

Chapter One

The Letter of Paul to the Galatians

The letter Paul wrote to the Galatians is a different kind of letter from those we have considered. Galatians is an inspired emotional letter of Paul. When Paul writes his letter to the Galatians, he is angry! (We might be more accurate if we say Paul was filled with righteous indignation when he wrote this letter.) Although Paul is frequently addressing church problems in his letters, on this occasion he is especially agitated. As he writes to the Galatians, he is addressing a problem far more serious than the problems of the sinful Corinthians.

Mini Bible College

**Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,
I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy,
Titus and Philemon**

STUDY BOOKLET #14

The Apostate Gospel

As you read Galatians, you get a sense of what had happened to these believers. After Paul had preached the Gospel of “salvation by grace through faith, plus nothing,” Messianic Jewish leaders in the church, like James, followed up this teaching of Paul to the Galatians, teaching the new converts, “What Paul told you is true, but you cannot be saved without being circumcised, and without keeping the Law of Moses.” They tried to make Jews out of these Gentile disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Absolute Gospel

When Paul heard that this had happened, and that many of the Galatians who were believers were actually being circumcised, he wrote this very emotional letter. After a very short and cool salutation, he writes:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1: 6-9)

In the Greek, that last word is “damned.” Now, this is a very strong statement, the strongest statement Paul makes in all his letters. Paul is saying, “There is only one Gospel—the Gospel I preached to you. The people who have followed up my ministry are preaching another gospel, a gospel that is a perversion of the Gospel I preached to you.”

What Paul is talking about here is apostasy. We met that word in the Law Books and in the Book of Judges (Deuteronomy. 13). Apostasy means, “to stand or fall away from what you once believed.” Paul sees apostasy as a spiritual cancer that is far worse than any problem in the Corinthian church. Therefore, as Paul writes

his letter to the Galatians, he confronts this apostate gospel that is being taught to the Galatians with the absolute Gospel he had preached to them. This letter then becomes an extraordinary statement of the Gospel of grace Paul preached. His letters to the Corinthians, the Romans, and the Galatians clearly and emphatically state the Gospel Paul preached and Jesus commissioned His church to proclaim to every creature.

An Absolute Apostle

In the first two chapters of this letter, Paul makes some extraordinary claims about his life and ministry. He claims that after his conversion on the Damascus road, he spent three years in Arabia being instructed by the risen Christ, Himself. He also claims that fourteen years later he traveled to Jerusalem and was confirmed by James, Peter, and other leaders of the church as a legitimate apostle. The Apostles decided that Paul would carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, and the rest of them would reach the Jews (see Galatians 2:7).

This letter of Paul to the Galatians is the only letter he wrote with his own hand. He had a stenographer when he wrote his other letters, perhaps because he did not see well. At least part of his “thorn in the flesh” was poor eyesight to the point of near blindness (II Corinthians 12:7). Perhaps Paul was so upset when he wrote this letter that he could not wait for the stenographer to arrive. Paul is very emotional when he writes this letter because the message of

Grace that he had preached when the Galatians were converted was being perverted.

Assignment: We can see that Paul was angry because the Gospel was being changed. Read this letter to the Galatians again and see if you can define first the apostate gospel, and then the absolute Gospel that Paul had preached. This will help you understand the message of Paul and the Gospel of Christ. Compare the first chapter of this letter with the first chapter of Philippians. Because Paul was in prison, believing brothers were preaching the Gospel because Paul could not preach. Paul rejoiced in that because the true Gospel was being preached. Compare that with the way Paul felt about a perverted gospel being preached to the Galatians.

The Gospel in Reverse

In chapter one, we learn that the Gospel of Jesus is the theme of Paul's short letter to the Galatians. In chapter two, we see a demonstration of what I call "The Gospel in Reverse."

Here, the great Gospel teaching of the Apostle Paul is in the context of a sharp confrontation he had with Peter. The issue here had to do with the fact that many people who were Jewish before they became disciples of Jesus, wanted to retain their Jewishness as much as they could after their conversion.

The very first church council was convened at Jerusalem where this issue was resolved. It was decided, that as long as they

were not trusting those Jewish traditions for their salvation, there was nothing wrong with Jewish disciples of Jesus retaining their Jewish customs as disciples of their Jewish Messiah. But it was also decided that Gentile disciples of Jesus were not required to practice these Jewish customs. The Jewish disciples were clearly instructed not to put that burden on the Gentile believers.

But, after this council at Jerusalem, the issue still remained controversial. For example, the church at Antioch had many Jewish and Gentile believers. They lived communally and shared many meals together. Since many of these issues involved foods and diet, they apparently had two tables available at mealtime. At one table they observed Jewish dietary laws, and at the other they did not.

When the Apostle Paul visited Antioch, everybody wondered which table he would choose. He sat at the Gentile table and ate the non-Jewish foods. Peter was so impressed that he sat with Paul at the Gentile table. Peter apparently did this for quite some time.

However, one day some of the brethren from Jerusalem, who kept the Jewish law very rigidly, appeared at the door. Paul must have had his back to the door, while Peter was apparently facing the door. When Peter saw the legalistic Jewish disciples from Jerusalem appear at the door, he got up from that Gentile table and started for the Jewish table. Barnabas, who had been eating with Paul and Peter at the Gentile table, apparently started to follow the example of Peter. About that time Paul turned around and saw who was at the door.

Paul was furious! Paul says in Galatians 2:11, "When Peter

came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.” The original Greek here suggests that their chins were only inches apart during this confrontation. It is in this context that Paul gives us what I call “The Gospel in Reverse.”

At the end of the confrontation with Peter, Paul gives us this great statement: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness could come by the law, then Christ died in vain.” (Galatians 2:20)

Paul is essentially saying, “The Gospel says that Christ died that you might live. But here is the Gospel in reverse: Now you must die so that Christ might live.” We know Paul is not really talking about literally dying in Galatians 2:20, because three times in this one verse he says, “I live.” Paul is talking about really living. In this one verse he gives us three reasons why he is really living.

First, in essence, Paul says, “I am really living because I live by faith.” I live abundantly in this present world, and I will live eternally, because I live by faith in Christ — not by trying to work my way to heaven by keeping a lot of laws and rules.

Secondly, he claims, “I live because Christ lives in me.” Paul will ask born again disciples of Jesus Christ, “Do you not realize that Christ lives in you? Do you not know that your body is the temple of God, and that Christ actually lives in you?” (I Corinthians 6:19) This is a dynamic teaching: “Christ in you is the hope of glory.”

(Colossians 1:27)

Finally, the essence of what Paul was telling Peter was: “I live because I am crucified with Christ.” He was telling Peter, the believers in Antioch, the Galatians, and you and me, that since Christ died that we might live; now we must “die” so that Christ might live His life through us. This is similar to Paul’s teaching in Romans, where He says, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice.” (Romans 12:1) Do you really live because you live by faith? Do you really live because Christ lives in you? Do you really live because you are crucified with Christ? Are you really living because you believe Christ died that you might live? Are you dying to yourself that Christ might live? Are you experiencing the Gospel in reverse?

The Gospel in Allegory

In Galatians three and four, Paul describes what I like to call “The Gospel in Allegory.” In chapter three, he asks eight questions. If you will listen to and then respond to Paul’s questions, you will see that Paul is presenting a very strong argument for justification by faith, not by works. Paul is teaching that we are not saved because we obey the Law of Moses.

In this third chapter, Paul presents two allegories. The first allegory is that of Abraham, who shows us from his experience that faith is not a matter of intelligence or a matter of works; it is a gift we receive from God. Abraham received this gift of faith. He did not

earn faith as if it were wages God owed him. That is why he could believe God when he was seventy-five years old and God told him he was going to have offspring in numbers as great as the grains of sand on all the beaches of the world, and as the stars in the heavens. Because Abraham believed God, God declared him righteous. In this example, Paul tells us that if we have saving faith because we believe the Gospel of Christ, we are children of Abraham.

Paul's second illustration gives perspective on the purpose of the law. Paul writes: "The law is the school master that was meant to bring you to Christ." (Galatians 3:24) In other words, the function of the law is to break you and show you that you need a Savior. Paul writes: "If you could save yourself by keeping the law, then Christ died for nothing." (Galatians 2:21) The truth is, you could never have saved yourself, because you could never keep all those laws. The law was a disciplinarian that prepared you for salvation through Christ.

In chapter four, Paul presents another allegory. This is where we find an important principle of biblical interpretation. There are many events in Scripture that contain both history and allegory. An allegory is a story in which people, places, and things have another meaning that instructs us morally and spiritually. When I say that an event, or a character in the Bible is an allegory, I am by no means implying that the event or character is not historical.

For example, Paul writes: "Abraham had two sons." That is history. But, the two sons also present an allegory. The first son,

Ishmael (whom Abraham fathered through his wife's Egyptian maid, Hagar), was a picture of the works of the flesh, meaning "human nature unaided by God." God had been telling Abraham He was going to give him a son, and Abraham was trying to help the process along. Now, having a child by Hagar would have been an accepted custom in those days. But the problem was that bringing Ishmael into the world was Abraham's plan, not God's. The story of Hagar and Ishmael is an allegory of the flesh. When you are doing your own thing and asking God's blessing upon your plan, Paul calls that a work of the flesh.

By contrast, the story of Abraham fathering Isaac through Sarah is an allegory of the Spirit, because only God could make that happen. We are told, "Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing." (Genesis 18:11) The birth of Isaac was a miracle.

Paul is telling the Galatians, and you and me that we are not saved by works. God had to accomplish our salvation through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has given us the gift of faith and repentance so that we can receive God's salvation. That salvation is the gift of God. We are not saved because we obey of the Law of Moses. We obey the Law of Moses because we are saved. That is the essence of the absolute Gospel in this letter of Paul to the Galatians.

Be honest with yourself. Have you ever entertained the thought that you could be good enough, or that you had to follow a set of rules to be saved? According to Paul, that is a "salvation" that

is of the flesh. The absolute Gospel Paul preached to the Galatians is that we must be miraculously born again by the Spirit. That is a salvation that is of the Spirit.

The Gospel Reaped

Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians by contrasting what he calls “the works of the flesh” and “the fruit of the Spirit.” The flesh and the Spirit are two forces that are at work - actually at war - in the life of an authentic believer.

Here Paul describes what we might call “The Gospel Reaped.” Paul’s metaphor is of sowing and reaping. It is as if our lives are gardens. Paul says that in the garden of our lives we have two potentials. We can plant and grow the works of the flesh, or we can plant and grow the fruit of the Spirit. When the “seeds” of the Spirit have been planted in the “garden” of our lives, the result will be what he calls “the fruit of the Spirit.”

Paul writes: “The works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:19-22).

This passage is very realistic about human behavior. It tells us that when you receive the Holy Spirit, your fleshly nature is not eradicated; evil is still present with you. Here, in Galatians 5, Paul says, “These two natures are at war within you.” There is a battle going on in our inward man every day.

The fruit of the Spirit

When we get to chapter six, we will find these familiar words: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Paul tells us that we who are spiritual should live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, plant the seeds of spiritual things in our lives, and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

The in Look

According to Paul, there are nine such evidences of the glorious reality that the Holy Spirit resides in us. If the Holy Spirit lives in us, when we look in, we will discover the first three fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, and peace.

The love Paul is talking about here is that agape love he described in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. In that great love chapter of the Bible, he told us that this kind of love is indestructible because it is unconditional, and irresistible because it is inspirational for those we love in this way. When this agape love

comes out of our lives, it is not coming from us, but from God.

Paul writes that joy is also a fruit of the Spirit, springing from the glorious reality that the Holy Spirit is in our hearts. Paul could write his, “Epistle of Joy” (his letter to the Philippians), from prison because he was filled with the Holy Spirit of God. You and I can be also be filled with joy, no matter what our circumstances may be, because the Holy Spirit lives in us. Because the Holy Spirit resides in us, pain and suffering may be inevitable, but misery will always be optional.

The next fruit of the Spirit is peace. If we have received the Holy Spirit, we can have peace even at times when it does not seem natural to have peace. Paul calls this “the peace that passes all understanding,” or the peace that does not made good sense (see Philippians 4:7).

The Look Around

For the love, joy, and peace of the Holy Spirit, we look within. For the next three fruit of the Spirit - patience, kindness, and goodness - we look around. We will experience these fruit of the Spirit as we relate to others.

If you are not a naturally patient person, and the Holy Spirit lives in you, you will appreciate the miracle that there is a quality of patience that comes from the Holy Spirit. When you are patient in your relationship with God, that patience is “faith waiting.” When your patience is being demonstrated in your relationships with

people, that patience could be called “love waiting.” For example, sometimes we have to wait for the Lord to work in the lives of our children. That takes patience - the kind of supernatural patience that is a love that waits because it is a fruit of the Spirit.

The next fruit of the Spirit is kindness. In English, the word “Kindness” comes from the word for “kin” or “family.” So, kindness means you should treat everyone as if they were your family.

The third fruit of the Spirit that works out in our relationships is goodness. The New Testament says of Jesus, “He went about doing good.” (Acts 10:38) Good works do not save us, but it is not wrong to be good or to do good works. John Wesley said, “Do all the good you can, wherever you can, to whomever you can, in every place that you can, in every way that you can, as long as ever you can.” Simply do good things. There is a goodness, kindness, and patience that is the fruit of the Spirit that shows up when we look around.

The Up Look

The last three fruit of the Spirit - faithfulness, meekness (or gentleness), and self-control - apply when we look up and focus our relationship with God.

One way to summarize the meaning of faithfulness is with the word “dependability.” Before we were converted, many of us had no discipline whatsoever. But when the Holy Spirit took up residence in our lives, we, found discipline and dependability coming into our

lives.

Meekness (or gentleness) is another fruit of the Spirit. Meekness is not weakness. When a powerful horse takes the bit and is broken, that animal is not weak; that horse is meek. When Saul of Tarsus met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, one particular version of the Bible translated the question Christ asked Saul: “Why are you kicking against the pricks?” The question literally was, “Why are you pulling against the bit?” When Saul responded, “Lord, what will you have me to do?” Saul “took the bit” and became meek.

When a powerful horse is meek, that horse is also referred to as being gentle. Like meekness, that kind of gentleness is strength under control. There is a gentleness that is synonymous with meekness when the fruit of the Spirit are listed. It is gentleness that is the fruit of the Spirit in a life that has accepted the control of the Holy Spirit and the risen Christ.

The last fruit of the Spirit listed by Paul is self-control. The CEO of a large company, who had thousands of employees, told me: “Some people are like wheels; they do not work unless they are pushed. Some are like trailers; they have to be pulled. Some are like kites; if you do not keep a string on them they fly away. However, some are like a good watch; pure gold, open faced, on time, dependable, quietly busy, and full of good works.”

In the fifth chapter of Galatians, the Apostle Paul is saying that if we are indwelt with and controlled by the Holy Spirit, we will not have to be pushed, or pulled, or kept on a string. We are going

to function like a good watch --- self-controlled, dependable, quietly busy and full of good works.

Chapter Two

The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians

Paul spent more time in the city of Ephesus than anywhere he planted a church on his missionary journeys. It was in Ephesus that Paul held a “seminary” in the School of Tyrannus, where he taught daily from eleven o’clock in the morning until five o’clock in the afternoon. It may be that his seminary students shepherded satellite churches that were started by the church in Ephesus, which was the church Timothy was assigned. Those satellite churches were in the cities of Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These six churches, plus Ephesus, are the seven churches you will read about in the second and third chapters of Revelation. It may be that this Ephesian letter was a circular letter that was meant for all seven of those churches and the church at Colosse.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians may be the most profound letter he wrote. The heart of the message of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is found in Ephesians 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Paul is saying to us, “You have all

the spiritual blessings you need to live as a born again, Spirit controlled believer.” Then he tells us those blessings are, “in heavenly places in Christ.” (v. 3) Paul is telling the Ephesians (and you and me), that we have everything we need to live as spiritual people in this world. However, all those spiritual blessings are in heavenly places, in Christ.

Ephesus and these other churches were located in what is now Turkey. In Paul’s day, this part of the world that we refer to as Asia Minor today was the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Because the beauty of Ephesus was extraordinary, and it was a sea resort, emperors, senators, and wealthy people had summer homes in Ephesus. All the glory of Rome was at its zenith when Paul was in Ephesus.

There were a great many other things were at their zenith in Ephesus when Paul was there. Today, in places like Ephesus, you can see archaeological evidence of idol worship, immorality, and pornography. Paul was essentially writing to the believers in this immoral part of the Roman Empire, “It is possible for you to live as a holy person in heavenly places, in Christ, even in the middle of the Roman Empire, with all of its filth and sin.”

Paul writes about an experience of being caught up into the third heaven (II Corinthians 12). Scholars believe that happened to him when he was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19). I think Paul always kept one foot in the heavenly dimension after that experience. And he tells us that we can actually be living in Christ, in the heavenly

dimension, while we are here on earth. Since Christ is eternal, we are eternal to the degree that we are living our lives in Christ. Paul refers to that as living “in heavenly places, in Christ.”

As in all of Paul’s letters, in this letter you will discover a doctrinal section and a practical section. Ephesians has six chapters. Most scholars believe the first three chapters are the doctrinal section, or the teaching section, and the last three chapters, chapters 4, 5 and 6, are the practical section, or the application section of this letter.

I believe the doctrinal section continues through the first 16 verses of chapter 4. In those first 16 verses, Paul teaches us some great truths about the Church. In chapter 3 he tells us about the great mystery of the Church. Mystery means “a secret that is sooner or later revealed.” Until Pentecost, no one knew, that one day, Jews and Gentiles would be made one through Christ and be gathered together in His Church. Paul finishes his teaching about the Church in the first 16 verses of chapter 4, by teaching us how the church is meant to function.

In addition to Paul’s inspired instruction about the nature and function of the Church, there is another theme in the Book of Ephesians. Since Paul had spent so much time in Ephesus—three-and-one-half years— and taught so much in that “seminary,” the key word in the first three chapters is “remember.” Paul is pointing out to the well-taught Ephesians that they already knew the truths he was reinforcing in this letter.

After Paul has told the Ephesians to remember what they have been taught, he begins the application part of the letter in chapter 4. Here the key word is “walk.” He writes: “Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Ephesians 4:1). Paul instructs the Ephesians to walk in lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, truth, and love. In other words, walk in such a way that you demonstrate all the truth I taught you when I was in Ephesus.

As you study Ephesians, ask the Lord to open your spiritual eyes so that you can learn to “live in the heavenly places” and “walk worthy of your calling” each and every day.

Rags and Robes

The purpose of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is to show the Church of Jesus Christ what it is designed to be in this world. This letter is his masterpiece on the subject of the Church. Let Ephesians encourage you and your local congregation to be, by the grace of God, the authentic Church of Jesus Christ in this world. There has never been a time when the world has needed the witness of the Church more than it does now.

A very simple, keyword outline will give you an overview of the content of this book.

The keyword in chapter one is reflection. Paul gives us many things to think about in first chapter of Ephesians. First, reflect on

what he says about “the heavenly places.” Paul tells us that, in the heavenly places, you have all the spiritual blessings you need to live your life in Christ. Christ actually exists in this heavenly dimension and it is possible for you to exist there with Him.

Not everything that exists in this heavenly dimension is good. “The heavenly places” means the invisible world of the spirit. In the spiritual dimension there is the Holy Spirit and there are evil spirits. We are told in this letter that our battle as believers is against negative spiritual forces in heavenly places. According to Paul, the believer who is in Christ can conquer the wicked powers of darkness that exist in the spirit world, or in the heavenly places.

Reflect on what Paul says about the sovereignty of God in chapter one. In verses 1-6 there are some strong statements about God choosing us before the world had foundations. He is saying that it was in the mind of God before time began that there should be a Church, a “called-out” people who would live holy lives and be a witness to this world.

Then observe what Paul says in chapter one about the process of salvation. In verses 13 and 14, we have a beautiful picture of it: We hear the Gospel, we believe the Gospel, and we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. All of this is God’s way of saying, “This is My possession.”

Also reflect on the prayers of Paul in Ephesians. Paul prays two magnificent prayers in Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-21. From these prayers it becomes obvious that he had a prayer list, and that he

was a great intercessory prayer warrior. When Paul heard that someone had come to faith and had demonstrated that they were really involved in the work of Jesus Christ, he began to pray for them and never stopped.

It is interesting to compare our prayer list with Paul's. Spiritually speaking, we pray for the losers; Paul spent his time praying for people he knew were going to be winners for Jesus. He prayed that they might be given a spirit of revelation in the knowledge of God.

Another key word that applies throughout the first three chapters of Ephesians is remember. Paul had already taught the Ephesians so much that all he had to tell them was, "remember." He is telling the Ephesians, "Remember what it was like before you came to Christ and what it meant to you when He came into your new life in Christ."

In chapter three, the key word is revelation. As a Pharisee, Paul had been a Christ hater. He never dreamed that one day God would bring together Jews and non-Jews into one body and make them the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul reveals to the Ephesians that the Church is the great mystery of God.

In chapter four, Paul gives us some beautiful truths about human behavior. I summarize this chapter with the word resolution. Here Paul compares your spiritual life to the wardrobe in your closet. On one side of your closet you have the rags of the old life. On the other side of your closet you have the robes of the new life. The rags

of the old life are alienation, ignorance, hardness of heart, the callused conscience, your immoral lifestyle, deceitful lusts, which means the very subtle lusts that seduce you, falsehood, dishonesty, lack of integrity and anger (Ephesians 4:25-32).

This dressing metaphor is instructing us to resolve that we will put off the rags of the old life. We have no business wearing those rags anymore, according to Paul. Instead, he tells us to put on the robes of the new life. "Put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness." (24) "Each one speak truth with his neighbor" (25). "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good and necessary for edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (29).

The ability to communicate is a great spiritual gift. Paul says communication is your opportunity to build up other people and impart grace to them. Every time you have interaction with another believer, you should leave them more built-up than you found them.

After Paul tells us how to dress, then he says, "Walk." Living in Christ is a daily experience, a daily "walk." You put one foot in front of the other, step-by-step, day-by-day. That is the way life in Christ is to be lived.

Paul tells the Ephesians, to "Walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2), as Christ did. Then, "Walk as children of light" (8), always doing things that please the Lord. All that is good and right and true is the fruit of light. So, walk in those things that are good, and right, and true, and

have no fellowship whatsoever with the unfruitful works of darkness.

Then Paul says, “Walk circumspectly.” (15) That means walking with our heads up and our eyes open, aware of the tremendous need in the world. The great social works and the great social institutions—the great hospitals, homes for unwed mothers, rescue missions, and the like—exist in this world because of Christ, and because believers knew what it meant to live in the heavenly dimension, in Christ. If you are in Christ, you are going to have the kind of compassion that is active, and that wants to do something about the needs of this world. That is why Paul says, “Walk circumspectly”.

It is in this context that Paul commands the follower of Christ to, “Be filled with the Spirit.” (18) Paul literally wrote: “Do not be under the influence of alcohol, which is excessive, but be under the influence of the Spirit.” The words in the original language are, “Be being filled with the Spirit.” To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will give us the power to live and walk in the heavenly dimension, in Christ, no matter what our circumstances may be.

Robe for Relationships

Paul tells us that Almighty God has assigned the work of the ministry to “the saints.” (Ephesians 4:12) This was Paul’s favorite word for what we call the laymen and women in the church today.

According to Paul, the pastor-teacher is the “coach,” but the laypeople in the church are the players on the team. The objective of the pastor should be to equip, perfect, edify, inspire, instruct, and challenge the laypeople to go out and do the work of the ministry. This is a very important part of the New Testament blueprint of the essence, function, and purpose of the church.

When Paul writes chapter five, he tells us that the work of the ministry through the saints begins in the most difficult place—the home. Why is the home the hardest place to apply our faith? It is because that is where we are really ourselves. We show one side of ourselves to the world, but all too often we show quite another side—a less attractive side—to the family. The home is where we really are ourselves, so Paul writes that the home is where the reality of Christ must first be seen in our lives.

In Ephesians 5:21-25 Paul writes: “...submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it.”

Here Paul gives us some of the most beautiful marriage counsel found in Scripture. He tells us that wives are to submit to their husbands and be subject to them in everything. This is very difficult for many women to take. But Paul not only tells wives they

should be subject to their husbands in everything. He also tells the husbands to love their wives “even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.” (25)

When Paul says the man is the head of the woman, Paul is saying that the man has the responsibility for his wife and for everything else in the marriage and the family. That is why God tells the woman to make it easy for her husband, because he has a great responsibility. When Paul writes to the woman, “Be subject to him,” he is really saying this: Your husband is designed to be to you what Christ is to the Church, and you are designed to be to him what the Church is to Christ. So the assignment given to the man is essentially: “Love (your wives), even as Christ loved; give, even as He gave; and be to your wife and children, even as He is.”

That is a very important role given to husbands and fathers, and all men need to understand this responsibility. The greatest problem in Christian marriages is not women who cannot or will not be submissive to their husbands. The biggest problem is men who will not accept the responsibility to love, give, and be as Christ to their wives and children.

If you are a husband and father, accept your responsibility to be all that God wants you to be. Ask Him to give you the power and grace to be Christ-like in your home.

Vital links in marriage

When God designed marriage, He designed a relationship in

which two people are to be one in spirit, one in mind, and one in physical unity. We can visualize the sense in which two married believers are to be one if we imagine them joined together by a chain with five links. The first link represents the spiritual dimension of their relationship - that they are one in Spirit. The spiritual relationship is the foundation of the oneness in marriage, and the couple’s spiritual relationship with each other is only as strong as each partner’s individual relationship with Jesus Christ. Their spiritual oneness can be illustrated by a triangle, with Christ at the top and the husband and wife at opposite corners. The closer they move toward Christ, their relationship will be closer and stronger.

The next link represents communication, or the fact that they are one in mind. Communication is the tool by which we maintain the oneness in our marriage. If we have good communication, we have the tool with which to work on our marriage relationship. Bacteria multiply in the dark but cannot live in the light. Communication turns the light on the relationship.

The next link represents compatibility, which is the evidence of the oneness. Sometimes I cannot help but wonder how two people ever got together because they do not have values, goals, or a lifestyle in common. When the spiritual foundation is in place, you will find compatibility on many levels.

The middle link in this five-link chain represents love. This love is the kind of agape love Paul described in I Corinthians 13. Agape love is a selfless, unconditional love. One of the reasons

marriages end is because people are selfish. They never really learn to be Christ-centered and other-centered. They need to understand the teaching of Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Agape love is the dynamic of the oneness.

The next link represents understanding. Understanding is the growth of the oneness. There is a difference between a male and a female, and each needs to understand how the other feels, thinks, and acts. Peter told husbands to dwell with their wives “according to knowledge.” (1 Peter 3:7, KJV) In other words, know the man or woman with whom you are sharing life.

The last link represents the physical unity of a husband and wife. Sex is the joyful expression of the oneness. The physical relationship between this man and this woman is really a very intense form of communication. It is through the sexual union that the man and woman express all that is represented by the other links in this chain of oneness.

When the physical relationship is what it should be, sex is ten percent of the relationship. When it is not, it can be ninety percent of the problem. Very often, one of the primary reason why there are sexual problems in a marriage is that the couple is trying to joyfully express a oneness that is not there. If there is no oneness in spirit or mind, no compatibility, love, or understanding to express, is it any wonder that the sexual union becomes a sterile and empty vacuum?

Other Relationships

In addition to this emphasis on marriage, in chapters 5 and 6 Paul will speak to the relationship between slaves and their masters. To a degree, believers can apply these truths today as employees and employers (see Ephesians 6:5-9). Children and parents also have principles to apply (see Ephesians 6:1-4). In these chapters, Paul is saying that the application of the truths in this letter begins with the person nearest to you. We might call the application section of this letter, “Robe for Relationships.”

In chapter six, Paul uses the expression “heavenly places” in a negative sense. In the spirit world, there are good spirits and evil spirits. Paul says that our battle is a spiritual battle, and our enemy is in the spirit world. Our enemy is described as “principalities and powers, hosts of wickedness and powers of darkness in heavenly places.” (12)

The only way we can live in spiritual triumph is to be victorious over those spiritual powers. To be spiritual conquerors, we must put on the armor of God (13-17). Every day we must put on the whole armor of God and then go out to fight our spiritual battles. Paul tells us we must put on the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness, we must take the shield of faith, we must have the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and our shoes must be the sharing of the Gospel. Every piece of armor must be put on with prayer. These are the spiritual weapons we must have in order to stand for the Lord in this sinful world. We must fight, not

in our own strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Have you put on the helmet of salvation? Do you know in your mind that you have been saved from the powers of sin? Is your heart protected by the breastplate of righteousness or doing right? Do you use the shield of faith? Do you know how to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God? Are you putting on the shoes of sharing of the Gospel with others. Are you putting each piece of armor on with prayer?

Chapter Three

The Letter of Paul to the Philippians

As we begin our survey of the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians, we should remember that the church in Philippi was planted as the result of a heavenly vision Paul received. He saw a man saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). The spread of the Gospel and civilization from Europe westward into this part of the world was the result of that heavenly vision.

After Paul left Philippi, the Philippian church became his favorite church. The word that describes the bond between Paul and the Philippian church is the word “fellowship.” Paul refers to the Philippian church as “a fellowship in the Gospel.” (Philippians 1:5.) This is a beautiful picture of what every church should be. A church

is really an organization that exists for the benefit of its non-members, because the purpose of the church is to implement the Great Commission and get the Gospel out to a lost world.

The Philippian church was Paul’s model church primarily because it was a missionary church. You can see this in Philippians one, if you will observe how many times Paul mentions the Gospel.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is not really a teaching letter; it is a love letter. It is a beautiful, inspired thank-you note. The Philippian church had been Paul’s support base, helping him financially while he ministered to people in other cities.

The letter of Paul to the Philippians was also one of the “prison epistles.” Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy are called prison epistles because they were written when Paul was in prison. The Philippian believers continued to support Paul during his imprisonment by sending him a gift. As Paul thanks the Philippians for their gift, he writes that he does not desire a gift, but that “fruit might abound to their account.” (see Philippians 4:17) Paul knew God would reward the Philippians greatly for sending this gift to him.

All four chapters of Philippians present a profile of Christ-like living. The theme of chapter one is “The Philosophy and the Passion for Christ-like Living.” Here Paul shows from his own life how to live as a follower of Christ.

In chapter two Paul writes about “Patterns for Christ-like Living.” He gives us many examples of people who truly modeled

both the philosophy and the passion for Christ-like living.

In chapter three, Paul reveals “The Purpose and the Prize of Christ-like Living.” As he did more than once in the Book of Acts, he recalls again his Damascus road conversion experience. This time he emphasizes the results of that experience. In the process he tells us how to know the will of God. Paul calls the will of God “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14) He tells us how to find that prize - how to discover the high calling of God in Christ Jesus for ourselves.

In chapter four, Paul writes a very practical chapter, which we might call “The Prescription for Christ-like Living.” In very practical terms, Paul tells us how to live in Christ, and centers his thoughts on the subject of God keeping us in a state of personal peace.

Looking through the grid of this overview, let’s now look at Paul’s letter to his favorite church, chapter by chapter.

Passion and Philosophy

In verses twenty and twenty-one of chapter one, Paul writes: “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (1:20,21)

According to Paul, the philosophy and the passion of a follower of Christ is based upon expendability. So Paul states his

philosophy for living in Christ when he tells us how his passion for living relates to the reality of his being in prison. Paul essentially writes: “I want Christ to be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death, by freedom or imprisonment, by health or by sickness. If I live, magnifying Christ is the only purpose for which I live. If I die, I want to magnify Christ in my death.”

That is the philosophy of someone who is truly living his life in Christ.

Beyond the individual believer’s commitment, Philippians one also emphasizes the idea that life in Christ is like a team sport. The Lord wants the church to equip the saints for ministry. When laypeople realize that all the ministry of the church is committed to all the members of the church, then we will fulfill the Great Commission and the Church of Jesus Christ will really be what it was designed to be.

Later in chapter one, Paul writes a beautiful description of a church: “Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.” (Philippians 1:27)

Paul’s ideal for his ideal church can be paraphrased this way: “A church in which every member is in Christ; all those who are in Christ are Christ-like; those who are in Christ and Christ-like are Christ-like together so dynamically that the Gospel is believed. Does that profile the local church of which you are a part? Can you say

that every member of your church is a true follower of Christ, living a life that is worthy of the Gospel? Are unbelievers believing the Gospel because they observe the way the Christ-like members of your church are Christ-like together?

The letter of the Apostle Paul to the Philippian church shows us by example, the nature, the essence and the function of the church. That example should model for every church, and for every authentic disciple of Jesus Christ, the passion and philosophy for living life every day, in Christ, and Christ-like.

Patterns of Christ-like Living

The theme of Paul's letter to the Philippians is "Christ-like Living." In chapter two, Paul gives us the general pattern for Christ-like living. Paul tells the Philippians that Christ-like living involves being lowly minded, love minded, and like-minded.

When Paul teaches the Philippians to be lowly minded, he is teaching humility and love. Paul sums up humility by writing: "Let each esteem others better than himself." (Philippians 2:3) Paul is not talking about shyness or poor self-esteem, but about a caliber of selfless love and humility that builds up other people.

If you are love minded, you go beyond this. The person who is love minded is applying the Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12) Paul expresses the Golden

Rule this way: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:4) Do you think of your own pressures and problems first? Or do you put the other person's pressures and problems before your own?

When we are lowly minded and love centered, the obstacles of ego and selfishness are overcome and we can be like-minded. Paul says we should demonstrate that we only have one mind and Spirit among us (see Philippians 1:27). Disciples of Christ sometimes have conflicts in the Church of Christ. Very often when they do, at the bottom of those conflicts you will find pride and selfishness. If we will be lowly minded, love minded, and like-minded, we will resolve the conflicts in our churches.

The Example of Christ

After presenting these truths, Paul goes on to cite some examples. First, there is the example of Christ (see Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus did not simply become a Man. He became the Slave of men, the Servant of men. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, dying for the sins of the world. Because Jesus humbled Himself in this way, God the Father has highly exalted Him (9).

According to Paul, just as Christ stepped down in humility and love, so should you and I. We should not be self-centered; but other-centered, Christ-centered, and love-centered so that our lives

will be an example for others of what it means to live in Christ and be Christ-like.

The Example of Paul

In chapter two, Paul also presents the example of his own life. He writes, “But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service your coming to faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.” (17-18) Paul is telling us that he, himself, followed the example of Christ. In Old Testament temple worship they had “pour offerings,” where a priest poured an offering on the altar. Paul likens himself to those pour offerings, his lifeblood being poured out so that the Philippians might come to faith.

The Example of Timothy

Next, Paul writes: “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the Gospel.” (19-22) Timothy was obviously a dedicated servant of Christ.

At the end of this second chapter of his letter to the Philippians, Paul holds up the example of the old man, Epaphroditus,

who brought the Philippian offering to Paul in prison. Observe how Paul describes Epaphroditus: “My brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to minister to my needs.” (25) There are various levels of fellowship in the body of Christ. I think Paul shows us something of those levels of fellowship as he describes this old man, Epaphroditus, as a brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, your messenger and minister.

What do these levels of fellowship mean? I believe that, in Paul’s mindset, a brother was another man who was in Christ with him. To Paul, a fellow worker was a brother who worked alongside, “in harness” with him, in Christ and for Christ. And to Paul, a fellow soldier was someone who risked his life along with him, in Christ and for Christ. Epaphroditus certainly is an example of these three levels of relationship with Paul and the messenger and minister sent by the Philippians. Obviously, this old man is another tremendous example of Christ-like living.

The Prize of Christ-like Living

When we reach the third chapter of Philippians, the Apostle writes about tackling the purpose for which Christ tackled him on the road to Damascus. In verses 3-11 Paul tells us about his conversion experience in terms of the results of that experience. Paul lists all the things that he once considered to be great achievements—his status as a Pharisee, for example. His achievements were things for Paul to

be proud of before he met Christ. But when he was converted, his perspective changed and he considered those things “rubbish” (8). God had now given him more important things to do. This is a magnificent chapter in which the Apostle Paul, through his own example, gives us a very good prescription for discovering God’s will for our lives.

First of all, observe that Paul had a revolution when he was converted. Paul came out of that revolutionary experience with a resolve, a fierce determination to find the will of God for his life. Then, he is seeking to have the dynamic of the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in his life.

It is as if Paul is running a race, and there is a rule for running that race. To win that prize, to know God’s will, the rule is that we must be obedient to the measure of light and discernment we have right now. If we follow and act on the light that God is showing us now, then God will continue to give us light until we see His perfect will. Paul calls the prize at the end of this race “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (14)

Paul gives us some more clues about how to find God’s will. He writes about sifting his priorities down to one thing. That one thing is, “forgetting things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.” (13) It is remarkable that Paul could focus his priorities down to one thing: “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (14)

Do you have that kind of a magnificent obsession? Do you

have the strong conviction that, when you met Jesus Christ, you and He met for a purpose? Do you believe there’s something specific He wants you to do for Him? Are you reaching for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

Paul gives us several insights into how to win that prize of the call of God: Sift your priorities down to one thing. Forget the things that are behind and keep reaching out to those things that are ahead of you. Live up to the light you have and move ahead into the will of God today, just as far as you can see.

A Prescription for Peace

Paul writes about peace in the fourth chapter of Philippians. He is not thinking about world peace, or even the peace with God that Jesus bought for us through His sacrifice on the cross. Paul is sharing with us the good news that there is a beautiful reality known as the peace of God. The peace of God is a state of continuous peace in which God can keep us if we will meet His conditions. In Philippians chapter 4, Paul gives us twelve conditions we must meet if we are to have and maintain this peace.

His first condition is, “Do not worry about anything.” (6) Paul tells us not to worry, because worry is not only unproductive, it is destructive. Worry burns up energy you need to face your problems.

His second condition for peace is, “Pray about everything.” (6) Whatever your circumstances are, no matter how great your

adversity may be, you have the privilege of praying to God. Whether your prayer results in deliverance from a difficult situation, or the grace to live through it, prayer is very productive. So, always pray about everything.

Paul's third condition for peace has to do with thinking. He says, "Think about all the good things." (8) Paul encourages us to think about the things that are true, honorable, fair, pure, lovely, and good news. Determine how you are going to think. Your thoughts are like sheep and you are the shepherd of your thoughts. Do not be controlled by your thoughts.

Frankly, I think when Paul wrote this, he was also telling us about the key to his personal sanity. In prison, Paul was exposed to everything that was untrue, dishonorable, unjust, impure, ugly and bad news. He had to keep his mind on these good and positive things to survive.

Paul's fourth condition for personal peace is a very practical one. He says, "Those things which you have learned, received, heard, and seen in me, do, and the God of peace will be with you." (9) Sometimes we lose our peace because we do not have the courage to do what we know to be right. What we do about what we know can lead us to peace. The prescription of Paul is to do what we know and believe to be right. (Psalm 4)

We find the fifth condition for peace in the words, "If there be any virtue," or, "If you believe in goodness," which imply that it is possible to lose faith in goodness (8). This means that we question

the value of all the good we have done on our journey of faith. What did it profit Paul to serve Christ as he did - one prison after another? That's what Paul means by believing in or doubting our goodness. Doubting the value of our good works can be a "peace thief."

Paul's sixth condition for personal peace is simply, "Be thankful." (6) Personal peace can be the byproduct of a positive attitude of gratitude. When you express grateful worship, you are automatically shepherding your thoughts away from the negative and toward the green pastures of the positive. To be thankful is a very constructive means of helping you maintain your state of personal serenity.

The seventh step in this prescription for peace is patience. Patience is faith waiting when we are waiting on the Lord. Patience is love waiting when we need patience with people. Impatience is a "peace thief." Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that brings peace (11).

Then Paul writes his eighth condition for peace: "Have a reputation for gentleness." (5) This is the gentleness of acceptance. If you accept the circumstances in your life that you cannot change, peace will follow. Gentleness and patience are the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

In his last four conditions for peace, Paul is addressing our relationship with the risen Christ. He gives us a ninth condition for peace when he writes: "The Lord is at hand," by which he means, "Never forget the nearness of your Lord." (5) Paul was never alone,

even though everybody he knew had deserted him when he was in his last imprisonment. During his final days in this world, he wrote: “They have all forsaken me. Nevertheless, the Lord stood by me and ministered to me.” (II Timothy 4:16,17) In a difficult situation, we can have peace if we will only remember that the Lord is always near us and can minister to us.

In the same context, Paul writes his tenth condition for peace: “Delight yourself in the Lord.” (4) In exhorting the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord,” Paul is really saying, learn to derive your joy from knowing Christ.

He also writes his eleventh peace condition: “If there be any praise,” which means, “Learn to value the approval of God.” If you must depend on the approval of people to maintain your serenity, your state of personal serenity is very fragile. There will be times when you cannot have the approval of God and the approval of man at the same time. You can have a stable joy and peace if you learn to value the approval of God. There are three words recorded in the Bible that were spoken, by God, to Abraham. Those three words were, “Walk before Me.” (Genesis 17:1)

Paul’s final condition for peace is, “Rest your hearts and minds in Christ.” (7) That is another way of saying, “God, I cannot but You can. It is not a matter of who or what I am; It is a matter of Who and what You are. It is not a matter of what I can do; what matters is what You can do. What’s important is not what I want; It is what You want that’s important. In the final analysis, it will not be

what I did, but what You did that really matters.” This attitude, which I call, “Four Spiritual Secrets,” leads us to the “peace that transcends all understanding.” These secrets demonstrate what it means to “rest our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Do you have the continuous state of peace the Bible calls the peace of God? Ask God to give you the measure of grace you need to meet these conditions. God is able to keep us in a state of personal peace, but that state of peace is very conditional. When we meet the conditions that Paul and other authors of Scripture mandate, God can keep us in a state of continuous, personal peace.

Chapter Four

The Letter of Paul to the Colossians

The city of Colosse is located about a 160 kilometers from Ephesus. It is possible that the Colossian church was part of that group of satellite churches, mentioned in the Revelation, that grew out of the church Paul planted in Ephesus (Revelation 2,3).

The Colossian church had at least three kinds of problems. First, there was a philosophical, intellectual attack on the faith of the Colossians. Then there was legalism. Orthodox messianic Jews in Colosse were trying to impose Jewish laws on the devout disciples in Colosse. Finally, there were people in the Colossian church who

were getting into questionable activities like visions, angel worship, and other mystical phenomena. When these problems surfaced in the Colossian church, Epaphras, who was a pastor from the Colossian church, sought out Paul in Rome to get his advice. It may be that visit prompted this letter of Paul to the Colossians.

The Book of Ephesians was Paul's masterpiece on the subject of the church. The Book of Colossians is Paul's masterpiece on "the Christ of the Church." Part of the philosophical attack on the faith of the Colossians concerned the person of Jesus Christ. People were making Jesus Christ far less than what the creeds affirm Him to be: "Very God of Very God." This philosophy attacked the deity of Christ, the fact that Jesus Christ was Immanuel, "God with us." That is why the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ is the theme of Paul's letter to the Colossians. In this letter, he is saying, "If you have Christ, you have it all. If you miss Christ, you miss everything. If Jesus Christ is anything at all to you, Jesus Christ is everything to you. Because, until Jesus Christ is everything to you, then Jesus Christ is not really anything to you."

In our churches today, I think we have parallels to these problems that existed in Colosse. We have people who try to put legalistic bondage on believers that is contrary to the teaching that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works. There are also people in our churches who think that anything that is spiritual is of the Holy Spirit, and that makes them vulnerable to the dark side of the spirit world. There are professing believers who reduce the faith

to something as cold and formal as ice. Then, there are people in our churches today who try to make Christ into something as nebulous and intangible as steam. They make Jesus Christ and His teachings so complicated that you do not even know what they are talking about.

These are the kinds of problems Paul was addressing when he wrote to the Colossians. In Paul's corrective teachings in this letter to the Colossians, we should find applications that can be used to address those same kinds of problems in our churches today.

In chapter one, Paul gives us some of the finest statements in the New Testament about Who Christ is. Paul writes that Christ is: "... the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." (Colossians 1:15-18)

Do you see that Paul is presenting Christ in such a way that he is refuting those philosophical attacks on the person and deity of Christ?

In addition to telling us Who Christ is, observe that Paul will also tell us what Christ has done. "For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He

loves, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (13-14) Is that not a marvelous statement of the Gospel and of the work of Jesus Christ?

In chapter one, Paul also tells the Colossians how to appropriate what Christ has done when He writes: “The only condition is that you fully believe the truth, standing in it steadfastly, convinced of the good news that Jesus died for you, and never shifting from trusting Him to save you.” (22-23)

Do we understand Who Christ is and what He has done for us? Do you understand how to appropriate what Christ has done for you?

Next, observe that Paul tells you how to live in Christ. Paul writes: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” (2:6-7) That is a beautiful statement in practical terms of how to live in Christ and what the results of living in Christ can be.

In chapter two, Paul will tell us what we have in Christ when he writes: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, Who is the head over every power and authority. In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the

dead.” (9-12) Paul is addressing these words to the legalists who were telling the Colossians they had to be circumcised, to be saved.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians demonstrates his deep spiritual insight. One of the keys to Paul’s spiritual life was prayer. He shows us by example, the importance of prayer just as Jesus did. Look at Paul’s prayer for the faithful in the Colossian church and compare it to your own prayers. Then try to learn to pray like Paul prayed, believing that God hears and answers prayer, and that will help you understand and follow His ways.

Chapter Five

The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians

The theme of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This subject was important to the believers in Thessalonica, because Paul taught them this truth even though he was with them for a very short time.

In the Book of Acts, there is a beautiful description of how the church was planted in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-15). These verses also help us to understand the extraordinary ministry Paul had in that city when this church was founded. This dynamic church was founded in less than a month, since Paul was only with them for three Sabbaths. Even though Paul went into the synagogue and preached,

the first converts in Thessalonica were not Jews, but prominent Greek men and women. As a result, the Jews became very jealous of Paul. They persecuted him so severely that he had to leave town, going first to Berea, and then to Athens and Corinth, where he wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. Timothy and Silas stayed behind in Thessalonica and caught up with Paul later.

Paul must have strongly emphasized the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when he spent those three weeks in Thessalonica. When Timothy caught up with Paul in Corinth, he gave a report about the believers back in Thessalonica. He reported to Paul, that although the Thessalonian disciples were strong in the Lord, the Jews were persecuting them to the point that many of these new believers had lost their lives.

Timothy also told Paul that the Thessalonians had a lot of questions about his teaching on the Second Coming. They were concerned about their loved ones who have been martyred in the persecution. Would they miss out on the blessings when Jesus Christ comes back for His Church?

With that perspective, consider these words of Paul, which focus the Second Coming of Jesus and the Rapture of the Church. The rapture of the church is the teaching that the believers will be “caught up” into heaven before Jesus returns. Paul shows us a heart filled with love for the persecuted Thessalonians when he writes: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

This is one of many important passages of Scripture about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Observe the heart burdens of Paul as he writes this passage. As a great teacher, Paul does not want these persecuted new believers in Thessalonica to be ignorant about certain aspects of the Second Coming of Jesus (13).

Since Paul is a great missionary, he does not want these Thessalonian believers to be without faith. In essence, he is writing, that if we believe Jesus died and rose again, we can believe in the resurrection of our dead loved ones (14). Then he tells them in specific detail about the Rapture of the Church.

Since Paul is a great prophet, he does not want the Thessalonians to be without a Word from the Lord. He writes that he is telling them this “by the Word of the Lord.” (15)

Finally, since Paul is a great pastor, he does not want these beloved people to be without hope or comfort. This is probably

Paul's primary motivation for sharing this truth with the Thessalonians, because their concern was for their loved ones who had been killed. He writes, "When Jesus Christ comes back again, the dead in Christ shall rise first." (16) The Rapture of the Church is the most important teaching in this dynamic passage of Scripture. Paul writes the essence of this same teaching to the Corinthians. (I Corinthians 15:51,52) Jesus teaches this same truth in His Mount Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:40, 41).

Paul is teaching the practical implications of a belief in Christ's return from the very beginning of this letter to the Thessalonians. In his salutation he writes: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul has a reason for mentioning their "work of faith" and "labor of love" as he writes to this church. Because the Thessalonians misunderstood his teaching about the Second Coming of Jesus, apparently some of them had quit their jobs. They thought the Second Coming was so imminent that they simply sat around all day waiting for the Lord to come. Paul is hinting, that if you have faith in the Second Coming of Christ, you should be involved in a labor of love for Christ.

In the second chapter of First Thessalonians, we find a wonderful profile of Paul, the model missionary. Observe Paul's courage, boldness, sincerity, straightforwardness, and his faithfulness

to God and to God's Word. He tells the Thessalonians that his purpose for living was their spiritual prosperity (1-12).

In the third chapter, we get a description of how this letter came to be written, when Paul writes: "For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord (5-8). That is a beautiful insight into the great heart of Paul the missionary, pastor, teacher, and author of half the New Testament.

Do you believe in the Rapture of the Church of Jesus Christ? The Apostle Paul shared this with us because he wanted us to be comforted. Do not miss the comfort that can be found in the teaching of the Rapture of the Church. It is the blessed hope of all who believe, and the only hope of this world.

In the fourth chapter, in addition to the passage we have focused, Paul begins to give some practical applications to this teaching. He tells the Thessalonians, who were so fascinated by the fact that Christ is coming back again, that they were to be good witnesses by their quiet living and hard work (11-12).

In chapter five, Paul first makes some comments about the chronology of the Second Coming, then he becomes very practical by emphasizing clear and basic applications to this teaching. He writes: “Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1-3)

In this passage, Paul seems to be saying that we should be agnostic about the exact time of Christ’s return. However, Paul goes on to say this: “But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.” (4-6)

Besides the Rapture of the Church, there are other events that we should note about the Second Coming, like the one thousand-year kingdom (see Revelation. 20:4-6). Some take that kingdom literally; some take it figuratively. If you say that the kingdom is a spiritual or figurative kingdom, then you are what is called “a-millennial.” If you believe that Jesus Christ is coming back before He sets up his reign for a thousand years on earth, you are called “pre-millennial.” If you believe that things are going to get better and better and that the kingdom of God will become a reality right here on earth, and at

that point Jesus Christ is going to come back, then you are called “post-millennial”.

There are also those who say they are “all-millennial,” because they believe it is “all” going to be all right. But, whatever your theological view of the Second Coming, the application section of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is very practical, especially at the end of chapter five. (12-22). Here he gives an explosion of commandments about what the believer’s attitudes and actions should be in light of the fact that Jesus Christ is coming back again.

There are two important truths we should learn and apply to our lives from this First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. First, the Lord Jesus is coming back; and secondly, we are to be involved in a labor of love for Him while we watch and wait for His return.

Chapter Six

The Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians

This second letter of Paul’s to the Thessalonians is very short and was written right after the first letter. Chapters one and three of this second letter are very much like First Thessalonians, so, since this is a survey of these letters, I will not comment in depth on those two chapters. You should read them and study them carefully, but the key chapter in Second Thessalonians is chapter two.

In this chapter, Paul is answering some of the questions and addressing the confusion of the very young church in Thessalonica. He writes: “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that The Day of the Lord has already come.” (1-2)

Paul is making a distinction here between the Rapture of the Church, which he told them about in First Thessalonians four, and the Day of the Lord, an event written about by prophets like Joel, Zephaniah, and Zechariah. In Second Peter three, Peter also foretold this event.

The Rapture of the Church and the Day of the Lord are not the same event. The “great and terrible Day of the Lord,” as it is sometimes called, is a cataclysmic judgment of God upon the earth. The Rapture of the church is an event when the church will be taken out of this world. One will be taken and the other left, in the words of Jesus. (Matthew 24:40, 41)

Now you can see why the Thessalonians were confused. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul makes a clear distinction between the Rapture of the Church and the Day of the Lord.

In Summary

This is the heart of the profound truth Paul shares about the events that must take place before the Day of the Lord comes. Paul

taught that the Day of the Lord cannot possibly come until a power of lawlessness, which has always been at work through Satan and is now being restrained by the power of Christ, is given free reign over the earth. When that happens, people will eagerly follow their sinful impulses. This is going to be a terrible time. The one who will rise to world leadership at that time will be the person whom the Bible calls the Antichrist. The Antichrist will try to take the place of the real Christ, warring against Him and all who love and follow Jesus Christ.

Some believe the Church will go through the time of great tribulation on earth, while others do not. In First Thessalonians Paul writes: “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.” (5:9-10) Based on those two verses, many pre- millennial Bible scholars believe that God will not allow His wrath to be poured out on His people as in the Great Tribulation. Through the Rapture, He is going to rescue His people and then pour out His wrath on the unbelieving world that remains.

Are you comforted by these words? If you know Jesus Christ as the coming King of kings and Lord of lords, Who will rule and reign forever, then these words of Paul are words of hope and comfort. If Jesus is not your Lord and Savior, these words are words of judgment. Trust Jesus to be your Savior. Pledge your allegiance to Him as your Lord right now, and these words will become your

blessed hope - and words of great comfort to you.

Chapter Seven

The First Letter of Paul to Timothy

The Epistles of First and Second Timothy, and Titus are Paul's "Pastoral Epistles," because they are addressed to two men Paul had recruited and mentored to be pastors. Paul wrote First Timothy and Titus at about the same time, and the two letters are very similar. Later, under the extreme duress of his second Roman imprisonment, he wrote his second epistle to Timothy, which records the very last words of Paul. We will therefore consider First Timothy, then Titus, Paul's short letter to Philemon, and then conclude our survey of the letters of Paul with Second Timothy.

Timothy was strategically placed by the Apostle Paul to be the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Titus was placed on the island of Crete. As we read the letters addressed to Timothy and Titus, two very different personality profiles emerge.

It becomes clear that Timothy was a young, compassionate, and sensitive person who Paul holds up as a model of a loving, caring pastor. Timothy also must have been a bit timid since he needed Paul's exhortations to be bolder and more assertive.

The profile of Titus that emerges in Paul's letter to him is very different. Titus was an older man who was apparently very mature and stable. We know this because of the assignments Paul gave him. For example, Paul used Titus to hand-deliver his corrective letters to the greatly troubled church at Corinth. He also strategically placed Titus on the island of Crete, which was a very difficult place to plant and shepherd a church. The Cretans were very hostile, fierce, difficult people. Titus was probably the best man Paul had for such difficult pastoral challenges.

There was an intensely personal relationship between Paul and Timothy, a father-son relationship in the work of the ministry. We may assume that when Paul taught at the School of Tyrannus in Ephesus, Timothy was one of his students. But Timothy had first met the Apostle Paul at Lystra (see Acts 16:1). Timothy was probably present when Paul was stoned in that city and left for dead. Imagine, when Paul miraculously survived the assault, the impact that episode must have had on a young boy like Timothy! I have an idea that when Timothy saw his courage and charisma, Paul became his hero. Paul recruited Timothy in Lystra on his third missionary journey, because, from that time on, Timothy is mentioned as part of Paul's missionary team.

Scholars believe Paul wrote this first letter to Timothy after he was released from his first Roman imprisonment. The purpose of the letter was that Timothy might know how the Church of God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth, was designed by God

to function. In this blueprint of church order and in his letter to Titus, Paul emphasized the character the men who lead the church must have (see I Timothy 3:1-13).

Many people believe the church is a “soul-saving station.” But, in reality, the church is intended to be a soul-saving base of operations, the center from which the truth of the Gospel is proclaimed by spiritually active laypeople. If the local church is going to be this center of truth, it must have definite spiritual standards for its membership, and especially its leadership.

As you survey this letter, you find many other truths emphasized. They are called “the faithful sayings” of the Apostle Paul. As Paul writes to these pastors, he will say at times, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.” What he means by that is, “I am now about to say something really important.”

Paul’s first faithful saying to Timothy is this: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” (I Timothy 1:15) What Paul is saying here is that the Lord wanted to give an example to sinners. Sometimes, people think they are sinners beyond saving. To these people, Paul is essentially insisting, “Jesus has already saved the worst sinner in the world. When Jesus Christ saved me, He saved the worst sinner who ever lived. If He can save me, He most certainly can save you!” Paul is not only being self-effacing here. Because he persecuted the church, he really did see himself as the chief of sinners.

In chapter two, as Paul tells Timothy how the church is to

function from day to day, he makes prayer the first priority of the church (I Timothy 2:1). When Paul mandates that prayers be made for all men, he is prescribing a specific kind of prayer. You might call it “evangelistic prayer.” It is prayer for all men because God “desires all men to be saved.” (v. 4)

The church is to be the pillar and base out from which the truth of the Gospel is proclaimed (I Timothy 3:15). That Gospel truth has to be proclaimed with prayer, because only the Holy Spirit can convert people and make disciples. According to Paul, prayer in the church was to be the pastor’s first priority (see 2:1).

Godly Overseers

The first letter of Paul to Timothy and his letter to Titus should be the official book of church order for all churches. Paul mandated many practical matters with local color in these pastoral letters. He also mandated principles that are supra-cultural (those not affected by culture) and should apply everywhere in all the generations of the church. For example, there is a passage that makes Paul very unpopular with many women today. Paul writes: “Women should be quiet and sensible in manner and clothing. Christian women should be noticed for being kind and good, not for the way they fix their hair or because of their jewels or fancy clothes. Women should listen and learn quietly and humbly. I never let a woman teach men or lord it over them.” (1 Timothy 2:9-12)

That is how the Living Bible expresses it. The King James Version reads: “I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over men.”

Paul is not saying here that women cannot minister. But he is saying something that he says consistently in all of his letters: There is a divine order in which the man is the head of the home, Christ is the Head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman. This means, that in the same sense that Christ oversees and shepherds the church, a man should shepherd and oversee his wife and family, and men should oversee or shepherd the local church.

The Bible clearly gives men the responsibility to be the leader of the home and the church. The Scriptures teach the absolute equality of male and female in the sight of God, but the Bible does not teach the equality of roles and functions for males and females. The Scripture says, “God made them male and female,” and He assigned certain roles, responsibilities, and functions to each.

In my opinion, a woman can perform any ministry in the context of a local church as long as she does it under the authority of those who are elders, or rulers in the church. Therefore, I see no reason why a woman could not be the pastor of a local church, under the authority of elders, just as a male pastor is under the authority of elders.

That brings us to another important subject in these pastoral letters. In First Timothy, you will find much instruction about the qualifications, the role, and the responsibility of church officers. The

elder has the responsibility for ruling, oversight, or for shepherding the flock of God. The other kind of church officer is the deacon. Deacons serve. They may serve in spiritual ministries or strictly practical ones, but they do not have the responsibility for rule or oversight. These two kinds of church officers are first introduced to us in the sixth chapter of the Book of Acts.

These officers are also mentioned in these books of church order, First Timothy and Titus. Qualifications are laid down for these officers. One of the reasons why the church is impotent today is that we long ago stopped enforcing definite standards for church membership, and even more definite standards for church leadership. The most important way the church proclaims the Gospel in any generation is through the lives of its leaders and its members. If you are an elder in a local church, carefully and prayerfully read the standards for elders in these pastoral letters of Paul, and then ask God to give you the grace to meet those standards for leadership.

Paul emphasizes the fact that the elders must be spiritually mature and spirituality qualified leaders. One qualification that is often misunderstood is “the husband of one wife.” (2) This literally means “a one-woman man,” or a man who has one wife. After studying these words in the original language, I do not think they mean that this man could never have had another wife, but that he lives with only one woman at the present time.

Observe that the standards for deacons are just as high as the standards required for elders. And equally stringent qualifications

are also listed for the wives of these spiritual leaders. This is a very important emphasis in the books of First Timothy and Titus.

In this letter, Paul will warn Timothy about apostasy, which means, “to stand away from what you once believed.” Paul predicts that in the last days there will be great apostasy. The apostasy here comes in two varieties—“seducing spirits” and “doctrines of devils.” (1 Timothy 4:1)

“Seducing spirits” means that everything spiritual is not of the Holy Spirit. Many people do not appreciate that distinction. They simply open themselves up to anything from the spirit world, not realizing there are spirits that can actually seduce people away from their faith in Christ.

The second form of apostasy cited by Paul he calls “doctrines of devils.” The Word of God is the doctrine we are supposed to teach and preach in the church. But there are also false doctrines — “doctrines of devils”. These doctrines are not found in the Scriptures, and they do not come from God. They come from the Devil, and many are deceived by false doctrines that are not found in the Scriptures. God’s people should never base what they believe on propositions that are not in the Bible.

Timothy apparently had an experience when he was ordained. It is implied here that when the elders laid their hands on Timothy, something was transmitted to him. Paul essentially writes, “Give all your energies to that which began when you were ordained.” I think he is addressing the same charisma when he writes, “Concentrate on

your reading, on your preaching and on your teaching.” (13-16)

Paul has some words for Timothy about his relationships to people in the body of Christ. Paul’s counsel to Timothy does not sound like he is telling Timothy to have a “professional” relationship with his people. Instead, Paul is telling Timothy to relate to the family of God as if they were all members of his own biological family. (1 Timothy 5:1-2) This is not a “professional” relationship, but a caring and intimate family relationship.

Paul gives Timothy some instruction about the importance of enforcing the high standards for the position of elder. Paul tells Timothy that if an elder does sin (and they do, of course), they should be censured publicly, because their ministry is public. Paul warns Timothy not to be partial about this church discipline, even if the censured elder were a personal friend of Timothy’s. Paul essentially writes: “Do not make these appointments lightly, Timothy. You will save yourself a lot of grief if you pray a long time before you appoint a man to the position of elder.” (1 Timothy 5:17-25)

Although Paul’s primary concern has to do with the character of the men who are going to lead the church, in chapter six, he gives other counsel as well. For example, Paul gives Timothy some practical advice about slaves. He tells Timothy to instruct slaves that they were to honor their masters so that God’s name would not be slandered (1). Paul was realistic enough to know that the social problem of slavery was not going to go away. Many of the early

believers were slaves, and since they were still not emancipated in this world, Paul shows them how to cope with their slavery.

In this chapter, we also find a remarkable passage concerning gain and godliness. There is an emphasis in our culture that places great value upon gain. From the day a child goes to school, he is taught to base his worth upon his achievement. But in adulthood, this proves to be an inadequate formula for fulfillment. There are so many people who have become the best in their profession but did not find peace, fulfillment, or happiness through their achievements. I think people like that are ready to hear Paul's words: "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (6)

Paul then goes on to share some warnings regarding materialism when he writes: "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil."

Paul emphatically exhorts Timothy to flee material things and pursue righteousness (11).

Paul then gives Timothy a word of exhortation that is to be passed on to the rich: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." (17)

Scripture does not say that it is wrong to be rich. Many godly men in the Bible were very wealthy, including Abraham, Job, and

King David. What is important is the motivation behind the pursuit of wealth, and then the attitude toward wealth. Those who are rich should use their money to do good deeds, always giving happily to those who are in need. Paul calls that kind of giving the only safe investment in eternity (18-19).

Paul's challenge to Timothy and to us is that we "exercise unto godliness," because godliness will profit us in both this life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8). Are you getting the kind of exercise that builds godliness into your life? Our culture tells us to pursue gain. Paul exhorts us to pursue godliness. Are you pursuing gain, or are you pursuing godliness?

Chapter Eight

The Letter of Paul to Titus

The emphasis of Paul's letter to Titus is that godly oversight means godly overseers. Paul seems to be saying, "The only way you can plant the church in Crete, Titus, is to have godly overseers who will adorn the doctrine of God with their holy lives." The expression, "adorn the doctrine with godliness" is the theme of what Paul writes to Titus in this minister's manual for planting a church in a difficult place.

Paul tells Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you

might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.” (1:5) Paul’s problem solver, Titus, was directed to correct defects in the church. You get the impression that some of the problems in the church at Crete were similar to the problems Paul had encountered in the church of the Galatians. Orthodox messianic Jews were teaching the believers in Crete that they had to be circumcised to be authentic disciples of Jesus. Others were teaching the disciples in Crete simply to get money from them. These were two of the problems Paul wanted Titus to address.

The most important passage in this pastoral letter describes three epiphanies, or appearances of God, through Christ, in this world. See if you can find them in these verses, which are one of the most beautiful statements of the Gospel in the New Testament:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people (a ‘peculiar people’), zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.” (2:11-15)

The Church of the Three Epiphanies

Have you ever heard of a church that is named The Church of

the Epiphany? The word “epiphany” is from a Greek word that means “appearance.” There is a sense in which the church profiled by Paul in his letter to Titus could be called “The Church of the Two Epiphanies,” because Paul writes to Titus about two appearances of God. He writes that the church is designed to exist between these two appearances. Paul writes, “The grace of God that brought salvation has appeared to all men.” (Titus 2:11)

This grace appeared when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, and will appear again when Christ returns. The church exists between these two appearances of God through Christ. In this letter, God reveals to Paul precisely how He wants His Church to exist between these two epiphanies. In this present age, we are to live “soberly, godly and righteously.” (Titus 2:12)

Paul tells us that in the first appearance of Christ that brought salvation, God redeemed us because He wanted to purify for Himself a peculiar people who would be zealous about doing good works (14). The word “peculiar” here means “one of a kind.” We are to be a special people who are conformed to the image of Christ.

Now you can see why I said that a good title for Paul’s letter to Titus would be “The Church of the Three Epiphanies.” Between the first appearing of Christ and the Second Coming, there is a third epiphany - God’s appearance in this world through you and me. God has chosen you and me to do His work. We are to be His “special people.” We are to be Jesus to the World. We are to be vehicles through whom the risen, living Christ appears to this world.

The emphasis of Paul in his letter to Titus is that the peculiar people, who make up the Church of Christ, simply must “adorn the doctrine of Christ” with holy, godly lives, that God might appear to this world through Christ in you and me. We can be assured that God has great plans for our lives, because He has chosen us to be part of a special, fruitful people through whom He appears to this world.

Chapter Nine

The Letter of Paul to Philemon

Philemon is the fourth of Paul’s five prison epistles. Even though Philemon is Paul’s shortest letter, this letter is very long on application, especially in the area of social action.

Philemon was a wealthy Gentile believer who lived in Colosse. He was a slave owner who had a slave named Onesimus. The name Onesimus meant “profitable” or “useful.” He was probably given this name because he was a very valuable slave.

Onesimus apparently stole some money from his master Philemon and ran away. Thus, he became both a runaway slave and a thief. But in the city of Rome, Onesimus met up with Paul in prison, and Paul led him to faith in Christ. Being born again always involves repentance, and for Onesimus, repentance meant he had to

go back to his master and face the consequences as a runaway slave. Paul must have told Onesimus this. But, he also told Onesimus that he would send him back to Philemon with a letter imploring Philemon to be lenient with his new brother in Christ.

The Epistle of Paul to Philemon is the letter Onesimus took in his hand when he went back to his master. It is not only a letter with great social application, but also masterpiece of diplomacy and tact. As you realize what Paul’s objective is in writing this letter, observe how beautifully, diplomatically and tactfully he approaches his objective. He appeals to Philemon’s Christ-like spirit, and emphasizes the positive when he hopes Philemon will take back Onesimus gladly and voluntarily.

The heart of this letter is that Paul is saying to Philemon, and to us by application, Jesus Christ changes men. And when He does, He changes their relationships to each other. Therefore, Paul writes to Philemon, “I want you to forgive Onesimus and receive him back, not as a runaway slave and a thief who should be punished, but as a brother, a fellow disciple of Christ.” The accepted punishment for a runaway slave was death.

Has Jesus Christ changed you? Has Jesus Christ changed all your relationships? Do you have the faith to believe that He can and that He will? Jesus Christ is the only One Who can change us, and our relationships because only Jesus Christ changes people.

As we read this letter, there are other applications we can make. Many people believe Paul’s letter to Philemon is filled with

symbolism. For example, they believe the eventual return and forgiveness of Onesimus allegorically symbolizes our redemption. To redeem something means to buy it back and to bring it back. The blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross was the price that was paid so that God might buy and bring us back to Himself and the quality of life He wills for us to live.

There is also a picture in this short letter of something that happens to our children. Paul wrote to Philemon that he may have lost Onesimus for a short time that he might gain him back forever (15). Very often we, as parents, lose our children for a time. Even if we “train them up in the way that they should go” (see Proverbs 22:6), they may do some straying before they finally decide how they are going to live their lives. But when they return to us, having found a faith and experience they can call their own, we get them back for a lifetime.

Some also believe this letter illustrates what we call “substitutionary atonement.” When the Apostle Paul says to Philemon, “If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to my account.” (Philemon 1:18) There are those who believe that is a picture of what Jesus Christ did for us. When Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, He essentially said to the Father, “Whatever they owe, put it on My account. I am paying it in full.”

You can see that Paul’s letter to Philemon is filled with application.

There is one more thought we should note in this brief letter

of Paul to Philemon. It is when Paul writes to Philemon, “You owe me your very self.” (19) The dictionary tells us that “self” is “the individuality, the uniqueness of any given person that makes him distinct from every other person.” According to what Paul wrote to Philemon, we cannot really be ourselves until we are born again. It was because Philemon was born again that Paul said, “You owe me yourself, Philemon. You never could have become the unique individual you are without the new birth. Since I was the agent of your new birth, you owe me yourself.”

So many people are frustrated, disillusioned and unhappy because they are not the people God meant them to be. This letter of Paul to Philemon tell us that we will never be who, what, and where God designed us to be until we come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapter Ten

The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy

The second letter of Paul to Timothy is the last will and testament of the Apostle Paul. Church history tells us that, having been released from his first Roman imprisonment, Paul did missionary work in Spain, and then returned to Ephesus. From Ephesus he went to Troas, and was there when the Roman Emperor Nero burned Rome and blamed it on the disciples of Jesus Christ.

When that happened, all the followers of Christ in the Roman Empire were declared outlaws, and they were treated with indescribable cruelty not only by the Roman government but by the citizens of Rome. Since Peter and Paul were public enemies one and two, Paul was soon arrested again.

It must have been obvious from the way Paul was arrested, that he would not survive this arrest and imprisonment (II Timothy 1:4). As Paul writes this letter to Timothy he knows that he will soon be executed. That makes these last words of this great apostle very grave.

If you were to visit the Mamertine prison in Rome today, you would appreciate the weight of every word in this letter. In the lower level of that prison there is a dungeon where it is believed the Romans held the Apostle Paul. The way he was chained amounted to continuous torture. That dungeon was a foul-smelling, horrible place to be incarcerated. It was reserved for Rome's most hated prisoners.

Under these conditions, it is a mystery how Paul was able to write his second letter to Timothy and get it out of the prison. Everyone, it seems, deserted Paul, except an old man named Onesiphorus and Paul's beloved physician, Luke. It may be Onesiphorus or Luke was able to smuggle this letter out. Paul certainly could not have written it with his own hand; he must have dictated it.

As you read these last words of Paul, never forget the context of that horrible prison in which these words were drawn from the heart of Paul:

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:6-7)

You can see the profile of Timothy that emerges from these verses. Timothy must have been a shy person who had a problem relating to people. Paul suggests that a miracle had taken place when Paul's hands were laid on Timothy at his ordination. Paul writes, “If you will stir up this inner power, you will never be afraid to tell others about our Lord, or to let them know that I am your friend even though I am here in jail for Christ's sake.”

In chapter two, we will see some illustrations that shed light on what it means to have a real relationship with Christ. In verses 4 through 7, Paul gives the illustrations of the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer.

The obvious application Paul makes concerning the soldier is this: When a man goes off to fight a war, he no longer entangles himself in the affairs of his peacetime employment. He gives himself totally and completely to the affairs of winning that war. Similarly, Paul encourages Timothy to be totally committed to fighting the battle for Jesus Christ.

Then, as Paul gives his illustration of an athlete, he says,

“Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules.” (1 Timothy 2:5) There are also rules for the life in Christ, and one of them is that you must suffer for Jesus Christ. You must take up your cross and be willing to follow Him.

When Paul writes about the farmer, his point is that a farmer works hard, both when he is sowing and when he is reaping. Then, he is “the first to receive a share of the crops.” (6) Paul is telling Timothy, “Work hard, as a farmer works. Work hard at sowing and work hard at reaping, and you will receive a great harvest.”

Paul was confident of Christ’s presence with him, even in his suffering. Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, God remains faithful to us and will help us, for He cannot disown us who are part of Himself. God’s truth stands firm like a great rock, and nothing can shake it. It is a foundation stone with these words written on it: “The Lord knows those who are really His.” (13,19)

Remember Paul’s agonizing circumstances as you read these words of great consolation. Paul writes that it is possible to be so sick and weak, mentally, emotionally, and even spiritually, that you do not have the strength to believe and to pray. Would you be lost in such a circumstance? No! This passage says that even if we are too weak to pray or too weak to believe, God will never deny His own. Even when we cannot keep the faith, He will always be faithful to us.

Paul teaches about the life purpose of the believer with an illustration about vessels (20-21). In those days, people had big

vessels, or jars, in their homes. Some of the vessels were used for honorable purposes, and some were used for purposes that were not so honorable (there was no indoor plumbing then).

Paul is saying, “Timothy, it is like that when you are following Christ. You can be a vessel that is used for dishonorable purposes, or you can turn your back on the turbulent desires of youth and give your positive attention to goodness, faith, love and peace. Then you will be a vessel fit for honorable purposes, clean and serviceable for the use of the Master.”

In one of the most familiar verses in this letter, Paul writes: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) This word translated “study” means “exert yourself.” Paul is saying, “Timothy, be disciplined and exert yourself so that, as a result of your commitment to your study, you will be approved of God some day.” Always ask yourself: Are you studying, really exerting yourself to learn more of the Word of God?

At the end of this second chapter, Paul advises the young pastor Timothy about how to help people resolve their problems. Today we call that pastoral counseling. In Paul and Timothy’s day, they would have called it shepherding. I am intrigued by the fact that his last words, shared in such dire circumstances coach Timothy in the skills of being a good pastor.

Paul tells Timothy that the problem with the people he is correcting and counseling is that they are living in opposition to

God's unique plan for their lives. (They are "opposing themselves" is the way one translation describes it.) They have been ensnared by the devil (26). There are many reasons why people do this. They may compare themselves with other people, or imitate other people, or allow themselves to be controlled by other people. There are many ways we can "lose ourselves" in that sense. People who are opposing God's plan for them are going to have great difficulty and be very unhappy in life.

Paul is saying, "Timothy, if you will, with meekness, gentleness, and patience listen to these people, these three fruit of the Spirit will keep the door open for God and earn your hearing. You will then be able to instruct these people and place before them the truth that can set them free." (see John 8:32) You absolutely must not strive with these people because that closes the door for God and leaves them in bondage to Satan. I think this is one of the finest things that has ever been written on the subject of spiritual, pastoral counseling.

What Are You Going To Do About What You Know?

The heart of this letter is found in 3:10-4:5. Paul knows he is going to be put to death, perhaps days or even hours after this letter is dictated and smuggled out of the prison. As he dictates these last words to Timothy, we should feel the gravity of Paul's words. They are words about his faith, his suffering, his affection for Timothy, and the importance of the truth of the Gospel. Many times in this

passage, Paul says to Timothy, "You know ... you know ... you know." How does Timothy know all those things Paul tells him he knows?

The obvious answer to that question is Timothy knows all these things because he observed those things in Paul's life. Paul is now challenging Timothy with this question: "What are you going to do about all the things you know?"

Paul gives this final charge to Timothy: "And so I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus—Who will some day judge the living and the dead when He appears to set up His kingdom to preach the word of God urgently at all times, whenever you get the chance, in season and out, when it is convenient and when it is not. Correct and rebuke your people when they need it, encourage them to do right, and all the time be feeding them patiently with God's Word. For there is going to come a time when people will not listen to the truth, but will go around looking for teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. They will not listen to what the Bible says but will blithely follow their own misguided ideas. Stand steady and do not be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Bring others to Christ. Leave nothing undone that you ought to do." (I Timothy 4:1-5)

These words are a challenge for all of us to be faithful and diligent in the work of the Lord, and to decide what we are going to do about what we know. The relationship of Paul and Timothy is also an important application to this last will and Testament of Paul.

If you are young in the faith or in the ministry, you desperately need a Paul. If you are a mature and seasoned believer or pastor, you are delinquent if you are not apprenticing some young believer or pastor like Timothy.

The Last Words of an Old Soldier

These solemn words of challenge are followed by words that must have broken the heart of Timothy. These are the last words of the greatest missionary, pastor, teacher, theologian and New Testament author in the history of the church:

“I say this because I will not be around to help you very much longer. My time has almost run out. Very soon now I will be on my way to heaven. I have fought long and hard for my Lord, and through it all I have kept true to him. And now the time has come for me to stop fighting and rest. In heaven a crown is waiting for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And not only to me, but to all those whose lives show that they are eagerly looking forward to his coming back again.” (II Timothy 4:6-8)