents, undermine the truth of the gospel, and disrupt the peace and harmony of the church.
 - 1. Paul said to "mark" such and avoid them (Rom. 16:17; KJV). "Mark" means "to be aware of, pay attention to." The NASB has "keep your eye on." It is the opposite of "ignore."
 - 2. The leaders of the church should take the lead in this (Acts 20:28-31; Tit. 1:9-11).

II. PAUL EXPOSED THE CULTIC ERROR.

- A. The error that had crept into Colossae was apparently an early form of Gnosticism that attempted to blend elements of Christianity with Greek philosophy and Jewish ritualism (see notes on Colossians in this article). He did not hesitate to condemn their error.
 - 1. Paul warned the congregation generally against the false teachers (1:23; 2:4, 8).
 - 2. Paul *specified* many errors of which they were guilty. In answering them, he cleverly used their cultic terminology.
 - a. They claimed they had special "wisdom" and

"knowledge" and were thus able to understand "mysteries."

- (1) Paul said true wisdom was in Christ (1:28; 2:3; 4:5).
- (2) Paul said the "mystery" had been *revealed* in Christ (1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; see notes in the article "Ephesians: Christ and His Church").
- b. They claimed that to be wise, in addition to Christianity one needed elements of Judaism and Greek philosophy.
 - (1) Paul noted that the old law and its ordinances were nailed to the cross (2:14, 16). The "circumcision" of the New Testament was spiritual, not fleshly (2:11).
 - (2) One does not need *human* philosophy and traditions (2:8, 9, 20-22).
- c. They had their own system of worship ("self-made religion," 2:23) which encouraged the superstitious fear of spiritual entities (2:15) and the worship of angels (probably as intermediaries to reach God, 2:18).
 - (1) Paul said all of this was "show" (2:23); it had no *substance*.
 - (2) Jesus defeated all "rulers and authorities" (2:15) when He died on the cross (2:14; Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:11); there was no need to fear them—and certainly no need to worship them (Rev. 19:10).
 - (3) *Christ* was all-sufficient to reach God (2:9; see also 1 Tim. 2:5!)
- d. They claimed that Christian ordinances, such as baptism, were ineffectual; they recommended *their* special rites and rituals to attain a "maturity" and superiority.
 - (1) Paul said that when one is raised from the watery grave of baptism, he has a *new life* in Jesus (2:12, 13).
 - (2) Maturity is not gained by human philosophy, but rather *through Christ*, by living the life Christ wants one to live (1:28; 2:10; 3:1ff.; 4:12).
- B. Some say our preaching and teaching should always be positive, never negative. Such a concept goes against common sense and biblical teaching (2 Tim. 4:1-4). We need always to be positive in our approach and preach "in love" (Eph. 4:15), but sometimes we have no choice but to expose error. Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Mt. 7:15; cf. Eph. 5:6; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 4:1).

III. PAUL EXALTED CHRIST.

- A. Above all, in meeting the cultic error, Paul exalted Christ, stressing that the false teachers offered nothing that Christ could not give. Christ was “all-sufficient” for their needs and is sufficient for ours. Some of the most profound Christological statements in the New Testament are here (1:15-19; 2:9, 10).
- B. Let us keep Christ at the center of our teaching, our thinking, and our lives (1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14)!

CONCLUSION

- A. We should keep abreast of spiritual threats, but new cults can spring up like mushrooms. How can we *always* be ready to meet any threat to the gospel? We must saturate our minds with the truths in the New Testament, especially the truths about Jesus. Those who are trained to spot counterfeit bills are first indoctrinated in the characteristics of *genuine* bills; then they can detect any differences.
- B. May God help us to stay true to Him, His Son, and His Word!

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1 Thessalonians: Strengthening New Christians

TITLE

This book is named after the recipients, Christians living in Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia (1:1).

BACKGROUND

After Paul received the Macedonian call (Acts 16:9), he first preached at Philippi (see notes in the article “Philippians: Rejoicing in Christ”), then went one hundred miles west on the Egnatian Way, to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). Thessalonica was one of the most important Mediterranean seaports. It was rich but wicked. Nearby were the snowclad slopes of Mt. Olympus, the supposed home of the mythical gods of Greece.

As was Paul’s custom, he and his companions went first to the Jews, speaking in the synagogue for three Sabbath days. Only a few among the Jews believed, but “a great multitude” of Greeks were receptive (Acts 17:4). The unbelieving Jews, filled with envy, started a riot. When they could not find Paul and Silas, they dragged other Christians before the rulers of the city. The brethren sent Paul, Silas, and Timothy on to Berea, but it was not long until Jews came from Thessalonica and stirred up trouble again. Once more Paul moved on, this time to Athens. Paul was concerned about the new Christians at Thessalonica, but he could not return (2:17, 18). When Timothy brought word from Thessalonica, it was as Paul feared. In addition to the normal problems of life, there were three pressures on their young faith: (1) persecution, (2) the temptation to return to their old way of life, and (3) false teaching. Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (3:2, 3, 5). Soon after, Paul went on to Corinth. He was there when Timothy returned with good news: The brethren at Thessalonica were basically remaining faithful (3:6). This was the occasion for Paul’s writing 1 Thessalonians, one of the first of his letters (if not the first; see notes in the article “Galatians: Liberty in Christ”). The purposes of the letter were to express concern and joy regarding the Thessalonians and to fill in some things lacking in their faith (3:10).

This letter can be dated with considerable accuracy: Luke refers to Gallio in connection with Paul’s work in Corinth (Acts 18:12), and an inscription at Delphi allows us to date Gallio’s stay in the same city. Using this information, we date the writing of 1 Thessalonians from Corinth at about A.D. 50.

OUTLINE

SALUTATION (1:1-4).

- I. PAUL STRENGTHENS NEW CHRISTIANS BY REMEMBRANCE: How it *was* (1:5—3:13).
 - A. Remember your conversion (1:5-10).
 - B. Remember how I worked among you (2:1-13).
 - C. Remember how I care for you (2:14—3:13).
- II. PAUL STRENGTHENS NEW CHRISTIANS BY EXHORTATION: How it *should be* (4:1—5:22).
 - A. Live in holiness (4:1-12).
 1. Abstain from fornication (4:1-8).
 2. Love each other and be honest (4:9-12).
 - B. Live in hopefulness (4:13—5:11).
 1. Christ is coming again (4:13-18).
 2. Be ready when He comes (5:1-11).
 - C. Live in helpfulness (5:12-22).

BENEDICTION AND CHALLENGE (5:23-28).

LESSONS FROM 1 THESSALONIANS

New Christians are called “babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1); that is what the Christians in Thessalonica were. In Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians, his approach was that of a conscientious parent. In the first letter, he was like the nursing mother (2:7), the concerned father (2:11). He *urged* them to do right. In the second letter, when he had learned that a gentle approach did not work with some, his tone became sterner; he *commanded* them (2 Thess. 3:6; etc.). As every parent learns that different situations require different approaches, so does every preacher and teacher.

Paul wrote to supply that which was lacking in their faith (3:9-13). Two things are essential to strengthen faith: (1) studying God’s Word (Rom. 10:17) and (2) obeying it (Jas. 2:20). Paul urges both.

From a theological standpoint, 1 and 2 Thessalonians are important because of their discussion of the second coming of Christ. One out of every twenty-five verses in the New Testament deals directly or indirectly with the Second Coming. It is a vital Bible topic, and the Thessalonian correspondence adds considerably to our understanding of the subject.

Those who teach that Christ is returning to the

earth to reign one thousand years say that 4:13-18 tells of a "rapture," when the good will be raised "first" (v. 16) before the evil ("the first resurrection"), and then the good will meet Christ in the air, where they will stay for the next seven years. The Scriptures say nothing of a "rapture." *The dead* in Christ are to be

raised "first" before those *alive* in Christ go to meet Him (4:16). Jn. 5:28, 29 teaches there is only *one* "hour" (moment in time) in which both the good *and* the bad will be raised. There is only *one* resurrection, immediately after which all will be judged (Heb. 9:27).

————— "This Is the Will of God, Even Your Sanctification" —————

(1 Thessalonians 4:3-7)

The word "sanctification" appears in 4:3-7 three times. Many of us are unsure about sanctification. Several years ago, Glenn Wallace, who was preaching at the Central church in Cleburne, Texas, asked all who were sanctified to stand up. Two stood: an elder and a part-time preacher. The rest did not know whether they were or not. If you are a child of God, whether you look like it, feel like it, or even believe it, you are sanctified!

I. DEFINITION OF SANCTIFICATION.

A. "Sanctification" does not mean "sinless perfection," but "*set apart*."

1. The word can refer to a state or condition. It refers to our becoming Christians (1 Cor. 6:11). Every Christian is a sanctified saint.
2. The word can refer to a lifestyle, as it is used in 4:3-7. Since we have been set apart, we should live like it. We are challenged not to live as the heathen live (v. 5; "lustful passion," NASB, is the same as "concupiscence," KJV).

B. The word also carries the idea of dedication, consecration, i.e., set apart for a *special* purpose. This is implied in our text (see 2 Tim. 2:20, 21).

1. A great danger is the desire to be like everyone else. We need the courage to be different (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:17, 18; Jas. 4:4; Dan. 1:3; 6).
2. We belong to God in a special way; we need to live like it (1 Cor. 6:20).

C. "Holiness" comes from the same root word as "sanctification." The thrust of the word "holiness" is *godliness*, i.e., being like God.

1. God is holy (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8), so we should be holy (Lev. 20:7). "But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15, 16).
2. The world does not like that which is different but that is the challenge given to us as children of God (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). We should act different because we *are* different. Our God, our King, our kingdom, our values, and our goals are different.

II. DEMONSTRATION OF SANCTIFICATION (4:3-7).

A. "Abstain from sexual immorality" (v. 3).

1. "This is *the will of God*, your sanctification." Sexual purity is not an optional matter with the child of God.
2. One illustration of sanctification is avoiding "sexual immorality," or general sexual sin.

B. "That each of you know how to *possess his own*

vessel in sanctification and honor" (v. 4).

1. "Vessel" probably refers to one's own body (note 1 Sam. 21:5; 2 Cor. 4:7). We must learn to control our passions.

a. Passion and sex are not wrong. God made sex. In the right situation, it is right: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

b. At the wrong time, in the wrong place, with the wrong person, sex is wrong, i.e., outside a scriptural marriage, with anyone other than your own mate. "*Flee* immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18).

2. The word "vessel" *may* refer to one's *wife* (1 Pet. 3:7).

a. The greatest deterrent to sexual immorality is to have the right relationship with a scriptural mate (1 Cor. 7:2-5; Prov. 5:15, 18-20).

b. Young people, one of the most important decisions you will ever make is whom you marry!

C. "That no man . . . defraud his brother" (v. 6).

1. Paul may be giving *two* illustrations of sanctification: Abstain from sexual sin *and* be honest in your business dealings. Business dealings reflect sanctification or a lack of it. Paul is probably still talking about sexual sin.

a. The generic word "any" (KJV) was added before "matter" by translators.

b. The Greek has the definite article before "matter": "*the* matter." What "matter" has Paul been discussing? Sexual sin.

2. Sexual sins *hurt others*: our mates, the mates of others, our parents, the church. Sexual sin is not all "fun and games" as portrayed by the media. It destroys our relationships with others; it destroys our relationship with God!

CONCLUSION

A. How we live goes back to our relationship with God. Joseph did not say, "I cannot commit fornication because Potiphar will kill me." He said, "How then could I . . . sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). In other words: "I belong to God. I am His in a special way. I am sanctified, holy. I can't do this!"

B. Are you sanctified? (Are you a Christian?) Are you *living* like it?

2 Thessalonians: Correcting New Christians

TITLE

This book is named after the recipients (1:1). It is Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica.

BACKGROUND

Not long after Paul first wrote to the church in Thessalonica (see notes in the article "1 Thessalonians: Strengthening New Christians"), he received a report (3:11) that prompted him to write a second letter; Among other things, news came that a forged letter, purporting to be from him and teaching error, was circulating in the congregation (2:2). Further teaching was needed on two topics mentioned in his original letter: the second coming of the Lord (note 2:2; see 1 Thess. 4:13—5:11) and the value of honest labor (note 3:11; see 1 Thess. 4:11).

Some were teaching that the second coming of Christ had already occurred (note 2:2 in NKJV and other modern translations). Perhaps some misunderstood Paul's teaching that Christians are "raised" with Christ and "reign" with Him (note Eph. 2:5, 6), not realizing that Paul was not referring to the *bodily* resurrection. Perhaps they concluded that "the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim. 2:18), meaning that Christ had already come. They were troubling the church at Thessalonica with their theories (1:7; 2:2).

Some in the congregation refused to work, expecting the congregation to support them. They spent their time as busybodies, stirring up strife. Many think the two problems are related, that the non-workers were the ones who had misunderstood Paul and were spreading the idea that the Second Coming was past. Having convinced themselves the Lord had already come, they concluded there was no need to work. Whether the two problems tie together or not, these individuals were disrupting the harmony of the congregation.

One of the most challenging things about this letter is the reference to "the man of sin" (2:3ff.; KJV) or "the man of lawlessness" (modern translations). First, Paul uses apocalyptic language (see notes in the article "Revelation: We Shall Overcome!") in what is otherwise a straight-forward document. Second, Paul had previously explained to the Thessalonians what he meant (2:5, 6), but we do not have that explanation. It is common today to identify "the man of lawlessness" with the "anti-Christ" John talks about, but John

makes it clear that the term "anti-Christ" referred to *anyone* who taught that the Christ had not come "in the flesh" (2 Jn. 7), especially the Gnostic teachers (see notes in the articles "1 John: The Certainty of Eternal Life" and "2 & 3 John: Do's and Don'ts of Christian Hospitality"). Years ago, one section of the church applied the passage to the Pope, while another section thought it was Mohammed. Paul seems to refer to something happening right then (2:7), not something far in the future. Since we do not have the insight the Thessalonians had, we cannot be dogmatic as to the meaning. Whether or not we ever understand exactly who or what "the man of lawlessness" is, we can understand the point Paul makes by mentioning him: Christ had not (and has not) already returned.

OUTLINE

SALUTATION (1:1, 2).

- I. CONCERN FOR THE THESSALONIANS (1:3-12).
 - A. They were being persecuted (vv. 3-6).
 - B. When Christ returned, everything would be all right (vv. 7-12).
- II. CORRECTION OF ERROR REGARDING THE SECOND COMING (2).
 - A. A clarification regarding the Lord's return (vv. 1-12).
 - B. A charge not to be led astray (vv. 13-17).
- III. COMMAND TO WITHDRAW FROM THE DISORDERLY (3:1-15).
 - A. Most were following Paul's instructions (vv. 1-5).
 - B. Those who were not should be disciplined (vv. 6-15).

BENEDICTION (3:16-18).

LESSONS FROM 2 THESSALONIANS

Old errors seem constantly to re-appear in new dress. Even so, the idea that the Second Coming, the Resurrection, and the Judgment are all in the past is back with us today. Paul would still say, "Do not be shaken in mind, nor troubled" by such teaching. When Christ returns, everyone will know it (Acts

1:11; Rev. 1:7); we will not have to depend on teachers with special insight to tell us it has happened.

The passage in 2:10-12 is one of the most chilling in all the Bible. It should cause all of us to search our hearts and ask, "Do I really *love* the truth?"

Paul uses the word "traditions" several times (2:15; 3:6). The word can mean "that which has been passed down," either from men or from God by inspired men, which is what Paul means here. A

===== "If Any Will Not Work" (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15) =====

Some think of work as a curse placed upon mankind as a result of sin, but work itself is not a curse. Before man sinned, he was given responsibility to care for the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). The Bible emphasizes that both God and Jesus work (Jn. 5:17). Thorns, thistles, and all that adds trouble to our toil are the curse (Gen. 3:17-19). Work itself is a blessing, adding purpose to our lives (note Eph. 4:28).

In the church at Thessalonica, some were not willing to work (3:11); they felt others should support them. Perhaps they misunderstood the second coming of Jesus. Perhaps, like some today, they simply thought someone "owed them a living." Whatever their motivation, Paul gave three powerful reasons why they (and we) should be willing to engage in honest labor:

I. BECAUSE OF GOD'S COMMAND (3:6, 10, 12).

A. Paul preferred to exhort and persuade, but when necessary, he could and did exert his God-given authority: "We command you" (v. 6; see vv. 10, 12). He did this by the authority of the Lord (vv. 6, 12)!

1. In leading an "unruly life" which was "not according to the tradition" (v. 6), they were disobeying God's expressed will (v. 10). The Thessalonians had been instructed to lead a quiet life, to attend to their own business, and to work with their hands (1 Thess. 4:11, 12).

2. "Will not work" (v. 10; KJV: "would not work") speaks of an attitude.

a. They were not *unable* to work because of an infirmity or a lack of opportunity. When a believer cannot work and has needs, we should help him (Jas. 2:14-17; 1 Jn. 3:16-18).

b. These were *unwilling* to work. They could work, but they would not.

3. Paul commanded such persons "to work in *quiet fashion* and eat their own bread [instead of everyone else's bread]" (v. 12).

B. Is this an unimportant matter? No! When God says something, it is vitally important! This was important enough to warrant corrective discipline (v. 6)!

II. BECAUSE OF PAUL'S EXAMPLE (3:7-9).

A. Did Paul just preach this, or did he live it? In our text, he reminded the Thessalonians of the manual labor he did while he ministered to them (see 1 Thess. 2:9).

B. Paul had a *right* to be supported by them (v. 9; see also Lk. 10:7; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17, 18), but he *gave up* that right because he wanted to set an example of honest labor.

"tradition" of God is always good. A "tradition" of man that is bound on others or that violates the will of God is bad (Mt. 15:1-9).

Church discipline is one of the most neglected, but most important, of Bible subjects. An undisciplined child is a terror; an undisciplined church is a disaster. The first recorded instruction given by the Holy Spirit on church discipline is found in 3:6-15. Carefully and prayerfully consider it.

III. BECAUSE OF SIN'S CONSEQUENCES (3:6, 11-15). (Do not doubt it for a moment; we are talking about *sin*—serious sin, with far-reaching consequences.)

A. The consequences to the church:

1. These non-workers were disrupting the harmony of the church.

a. They were "unruly" and "undisciplined" (vv. 6, 11).

b. They were "busybodies" (v. 11; see 1 Tim. 5:13).

2. Those willing to work were being discouraged (they were "losing heart," RSV), so Paul had to urge them (v. 13).

3. The influence of the church was being hurt (note 1 Thess. 4:12a).

B. The consequences to those not willing to work:

1. Not only were they a burden on others; they were robbing themselves of the blessings of honest labor (note 1 Thess. 4:12b).

2. If they did not repent, they would be publicly disciplined (vv. 6, 14, 15).

a. We may think corrective discipline is only for the immoral (1 Cor. 5) or those teaching error (Rom. 16:17), but few things hurt the body of Christ like the sin of indolence. Therefore, Paul closed this discussion the same way he began it: "Discipline these" (vv. 6, 14).

b. We sometimes call this "the withdrawal of fellowship." It involves not keeping company with an erring brother (v. 14). Paul advised the Corinthians "not even to eat with such a one" (see 1 Cor. 5:11). We are no longer to have the same relationship we had with that unrepentant brother before we took this action.

c. The aim is to cause the erring brother to be ashamed of his sin (v. 14) and repent. Always, the purpose of corrective discipline is to try to bring the erring back, "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5). Paul closed his discussion in v. 15 with this instruction: "Do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

CONCLUSION

Few things are more important than teaching our children to be responsible citizens who carry their own weight in life. We must also teach "babes in Christ."

1 Timothy: A Handbook for Preachers

TITLE

First Timothy is named after the recipient, a young preacher (1:2).

BACKGROUND

Paul's epistles are naturally divided into those addressed to congregations (Romans—2 Thessalonians) and those addressed to individuals. The first addressed to an individual is 1 Timothy. The first of a block of three letters (1 and 2 Tim., Tit.), 1 Timothy is considered one of "the pastoral epistles." This designation probably stems from the denominational practice of calling the preacher "the pastor." In the New Testament, however, the term "pastor" was applied to the overseers of the church (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-4), not to the preacher or evangelist. It is better to think of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as "the evangelistic epistles."

At the close of Acts, Paul had been in prison two years (Acts 28:30, 31), but he expected to be released soon (Philem. 22). According to Clement of Rome (A.D. 95), Paul *was* released and traveled extensively, perhaps even reaching Spain as previously planned (Rom. 15:24, 28), before being arrested again about A.D. 64-65 (see notes in the article "2 Timothy: Passing the Torch"). The first letter to Timothy and the letter to Titus fit into the period between the two Roman imprisonments. During this period of freedom, Paul traveled to Ephesus with Timothy and then left Timothy there while he started on to Macedonia (1:3), planning to rejoin Timothy soon (3:14). He probably wrote this letter about A.D. 63-64 from Macedonia.

Timothy had a special place in Paul's heart. He was from Lystra (Acts 16:1); his mother and grandmother were godly Jewish women (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). He was probably converted during Paul's first missionary journey (1:2; Acts 14:6, 7). When Paul passed through Lystra on his second journey, he invited this outstanding young preacher to join their party (Acts 16:1-3). From that time on, Timothy was Paul's constant traveling companion, close friend, and most trusted co-worker (Phil. 2:19-22).

The first letter to Timothy is very personal, blending instructions on congregational matters with practical advice on how to conduct oneself as a "man of God" (6:11). This epistle, along with the two that

follow, outline the life and work of every man who would devote his life to preaching the Word.

OUTLINE

The word "sound" as used by Paul (1:10) was a medical term meaning "wholesome" or "healthy" (see 2 Tim. 1:7, 13; 4:3; Tit. 1:9, 13; 2:1, 8).

SALUTATION (1:1, 2).

- I. HOW TO HAVE A HEALTHY CHURCH (1:3—3:16).
 - A. Battle disease (false teaching) (1:3-20).
 - B. Encourage good health habits (2; 3).
 1. God-pleasing worship (2).
 2. God-approved leadership (3).
- II. HOW TO BE A HEALTHY PREACHER (4:1—6:19).
 - A. Dedicate yourself to preaching the truth—and only the truth (4).
 - B. Learn how to conduct yourself with the different groups within the church (5:1—6:2).
 1. Older members (5:1, 2).
 2. Widows (5:3-16).
 3. Elders (5:17-25).
 4. Slaves (6:1, 2).
 - C. Keep your motives pure; do not preach "for money" as false teachers do (6:3-19).

CLOSING CHARGE AND BENEDICTION (6:20, 21).

LESSONS FROM 1 TIMOTHY

The preacher for a congregation is not "the pastor"; as the evangelist, he does not have the oversight of the congregation. This does not mean that he has no responsibilities regarding the congregation. It is obvious from 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus that he has many responsibilities; he should be one of the leaders in the congregation. He fulfills his leadership not by making decisions for the congregation, but by setting a godly example and by faithfully proclaiming the Word (4:16)! It is an awesome task!

If you are not a full-time preacher, 1 Timothy still has much to say to you. All of us should be sharers of truth (Mt. 28:18-20). There is powerful teaching in this

book on both congregational and personal matters. Read it carefully, and take it personally

One of the most practical sections of the book for the materialistic world in which we live is the teach-

—————“The Dogs Have Had an Awful Wait!” (1 Timothy 4:12)—————

“Young people are going to the dogs.” So some people say. And it has ever been true. Apparently, youth was also despised by some in Paul’s day (4:12).

My grandfather notes this world’s worn cogs,
And says, “Young people are going to the dogs”;
His grandfather in his house of logs,
Said, “Young people are going to the dogs”;
His grandfather in the Flemish bogs,
Said “Young people are going to the dogs”;
And his grandfather in his hairy togs,
Said “Young people are going to the dogs.”

But this one thing I wish to state:
The dogs have had an awful wait!

Even though youth in general may be looked down upon, Paul told Timothy that *his* youthfulness need not be despised: “Let no one look down on *your* youthfulness.” Even if older generations think young people as a group are going to the dogs, they should still be able to point to *you* and say, “But so-and-so there, now he or she is a good kid!”

Here is how you as a teen-ager can so live as to be respected (4:12):

I. BE AN EXAMPLE TO THE BELIEVERS.

A. We generally challenge *adults* to be good examples to teen-agers, but Paul challenges the young man Timothy to be the example. Young people, realize that you have influence—often more far-reaching than you can imagine! As a young person, you have qualities that older people need. You can set the pace in many areas:

1. Using your many talents for the Lord.
2. Idealism.
3. Zeal and enthusiasm.

B. Living the Christian life is expected of older Christians; often their example has little effect on others. When a young person lives a special kind of life, people sit up and take notice! Resolve to be a good example!

II. BE AN EXAMPLE IN THESE VITAL AREAS:

A. In word (Eph. 4:29a).

1. Get rid of “filthy communication.” You have 400,000 words to choose from in the English language. The person who has to resort to dirty words shows his poverty of language.
2. Learn to speak that which “is good to the use of edifying” (Ps. 19:14; Prov. 25:11).
 - a. Speak words of kindness, sympathy, encouragement, love.
 - b. Use your lips to teach others about Jesus.

B. In manner of life (Mt. 5:13-16).

1. Salt was used to preserve meat in Bible times. Christians are to be different from the world, to be the preserving element of society.
2. Christians who lose their distinctiveness are

ing on riches (6:6-10, 17-19). One of the greatest challenges is found in v. 8: “If we have food and covering, with these *we shall be content.*” Paul had learned how to do that (Phil. 4:11ff.); have we?

“good-for-nothing” Christians. Dare to be different! “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27a), “that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (2:15)!

C. In love (Jn. 13:34, 35).

1. We are to love God and our fellow man (Mt. 22:37-39). In many ways, ours is an unloving world; you can make it a better place in which to live.
2. What love is all about is given in 1 Cor. 13:4-7:
 - a. Love does not try to get back at people (v. 4a).
 - b. Love is not jealous if others are more successful than we are (v. 4b).
 - c. Love is not quick-tempered (v. 5c).
 - d. Love is not suspicious (v. 7b).

D. In faith (Eph. 6:16).

1. The world is filled with worry, fear, and doubt. How it needs *faith!* Take the lead in showing the world what living by faith is all about. Live a life *confident* in God’s promises (Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:13; Mt. 28:20).
2. Satan is doing all he can today to destroy your faith with the theory of evolution and other humanistic philosophies. Build your faith:
 - a. Study your Bible (Rom. 10:17).
 - b. Live what you learn (Jas. 2:20). A “dead faith” is of no value!

E. In purity (Jas. 1:27; 1 Thess 5:22).

1. This starts in the heart (Mt. 5:8; Prov. 23:7). Your soul is dyed the color of your thinking. Take care what you read and watch.
2. You are under a *double* attack by Satan; he is trying to destroy your faith. At the same time, he is trying to get you to experiment with sin. These attacks go together. If he can get you to live an ungodly life, then you will be uncomfortable around the Bible and will more readily accept the theories that destroy faith. If you would preserve both your integrity and your faith, resolve to stay pure!
3. Young people have some *special* challenges in the area of purity (2 Tim. 2:22). *Sexual* purity is not all that is involved in “youthful lusts,” but it is certainly included. When you are tempted, “*flee!*” Get away from that temptation!

CONCLUSION

- A. Our prayer for you is that you will always depend upon God’s Word (Ps. 119:9-11).
- B. If you have not already done so, *right now* is the time to put your young life in the hands of God: “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’” (Eccles. 12:1)!

2 Timothy: Passing the Torch

TITLE

This is the second letter addressed to Paul's younger friend and traveling companion (1:2).

BACKGROUND

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he was in Rome (1:17) and in prison (1:8; 2:9). The tone of this letter, however, is strikingly different from the original "prison epistles" (see notes in the article "Ephesians: Christ and His Church"). In those, he expected to be released (Philem. 22); in *this*, he believes his death is imminent (4:6ff.). As best we can reconstruct the sequence of events, Paul was released from prison in Rome after two years (Acts 28:30). He then traveled extensively, during which time he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus (see notes in the articles "1 Timothy: A Handbook for Preachers" and "Titus and Philemon: Putting Things in Order"). In A.D. 64, Rome burned, and Nero blamed Christians. At this point Paul was re-arrested, perhaps at Troas (3:13) or Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12), and returned to Rome. This second imprisonment was the occasion for writing 2 Timothy. The time was about A.D. 64-65.

We are not sure where Timothy was at the time of the writing of this epistle. Apparently, he had finished his work at Ephesus and had gone elsewhere (4:12).

Paul urged Timothy "to come . . . soon" (4:9). "Make every effort," the aged missionary pleaded, "to come before winter" (4:21). If Timothy did not come before winter, travel would be impossible until the spring. The implication is if Timothy did not come before winter, Paul would never enjoy the company of Timothy or Mark (4:11); nor would the cloak and parchments (4:13) be of any value to him. In other words, Paul would not be alive when spring arrived.

The purpose of the letter is to pass the torch on to the younger man, who was to keep it burning, then pass it on to others (2:2). Paul tried to encourage and strengthen Timothy for the task and also warn him regarding men who attempted to hinder his own ministry. Above all, Paul expressed his faith in Jesus, who had helped him through all his troubles, and who (Paul was confident) would help him now (4:8, 17, 18). The implication is that Jesus would also be with Timothy if the young man remained faithful to his charge (4:1, 5, 22). To appreciate this letter fully, put yourself in Timothy's place. What a challenge to

carry on in Paul's place!

According to tradition, Paul was beheaded in Rome A.D. 64 or 65.

OUTLINE

SALUTATION (1:1, 2).

- I. PAUL ENCOURAGES TIMOTHY (1:3—2:26).
 - A. Be faithful (1:3-18).
 - B. Be steadfast (2:1-13).
 - C. Be approved of God (2:14-26).
- II. PAUL WARNS TIMOTHY (3:1—4:8).
 - A. Beware of apostasy (3:1-9).
 - B. Defend the faith (3:10-17).
 - C. Preach the Word (4:1-8).

CLOSING NOTES: Greetings, personal requests, benediction (4:9-22).

LESSONS FROM 2 TIMOTHY

"Famous last words" of an individual often have special significance. In 2 Timothy we have the last known recorded words of one of the world's greatest men: the apostle Paul. These words are worth reading and considering again and again.

The heart of this epistle (and also of 1 Timothy and Titus) is found in 1:14: "Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you." "The treasure" refers to the treasure of the Word of God (1:13), which had been entrusted to Paul. "Guard" means to keep safe. God's Word is like a treasure that has been given into our keeping; we should guard it with our lives!

There is great emphasis in this letter on the Word of God. It has been given by inspiration (3:16, 17). We are to learn how to "rightly divide" it (2:15; KJV) or "handle it aright" (ASV). The only way we can do that is by constant and diligent use.

In 2:24-26 we see a beautiful picture of "the Lord's bond-servant," including a summary of the attitude and approach we should use in teaching others.

The words in 3:1-7 sound as if they came directly from today's headlines, do they not?

May God help all of us to accept the charge to guard the treasure of the Word and then to pass it faithfully on to others (2:2)!

Keep the Faith, Brother! (2 Timothy 4:1-8)

The last words Paul ever wrote are probably found in 2 Tim. 4. In them the old warrior of the cross gives his final orders to a younger soldier, Paul, having kept the faith (v. 7), challenges Timothy to do the same. No doubt Timothy read these words with tears in his eyes.

Even though these words have special significance to full-time preachers of the gospel, Paul includes all Christians in v. 8. We have *all* been entrusted with the gospel (Mt. 28:18-20; etc.). *Each* of us, therefore, should be challenged to “*keep the faith.*”

I. A SOLEMN CHARGE: PREACH THE WORD (3:16, 17; 4:1, 2)!

- A. When should we preach? When it is convenient and when it is not. When people want it and when they do not.
- B. What should we preach?
 - 1. Reprove those in error.
 - 2. Rebuke those who continue in sin (1 Tim. 5:20). Paul told Titus about such individuals, “Reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:13).
 - 3. Exhort all to obey God’s Word and to remain faithful. Tit. 2:15 says, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. . . .”
- C. How should we preach?
 - 1. With patience.
 - 2. With doctrine.

II. A SERIOUS THREAT: APOSTASY IS COMING (4:3-6; 1 Tim. 4:1-3).

- A. The steps to apostasy (vv. 3, 4).

- 1. They will not appreciate sound doctrine.
- 2. They will find teachers who will preach what they want to hear.
- 3. They will turn from truth to error (1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; Tit. 1:14).
- B. The solution to apostasy: Steadfast Christians . . .
 - 1. Who are alert.
 - 2. Who can take affliction.
 - 3. Who have a burden for the lost.
 - 4. Who carry through on their areas of service.

III. A STIRRING PROMISE: A REWARD IS WAITING (4:6-8).

- A. Since Paul had kept the faith, he was filled with confidence.
 - 1. As he looked at the present (v. 6; Phil. 2:17).
 - 2. As he looked at the past (v. 7; 1 Tim. 6:12).
 - 3. As he looked to the future (v. 8a).
- B. If we keep the faith, we too can be confident (v. 8b). Heb. 6:10 says, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”

CONCLUSION

Do we “love His appearing”? Paul said, “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (4:8; cf. Rev. 22:20; 1 Cor. 16:22). Are we *ready* for Christ’s return? “Preach the word; *be ready* in season and out of season; . . .” (vv. 2, 3).

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Titus and Philemon: Putting Things in Order

TITLES

Titus is named after the recipient (1:4). Even though Titus is not mentioned in Acts, it is obvious from Paul's letters that he was a valued co-worker (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6, 13, 14; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18; Gal. 2:1, 3; 2 Tim. 4:10). Titus was a Greek (Gal. 2:3), whom Paul converted (Tit. 1:4). Since Paul seemed always to send Titus into hard situations, he has been called "Paul's trouble-shooter."

Philemon is also named after the recipient (v. 1). Since Onesimus, the subject of the book (v. 10), was from Colossae (Col. 4:9), we may assume Philemon lived in that city (cf. Col. 4:7-9 and Philem. 10-12).

BACKGROUND

The Book of Philemon was written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome (see notes in the article "Ephesians: Christ and His Church"). The purpose of this personal letter was to "set in order" the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus, his run-away slave who had been converted by Paul in Rome. It seems that Paul expected to be released soon (see v. 22).

Apparently Paul *was* released from his first imprisonment at Rome and did additional traveling and preaching not recorded in Acts (see notes in the article "1 Timothy: A Handbook for Preachers"). During this period, Paul and Titus made a trip to Crete, where Paul left Titus to "set in order" the things lacking in the congregation (Tit. 1:5).

Crete was an island located southeast of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea. Representatives from Crete were in Jerusalem when the gospel was first preached (Acts 2:11); perhaps some were converted and took the gospel back to their island. The inhabitants of Crete were descendants of the Philistines. They were daring sailors and bowmen, but they had a reputation as "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Tit. 1:12). It was not the best soil for planting the seed of the gospel, but God is concerned about all men (Acts 10:34, 35).

When Paul wrote to Titus, he apparently was on his way to Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12), a city in western Greece; perhaps he was passing through Macedonia. Paul wrote to tell Titus *how* to set in order the things that were lacking, but he probably also wrote for other reasons: (1) to *encourage* Titus in the difficult task before him, (2) to *back up* Titus by giving him an

authoritative apostolic letter.

Titus is written in an authoritative style which the Cretans could understand. However, in addition to the no-nonsense instructions to the members, the book also contains a sobering charge to all preachers (Tit. 2:7, 8) and two of the greatest doctrinal passages of the New Testament (Tit. 2:11-14; 3:3-7).

Some think that after Titus met Paul at Nicopolis, Paul was arrested there and taken to Rome; Titus may have gone with him (2 Tim. 4:10).

OUTLINE OF TITUS

- I. PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER BY APPOINTING STRONG LEADERSHIP (1).
 - A. Men who are strong Christian husbands and fathers should be selected (vv. 5-9).
 - B. Men who are able to deal with false teachers should be selected (vv. 10-16; see 3:9-11).
- II. PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER BY TEACHING SOUND DOCTRINE (2; note vv. 1, 15).
 - A. Sound doctrine commanded (vv. 1, 7, 8, 15).
 - B. Sound doctrine applied to all ages (vv. 2-8) and servants (vv. 9, 10).
 - C. Sound doctrine explained (vv. 11-14).
- III. PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER BY ENCOURAGING GOOD WORKS (3; note vv. 1, 8, 14).
 - A. The need for good works (see 1:16; 2:7, 14).
 1. As citizens (vv. 1, 2).
 2. As evangelists (vv. 8, 14).
 - B. The motive for good works: God's love (vv. 3-7).

LESSONS FROM TITUS

The principal thing lacking in the church at Crete was *strong leadership* (1:5). Good leadership is essential for the church to be what it should be. If a congregation has existed for a reasonable period of time but has no elders, generally something is lacking. A congregation should never appoint elders if there are no qualified men. ("It's better to be scripturally unorganized than unscripturally organized.") Every effort should be put forth to develop as quickly as possible men with the necessary qualifications (1:5-9).

Some teach that the responsibility of appointing elders (1:5) proves that Titus (an evangelist) had

authority over the elders (“evangelistic authority”). Acts 6:1-6 indicates that the selection of leaders should be done by the congregation. All the evangelist does is “install” them (“set them in place”). The official who administers the oath of office to the President of the United States does not then have authority over the President. Neither does the preacher who is involved

in appointing elders have authority over them.

Meditate on 2:11-14 and 3:3-7. Consider what God has done for us and how this should affect our lives!

OUTLINE OF AND LESSONS FROM PHILEMON

See sermon outline.

Reading Between the Lines (Philemon)

You get a letter in the mail. You glance at the return address; it is from a friend. You open the envelope, expecting a cheerful “How-are-you?-I’m-fine” note. Instead, your friend pours out his heart to you. Maybe the words make you glad . . . or sad . . . or even mad. Emotionally stirred, you drop the letter and pace the floor. After you have control of your emotions, you pick up the pages and read them again, slowly, carefully. This time you discover things you did not see originally. You put the letter down again, but the words stay with you. Gradually, you see even more implications in the message.

The brief letter to Philemon is like that. Philemon was a leader in the church at Colossae. He may have been converted by Paul (v. 19b); certainly Paul counted him as a close friend. Imagine the scene as Tychicus (Col. 4:7) one day shows up on Philemon’s doorstep saying, “I have a letter for you from Paul all the way from Rome.” Philemon steps forward with a smile to take the scroll. As he does so, he sees with Tychicus someone who wronged him, someone he thought he would never see again: Onesimus (Col. 4:7-9), a slave who had burglarized his house, then fled into the night. Philemon’s smile changes to a frown; anger flushes his cheeks. Bitter words flood his mind, and he opens his mouth to speak. “Don’t say a word, Philemon,” Tychicus cautions, “until you read the letter from Paul.” Breathing heavily, Philemon sits and begins to read.

This letter is unique in the New Testament. At first reading, it is a bit of personal correspondence, allowing a glimpse into the age Paul lived in. As we read, re-read, and ponder it, there are lessons here for any age.

I. SLAVERY AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

A. The letter must be studied in light of the slavery of that day.

1. Onesimus was a slave, Philemon’s *property*. It would be hard for a slave to commit a worse offense than running away, compounded by theft. Philemon would be within his right to inflict the gravest of punishments. (Paul did not minimize Onesimus’ crime.)
2. Slavery goes against what we stand for as Christians, but the New Testament gives special instructions to masters and slaves (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22—4:1). We do not see slavery condemned outright, not even in the book we are studying. *Why?*
 - a. Priorities. Christianity is more concerned about the soul that will spend eternity somewhere than about the body that will return to the dust in a few years.
 - b. Procedure. This was an explosive situation that had to be handled with care.

(1) The Christian approach has never been revolution.

(a) We are to respect those in authority, even if they are not Christians (Rom. 13:1ff.).

(b) We are to pray for our leaders, that there might be peace (1 Tim. 2:1ff.).

(2) The Christian approach is to teach Christian principles, changing lives by changing hearts.

(3) This approach *worked*. Where Christian principles have been taught and practiced, slavery has ultimately been abolished.

B. We need this lesson today. Christians should be concerned about social ills. Our primary goal, however, should not be social change, but the salvation of souls. We are solving social problems as we faithfully teach and preach the gospel of Christ and the wondrous principles Jesus gave us!

II. BROTHERS AND FORGIVENESS.

A. It is hard for us to appreciate fully Philemon’s dilemma. Onesimus *deserved* the most severe punishment. Philemon would not want to offend Paul or lose the respect of his household. It was one of the stickiest “forgiveness problems” anyone ever faced. Note how delicately Paul handled it.

1. Paul began in a positive way by commending his friend, Philemon (vv. 4-7).
2. Paul did not demand; he beseeched (vv. 8, 9, 14).
3. Paul gently brought to mind his sacrifices by referring to himself as “the aged” and as “a prisoner” (v. 9), adding, “Accept him as you would *me*” (v. 17).
4. He stressed that Onesimus had become an active, serving Christian (vv. 11-13) and would be useful to Philemon (v. 16).
5. He introduces some humor with a play on words (v. 11). “Onesimus” means “profitable” or “useful.” In the past, “Good For Something” was “good for nothing”; as a Christian, he really would be “good for something.”
6. He implied that the hand of God may have been in all that had happened (v. 15).
7. Without minimizing the crime, he offered to pay for the damages (vv. 18, 19a; *v. 18 is the key to the book*).
8. Paul reminded Philemon of what he owed him (v. 19b, 20).
9. He expressed confidence in Philemon’s deci-

sion (v. 21).

B. Touchy situations arise in the church, as brother is pitted against brother. Most could be resolved if everybody would “act like Christians”! We need to learn to forgive, not merely because it is commanded, but because of the great debt we owe the Lord (Eph. 4:32)!

III. CHRIST AND THE CROSS.

A. What Paul was suggesting went against the society of his day. How could Paul even suggest that Philemon forgive a slave? Paul was saturated with *Jesus* (Gal. 2:20). What Paul suggested parallels what Jesus did for us.

1. We were born “good for something”; when sin came into our lives, we became “good for noth-

ing.” Like Onesimus, when we come into contact with the gospel, we realize our condition.

2. Jesus said, “I will pay the debt.” Then He said to the Father on your behalf and mine, “Receive this one even as you receive Me”!

3. We are “good for something” again, useful both to God and man!

B. That is what Jesus had done for Paul, so he did not hesitate to suggest that Philemon do it for Onesimus. If we can realize what the Lord did for us, it will change our outlook on everything!

CONCLUSION

Powerful lessons can be found in this little book that is tucked away between Titus and Hebrews. We need to read it, re-read it, ponder on it, and even read between the lines.

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Hebrews: *A Word of Encouragement*

TITLE

Hebrews is named after the recipients. “Hebrews” refers to Hebrew-speaking Christians, in other words, Jewish Christians. The content of the letter confirms that this is a letter to readers with a Jewish background.

BACKGROUND

Since the author of the book does not identify himself, there is considerable controversy over who wrote the book. Elaborate theories have suggested Luke, Timothy, Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Aquila and Priscilla, and others as possible authors, but there is no historical evidence for any of these. The strongest tradition is that Paul wrote the letter. An early scholar, Origen, is often quoted as saying “only God knows certainly” who wrote Hebrews; but Origen indicated in a letter to a fellow Christian that he had no doubt Paul was the author. His famous remark concerned who acted as Paul’s *scribe*. The problem is that while there are many things in the epistle reminiscent of Paul, there are also many things different from Paul’s usual style. Chances are the volume was written by Paul or a close associate of his, but one cannot be dogmatic on the point. The important thing to remember is that the Holy Spirit is the real author.

The letter is not addressed to Jewish Christians everywhere, but to a group of Christians the writer knew personally (13:18, 19). These Christians may have been a small segment *within* a congregation (13:17, 24). They had been Christians for some time (5:12; 10:32). They had started the Christian life with enthusiasm (6:10; 10:33, 34); they had even endured persecution (10:31, 32). However, they had become discouraged. They were staying away from worship (Heb. 10:25). They were in danger of apostatizing (2:1ff.; 6:1-6; 10:26-31). The line of reasoning in the epistle indicates they were tempted to return to Judaism.

A key word in the book is “better.” The word is used twelve or thirteen times. The writer emphasizes that everything is better in Christianity than in Judaism. The style is that of a transcribed sermon, alternating arguments with practical exhortation (see outline). The author called his total effort “this word of exhortation” (13:22). “Exhortation” is from a com-

pound Greek word, the verb form of which means literally “to call alongside” and is variously translated “to exhort,” “to beseech,” “to comfort.” A happy compromise is the word “encourage,” which combines the ideas of exhortation and comfort. Hebrews is a “word of encouragement.”

Since the Jewish sacrificial system was apparently being practiced at the time of the writing (9:6-10; 13:10), the book was probably written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

To understand fully the arguments of the book, we need a basic knowledge of the Jewish system as outlined in Leviticus, Numbers, and Exodus.

OUTLINE

- I. ARGUMENT: Christ is better than the prophets and the angels (1).
- II. EXHORTATION (2:1-4).
- III. ARGUMENT: Christ is better than the angels and Moses (2:5—3:6).
- IV. EXHORTATION (3:7—4:16).
- V. ARGUMENT: Christ has a better priesthood, part 1 (5:1-10).
- VI. EXHORTATION (5:11—6:20).
- VII. ARGUMENT: Christ has a better priesthood, part 2 (7:1—10:18).
- VIII. EXHORTATION (10:19—13:25).

LESSONS FROM HEBREWS

Though most of us do not have a Jewish background, we do get discouraged and are tempted to go back to our old ways of life. Hebrews has a powerful message for us all: The world can offer *nothing* better than Christ!

This is the only book in the New Testament that presents Jesus as our high priest. Ten times in the book He is referred to as “high priest” and other times as “priest.” Key verses are 4:14-16. Because Jesus is our high priest, we can approach God’s throne with

boldness!

As you study the epistle, note the constant contrast between the old and new covenants, especially in chaps. 8—10. Why would anyone want to go back to the Old Testament for their religious practices?

The recipients' basic problem is pinpointed in

The Anchor of the Soul (Hebrews 6:9-20)

The writer has just shown his readers what terrible things *could* happen to them (6:1-8), but now he says, in effect, "We still have *confidence* in you" (6:9). What would be essential to their being saved? They needed to hold onto hope. Hope is so important! "But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; . . ." (1 Cor. 13:13). It is called in 6:19 the "anchor of the soul." It gives us *security*. How can we have hope? Our text gives us several sources of hope:

- I. WE CAN HAVE HOPE BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF GOD (6:10a).
 - A. God is not *unfair*.
 - B. God does not *forget*. As human beings, we forget; but God does not.
- II. WE CAN HAVE HOPE BECAUSE WE ARE DOING OUR BEST (6:10b, 11, 12a).
 - A. God does not forget the work we have done for Him.
 - B. If we continue to serve Him diligently, we can have a "full assurance of hope"!
- III. WE CAN HAVE HOPE BECAUSE GOD HAS BLESSED THOSE WHO HAVE DONE HIS WILL IN THE PAST (6:12b-15).
 - A. In the past God blessed those who had faith and endured (chap. 11).
 - B. As an example, consider Abraham. Abraham endured because he had *hope*; he really believed that what God said He would do, He would do. At last all the promises were fulfilled!
- IV. WE CAN HAVE HOPE BECAUSE GOD CANNOT LIE (6:16-18).
 - A. God swore by Himself (6:13; Gen. 22:16); this thought is now expanded.

5:11-14. Most of the "exhortation" sections are in third person, but this section is in direct *second* person: "You have become dull of hearing" (v. 11). These Christians had failed to grow up spiritually; they had failed to mature in Christ. How many of *us* are still spiritual babies after years of being Christians?

B. When God gives a promise, you can stake your life on it!

V. WE CAN HAVE HOPE IN JESUS (6:18b-20).

- A. Note where the hope is anchored: "within [inside] the veil," i.e., in heaven (v. 19)!
- B. Note who is in heaven to secure that anchor: Jesus (v. 20). He serves for us as a "merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (2:17; see 2:18). We are told in 4:14-16, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

CONCLUSION

"We may have strong encouragement, . . . laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast. . . ." (6:18, 19). Does your life have this anchor "sure and steadfast"? Have you "laid hold" on it through faith and obedience?

Hebrews: Christ Is Better

One of the key words for understanding the epistle to the Hebrews is "better." It appears thirteen times (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24), twice in 8:6 "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises."

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James:

Practical Christianity

TITLE

The epistle of James is named after the author, who identifies himself as “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).

BACKGROUND

James is usually classified as a “general epistle” (perhaps *the first* general epistle, depending on who wrote Hebrews). “General” means not written by Paul and not addressed to specific congregations or individuals. Paul’s epistles are named after the recipients; the general epistles, after the authors.

Apparently the author was well-known and thought that calling himself “James” was sufficient identification. We determine which James by the process of elimination. There are only four Jameses mentioned in the New Testament. Two can be eliminated because they were *not* well-known (Lk. 6:16; Mk. 15:40). A third James, the apostle who was the son of Zebedee, was well-known, but he died a martyr’s death before A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). This leaves James the Lord’s half-brother (Mary was their mother, but Joseph was James’ father and God was Jesus’ father; see Mt. 13:55, 56).

At first James did not believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:3-5), but a resurrection appearance (1 Cor. 15:7) changed his life. He emerged as a figure of prominence in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 1:13, 14; 12:17; 15:13ff.; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9). He was called James “the Just” because of his sincerity and honesty. It is said his knees became as calloused as those of a camel because of his constant kneeling in prayer. Ultimately, he incurred the wrath of the rich, corrupt leaders of the Jews. Using the excuse that he was a breaker of the law, they threw him from the temple, stoned him, and then ended his life with a club. It is said that he died with a prayer on his lips for his murderers.

If James the half-brother of the Lord is the author, this tells us something of the time, place, and situation of the writing. The place of the writing would probably have been Jerusalem. The time of the writing would be between A.D. 44, when this James came to prominence after the death of James the son of Zebedee, and A.D. 62, the approximate time when this James died. (This means that the Book of James could be the first written of all the New Testament

books.) This was during the period of oppression under the high priest Ananias and the Roman governor Felix, when famine was impoverishing the area (Acts 11:27ff.).

The letter is addressed “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad” (1:1). The phrase “twelve tribes” can refer to the Jewish people as a whole (Acts 26:6, 7); through the years the Jews had been scattered by many oppressors. James, however, is not referring to all Jews. Fifteen times he identifies his readers as “brethren” who had the “faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1). This fact, plus the use of Jewish terminology throughout the book (1:1; 2:2, 11, 21, 25; 5:17), makes it probable the book was written to Jewish Christians who had been scattered because of persecution (Acts 8:1ff.).

The book is a powerful little volume on practical Christianity. It has been called “the Christian book of Proverbs” because it moves quickly from one topic to another. It achieves continuity by the use of a literary device, often repeating a word from the end of one clause at the first of the next clause.

OUTLINE

GREETING (1:1).

- I. TRUE FAITH IS STRENGTHENED BY TRIALS (1:2-18).
- II. TRUE FAITH IS EXPRESSED (1:19-27).
- III. TRUE FAITH IS IMPARTIAL (2:1-13).
- IV. TRUE FAITH IS ACTIVE (2:14-26).
- V. TRUE FAITH CONTROLS THE TONGUE (3:1-12).
- VI. TRUE FAITH KNOWS THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE (3:13-18).
- VII. TRUE FAITH AVOIDS WORLDLINESS AND STRIFE (4:1-12).
- VIII. TRUE FAITH ALWAYS CONSIDERS GOD’S WILL (4:13-17).

IX. TRUE FAITH AVOIDS THE DANGERS OF RICHES—AND LEARNS PATIENCE (5:7-12).

X. TRUE FAITH KNOWS THE POWER OF PRAYER (5:13-18).

XI. TRUE FAITH IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE LOST (5:19, 20).

LESSONS FROM JAMES

Even though James is Jesus' half-brother, he refers to himself simply as "a bond-servant . . . of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). Perhaps this is an expression of humility, or perhaps James is reflecting Jesus'

statement that a spiritual relationship with Him is more important than a physical relationship (Mk. 3:31-35).

There are many parallels between the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 1:2 and Mt. 5:10-12; 1:5 and Mt. 7:7-12; 1:19, 20 and Mt. 5:22; 1:22 and Mt. 7:24-27).

"Salvation by faith only" is a popular doctrine. The only place the phrase "faith only" is found in the KJV is 2:24, which says, "Not by faith only."

A theme returned to again and again in James is the subject of *the tongue*: 1:26; 3:1-12; 4:11, 12; 5:12. Controlling our tongues is one of the hardest struggles we have!

————— *Saving a Soul From Death (James 5:19, 20)* —————

James has just said there must be concern for the sick, whether physically or spiritually (5:15, 16). In the last two verses of the book, his primary concern is for the *spiritually* ill. Let us examine these vital lessons.

I. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A CHILD OF GOD TO GO ASTRAY.

A. Some deny that it is possible for a child of God to sin and become lost. This attitude is contrary to the teaching of both the Old Testament (1 Chron. 28:9) and the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:27; 10:12; Gal. 5:4; Heb. 10:26). No passage is more powerful on this point than 5:19, 20.

1. The individual under consideration is not an alien sinner, but an erring brother in Christ: "*Brethren, if any among you. . .*"

2. The Greek word translated "err" means "to wander, to go astray," as on a mountain peak or away from a path. The thing they had wandered from was "the truth" (Jn. 8:32; 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:22).

3. The destination of this one if not brought back: "*death,*" spiritual death (Is. 59:1, 2; 1 Tim. 5:6; Rev. 20:15)!

B. If we fully appreciate this truth, we will make a greater effort to keep this from happening!

1. We will continue teaching people after we baptize them (Mt. 28:19, 20).

2. We will do all we can to bring back those who have wandered away!

II. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BRING THE ERRING CHILD BACK.

A. The main thrust of these verses is not negative, but positive. The emphasis is not that a child of God can be lost, but that there is *hope*: "If any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner . . . will save his soul from death" (vv. 19, 20).

B. We cannot restore every unfaithful Christian, but there are many who will be receptive if we show love and concern. The phrase "will cover a multitude of sins" seems to be taken from Proverbs 10:12: "*Love covers all transgressions.*"

1. *Show* you are interested in him personally. Get

involved in his life.

2. *Talk* to him about his spiritual needs (2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 10:24). Love seeks the best for the loved one. If my brother is in danger of being lost and I do not talk to him about it, I do not love him. Some just need to be encouraged; others need major teaching (Heb. 5:12).

3. *Pray* for him (5:15, 16)—and let him know you are praying for him.

III. IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO TRY TO BRING THE ERRING CHILD BACK.

A. The passage begins, "*Brethren, if any among you. . .*" The one involved in bringing back the erring is another child of God (Gal. 6:1ff.). The unfaithful have responsibility; each must give an account for himself. Still, the faithful are commanded to try to bring the erring brother back.

B. There are many reasons why we should *want* to restore the erring:

1. He is our brother, one for whom Christ died.

2. We could become unfaithful: "If any among you strays from the truth" (see 1 Cor. 10:12). Would we want someone to be concerned if *we* wandered away? (See Mt. 7:12.)

3. God has hidden our multitude of sins. We should want that for our brothers.

4. The erring can have a negative influence.

5. Helping a brother come home brings joy.

6. Our efforts may determine whether he is saved or lost.

a. What a blessing to have one's sins covered and forgiven (Ps. 85:2; see Neh. 4:5)!

b. Our sins are covered by the blood of Christ (1 Jn. 1:7, 9).

7. Our attitude toward the lost can be a vital factor in *our own* salvation! God help us not to be like "the elder brother" of Lk. 15! Let us save ourselves *and* our wandering brothers (1 Tim. 4:16).

CONCLUSION

James ends his letter without greetings, benedictions, formal closings, or farewells. To the end James is practical, pertinent, and challenging. Let us take his words to heart!

1 Peter: Suffering With Dignity

TITLE

The first epistle to Peter is named after the author: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). The consensus of early writers was that the apostle Peter was the author. Peter means “rock” or “stone.”

BACKGROUND

This is another “general epistle.” The other general epistles are 2 Peter; 1, 2, 3 John; and Jude.

Peter is one of the better known Bible characters. We can identify with his obvious “humanness.” According to tradition, Peter was crucified head downward about A.D. 65-67 during the persecution of Nero which began A.D. 64.

The letters of Peter may have been written as partial fulfillment of Jesus’ charge to the apostle to strengthen and feed the church (Lk. 22:32; Jn. 21:15-17). The first letter is addressed “to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1), five Roman provinces in the northern part of Asia Minor; they covered the greater part of what is now Turkey. The phrase “aliens, scattered” has a Jewish flavor, but Christians had also been scattered (Acts 8:1ff.). “Aliens” is Peter’s way of reminding Christians this world is not their home (2:11). The phrasing of the book indicates Peter primarily has a Gentile audience in mind (2:10; 4:3, 4; etc.).

In 5:12 Peter summarizes his first letter: “I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!” It is obvious that suffering, persecution, and trials are on Peter’s mind; he mentions suffering about sixteen times in the book. In 5:12 he says, “I have written to you to let you know it is through the grace of God that you can *stand up under trials*.” The book emphasizes the suffering of Jesus as an example for His followers (2:21-25; 3:18ff.; 4:1, 13; etc.).

If the suffering mentioned is that initiated by Nero after the fire of A.D. 64, the book had to be written between that time and the time of Peter’s death; the time of the writing is probably A.D. 64-67.

One of the most questionable things about the book is the *place* of writing. Peter indicates he is in “Babylon” when he writes (5:13). Many think this is a cryptic way of referring to Rome: Strong early tradi-

tion says Peter spent his last years in Rome; it was not uncommon for Rome to be called “Babylon” (Rev. 17:18). Others deny this, saying there was no reason for Peter to be obscure about where he was; they insist Peter was probably at the original Babylon on the Euphrates during his many travels (Acts 12:17). There is no way to settle the controversy, but even if Peter spent time in Rome, it does not validate the claim that “Peter was the first pope.” In 1 Peter the apostle identifies himself, not as “the pope” over all the church but as “an elder” (5:1, i.e., one of several) working with a local congregation (“the flock of God among you,” v. 2).

OUTLINE

SALUTATION (1:1, 2).

I. THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD (1:3—2:10).

- A. Testimony: The great salvation (1:3-12).
- B. General exhortation (1:13—2:10).

II. THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD HELPS US STAND (2:11—3:12).

- A. Standing in various relationships (2:11—3:7):
 - 1. Relationships with unbelievers (2:11, 12).
 - 2. Relationships with the state (2:13-17).
 - 3. Relationships with masters (2:18-25).
 - 4. Relationships in marriage (3:1-7).
- B. General exhortation (3:8-12).

III. THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD HELPS US STAND UNDER TRIALS (3:13—5:11).

- A. Testimony: Understanding trials (3:13—4:19):
 - 1. The need to endure trials (3:13-22).
 - 2. How to live while enduring trials (4:1-11).
 - 3. The purpose of trials (4:12-19).
- B. General exhortation (5:1-11).

CONCLUSION AND BLESSING (5:12-14).

LESSONS FROM 1 PETER

The “health and wealth gospel” is popular today. “Just be a Christian,” we are told, “and your problems will go away.” In contrast with that, Jesus and the apostles were candid about the problems which being a follower of the Lord would bring (Mt. 5:11; Acts

14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12). The message of 1 Peter is not that God removes all problems from His children, but rather that through His grace, we can endure the problems and actually be made better by them.

When a person has lived a worldly life (see 4:3) and becomes a Christian, he is sometimes surprised

and disappointed that his worldly buddies are not thrilled at his decision (consider 4:4).

As Christians, we need to learn to *suffer with dignity*. Especially when we do not deserve the suffering, we should behave like the followers of Jesus, who did not retaliate, but trusted in His Father.

Daughters of Sarah (1 Peter 3:1-7)

If Abraham is the father of the faithful (Gen. 17:5; Rom. 4:11), Sarah is *the mother* of the faithful (Gen. 17:16; Is. 51:2). She was with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of promise and beyond. When angels appeared to Abraham, she became the first woman in the Bible to offer hospitality. When at last Isaac was born, it was as much a result of Sarah's faith as it was Abraham's (Heb. 11:11).

Sarah is used to illustrate certain principles of marriage (3:5, 6). Note the phrase "whose daughters ye are" (KJV; see also NIV). Our lesson from 1 Pet. 3:1-7 is a tribute to all daughters of Sarah and a challenge to all women to become such examples of faith.

I. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH ARE WILLINGLY SUBMISSIVE (3:1, 2, 4-6).

A. "In the same way" (v. 1) refers to the example of Jesus (2:21-25) who was willingly submissive to the will of God.

1. Submission has nothing to do with inferiority.
 - a. Jesus was not inferior to God (Phil. 2:5).
 - b. Peter stresses that husband and wife are "heirs *together* of the grace of life" (v. 7; KJV). Neither is more important than the other.
2. It has to do with respecting the will of God (note 2:15)! Like Jesus we need to submit to God's plan; He knows best.

B. Because Peter's over-all theme in this letter is that of persecution, he pictures a Christian wife married to a non-Christian husband. The principle of submission applies in all marriages (Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5).

1. "Be submissive to" is from a military term that means "to place under rank" (note 1 Cor. 11:3).
2. "Without a word" suggests "without nagging." "Behavior" means "manner of life." Great power exists in a godly influence!
3. This submission is not merely outward, but reflects a submissive *spirit*.
 - a. Genuine respect (v. 2; NASB; KJV has "fear") (see Eph. 5:33).
 - b. "A gentle and quiet *spirit*" (v. 4).

C. The illustration of Sarah (vv. 5b, 6a).

1. "Lord" is a term of respect (see Gen. 18:12). "Calling" is the present participle, indicating *continuous* action.
2. This does not mean that she had no mind of her own and never expressed her opinions or wishes (note Gen. 21:10). It does mean that she was willing for Abraham to be the head of their family.

II. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH HAVE A QUIET AND SERENE DIGNITY (3:2-5).

A. "Chaste conversation" (v. 2; KJV) indicates "pure

lives" (see Tit. 2:4, 5). An illustration is avoiding outlandish fashions (v. 3).

1. See the list of "beauty aids" given in Is. 3:16-25. Peter's three categories are still with us: hairdos, jewelry, and clothing.

2. Daughters of Sarah are not characterized by an addiction to fashion (Rom. 12:2), but by modesty and dignity (note 1 Tim. 2:9, 10).

B. Daughters of Sarah need not be totally unconcerned about their appearance (vv. 3-5).

1. Sarai's name was changed to "Sarah," which means "princess" (Gen. 17:15f.). She was apparently a princess in beauty (Gen. 12:14) and in bearing.
2. They do not depend on the artificial to enhance their appearance; their character enhances their appearance. They walk and talk with dignity.
 - a. "Adorn" is translated from the Greek word from which we get "cosmetics."
 - b. Daughters of Sarah are made beautiful from "inward" cosmetics one cannot buy.

III. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH HAVE AN INNER AND UNFADING BEAUTY (3:3-6).

A. The question is the *emphasis* of one's life; v. 3 is not a prohibition, or women could not wear dresses!

1. An emphasis on the *inner* self (v. 4) and on pleasing *God*: "in the sight of God" (v. 4), "who hoped in God" (v. 5).
2. The emphasis of Sarah's life was to "do what is right" (v. 6).

B. When our priorities are spiritual rather than physical, there are at least two results:

1. We can face whatever comes, "without being frightened by any fear" (v. 6), i.e., "not terrified" (note Prov. 3:25). When persecution comes (even from a non-Christian mate), God will be with us!
2. Beauty within has nothing to do with evenness of features or smoothness of skin; time cannot erase inner beauty but only enhances it (note vv. 3-5; NIV)!

IV. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH ARE LOVINGLY RESPECTED (3:7).

A. The pathway for husbands and wives is the same ("likewise," v. 7). Respect must be mutual.

1. "Treat them with *respect*" (NIV). The word translated "honor" in the KJV is even stronger than that. It is translated "*precious*" in 2:7. Let her know she is precious!
2. "Weaker vessel" refers to physical strength, not to worth. A fragile vase is worth more than a rusty bucket.

- B. Sarah was respected and loved—and so are her daughters (Prov. 18:22; 31:28).
1. Like her daughters after her, Sarah was “an heir” with Abraham “of the grace of life”—physically in the birth of Isaac (Ps. 127:3), spiritually in following the way of God (1:4).
 2. Abraham loved and respected her.
 - a. He respected her wishes regarding Hagar (Gen. 16:6; 21:10, 12).

- b. He placed trust in her to care for his vast household.
- c. He mourned when she died (Gen. 23:2).

CONCLUSION

May God bless all daughters of Sarah! Are *you* a daughter of Sarah? “You are her daughters *if* you do what is right and do not give way to fear” (v. 6; NIV).

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2 Peter and Jude: Contend for the Faith!

TITLES

Second Peter and Jude are named after their authors. Peter is well known. “Jude [or Judas], . . . brother of James” is not as well known; he is another half-brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55, 56; see notes in the article “James: Practical Christianity”). The authenticity of these two volumes has been questioned; but both internal and external evidence testify to their genuineness.

BACKGROUND

In 2 Pet. 3:1 the apostle says; “Beloved, the *second* letter I am writing to you. . . .” If the first letter was written after Nero’s persecution of Christians began in A.D. 64—and Peter died around A.D. 65-67 (see notes in the article “1 Peter: Suffering With Dignity”)—this second epistle had to be written shortly after the first. The two letters supplement each other: The first deals with attacks on the church from *without* (persecution); while the second deals with attacks from *within* (false teaching). In 2 Pet. 1:14, 15, Peter makes it clear that his death is imminent and that he is writing to remind brethren of these matters even after he is gone.

The little epistle of Jude is similar to 2 Peter (note 2 Pet. 2:1—3:3 and Jude 4-19). Jude intended to write “of the common salvation” (v. 3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:9, 10), but he became convinced that he needed to write to encourage the Christians to “contend earnestly for the faith” (v. 3). Perhaps he saw a copy of Peter’s second letter and, realizing that Peter’s warning had come true (v. 17), he decided to send the same warning to his own circle of influence. If this scenario is correct, the letter was probably written in the late 60s or early 70s, perhaps from Jerusalem. We can only guess at the circumstances. The important thing to remember is that both Peter and Jude were guided by the Holy Spirit, who felt the warning important enough to be repeated.

OUTLINES

2 PETER: “BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS!” SALUTATION (1:1, 2).

- I. PROTECTION AGAINST FALSE TEACHING (1:3-21).
 - A. Continue to grow in knowledge (vv. 3-11).

- B. Continue to be reminded of truth (vv. 12-21).

II. WARNING ABOUT FALSE TEACHING (2).

- A. The existence of false teachers (vv. 1-9).
- B. The expression of false teachers (vv. 10-16).
- C. The end of false teachers (vv. 17-22).

III. AN EXAMPLE OF FALSE TEACHING (3).

- A. The denial of the second coming of Christ (vv. 1-13).
- B. The demands of the Second Coming: the life we should live (vv. 14-18).

JUDE: “CONTEND FOR THE FAITH!”

- I. INTRODUCTION (vv. 1-4).

- II. WARNING (vv. 5-16).

- III. ADMONITION (vv. 17-25).

LESSONS FROM 2 PETER AND JUDE

One challenge fits all Christians—new converts, those mature in the faith, and all in between. The challenge is to *grow* (2 Pet. 1:5-7; 3:18). Where we are spiritually is not nearly as important as where we are going.

Christians sometimes complain of being “bored” with the basics of the gospel: “We’ve heard those things before!” We need to be *reminded* of these matters with great regularity (2 Pet. 1:12-15; 3:1). If we are not careful, we will raise a generation that has not learned the grand old truths, because we have convinced our preachers and teachers they must ever teach us “something new” (Acts 17:21).

False teachers still abound; never doubt it. Their fate—as well as the stance we must take toward them—is still the same. “*Contend* earnestly for the faith!” (Jude 1:3).

Some are concerned by Jude’s apparent reference to two noncanonical Jewish books (vv. 9, 14, 15). Paul occasionally cited uninspired sources (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Tit. 1:12). This does not necessarily mean that either Jude or Paul endorsed everything in their sources.

Jude ends with a beautiful benediction (vv. 24, 25).

Don't Forget That Day! (2 Peter 3)

How important memory is! Peter was “stirring up” the memory of his readers (3:1) concerning what the prophets and the apostles had spoken (3:2), specifically about “the day of the Lord” (3:10). The term “day of the Lord” was used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to God’s coming in judgment upon people or nations (see the Book of Joel). In the New Testament, the term is used to refer to the *final* day of judgment (1 Con 1:7, 8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet 3:10, 12).

We get wrapped up in things we can see, hear, touch, and taste; we also need to remember “there’s a great day coming”!

I. REMEMBER THE PROOF OF THAT DAY (3:1-9, 17).

A. Scoffers (the false teachers of chap. 2) were denying that Christ would return (vv. 3, 4).

1. The long delay since the promise.
 - a. Christ and the angels had made the promise (Jn. 14:1ff.; Acts 1:11), but in thirty years Christ had not returned.
 - b. Today one might say, “It has been *two thousand years* since the promise was made; He is not coming again!”
2. The ongoing world implies a stable, fixed universe free from cataclysmic events.

B. Peter answers the arguments in opposite order (vv. 5-9).

1. This is *not* a “stable, fixed” universe in which catastrophic events cannot occur.
 - a. This earth was destroyed by the flood (v. 6). The Greek word translated “flooded” is the word from which we get the English word “cataclysm.” The earth was destroyed once; it can happen again!
 - b. Next time it will be destroyed by fire (v. 7)! In this atomic age, people no longer ridicule this idea. (Not *man*, but God, however, will “push the button.”)
2. The fact that time has transpired does not prove the promise has been aborted.
 - a. God is not time-bound as we are (v. 8; see Ps. 90:4).
 - b. The delay is a gift to mankind, giving all a chance to *repent* (v. 9; see v. 15). God wants all to be saved (Ezek. 18:23; Rom. 11:32; 1 Tim. 2:4)!

C. That Great Day is really going to happen (v. 10a)! Do not be led astray by “sophisticated” minds of today who deny it (v. 17)!

II. REMEMBER THE PORTRAYAL OF THAT DAY (3:7, 10, 12, 13).

- A. It will come unexpectedly: like a thief (v. 10a; see Mt. 24:36, 43, 44; Mk. 12:42; 1 Thess. 5:2, 3; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). How foolish are those who set specific dates for Christ’s return!
- B. It will be a time of unparalleled destruction (v. 10b; see 7b; Mt. 24:35).
 1. The heavens (sun, moon, stars) will pass away with a great noise (see v. 12).

2. The elements will melt (disintegrate, dissolve—see v. 11a) with fervent heat (see v. 12).
 3. The earth and its works (man’s achievements and creations) will be burned up.
- #### C. It will be a time of judgment (v. 7b)!
1. Read Acts 17:30, 31; Heb. 9:27.
 2. The destruction (KJV: “perdition”) of ungodly men (the impenitent, v. 9). They will “perish” spiritually (v. 9; see 2 Thess. 1:8).
- #### D. For those prepared, it will also be the coming of the “new heavens and new earth” (v. 13; see Is. 65:17)!
1. This is where the righteous will spend eternity. The “*new heavens and a new earth*” will accommodate the *spiritual* body that will be raised (1 Cor. 15), according to Jesus’ promise (Jn. 14:1ff.). There righteousness will dwell (Rev. 21; 22).
 2. For some, it will be a happy day! For others, it will be the most tragic of days. Which will it be for you?

III. REMEMBER THE PREPARATION NECESSARY FOR THAT DAY (3:11-14, 18).

- A. The biblical doctrine of the Second Coming is not just theological truth; if we really *believe*, it should impact our lives as nothing else can!
- B. “What sort of people ought you to be?” (v. 11).
 1. Godly people who live holy lives (v. 11; see v. 14), in contrast with the ungodly (v. 7).
 2. Expectant persons (vv. 12-14a).
 - a. “Looking” means “to await eagerly, be expectant.” (We should “*love His appearing*,” 2 Tim. 4:8.)
 - b. Christians in the first century prayed earnestly for the Lord to come (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20).
 3. Peaceful persons (v. 14).
 4. Growing, maturing persons (v. 18).

CONCLUSION

- A. If you are not a Christian, or are an unfaithful Christian, the Lord has delayed His coming because He loves you and wants to give you another opportunity to respond (v. 9)! You can be saved today if you will come to *repentance* (Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30; 2:38; 8:22, 23)!
- B. Notice the words of the song we sing, “Are you ready for that day to come?”

The Writing of Jude

Very discouraging news had come to Jude as to the state into which some Christians were drifting. He started to write about salvation but changed his mind and wrote about the false teachers who had crept in among the believers (see v. 3). The epistle is very sharp and severe in speaking out against these false teachers, who were abusers of the grace of God and deniers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The situation brought forth this epistle, whose theme is “Contend for the Faith!”

1 John:

The Certainty of Eternal Life

TITLE

The first epistle of John is named for the author, the apostle John. He does not identify himself in the book, but two of John's disciples, Polycarp and Papias, quote from the book and attribute it to him.

BACKGROUND

John probably wrote 1, 2, and 3 John shortly after the writing of his Gospel Account. He wrote about the life of Jesus to produce (or strengthen) faith in Christ (Jn. 20:31). He wrote 1 John to help believers go on to perfection (or maturity), that their joy might be "complete" (1:4; 5:13).

In the Gospel of John, the key word is "believe"; in 1 John, the key word is "know." "Know" and its derivatives are found thirty to forty times in the book. The emphasis is on confident certainty.

John's constant use of the word "know" is a play on words. The Greek word for "know" is *gnosis*, and John is combating the Gnosticism of his day. Gnostics claimed special knowledge (see notes in the articles "John: Christ, the Son of God" and "Colossians: The All-Sufficiency of Christ").

There were several varieties of Gnostics, but all thought of matter as evil. This gave them a peculiar view of the incarnation. One group believed the real Christ merely controlled the man Jesus and left Him before the crucifixion. Another group said that the Christ had an illusionary body and merely appeared to suffer. In 1 John, as in the Gospel Account, the apostle emphasizes that Christ became flesh (4:2, 3; see 2 Jn. 7).

The view of matter as evil also gave these false teachers a peculiar view of sin. Some went to one extreme, trying to remove from their lives anything that gave physical pleasure (note Col. 2:21). Most, however, went to the opposite extreme, saying that the actions of the flesh did not affect the spirit. Thus John emphasized the importance of obeying God (2:4) and living a godly life (3:10).

This is an intense letter from an older Christian to his spiritual children. It is a book filled with love (the word is used over fifty times in five chapters), but it is also very direct. It may have been intended to circulate among the churches in Asia. The place of the writing was probably Ephesus; the time, about A.D. 90 (see notes in the article "John: Christ, the Son of

God"). Because John does not mention patience under persecution in this book, it was probably written in the period of peace just prior to the outbreak of persecution under Domitian in A.D. 94-95.

OUTLINE: THE CERTAINTY OF ETERNAL LIFE (5:13)

INTRODUCTION (1:1-4).

I. CERTAINTY THROUGH WALKING IN THE LIGHT (1:5—2:29).

A. God is light (note 1:5-7; 2:8-11).

B. Emphasis on:

1. Commandments (2:3-8).

2. Commendation (2:12-14).

II. CERTAINTY THROUGH ABIDING IN LOVE (3; 4).

A. Practical love (3:11ff.).

B. Perfect love (4:7ff.); God's love (4:8, 16).

III. CERTAINTY THROUGH THE EXERCISE OF FAITH (5:1-12).

CONCLUSION: The certainties of life (5:13-20).

LESSONS FROM 1 JOHN

As children of God, we are never to become complacent (1 Cor. 10:12), but we should be characterized by a quiet confidence—not in self, but in the grace of God. Paul said, "There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . will award to me on that day" (2 Tim. 4:8).

We can have confidence in knowing that "if we walk in the light . . . the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us from all sin" (1:7). "Walking in the light" does not mean living perfectly (otherwise, we would have no sins to be cleansed). Rather, it refers to a *lifestyle*, the result of a heart set on obeying the Lord.

If the conscience is tender, we will at times feel guilt, but God's desire is that, as a rule, we have confidence before Him (v. 21). If our desire is to please Him, it is important to remember "God [who is gracious and merciful] is greater than our heart" (3:20). God wants us to *enjoy* the trip to heaven!

When We Sin (1 John 1:5-2:3)

Christians sin (1:8, 10). What *is* sin? John tells us in 1 Jn. 2:16; 3:4; 5:17. Apparently some claimed they no longer sinned. Today some people have no sense of sin; they call sin a disease, anti-social behavior, mistakes, psychological problems, but not S-I-N. The question is not *whether* we will sin, but how we will *deal* with it (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Satan wants us either to be *disinterested* ("What I did wasn't all that bad") or *discouraged* ("There's no need in my trying"). John deals with the disinterested (2:1) and the discouraged (1:4).

When we sin, we need to remember three things:

I. REMEMBER: THE BLOOD OF CHRIST CONTINUALLY CLEANSSES (1:7).

A. Most realize that we are cleansed from our sins by the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:22; 10:4, 10; Rev. 1:5) and that we contact the blood when we are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-6). How wonderful it is to know our sins have been washed away (Acts 22:16)! Some do not realize, however, that we can *continue* to have this marvelous feeling of forgiveness as the blood of Christ continues to cleanse us: 1:7 uses *the present tense*, indicating *continuous action*!

B. There is a condition: "If we walk in the light" (v. 7). What does this mean?

1. "God is light" (1:5; see Ps. 27:1); we need to walk with God. *Jesus* is also light (Jn. 1:5-9; 8:12); we need to walk with *Jesus*. Light comes from *God's Word* (Ps. 119:105, 130). We need to walk according to the Bible (note Amos 3:3).
2. "Walk" refers to the way we *live*. The phrase we use today is "*lifestyle*." To walk in the light of God's Word is to do what God wants to the best of our ability (2 Tim. 2:15a; Heb. 11:6; Phil. 3:13, 14). We will not be perfect, but when we stumble, we need to get up and keep going. The blood will continually cleanse us!

II. REMEMBER: GOD IS FAITHFUL TO FORGIVE OUR SINS (1:9).

A. This has a different emphasis than the last promise. Some ask, "How can I *know* I'm forgiven?" God is *faithful* and *just*!

1. God is *faithful*; you can trust Him (1:7).
2. God is *just*; He is fair. When Jesus died for our sins, the justice of God was satisfied (that is what "propitiation" means; 2:2). God can, in all fairness, forgive our sins! (The Christian who worries about forgiveness doubts whether the death of Jesus was sufficient!)

B. There is a condition: "If we *confess* our sins" (v. 9). People try to hide, forget, excuse, and run away from their sins. John says we need to *confess* them (note Prov. 28:13).

1. The compound Greek word translated "confess" does not mean merely acknowledging we have sinned; it means "to say the same thing"—the same thing as *God*. We must look at sin as God does, realizing how terrible it is and doing

all we need to do to turn from that sin (Acts 8:22; Jas. 5:16).

2. John is not talking about glibly saying, "I'm sorry" and thinking that takes care of it. He means, first of all, striving to walk in the light and, second, being brokenhearted when we fail to do so!

III. REMEMBER: WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER (2:1).

A. From John's emphasis on cleansing and forgiveness, some might infer that it is okay to sin because God will forgive. John refutes this in v. 1a. Here the present tense is not used in the Greek, but *the aorist*, which indicates a *one-time action*. John says, "I do not want you to commit even *one* sin!" On the other hand, he knows that even if we are walking in the light (continuous action), we will commit sin (one-time sin, not a sinful lifestyle). Here is his third encouragement: "We have an Advocate."

1. "Advocate" is from a Greek word that means "one called alongside" to help. It was used in the courts to refer to the defense attorney.
2. *Jesus* pleads on our behalf (see Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:15, 16)!

B. Again there is a condition: "If we keep His commandments" (2:3).

1. How can we *know* our relationship with God is right? By doing the will of God (2:4, 5)—to the best of our ability.
2. Are our hearts centered on doing the will of God? The slave obeys because he *must*; the employee obeys because he *needs to*; the mature child of God obeys because he *wants to*.

CONCLUSION

What confidence these promises can give us! These promises are only for the child of God committed to living for God. Are you a *faithful* Christian? You need to be!

Seven Tests of Christian Genuineness

1. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; . . ." (1:6).
2. "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1:8).
3. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1:10).
4. "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; . . ." (2:4).
5. "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (2:6).
6. "The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now" (2:9).
7. "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (4:20).

2 & 3 John: Do's and Don'ts Of Christian Hospitality

TITLES

The second and third epistles of John are named after the author. Early Christian writers identified this author as “the beloved apostle.”

BACKGROUND

A chain of evidence proves that the Gospel of John and 1, 2, and 3 John were all written by the same person. First, the Gospel of John and 1 John were written by the same author (cf. Jn. 1:1 and 1 Jn. 1:1). Second, the same individual wrote 1 and 2 John: Both books were written by an older person, both are concerned with Gnosticism (see notes in the article “1 John: The Certainty of Eternal Life”), and they use the same words and phrases. Third, the same person wrote 2 and 3 John (cf. 2 Jn. 1, 12 and 3 Jn. 1, 13, 14).

Both 2 and 3 John are personal letters; they deal with some of the themes covered in 1 John. They were probably written at the same time and place: about A.D. 90 in Ephesus (see notes in the articles “John: Christ, the Son of God” and “1 John: The Certainty of Eternal Life”). They may have been sent along with 1 John. These epistles give us an intimate glimpse into the early church.

Second John is addressed to “the chosen lady.” This may be a figurative way of referring to the church (Eph. 5:23, 24, 29-32); but the warm, personal tone of the letter makes it more likely this was a Christian mother, perhaps one who lived near Ephesus. Some try to make the word “chosen” (*eklekte*) or the word “lady” (*kuria*) into a personal name (“Electa” or “Cyria”). If “the chosen lady” is an individual, this is the only letter in the New Testament addressed to a woman.

Third John is addressed to “Gaius.” There are at least three Gaiuses in the New Testament (Acts 19:29; 20:4, 5; Rom. 16:23). We do not know which, if any, of these was the Gaius of 3 John, but he was evidently a fine Christian man.

A theme that connects the two books is “hospitality.” Hospitality was a vital part of New Testament Christianity (Heb. 13:1, 2). The difficulties of travel and the deplorable condition of public accommodations made hospitality doubly important. Traveling evangelists especially needed this expression of support and concern (note Mt. 10:11-13). The recipients

of these two letters were noted for their hospitality (3 Jn. 5-8). “The chosen lady,” in fact, had to be cautioned about extending it to false teachers (2 Jn. 9-11). In a world becoming daily more impersonal, the biblical emphasis on hospitality is refreshing.

OUTLINE OF 2 JOHN

- I. JOHN COMMENCES (vv. 1-3).
- II. JOHN COMMENDS (v. 4).
- III. JOHN COMMANDS (vv. 5, 6).
 - A. To love.
 - B. To obedience.
- IV. JOHN CAUTIONS (vv. 7-11).
 - A. Recognize false teachers.
 - B. Refuse error.
- V. JOHN CONCLUDES (vv. 12, 13).

LESSONS FROM 2 JOHN

Gnostics have been called “the original modernists.” They did not take the historical facts and moral precepts of Scripture literally. They did not believe the Scriptures contain all that is necessary for man’s spiritual well-being. Unfortunately, they have their modern counterpart.

Sensationalists today speak of a mysterious figure they call “The Anti-Christ,” who will appear before Christ returns. John made it clear, however, that the term did not refer to one individual who would live thousands of years later, but rather to all the Gnostics in his day, who denied Christ came in the flesh (v. 7; see 1 Jn. 2:18, 19, 22; 4:1-6).

We need to take vv. 9-11 to heart. We should never do anything that would leave the impression we condone error.

Consider 2 Jn. 12 and 3 Jn. 13, 14. There is value in writing letters (as evidenced by the twenty-one letters in the New Testament), but some things are best expressed face to face.

OUTLINE OF AND LESSONS FROM 3 JOHN

See sermon outline.

A Postcard to Encourage (3 John)

The Bible contains five one-chapter books: one in the Old Testament (Obadiah) and four in the New Testament (Philemon, 2 and 3 John, Jude). In the original text, 3 John is the shortest. Someone has suggested it should be called a "postcard" instead of a "letter." Third John is personal correspondence from the apostle John to a friend named Gaius. The content of this intimate note centers on three men.

I. THE PROSPERITY OF GAIUS (vv. 1-8).

- A. John believed in encouraging workers for truth.
 - 1. No doubt Gaius was heartsick over what was happening in the local congregation (vv. 9, 10).
 - 2. Before dealing with the problem, John encouraged his friend.
 - a. He expressed his love for Gaius (vv. 1, 2, 5, 11).
 - b. He prayed for Gaius (v. 2).
 - c. He commended Gaius (vv. 3-6a), generally, for "walking in truth," and specifically, for showing hospitality to traveling evangelists (Heb. 13:1, 2).
 - (1) "To send them on their way" meant to assist them on their journey with food and supplies (1 Cor. 16:6; Tit 3:13).
 - (2) We should not support those who teach error (2 Jn. 9-11); we *should* support those who teach truth (Lk. 10:7; Gal. 6:6-10; 1 Cor. 9:7-11).
 - d. He challenged Gaius to continue to show hospitality (vv. 6b-8).
- B. We know people who get discouraged trying to serve the Lord. We should always encourage them!

II. THE PRIDE OF DIOTROPHES (vv. 9, 10).

- A. John believed in reproving opponents of truth.
 - 1. We may be tempted to think all was wonderful in New Testament times, that every member loved and supported every other member; but it was not so. Wherever there are people, there are problems.
 - 2. The congregation Gaius attended had "an ecclesiastical bulldozer" named Diotrophes.
 - a. He "loves to be first"; he liked to be number one; he had to have his own way (see Mt. 18:1ff.; 20:25-28; 23:6).
 - b. Unlike Gaius, he was *not* hospitable (note Lk. 10:16). He brought false charges against John and used church discipline as a per-

sonal weapon to get rid of those who did not agree with him.

- c. John said, "I'll deal with him when I come."
- B. Unfortunately, some desire to be "church bosses." Once an article on Diotrophes appeared in a religious paper. The editor later reported twenty church leaders canceled their subscriptions "because of the personal attack."
 - 1. We must discourage the Diotrophes attitude!
 - 2. Let us make sure *we* are not like Diotrophes (Mk. 10:44).

III. THE PRAISE OF DEMETRIUS (vv. 11, 12).

- A. John believed in commending witnesses of truth.
 - 1. When problems exist in the church, we may react with the same spirit that produced the problem in vv. 9, 12. The result can be the division of the body and irreparable harm to the cause of Christ. John says, in effect, "Do not be like Diotrophes, but be like Demetrius" (v. 11).
 - 2. Demetrius may have been a traveling evangelist who delivered this letter. Whoever he was, he had the finest of references: recommendations of the church, the truth (i.e., his life was in accordance with the truth), and John.
- B. Let us live in such a way that we, too, could receive this kind of recommendation. Let us always recognize those who deserve it.

IV. THE POSTSCRIPT OF JOHN (vv. 13, 14).

- A. John said, "I'll come see you soon" (and straighten things out; see v. 10).
- B. In the meantime, instead of being filled with turmoil over the situation, "*Peace* be to you." Remember that you have *friends*.

CONCLUSION

When problems exist in the church, am I part of the problem or part of the solution? Am I a Gaius, a Demetrius, or a Diotrophes?

The Second Epistle of John

This epistle would not be a general epistle. However, it is included in that group. The General Epistles are so classified because, in the main, they are addressed to a group of churches or a region where Christians lived. This would not be true of this epistle, for it is addressed to "the elect lady." Second John is a personal or a congregational letter.

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Revelation: We Shall Overcome!

TITLE

The title of this book is taken from the first words of the text: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” In many Bibles, the book is titled “The Revelation of John,” but it is actually the revelation of Jesus through John.

BACKGROUND

The last division of the New Testament, “prophecy,” contains a single volume: the Book of Revelation.

The Greek word for “revelation” is *apokalupsis*. Apocalyptic literature is a special kind of literature. There are many examples in uninspired books written between the Testaments, but only a few examples in the Bible: parts of Ezekiel, the last half of Daniel, some passages in Zechariah, and the Book of Revelation. Apocalyptic literature was produced during times of trouble. It was written in symbols (codes intended to “reveal” the message to those for whom it was intended, but to conceal it from others). Such literature foretold the future (in general terms) to encourage those who were being oppressed.

There are basically four types of symbols used in Revelation: (1) *Old Testament references*. A knowledge of the Old Testament is essential to understand the book. (2) *Numbers*. To the ancients, certain numbers carried specific concepts. For instance, “3” was the number of divinity and “4” was the number of humanity. Thus 3+4 (“7”) was a complete or perfect number as was 3x4 (“12”). Another complete number was “10” or any multiple of “10.” Most of the numbers in Revelation relate in some way to “3,” “4,” or “10.” (3) *Historical references*. Most of the historical references relate to the Roman Empire. Note, for instance, that “Babylon the Great” (represented as a city in chap. 18) is sitting on “seven mountains” (17:9). This seems to be a reference to the city of Rome. (4) *Unique symbols not found elsewhere*. These must be interpreted in light of the context. Some of these are identified in the text (for instance, the “great dragon” of 12:9 is Satan).

Because of its symbolism, Revelation lends itself to fanciful interpretations. Some of these are relatively harmless. Others, such as the “futuristic” view (premillennialism), contradict other Bible passages. The primary purpose of the book was to comfort

Christians under severe persecution. The futuristic approach (“interpreting” the book to fit today’s headlines and viewing most of the book as still in the future) would not have been much comfort to a Christian about to be thrown to the lions.

In reading the book, look for “the big idea” of each scene; do not get bogged down in the details. The book has a simple message: *Even though things look bad now, if you stay on God’s side, you will overcome; you will win!*

The writer of the book identifies himself simply as John (1:1, 4, 9). This seems to fit best the apostle John, who was exiled on the isle of Patmos (1:9) in the Aegean Sea off the coast of what is now Turkey. The original recipients of the book were “the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4), seven actual congregations located in the Roman province of Asia (now the western coast of Turkey). The time of the writing was a time of severe persecution by the Roman government, probably during the reign of either Nero or Domitian. Since the persecution in Nero’s day was more localized, many scholars prefer the time of Domitian. If written near the end of his reign, the date of the book would be around A.D. 94-96.

OUTLINE

- I. CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS: the seven churches (1—3).
- II. THE BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS: a revelation (4—7).
- III. SOUNDING OF THE SEVEN TRUMPETS: a warning (8—11).
- IV. INTRODUCTION OF THE ENEMIES OF THE CHURCH: the great red dragon and the two beasts (12—14).
- V. SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH Poured Out: punishment (15; 16).
- VI. ENEMIES OF THE CHURCH DESTROYED: including Babylon the Great, except for the dragon (17—19).

VII. DESTRUCTION OF THE DRAGON, AND THE NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH (20—22).

LESSONS FROM REVELATION

The “number of the beast” (13:18) is not a literal number that someday will be stamped on the foreheads of men. The number “6,” being almost “7” (completeness), was considered by the ancients to be a number representing both deception (since it is almost “7”) and failure (since it is not “7”). The number “666” just means that the beast (the forces of evil) may deceive many people, but ultimately will fail. Evil will not win!

The “thousand years” of Rev. 20 does not refer to a literal period of time. The “1000” is 10x10x10, i.e.,

————— *The Church That Had It Made (Revelation 3:14-22)* —————

Eighty or so miles east of Ephesus, near Hierapolis (Col. 4:13), lie the extensive ruins of Laodicea. The city has not been excavated, and the tops of massive arches and other structures thrust from the rocky soil like gigantic tombstones in sad memory of a proud city and a proud congregation that thought they had it made.

Three things should be noted about the city. First, Laodicea was a financial center; it was the wealthiest city in Asia. The people were proud of their wealth and proud to be self-sufficient. Second, it was a medical center. Some of the world’s best-known physicians resided there. They specialized in diseases of the ears and eyes. Third, it was noted for its clothing industry, especially for the cloth made from the high-grade wool of its jet-black sheep.

I. JESUS COMMENCES (3:14).

- A. The congregation was probably started while Paul was at Laodicea (Col. 2:1; 4:15, 16).
- B. The description of Jesus.
 1. “The Amen.” This is the only time this word is used as a proper name. It denotes “The faithful and true Witness.”
 2. “The Beginning of the creation of God” (Col. 1:15-17). Jesus is from heaven. He can be *trusted*.

II. JESUS CONDEMNS (3:15-17).

- A. Put yourself in the place of this congregation as they gather to hear the Book of Revelation read. They hear Philadelphia praised. Surely *their* praise will be greater. Then they hear vv. 15-17! There is no commendation of this congregation at all! One other church (Sardis) received no commendation as a group, but had “a few names” that were faithful. This letter contains no praise for anyone!
- B. A contrast in views.
 1. Jesus calls the Laodicean Christians lukewarm!
 - a. They are neither hot nor cold. They have not quit, but they are satisfied with the bare minimum.
 - b. Jesus says that He would have preferred them hot or cold. He wants them all the way in or all the way out. Lukewarm Christians, still *claiming* to belong to the Lord, are a

“completeness” intensified. This refers to the complete, perfect, total reign of Jesus, which began when He ascended to heaven (Acts 2:33-36; 1 Cor. 15:25). It may look as if evil has control of the world, but Jesus is in control. The “good guys” will win!

When we look about us today, it is easy to get discouraged. How can we win against such odds? When Christians at the end of the first century looked about them, they saw the “invincible” might of Rome. How could Christianity possibly survive? It did. Through the strength of the Lord, it triumphed mightily over the Roman Empire! The message for us is to stay with the Lord, remain faithful, no matter what comes (2:10). Someone has said, “I’ve read the last chapter of the book—and our side wins!”

greater hindrance to the cause of Christ than those who have abandoned their faith but have been honest about it.

- c. “Spew” (KJV) is from the Greek word *emeo*, from which we get “emetic.” Lukewarm water is a common emetic to encourage vomiting. (Note: Nearby Hierapolis is still noted for its warm water springs.)
2. They have viewed themselves as spiritually rich, having need of nothing; this attitude probably reflects their financial wealth. Jesus, however, describes them as “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”
 - a. Instead of being people to be admired, they are compared to objects of pity.
 - b. In a center of material wealth, they are spiritually “poor.” In a medical center, they are “blind.” In a clothing center, they are “naked.”

III. JESUS COUNSELS (3:18, 19).

- A. They need (v. 18):
 1. For their poverty: “Gold refined [tested] by fire”—i.e., true riches, treasures in heaven.
 2. For their nakedness: “White garments”—reliance on Jesus (7:14; 19:8).
 3. For their blindness: “Eyesalve”—the proper perspective of what is really important.
- B. Jesus speaks plainly because He *loves* them (v. 19).

IV. JESUS CLOSES (3:20-22).

- A. In this most scathing letter, Jesus gives the most tender invitation (v. 20); He wants to penetrate their shell of complacency.
- B. Jesus closes with one of the greatest promises in any of the letters (v. 19). To sit with Him on His throne would be the greatest of honors, in contrast with the temporal honor of being a Laodicean.

CONCLUSION

Do not let *pride* keep you from obeying the Lord. You are *not* self-sufficient. You need the Lord. Let Him come in and live in your life.