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Preface

This commentary is a companion to The New Testament Letters. As is true of any commentary, it is one person's or group's opinion and interpretation. Some commentaries are very thorough and technical, comprising many volumes, but most believers get much more use out of something handy and concise. That is the intended audience for which this commentary was written.

While some passages of scripture surely do need detailed and somewhat technical examination, for the most part this commentary takes a more practical, "common sense" approach. Too often, Bible study becomes a habit of dissecting the Word and treating each bit as a specimen on a laboratory slide, instead of a study of the "living and active" entity that it is. There is a time and place for surgery, and a time and place for living and moving.

So it is my hope and prayer that this commentary will serve as a teaching aid, a "three-dimensional" viewer, to open up the scriptures and free them from traditional constraints.

James

The letter from James is perhaps the earliest of the Letters, written before 50 AD and probably earlier (since it does not mention the Jerusalem meeting of around 47 AD). This is believed to be the James that was Jesus' earthly brother and not one of the original disciples. The content is relatively simple and practical, appealing to common sense.

Outline

1. 1:1 Greeting
2. 1:2–4 Perseverance
3. 1:5–8 Wisdom and doubting
4. 1:9–11 Rich and poor
5. 1:12–16 Temptation
6. 1:17–18 God, the source of all goodness
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15. 4:13–17 Boasting

16. 5:1–6 The rich
17. 5:7–11 Patience
18. 5:12 Oaths
19. 5:13–18 Sickness and faith
20. 5:19–20 Saving others from deception

Comments

1:1 Greeting

James only describes himself as a slave of God, just as Paul often did, in spite of being the half-brother of Jesus. But notice that the letter is directed at the twelve tribes of Israel, scattered among the nations. Many people advocate the theory of "lost tribes", the remnant from when Israel and Judah were conquered. But that was long before this letter was written, and yet here is James writing to all twelve tribes. Not one hint is made about any of them being lost. However, some could take the expression as poetic license, just a way to refer to Jewish believers not living in Jerusalem. Even so, it should be noted that not one hint of any lost tribes is mentioned in the Bible. In addition, we have all twelve tribes listed in the book of Revelation concerning the distant future compared to the first century, as well as Paul's assertion of his being able to trace his Hebrew lineage (Phil. 3 for example).

1:2–4 Perseverance

James begins by advising the people on the proper reaction to hardship. Its purpose is to refine and mold us, to make us strong and mature. That message has largely been lost today. Most believers think God only wants them to be happy and comfortable. And note the reference to "brothers and sisters". Even though this letter is addressed to "the twelve tribes" of Israel, these are also believers in the Anointed One Jesus.

1:5–8 Wisdom and doubting

Another issue that seems to have been forgotten today is that of asking God for wisdom. Instead we try to work for everything, but we never seem to reach the goal because we're using our own power instead of God's. We ask God for many things in prayer but really don't expect an answer, and James makes it clear that such an attitude will not get us anything from God.

1:9–11 Rich and poor

In this passage and again later, James targets the issue of how we view riches and social standing. The rich should be humbled by the fleeting nature of wealth, and the poor should boast of their true and eternal riches. Many of our values in this life will be reversed in the coming kingdom.

1:12–16 Temptation

We must be careful not to take the term "medal of life" as meaning salvation, or we'd have to say James is teaching salvation by works (we'll look at that more in the next chapter). But God never tempts anyone to sin, which is an important point to remember on the topic of the sin of Adam, because some claim God put the Tree there to get him to sin. And Satan is not mentioned here at all, but only our own desires, along with a warning about deception.

Today it is becoming increasingly popular to blame this or that "spirit" of something for every evil thing we do or experience, such as "the spirit of lust" or even "the spirit of poverty." Such notions come from superstition, not God. We do get tempted by the world around us, and certainly demons are involved in much of that, but the blame for falling lies solely with us. Instead of slamming the door when sin comes along, we invite it in and allow it to stay. Then it "grows up" and takes over.

1:17–18 God, the source of all goodness

In contrast to the notion that temptation comes from God, James tells us that only what is good comes from God. God never wavers or changes, which is very much in contrast to the gods of other religions such as Islam.

1:19–27 Purity and actions

We would do well to heed James' advice here to be slow to take offense. We live in a world where everyone feels entitled to be free of offense. Even many Christians expect others to tiptoe around them and never hurt their feelings. The slightest disagreement is taken as offense and hostility. We are to be sensitive and considerate, but that does not mean the hypersensitive can demand never to be challenged.

James advises people to be self-controlled and patient. And we must go beyond merely hearing the Word to also practice it. We must choose daily to keep focused on Jesus and the truth of the gospel, and the sound teachings of the Bible. A good sign that we are practicing the teachings is how well we control our tongues, a topic James will elaborate on later.

A religion that is clean and pure is of no credit to us without standing the test: staying clean in spite of our contacts with the world. There is no reward for being clean if you never leave your house! A monastic life is largely an untested and concealed life; it is of much more value to be found clean if one is out where there is dirt.

2:1–9 Prejudice

James appeals to the people's own experience to question why they would fawn over the rich and despise the poor. He states in no uncertain terms that it is a crime to favor the very class of people that do the most harm to the faith; it favors the enemy and

disgraces the Name and his people, who often are found among the poor.

In spite of this passage being familiar to most believers, it is rarely followed. Favoritism is alive and well in the churches. The unbiblical clergy class is favored over the so-called laity, men are favored over women, and the rich are courted for their financial support, even though it is these people who do the church the most damage. Favoritism is a violation of the "royal law" to love your neighbor as yourself.

2:10–13 The law

If one part of the law is violated, the whole thing is. So nobody can claim to be better than anyone else since everyone violates the law. And when it comes to judgment, God will judge us with the same standard we used on others. If we want God to go easy on us, then we'd better do the same for other people in this life (see also Mt. 7:2).

2:14–26 Faith and actions

Now to the "faith and works" passage, one which has vexed Bible students for ages. Many believe it to be at odds with the teachings of Paul, who said in Romans 4 that Abraham was made righteous (or "just") by faith alone, in contrast to the earning of a wage.

First of all, remember that this letter was written before Paul's letters (with the remotely possible exception of Galatians), which contain a much more developed theology. Second, James is speaking of a dead faith, not a non-existent one. If a person dies, does it mean they never existed? Of course not, and neither is a person without works necessarily one who was never born again spiritually. Third, this whole letter is about practical, everyday Christianity. Just as James was amazed that people were fawning over the rich who were exploiting them, he is also amazed at people who claim salvation but never show it.

In vs. 14–20 James is talking about the uselessness of a faith no one can see in action, not that such inaction proves a complete absence of faith. He asks how anyone can know you have such faith if they can't see it. People are not like God who sees the heart; we have nothing else to go on but actions and words. So James is building a case against those who have made the claim but never displayed the faith, to ask them why anyone should believe them.

But what about Abraham? James says that Abraham was declared just by offering Isaac on an altar, doesn't he? But note the pivotal phrase, "And that **fulfilled the scripture** that says 'Abraham believed God...'" In other words, what Abraham would later do was determined beforehand by his faith. The scripture about when Abraham was declared righteous by God is the belief, and the offering of Isaac is the result of the test. So James is not contradicting Paul at all. But the thrust of his argument is that Abraham was declared righteous for us to see when his faith took action. Otherwise James would not only be contradicting Paul but also himself, because he said "Abraham believed... and was credited with justice" and that a person is justified by actions. Which is it?

The answer of course is that God sees our faith, but we can only see actions. After all, God really didn't need to see Abraham's actions in order to know if Abraham had faith, yet "the Angel of the Master" said "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (Gen. 22:12b)

There is a popular phrase, "Faith without works is alone, but faith that works is never alone." Those who say this demand proof by works that a person has faith, or they call them unbelievers. But that's something only God can know; it is not anyone else's place to judge. We can only see actions, and there are times that actions force us to expel someone from our fellowship. But we dare not call them lost without asking first what they believe.

Again, James is imploring people to put their faith into practice, not writing a thesis on salvation. And those who insist on works for salvation cannot agree where the line is drawn. Exactly

what and how many works are required, and where does the Bible say this? Instead, we see the same line of reasoning Paul used about the difference between spiritual infants and mature adults, between the spiritually immature and true disciples.

A dead person exists but is useless, and a dead faith exists but also is useless. We are not to be content with just being born, but to be useful to God and the other believers.

3:1–12 Teaching and taming the tongue

Now to the subject of Bible teachers. Anyone who is in a position of teaching is held to a higher standard since they are responsible for the spiritual nurturing and protection of others. If all Sunday School teachers and preachers would take this seriously, how many would be left? Did God ever intend for any warm body who can read a "teacher's guide" to be put in a teaching position? As Paul wrote, the standards for teachers and Elders are very high, and God will hold them responsible.

I don't think there is necessarily a break to a different subject in verse two, which begins the passage on the tongue. James just wrote about teachers and how careful they have to be in what they say. Like the rudder of a ship, the tongue can control "the whole body", which can refer to the Body of believers. Great damage can be done by false or inept teachers. Of course the section can apply to every individual believer as well, but I really think James may have had teachers in mind when he wrote this part.

3:13–18 Wisdom

Back again to general Christian behavior, about putting our faith in action. If we do this we won't have the squabbles and conflicts typical of churches throughout history. The hierarchal structure of "churchianity" fosters the jealousy and selfish ambition James writes about here. And if it was a problem in James' time, before this structure set in, then we can understand why it has become so much greater a problem now.

4:1–6 The battle within

What causes those battles and struggles? The same "self" that James wrote about earlier, that tempts us to sin. We crave a lot of things, and even try to fool ourselves that some of them are not desires but needs that God owes us. We are of course to enjoy the fruit of our labor, but we must not forget the poor. How often do we ask for the means to help them?

We must also remember how God views human pride. Just as he will speak of a different kind of resistance on our part, James first speaks of God's resistance to the arrogant. They may succeed in this life, but God will be their judge in the next!

4:7–12 Come near to God, away from evil

This time James offers a strategy for standing firm: resist! Most of our sin is simply due to our not even putting up a fight. But if we stand against the Tempter he will run away in fear. But does this conflict with James' earlier statement that temptation comes from within? No, because he never said *all* temptation was from ourselves. We do have an external Enemy, but one that cannot prevail against a strong defense. The pride of self is no match for him, but if we humble ourselves to God instead of being self-sufficient and arrogant, we can't lose.

Bringing down the idol of Self can be painful, but it must be done if we are to conquer sin and stand against temptation. We must also stop watching others like a hawk to see if they fall so we can "shoot our wounded." I've seen far too much of that in the churches. People dress up and play the part every Sunday, but instead of examining themselves they gossip and backstab and cut each other down continually. Or they go to the other extreme and pretend not to see error or sin or heresy.

Here is an instance of "do not judge", and like the others, it's typically taken out of context. James has been talking about people tearing each other down, and it is this kind of judging that is wrong. And the people doing this, instead of judging themselves

compared to God's standards, judge themselves by their own standards. They are very much like the Pharisees.

4:13–17 Boasting

Pride is the root of boasting. From our own limited perspective we think our lives to be long and important. But we are in fact mere vapors, fleeting moments in time. As Paul has said, anyone who brags should only brag about the Master. To know all of these things and ignore them or fail to act is every bit as much a sin against God as the commission of evil acts.

5:1–6 The rich

Do you get the impression that James was a little upset with the rich? Like many employers today, they were exploiting workers, and remember he's addressing believers! Many employers have gone to church each Sunday but lived like the devil all week, saying "Business is business." I have a hunch that this was the sort of disjointed spirituality James was so upset about. And again, these were the types of people who gave the believers most of their trouble.

5:7–11 Patience

Abruptly James shifts focus to the exploited now, asking them to be patient. We hold out the hope of the Master's return as our power to endure. Sadly, just when we need it most, this hope has been all but abandoned by the churches today. They have decided that prophecies are just stories about good and evil, and they mock those who still believe the Master will return for us. After another quick jab at the judgmental ones, James gives examples of patience from the past, the hated and persecuted prophets of old.

5:12 Oaths

Next is a statement that we must be careful not to misunderstand: do not take oaths. But like the same issue when Jesus was speaking about the Pharisees (Mt. 5), who were using legal loopholes to get out of keeping their oaths, James is only saying we should be people of our word. We should not be trying to see what we can get away with but how holy and faithful we can be.

5:13–18 Sickness and faith

Many people take this passage as a kind of magic formula whereby we can practically order God to heal someone. There is nothing magical about oil used to anoint anyone. But notice whose faith it is that can heal the sick person: the Elders who are praying over them. Most so-called faith healers blame the sick person for not having enough faith to get better, but the Bible clearly lays the blame at the feet of the ones doing the praying and anointing. The prayers of the proud and fake cannot heal, but those of the righteous can.

There are some commentators who believe that James has a specific kind of sickness in mind here: that brought about by sin. But we don't have enough in the context to say for sure.

5:19–20 Saving others from deception

James ends the letter with an encouraging note: that it is a great honor and blessing to bring people back from sin and deception. This of course stands in stark contrast to the "shooting our wounded" we usually see.

1 Peter

The first letter from Peter was written in the early 60s AD while he was in Babylon. Its overall theme is Christian behavior in a world that was becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity.

Outline

1. 1:1–2 Greeting
2. 1:3–5 Our living hope
3. 1:6–9 Faith that passes the test
4. 1:10–12 The mystery of salvation
5. 1:13–19 Holiness and strength
6. 1:20–22 The mystery revealed
7. 1:23–2:3 A new immortal life
8. 2:4–10 The living stone
9. 2:11–3:12 A new citizenship
10. 3:13–18a Suffering for righteousness
11. 3:18b–4:7a Jesus' suffering and example
12. 4:7b–11 Prayer, love, and service
13. 4:12–19 The season of trial
14. 5:1–4 Elders' responsibility
15. 5:5–7 Learners' responsibility
16. 5:8–9 Stay sharp
17. 5:10–11 Praise

18. 5:12–14 Final greetings

Comments**1:1 Greeting**

Peter was considered the "chief" of the apostles, until Paul began his ministry. Even afterwards he was known as the apostle to the Jews, in contrast to Paul being sent to the Gentiles. Many have portrayed him as impetuous and brash, but we need to be careful not to read too much between the lines.

He is writing here to believers in various locations, and refers to them as those who were chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father. Note that it is advance *knowledge*, not advance *predestination*; God knew they would choose to accept Jesus.

1:3–5 Our living hope

It is our faith in Jesus' resurrection that results in God giving us this new birth and the inheritance that goes with it. As Paul also wrote, this promise of eternal life is being guarded in heaven for us; it does not depend upon us in any way to keep it.

Further, we are guarded by God's power right up to the moment of deliverance. We have no need or right to worry about losing it. It is this guarantee that gives us the hope of endurance, the power to keep going through many trials. We love and trust in God even without having seen him.

1:6–9 Faith that passes the test

Peter describes the suffering the people were under as being exalted. The trial of faith in this life is painful, but it will prove whether a faith was genuine or not. And the completion of the test is that we spread the gospel.

1:10–12 The mystery of salvation

God had given hints in Old Testament prophecies about this age of grace we live in, but nobody could figure it out beforehand. And yet what was written was ultimately for our benefit. Even the angels long to discover these things.

1:13–19 Holiness and strength

Because of all that, we should be motivated to be self-controlled and prepared for anything. Our focus should remain on Jesus and not self, on holiness and not indulgence. God will judge us impartially, and we must therefore be impartial in our dealings with others, as James discussed in more detail. Peter defines maturity as relying on the grace of God through Jesus. When we reach this maturity we leave the old ways and become holy, meaning set apart for a higher purpose.

Our redemption was not obtained by tradition or material wealth, but by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb. Many today nonetheless put tradition or status over the cross and the Word, thinking that the Word is less trustworthy than people's traditions!

1:20–22 The mystery revealed

Although chosen from long ago, Jesus was only revealed to us when he came as a man and was raised from the dead. This is where our faith lies, and what has given us birth into a new family.

1:23–2:3 A new immortal life

In light of the nature of our redemption, we must behave as those who are grateful. We should not only give up that which is worthless but also crave that which is good.

2:4–10 The living stone

Striving for maturity will result in our being used as "living stones" in a spiritual building. We serve as priests, and we must see to it that we serve faithfully, bringing God the spiritual sacrifices of true disciples. Notice that all believers are seen this way, not just an imagined clergy class or just males; we are all equally holy to God.

Jesus, as the cornerstone, is the foundation upon which all of us are to rest. He, the Master, in becoming human, has taken the lowest position, the basement! How can any of us mere "bricks" think that because he did this in order to lift us up, that we are more important? Yet that's what many in the churches do. They think a "minister" (which means "servant") is to rise above the rest and be in charge, but we are to follow Jesus' example and serve as He did: by getting lower than the rest and serving them to lift them up. If Jesus could do this for us, then we must do this for others.

Before Jesus came the Gentiles (non-Jews) were "not a people" and not shown mercy, but now God's mercy is for all, and all who come to him in faith are his people.

2:11–3:12 A new citizenship

So because we are described in this way, we are urged to think of ourselves as only temporary residents of this world. We should live in such a way that all charges brought against us will always be false. We do this in part by being good citizens as much as possible. Freedom is not license! Instead, we are to value everyone and remember that we are lowly slaves of God. Now Peter lists the practical outworking of this fact.

Peter specifies three main groups: servants, wives, and husbands. Notice first of all that he does not present these as pairings of master/slave and husband/wife; he addresses servants without addressing masters. The word servant is *oiketes* which means house servant or "domestic", and the word for their masters is *despotes* which means owners or employers when contrasted

with domestics. These domestics are to *hupotasso* their employers. This word is not about subservience to an overlord but support and identification with a person in some leading capacity.¹

As for the word translated “respect” or “fear”, the Greek word is *phobos*. Like our English word “fear”, it can have a range of nuances: abject terror, a mild sense of foreboding, or a realistic caution. Which one of those it means depends of course on the context. And since Peter speaks of both kind and unkind employers, the nuance will change depending on which kind the domestic is dealing with. We might well ask what kind of fear an employee would have for a good and kind employer, but anyone who has ever held a job understands this kind. At the very least, we fear losing our jobs if we fail to satisfy the directives of the boss. So while one would certainly respect their employer, there is a separate element of fear as well, however mild it may be.

This may all seem very clear and simple, but the plot thickens when we look at the instructions to wives. But before we do, we must know that as in just about every language except English, Greek has what is called “grammatical gender”. It is the assigning of male or female pronouns or word affixes which are completely unrelated to biology. For example, in Hebrew the pronoun for the Spirit of God is feminine (she), and in Greek it is neuter (it). So the way we can tell which parts of a Greek sentence go together is by looking at the grammatical gender. This will prove critical to our understanding of what Peter says to Christian women.

1 Pet. 3:1 begins with “likewise”, so there is similarity (witness by behavior) between what Peter said to employees and what he will say to wives. As I’ve written in some of my books in studying the writings of Paul, there was a Roman law at the time called “the marriage without hand” wherein a woman’s allegiance was to her father for life, not to any husband. Her father could take her back at any time and give her to another man. So the instruction, both from Paul and Peter, is for Christian women to identify with their husbands instead.

1. God's Word to Women

But Peter adds the purpose for this instruction: to win over unbelieving husbands; remember the larger context of minding our behavior for the world to see. The phrase in Greek, “if any are-being-stubborn [*apeitheo*] to-the word” is always used in a context of rejecting the gospel message; it is not used in any context where the topic is backslidden believers. It literally means to not be persuaded and is held in opposition to faith, not obedience.² So it clearly refers to unbelievers and not backslidden or immature believers.

So rather than a general instruction to all Christian wives, Peter specifies here that his instructions are to Christian wives of non-Christian husbands. Theirs was a most difficult position to be in, since they could be divorced or killed by their husbands if they tried to convert them. They had little opportunity to speak to their husbands about religious or spiritual matters. That is why Peter leans so heavily here on behavior and depth of character, qualities the culture did not believe women possessed. Christian husbands, in contrast, had no right to silence their wives and no need to be converted. If they were sinning, they needed to repent, and their wives had every right in Christ to say so.

Continuing in verse 2, Peter shows exactly how this behavior will be a witness to the gospel. Here is the literal English rendering:

observing of-the in fear pure behavior of-you

The blue words are grammatically masculine, and the red words are grammatically feminine. So we can easily see that it is not the women but the unbelieving men who will “fear”. This ties in with the phrase about being “*apeitheo* to-the word”, because the “fear” of God is what such people lack. And it is these unbelieving husbands who will “observe” the pure (not “chaste”, which denotes sexual purity whereas this word refers to the inner person)

2. Study on Rom. 27:8

behavior of their Christian wives and thus “fear” this wordless gospel message.

Peter goes on to emphasize the inner strength of character a Christian woman must develop, which society did not think possible. But we encounter another debatable passage in vs. 5 and 6. Verse five is in the present tense, not the past as it is typically translated. And again we see the word *hupotasso* in conjunction with “their own husbands”. It is only verse 6 which has to be in the past tense because it refers to people who were long dead, Sarah and Abraham. But instead of *hupotasso* we have Sarah rendering *hupakouo* to Abraham, which means “to attend to” (same word as when a servant “answered” the door for Peter after his miraculous escape from prison in Acts 12:13).

But what of Sarah calling Abraham her ‘lord’? And what does it have to do with women not being afraid or dismayed? The only recorded instance we have of Sarah calling Abraham ‘lord’ is in Gen. 18:12 when she laughed to herself at the prospect of becoming pregnant by her very old husband. The times we see her doing what Abraham said are when he twice passed her off as his sister in order to save his own skin (Gen. 12:13, 26:9), and she also stood up to him regarding the slave woman Hagar (Gen. 21:10). Is it not this strong, fearless Sarah that Peter is telling Christian women to be like? Peter does **not** say they are like her if they call their husbands ‘lord’, but if they do not fear and are not dismayed.

Now we can see why taking the traditional rendering of vs. 2 creates a contradiction, because first Peter tells women to fear, and then he tells them not to fear. Rather, he tells them to bring the fear of God to their unbelieving husbands through character and quality, then tells them to fear nothing nor be dismayed.

The last point to cover is vs. 7, which also begins with “likewise”, continuing the list of ways to live the Christian witness. The Christian husband is to “make a home together with” his wife, not build a castle with her as his maid. And Peter appeals to the men’s “knowledge” that women have “the less stable income”. This is typically translated more literally as “weaker vessel” even though there is apparently no firm consensus on what it means. But

I have the impression that it is an idiom (a good place to start in the case of any such puzzling phrase), and in classical literature it did refer to being at an economic disadvantage. Peter says this along with calling women “joint heirs”, so he is drawing an analogy between social inheritance and spiritual inheritance.

It should be noted regarding the matter of how the husband treats his wife that Peter does not merely say that if he fails to honor her God not answer his prayers, but that God will block them and refuse to hear them. The Greek word is *egkopto* and is much stronger than the idea of merely ignoring something. God will actively oppose and hinder the prayers of a Christian man who fails to honor his wife.

Note also that Peter is addressing husbands, not all men, so the weakness their wives have is because they are wives, not just women. Just as slaves were not disadvantaged because of something intrinsic to them as people but because of their position in that society, so also wives were not "the weaker vessel" due to their being women but to their position in that society.

Let's summarize the list now:

- Employees, support your employers whether they're nice or not.
- Wives, identify with your husbands instead of your fathers, so that you can witness without words to them; though they are hostile to the gospel your purity and depth of character will cause them to fear God. Do not be fearful or intimidated, but instead be like Sarah.
- Husbands, treat your wives as the joint-heirs they are, building up the home together with them and remembering their social disadvantage, or God will thwart your prayers.

After focusing on husbands and wives, Peter extends the command of mutual submission to all believers. Our unity comes

not from everyone being forced to follow a domineering leader, but from being saturated in the Word.

3:13–18a Suffering for righteousness

Again Peter deals with the problem of suffering, and he encourages the people to be brave. If we do that, we will always be ready to answer any who want to know why we believe as we do. Some take this as a blanket condemnation of all passion and challenge when we are confronted by unbelievers, but notice that Peter is talking about being asked what we believe— not about being harassed, villified, thrown in jail, slandered, or any other openly hostile attack. The gentle and respectful treatment Peter commands here is for those who are honestly asking us why we believe. It is not to be used as a gag on us when we encounter a hostile opponent who is trashing our faith! To ignore this is to ignore the examples of Jesus and the apostles. Good shepherds are only kind to sheep, not wolves. A "potential sheep" will not come with hostility.

3:18b–4:7a Jesus' suffering and example

Like Paul, Peter manages to stir some controversy. He writes of Jesus preaching to "the spirits in prison", who long ago were disobedient while God waited patiently before flooding the earth. We can only guess what this means, but it appears to say that Jesus had a message for those people while he was physically dead but of course still spiritually alive. Some take it to mean he preached the gospel to them and gave them a second chance, but scripture does not say so. Peter will, however, give us a small hint in the next section.

Then he points out that the Flood symbolized the immersion that saves us now. First, note the direction of the symbolism: the Flood was symbolic of immersion, not immersion symbolic of the Flood. Second, this immersion is not the washing of our bodies with water (water baptism), but "the examination of a good

conscience." This contradicts those who insist that we must be baptized in water to be saved, or even just to be obedient. Faith in Jesus' resurrection immerses us in God via the Holy Spirit indwelling us. Such a person has symbolically died to the flesh, so we should live to God.

Those who insist upon being pampered and always comforted are the first to turn from God in the face of suffering, because they have not developed endurance. The world is guaranteed to heap insults on all who follow Jesus, so we should expect it instead of demanding that God explain why he has apparently abandoned us.

Now Peter gives a clue about what Jesus said to the people who died in the Flood: "a good message was also brought to the dead so they could be judged." Not as specific as we'd like, but a clue all the same. What we can say is that God judges fairly and would not send someone to hell on a technicality. If the world of the Flood was so vile as to need mass destruction, it is all the more significant that Jesus should go and speak "a good message" to them.

And in spite of the fact that almost 2000 years have passed since this letter was written, the time has always been short. Jesus can return at any time, and we must be found faithful in the use of the spiritual gifts we've received. We never know how long we have to use them.

4:7b–11 Prayer, love, and service

Love is the underlying motivation, and hospitality is one of its results. Another is the sharing of our spiritual gifts among ourselves. Gifts are meant to be used for the betterment of others, and exercised to the best of our ability. This brings honor to God instead of to ourselves. And of course if we love others we will pray for them.

4:12–19 The season of trial

Suffering is normal for us, not something to be terribly upset about. This life is a test, and nobody enjoys taking tests. But there is great reward awaiting all who remain true through persecution. Again, putting up with suffering we deserve is of no credit to us, but only that which we are innocent of. It is a great honor to suffer for being a Christian.

As legitimate children of God, testing and refinement and judgment begins with us. But if God will punish his own children, how will he treat people who are not of his family? A sobering thought for the lost.

5:1–4 Elders' responsibility

Peter now turns to the Elders in the churches and appeals to them as an eyewitness of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: be good shepherds. It should not be viewed as a job or a chore, but as grateful and humble service to God. This is not a position of prestige or profit or domination, but the tender nurturing of those who have not yet matured.

5:5–7 Learners' responsibility

Likewise, the young and inexperienced should respect the old and wise, but everyone must remain humble. Arrogance has no place in the body of the Anointed One.

5:8–9 Stay sharp

All believers need to stay alert for attacks from the evil one, who roams around "like a roaring lion" searching for prey. We are commanded to stand strong against him, to be stubborn in our faith.

5:10–11 Praise

We cannot stand strong without the proper armor and weapons, which only come from God. Such weapons and power are to be used for his glory alone.

5:12–14 Final greetings

In closing, Peter mentions that he had dictated the letter to Silas, a faithful believer who had also been with Paul (Acts 15-18, 1 and 2 Thessalonians). He also mentions "she in Babylon" who sends greetings, along with that of "my son Mark". Some believe the "she" is a literal woman in Rome, while others believe it refers to the church in Rome. As for Mark, most commentators seem to think he was not the literal son of Peter but his spiritual son, one he had led to the Anointed One, who was also in Rome at this time.

2 Peter

The second letter from Peter was written shortly before his death in about 64 AD. While the focus of the first letter was persecution from outside, this one deals more with false teachers among the believers.

Outline

1. **A** 1:1–4 Greetings and praise
2. – **B** 1:5–11 Our response to the gift of Jesus
3. — **C** 1:12–19 Reminder: the first days
4. — **X** 1:20–2:22 False prophets
 1. — **X** 1:20–2:9 Their practices and judgment
 2. — **X** 2:10–14a Their self-destruction
 3. — **X** 2:14b–19 Their doom
 4. — **X** 2:20–22 Their true colors
5. — **C'** 3:1–10 Reminder: the last days
6. – **B'** 3:11–16 Our response to what is coming
7. **A'** 3:17–18 Final warning and farewell

Comments

A 1:1–4 Greetings and praise

Peter begins with encouraging remarks about the power of God to give us everything we need for living holy lives. So we should not be content to remain newborns, but to grow in maturity

and knowledge. This will result in endurance, holiness, and a tender heart for other believers.

B 1:5–11 Our response to the gift of Jesus

This is the "fruit" of the Christian disciple; it validates to the others that we are saved and faithful. This is a public confirmation of salvation, not a means of attaining it. Some mistake it to suggest that we have to produce this outward evidence in order to stay saved, but that is not what the text says. Others would do well to be concerned about us if we have no works, but the Bible clearly says we are saved solely by faith, plus nothing.

C 1:12–19 Reminder: the first days

We all need refresher courses sometimes, even in subjects we know well. Likewise, Peter sees value in reminding them of what they already know. He is all the more eager to do so because he has the impression that he will not be on the earth much longer.

He relates his personal witness of Jesus having been raised from the dead by God's power. It was not a clever second-hand story or fable. He also personally witnessed Jesus' glory in the Transfiguration (Mark 9), and he heard the voice of God. Certainly, at the end of his life, if Peter had been deceived or lying he would have confessed by this time, but he sticks to his story even knowing he will be executed for it. This is but one of many powerful evidences for the truth of the gospel.

X 1:20–2:22 False prophets

This is the crux or central point of the letter. Peter introduces the topic with a statement about true prophets.

X 1:20–2:9 Their practices and judgment

First we see a frequently misunderstood statement taken out of context, typically translated as "no prophecy is of private interpretation." Some take it to mean that individuals, "ordinary" believers, cannot interpret the scriptures for themselves but instead must bow to some "infallible interpreter" such as the Catholic Magisterium or some other governing authority. These verses ripped out of context are used as a means of suppressing dissent, which is an insult to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers. Instead, the obvious meaning in context is that Peter is validating the testimony of the prophets. They, like he, did not invent prophecies but got them straight from God via the Holy Spirit.

Most translations give the idea that the phrase about the Holy Spirit means the Spirit "carried them along", but the Greek shows two parallels of the verb for "carried": by the prophets, and then by the Spirit. It points to the subject of the phrase in each case: not carried on by people, and carried on by the Spirit. That is, the prophets were not doing their own work but that of the Spirit. It is the message that's being performed or "carried on", not the prophets that are being carried.

After making a point about true prophets, Peter warns that there were also false prophets who did make up their own stories. And such would soon invade the churches. They would introduce wrong thinking and bold heresies, and draw away many after themselves. History has born this out, and it continues to this day. But God will surely judge them, all in his good time.

Not even angels who sinned could escape judgment! Here Peter mentions the same angels as that of Jude 1:6, and identifies the place of their prison as Tartarus. As proven also with Noah's Flood and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, God will only wait so long before paying everyone back for their wickedness. But notice that he spared Noah and Lot, keeping them safe in the midst of the deluge. This is certainly a picture of the time during the Tribulation when God will keep the believing Jews safe for the

final three and one half years. God knows how to rescue his own and not let them suffer his judgment.

X 2:10–14a Their self-destruction

God reserves justice for a future time, when he will finally deal with those who despise him and only think about this life. They speak abusively against powerful beings they can't compare to, yet even the angels do not presume to say such things. They are like brute beasts, born to be caught and killed. What they think is fun will come back to haunt them. And some of them pretend to be Christians! Peter then goes on to further describe the depravity of these people.

X 2:14b–19 Their doom

Those false teachers are doomed and cursed, consumed by greed. Deep darkness is the eternal fate they have chosen for themselves, victims of their own traps.

X 2:20–22 Their true colors

Now we come across a controversial statement related to the issue of whether a believer can be lost. Who is Peter describing here, true believers or fake believers? He just talked about the latter at great length, but were these people ever saved? Look at verse 22 for the answer: they never changed; they were always "dogs and pigs" who were merely bathed and dressed up, but their nature had never changed. But why does Peter say they had turned their backs on the "holy precept"? Just as with the discussion in Hebrews 6, Peter concurs that these people heard the gospel but never accepted it. They knew the way but did not follow it. They chose a different path and were trying to bring believers with them.

C' 3:1–10 Reminder: the last days

Now Peter returns to reminding the people about the true prophets and apostles (first missionaries), whose teachings came through Jesus. Just as the early believers devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles (Acts 2:42), we can still do that by devoting ourselves to their written words. Now Peter adds some prophecy about the end.

"The last days" are described as a time of deception and mocking. Like the old-earth teachers we see today, they say "So where's this return you keep talking about? Everything has stayed the same for all time; nothing has changed." But they deliberately suppress the fact that God made the world out of water, then used some of it to produce the Flood. Is this not a characteristic of our time? Even the churches have bought into the great lie that Genesis is just a story and not literal history. It is surely a sign of the end, and instead of water, this time God will destroy it all with fire.

The statement about a thousand years is another scripture that is frequently taken out of context. Is Peter giving us a formula for predicting the time of the end? Some say yes, and even use it to argue that the days of creation were really periods of time ranging anywhere from a thousand to a gazillion years (take your pick). But there is no reference here to creation week, only to the Flood. The topic is the *last* days, not the *first* days!

All Peter is saying is that we must not become discouraged by these mockers who have deluded themselves into thinking that if we think nothing has ever changed, then nothing ever will. God is not constrained by time as we are, so it's immaterial whether he waits one or a thousand years to do something he promised. He is not late or slow as we count time, but is being patient. And the reason he is patient is because he doesn't enjoy destroying people; he wants everyone to repent. This flies in the face of the Calvinistic notion that God hates most people and sends them to hell "for his good pleasure."

B' 3:11–16 Our response to what is coming

That Day will surely come, and afterwards the earth will be no more! The universe will be replaced with a new heavens and earth. Knowing all this, we should be all the more diligent in our Christian lives to be faithful servants. The way we can hasten the time when we'll be given our inheritance is by spreading the gospel and living holy lives that honor God. This is the mark of the true Christian disciple: to spread the gospel while eagerly hoping for the Master's return.

God's patience is for man's benefit, just as Paul had written. Speaking of Paul, Peter not only acknowledges his wisdom but also that his letters can be hard to understand. What an understatement! But it's no excuse for people twisting his writings, which Peter equates with "the other scriptures." Here we have an eyewitness of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection calling Paul's letters "scripture." I think that's a pretty good rebuttal for all those today who try to make Paul into a false teacher.

A' 3:17–18 Final warning and farewell

At the end of his letter, Peter gives a last warning about these false teachers and wishes increased wisdom and knowledge for the people.

1 John

The first letter from John was written around the time between 85–95 AD. This is the same John who was Jesus' "beloved disciple", who also wrote the Gospel of John and Revelation. The letter has two main themes: combating false teaching (most likely early Gnosticism), and assurance of salvation.

Outline

1. 1:1–4 Introduction
2. 1:5–2:11 Matching words and actions
 1. 1:5–10 Light and darkness
 2. 2:1–6 Sin and redemption
 3. 2:7–11 An old/new command
3. 2:12–17 Advice from a "father" to his "children"
4. 2:18–3:12 Deceivers
 1. 2:18–25 Antichrists
 2. 2:26–3:12 How children of God stand against them
5. 3:13–15 Hatred and murder
6. 3:16–5:5 True love
 1. 3:16–19a Love in action
 2. 3:19b–24a Confidence before God
 3. 3:24b–4:6 Test the spirits
 4. 4:7–11 To love God is to love people

5. 4:12–18 Perfect love
6. 4:19–5:5 Fake love
7. 5:6–12 Three witnesses
8. 5:13–15 Assurance of salvation
9. 5:16–18 Praying for other believers
10. 5:19 21 In the True One, not false ones

Comments

1:1–4 Introduction

John has a different writing style than most of the other New Testament writers. He seems to be more abstract, philosophical, and poetic. This is evident in the very first verse, where he describes Jesus as "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard and seen and touched". This is evidence from personal testimony. Although he is writing to believers, there is no harm in continually giving reasons for our faith.

Further, Jesus is described as having been "with the Father" — not beneath him or apart from him. And the purpose of testimony and evidence (apologetics) is to convince people that Jesus is God who died for our sins and rose again.

1:5–2:11 Matching words and actions

Now John focuses on practicing what we preach.

1:5–10 Light and darkness

Since God is light, then to live in darkness yet claim to be saved is a lie. And to say we don't sin is another lie. On the surface this seems contradictory: how can anyone claim to be saved since

we all sin? The answer is that there is a difference between living in sin and occasional lapses.

2:1–6 Sin and redemption

The purpose of writing encouraging letters to believers is not to keep them saved, but to keep them from falling into sin. But even if we fall, Jesus is there to pick us up. He is our Defense Attorney against Satan, and he never loses!

Notice who it is that Jesus takes sin away from: the whole world. Is John teaching Universalism, that everyone will go to heaven? Absolutely not. The key is to understand the difference between reconciliation and salvation. To be reconciled is to remove the barrier between God and man, that was put up due to Adam's rebellion. This made salvation by faith possible. If we believe that Jesus reconciled the world to God, then we are saved. If we do not accept his redemption, then we are lost. So our destiny in either heaven or hell is not determined by sin, but by faith. Sin has to do with wages earned (Rom. 6:23), but salvation has to do with faith, which is not a work (Rom. 4:5, 5:6-7, 11:6, Eph. 2:8-9). Let me put it this way:

1. Salvation is a gift. (Eph. 2:8)
2. Earned wages can have nothing to do with gifts. (Romans 4:4)
3. Death is the earned wage of sin. (Rom. 6:23)

Therefore: Sin is not what decides a person's salvation.

What Jesus did was to take away the barrier between God and man, such that man has the option of accepting God's offer of reconciliation. If we accept this by faith, then we are saved. But then what is judgment for? Judgment has to do with earned wages, with sin, with the things we did in this life (2 Cor. 5:10). Believers will be paid according to their works, either gaining or losing rewards, but salvation is still guaranteed (1 Cor. 3:15). Unbelievers

will also be paid for their works, either suffering little or suffering much, but they can never enter heaven (Rev. 20:12).

So when John says Jesus takes away our sin, he is referring to it on two levels: the sin barrier of all mankind which Jesus removed, and the individual sins believers commit that cause us to lose rewards. These rewards can be regained through repentance, but we must be more motivated by restoring our closeness with God than with rewards. It's all about the Relationship.

Is John advocating salvation by works, as James has been accused also? Not at all. John is not telling us to judge each other's salvation, but to judge our own. He is telling us to look in the mirror and ask ourselves how we can justify wallowing in any sin while claiming to be saved. This is yet another good reason for him to keep talking about salvation, since not all who think they are saved are truly saved. Instead, as we see in vs. 5-6, works are a visible indication of maturity. A disciple is supposed to act like their master.

2:7–11 An old/new command

Our behavior is summed up in a command which John describes as both old and new: love your neighbor. You cannot both love and hate a person! So if you despise anyone, you do not have the love of God in you, and you should therefore take a good look at your spiritual condition. Again, this is not a weapon with which we should beat other believers over the head, but a mirror.

2:12–17 Advice from a "father" to his "children"

Here we see John wax poetic about the reasons for this letter. Some people try to extract doctrine out of this passage, as if only young men are strong and can overcome the evil one. It's just poetry.

Not loving the world doesn't mean not ever enjoying anything, but simply not giving it priority over our relationship

with Jesus or our real home in heaven. This is especially important as we near the Master's return.

2:18–3:12 Deceivers

2:18–25 Antichrists

Some take this passage to mean that there is no person we can call The Antichrist, since John mentions many antichrists. But the fact that an individual is mentioned means there are both. The Greek from which we get "antichrist" means not only one who opposes Christ but who also impersonates him. He will be a fake Christ. In the meantime, there are many fake Christs with limited followings, which is itself one of the signs of the end. But from other scriptures we can be sure that there will be an ultimate and final Antichrist.

Such impostors can't remain for long among believers who are mature disciples. John makes it clear that these people were never saved. Some add "as if" to the verse, changing it to "if they had belonged to us they would have stayed, so the fact that they left makes it just as if they were never saved." John does not say "as if", but states as a fact that those who leave were never saved in the first place. And remember the context of false teachers; it is these who are called "antichrists".

Notice that John says he's not writing to get the people saved but to remind them to practice what they preach. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Messiah is "the antichrist". Again, we have plenty of scriptures to say there will in fact be an individual to come who pretends to be Jesus returning, but in the meantime many of these impostors abound.

To have the Son is to also have the Father; they are one. Later John will elaborate on this, adding that whoever doesn't have the Son also doesn't have the Father. Many cults try to only keep one or the other, but that is against the Bible. And this also includes Jews. Some say they need not be evangelized because they worship the One True God, but remember what Peter said on

Pentecost (Acts 2)? The Jews had to accept their Messiah. That is where the line is drawn now, for all people.

Again John tells us that he is writing all this to keep us aware of false teachers. Jesus will return soon, and we need to be sure we're saved and growing to maturity, so that we will not be embarrassed when he comes.

2:26–3:12 How children of God stand against them

All who are saved are born as God's children. Not servants or enemies, but children. Because of this, we will someday be made like him and see him as he really is. We are to set our hope on him, not on us, and we must not give up this hope. Keeping it helps to purify us.

To sin is to break God's law. This of course is not the Old Testament law, but the law John wrote about earlier: love your neighbor. Since love does no harm to its neighbor (Rom. 13:10) and sin always does, then sin breaks this law. If we continue to live in sin then we have never known Jesus.

Satan has done nothing but sin but Jesus destroyed his work. In light of that, it should be clear that to continue following in Satan's footsteps indicates one who is not saved. Since we can't see the heart as God does, outward behavior is all we have to go on.

Does this violate scriptures quoted earlier about people being saved but having no works? Not at all. There is a vast difference between doing nothing and living in sin. Yes, it's a sin to fail to do right (James 4:17), but such people are not committing evil acts like murder. Satan doesn't sit around and do nothing! But we must not see how little good we can do, but how much, out of love for God and people.

3:13–15 Hatred and murder

We can expect the world to hate us for Whose we are, but not other believers. So again, anyone claiming Jesus must not hate people. Instead, love for people is expressed in Jesus' laying down

his life for us. Although most of us will never be required to do that, there is much we will be expected to do, such as sharing our material goods and showing compassion.

3:16–5:5 True love

3:16–19a Love in action

It's better to never say "I love you" and do loving acts than to say the words but never back them up with action.

3:19b–24a Confidence before God

The conscience is not terribly reliable among lost people, but among believers it should help us stay the course. We are to keep believing and keep loving, and our conscience will be clear. Here again, some take this to mean salvation by works and keeping faith by our own efforts. But this cannot be so, considering our earlier look at the opposites of faith and works. It is God's power and the indwelling Holy Spirit that keep our faith for us (1 Peter 1:3-5). He gives us the ability to obey this command to keep believing.

3:24b–4:6 Test the spirits

This is one of the most important but most ignored verses in scripture: test the spirits. One test is to see if a teaching agrees that Jesus the Messiah came from God in human form. The Gnostics were teaching against this in John's day, and they're still teaching it today. Other religions such as Islam deny that Jesus was God and that he was crucified for our sins. So those who are trying to say we worship the same God as Islam are speaking blasphemy! Here is what Christian author A. W. Tozer had to say about testing the spirits:

Many tender-minded Christians fear to sin against love by daring to inquire into anything that comes wearing the cloak of Christianity and breathing the name of Jesus. They dare not examine the credentials of the latest prophet to hit their town lest they be guilty of rejecting something which may be of God. They timidly remember how the Pharisees refused to accept Christ when He came, and they do not want to be caught in the same snare, so they either reserve judgment or shut their eyes and accept everything without question. This is supposed to indicate a high degree of spirituality. But in sober fact it indicates no such thing. It may indeed be evidence of the absence of the Holy Spirit.

Gullibility is not synonymous with spirituality. Faith is not a mental habit leading its possessor to open his mouth and swallow everything that has about it the color of the supernatural. Faith keeps its heart open to whatever is of God, and rejects everything that is not of God, however wonderful it may be. Try the spirits is a command of the Holy Spirit to the Church. We may sin as certainly by approving the spurious as by rejecting the genuine. And the current habit of refusing to take sides is not the way to avoid the question. To appraise things with a heart of love and then to act on the results is an obligation resting upon every Christian in the world. And the more as we see the day approaching.

So discernment is like an open window with a screen: it lets in the fresh air but keeps out the bugs.

We believers are said to have had the victory over false teachers. It's in the past tense, and it's all because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. To say that we are capable of being lost is to say the Spirit in us is powerless against

Satan! Instead, this Spirit is "the spirit of truth" which guards us against "the spirit of deception". All we have to do is listen carefully.

4:7–11 To love God is to love people

Again John emphasizes the need for believers to put love into practice. Perhaps it was a problem to the people he was writing to. He appeals to the love God showed to us in sending Jesus to save us. He loved us first, while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). Jesus referred to this when he said "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them." (Luke 6:32). But God loved us who were still his enemies. So also we must try to express love to people no matter how they treat us.

But note that love is not always gentle and nurturing. God says that he rebukes and disciplines those he loves (Rev. 3:19). And it's certainly not loving toward the victim if we do nothing to oppose the criminal. Love "always protects" (1 Cor. 13), and sometimes this requires strong opposition to evildoers.

4:12–18 Perfect love

Even though we haven't actually seen God, his love lives in us if we show it to others. God's love is not anything to be feared, since he will never throw us away. But he will discipline us if we stray, so it's only sensible to strive to practice love.

4:19–5:5 Fake love

As if to give us a hint that this is important, John repeats his statements about the impossibility of loving God yet hating people. After all, if we can't love people we can see, then how can we love God whom we can't see? Faith in God is our only means of victory over the sinful world, specifically faith in Jesus as the Anointed One.

5:6–12 Three witnesses

What's all this about "water and blood"? One theory is that John is combating a Gnostic heresy that Jesus was only divine when the Holy Spirit came upon him at his baptism, and that it left him before his death. They believed this because they could not accept God in the flesh. Jesus was a mere man to them, who only had the divine presence for a limited time. So when John says "water and blood" he refers to the fact that Jesus was not only divine at his baptism, but all the way through his death. But this would tend to give the impression that Jesus was not divine until he was baptized.

Another view is that water refers to Jesus' physical birth (as in the context of his conversation with Nicodemus) while blood refers to his physical death. That would make John's meaning to be that Jesus was physically born and physically died. He further bolsters this testimony with that of the Holy Spirit for a third witness. This view makes more sense to me in light of the more general Gnostic teaching that Jesus was never human at all, but only appeared to be. And this follows his statement about the saved being those who believe this.

So we have God's own testimony that Jesus is his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life. That again supports the statement that it is our faith in Jesus that saves us, not repentance from sin or doing good works.

5:13–15 Assurance of salvation

Notice verse 13: John writes these things "so you can understand that you have eternal life, you who believe..." Believers can rest assured that eternal life is already ours. John is giving this assurance to people who are already saved. So if someone is not sure they're saved, we can't declare them lost, but instead should reassure them that if they have believed that Jesus is

God in the flesh who died for our sins and rose again, they already have possession of eternal life.

At this point many believers cry "You're teaching a license to sin and giving people a false sense of security!" But that's not true; liberty is not license, and our confidence is not false. Instead it is sure because it is in Jesus, not in ourselves. We should make every effort to silence those who falsely teach that salvation can be lost and rob believers of their confidence.

Is the statement about asking anything of God a "blank check" that any Christian can cash? Hardly. John is just saying that if we ask anything **according to God's will**, we'll get it. How do we know what things are according to God's will? By whether or not he grants them.

5:16–18 Praying for other believers

What is the "sin that leads to death"? In Paul's writings, and also in the account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), we see that God will go so far as to punish his own people with premature death for continued disobedience or for lying to the Holy Spirit. It's possible that this lying to the Spirit is the particular sin John is talking about. But notice that we are told not to pray about it! There are apparently some things God doesn't want us to try to change his mind about. If parents get angry when their children lie to them, we can understand why God would not tolerate this.

5:19 21 In the True One, not false ones

At the end, John repeats some points, then makes a quick warning against idols. It seems somewhat out of place but really isn't. John has been warning against false teachings and teachers who were leading people astray. Such turning away from the one true God toward other so-called gods is idolatry. John spent a great deal of effort to divide light from darkness, truth from error, Christ from Antichrist, so his last statement is simply a command to stay alert.

2 John

The second letter from John was written around the same time as the first, between 85–95 AD. This is a more personal letter and just briefly touches on the topic of Gnosticism, which taught that God could never indwell human flesh.

Outline

1. 1:1 Greeting
2. 1:2–6 Praise, and a new command revisited
3. 1:7–11 Watch out for deceivers
4. 1:12–13 Final greetings

Comments

1:1 Greeting

John introduces himself as "the Elder" (Gk. *presbuteros*), and writes to "the chosen master". The Greek word typically translated as "lady" and sometimes transliterated as a proper name, is *kuria*. According to the Strong's listing, it comes from the base word *kurion* which carries the following meanings and forms:

- 2959 Kuria koo-ree'-ah feminine of kurioV - kurios 2962; Cyria, a Christian woman: – lady
- 2960 kuriakos koo-ree-ak-os' from kurioV - kurios 2962; belonging to the Lord (Jehovah or Jesus): – Master's
- 2961 kurieuo ko-ree-yoo'-o from kurioV – kurios 2962; to rule: –have dominion over, lord, be lord of, exercise lordship over

- 2962 kurios koo'-ree-os from kuros (supremacy); supreme in authority, i.e. (as noun) controller; by implication, Master (as a respectful): – God, Lord, master, Sir
- 2963 kuriotes koo-ree-ot'-ace from kurioV - kurios 2962; mastery, i.e. (concretely and collectively) rulers: – dominion, government
- 2964 kuroo koo-ro'-o from the same as kurioV - kurios 2962; to make authoritative, i.e. ratify: – confirm

Notice that all forms of the word are given the same range of meanings— lord, master, ruler, authority— but the female form alone is not assigned any of those terms. The only places the feminine form is found are here in this letter, vs. 1 and 5. The usual commentaries seem split on this, and they argue against each other's position. There is also one that argues against John's likelihood of addressing anyone as "master" by virtue of Jesus being called "the Master", but I find the logic in that very weak. After all, believers are called "holy ones" and so is Jesus, and some believers are called "masters" (e.g. Eph. 6:1).

We turn to Ockham's Razor³ in the midst of many theories, and the simplest interpretation is that John is addressing a woman who has leadership of a community of believers ("children"). Most translations agree that this concerns a community of believers in some way. If John is just writing to a family he knows, why did he not address it to the man? And why was this letter considered holy scripture and preserved with all the other scriptures? The simplest view would be that since the early believers considered it holy scripture, then it must concern the community of believers at large, making this woman the leader of that group.

3. Ockham's Razor refers to a rule made by 14th-century English logician and Franciscan friar, William of Ockham. The principle states that all else being equal, choose the simplest solution.

Linguistically and historically, there is no reason to treat the feminine form here any differently than the male form. Prejudice is the only explanation.

1:2–6 Praise, and a new command revisited

John is happy that at least some of the people are living a life of truth, and repeats his "old/new" law from the first letter: love your neighbor. Again he points out the need for action and not just words.

1:7–11 Watch out for deceivers

False teaching was a big problem even in the young church, and John again takes aim at the Gnostics, who deny that Jesus came in the flesh. He encourages the people not to lose their hard-earned rewards by backsliding.

Now we see a rule putting restrictions on hospitality and who we allow into our meetings: anyone who doesn't bring the teachings of the apostles is not to be welcomed. If we welcome them anyway, we are held accountable for participating in their false teachings. Churches today ignore this warning, letting in anybody teaching anything, "because they might get saved." But the community of believers is to go out into the world, not let the world in among us.

1:12–13 Final greetings

We probably wish John had written more on these matters instead of talking with the people only in person. But if God had wanted those words preserved, they would have been. John then signs off with greetings from the "chosen sister" he is fellowshiping with at the time he wrote the letter.

3 John

The third letter from John was written around the same time as the other two, between 85–95 AD. It is another personal letter, but this time the topic is a particular false teacher.

Outline

1. 1:1–4 Greeting and Praise
2. 1:5–8 Instructions about helping others
3. 1:9–10 Proud Diotrephes
4. 1:11–12 Good Demetrius
5. 1:13–14 Final greetings

Comments

1:1–4 Greeting and Praise

As with the second letter, John introduces himself as "the Elder" but this time writes to an individual named Gaius. He has a good reputation of being honest and faithful among people he doesn't even know well.

1:5–8 Instructions about helping others

John instructs Gaius to support the people and share in their work. He tells him to send out some believers for an unnamed purpose. As with Paul, we understand this to refer to making provision for them, that is, not sending them out empty-handed. They gave up their possessions and livelihood in many cases and so had nothing.

1:9–10 Proud Diotrephes

Like Paul, when John encounters a teacher who is deliberately and knowingly leading people astray or abusing them, he names them publicly. Someone called Diotrephes is domineering and not recognizing the authority of the apostles. He gossips against them and even throws people out of the fellowship if they don't do everything his way.

This is sadly a typical problem today. There are many preachers who are proud and egocentric. They beat the sheep in their care and demand blind obedience, even excommunicating any who don't "get with the program". This is especially true of the Purpose Driven fad sweeping the world now. Many people have reported being shown the door for resisting or asking questions, and it is stated in the official documentation that this is the accepted policy.

Another expression of this pride is concerning women believers. Many who oppose women's full equality have come to the point of calling those who support it unbelievers and heretics. They refuse to let women exercise their God-given gifts for the benefit of the whole assembly, and throw out any who teach otherwise. It is truly a case of those who "love to be in charge" domineering over those they consider beneath them.

1:11–12 Good Demetrius

So Gaius is to be sure not to imitate such evil people but only good. In contrast to Diotrephes is one named Demetrius, someone everyone speaks well of.

1:13–14 Final greetings

Like the second letter, John cuts it short so he can say more in person.

Jude

The letter from Jude was written around 65 AD, although there is a fairly wide range of possible dates. Scholars seem to agree that this was a half-brother of Jesus, just as James was.

Outline

1. 1:1–2 Greetings
2. 1:3–4 The problem of false teachers
3. 1:5–13 A lesson not learned
4. 1:14–16 Enoch's prophecy
5. 1:17–23 Turning away from falsehood
6. 1:24–25 Praise

Comments

1:1–2 Greetings

Another "slave of Jesus" is Jude, who identifies himself as the brother of James. There was an apostle named Jude but this one does not identify himself as an apostle. He doesn't say who his intended audience is, beyond their being believers, who he describes as being "held firmly by Jesus."

1:3–4 The problem of false teachers

Jude's intentions were to just chat about salvation, but Gnosticism was rising up and infiltrating the young congregations. Notice that we are to "contend for the faith." Many today teach that this is wrong, unloving, negative, etc. But there is no way to take

this as a vague and gentle "sharing" of what we believe. It is a strong defense and counter-attack against falsehood. And it is The Faith we are to contend for, not our personal convictions beyond salvation. It is The Faith "that was handed over to the holy ones." That faith is what is recorded in the pages of the New Testament, that Jesus is God in the flesh who paid for our sins and rose from the dead. We dare not be weak or unsure about this, nor fail to oppose any other teaching.

The community of believers had been infiltrated by sneaky false teachers, but such are doomed. And we can recognize them by their immorality and disrespect toward God.

1:5–13 A lesson not learned

This passage gives us a rare glimpse into the realm of Messengers or angels. The "fallen angels" that deserted their positions were thrown into an eternal gloomy prison to await Judgement Day. The statement that follows tells us that these angels were the ones who "were extremely promiscuous" as told in Gen. 6:1-8. The phrase "different flesh" is not defined but probably refers to the fact that angels were intermarrying with humans. It's possible that the stories we've all heard about alleged space aliens abducting people and doing experiments on them related to reproduction are either the remaining fallen angels or possibly demons (the hybrid children of the illicit unions?) that are trying the same thing. Their destiny is "eternal fire".

Jude ties the false teachers he's writing about to these fallen angels. These people are like animals, dismissing the supernatural as a myth and mocking all who believe in it. Yet not even the archangel Michael would mock Satan! This incident of them arguing over the body of Moses is not recorded in scripture. For that reason some believe the letter should not be in the Bible, but Jude is simply referring to an event in history, not promoting any false teaching.

Again, these false teachers are like wild animals who act only on instinct. They are an embarrassment at the "fellowship meals"

in the assemblies, treating them only as occasions for gluttony and not recognizing the Master at all.

1:14–16 Enoch's prophecy

Jude mentions Enoch as making a prophecy about such evil people. Does this mean we should accept as scripture the "Book of Enoch"? Not at all. For one thing, there is no record of any other prophecies from Enoch. For another, there are many forgeries of the book. And for yet another, none of them are from anywhere near the time of Enoch. The Jews faithfully preserved the words of all prophets of God, so the absence of any ancient Book of Enoch should tell us something. If the letter of Jude can be called into question just for quoting it, then certainly the Book of Enoch should not even be considered.

But the point in quoting Enoch is that he predicted the final judgment of such evil people, who do nothing but complain and boast and fool people with flattery.

1:17–23 Turning away from falsehood

Here Jude refers to apostles, implying that he is not one of them. They foretold the coming of scoffers and deceivers who would cause divisions in the assembly. But in the face of that, we must be vigilant in prayer and in following the Holy Spirit. We must show mercy to those who are confused, plead with those who are backsliding, and thereby "snatch the lost from the fire."

1:24–25 Praise

Jude closes with yet another of many similar statements found elsewhere in scripture: Jesus is able to guard us and bring us safely into God's presence. He will again be recognized for the glory he had before the ages.

Hebrews

The letter to the Hebrews (a presumptive title based on the content, but never explicitly stated) was written between 49–70 AD but probably toward the end of that range. Since the Levitical system was still in place, being referred to in the present tense throughout the letter, it must have been completed before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

It is the only Letter that mentions Timothy in prison (13:23), which could weigh toward its having been written after the death of Paul. But there is at least one other reason to reject Pauline authorship: Heb. 2:3 states that the author(s) (5:11, 6:9, 8:1 etc. use the pronoun "we", yet 11:32 uses "I") had not heard Jesus personally. In addition, Paul always signed his letters, at least partially to guard against forgeries. He had no reason to hide his identity, and it would have been very much out of character for him to do so.

Though it has the most sophisticated Greek of all the Letters, its author remains a mystery. In fact, there seems to have been a deliberate hiding of the author(s)' identity. Luther suggested Apollos, and later research has suggested Apollos' teacher, Priscilla (a.k.a. Priska) or possibly she along with her husband Aquilla. Priscilla had been mentioned by Paul as a co-worker. And female authorship would explain the omission of the author's name, as it would have not only gone against social norms of the time, but could result in the woman's torture and death at the hands of the Roman government. She, her husband, and Timothy had all worked together with Paul.

There is only one spot in the entire letter that is cited as proof that the author must have been a male. In 11:32 the pronoun "me" goes with the verb "to relate", and that verb is in the grammatical masculine. Yet not only is this a great stretch upon which to base male authorship of the whole letter, it ignores the use of what is called the "authorial masculine", and that this is the only occurrence

of this form in the entire New Testament (Strong's Concordance #1334).⁴ All other forms of the word have no grammatical gender associated with them. I'm quite certain that if this occurrence of the word had the female grammatical gender, that no scholar would cite it by itself as proof of a female author.

(Lest anyone make the accusation that this is all some modern feminist invention, note that the first scholarly argument for Priscilla's possible authorship was done by the German scholar Adolf von Harnack in 1900.)⁵

Another candidate is Barnabas, who was a Levite (Acts 4:36, and the content of Hebrews is of course heavily Levitical), yet like Paul, there would have been no reason to hide his identity. Other names offered include Clement of Rome and Luke.

The letter's theme is the absolute supremacy and uniqueness of Jesus. Much time is spent on explaining the purpose and symbolism of the Levitical system and its fulfillment and annulment in Jesus. It is loaded with theological meat, making it an excellent one-stop resource for defending the faith against all sorts of false teachings and cults.

Outline

1. 1:1–4 Introducing Jesus
 1. 1:5–2:18 The superiority of Jesus above Messengers (angels)
 1. 1:5–2:4 By virtue of his divinity
 2. 2:5–18 By virtue of his humanity

4. The references to all forms of the base verb are Acts 8:33, 9:27, 12:16; Mark 5:16, 9:9; Luke 8:39, 9:10, and Heb. 11:32.

5. A. von Harnack, *Probabilia uber die Adresse und den Verfasser des Hebraerbriefes*, *Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1900

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2. 3:1–6 The superiority of Jesus as Ruling Priest above Moses
 2. 3:7–11 Warnings from history
 3. 3:12–15 Encouraging each other while there is time
 4. 3:16–4:11 Entering God's "rest"
 5. 4:12–5:10 Jesus as Ruling Priest in a new Order
 6. 5:11–6:19 Diversion to discuss maturity
 7. 6:20–10:36 Continuing on Jesus' new priestly Order
 1. 6:20–7:10 The Order of Melchizedek
 2. 7:11–17 A new priesthood
 3. 7:18–28 A new law
 4. 8:1–13 A new offering
 5. 9:1–11 A new temple
 6. 9:12–10:18 A new contract
 7. 10:19–36 A new relationship
 8. 10:37–11:40 By faith
 9. 12:1–2 Our examples to follow
 10. 12:3–11 Children of God
 11. 12:12–13:7 Our response
 12. 13:8–15 Warnings to stay sharp
 13. 13:16–19 The wisdom of following the examples of proven leaders
 14. 13:20–25 Final blessings and greetings

Comments

1:1–4 Introducing Jesus

This letter begins, not with a greeting or other pleasantries, but with a simple statement of fact. But it says two important things about how God speaks to us that many ignore: little by little, and in many ways. God has not chosen to dump everything out at once, but to gradually tell us more and more, in order to bring us to Jesus at just the right time in history. And he does not always speak in the same way, but he does always speak through approved prophets, attested by their 100% accuracy rate (see Deut. 18:22). In light of that, we must not make the mistake of applying uncritically principles or rules for one epoch onto another. God's character never changes, but his dealings with us do.

Notice also that there is a tone of finality when it says "but in these last days he has spoken". Jesus was the culmination of history, the point to which all the "little by little" was aimed. Since God "has spoken" we can deduce that he speaks no more through the prophets to reveal things we need to know. He has given us all we need. This is not to say anything about the spiritual gifts, but simply to close the canon of scripture. Yes, the Letters were written afterwards, but they all point to Jesus and record for later generations what would surely have been lost to them. They were the eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus and commissioned by him to speak on his behalf.

Jesus is said to have "made the ages". Other translations put it as something like his having made the universe. Certainly that's true (Col. 1:15-20), but the context here is about God's having revealed his will gradually through the ages. The Greek word is where we get our word "eon"; if the universe were the intended meaning here, the Greek word would have been our "cosmos". So Jesus is the One who made the gradually unfolding revelations which were designed to present Him to us at just the right time in history.

Jesus is further described as "the radiance of God's splendor and the exact likeness of his basic nature". That being the case, how can anyone argue that Jesus is eternally subordinated to the Father, as is becoming popular among many Christian writers today? They look only at the following statement about his having sat down at the right side of the Majesty. But even there, we see that Jesus is both separate from and equal with the Father. Note also that Jesus is the radiance of God, not only of the Father; those are two different words in the Greek (*theos* and *pater*). We must not mentally substitute the meaning Father when we read the word God. (And technically, both the Father and the Spirit "fathered" the humanity of Jesus; see Luke 1:35.) Adding the statement about Jesus "holding everything up", we understand him to be the Agent of creation.

And of course this all has its ultimate purpose in Jesus' sacrifice for sins. But having accomplished that, he rose again and was returned (not taken for the first time) to his former glory as God (see also Phil. 2:5–11). Jesus, since his incarnation, has had both his eternal divine nature and his human nature, the so-called "hypostatic union". This causes us confusion because we don't always see which aspects of his relationship to the Father and Spirit are representative of his divinity and which are of his humanity. There is no hierarchy within the divine Trinity, but there is regarding Jesus' humanity. We simply cannot grasp how the two are joined. But it is this joining that makes it possible for us to be adopted as children of God. That is why Jesus is the only Way to the Father, such that only if we are "in" Jesus can we be considered righteous in God's eyes.

1:5–2:18 The superiority of Jesus above Messengers (angels)

When we read that Jesus **became** above the Messengers (angels), we must remember that this only applies to his humanity, not his divinity.

1:5–2:4 By virtue of his divinity

Now the writer goes into the many ways in which Jesus is not, and never was, a mere angel. And how much more clearly can his eternal divinity be stated than this? " **God**, your throne is eternal, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your Kingdom... and for that reason **your God** annointed you..." Jesus was always God but also became human at a point in time. And again, Jesus is said to be the one that "laid down the foundations of the earth in the beginning." In contrast, angels are described as servants that minister to believers. And someday we will be their judges (1 Cor. 6:3).

Although angels are our servants, we must remember that we are presently not as powerful as they. The writer warns that to disobey what God delivered through an angel was severely punished. Yet the point here is mainly that since such punishment was associated with angels, then how much greater punishment will be associated with rejecting the good message brought by and through Jesus, who is so much greater than they?

2:5–18 By virtue of his humanity

Continuing the theme of contrasting angels with God or humans, it is pointed out that humans, not angels, were the very reason God created everything. And here again, Jesus is shown to have only temporarily been made lower than the angels, then exalted back to glory.

The reason Jesus was made lower was to share in our humanity and to experience physical death on behalf of everyone. This opened the door for everyone who accepted him to be saved. As a result, all us who have believed in him are one family, to the point where we are exalted above the angels, being children instead of servants. Jesus shared in our humanity, which is not true of angels.

Now we see in vs. 16 that he did all this for "the descendants of Abraham". Immediately the Calvinists jump on this as proof of

Limited Atonement, or the theory that Jesus only died for "the elect" and not the whole world, but that takes it out of context. The contrast here is primarily between people and angels, within the larger context of the Hebrews. And we cannot simply discard all the other scriptures that clearly show Jesus having died for the whole world. Logically, to say Jesus did this for a particular group is **not** to say he did so for **only** that group. Yes, it was for Abraham's descendants-- and everyone else as well.

3:1–6 The superiority of Jesus as Ruling Priest above Moses

Since Jesus is greater than any angels, it follows also that he is greater than Moses. Moses was a favored servant, but Jesus became God's Son; therefore all who trust in Jesus, not Moses, are members of God's household. So the Holy Spirit pleads with all people to not follow the example of rebellious Israel, but to hear God's voice.

3:7–11 Warnings from history

A warning is given here to do more than listen to true teachings, but also to put them into practice. The nation of Israel is held up as an example of people who had known the ways of God but turned against Him. They had seen his great miracles and enjoyed his deliverance, yet they threw it all away and were then considered unworthy of their inheritance, in much the same way that Esau sold his birthright (Gen. 25:34, Heb. 12:16).

Notice the phrase "do not harden your hearts." It is people who choose to harden their own hearts, not God imposing it upon them to keep them from being saved. The people of Israel had done it themselves, or else the writer of Hebrews would not be warning their readers against doing the same thing. The implications of "today" and "enter my rest" will be discussed under "Entering God's 'rest'".

3:12–15 Encouraging each other while there is time

It's all well and good to heed a warning, but it helps a lot to have people reminding each other about it. We believers need to be in the continual habit of encouraging each other so that we do not "harden our hearts" like Israel did. Note the crux of the cause of their punishment: unbelief. It was not Jewish ancestry that would save the readers of this letter who might still be in unbelief; it always boils down to faith in God.

3:16–4:11 Entering God's "rest"

Not all of the Israelites rebelled, but God punished those who did. It was the unfaithful, the rebellious, who would be kept out of God's "rest". God will not wait forever for people to change their minds, so it is imperative that we don't put it off.

There are two erroneous teachings derived from this passage: (1) since Today is still continuing then the days of creation week must have been long ages, and (2) Israel's having escaped from Egypt yet some later being denied entrance to God's "rest" must indicate possible lost salvation (Conditional Security).

The first error claims that if the seventh day is the day God rested from creative work, and if God still speaks of people entering his rest, then this must still be the seventh day. But that would mean all people, not just the righteous, have entered God's rest. And it is clearly stated that a "Sabbath" **still remains**, meaning it hasn't started yet. This passage clearly states that only the righteous can enter it, along with all other scriptures regarding salvation. So the rest spoken of in this context cannot be equated with that of the seventh day of creation. "Today" here is held in contrast to ancient Israel, not to creation week. Notice also that "God specified **another day called Today**." Not all the "Todays" are the same.

Reference is made to creation week and specifically portrays the seventh day as symbolizing God's rest. But note the direction of the symbolism: the literal seventh solar day is a symbol of God's

rest; God's rest is not a symbol of the seventh day. And God's rest will never end; the writer has repeatedly pointed out that the opportunity to enter God's rest (Today) is temporary, but the rest itself is eternal.

The fact that Today is associated with God's "rest" and is entered into by faith means it cannot be related to legalistic performance. It is God's "rest", *not* God's "work"! Ch. 4 begins with an explicit statement to that effect: to enter rest is to stop doing one's own work. To work for entrance into that rest (or to remain in it) is to lack faith.

The second error claims that since the history of Israel is to be an example and warning for us (see 1 Cor. 10), then the failure of many of them to enter the Promised Land must be teaching us that salvation can be lost. But one thing to remember is that the physical nation of Israel has always been a special class of people to God. They have enjoyed a relationship to him that no other ethnic group has had. Yes, they all "drank the same spiritual drink... and that Rock was the Anointed One" (1 Cor. 10:4), but they did not have the Spirit indwelling them as believers do in this age, after Jesus came.

Salvation was never guaranteed to anyone either before or after the current age, the so-called Church Age (generally held to have begun at Pentecost). They had to persist in obedience or they could be lost. Not so with us who have the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph. 1:14). So they had to keep "drinking", but we do not.

The writer is speaking to believers (3:12), but also to Jews. In that group there were likely some who were still really only trusting in their heritage, in Moses. That seems to be the point in spending so much time on ancient Israel. They are being asked to examine themselves, to be sure they had truly accepted the gospel message, and were not relying on their being Jews to save them.

4:12–5:10 Jesus as Ruling Priest in a new Order

There is an abrupt end to the subject of God's rest here, changing now to a discussion of the Word of God. This phrase or title "Word of God" has been taken to refer to the Bible, but it also clearly refers to Jesus personally (John 1:1, Heb. 1:2). So the phrase encompasses all that God has communicated to us, whether spoken by God's own voice, through the prophets, in and by Jesus, and through his recorded teachings. The important thing is not the medium but the Source; it is all "of God." And because God has given us his Word, there are no more excuses, no more mysteries, no more hidden plans (1 Cor. 2). We must take a firm grasp of the gospel, not keep it at a distance and only stay near it or take it lightly.

There is a controversy here over the statement that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are. Could he have sinned? Some say no, it was impossible for Jesus to sin. But what it says here indicates otherwise. Jesus is being portrayed as one who is like us, who can sympathize with our struggles against sin. This would not be the case if Jesus had no capacity to sin. He is held up as the One who resisted it, which would be pointless if tempting him had been a waste of time. And because Jesus withstood temptation, we have absolute confidence in approaching God. This confidence is in him, not in us, and he will never fail. Our salvation is assured. We have a perfect, sinless, and sympathetic Ruling Priest.

The theme of Jesus as our Ruling Priest is now introduced but will be developed more fully later. Notice first of all that a priest represents people to God, not God to people (that would be what prophets do). Jesus is thus shown to be our representative in his humanity. And in spite of being God, as a human he did not appoint himself priest, just as the Israelite priests could only be selected by God. But unlike a human priest, Jesus had none of his own sins to atone for. In addition, he was not a priest in the order of Aaron or Levi, but in a new order: Melchizedek.

5:11–6:19 Diversion to discuss maturity

The writer now interrupts the issue of Jesus as priest to stop and address a problem with the people being written to, and it begins a passage of scripture that has been hotly debated for centuries.

The writer has a lot to tell them but is hampered by the people's lack of maturity. They should have reached the level of teachers by this time, but instead they were stuck in spiritual infancy. They were still on "square one", going over and over the basics of salvation. They had made no effort to dig deeply into the words of God, preferring instead the easy "milk". They are still in their "playpens"! So the people are to get out of diapers and grow up. The basic teachings referred to here are the practices of the old Law; remember that these people are Hebrews. They wanted to stay in familiar territory (ref. Egypt) instead of stepping out in faith (ref. the Promised Land). The writer has spent a lot of effort up to this point, making illustrations from Israel's history that should spur the people on to confident trust in Jesus. But they are tiptoeing, crawling slowly, barely grasping what salvation means.

But before the writer says more about that, they warn them again that it is not enough to only hear the gospel and mingle with believers, but to be believers themselves. It is such people who have experienced the heavenly gift, the Holy Spirit, the grace of God, and the power of the coming age. Just like the illustration from Israel's history, these people are relying on Moses instead of Jesus. As Jews they have been close to God, basking in the warmth of his protection, but now they must accept the gospel or be lost. If they were not convinced the first time Jesus died for them, then a second or third crucifixion would be of no use either.

Some view this passage as saying that saved people can lose salvation. But not all who have that view deal with the language here indicating that salvation could only be lost once and never regained. How can anyone justify the idea that a person can be born and unborn multiple times, on the occasion of every unconfessed sin? This mocks Jesus by turning him from the Way

or the Gate into the Revolving Door! Jesus only went to the cross once, died once, and rose once. He cannot repeat this, not even once. But this is what would be required to make it possible for the truly saved to be lost and re-saved. So even if this passage could be taken to mean salvation can be lost, it must also be taken to mean salvation once lost can never be regained, because Jesus cannot go back to the cross a second time.

After reinforcing the point about initial salvation, the writer turns back again to the importance of growing to maturity. They use the illustration of good soil that produces a crop. Note that what is burned here is not the ground itself, but the crop. Remember that in 1 Cor. 3 Paul speaks of our works being like a building that God will test by setting it on fire. We ourselves are saved but any works that were of poor quality will be burned up. So it is useless works that are cursed and burned, not people or souls.

But the writer is confident that such poor crops will not be produced if the people grow up. Already they have a few good deeds to their credit, and God will not overlook them. They long for them to produce a good crop in full measure, to receive their full inheritance. Once again, the inheritance itself is stated as being obtained by faith, not works (5:12). Works are the crop the soil produces; good deeds and outward actions are what we expect to see from the saved. (This concept is developed in more detail in the commentary on the Letter of James.)

To show them that our salvation itself is not in danger of being lost, Abraham is held up as an example. God made unilateral promises to him, promises that depended completely upon God alone, that he would surely bless Abraham no matter what. Likewise, our inheritance is sure and guaranteed by the blood of Jesus who sealed the contract. It is this guarantee that is our hope, so any teaching that robs believers of this hope and chips away at their confidence in the promises and guarantees of God can only produce a life of fear and legalistic performance. (See commentary on Romans for discussion on the "license to sin" accusation.)

6:20–10:36 Continuing on Jesus' new priestly Order

Now we begin a long discussion of the new priestly order of Melchizedek.

6:20–7:10 The Order of Melchizedek

The Old Testament account of Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14. Not much is said about him other than being a priest and king of Salem (an older name for Jerusalem). Although Genesis is filled with genealogical records, Melchizedek appears suddenly and then is never mentioned again in Genesis. Psalm 110, which Jesus applied to himself, is the only other OT mention of him, and it only refers to the order of that priesthood. It's possible that he was a pre-incarnation of Jesus, but we simply don't know.

Many preachers make a big deal out of the fact that Abraham paid this priest one tenth (a "tithe") of the spoils of a battle. But there is no record of Abraham tithing on any other occasion, or that he had a regular practice of tithing to anyone else. And it was not based upon his regular income but on one war's captured goods.

The whole point of bringing this up is that Levi, who only ever collected tithes from the Israelites, could be technically credited with paying a tithe to the superior priesthood of Melchizedek by virtue of being a descendent of Abraham. The words in Greek, *os epos eipein*, literally "as say to say", mean "so to speak" (translated here as "you could even say"); it is not a statement of a literal fact, that somehow Levi existed as a person at that time. A person does not exist until an egg is fertilized, or else we'd have to consider all the sperm and eggs throughout human history as separate people (what happens when they join together?)!

So beware of stretching this "credit through genetics" analogy. If we are all supposed to have sinned because we all descend from Adam and were "in him" at his creation, then we could also claim to be righteous since we all descend from Noah and his family, or even our own parents if they were saved. Yet

this is obviously not the case as the scriptures clearly state, so neither can we be credited or blamed for sin just because we descend from Adam. (More detail about that is discussed in the commentary on Romans.)

7:11–17 A new priesthood

"So then" or "Therefore" refers to the argument just completed about the Melchizedek priesthood being superior to the Levitical priesthood. If the Levitical one had been adequate to deal with sin, then there would have been no need for another priesthood.

But what most people miss is the fact that when the priesthood changes, so does the Law. They are inseparable; where one goes, there goes the other. Moses only gave the tribe of Levi access to the priesthood, but not the tribe of Judah which Jesus came from. And unlike the Levitical priesthood, the Melchizedek one is permanent; Jesus holds the office of Ruling Priest forever. (Incidentally, this is an excellent rebuttal to Mormonism's dual priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek. They cannot coexist, and no Mormon can claim to be of the tribe of either Levi or Judah.)

So since the priesthood we are under is that of Melchizedek and not Levi, we are not in any way obligated to observe any law associated with Levi. This has obvious implications for the matter of legalism for believers. Most believers think we must still obey the Ten Commandments, but they were only given to Israel under the priesthood of Aaron/Levi. And Gentiles should remember that we were *never* under the old Law at all.

7:18–28 A new law

The old law could not save or perfect anyone, and note that it has been annulled (see ch. 9 for discussion on how Jesus' death accomplished this annulment of an "eternal" law). But God sealed this new priesthood with an oath: that Jesus would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek forever. There is no other priesthood to

come, since this one alone can bring people to perfection. Unlike the old system where sacrifices had to be repeated, Jesus only needed one sacrifice of his own blood, once and for all. It is a great insult to God to claim Jesus didn't do enough.

8:1–13 A new offering

Jesus, our Ruling Priest, serves in the heavenly sanctuary made by God. The earthly temple of Israel was a type or shadow of the real one in heaven, which is why it had to be made to such precise specifications. But it should be obvious that the heavenly temple, Ruling Priest, and sacrifice are infinitely superior to the earthly ones. And because of that, the New Testament (contract or covenant) is greatly superior to the Old. And as the writer already pointed out, there would have been no need for a greater contract unless the old one was imperfect and defective.

And again we see that the old law is fading away. At the time of the writing the Jews were still in a contractual relationship with God, but He would soon disperse them for unbelief. So the law, though officially annulled, was still fading out and not completely gone. Technically, though, the Israelites had broken it long ago and effectively annulled it then, but a contract is between two parties. So Jesus had to die to end God's obligation to it.

Many people think we should still be held to the Ten Commandments and cite Mt. 5:17-18 for support. But not only do they ignore the clear statement here, they miss the meaning of the passage in Matthew. Here is a better interpretation:⁶

Do not think that I have come to dismantle the superstructure of promises and predictions recorded in the writings of Moses and the Prophets -- leaving them unfulfilled. On the contrary, I have come to fulfill every single prophecy therein. In fact, let me

6. G. Miller, *Christian Thinktank*

repeat this for emphasis: No matter how long it takes — even to the end of the universe — no prediction in the Old Testament, great or small, will fail to occur. Period.

Jesus did not come to perpetuate the Law which is tied to the old Levitical priesthood, but to replace it with a superior one. What he fulfilled was prophecy. Of course, to be the spotless sacrificial Lamb he had to perfectly obey the old Laws, which he did. But that means only those who are in Jesus really keep it, not by their own efforts, but by virtue of Jesus having kept it. And just as re-sacrificing Jesus is a slap in His face, so also is trying to keep the Law that Jesus already kept.

9:1–11 A new temple

Here we see details about the Temple, and the point of it all is to impress upon us the lengths to which God went to symbolize the superior one in heaven. The curtain symbolized that the Holiest Place was not to be seen until Jesus came with the sacrifice of his own blood. This gives added significance to the tearing of that curtain in the earthly Temple when Jesus died. It was the end of all sacrifice.

9:12–10:18 A new contract

Given the fact that Jesus' blood was far superior to that of mere animals, we can rest assured that it cleansed us completely from sin. He is the one and only Mediator of this New Testament, one which is between God and all people, not just one nation. His death paid the ransom for all mankind and canceled the charges against us.

Now we are given a perspective on all this from ordinary civil law. A will (or "testament") is not in effect until the one who made it dies. That is the reason for blood being required in the old

sacrifices. Only death can put an end to sin; without this bloodshed there is no cleansing, no cancellation of the laws against us. (The Roman Catholic Church calls the Eucharist an "unbloody sacrifice", which this verse shows to be ineffective.)

But just as the earthly sanctuary had to be cleansed with blood, so also did the heavenly one. And no animal's blood could be good enough for that, but only the blood of God in the flesh, Jesus the Anointed One. Yet unlike the earthly sanctuary, the heavenly one only needed one cleansing. And just as people are only able to die once and then face judgment (a good thing to remember when dealing with the concept of karma or reincarnation), so too Jesus only needed to die once to take away all sin. He will appear again, but not for taking away sin. Instead it will be to bring us our promised deliverance.

Again it is emphasized that the old Law was a shadow of better things to come, namely the new covenant sealed in Jesus' blood once for all. That old Law could never perfect anyone, as proven by the fact that the sacrifices had to be repeated. All the repeated sacrifices did was remind the people of their sins. But God was preparing them for the ultimate Sacrifice that would only be needed once. And again, we see that "he takes away the first in order to establish the second." This is also what Jesus referred to in his illustration of the wineskins (Mark 2, Luke 5); the old and the new cannot be mixed.

To further emphasize the fact that Jesus finished our redemption, we see that he sat down at God's right hand and is waiting until all his enemies are humbled before him. He is not still sacrificing! And yet again we see this point which cannot be over-emphasized: "By one offering he **has finally completed** the holy ones." Not only does this put an end to sacrifices, it also does away with the notion of Conditional Security. It says we are sacred and complete for all time, not for as long as we keep believing. It's a finished work and it cannot ever be undone by anyone.

The statement, "there is no more need of offerings" for sin ties back into the earlier statement in chapter six about the impossibility of being saved more than once, since there is no more

sacrifice. So the saved are free of the burden of perpetual sacrifices, and there is no way a believer could be lost and re-saved since Jesus will not be sacrificed again.

10:19–36 A new relationship

Here is another "therefore", and it is the consequence of all the previous teachings: we are free to boldly go into the "Holy of Holies", the inner sanctuary, to the very presence of God. This is now possible because of the blood of our new Ruling Priest, which was "sprinkled on our hearts" when we believed. We need not waver in our confidence in him since he is perfectly trustworthy.

Verses 24 and 25 are perhaps the most famous verses in Hebrews, with the possible exception of the "faith chapter" to follow. Yet they are not without controversy, because many take it to sanction mandatory "church" attendance.

While it's true that believers are always encouraged to work together as a body (see also 3:12–15), many in the churches use these two verses as a club to beat people over the head for not attending services regularly. But typically, such services are not real Biblical fellowship at all. From years of personal observation and regular attendance at them, I can say that a large number of the attendees are only there in body and not in spirit. People can attend for many years without even being saved, and the churches admit this! And many more only go to worship God, never really getting to know the people.

Showing up in appointed places at appointed times to perform appointed rituals is not what the writer is talking about here at all. Instead, it's about not only staying close to sound teaching but also interacting in the daily lives of other believers for the purpose of both serving and being served. The churches should first clean their own houses and check up on the regular attendees before hunting down the "members" who are at least being honest. And they need to ask themselves why people drift away in such large numbers.

Instead, what is stated here is that we are to "prompt each other into love and ideal works"; that is the purpose of meeting together. Notice that worship of God is not even mentioned here, but only interactions between people, to encourage each other and to band together as we see the End approaching.

After defining the new relationship believers have with God due to Jesus' sacrifice and our faith in him, verse 26 begins more discussion about the finality of all that. As before, the writer is not promoting the idea that the saved can be lost, but that those who hear the gospel are not saved unless they accept it. To turn away from it and keep on sinning even after we've known the truth is to condemn ourselves. Notice the warning against failure to appreciate the blood of the new contract. We have already discussed the error of trying to make additional sacrifices, and that's what this refers to. God will surely take revenge against all who treat Jesus' sacrifice as inadequate!

After all that theology about the meaning and effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice, the writer adds an appeal to the people's own experiences. When they were first saved they were persecuted but stood firm through it all. They must not throw all that away, but endure and receive their rewards.

10:37–11:40 By faith

We are not to be fearful and defeated, but to be faithful and overcome. And it is plainly stated that "we have faith for the security of our souls." Security, not insecurity. Guarantees and security are neither guaranteed nor secure if they can be lost.

The famous "faith chapter" (eleven) begins with a definition: faith is "a sure hope, a conviction about what is not seen." It is confident trust in the Person who will never fail us, even when we are overwhelmed with doubt or hardship or oppression. It is impossible to please God without trusting him, and to do that we must first of all believe that he exists. God makes himself known to all who seek him out in faith. This is no blind, "leap in the dark", baseless wish, but absolute assurance of something or someone due

to that which we can examine. God made sure there were eyewitnesses to Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The Gospels were written for precisely the purpose of giving testimony, and the evidence is appealed to repeatedly throughout the New Testament as the basis of our faith.

I won't repeat what you can easily read in this passage yourself, but only touch on a few highlights. Notice the one about Abel. When people read the Genesis account of Cain and Abel they often wonder why Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable to God. Being a worker of the field and not raising animals as his brother did, we can speculate that he did not bring the required blood sacrifice. But here we see another factor: faith. Abel had a better sacrifice because he had faith.

Another very interesting point is the mention of Enoch, who did not die but was taken directly to heaven. The only other person ever to have this happen was the prophet Elijah. Why were these two taken without dying, while people like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David were not? We can speculate that the others were just not pure enough, but God may have another purpose in future prophecy. It is possible that these will be the two "witnesses" of Revelation who will be murdered and then raised to life after three days.

We also see a contrast in this chapter. Some of these giants of faith received some rewards in this life, and others did not. Some were honored, but others were hunted like animals and brutally murdered. Yet they did not rail against God and say "Why didn't he protect me?" as many do today. People seem to expect God to be like Santa Claus, who exists to only give them good things.

12:1–2 Our examples to follow

Considering the caliber of people who went before us, we should therefore stand strong and stop being content with spiritual infancy or worrying about whether we'll get to heaven or not. And we do this not by focusing on self, as is popular in the churches today, but on Jesus. It is He who will bring us to completion, not

us. He gave up the comforts and respect of his heavenly throne for people who were still against him! He, above all the others listed in the previous chapter, is our greatest inspiration and example.

Notice that it is not "our" faith that Jesus is the Originator and Finisher of, but "the" faith (the article is implied in the Greek). He does not have to create faith in us as held by the fatalistic view; our faith is a choice we make. And the "race" we run to eventual reward is a matter of something we do; it must therefore be the opposite of a gift to be received, and thus not having to do with salvation from eternal wrath.

12:3–11 Children of God

Some take verse 4 as referring to Jesus sweating "great drops of blood" in the Garden of Gethsemane, but no such connection is made by scripture (and the gospels never say it was blood but only that his sweat was as profuse as blood dripping). All it says is that the people being addressed in this letter have not yet had to lay down their lives for the gospel. But they have forgotten that they are adopted children of God, and as such, they will be disciplined as any good father would discipline his own children. Fathers aren't responsible for other people's children, so if God didn't discipline us, it would mean we don't belong to him. We must not abandon God for letting us suffer, any more than as children we would all run away from our parents for punishing us when we needed it.

12:12–13:7 Our response

With all that in mind, we should "work out" to get ourselves in shape, instead of being "couch potatoes" that never make an effort to grow strong. We should do our best to get along with others, yet be vigilant to stand against error which could lead people astray.

Unlike ancient Israel, we have not come face-to-face with a consuming fire, darkness and gloom, a whirlwind, and a loud

trumpet accompanying the voice of God. They were afraid to have him speak to them any more, and even Moses was afraid. Instead, we can come to God without any fear, as beloved children. So we have no excuses at all to stay away from God. On the other hand, if the first covenant carried the death penalty for any who failed to meet its requirements, how bad will it be for those who reject the second? All the more reason to come close to God instead of running away from him.

Chapter 13 begins with a curious statement: people have sometimes unknowingly given hospitality to angels! We must keep that in mind when we encounter strangers, as it could be a test from God of our true attitude toward others. We should also show our concern for those who have been imprisoned or suffered hardship for the sake of the gospel.

There is a brief statement about marriage here. Apparently some had asked whether it's okay for believers to marry, and the answer here is the same as that to similar questions to Paul from the Corinthians: yes, believers can marry. Of course unfaithfulness is not permitted, but only a monogamous relationship. Interestingly, the Bible never specifies what makes a couple officially married beyond physical union. There are no prescribed ceremonies, oaths, or official documents or sanctions by society. In God's eyes then, they are married by the physical union. But any who have multiple partners are sinning against God. Paul had more to say about that in his letters.

Then the people are given general statements that should be obvious: be content with what you have, take courage, respect those spiritually mature ones who have been watching out for you, and take their example of life and faith to heart. There are no such words as obey, follow, or submit in that statement about leaders. It literally reads, "remember the ones-leading you who speak to-you the word of-the God of-whom contemplating the sequel of-the behavior imitate the faith." And in the context the emphasis is clearly on following examples. We are to be like them, not to excuse their poor behavior or blindly follow the orders of a despot. This will be emphasised again shortly.

13:8–15 Warnings to stay sharp

Jesus is again presented as One to be trusted. He will never waver or change. And just as Paul wrote, this writer warns the people not to waste time arguing about the old laws or strange new teachings that didn't come from God. They again refer to the old sacrificial system as being inadequate, so that we must not go back to it but instead go "outside the camp" to Jesus.

13:16–19 The wisdom of following the examples of proven leaders

The only kind of "sacrifices" we can add are those of pure words of praise and of being the **community** of believers we were meant to be. And again, in vs. 17, the writer mentions leaders, who are guarding them from error. As stated before, this is not a command to obey the every whim of a boss, but an appeal to the wisdom of staying close to those who are stronger in the faith than we are. The responsibility Elders have for the other believers is not to dominate or rule but to serve and protect. It is simply a smart move to listen to them.

The Greek here literally reads, "be-persuaded to-the ones-leading of-you and defer they for are-being-vigilant over the souls of-you as saying having-to-render that with joy this they-may-do..." Again, there is no mention of authority, rule, obedience, or punishment for failing to obey.

13:20–25 Final blessings and greetings

As the letter winds down with the typical farewells of the day, we see a commonly mistranslated statement. Most render it "a short letter", which this obviously isn't! Instead, the Greek clearly indicates that it was written in bits: "bear-with the word of-the entreaty and for through bits I-wrote-the-letter to-you." This would explain some of the topic shifting as well. The letter was evidently not all written in one sitting but here and there as time allowed.

Galatians

The letter to the Galatians was written by Paul around 48 AD. It is the first letter he wrote, soon after returning from the areas noted in Acts 13 and 14. The central theme is salvation by faith alone, nothing added nor removed. He writes in defense of his authority as well as to combat the legalists.

Outline

1. **A** 1:1–5 Greetings
2. – **B** 1:6–9 A different gospel
3. — **C** 1:10–12 Paul's motives
4. — **D** Reminders
 1. 1:13–2:10 Paul's actions and history
 2. 2:11–14 Paul confronts Peter
5. — **E** 2:15–2:21 Justified by faith alone
6. — **F** 3:1–5 What happened to you?
7. — **G** Law
 1. 3:6–14 Abraham, faith, and law
 2. 3:15–18 Examples from law
 3. 3:19–4:7 The purpose of law
8. — **X** True or false
 1. 4:8–11 Turning back to fake gods
 2. 4:12–16 The crime of telling the truth
9. — **G'** Law

1. 4:17–20 Ulterior motives of the legalists
2. 4:21–5:1 An allegory about slavery to law
3. 5:2–6 The limits of law
10. ——— **F'** 5:7–12 What happened to you?
11. ——— **E'** 5:13–26 Freedom vs. license
12. ——— **D'** Reminders
 1. 6:1–6 Individual and collective responsibility
 2. 6:7–10 Harvesting what we plant
13. — **C'** 6:11–13 The critics' motives
14. – **B'** 6:14–17 The true gospel
15. **A'** 6:18 Greetings

Comments

A 1:1–5 Greetings

Paul begins by giving some of his credentials as a hand-picked apostle of Jesus the Anointed One. He also includes greetings from others with him and praises God for the sacrifice Jesus made to rescue us all from "this evil age".

B 1:6–9 A different gospel

No sooner is the greeting given than he cuts to the chase and confronts the Galatians over their amazingly quick abandonment of the true gospel of grace for a different "gospel", one which would again enslave them to a religion of salvation by good deeds. He strongly condemns any who preach such a distorted gospel and rob believers of their freedom.

C 1:10–12 Paul's motives

Paul is apparently responding to charges that he was only after people's approval, but he reminds them of the fact that he got the gospel directly by revelation from Jesus Himself, not from anyone else, not even the other apostles before him. And of course he would not be persecuted if he were only acting on human impulse.

D Reminders

1:13–2:10 Paul's actions and history

He relates how formerly he had been Christianity's bitterest enemy, hounding and persecuting the believers, even having some put to death, thinking he was just being a good Jew (actually, an outstanding Jew, as he had surpassed his peers among the Pharisees). He was stopped cold by Jesus, after which he went away alone for three years. Only then did he meet with the others in Jerusalem, where he was acknowledged by the church leaders as having received a commission from God. He presents this as his sworn testimony and not just idle talk.

A mere fourteen years later, the church was already being infiltrated by "false brothers" who were trying to enslave the believers with laws and rules. He went to Jerusalem very cautiously, to test the openness of the current leaders to what Jesus had commissioned him to do. Their reputations, even as hand-picked disciples of Jesus, were of no concern to Paul. No one was to be judged on the basis of credentials but only on the Good Message alone. He cites James, Peter, and John as the top leaders, who then accepted Paul as having the same authority as they had to speak for Jesus.

2:11–14 Paul confronts Peter

By this time Paul's authority had been recognized by all the believers, as shown in the confrontation with Peter over this issue. Peter had allowed the pressure of the false teachers to cause him to slide back into Jewish legalism, and Paul had to *publicly* rebuke him. This is significant on two levels: Paul had the authority to rebuke an apostle that had been with Jesus during His time as a human, and the rebuke was public, something that is not tolerated in churches today.

E 2:15–2:21 Justified by faith alone

The Law could never justify anyone but only condemn them. It told them what sin was and that they were not perfect in the sight of God. So salvation can only come by faith, and that faith must be in Jesus the Anointed One. The fact that we still struggle with sin, however, in no way condones sin or associates it with salvation. We died to the law; our relationship with it is broken. Therefore we died to the ways of sin and to offending God. Our lives are wrapped up in His, so that we must turn from the old kingdom to the new. Besides, if law could save people, then there would have been no purpose for Jesus to come and die for us.

Of course, Paul is not saying we lose our identity or personality and become "absorbed" into Jesus per the Hindu teaching, but that we are to walk in step with Jesus and his will.

F 3:1–5 What happened to you?

Paul cannot fathom why people would prefer to try and earn that which is available for free. He asks them rhetorically how they were saved in the first place, and how they received the Holy Spirit. Law had nothing whatsoever to do with it.

G Law

3:6–14 Abraham, faith, and law

The Good Message is all about faith, not works. Abraham was not credited with justice by anything he did, but only by his faith in God's promise to him. And it is this same faith by which all nations would be blessed in Abraham.

In contrast, as he continues his grilling of the Galatians over their desire to work for that which is freely offered, Paul goes on to explain that if anyone wants to keep the law they have to keep *all* of it. You can't keep most of it; it's all or nothing. But that's what many Christians have tried to do. They say, "You don't have to make animal sacrifices, but you must keep the Sabbath (and whatever else I personally feel everyone should do)". This attempt to meld the old and the new is exactly what Jesus said was impossible, with the illustration of the wineskins (see Luke 5:33–39). He redeemed us from the old law.

3:15–18 Examples from law

Illustrations are a good way to explain principles, and here Paul uses their knowledge of ordinary laws, especially a Last Will and Testament. God had made a unilateral promise to Abraham, specifically to a particular Descendant of his, the Anointed One. It could not be affected by any other contracts. So the law that came 430 years later was not at all related to that promise, and it therefore did not nullify or replace it; inheritance can only come by a Will or promise.

3:19–4:7 The purpose of law

So if the law does not save, what good is it? Paul explains that it served as a custodian, to bring people to the point where they could inherit the estate. It was a contract between two parties, not a

will made by one; there is no need of any mediator for a Will. Therefore a sharp line is drawn between law and promise.

It is in this particular context about the divide between law and promise that Paul writes the statement, "in him there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male and female, for you are all one in the Anointed One Jesus." To be "in" Jesus is to be in his death to the law, such that the testator has died and the custodian of the old law is no longer in effect. That would be the only way out of the old contract. Otherwise we'd still be under it, even though we have the Promise, because the Promise could never affect the contract. So that is why Jesus had to die, and why only those who are "in" Him have also died to the old law. And only those with faith in Him and his resurrected life are thereby part of the Descendant and thus heirs of the Promise.

Yet some people still want echoes of the law to persist: heirarchy, clergy, altars, sacrifices, and rituals. They want to impose the Jewish tithe, to call the church building or organization "the storehouse", to put us back into bondage. That is the whole reason Paul is writing to the Galatians: to put all such nonsense away. We are now one in Jesus (3:28) and there is no more hierarchy, no more privilege, no more of the old ways.

For Paul who was a Pharisee, his choice of words in 3:28 is most forceful. There was a rabbinical prayer that said, "Thank God that I was not born a gentile, a slave, or a woman!"⁷ He dismisses each and every one of those boasts in order, as well as showing that the law does not apply in Jesus. (Note: the first two pairings of Paul's statement are no/or, but the last is no/and. As of this writing I have found no attention paid to this difference, and therefore will not comment until I have a firm explanation for it.) Sadly, while Christianity quickly accepted the equality of Jew and Gentile, and reluctantly conceded that there should also be no slavery, it still clings to a hierarchy between male and female, along with one between an imaginary clergy and laity. Our unity is in Jesus, not in society or biology.

7. Menahoth, *Mishpocha*

So by faith we are all heirs of the promise made to Abraham, a promise outside of law and thus unaffected by it. We are no longer minors under a custodian. Jesus died "at the time set by His Father" to make us all dead to the law and inheritors of the estate. Slaves do not call their owner "father" but only "master", so the fact that we can call God our Father is another indication of our having inherited eternal life and of having been freed from the law. And such a condition is irreversible; Jesus cannot repeatedly die in order to repeatedly free us, which also would require that the old contract is repeatedly reinstated. Salvation is all about adoption and inheritance, not legal performance regarding a contract that is no longer in effect for us.

X True or false

This is the crux of the whole letter: the Galatians' turning away from the Good Message and back toward fake gods and old laws. Paul has built up to this point from the basics of salvation and examples of how laws and contracts and unilateral promises work.

4:8–11 Turning back to fake gods

Paul asks the Galatians how they can want to turn from this freedom he's been talking about back to "those weak and poor fundamental principles" associated with false gods. Some take that unusual phrase to refer to the ancient Babylonian practice of astrology with its supernatural "elements" and principles. These things had enslaved them before, yet now they wanted to return to this slavery! They were beginning to once again observe the calendar, perhaps even the zodiac (equally possible, the requirements of the old Law).

Ironically, churches today do many of the same things and adopt the same beliefs, which have been repackaged in Christian or harmless-sounding terms: Twelve Step programs, breath prayer, "the silence", chanting, territorial spirits, prosperity by shamanistic

practices such as sacred objects, etc. They combine these with Jewish law: tithing, observing the Sabbath, and many others, as if sacrifice is the *only* thing Jesus did. Paul's words here to the Galatians are very much needed for today's believers as well.

4:12–16 The crime of telling the truth

Paul now expresses the great emotional pain he is in because of the Galatians' turning back to the worthless old practices. He had come to them originally in poor health, evidently a condition that was repulsive, yet they had welcomed him as they would Jesus Himself. How could they now do such a thing as to believe Paul was insincere or seeking popularity or faking authority to speak for God? They had turned against him even though he had told them the truth.

As noted in the text, there are two ways to take Paul's words here regarding eyes: either he had an eye problem or he was making a play on words regarding the "evil eye" of paganism.

Now that he has built up his case and confronted the Galatians over their abandonment of the gospel and betrayal of him personally, Paul will begin to go back over the evidence and turn their accusations around.

G' Law

4:17–20 Ulterior motives of the legalists

Paul now discusses the motivation of the false teachers: to gather a following without the persecution that goes with faithfulness to the gospel of freedom. He knows that the Galatians did not just wake up one morning and decide to turn from the truth; they were swayed by people with sinister and/or selfish motives. It is they who were the fakes, the liars, the enemies. They were driving a wedge between the people and Paul so they could take over and be esteemed as leaders. Paul could be very crude at times, and here he uses the words "cut off" to describe what the legalizers

are trying to do to him. He is making a veiled reference to circumcision, the favorite rule of the Judaizers, and he will continue to reference this analogy as he goes along.

But he also describes his consternation with the Galatians in terms of labor and childbirth. By saying he is "writhing in the pains of childbirth with you until the Anointed One is formed in you" he is of course not talking about salvation. Salvation is a single event in time, at the moment of faith, when we die to the old contract and are assured the inheritance of eternal life by virtue of our being "in Jesus". So he uses labor and childbirth as a description of the process of spiritual growth and maturity. (See also 1 Tim. 2:15 for another of Paul's references to childbearing.)

People can be confused by this terminology since Jesus called our salvation being "born again". Context is the key: Jesus was talking to a Pharisee about salvation, and Paul is talking to the saved about how they are being tricked into a return to old religious practices. Remember that this letter was addressed to "brothers and sisters", that is, fellow believers. After all Paul has said about law, promise, and inheritance, how can we think this can be reversed? Would he say two opposite things in the same letter: that we have been saved by faith, but that adding legalistic practices can undo that?

4:21–5:1 An allegory about slavery to law

The Galatians had forgotten that Abraham had two lines of descendants: slave (Ishmael) and free (Isaac). These two literal children represented the Law and the Promise. (Note Paul's use of the analogy: he is using Hagar's child to represent those under the Law, that is, earthly Jerusalem, while those who have Abraham's faith are of the heavenly Jerusalem.) Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, the unbelieving Jews were persecuting those who became Christians. So Paul is telling the Galatians that they must "send away the slave woman", that they must not go back into slavery to law.

5:2–6 The limits of law

In addition, the people were not thinking through the implications of going back under the law. To be under law is to not be under grace; to be under contract is to not be under promise. Paul turns again to the rite of circumcision as a symbol of all that is wrong with legalism, going so far as to equate the legalizers with that which is "cut off" and discarded! In stark contrast is the only way for anyone to be justified: faith empowered by love. Referring back to the previous pairings, Paul now expresses the Jew/Gentile pairing as "no circumcision or uncircumcision" in the Anointed One Jesus.

F' 5:7–12 What happened to you?

Turning back to the people after aiming at the legalizers, Paul tells them that they had been running a good race but the legalizers cut in front of them. Though he is confident that they will eventually get back on track, he has no kind words for what is apparently a particular individual who is causing all the trouble. He appeals to reason: if he were just going along with the circumcision, why would they be persecuting him? As a final insult to the legalizers, Paul adds deep sarcasm to crudity by suggesting that those who are so fond of cutting should just keep going!

E' 5:13–26 Freedom vs. license

But after all this effort at driving home the point that we are free, Paul puts it in balance by reminding the Galatians that freedom is not license, as he also wrote to the Romans. Our freedom is *from* sin, not *to* sin. We are free from the prison of the Law, but should we then spit in the face of the One that bought our freedom? That's what Paul is saying about the new "law" of love in the Anointed One; we are now free, but we are also indebted to the blood of Jesus that bought us. We no longer desire those things that would grieve the One we claim to love.

Does Paul once again apparently suggest we have a salvation that can be lost, by saying "those who commit such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"? No, he's just mentioning that the outward acts of "the flesh" are opposite the outward acts of the spirit. The lost are known for self-indulgence, and such will certainly not inherit the Kingdom. Only children get an inheritance.

D' Reminders

The case has been made and the closing arguments given. Now Paul begins to wind down with some general instructions.

6:1–6 Individual and collective responsibility

We are a Body, a community of believers. As such we must help each other when we stumble. This is a preventative measure that Paul is prescribing for the Galatians, to keep them from stumbling again. Instead of comparing ourselves with others we must always look to Jesus, our true "role model". And those who teach such truths are to be honored and also helped materially if needed.

6:7–10 Harvesting what we plant

There are consequences to actions and beliefs. God will not be fooled or bribed or dishonored; He will certainly pay us back in proportion to how we lived. So the wise will live in such a way as to please God, and that includes striving for the good of others. And we should put fellow believers first, as Paul also wrote in 1 Tim. 5:8.

C' 6:11–13 The critics' motives

Many assume that Paul's reference to writing in large letters must be proof of his having eye problems, but notice where he

writes it: just before making one last jab at the legalizers. He is emphasizing their sinister motives, and writing large so they don't miss it. They are the ones whose motives are to be questioned.

B' 6:14–17 The true gospel

There is only one Good Message, one Way, Truth, and Life. We all are "cut off" from the world, not by a physical act but by faith in Jesus alone. We are new creations and can no longer keep living like we belong to the world. Paul reminds them that he has been "branded" with Jesus' seal of ownership, his physical sufferings for the faith. His detractors could make no such claim.

A' 6:18 Greetings

In spite of all the intense emotion and harsh criticisms, these are still believers and still precious ones for whom Jesus died. Paul signs off with what the Galatians should know by now is a genuine blessing.

1 Thessalonians

The first letter to the Thessalonians was written by Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy about 50 AD, soon after Paul arrived in Corinth. The primary motivation seems to have been Paul's need to defend himself against slander. He touches briefly on the matter of prophecy as well, which he will focus on more in his second letter.

Outline

1. 1:1–5 Greetings and praise
2. 1:6–2:1 Imitating Paul
3. 2:2–13 Paul appeals to their knowledge of him
4. 2:14–16 Imitating many believers
5. 2:17–3:13 Longing to see them again
6. 4:1–12 A charge to continue in holiness
7. 4:13–5:3 Concerning death, resurrection, and the Master's return
8. 5:4–11 Proper response to the Master's return
9. 5:12–22 General instructions
10. 5:23–28 Final blessing and greetings

Comments

1:1–5 Greetings and praise

The people are commended for their faithful work and endurance in hope. Their salvation was evident by the power of the Holy Spirit among them after they heard the Word. Paul reminds

them that he too displayed this same power when he was among them.

1:6–2:1 Imitating Paul

They began to imitate Paul and the others and welcomed their teaching, even in the face of persecution. They have become renown for their faith and their having turned completely from idols to God, and they eagerly wait for Jesus' return for them. All of this is proof of the power in which Paul had come to them.

2:2–13 Paul appeals to their knowledge of him

The gospel had been brought to these people after Paul and the others had experienced insulting treatment at Philippi, yet they were bold anyway. They came not with deception and cunning but the truth of the gospel, not being concerned with popularity but with pleasing God. They used no flattery and were not greedy, did not seek praise and did not "throw their weight around" over the people. Instead, Paul and the others were like parents tenderly soothing their children (which does not fit the masculine image patriarchalists try to impose upon the scriptures!). They were kind and gentle and encouraging through it all.

2:14–16 Imitating many believers

As a result, the people received the gospel gladly. But like the Jewish believers who were being persecuted by their own people, these believers too were being persecuted by theirs. Paul relates how his own people keep trying to forbid the Gentiles from hearing the gospel.

2:17–3:13 Longing to see them again

Paul expresses his desire to visit them again in person, in spite of the obstacles Satan has been throwing in front of him. He had decided to stay in Athens and send Timothy his co-worker (a term

he also used elsewhere for women who were preaching and leading) to strengthen and encourage them. Paul had told them before about the persecution that is promised to believers, and which he and others had experienced. It was persecution that was keeping him from visiting them, so he sent Timothy to check up on them and put his mind at ease.

But Timothy had returned and the news was good. This gave Paul great encouragement in his trials. He praises God for them and is all the more eager to see them again, wishing them continued growth and strength.

4:1–12 A charge to continue in holiness

Paul reminds them of instructions he gave earlier about proper Christian behavior, and to continue in them and strive for maturity. This extends to how they do business in the world, not just among themselves. Many in the churches throughout history have ignored this teaching, treating "church" as a box to keep their religion in, while being just like the heathen out in the world. It is a sin against God to live in such hypocrisy! But at least the believers here were treating each other with love, something that isn't always the case in many churches.

4:13–5:3 Concerning death, resurrection, and the Master's return

Now the focus turns to questions the people had about what happens when believers die. Instead of being exceedingly sad like the lost, they were to be comforted by the fact that we will see departed believers again in heaven. After all, if we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, there is no reason to doubt that his followers will rise too. Here we have a firm picture of not only our hope for resurrection, but an event commonly referred to as the Rapture. The Greek word means "to snatch away" or plunder, which was translated into Latin and then anglicized into "rapture". Even in its modern sense, to be enraptured is to be "caught up"

with our emotions. But context determines what is being "caught up" and why.

This particular context is about the righteous dead and the hope we have. Paul just told them that he is giving them a reason to hope, to not mourn like the heathen. We who are alive at the Coming of the Master (**not** the DAY of the Master) will be "snatched away" immediately after the righteous dead. This coming will be the Master Himself coming down from heaven with a shout from the chief angel and the trumpet of God. But the Master doesn't come down to the earth, only "in the clouds", to which we all are raised. So it really is a meeting in the clouds; first the dead and then we who are still living.

This, again, is all given to us as a reason to hope, something to encourage us with. Many in the churches today mock this hope, this scriptural teaching. They say the Rapture is only escapism for people who are afraid of suffering or think themselves "holier than thou", but those are false charges. People are to find great comfort and hope and encouragement in knowing it and in continuing to watch and wait for the Master's return.

There is also a parallel with Jewish wedding customs, a parallel frequent throughout the New Testament. The groom would prepare a room in his father's house, then come at an unpredictable time for his bride. He would take her to his father's house for a feast, which would last seven days, and then they would begin their life together. In the same way, Jesus said that in his Father's house were many rooms and that he was going there to prepare a place for us, his "bride". At the right time, unannounced and unknown to the bride, he will return for us and take us to heaven to the "wedding banquet". There will be seven years of celebration there, while the earth experiences seven years of God's wrath against all who refused his invitation and despised his Son, the groom.

Paul also addresses the timing of the end. He had already told them about this, but briefly summarizes. "The Day of the Master" will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like a thief during the night. People will be caught off-guard, thinking they have finally

achieved peace and safety, but doom and destruction rain down upon them instead. It is likened to when a pregnant woman's time comes to give birth; we never know when the hour will come, but when it does, there is no mistake, and no stopping it.

5:4–11 Proper response to the Master's return

In contrast, believers are not to be taken by surprise. We are "in the light" and people of the day, and have no excuse for falling asleep. In fact, we are to remain dressed for battle. Paul uses some of the same symbolism here as he did in writing to the Ephesians about "the whole armor of God". We are to keep watch and be alert. We are mocked today for watching, for pointing out the lateness of the hour, for looking for clues about the nearness of the Master's return. But faithful soldiers and brides remain true to the end.

Notice the words Paul uses: "they" will be taken by surprise, but "you" will not. There is a clear difference between how Paul refers to the Master's coming for believers, and how he refers to "the day of the Master" for unbelievers. Two different events for two different groups. And we are told that the "coming" precedes the "day".

We are not destined to suffer this impending wrath of God, but instead are to be delivered through the Master Jesus the Anointed One. Some would brush this off as the general hope of salvation, but look at the context. It's all about our hope in a specific "coming", in which we will be snatched away to heaven while still alive. It is something Paul uses to encourage the people who have been wondering about "times and seasons". People don't ask about those things in regards to general salvation.

5:12–22 General instructions

The focus turns again, this time to watching their own assembly for faithful workers and for guardians. These serve by warning them of spiritual danger. Today, most believers cannot

stand warnings and rebuke those who give them. Yet in a world filled with heresy and falsehood, guardians have a lot of negative things to warn about, and we would naturally expect this to intensify as we near the end. This we observe, yet most guardians are shouted down and told to be silent.

Paul instructs them not to scorn prophecies, and he says this right after telling them not to squelch the Spirit. Prophecy is from God and we dare not ignore it. Yet this must be balanced with discernment; we are to test everything. We are to sift through it and keep what is good and from God, while discarding all that is not.

5:23–28 Final blessing and greetings

Paul now gives his customary farewell, with blessings and challenges.

2 Thessalonians

The second letter to the Thessalonians was written shortly after the first. Its main focus is prophecy, specifically in response to a forgery (2:1–5). Paul is correcting misunderstandings and undoing the damage caused by fake letters that were claimed to have been from him.

Outline

1. 1:1–7 Greetings and praise
2. 1:8–12 God's revenge
3. 2:1–12 Correcting misunderstandings about prophecy
4. 2:13–15 Standing firm in the truth
5. 2:16–3:5 Prayer and praise
6. 3:6–12 Warnings and examples
7. 3:13–15 Perseverance
8. 3:14–18 Final blessing and greetings

Comments

1:1–7 Greetings and praise

The second letter to the Thessalonians begins much like the first. Persecution continues, presumably from their own people around them as before. But relief will come one way or another, in this life or the next.

1:8–12 God's revenge

God will eventually inflict vengeance upon those who deserve it. Many today think a loving God would never do such a thing, and oppose all who speak of judgment. But scripture clearly equates judgment with justice, with revenge, and with retribution for sin. This is to God's honor due to his being holy. Holiness is frequently ignored in favor of love, but both are true of God.

So Paul implores the believers to keep on in the faith and keep pursuing maturity. God will bring us safely to our inheritance, but we have deeds to do in the meantime that will earn eternal rewards.

2:1–12 Correcting misunderstandings about prophecy

As with the first letter, this one also addresses questions the people had about "the Coming of the Master". Some people had brought false reports or prophecies or letters allegedly from Paul, claiming that "the Day of the Master" had already happened or was imminent. This would mean, considering the content of the first letter, that the Coming must therefore have happened already, and they had missed it somehow.

But Paul assures them that no such thing has happened, and that no such messages had come from him. And he also explains how they can be sure it hasn't happened, in a passage that gives us more detail about the sequence of these events.

First in line will be "the Departure". Almost all translations and commentators completely miss the Greek here and sidestep the meaning of the word instead of actually translating it. It is rendered "the apostasy" instead of actually being translated. The Greek phrase *a apostasia* literally means "the departure" and does not specify what is being departed from, so context must be checked to find out what that is. And the context here is all about the last days but nothing about false teachings.

Recalling the first letter, this Departure can be nothing else but what we call The Rapture, the "snatching away" of the righteous dead and living which happens before the Day of the

Master. The people were being told that they had missed this great hope, the very thing Paul had encouraged them with in the first letter. Even today, people try to rob believers of this same hope, calling the Rapture escapist or elitist. Such people are described by Paul as deceivers, those who try to throw believers into despair and confusion.

The next event is the appearance of the Lawless One. This person will exalt himself as above all "gods" and will even take his seat in the temple of God, claiming to be Him. Of course, there must be a Temple for this to happen, and it most likely refers to the Jewish Temple. People mock this idea as well, claiming all references to another Temple must certainly be allegorical, a popular escape clause in itself. But Paul is not giving any vision or parable here. He is speaking plainly to dispel a rumor, and laying out concrete events the people could look for.

Another factor is introduced here: the restraining force that holds back the Lawless One (I'll abbreviate to LO). First Paul points out that the evil associated with the LO is already at work but is currently restrained. Many try to say that since there is evil in the world then the Bible doesn't say there will be a certain evil person but only a general evil characteristic of the age. But Paul mentions both here, the LO and the general evil of the world. They cannot be the same. This is yet another attempt to brush aside Bible prophecy as being not literal or future.

So who or what is this Detainer? Paul doesn't specify clearly, but whoever or whatever it is (many believe it to be the Holy Spirit) must continue to restrain until after The Departure. God will restrain evil up until he takes us home.

This LO's appearing will come with Satanic power: miracles, deceptive wonders, and great deceit. Those who have loved darkness will be completely fooled. And because they loved darkness and deception, God will "give them over" (see Romans) to the extreme and make them swallow a particular "Big Lie". Like The Departure, this is a special, specific lie, not a general condition of the time. People speculate on what this could be, but context hints that it has to do with the LO pretending to be God. That's

what the transliterated word *antichrist* means: one who opposes Christ (the Anointed One) by pretending to be Him. He is an impostor, a fake, and people will fall for it.

2:13–15 Standing firm in the truth

Turning back to the people at present, Paul praises God for "choosing them from the beginning". Choosing them how, and for what? To be saved by means of the gospel through the work of the Spirit. God chose the work of the Spirit to be the means by which people are regenerated upon hearing and accepting the gospel. As commented elsewhere, there is no choosing of people for either heaven or hell by some alleged eternal decree of God that ignores human free will. But there is God's choosing the method by which we become saved. Paul expressly states that this is all by means of the gospel. As with the account in Acts 11:18, God has chosen not only Jews but also Gentiles for this salvation.

From another angle: If it is said that God chooses these people at Thessalonica, does it imply He has chosen no other? Not at all; that is poor logic. Of course God chose the Thessalonians — since they came to him in faith. There would be no point in praising the people for their spiritual growth or encouraging them to strive for more, unless these things were matters of free will.

2:16–3:5 Prayer and praise

Paul asks for continued prayer and assures the people that the Master will strengthen and guard them from the evil one. Along with that, they are to watch out for any believer who gets out of line. They should instead follow Paul's example in integrity that he showed among them.

3:6–12 Warnings and examples

Specifically, Paul commanded that if anyone won't work, they should not eat. Laziness is not a Christian virtue! Today things are

complicated by government handouts, but this does not absolve the churches of holding to Paul's command. If anyone is a believer and is truly in need, the church should be taking care of them. Had the churches consistently practiced this, no believer would ever have to go on government welfare.

3:13–15 Perseverance

Finally, Paul tells them not to lose heart. Even the simplest encouragement can lift a person up, so we would do well to keep an eye out for the discouraged and help them. But for those who refuse to listen to sound instruction, Paul commands us not to associate with them. We cannot look the other way and pretend all is well; we must face problems and deal with them.

3:14–18 Final blessing and greetings

Paul signs off with his own handwriting, as a stamp of authenticity. This was especially important in this case, seeing that the whole purpose of the letter in the first place was to silence people who were faking letters from him.

1 Corinthians

The first letter to the Corinthians was written around 55 AD by Paul while he was in Ephesus on his third missionary trip. There were four letters: the "previous" letter (see 1 Cor. 5:9), 1 Corinthians, the "severe" letter (see 2 Cor. 2:4 and 7:8–9), and 2 Corinthians. But it is possible that the two we have include the other two.

Outline

1. 1:1–9 Greetings
2. Divisions
 1. 1:10–13a Misconceptions about leaders
 2. 1:13b–2:16 Misconceptions about salvation
 3. 3:1–4 Immaturity and worldliness
 4. 3:5–23 The temple of God
 5. 4:1–21 The servants of God
3. Christian Living
 1. 5:1–13 Purity and discipline
 2. 6:1–8 Legal disputes among believers
 3. 6:9–20 No license to sin
4. Domestic Issues
 1. 7:1–9 Marriage decisions and rights
 2. 7:10–16 Divorce
 3. 7:17–24 The relative unimportance of social constructs

4. 7:25–40 The unmarried
5. Freedom, rights, and consideration
 1. **A** 8:1–3 Love vs. knowledge and rights
 2. – **B** 8:4–8 Food and sacrifices
 3. — **C** 8:9–13 Stumbling blocks
 4. — **X** 9:1–27 Deferring rights out of love
 1. **Xa** 9:1–18 Paul's self-defense as an apostle
 2. **Xb** 9:19–27 Evangelistic strategies
 5. — **C'** 10:1–14 Stumbling blocks
 6. – **B'** 10:15–22 Food and sacrifices
 7. **A'** 10:23–11:1 Love vs. knowledge and rights
6. Symbolism and propriety in the Assembly
 1. **A** 11:2 Keeping the right traditions
 2. – **B** 11:3 Origins
 3. — **X** 11:4–10 Head coverings
 4. – **B'** 11:11–15 Origins
 5. **A'** 11:16 Not keeping the wrong traditions
7. The Community of Believers
 1. 11:17–34 Meeting and eating
 2. 12:1–31 The Holy Spirit and the Body
 3. 13:1–13 The greatest quality
 4. 14:1–25 The greatest gift
 5. 14:26–40 Order in the meetings

8. The Gospel
 1. 15:1–10 Evidence for the gospel
 2. 15:11–49 Implications of the gospel
 1. 15:11–19 Resurrection
 2. 15:20–28 Death and life
 3. 15:29–34 Immersion (baptism)
 4. 15:35–49 Old and new bodies
 3. 15:50–58 Our ultimate hope
9. 16:1–9 Believers helping each other
10. 16:10–18 Personal recommendations
11. 16:19–24 Greetings

Comments

1:1–9 Greetings

In spite of the criticisms to follow, Paul begins with the positive. This letter is to the saved, which is an important thing to remember while reading the rest of the letter. In spite of their faults, the Corinthian believers were considered holy by virtue of their being "in the Anointed One" alone. Some people would have us believe there are some Christians who will not go to heaven or will wind up in some kind of limbo, but here we see that our holiness does not depend on us at all, but on the finished work of the Anointed One. Once we are "in the Anointed One Jesus", there is no argument to be made about dividing believers into "holy" and "not holy". Disciples and carnal yes, but not sanctified and unsanctified.

Notice also that these people eagerly wait for our Master Jesus the Anointed One to be revealed. This, I think, is a pivotal

"fruit" of salvation, a basic expectation from all who claim to be saved. A person who has been made holy by faith in Jesus will look forward to seeing him face to face. Yet many today seem indifferent; they couldn't care less. And some even doubt that Jesus will actually return at all, preferring to spiritualize or allegorize the scriptures to mean some vague idea of restoring peace in society. Sidetracked and backslidden as the Corinthians may have been, they at least believed that Jesus would someday return for them. Can we say that about today's Christians?

Eternal Security support is found in the statements that God will keep us firm to the end and that God is faithful. Again, our guarantee of salvation is found not in us but in Jesus.

Divisions

The community of believers in Corinth was splintered into many factions. Paul will now deal with the causes of these divisions and explain why they are wrong.

1:10–13a Misconceptions about leaders

Just as the ancient Israelites demanded a human king to follow, the people here were lining up behind various leaders. They were treating leaders like the world does and forming sects, apparently around the ritual of water immersion. But Paul will now remind them of what the gospel is and how each person relates to others.

1:13b–2:16 Misconceptions about salvation

Immersion in water is downplayed and separated from the Gospel. Interesting that Paul says the Anointed One did not send him to immerse, since in the Great Commission Jesus commanded his disciples to do exactly that. But the Great Commission, although after the Cross, was before Pentecost, and thus before the church age, and also before the revealing of "the mystery" to Paul

(Colossians 1:26). It is therefore possible that Jesus' command is for the Jews only. Paul did immerse the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), who was not a Jew. But this was a common practice in many parts of the world at that time, and signified a person's being recognized as part of a particular group. So it would seem that Paul neither ordered nor condemned it. And we can't forget that Paul was himself a Jew, yet he was not sent to immerse. I must conclude that it was not an issue to Paul, so the Great Commission may not be applicable to everyone at all times.

Here we also see that such worldly "wisdom" is made to look foolish. It is "the foolishness of what was proclaimed" that God chose to use as the method of spreading the gospel, not high philosophy. Such emphasis on what makes sense to carnal minds takes away the power of the cross and gives glory to people instead of to God. Yet this problem has always plagued the community of believers. Paul further develops this point in appealing to what the Corinthians had formerly been. They were not saved by high-sounding arguments but by the power of the simple gospel. Educated as Paul was, he did not use his human credentials to win people over. Yet wisdom is used for those who have already been saved and who have shown a desire to grow spiritually.

Paul defines the wisdom he's been talking about as not philosophy but the "mystery" of the gospel revealed. He explains that God hid the plan of salvation from everyone so that Jesus would be crucified for our sins, to fulfill prophecy and seal our redemption. This is the mystery, the wisdom of God, which Paul was given to reveal. He then points out that it is God's Spirit that reveals mysteries and wisdom. This is most definitely not, as some teach, saying that lost people cannot understand the gospel message. They teach that God has to "regenerate" them first and use this passage as a proof text. But the context supports no such thing. It only says that the "soulish" (Gk. *psukikos*) cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. There is no justification for interpreting "soulish" as necessarily "unsaved", especially given the context. Instead, Paul is referring to maturity

in the faith, per verse 6. This will be further supported in the following section.

3:1–4 Immaturity and worldliness

After defining spiritual maturity, Paul points out the Corinthians' lack of it. They, although definitely saved, have not grown to maturity but remain as infants. They are the ones who cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are worldly, acting like the unsaved. The same wording (soulish and spiritual) is used for them as was used for the preceding discussion of the mature and immature in general.

3:5–23 The temple of God

Then Paul dismantles the pedestals the people had erected for various leaders. The people were trying to do what the vast majority of "churchians" have done since the apostles died: construct a hierarchy, a class distinction between clergy and laity. Yes, these leaders were their foundation and source, but that is all. They were simply doing their jobs. Though Paul laid the foundation, he himself was not that foundation, but Jesus. In other words, he presented the gospel to them. Now, the people were to build on that foundational truth.

But Paul cautions them on the care with which they must build. Using the illustration of a building set on fire, he tells them that what they do with this gospel will be tested for its worth and strength and quality. These, Paul explains in vs. 13, are people's works or deeds. Vs. 14 tells us of the "pay" the builders will receive as a result of the testing. Clearly, this all is indicative of earned wages, not received gifts. A sharp distinction must be made between the two. Notice again that Paul is talking to and about saved people, as shown in vs. 15. To experience loss is not the loss of salvation, but the loss of wages or rewards.

Referring back to his earlier discussion of worldly wisdom, Paul relates it to the Corinthians' worldliness and rebukes them

again for their immaturity. They, like us, needed to keep things in proper order between God and people, and not to put people between others and God. Having exposed the root of the problems the Corinthian church was experiencing, Paul is now ready to deal with specific "branches".

4:1–21 The servants of God

After reminding the Corinthians not to put people on pedestals, Paul gets to the matter of judgmentalism and the presumptuous false apostles. He begins by addressing the problem of their jumping to conclusions before knowing both sides of the dispute.

But then things get dicey. Paul launches a sarcastic rant about their self-sufficiency and superiority to him. He then holds up as proof of his authority and sincerity the price he and Apollos have paid for being true apostles, and how they have stood up in the face of persecution and hardship. Yet Paul's motive is not to embarrass them, but to warn them. He appeals to them as a father to his wayward children, and urges them to follow in his footsteps.

The Corinthians had become arrogant, and Paul challenges them to put their money where their mouth is. He would soon come to them personally and face his accusers, to see if they can "talk the talk" to his face. But he wants to do more than talk; he will see whether these people have any real spiritual power. He gives them a choice in the meantime: clean up your act or suffer my wrath.

Christian Living

Now Paul turns to deal with specific moral lapses, some of which were even worse than what the lost would tolerate.

5:1–13 Purity and discipline

In their worldliness and arrogance, the Corinthians had sunk lower than the surrounding pagans. There was incest in the "camp", and the people were proud! This sounds eerily like today's churches, where perversion is seen as "enlightened" (echos of Gnosticism). Paul invokes the authority given him by Jesus and orders them to hand the man over to Satan, "for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved".

This is an interesting concept: a believer is to be excommunicated for the purpose of punishing the 'flesh'. Many versions translate the Greek word *sarkos* (flesh) as "the sinful nature" but this is misleading and inaccurate (and inconsistent; they'll translate it as sometimes flesh and other times sinful nature). Some assume that lost people have dead natures, not just corrupt bodies. Yet the immediate context is clear that the sin being dealt with is very much about the flesh, the body. Elsewhere Paul speaks of sexual sin as "against your own body" (6:18) and many passages relate other sins to the body as well (Rom. 6:6,12, 8:10,13).

There is no doubt about the dual "nature" of saved people. We are both physical and spiritual, battling sin while possessing the Spirit. Paul lamented about this very thing extensively in Romans 7, and he speaks of "this body of death". Yet no one would dare accuse Paul of being lost! So when we are saved we are "born of the Spirit", yet we are still contained in this body of sin. The flesh battles the spirit (Gal. 5:17) and is the source of our struggle against sin.

So what Paul intends is for this separation to motivate the sinner to take control of his flesh and stop allowing it to rule. This will "save" his spirit. Is this to be understood as salvation in the sense of the man being "born again" – again? No, and the context tells us why. Not all instances of saving have to do with being saved from hell. Didn't Paul just finish illustrating how our deeds will be judged? And this sinner was to be put out of the fellowship, **not** put out of the Body. Sin among believers is contagious so Paul has the man quarantined to protect the other believers. We'll see in

his next letter further evidence that the man was not lost but separated, and eventually restored to fellowship.

Note that this is not Gnosticism, such that the body should be treated with either extreme physical deprivation or extreme immorality, depending on the sect. Some of them say that because the flesh is inherently evil, we should punish it and treat it harshly, while others of them say we should not care what we do with it. Either way, they seem to agree that Jesus could not have come "in the flesh" because of it, which is heresy. Yet corrupt though the flesh is and given its continual pull toward sin, Jesus never gave in to it. He was tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Satan appealed to Jesus' physical hunger among other things, a need of the flesh. So while physical bodies pull us toward sin, we are not obligated to let them rule over us (Rom. 6:12).

So the key difference between the Gnostic view of the flesh and the Biblical view is what we do about it. The Gnostics erroneously thought to try either harsh treatment of the body (Col. 2:23) or indulgence in evil, but we are commanded to resist sin and not let our flesh have its way with us. Only Jesus ever succeeded, but we are obligated to try. This struggle gives us strength and is one way in which we are forged and purified by God.

Paul also distinguishes between how we deal with believers and unbelievers. Avoiding sin is simply not possible in the world; how else would we permeate the culture as "salt and light"? Instead, Paul clarifies that to not associate with immoral people only refers to within the fellowship of believers. The key here is if they claim to be fellow believers yet indulge in sin. We are not to associate with them in any way. It is inside the fellowship that we must judge, even to the point of throwing people out.

6:1–8 Legal disputes among believers

Now Paul turns to the matter of internal disputes. The Corinthians were suing each other. Paul reminds them that as people who in the coming age would judge the world and also

judge angels, they should surely be able to settle trivial matters among themselves. Instead, they were going to secular courts and thereby bringing shame on the fellowship. And the root of the problem was the same as the one behind their bickering about leaders: they were worldly and immature. It would be better to just take being wronged than to go to unbelievers for judgments.

6:9–20 No license to sin

Speaking of doing wrong, Paul reminds them that people who practice such things as a way of life will not inherit the kingdom of God. But don't be too quick to decide what that means, since it is debatable. Does it refer to salvation of the soul or to loss of rewards? The immediate context is not decisive, but I think we can get some help from Colossians 2:20 which says "Since you died with the Anointed One to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules...?" In other words, the Corinthians were saved but were acting like they weren't, like they did before being saved.

So Paul is not warning them they could lose their salvation, but reprimanding them for acting like unbelievers. Notice he points out that "that is what some of you were". They were backsliding into their former lifestyles. But Paul reminds them that they had been "washed... sanctified... justified in the name of the Master Jesus the Anointed One". And notice that homosexuality is listed as being something "some of you were, but...". Here we have Biblical proof that it is not an inherited trait but a sinful lifestyle, and one that the blood of Jesus can make clean. People can no more justify homosexuality for Christians than they can justify greed or drunkenness or slander or swindling. By the same token, the swindlers and greedy cannot look down their noses at the homosexuals. Sin is sin is sin!

Evidently the Corinthians were flaunting their rights and freedoms, not just backsliding. They were proud of their sin and wanted everyone to know. The wording in vs. 13 hints at the Gnostic indulgence idea discussed earlier, but Paul counters with

how God views the body as opposed to the Gnostic view. He goes further to reveal that our bodies are "members of the Anointed One himself", and that "you are not your own; you were bought at a price".

We see in this section the word "flesh" again, and this time in reference to Genesis. Many today have the distorted notion that marriage unites people's spirits, but it doesn't say that. It says "the two become one **flesh**". And it is this principle that Paul appeals to as the reason for sexual purity and faithfulness to one's spouse. Our spirits unite with God, but our bodies unite with each one we are intimate with. This effectively throws the Corinthians' indulgence theory into the trash.

Notice also that our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit". We have no need of external constructed buildings or shrines or holy places. Jesus said that "where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them" (Mt. 18:20). Personally, I think that "gathering in Jesus' name" means meeting with other believers just because we are believers. That is, I wouldn't call it "meeting in Jesus' name" if two believers happen to eat together or something like that, but only if they met for the purpose of spiritual matters. Paul has more to say about such meetings elsewhere.

Domestic Issues

Marriage and divorce have always been controversial topics, but we must be careful to understand the context. For example, when Jesus was asked about divorce (Mt. 19:3), there was much more to the question than meets the eye. About the time of Jesus' birth, a new type of divorce called the Any Cause divorce was invented.⁸ The phrase in Deuteronomy originally only meant unfaithfulness, but a legal loophole was created by dividing it up into two separate grounds for divorce: unfaithfulness and "a cause".

8. D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*, IVP Books, November 30, 2006

A rabbi called Hillel argued: why did God use the phrase "cause of sexual immorality" when he could merely have said "sexual immorality"? The word "cause" must refer to another separate ground for divorce he decided meant "Any Cause". But the disciples of Shammai disagreed with this reasoning and said the whole phrase "a cause of sexual immorality" meant exactly what it said: "Sexual Immorality". (And of course, if God had meant "any cause", then the other stipulations were redundant too.)

So what Jesus was being asked was very specific: was the Any Cause divorce interpretation legitimate? His answer was clearly No. But at the same time, neither was Jesus making a statement that meant divorce had no legitimate grounds except for marital unfaithfulness. If we study the entirety of the Law, we see that it also included various forms of neglect as well. But remember that this all pertains to Israel; Paul will give more details about this for Christians.

7:1–9 Marriage decisions and rights

Paul now tries to clarify statements he had made earlier which the Corinthians had apparently misunderstood. They had the notion that Paul considered all sex bad. So he explains that what he meant was that marriage puts extra burdens on people that distract them from spiritual things. Yet at the same time, most people cannot accept singleness as Paul could, a condition he called a "gift". He explains that both husbands and wives must be considerate of each other's needs and not force abstinence on each other.

7:10–16 Divorce

Paul is not using the singular here as we might today, such as in saying, "A child is not an adult until the age of 21." Remember that he prefaced this section with the statement that he is addressing questions the Corinthians had asked (7:1), and there are other instances in Paul's writings where he suddenly switches from the plural to the singular which indicates specific individuals.

Here, Paul's instructions seem too specific to be taken generically; they include no general statements or cover any of the possible situations that can cause marital discord. Note the statements in the preceding sentence about those who "cannot control themselves", and the preceding paragraph, which talks about "each man" and "each woman"; there is no such grammar for this married couple. And the next paragraph is directed "to the rest", giving additional weight to his not having addressed all married couples here.

The statement "and this is not from me but from the Master" does not indicate whether what Paul is about to say is divinely inspired or not; it simply means he had a direct command from Jesus about it. No one would insist that all the rest of the Bible was dictated verbatim by God, but would agree that the Holy Spirit prompted His words to be written through the writer's own personality. So when Paul says he is giving a command from the Master, he was given that command expressly. Otherwise, he simply wrote as he was inspired.

Look closely at vs. 15: there is an important principle given here, which Paul offers as a kind of catch-all for the gray areas. The most important thing in marriage is to live in peace. People tend to take Paul's meaning here backwards. He's not saying "Stick with it in the hope you will save your spouse"; but "Don't keep beating a dead horse". In other words, the emphasis is on the fact that we *don't* know whether the spouse will ever be saved; we can't make it happen. He wants people to show mercy to unbelievers who want to leave, and not live in discord just in case the spouse might someday be saved.

7:17–24 The relative unimportance of social constructs

Believers shouldn't be overly concerned about their past or present situation in life, unless it clearly violates the Christian principles listed earlier ("that is what some of you were"). God never commanded Christians to live in deprivation or isolation from the world. How else would we be "salt and light"?

7:25–40 The unmarried

Some take Paul's statements in vs. 25–35 as being about specific and strict rules on marriage— in spite of what he just got done saying. They also try to use it to justify the custom of parents choosing spouses for their children, as if it were an eternal command. Remember that these letters weren't written in a vacuum. Paul is writing to a particular group of people in a particular cultural setting, a fact that will be even more significant later on the topic of women in the church. This section is simply an elaboration on the earlier statements about the pressures married people face and is really very simple. Paul repeats that people should carefully consider whether to get married, and if they decide to do so, they should follow his guidelines, as he says in vs. 35.

In vs. 36–40 Paul appears to be addressing specific situations there in Corinth, the first being a man who isn't sure whether he should marry, and the second being a woman whose husband is apparently near death. She needed to know what she should do in that case, especially if she were Jewish and would otherwise be obligated to marry a brother of her husband in order to produce heirs. Paul says that the Christian women are not obligated to honor this law, especially if it would mean having to marry an unbeliever.

Freedom, rights, and consideration

At this point Paul presents his defense concerning his rights and authority as an apostle. He will build up from a question about food offered to idols to the broader question of how and when Christians should exercise their rights, then back to the original question in light of his argument.

A 8:1–3 Love vs. knowledge and rights

To preface what he is about to say, Paul gives the overarching principle that the humility of love is superior to the conceit of knowledge. What he tells them about meat offered to idols is to be understood in that light.

B 8:4–8 Food and sacrifices

Although everything really comes from God, and what we eat is irrelevant to our spirits, many people said to have a "weak conscience" still think of certain foods being off limits. In spite of our the Christian right to eat anything we choose, we need to be considerate of those with a weak conscience when it comes to matters like this that have no bearing on spiritual things. This same principle on how to handle "disputable matters" is covered in more detail in Romans 14.

C 8:9–13 Stumbling blocks

The principle of love will prevent us from hurting others in exercising our rights. Though the "strong" may know that there is nothing wrong with eating such meat, it becomes wrong when flaunted in front of those who used to worship idols and want to keep well away from that. They would be emboldened to violate their consciences. So the strong must defer to the weak in these cases. Paul has established this principle not only to answer a question put to him, but also in support of the defense he is about to make concerning his being an apostle.

X 9:1–27 Deferring rights out of love**Xa 9:1–18 Paul's self-defense as an apostle**

Now arriving at the crux of his presentation, Paul expresses his indignation against the false apostles who are criticizing him

and his authority. He demands to know why he and Apollos are not allowed the same rights as other believers, such as bringing their spouses along or being financially supported in their journeys. Regarding pay, he appeals to the Law and to his being the Corinthians' spiritual "father". Yet although he proves his right to support and respect, he has laid those aside just to keep the people from being burdened.

Xb 9:19–27 Evangelistic strategies

Paul's point is all about lack of obligation. He is not constrained by any situation, leaving him free to take any needed angle for the purpose of convincing people to accept the good message of salvation. It is important to point this out because many take his words to be an acceptance of all religions, known as ecumenism. But nothing could be farther from the truth; Paul was very clear on the need to be intolerant of any compromise of the gospel. It is Paul who is winning them over to salvation, not them winning him over to their religions.

But even in this, we must not forget basic principles of salvation. This "prize" Paul is referring to is not salvation but reward, as indicated by his reference to qualification. Since salvation is a gift it cannot be earned and we cannot qualify for it. So since Paul is talking about something to qualify for, it must be something other than salvation. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to do more than sit on their salvation, but to strain for the goal by deferring when possible, by being considerate, by looking for the good of others.

C' 10:1–14 Stumbling blocks

The first five verses are a backdrop to the point Paul will make next. He just finished discussing the need to "run to win" and the problem of false apostles. Now he is about to issue a warning from history. But note that while it is said that "all of them were immersed into Moses", they were never literally dunked in water.

In fact, God made a point of not allowing it! They were kept dry crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan River. So any attempt to tie this passage into some requirement for being immersed in water (baptized) is erroneous. The Israelites were fully immersed into all this because they experienced it, and it also had spiritual symbolic meaning.

Now Paul plainly states that what happened to Israel in the past was to serve as a warning, and then he lists specific sins including testing the Messiah or even grumbling against him. We must be careful not to get over confident in our spirituality or standing among other believers. We are always being tempted, but if we just keep our eyes open for the way of escape God provides, we can avoid making the same mistakes as the Israelites.

B' 10:15–22 Food and sacrifices

Back in chapter 8 Paul brought up the matter of food offered to idols, and he pointed out the need for being considerate of those with a weaker conscience. But now he approaches the same subject from another angle: that it is not only individuals we need to consider, but also society. For the sake of their reputation among the lost, Paul recommends that all the believers stay clear of anything that might give society the impression that they have anything to do with idols. He contrasts the food offered to them with the bread and wine used to remember the Master.

It's important to note that this is not an establishing of the ritual known as "communion" either, or calling this ritual a "sacrifice" per the Roman Catholic definition. Paul is simply wanting to make a distinction between idol worship and the Christian gatherings, and he's saying it to the Corinthian believers. He already made it clear that this is all a matter of conscience and will go over it again in the following verses.

Some say Paul is contradicting himself here. Before, he said that idols are nothing (repeated here also), such that eating food that had been offered to them in sacrifice is not wrong in itself. But now he says "You cannot eat at the table of the Master and of

demons". Note first of all that Paul just finished talking about "partnership" (the accurate meaning of *koinonia*, typically translated "communion"), that is, immersion. So if the eating of food offered to idols is done as part of a ceremony or ritual, that would make it wrong. In other words, to eat such meat along with those who are considering it a sacrifice is wrong, but not to eat it when simply sold to anyone in the marketplace.

A' 10:23–11:1 Love vs. knowledge and rights

We see it all tied together in 10:31: whatever you do, do it to glorify God. The goal is to get people saved and spiritually matured, not to flaunt our freedom or wave our strong faith in the faces of the weak. This is the point we need to keep in mind as we read all of this. Those who scour these verses for black-and-white rules search in vain. Those who would use these verses as clubs with which to beat down other believers completely miss the intent of the writings.

Just as it would be wrong for an individual to eat meat sacrificed to idols if the person serving it warned them, it would also be wrong for the the Christian community to appear to participate in the worship of idols in the eyes of society. We must be considerate of their weak consciences and remember the greater goal of winning them to the gospel. So in both cases (chapters 8 and 10), Paul is saying that we should not go out of our way to find out where the meat came from, but if anyone has a problem with our eating it, we must abstain. This principle would be the same no matter what the topic or time of history, but we can use this as a guideline. Glorify God instead of self. This has been Paul's example, and the the Christian community would do well to follow it.

Symbolism and propriety in the Assembly

This was an important issue to discuss because of what a head covering symbolized at the time. A Jewish man was to cover his

head as a sign of guilt before God, but Jesus took that guilt away for his followers. So for a Christian man to cover his head in worship would be insulting to the sacrifice of Jesus. But for a Christian woman to uncover her head would be a sign of loose morals. What should she do then, especially if her husband were an unbeliever? If she covers she shames Jesus but if she doesn't she shames her husband. This is the backdrop to what Paul will advise.

A 11:2 Keeping the right traditions

Paul begins with the positive: the Corinthians had been following traditions he had given them. But they had a question about head coverings that needed to be clarified.

B 11:3 Origins

The Greek word for "head", *kephale*, is translated here as "source" unless it clearly refers to a literal physical head. In the culture of Paul's day, it was believed that the body grew out of the head, and thus that the head was the source or origin of the body. They never used "head" as a representation of rule or authority.⁹ Notice also the order: source of man, source of woman, source of Anointed One. Adam was created first, then Eve, and then the Savior came through her "seed". More weight is given to this interpretation when Paul writes, "Yet at the same time, the woman is the glory of man, because she came from man and was made for him". If hierarchy had been intended, then certainly the order would be God, then the Anointed One, then people.

Paul is known for using plays on words, and we have a prime example here which really doesn't translate well. If we use "head" people read into it the meaning "boss" but we can get the play on words; if we use "source" people get the proper meaning of "head" but we lose the play on words. The play on words is shown by

9. S. Bedale, *The Meaning of kephale in the Pauline Epistles*, Journal of Theological Studies, 5, 1951

Paul's use of head to preface the discussion of head coverings for the Christian women.

X 11:4–10 Head coverings

Although it is uncertain, I believe Paul quotes the Corinthians in vs. 4–6. They are presenting the problem the Christian women were facing, concerning the impossible position this put them in, as already mentioned. To uncover was to indicate loose morals, so they needed to know how to handle this.

Paul responds first by agreeing that men should not cover, which of course would not cause any social problem. But then he reminds them of the reason men should not cover: they are the glory of God. And if one who is the glory of another must not cover, then as the glory of man, women must not cover either. Paul also points out the reason that woman is man's glory: she came from him and was made for him. Note that he makes the statement in the context of glory— *not* of authority or hierarchy. She was not made for him to be an inferior assistant, but as the Hebrew indicates in Gen. 2:18, a "strong one facing him" (Heb. *ezer kenegdo*, an equal coming to one's aid). (And neither is she somehow not made in God's image as men; being the glory of man does not negate her being in the image of God.)

So as the equal of man, being of the same flesh, woman is not to cover her head. For that reason she has the authority (Gk. *exousion*) to decide for herself what to do. This is the first time Paul mentions authority or power or rank, and the woman has it for herself. Neither a man nor the community of believers is to tell her what to do, especially since she is the one who may suffer reprisal over this. Yet Paul also gives a second reason: "because of the Messengers" (the Greek word *angelos* means messenger). What does this mean?

Many theories have been proposed, such as that the angels would be moved to lust at the sight of a woman without a head covering. This is preposterous; such angels would only be moved to lust in a worship setting? And since both men and women can

grow long hair (next section), why would this lead to lust? Would the good angels attending such a worship service be moved to lust at all? Clearly this proposal makes no sense at all. Instead, there are two very good possibilities.

One is that Paul mentioned believers judging angels in 1 Cor. 6:3, so he is saying that since women are not excluded from this, then surely they can be trusted to judge on the matter of whether or not to cover their own heads. Another is that it could refer to the practice at the time whereby Rome would send spies or "messengers" into various gatherings in order to report whether rebellion was being taught. Women uncovering their heads in worship would have been seen as subversive. So Paul could be saying, "The women should cover their heads anyway, just for the sake of not getting us accused of sedition." Yet if this were the reason for covering, then surely Paul would have commanded it instead of leaving it up to the women.

B' 11:11-15 Origins

Now back to origins or sources. After talking about glory and chronological order, Paul reminds the people that everyone comes from God. We are not independent as believers; we are one Body with one Head. If origins or chronology were important, Paul would not have had to point out that ever since Eve, all men have come from women. He is strongly putting the notion of chronology-based hierarchy to rest.

Paul again reprimands the Corinthians for their inability to judge trivial matters, and what he says here about it is almost always translated backwards. It does **not** say that nature tells us long hair is bad for men but good for women. It says, "Look at nature; both men and women can grow long hair. Nature teaches only that they are the same when it comes to head coverings."

A' 11:16 Not keeping the wrong traditions

Finally, Paul tells them that none of the Assemblies has any such custom about the significance of head coverings. It is clearly not one of Paul's traditions.

The Community of Believers

Now Paul turns to matters of concern only among believers, especially questions about spiritual gifts.

11:17–34 Meeting and eating

In contrast to his positive statement about their following his traditions, here Paul reprimands them for something they're doing very badly, meeting together, and he begins by addressing their common meals.

Apparently "the Master's supper" was a full meal which included using the wine and bread as a simple way to remember Jesus' sacrifice for them. But the people were turning it into an act of gluttony, ignoring the poor and getting drunk. (Note that this wine was indeed alcoholic.) Instead of honoring the Master, they were shaming him. Paul reminds them of the point of sharing bread and wine. This is not, as the churches have always practiced it, a prescription for ritualistic repeating of Paul's words. There is no command for us to repeat these verses when remembering Jesus. The whole point is all about the heart, about remembrance, about honoring Jesus. Its purpose is to "proclaim the Master's death until he comes".

This is the meaning behind vs. 27 where it talks about people eating and drinking disrespectfully. Note that people are to examine themselves, not face an inquisition from church leaders. God took care of those who made a mockery of the sacrifice of his Son! Some were sick and others were killed because of this flippant attitude toward God and mistreatment of the poor among them. Remember that Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) were killed

for lying to the Holy Spirit. Instead, the people were to avoid God's judgment by judging themselves, and they were to all eat together to make sure nobody went home hungry.

12:1–31 The Holy Spirit and the Body

Paul begins by stating that at the very least we can discern the spirit behind a teaching by how it views Jesus. No one who would curse Jesus could possibly be of God, and no one can honestly call Jesus The Master without having the Holy Spirit. This is more than just saying the words "Jesus is Master", but instead indicates one's personal conviction.

I really don't think Paul intended for these lists of spiritual gifts to be all-encompassing or technical. He seems to be picking out random, off-the-cuff ministries that can be active in the body of believers. This is indicated by his opening statement that it all comes from one Spirit, one source. More importantly, Paul gives the purpose of these spiritual gifts: to build up other believers and serve them. And we are not to say that the Spirit can only give this gift or that, to one person or another, as he will explain next.

Paul gives the analogy of the human body as a means of understanding how the various spiritual gifts fit together. He first emphasizes the fact that it is one Body, one organism, one unit. All the parts are made of the same substance and get their life from one Head. The head is of the same substance as the body though, and cannot live without it. Conversely, the body cannot live without the head. If a part is missing, the body is crippled and not whole. One part cannot say to another, "I don't need you!"

It all seems so obvious— until we apply it to what goes on in the typical "church". One part does indeed say to another, "I don't need you!". Believers with one gift will ignore or despise those with other gifts. People will assume that only one "part" has a particular gift. The "pastor" is held up as the only one with discernment and prophecy and vision, ignoring others who may also have these gifts. Surely the Body is hopping on one leg and has one hand tied behind its back!

Paul then points out that our ideas of importance are not God's. The parts we deem weak or unnecessary may be the most vital, and the ones we think are most important are nothing special. Paul tells us that God did this deliberately, so that no part of the Body would feel superior to another part. We are individual parts of one Body, not identical spokes in a wheel or interchangeable machine components. All parts have equal access to the Head; all are directly a part of the Body and not secondary or inferior parts. Then Paul specifically mentions some parts that apparently the Corinthians held up as special or prominent. He reminds them that the body of believers is more than its eyes, more than its hands. In fact, he will downplay those gifts assumed to be superior and show them what parts are really the most vital, the "weak" parts.

13:1–13 The greatest quality

This is undoubtedly one of the more familiar passages of scripture in the New Testament, the "love" chapter. Paul gives a definition of real spiritual love before showing its place in the Body. It is the foundation of all the gifts. But believers seem to forget this, especially when it comes to dealing with each other. Many clamor for having their own way, for making others follow their particular "vision" or goal. But if they truly love others they will not "demand their own way".

Ignoring the context, many take Paul's statements about gifts that cease as some kind of doctrinal thesis. He is not saying which (if any) spiritual gifts would cease with the death of the apostles (cessationism). They try to make "that which is complete" into some wedge by which they can claim speaking in "tongues" is a thing of the past, by making the New Testament "that which is complete". This is a prime example of being given an inch and taking a mile. The context simply doesn't go anywhere near the idea of putting restrictions or time constraints on the Spirit, or identifying exactly what is meant by "that which is complete".

All he seems to be saying is that the gifts are for this life and not heaven, and that the only things we have now that we'll still

have in heaven are faith, hope, and love. He has mentioned the problem of immaturity before, and here he seems to present the spiritual gifts as things which are needed until we reach maturity.

With that in mind, Paul will now get to the matter of "speaking in tongues" as compared to prophecy.

14:1–25 The greatest gift

With love as both the basis and the ultimate goal, Paul gives the purpose of the gifts: to build up the Body. This lengthy chapter begins with a discussion of "speaking in tongues". There is strong disagreement among scholars over whether these "tongues" or languages are real human languages that the speaker has not learned, or the languages of angels, or possibly a "Holy Spirit" language. Whatever they are, they are of supernatural origin.

In this section, Paul stresses the importance of mental understanding as opposed to only an experience. The purpose of all the spiritual gifts is to build up the church, not to just be absorbed by individuals. Without interpretation there is no understanding, and without understanding there is no building up of the church. Self-improvement is fine but it must include other-improvement as well.

With another quick reference to the Corinthians' lack of maturity, Paul explains that these languages are a sign for unbelievers, while prophecy is for believers. What sign is this? Possibly just to indicate to unbelievers the presence of God among the believers. It's possible that miraculous signs of any kind are more prevalent when there is either little access to the written scriptures or when the unbelievers are spiritually blinded to the point that the words alone cannot get through. Jesus had said that "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign!" (Mt. 12:39), giving further weight to this. In general, miracles seem to accompany times when God is about to do something new, a change in the way he deals with mankind, or to signify an important event. So Paul is telling them that sign gifts are not of

primary importance in the church, and in fact are relatively useless. Many churches today would do well to realize this.

14:26–40 Order in the meetings

In all the New Testament, very little is said about how, when, and where believers should assemble together. Along with Jesus' statement that "you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-23), we have to conclude that the practices of churches throughout history have born little resemblance to anything found in the NT. Conspicuous by their absence are the ideas of special buildings, pulpits, altars, or a clergy class ruling over a passive laity in a perpetual parent/child relationship.

In contrast, as we see here, the Christian gatherings were meetings where everyone participated and used their various spiritual gifts. The spiritually mature were to guide and teach the less mature, and prophets would give revelations from God. But Paul is not actually praising them here for their participation in the meetings; he is reprimanding them for the chaotic manner in which they did so. There is to be order in the meetings, but not an order born of ritual or liturgy. Both stilted ritualism and chaos are harmful extremes.

Is every pastor a prophet? Yet we treat them as though they are, frequently saying "Let us hear what message the Master has laid on the pastor's heart for us today". That's prophecy. Yet these alleged prophetic messages from God are really the act of teaching and expounding the scriptures, the result of hours of preparation and research. There's nothing wrong with that at all, but we cannot call it prophecy or assume that every sermon is a revelation from God. And where do we get the idea of sermons anyway? Historically, they have more in common with the ancient Greek and Roman orators than with anything in the Bible. "Pastor" is a spiritual gift, not an office, and no one is ever designated as a perpetual speaker in the Christian gatherings.

Notice that the prophets were to take turns. (There is some question about who exactly is discerning or weighing what the prophets say. Are they other prophets only, or all the people, or any spiritually mature person? Most translations don't specify it, but some lean toward the others being prophets.) This assumes that there were more than one in the assembly, and that their speaking was impromptu as opposed to the typical Sunday sermon with its alliterated 3-point outline. Speaking of which, there is nothing in the New Testament to specify a particular day for these meetings. Granted that "the first day of the week" is mentioned in several places (John 20:19, Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2), but nothing is ever said about it being a prescribed practice for believers of all time regarding their gatherings. There is also no mention of a formal membership list, committees, trustees, etc. Those have more to do with corporations than families.

Remembering the immediate context of order in the meetings, we come to a very controversial passage beginning in vs. 34. But first note that this discussion of order is repeated at the end (vs. 39–40); the intervening discussion could be lifted out without breaking the flow. In fact, because of this, some scholars believe it was either added by later scribes or belongs at the end of chapter 14 instead of where it is. But it will be treated here as a legitimate part of Paul's letter, and in the place he wrote it.

There are no quote marks in Greek, but frequently quoted material is ended with the word *He* and is typically translated as "or", if it is translated at all. We see this word twice in verse 36, and we can tell by the content preceding that Paul is quoting someone else. As just stated, the passage starting in verse 34 and ending with 38 is clearly out of the flow of the discussion about order in the meetings. So we have good indications of both the beginning and ending of the quoted material.

Verses 34 and 35 are the words Paul is quoting. We see "the law" mentioned, yet there is no such statement about women being silent in any of the Old Testament laws; it is in fact seen in the Jewish Talmud.¹⁰ Even if there had been such a law in the Bible, this is the same Paul who wrote passionately against believers

staying under the law in his letter to the Galatians. It also contradicts what Paul wrote elsewhere about women being allowed to prophesy in the meetings. Remember that Paul put forth a lot of effort fighting against the Jews who wanted Christians to submit to circumcision and other requirements of the old law, so it is highly unlikely that he would turn around and appeal to it here.

Paul strongly opposed the silencing of women in the churches. This view is also consistent with his other statements about the prophesying of women in the congregation. Some interpret Paul's rebuttal as being aimed at an *anticipated objection* instead of a quote from the Corinthians. But there is nothing in the rebuttal to indicate this, no such words as "someone will object"; see 15:35 for example.

The Gospel

Paul is about to address the Corinthians' question concerning the resurrection of the dead, but he prefaces it with a definition of the gospel.

15:1–10 Evidence for the gospel

He begins with a statement that some take as meaning salvation can be lost. But it can easily be understood as referring to a misplaced faith, one that was never genuine to begin with. That is why Paul repeats what he had told them earlier, the gospel itself. Had someone already been genuinely saved, they would already know the gospel. (And if we take Heb. 6 as saying it can be lost once but never regained, then there would be no point in repeating the gospel for that reason either.)

Notice four critical components of the gospel: (1) Jesus died for our sins as prophesied, (2) Jesus was buried, (3) Jesus rose again the third day as prophesied, and (4) there were credible witnesses to these things. Our faith is based upon prophecy and eye-witness

account, in the death and resurrection of Jesus who paid for all sin, once and for all (Heb. 7:27). Paul himself was a witness to the risen Jesus, and in a very unique way. So the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead is well-established, and now Paul will build upon that foundation.

15:11–49 Implications of the gospel

The Corinthians seemed to have forgotten their beginnings, their reasons for meeting together. Yet resurrection from the dead is absolutely critical to the faith.

15:11–19 Resurrection

Without there being a resurrection of the dead, not even Jesus was raised, and our faith is useless and without purpose. And all who preach the gospel are then labeled as false witnesses. If our faith is only for this life, then Christians are to be pitied for following a false hope. These are the logical conclusions to disbelief in resurrection. So if the Corinthians had truly believed in the risen Jesus, then they had to also believe in the resurrection of the dead.

15:20–28 Death and life

Now Paul explains why we die at all: sin. It came through one person, Adam (note that Eve is never mentioned here at all). We all die because of him, and Jesus is held up as the direct opposite, the One who would bring life. That the death spoken of here must be physical is based upon the fact that Jesus' death and resurrection were physical, or we'd have to attribute spiritual death to him, which is impossible. Yet Jesus' immortal resurrected body is the "firstfruit", the beginning. The rest of us do not yet have our new immortal bodies but we will surely get them at the right time. And then Death itself will finally be defeated. Again, this must be

physical death, because the spiritually dead will remain so forever once this life is over.

15:29–34 Immersion (baptism)

The controversial statements here are in the context of Paul's argument for physical resurrection and how the Corinthians were not being consistent with their faith in Jesus. So it seems that Paul is addressing yet another one of those inconsistencies. Beyond that is pure speculation, and certainly not an endorsement of rituals for the dead. Paul then expresses his frustration with the Corinthians by saying, "If there's no resurrection, then who cares about anything? Party on and just have fun"— followed by a smack in the face for them to wake up.

15:35–49 Old and new bodies

We can almost see Paul putting his head in his hands and weeping as he ponders their ignorant question, "What kind of body will the raised have?" After telling them what a stupid question this is, Paul patiently teaches them to look around at the obvious. The "planted" body is completely unlike the "raised" body, as anyone should know. Seeds are not at all what they will grow into once planted. But they must be planted in order to change; they must "die" before they can "live" again.

Paul describes the raised human body as a "spiritual body" that bears the image of Jesus (vs. 49). This new body cannot see corruption as the physical one does, and it will not have "flesh and blood". And just as we have all shared in the corrupt flesh of Adam, so also we who believe will all share in the immortal body of Jesus.

15:50–58 Our ultimate hope

Then Paul introduces a new "mystery": not everyone will have to experience physical death! In an instant, we will be

changed from the mortal to the immortal. First the bodies of the dead will be raised in immortal form, and then we who are still alive will be changed. Paul will have more to say about the timing of this glorious event in his letters to the Thessalonians. All he says here is that it will be "at the last trumpet", but there is great controversy over exactly what that means. Whenever that happens, then the scripture will be fulfilled that the "sting of death" will be no more.

16:1–9 Believers helping each other

The Corinthians had asked Paul questions about a collection for "the Master's people", and he responds that they should follow the Galatian practice of setting aside funds on the first day of the week, according to how they have "prospered". Many take this to be an endorsement of the Christian "tithing" and Sunday worship, but does the context support that?

No. First of all, we see that this was a specific collection for the believers in Jerusalem, not something that was practiced continually for all believers. Second, it was to be freely given, not a kind of legalistic tax. In addition, it was to be done in proportion to one's prosperity or increase. As long as your expenses meet or exceed your income, you are not increasing. This was not a way to make some believers comfortable while others would be hard-pressed (2 Cor. 8:13). And there is no indication in the text to support Sunday worship. Nothing is said about corporate worship at all; it only speaks of individuals ("each one of you"), and no mention is made of an "offering plate" or official place to bring these gifts as they were being built up. There is no mention of any group or individual or place that could be considered the equivalent of the Old Testament "storehouse" or altar.

16:10–18 Personal recommendations

Paul orders the Corinthians to respect his emissary Timothy, who we can surmise may not have otherwise received such respect

due to his youth (1 Tim. 4:12). Others are to be respected as well, and again the foundational quality of love is emphasized.

16:19–24 Greetings

Finally, Paul sends along greetings from others, especially the group meeting in the home of Prisca and Aquila. And to guard against the threat of forgery, Paul makes sure to include a greeting in his own handwriting. Note the curse upon foes of Jesus, whom Paul wishes to return soon. We can be assured that these whom Paul would curse are those who have hardened their hearts against the gospel. Yes, there are times when we are not to bless, per Paul's example.

2 Corinthians

The second letter to the Corinthians was written by Paul the same year as the first, around 55 AD. We know from 1 Cor. 2:13 and 7:5 that it was written from Macedonia. The main topic is about Paul establishing his credentials as having authority from Jesus, against accusers among the Corinthians.

Outline

1. 1:1–14 Greetings
2. 1:15–2:3 Defense of Paul's change of itinerary
3. 2:4–11 Instructions on restoring a repentant believer to fellowship
4. 2:12–17 Missionaries and motivation
5. 3:1–6 Establishing credentials
6. 3:7–18 The veil covering Jewish minds
7. 4:1–5:4 Perseverance, boldness, and hope
8. 5:5–10 Faith, sight, and courage
9. 5:11–13 Defending credentials
10. 5:14–6:2 Reconciliation
11. 6:3–10 Added credentials
12. 6:11–7:4a Purity and reconciliation
 1. **A** 6:11–13 Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him
 2. **X** 6:14–18 Unequally bound

3. **A'** 7:1–4a Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him
13. 7:4b–16 Godly sorrow and comfort
14. 8:1–15 Following an example of generosity
15. 8:16–24 Trustworthiness
16. 9:1–15 Living up to a good reputation
17. 10:1–12:13 False missionaries
 1. 10:1–11 A warning to Paul's opponents
 2. 10:12–11:30 A challenge to Paul's opponents
 3. 11:31–12:10 Only Jesus is worthy of boasting
 4. 12:11–13 A comparison to Paul's opponents
18. 12:14–13:4 Three witnesses
19. 13:5–10 Test yourselves
20. 13:11–14 Greetings and final warnings

Comments

1:1–14 Greetings

As with his first letter, Paul begins with the positive. He explains that the things we suffer are partially to make us sympathetic with others who suffer and show them how we get through it. This is good to remember whenever we start thinking Christians aren't supposed to suffer, or that being saved means a life of ease. Paul uses his own experiences as an example of this principle. The Corinthians had been generous with both monetary gifts and prayers.

1:15–2:3 Defense of Paul's change of itinerary

Then Paul mentions his intention to visit them previously but was unable. For this "crime" he was accused of being two-faced! He appeals to their memory of his original presentation of the gospel to them, which he did clearly and without confusion. This should dispel any accusations about his intentions.

The "how" and "why" of the security of the believer is stated in 1:22. We have been sealed and given the Holy Spirit as a down payment on what is to come. Both of these are legal terms: the seal was an official authoritative stamp of authenticity, and the down payment is a guarantee of the eventual completion of a transaction. So every true believer is stamped with the Seal of God, and has a Deposit to guarantee our inheritance, which is eternal life in heaven. Neither of these things depend upon us or have any kind of escape clause. We are not at liberty to revoke either. Remember that Paul had earlier spoken of how we will have our deeds tested, and here he gives further assurance that our deeds have nothing to do with our salvation, but only our rewards.

Notice that Paul says that he and other leaders did not consider themselves masters but co-workers. Many think that authority among believers is all about domination and control, but instead it is about people of varying gifts serving each other. He then explains that he had sent the earlier harsh letter for the purpose of showing how much he cared about them, and that he had no pleasure in having to write such a letter.

2:4–11 Instructions on restoring a repentant believer to fellowship

When Paul uses the singular (someone, a person, a woman) he means a specific individual. There is good support for this also in light of the fact that when Paul discusses a false teacher he names names, but a deceived or ignorant person doesn't get named. This section seems to be addressing the situation of the man practicing incest that Paul had written about before. He is telling the

Corinthians to now restore this repentant man publicly, since he had paid the due penalty for his sin and turned away from it. The devil would have loved nothing more than for this healing believer to be crushed and defeated, and for the others to be hard and proud.

2:12–17 Missionaries and motivation

After briefly mentioning his short visit to Troas, Paul gives an analogy of the believers' effect on the world which parallels that of Jesus' "salt and light" analogy. We are described as "smelling like God". To those who are open to the gospel we are a sweet aroma of life, but to those who are not we are the stench of death. This is good to remember when we witness, since by their reaction to this "smell" we have some idea of whether the lost person is open or not to hearing the gospel. Further, he points out that we are to be sincere in our witnessing, not following the worldly model of marketing.

The idea of marketing the gospel is a great blight on the churches today. Everything is packaged to sell to the masses and appeal to the emotions. The emphasis is now on the experience, on the here and now, instead of on Jesus and his sacrifice for us. We have lost our "scent", our saltiness, our light. People are no longer able to "smell God" in us, so they do not react with revulsion even if they are not open to the true gospel. We were promised persecution, not pampering or popularity!

3:1–6 Establishing credentials

Apparently some at Corinth were demanding that Paul produce some credentials to prove his authority over them. But he reminds them that they themselves are his "letter of recommendation", one written by God. All comes from him, not any human, and the old ways are gone. We are under a new contract or Testament that brings life, as opposed to the old Law that brought death. Yet if even the old Law had its glory, think of what must be the glory of the new Testament! Paul is trying to

express how much superior the new ways are to the old, and he uses it to explain his boldness in speech.

3:7–18 The veil covering Jewish minds

Paul makes the statement that the minds of people are still veiled whenever Moses is read, and some take that to mean they are incapable of accepting the gospel message. But that notion is demolished in the very next statement: when someone turns to the Master, the veil is removed. Fatalism¹¹ would say it exactly backwards: when the veil is removed, someone turns to the Master.

4:1–5:4 Perseverance, boldness, and hope

Paul again testifies to his motives and innocence in declaring the truth to them. But then he refers again to "veiling" and talks about unbelievers being blinded by "the god of this age". Again, some would take this to mean that the devil overrides a person's will so they cannot respond to the gospel. But if this were true Paul would be contradicting himself. The key is found in Romans 1, where we see that God only "gave them over" to depravity after they suppressed the truth (vs. 18). These people had known God but rejected him (vs. 21). Clearly, the Paul that wrote those words would not tell a different story to the Corinthians.

He again points out that it is not himself or his fellow workers but Jesus that is being preached. The same One who said "Let there be light" was shedding light in their minds. Yet this amazing light is held in common pottery so to speak, mere mortals. As such, we are under constant pressure but we must endure it and be found faithful. But of course our strength comes only from God, not ourselves.

As further encouragement, Paul tells them that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us up too.

11. Fatalism: the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable; Calvinism is a form of fatalism in Christianity

Outwardly we appear to be wasting away, but inwardly we keep getting renewed. We keep our eyes fixed on the goal, on things we cannot yet see, which are the only things that last. We live in this "earthly house" temporarily, to be replaced by an "everlasting house"; we groan in our mortal bodies as we wait for our spiritual ones.

5:5–10 Faith, sight, and courage

Paul makes the comment he has made elsewhere: we have the Spirit as a down payment for our immortal bodies. We are guaranteed to get them! This gives us confidence, the assurance of our hope in the Master. But of course this hope is no license to sin; Paul has made that very clear in his writings. Yet neither is it right to constantly doubt our salvation, as this would be a lack of faith in the power of God to keep us safe (see 1 Peter 1:5).

Another point in this passage is that to be away from the body is to be at home with the Master. This mitigates against the idea of "soul sleep", which argues that when a believer dies they enter into an unconscious state until resurrected. There is no hint of any time gap between the two events (death and heaven), seeing that they are even written in the same sentence. Who looks forward to eons of sleep? There is no comfort in being in the Master's presence if we are unaware of it.

5:11–13 Defending credentials

Back to Paul's having to defend his motives and actions against the false teachers. He appeals to the Corinthians' personal experience with him and the fact that his motives should be obvious. What matters is what is in the heart.

5:14–6:2 Reconciliation

Paul writes once more against any idea of a license to sin, that we should no longer live for ourselves. We are a new creation that

seeks to please the One who died for us. An important statement about what exactly Jesus did for us is brought out here: that he reconciled (restored to friendship) the world to God. This is the gospel message we are to be spreading. We are ambassadors on Jesus' behalf. He reconciled the world, so that all anyone has to do to be saved is accept Jesus and what he did.

But this is not Universalism,¹² which doesn't distinguish between reconciliation and salvation. What Jesus did was to reverse the separation between God and man that Adam caused, making salvation by faith possible (and "legal" concerning God's holiness). The difference between a person's spending eternity in either heaven or hell is based solely on faith in the risen Jesus, not on our deeds. So "judgment day" is not about salvation, but about payment for wages earned. John 3:18 says, "Whoever *believes* in him is *not condemned*, but whoever *does not believe* stands *condemned already* because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

So the whole world was reconciled with God by Jesus' sacrifice, and now we are to spread this good news to everyone, showing them that they can have salvation just by trusting in the Jesus who died for them and rose again. Reconciliation involves two parties, so even though God did his part in this, we still have to accept it to make the reconciliation complete. Those who are not reconciled to God have only themselves to blame. After explaining the gospel message, Paul once again implores the believers to not receive God's favor in vain but to "walk the walk", to live like salvation matters.

6:3–10 Added credentials

Again Paul gives his credentials, listing the ways in which he and others have given themselves to the spreading of the gospel. He shows by personal example the proper Christian life, and the

12. Universalism: the belief that all who ever lived will eventually be allowed into heaven

perseverance required in the face of opposition. He contrasts appearances and outward treatment with the inner strength and purity of those who are truly disciples.

6:11–7:4a Purity and reconciliation

A 6:11–13 Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him

He appeals to the Corinthians to observe his openness and honesty. Any problems between them and him are laid at their feet, so he challenges them to return the favor.

X 6:14–18 Unequally bound

Next, the famous passage about being in partnership with unbelievers (trad. "unequally yoked"). This is not between spouses of varying ethnicity or skin color, as has been popularly supposed, but between believers and unbelievers. Marriage isn't even in view here. The language Paul uses is clearly about good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan. He appeals to the Old Testament for the need to be separate from all evil.

A' 7:1–4a Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him

Paul continues to implore the Corinthians to open up to him and stop the false accusations. He has done nothing to deserve their suspicion of his motives, and has in fact bragged about them to others.

7:4b–16 Godly sorrow and comfort

Paul regrets having had to grieve them over various issues, but at the same time he is convinced it was necessary. It fulfilled its purpose of changing the people's minds about their wrong attitudes.

8:1–15 Following an example of generosity

Paul abruptly changes to the subject of charity among believers of differing locations. He stresses that such giving cannot be coerced, demanded, or forced, but must be free and voluntary. Verses 8-9 make it even clearer that this is not any kind of divine command.

What Paul is telling the Corinthians is that they must follow through on their prior actions when it comes to giving; they must not only talk about it but do what they said they'd do. Notice that this is not to be a case of "giving beyond your means" as the popular saying goes, but from what we can afford. Preachers like to insist that a Christian can't really give until they have first "tithed", and they lay a major guilt trip on any who disagree. But this flies in the face of what the Bible actually says to believers. God looks on the heart, not the bank account.

Further emphasis on the nature of true giving is spelled out for us: Giving is not so others will have relief while you will have hardship, but to produce equality. We give to those who are in need until they are back on their feet, and then if the tables are later turned, those who are then in need can expect help from others.

Notice also that there is no mention here of giving to "the Master's work" or buying a building or paying salaries or anything else tradition has invented. This is about people with means helping people without means, and it only goes one way until the situation is remedied. It is not a perpetual, planned, legalistic obligation at all. When preachers try to shame people into "giving", they remove any possibility of it being done Biblically, since paying out of fear or guilt is the wrong motivation.

8:16–24 Trustworthiness

Brief mention is made of Titus, whom Paul recommends to them and encourages them to respect. There is speculation that this unnamed believer travelling with him may be Onesimus who is mentioned in Philemon, but we really don't know. But above all,

Paul wants everything to be done with the utmost integrity, especially concerning the handling of money.

9:1–15 Living up to a good reputation

Paul continues with strongly encouraging the Corinthians to follow through on their intention to give generously, recommending that they don't wait till the last minute to collect the money. Paul has stuck his neck out in boasting about them, so he doesn't want to look like a liar if they don't put their words into action.

Again, he makes it clear that any real giving is a matter of personal conscience, because "God loves a cheerful giver". We can't give cheerfully when we have fear or guilt. God will prompt the people's hearts to give as he wills, not any preacher. Then as further incentive he reminds them of the Gift of Life they received.

10:1–12:13 False missionaries

Now we come to a lengthy passage in which Paul expresses his exasperation with the Corinthians regarding his standing as a missionary (trad. apostle, a transliteration of the Greek word for someone sent out on a mission).

10:1–11 A warning to Paul's opponents

Paul would much prefer to be gentle with the Corinthians, but he warns them that if he has to he will be more than the "paper tiger" he is accused of being. Of course he was meek in person, not wanting to draw attention to himself but to Jesus. But now, since they've been asking for it, he intends to take the gloves off at his next visit.

Some take Paul's military analogy here as a sanction for the occult practice of ritual exorcism, all based on the phrase "pull down strongholds". Specifically, they think we actually have to go to a "demonic" area and pray and do certain things to drive the

demons away. There are large movements for this today, where people go from city to city performing rituals. Yet nobody ever seems to notice that nothing changes; evil marches on. And there is no Biblical precedent for this. Instead, the context indicates an internal struggle, the one even Paul expressed frustration with in Romans 7.

10:12–11:30 A challenge to Paul's opponents

If the Corinthians thought themselves to belong to Jesus, then certainly Paul could more easily make that claim. Yet the false teachers were apparently not only challenging his authority, but his very salvation! But he tells them where the line is drawn when it comes to boasting. And it is not their approval but the Master's that really matters.

Now Paul launches a long rant about the Corinthians' amazingly easy acceptance of any teacher that comes along while at the same time rejecting Paul and the others. They are easy prey for smooth talkers. With much sarcasm he tells them he was not like that, being humble and honest, but maybe he should have been harsh and domineering like these "super missionaries". And this is where we see the well-known statement that Satan pretends to be a "messenger of light". The churches have pretty much forgotten this, following any and all who tickle their ears. Then Paul reluctantly lists the things he has suffered for the gospel, and dares the false teachers to match his dedication in the face of hardship. If these things are seen as a weakness, then Paul is glad, because it glorifies the Master.

11:31–12:10 Only Jesus is worthy of boasting

Here Paul gives his account of having been taken up to heaven to receive visions and revelations from the Master. Although he speaks of this in the third person, it seems obvious that he is really speaking about himself. It's possible, but of course not known for sure, that this is when he was given the "secret" of

the community of believers, which is salvation by faith alone as the hallmark of what we call the "church age". Next he tells of his "burr in the flesh", another controversy. But the main point is that the purpose of this was to keep him humble after his visions (another hint that he was speaking of himself).

There is debate about the nature of this irritation or suffering, over whether this was an actual physical infirmity or a spiritual harassment. Support for the spiritual view is from Paul calling it a "messenger of the Enemy", while support for it being physical is by virtue of the word "flesh" and also his statement in Gal. 4:15 about them being willing to give their own eyes to him (also 6:11 where he says he has to write large letters when he writes with his own hand, instead of dictating to someone else). Another possibility is that Paul is referring to the pagan practice of spitting three times to ward off a spell cast by "the evil eye", making his reference to the Galatians' willingness to "gouge out their own eyes" a play on words. Yet on the other hand, we remember that during his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was struck blind for three days, so it could also refer to a literal eye problem.

12:11-13 A comparison to Paul's opponents

Paul sarcastically asks the Corinthians' forgiveness for not being a burden to them like the false teachers, and for doing all those miraculous signs among them. In spite of miracles they still listened to those who challenged his right to speak with authority.

12:14–13:4 Three witnesses

Twice in this passage Paul establishes the testimony of three witnesses in his lengthy defense. The Corinthians had accused Paul of treachery and deceit, yet he assures them that he will not change the way he relates to them, but will continue to live the example of a faithful servant of God. He wants to build them up, not tear them down, in spite of how they have treated him. Yet if he must, he

will not come in humility the next time, but in boldness. He will give them the proof they demand that Jesus does indeed speak through him.

13:5–10 Test yourselves

Paul warns them to test themselves before he comes, so he won't have to make himself treat them harshly after all. He challenges them to make sure first of all that they are really saved.

13:11–14 Greetings and final warnings

And as was his custom, Paul ends the letter with a final pleading to mend their ways, and a blessing.

Romans

The letter to the Romans was written around 57 AD by Paul while he was on his way from Ephesus to Corinth. He gave the letter to Phoebe to take to Rome on his behalf. It is the most systematic and doctrinal of his letters, touching on a wide range of issues yet centered around salvation by faith for all people, regardless of heritage.

Outline

1. **A** 1:1–7a Greetings
2. – **B** 1:7b–16 Prayers and blessings
3. — **C** 1:17 Theme: Salvation by faith
4. — **D** 1:18–8:11 Theology of theme
 1. 1:18–32 Non-Jews
 2. 2:1–3:8 Jews
 3. 3:9–26 Both groups
 4. 3:27–5:5 Faith and law
 5. 5:12–6:2 Sin and redemption
 6. 6:3–11 A Death and resurrection like Jesus'
 7. 6:12–23 Living accordingly
 8. 7:1–8:7 The purpose and limitation of law
 9. 8:8–11 Duality
5. — **E** 8:12–39 Obedience to God
6. — **X** 9:1–11:36 Unity in God

1. **X1a** 9:1–5 Anguish over Israel
2. – **X1b** 9:6–9 Faith and promise
3. — **X1x** 9:10–26 Choice and calling
4. – **X1b'** 9:27–33 Faith and promise
5. **X1a'** 10:1–4 Anguish over Israel
7. 10:5–17 How all can believe
 1. **X2a** 10:18–21 Provoking to jealousy
 2. — **X2** 11:1–12 Rejection and blindness
 3. **X2a'** 11:13–15 Provoking to jealousy
8. 11:16–36 Analogies and timing
9. — **E'** 12:1–2 Obedience to God
10. — **D'** 12:3–15:7 Practice of theme
11. — **C'** 15:8–12 Theme summary
12. – **B'** 15:13–16 Prayers and Blessings
13. **A'** 15:17–16:27 Greetings

Comments

A 1:1–7a Greetings

Paul begins with his usual greeting, but goes a step farther in calling himself a slave of Jesus— not just a servant, but one who completely and permanently belongs to another. He includes the fact that the gospel he is preaching was promised through the Old Testament prophets. They pointed to Jesus the Messiah, who was proven to be God by his resurrection from the dead. Paul, though a Jew, had been given the task of bringing this good news to the Gentiles.

B 1:7b–16 Prayers and Blessings

After thanking God for the believers at Rome, Paul expresses his great desire to see them in person, since he had been prevented from doing so several times. This Good Message came first to the Jews and then everyone else (Gentiles or "Greeks").

C 1:17 Theme: Salvation by faith

The overarching theme of the letter is that "the just will live by faith." It began with faith, both on the part of Eve when she expressed belief in the coming Savior (Gen. 4: "I acquired a man with YHWH", and YHWH literally means "the Coming One"), and on the part of Abraham (Gen. 15:6). And with the coming of the Messiah Jesus, it ends with faith. As Paul will develop in detail, the important thing in God's eyes is not ancestry, social standing, or any other division, but only faith.

D 1:18–8:11 Theology of theme

This long section is where Paul meticulously constructs the theology to back up his theme. It begins with a very familiar passage about sin and judgment. We have to be careful here because there is much theological baggage applied to this passage, which is not necessarily warranted by the context.

Da 1:18–32 Non-Jews

First Paul talks about those who deliberately suppress the truth. They know there is a creator God just by looking around at nature. Someone had to make it all, since it's impossible for anything to make itself. Who has the power to create the "heavens and the earth" but God? We never observe animals arising from plants, or people from animals, but that all things reproduce "after their kind". But especially in the last century, people start with the assumption that God cannot exist, then find alternative stories to

explain what we see. People are without excuse for this, since they know the truth but try to bury it and also keep others from seeing it. Because of this deliberate rejection of God, they became stupid! They traded the almighty Creator for idols of mere animals or people.

Throughout the rest of the chapter, we see the repeated phrase "Because of this, God gave them over...". Note carefully the order of events here: First people reject the God they know exists, and then God "gives them over" to the evil and darkness they love. Some will ignore the cause of the effect, saying God gave them over to evil without their first having known the truth.

Db 2:1–3:8 Jews

But Paul suddenly turns on the self-righteous, who all this time were undoubtedly patting themselves on the back as he listed the deeds of the irreverent. The Jews especially had relied upon their being the Chosen People to think themselves automatically righteous. But Paul shows them that they who know better are actually worse off than the non-Jews who naturally do what law requires. He explains that God's goodness is intended to lead them to a change of heart, not a license to sin. Just because God is patient and withholds judgment for a time shouldn't be an excuse to indulge the flesh, because God's patience will not hold out forever. And this is not any kind of anti-Semitism! Paul and Jesus were both Jews after all. But in this age of grace, we're all treated the same. God is not finished with his Chosen People yet, but for the time being, there is no favoritism.

Note that Paul is not pushing salvation by works here, but simply stating that those who seek righteousness will find it, and those who reject God will not. Actions are the result of what's in the heart. Remember that when we see words like "actions" or "deeds" and "rewards", this is "works" language; it refers to what we earn or deserve. Salvation on the other hand, as is very clear from other scriptures, is strictly by faith. So we can tell what the subject is by looking for those words. Deeds are the result of

salvation, not the cause. And scripture makes it clear that the two are mutually exclusive: it's either faith or works, not both at the same time.

In 3:1 Paul turns to the logical question in the reader's mind by this point: has he been saying that being a Jew is now worthless? Not at all. God had given his written laws exclusively to them, and through them the Savior of the World had come. Their unfaithfulness could not nullify the promises of God, even if most of them rejected him. There has always been a "remnant", a small group of the faithful, and God certainly will never forget them.

Dc 3:9–26 Both Groups

But this does not negate God's justice, and in that sense there is no privileged class; the Jews have no legal loophole when it comes to personal sin. God is gracious, but this does not negate his holiness. Jews are no less sinful than Gentiles, and Paul quotes their own Psalms to emphasize the point; the psalm was not written only about Gentiles!

Now Paul discusses the purpose of law (3:20): to expose sin and make us conscious of it. It was never meant to save anyone, but to make them aware of their need to be saved. Salvation is "apart from the law" and is for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. All have sinned, and all who are saved were saved by faith in Jesus' "ransom payment". Note that this happened "at the right time". We must remember that timing is an important factor in God's view, such that we should be careful not to take what God prescribes for one period of history and try to make it fit another, without clear reasons to do so. Also note that there is no need to use law to expose any alleged "original sin"; this is all about those personal failures we commit.

Dd 3:27–5:5 Faith and law

Paul points out, after all that about the lack of favoritism toward the Jews in regard to sin, that God is God over all, not just them. So the basis for his judgment will be the same for all: faith. The law has one purpose, but faith has another. Per the example of Abraham (4:1), Paul shows that he was declared righteous long before the Mosaic law had been given. Had Abraham worked for this declaration he would have earned a wage owed to him. But instead, having done nothing but believe God, we can see that this declaration was not a payment of wages owed but a gift. And not only did this happen before the Law, it happened even before the rite of circumcision. So that rite was not the cause or guarantee of righteousness, but only a sign that such righteousness had already existed. So while the physical descendants of the Promise were marked by circumcision, the spiritual descendants would be known by their faith.

Just as Abraham's faith was in the promise of God, our faith must be in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (4:23). And this sacrifice of Jesus was made while we were still alienated from God, so again our salvation could not have anything to do with having deserved or even asked for this ransom to be paid on our behalf; our faith is not a work. Jesus' death reconciled us all to God, but we must have individual faith in order to be saved. Now we will take a careful look at how sin entered the world and the implications of that. This will further enhance our understanding of exactly what Jesus did.

De 5:12–6:2 Sin and Redemption

Sin entered the world through one person, and death entered the world through sin. There was no death before sin, an important point to remember on the subject of origins and Genesis. What kind of death is this referring to? We look at Genesis 3 and see that it's clearly about mortality— which means being able to die physically. If it meant any other kind of death, then we have to say

that animals and plants, who were cursed because of Adam, have spirits! They suffered the very same death as Adam. We could also look at it as the broken relationship that it was; Adam became "dead" to God in the sense of being no longer in fellowship with him.

Notice the order and wording: death passed to all people because all sinned. And "death was in charge from Adam to Moses, even over those whose failure was not like that of Adam." How did Adam sin, as opposed to how Eve sinned? He rebelled against God to his face, blaming him for giving him Eve. That's why sin is attributed to him alone; both Adam and Eve ate the fruit and died for it, but only Adam blamed God and added a second sin. God never said there would be any additional penalties besides "death" for eating the fruit, so the cursing of the ground and Adam's being driven out of the garden were for his unique second sin of open rebellion. We see this same blatant rebellion in Cain. So physical mortality is what we all inherit from Adam, but rebellion is what Jesus came to die for, along with the promise of a new immortal body. Innocent babies sometimes die, and it's obvious they never had the capacity to rebel against God. Animals die as well, and are incapable of such rebellion. We all suffer the consequences of Adam's rebellion, which is physical decay and death and suffering.

Df 6:3–11 A Death and Resurrection Like Jesus'

It is important to emphasize what Paul is saying in this passage. Our death is compared to Jesus' death, so it must be physical, or else we have to say Jesus died spiritually! And what kind of resurrection did Jesus have, physical or spiritual? Then our resurrection will be physical, like Jesus'. And Paul expressly states that it is the **body** of Failure that we put to death; we are dead to sin! Jesus died to sin "once for all" so that we could be alive to God with him. And being dead to sin means we cannot keep going on as though we are still alive to it.

Dg 6:12–23 Living Accordingly

In 6:18 Paul summarizes his point: that Adam's sin gave us spiritual separation and physical death, but Jesus' death and resurrection gives us spiritual union and physical immortality. Again he also points out that the law he was talking about earlier only highlighted our rebellion, making the need for God's grace even more obvious. And in case anyone would conclude that sinning is ultimately going to make God look better, Paul strongly retorts that this grace of God is not a license to sin. Instead, we are immersed into the same kind of death and life as Jesus, who knew no sin.

Dh 7:1–8:7 The Purpose and Limitation of Law

Here Paul takes another angle regarding law. Death puts an end to a person's obligation to law, so since we died to sin we are no longer under its laws. But those believers who were under the Mosaic law also died to that law, as Paul said, "in order to belong to Another". This is a strong rebuttal to the idea that believers in Jesus are somehow under that old law, "married" to it and obligated under it. But that is impossible; we died to law and now belong to Jesus, to the new Law that gives life as opposed to the old one that brought only condemnation.

So does this mean the old law was evil? Not at all; it was the "glass" through which we could see what sin is. It illuminated sin, making us aware of it. And you know how people are: if we are told not to do something, we feel compelled to do it. Without being told that, we would have had no desire to do it. This is what the Law does: it brings sin to our attention. But it is really our own sin that draws us to do that which the Law forbids.

Di 8:8–11 Duality

We cannot blame the Law for our own weakness. Yet we still live in our mortal bodies; we have not yet received our full

inheritance. And it is this "flesh" that continually battles with our spirit. In fact, Paul expressly states that "the body is a rotting corpse because of failure, yet the spirit is alive because of justice." We died to the law and will get a new body that is not under the influence of sin, but for the time being we must struggle with it.

E 8:12–39 Obedience to God

Because of what Jesus accomplished for us, and if we put our faith in him, we can confidently approach God— no longer as slaves to a master but as children to a father. Yet if we are truly children, we will seek to please our Father and not disobey him. We must keep in mind that we have a new life, a new relationship, a new law, and we must keep in step with that instead of the old ways. But we are not in this struggle alone; we have the Spirit not only as a Deposit but also as a "helper". The Spirit is our link, the bridge between our spirits and God. He continually intercedes for us, even when we just don't know what to pray.

In what Paul says about God's foreknowledge (8:29), remember the context. He is discussing our adoption as children and our help from the Holy Spirit. The people God foreknew (not fore-chose) are the ones he then predestined— not to be saved but to "be conformed to the image of his Son". In other words, God decided that whoever would be saved would then be like Jesus, and be God's own children. It is these who are also "called", "justified", and "glorified". Notice also the past tense here: these things are guaranteed and considered finished in all who are saved. We don't have to work for them, so we cannot lose them.

Using legal terminology again, Paul speaks of Jesus as our Advocate in the courtroom, defending us against all charges. And in spite of our present trials, we are conquerors in the eyes of God. Even though we have not yet won all the battles, we are guaranteed the victory; we will certainly receive our promised eternal life with God in heaven.

X 9:1–11:36 Unity in God

Here we arrive at the centerpiece of Paul's dissertation: the unity of all people groups in faith.

X1a 9:1–5 Anguish over Israel

Paul begins by expressing his anguish over his own people, the Jews. He points out that the blindness they suffer in regards to their own Messiah is not a failure on God's part. Instead he reminds us that God's promises were to the faithful, not just to the physical descendants of Abraham. Many people take this to mean God has no more purpose for Israel, but this is not the case at all. This idea is formally known as Replacement Theology, where the Assembly (or possibly some other group) takes Israel's place. Yet these people only accept Israel's blessings and not her curses!

X1b 9:6–9 Faith and promise

Some take the account of God's choosing Isaac over Ishmael as proof of his forcing people to be saved, but look at the context. God is simply choosing a physical race; this is not about individual salvation at all. As also with Jacob over Esau and many other examples, God has the right to choose whomever he wills to be the ancestors of the Messiah. It has nothing at all to do with individual salvation.

X1x 9:10–26 Choice and calling

But is God unjust to choose people for an ethnic group? Hardly. But again, the statement that God says "I'll have mercy on whom I'll have mercy" is twisted to mean the predestination of individuals for salvation. Yet the theme is still about God choosing a race of people through whom the Messiah would come. God didn't choose Israel for its good qualities or numbers, but just the

opposite, so his Name would be glorified instead of the people (Deut. 7:7–8).

Objects "designed for destruction" and those prepared for honor (9:22–26) refer to God's responses to hearts that are either dead-set against him or made righteous by faith. And this is in the middle of a context about nations, as well as individuals who are chosen for various kinds of service based upon the condition of their hearts. That nations are in view is further supported by the following statements about Hosea and Isaiah. We learn of those God calls "his people", and of the remnant, the few who have faith in God.

We can also look on the objection of 9:19 as the Jews being indignant that God would include Gentiles in the plan of salvation. They were actually mad at God for doing this! But Paul responds with an equal degree of indignation at their conceit. And if predestination were true then we could rebut that as well: if we were mere puppets that God operates, we couldn't be blamed for our sin. This concept of God blaming people he predestines to hell for their sin actually makes God the author of sin! No, God's choices are not for who will be saved and who will not, but for who is used to perform his will in this life (9:22–26). Those "designed for destruction" are the ones who were "given over" to their choices (see section D). And since the people he chose rejected him, God included Gentiles in order to make the Jews jealous— which is exactly what we see here in the Jews' objection to God's including them in salvation.

X1b' 9:27–33 Faith and promise

God's promise will stand, regardless of the number. Though only a small number of physical Jews will be saved, because salvation is by faith, it is only by God's grace that there would be any saved at all. Faith inherits the promise, whether held by Jew or Gentile.

X1a' 10:1–4 Anguish over Israel

As with what began in 9:1, Paul ends this small section by expressing his heartfelt desire for the salvation of his people, the Jews. But they still try to make their own righteousness by works, in ignorance of the fact that Jesus already fulfilled all the obligations of the law.

10:5–17 How all can believe

Paul now focuses on Moses, to whom the Jews look. But instead of supporting them, Moses condemns them: "The one who does all these things will live by them". The Jews had to know that they were not perfectly obeying Moses, yet the law demands perfection. Only Jesus achieved that.

In vs. 9 and 10 we see the gospel message in its most concise form: Jesus is Master and God raised him from the dead. With your heart you believe that Jesus reconciled the world to God, and with your mouth you confess that he is God. This is not at all a requirement to speak the magical words "Jesus is Master", but simply an explanation of how we relate to both God and man. Man cannot know the heart as God does, so we have to speak up.

What exactly does it mean to call Jesus "Master"? It does not mean you prove by works that you are perfectly obeying him. Instead, it means that you believe him to be The Master, The I Am. In other words, it's not "Jesus is **my** Master" but "Jesus is **The** Master". Of course you will be expected to treat him like your Master after being saved, but not in order to get saved. So you confess that Jesus is YHWH, and you have a conviction that God raised him from the dead. His death reconciled us; his life saves us. So these verses give the two most basic elements of saving faith: the right Savior and his Resurrection.

Another important point is the order of events: you believe, and then you speak. It's very much like the order of events in Peter's address to the crowd on Pentecost: repent and be baptized. You repent (change your mind to belief), and so you are baptized.

Confession, like water baptism, is a result and acknowledgment of a change of heart (the meaning of 'repent'). It clearly isn't the speaking or the dunking that get you saved, it's the heart's conviction. As with the circumcision of Abraham, the faith comes first and the outward signs second.

And above all, this all applies equally to both Jew and Gentile (10:12). All need to hear the gospel in order to know where their faith is to be placed. And if anyone is assured of having heard, it is the Jews (10:18). But again, God used the salvation of Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy, since they heard the gospel but rejected it.

X2a 10:18–21 Provoking to jealousy

Another blow against predetermined salvation of individuals is found in the remaining verses of chapter 10. God woos Israel, he longs for them, he waits for them. This is not the forced dragging against our will of predestination but the pleading of a rejected Father who loves even his enemies. Surely God does not hold out his arms to people whose fate he decreed in eternity past!

X2x 11:1–12 Rejection and blindness

In chapter 11 Paul soundly defeats the idea of Replacement Theology. He appeals not only to his own heritage but the fact that God always preserves a remnant. And if it is by God's choosing, then it can't depend upon Israel being faithful. Many claim that since Israel disobeyed God that they must be rejected. But here again we see that this is not so. It's all about God, about his unilateral promises, about bringing him glory. That God is faithful in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness is a tribute to his trustworthiness, rather than a rejection of Israel as his chosen people. Because of their continual rejection of him, God (as we've seen in this letter repeatedly), "gave them over" to blindness and deafness to the gospel. Yet individuals can still be saved. And how much more

clearly can Paul put it than he does in verse 11? Israel did not fall beyond recovery!

X2a' 11:13–15 Provoking to jealousy

It is their very hardness towards God that allowed the Messiah to be sacrificed for us all. It was to bring them to jealousy that God allowed this. Yet Paul cautions the Gentiles to not become proud. After all, if God would punish his chosen race, and if the Jews cannot escape responsibility for sin by their privileged position, then the Gentiles have even less reason to be overconfident.

11:16–36 Analogies and timing

Paul uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to illustrate the relationship of all, Jew and Gentile alike, to the Vine. All draw their life from the Vine. The broken-off branches represent the unfaithful of a chosen group. This is in keeping with Paul's discussion of the remnant. Just as with the Jews, the Gentiles have been "grafted in" as a group, but individuals stand or fall on the basis of faith.

The analogy of the olive tree serves the same purpose, but be careful not to attach unwarranted meaning to it. Some say that the olive tree must always represent Israel, but that cannot be the case here. Otherwise we'd have the nonsensical situation of the branches being made equal to the trunk! Put another way, if Israel is the trunk then it cannot also be the natural branches. But in context, the trunk must represent the same thing as the vine: Jesus. The Jews are "natural" branches and the Gentiles "wild", but they're all branches nonetheless.

An important implication of this is that it shows that the Assembly has not been absorbed into Israel, nor Israel into the Assembly. The Assembly is composed of both wild and natural branches. The context here tells us that the wild branches must therefore represent Gentiles, not the Assembly. Another implication is that Jews and Gentiles are still separate entities,

branches of two types, but they all are grafted into the Trunk. So the natural cannot look down on the wild, and the wild cannot look down on the natural. The two groups are equal in one way but distinct in another.

All that being the case, then there is no support for Conditional Security (opposite of Eternal Security). To be grafted into either the Vine or the Trunk illustrates not individual salvation but God's inclusion of Gentiles alongside Jews in the plan of salvation. Individuals can be cut off on the basis of lacking saving faith. Notice that these branches are first given a chance, and only after they produce no fruit are they removed. God is patient, and reluctant to cut anyone off. But if they persist, God will finally "give them over" to the flames.

In 11:25–32 Paul continues to warn people about not getting overconfident, and gives us a hint about prophecy: there is a certain number of Gentiles that are to be grafted in, not necessarily a certain point in time. But somehow he manages yet again to create another controversy: "All Israel will be saved". What can this mean? Let's remember all we've been reading in this letter. The theme is faith, not ethnic privilege or works. Who are true Israel? Who are the children of Abraham? The ones with faith. So here Paul is referring to the saved Jews, the faithful ones. The time will come when all the fruitless branches are cut off, and all that is left are the saved. To put it another way, someday Israel will be composed of only the saved. It does not mean that all the physical children of Abraham will be saved. Although Israel's "hardening" was necessary to enable the gospel to be brought to the Gentiles, they are still God's chosen race, and he has not forgotten his promises to their forefathers. These were irrevocable promises.

Wrapping up this pivotal point in his letter, Paul breaks out in praise to God in 11:33-36.

E' 12:1–2 Obedience to God

Now there is a distinct shift in Paul's letter and he begins to work back in reverse order, with his focus here on obedience. In

light of all that's been said, he appeals to how reasonable it is to live in accordance with what pleases God. This is all about living like Christians, not how to be saved. We are to please God, and worship him out of understanding instead of ignorance. Otherwise there would have been no point to Paul's long dissertation. If Christianity is just another blind, experience-oriented religion, then what's the point of arguing over doctrine?

In contrast to the empty, powerless experience religions, Christians are to be "transformed by renewing your minds" instead of being pressed into the world's mold. This is the exact opposite of the meditation of the world, which seeks to empty the mind and push it aside. Instead, we are to renew and fill our minds, for the purpose of knowing the will of God, a will that is pleasing and perfect. Even our bodies are to be presented to God as a kind of sacrifice. They are meant for neither self-indulgence nor self-destruction, but to please God.

D' 12:3–15:7 Practice of theme

Moving back to the topic of the family of God, Paul puts added emphasis on ethics. A warning against self-centeredness is found in 12:3–8. We are to neither over- nor under-value ourselves, but be realistic. Sometimes we mistake extreme self-depreciation as humility, but it is just as bad as the other extreme. To say of oneself either "I am better than you" or "I am nothing" are both wrong. One presumes what God has not given, and the other insults his empowerment. So both are self-centered. To illustrate this point, Paul gives the analogy of the human body, as a figure of the Assembly being the Anointed One's "body". All parts are necessary and all are equally important. Some are more prominent while others are kept hidden. Yet they all compose one body; with any part missing, the body would not exist. So one part cannot be considered either superior or inferior to another. This principle has important implications on the topics of a clergy/laity class distinction and discrimination on the basis of race, social class, or gender.

Now to some general exhortations to all believers (12:9–13:14). Clearly we are to be more than bench-warmers, more than spectators. Instead of lifeless appendages, we are to be busy with the work God has given us to do. We are a body, not a blob of protoplasm. Evil is overcome by active resistance to it, not by running away from it. And we must be model citizens wherever we are. After exhorting people to give what they owe and not be in debt, Paul again mentions law, but that it is fulfilled by love for others; this one command encompasses all the rest.

In chapter 14 Paul turns from how believers relate to society, to how believers relate to each other. The immediate context is about "to eat, or not to eat" in regards to meat, but the general principle is to keep everything in perspective relative to the gospel and the Body of the Anointed One. One whose faith is "strong" and has no qualms about this or that food must not despise one whose faith is "weak" and whose conscience is bothered over certain controversial things. But it goes the other way too; the "weak" must not despise the "strong". So instead of rubbing our personal convictions in each other's faces, we are to keep to ourselves those things we know will bother others, in the name of peace. But don't make the mistake of treating important doctrines as something we should keep to ourselves. This passage is about the disputable, the controversial, the matters of personal conviction over things God has not commanded us about.

We are all parts of one Body, but those parts are not identical. We each have different functions and levels of faith. Many today think we should all be interchangeable parts and demand that others see every detail exactly as we do. But we all answer to God, not to each other (14:10–13). And who is any of us to boss the others? We each will have to answer for how we treated other believers. Does this equate to no judging at all? Hardly. We are commanded to judge, to discern, to seek out the truth. But in this context, the judging we're not supposed to do is to make ourselves authorities over others.

In 14:21–15:7 Paul gives his personal opinion on meat eating, but leaves the whole matter to individual conscience. He tells us to

be sensitive to others, whether they have more or less faith than us. Food should never be a reason to part fellowship; it's a trivial matter in the kingdom of God. But this is not to be taken as forcing people to violate their own consciences. The idea here is not to make everyone think the same over these secondary issues, but to keep peace by voluntary restriction, keeping things to ourselves if necessary. Our example is Jesus, who set aside his divine privileges to become one of us. In fact, all of what was written in the OT was recorded for our benefit. We can look at the heroes of old for inspiration. He again speaks of the Gentiles' inclusion with the Jews in God's plans, and that all of us who believe are to praise God because of this.

C' 15:8–12 Theme summary

Paul is now back to his focus on faith. Jesus came not only to die for sin, but also to fulfill the promises, resulting in salvation also to the Gentiles. The promise began by faith in the promise, and it ended in Jesus delivering the promise.

B' 15:13–16 Prayers and Blessings

As he begins to wind down to the end of his letter, Paul expresses his usual prayers and blessings. Though he credits the people with what they already know, he nonetheless felt the need to remind them of many things.

A' 15:17–16:27 Greetings

Final greetings are given now. Paul has been living the example they should follow and spreading the gospel everywhere. His driving ambition has been to take it to places it had never yet been, and his work has been accompanied by demonstrations of God's power. This, he explains, is why he has been unable to visit them in person, but soon he hopes to do so, since he has completed his mission in that part of the world. But first he has business to

attend to in Jerusalem and he appeals to them for prayer support in this.

In his final list of names (beginning in 16:1), Paul starts off with a woman named Phoebe. She is called a "servant" just as any man in the Letters; the Greek word is the masculine form typically transliterated "deacon" or translated "minister". She was, as the Greek states clearly, "a presiding officer over many, including me". This was no mere assistant or courier, but an important official to the believers in a large city. She was deemed worthy to take Paul's letter to Rome, and the people there were to treat her as they would Paul.

Next is the married couple Priska and Aquila. Note that the female is listed first, which is outrageous by the standards of the time, and especially so since Paul had formerly been a Pharisee. He praises them both equally for risking their lives for him.

Another female noted is Mary. She was a co-worker, not simply a likeable person; she was on the same level as any male Paul named a co-worker.

Now to Junia. In an effort to explain away the obvious, those who believe in male preeminence have three ways to interpret this:

1. Junia is really a man, Junias (no textual attestation exists for this before the Middle Ages)
2. She is not an apostle herself but known to them
3. She is not an "authoritative" apostle

Junia is in fact a woman, numbered among the apostles and counted as outstanding, and has the same authority as any male apostle;¹³ there is no hint in scripture of a non-authoritative apostle. Only with a prior commitment to male preeminence can any of the three objections above be supported. They simply cannot imagine a woman in the Assembly having authority, so they start with that assertion and contort scripture around it. But Paul

13. E. J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, October 01, 2005.

matter-of-factly lists these prominent women as co-workers, as equals. Added to the list are women such as Tryphena and Tryphosa, and several unnamed others.

In contrast to the people he listed as being commended, Paul follows with a warning to note the other extreme, the ones causing disputes and tripping people up in the faith (16:17–19). Such people are to be shut out. We are to be wise about the good, and innocent about evil. God will soon crush Satan under our feet!

More greetings, and then a final blessing. Paul has been given "the secret" to reveal, the gospel itself and the relationship and security we have as believers. Through Jesus the Messiah we can all be saved, Jew and Gentile alike, by faith alone.

Ephesians

The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul around the late 50s AD. It addresses general topics and appears to have been intended for circulation among the various assemblies. Jesus is exalted throughout, with gentle appeals for righteous living.

Outline

1. 1:1 Greetings
2. 1:2–14 Love, purity, and adoption
3. 1:15–23 Glory, power, and unity
4. 2:1–5 Dead to sin
5. 2:6–10 Our inheritance
6. 2:11–22 Reconciled
7. 3:1–12 The secret and grace given to Paul
8. 3:13–21 Encouragement through adversity
9. 4:1–6 Unity and humility
10. 4:7–14 Spiritual gifts
11. 4:15–16 The head and body
12. 4:17–5:2 A new attitude
13. 5:3–5:17 A higher standard
14. 5:18–6:9 Be filled with the Spirit
15. 6:10–17 The armor of God
16. 6:18–20 Prayer requests
17. 6:21–22 Personal business

18. 6:23–24 Blessings

Comments**1:1 Greetings**

As in all his letters, Paul begins with greetings to fellow believers. He identifies himself as one sent out by God.

1:2–14 Love, purity, and adoption

We always need to remember the tremendous blessings we have received as a gift, one given out of love. But what are we to conclude from the statement "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world"? Note first of all that the purpose of the choice was for us to be holy and flawless; it does not say the purpose was for us to be saved by force. Salvation is well-established in all Paul's writings as being solely by faith, a faith we exercise by free will. So what God chose for us who believe is that we will be made holy. God also decided that we would be more than servants— we would be children.

Grace is the favor bestowed upon the lesser by the greater, and this is what God did in offering Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins. This was a legal matter in that the charges against us were dropped as a result. In addition, God revealed that this salvation by faith for all was the goal to which the progression of history was aimed.

Once again we see something about destiny, and once again we note that it is not salvation that was chosen for us, but that "we" (Paul and his contemporaries) who were the first believers would glorify God. And everyone who would believe would be given something unique in all of history: the "down payment that guarantees our inheritance", that is, the Holy Spirit to live within each believer. No other group outside of the community of believers (trad. "the church") would be blessed in this way. No

righteous person before Pentecost was said to have this lifelong indwelling, this guarantee.

1:15–23 Glory, power, and unity

Seeing that the Ephesians had placed their faith in Jesus caused Paul to rejoice, and he promised continued prayer for their spiritual growth and maturity. As their understanding of their riches in Jesus increases, so too will their gratitude. And we are promised the power to grow, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him above all other authorities and powers. All power comes from him, and it enables his Body, the believers, to grow to completeness.

2:1–5 Dead to sin

Paul describes our current condition as being dead to sin. The majority of translations say "you **were** dead **in** sin", but that is not in the Greek. It is the present tense, and the implied article there is never translated as "in". But the concept of death in that culture and time had the primary meaning of separation, not inability. To be dead to God is to have a broken relationship with him, and to be dead to sin is to have a broken relationship with it. It doesn't mean we can no longer sin, but only that we are no longer in step with it.

Then Paul goes on to contrast how we are in our new relationship compared to the old. We obeyed the flesh and the devil and thus deserved the wrath of God. But in spite of that, God showed us all mercy by buying us with the blood of Jesus and restoring our broken relationship with God. And it was all on God's initiative; we didn't ask for him to do this. But of course we are then obligated to ask for the free gift God offers because of what Jesus did, and we do this by trusting in him. Then we will be dead to sin and alive to God.

2:6–10 Our inheritance

It is by God's favor and initiative that we can be saved by faith, not by our own works or plans. We didn't ask God to sacrifice Jesus for sin. But knowing this, nobody can boast about themselves.

Note that many people think vs. 8-9 say our faith itself is a gift from God, but it doesn't say that at all. It is the whole thing — salvation by grace through faith — that is the object of "not of yourselves". This is an issue of Greek grammar and syntax and does not come through clearly in English. But from the totality of New Testament teachings we know that this gift is the whole plan of God: salvation through faith because of Jesus. God decreed that this is the way we would be saved. So God does not have to give us faith before we can be saved. Instead, he gives us the choice, the opportunity, to be saved if we just put our faith in Jesus.

Those who believe are held up as a prize, a masterpiece made by Jesus Himself. We are the crowning achievement of his suffering, death, and resurrection, and a sign of defeat to Satan. We must not forget that we are the work of Another and become proud of ourselves instead of Jesus. We are to honor him by doing the good things he has planned for us. Note yet again that there is no hint of being forced to do these things; the Letters are filled with pleas for us to do the right things. God has plans for us, but we are not forced to perform them. Our future rewards are based upon how well we chose God's path instead of our own.

2:11–22 Reconciled

Before Jesus came, the non-Jews were without hope of salvation. Yet we know that individuals could convert to Judaism and be considered righteous in God's sight. So Paul is not saying no Gentile could be saved before, but that the Gentile nations had not been "chosen people" of God. They were outside of both the Promise and the Law — as people groups, but not as individuals.

God may choose groups for his purposes without violating individual free will (see Romans for a more detailed discussion).

Now, through Jesus, there is to be no more dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. All are "chosen" on the basis of faith alone. The old Law was voided by virtue of Jesus' death, and our adoption by faith was made possible by virtue of Jesus' resurrection. All can come to God on the same basis and be reconciled. This new entity or "house" is built upon one foundation, the missionaries (trad. "apostles"), whose cornerstone is Jesus. Such a building is more than a house, but a temple holy to God.

Note that Jesus is the cornerstone. A cornerstone is laid at the foundation, not put up on top of the roof. This is his function as a human, and the example he gave for us all to follow. As illustrated in Phil. 2:5–11, Jesus demonstrated what we are to follow: laying aside privilege and power in order to get under others and lift them up. Jesus expressly taught this in his rebuke to the disciples for wanting positions of importance in the coming kingdom (see Mt. 20:20–28 and Mk. 10:35–45). In his humanity Jesus both showed and taught the attitude and actions his followers must have.

3:1–12 The secret and grace given to Paul

The reason Paul is a prisoner at this time is because of the very thing he's been writing about: the gospel is for everyone, including Gentiles. God had entrusted Paul with making known his plans for this age, plans which God had revealed directly to him by revelation. It was something that had never been revealed before.

In spite of this, Paul considered himself the very lowest of the apostles. Yet this served the purpose of making it all the more obvious that this was of God and not Paul. God was now revealing his ultimate plan of salvation via the community of believers, an entity nobody saw coming. This sent a message to all the "rulers and authorities in the heavenlies" that God is supreme and cannot be out-witted. Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection was the very epitome of all God's plans through the ages.

3:13–21 Encouragement through adversity

For all of these reasons, Paul asks the people not to be discouraged by what he is currently suffering for the sake of the gospel. Instead they should be proud of this suffering, because it will strengthen them and help them grow, giving them ever-increasing appreciation for the gift of God.

4:1–6 Unity and humility

Now he implores the people to live and act according to their understanding of the great things God has done for them. We are all of one Spirit, forming one Body, through one Gift. We have one Master, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father. But we should remember that our unity comes from this, and not from a false peace imposed externally.

4:7–14 Spiritual gifts

Paul begins to talk about spiritual gifts, but introduces it with references to Jesus' accomplishments. What does it mean that Jesus "captured captivity"? There is much speculation because the context doesn't give us much to go on. Likewise, what does it mean that he also "descended into the lower parts of the earth"? People get astounding amounts of material out of these obscure statements. But certainly we'd all agree that Jesus came to the earth, which could be considered "lower parts" as compared to having "ascended". Some claim it must mean he went into Sheol, but differ over exactly where and why. I think it's ridiculous to imagine what some say, that Jesus was tortured by Satan but escaped, or something to that effect. But a case can be made for saying Jesus went to the place of the dead and took out of there all the righteous people who had died before him. They could only now be taken to heaven since the Sacrifice had finally been made.

Whatever those statements mean, they had to happen in order for Jesus to dispense gifts. We cannot assert that any of the lists of

such gifts are meant to be exhaustive; that is, that these are the only gifts there are. Paul seems to be mentioning a few of them to give some idea of what the Spirit does within the body of believers. Does the order of gifts signify importance or a hierarchy? This context says nothing about that, but Paul did say that he and the other missionaries were laying the foundation (see 1 Cor. 3). Yet again we must remember that the foundation supports and lifts up the rest of the building from beneath it, not from the rooftop. If there is any hierarchy in Christianity, it is upside down to the worldly model.

These are gifts, not "offices" or positions of domination, or any kind of clergy class over the common people (a phrase which implies that there are also special or privileged people). These people are gifted to nurture, not to oppress, dominate, rule over, or boss. They build up, not tear down. While it is obviously wise to listen to the spiritually mature and gifted, it is their **example** that is most important. They lead by being what the others should aspire to, not by decree or command. That is exactly how Jesus led as well while on the earth.

4:15–16 The head and body

Here Paul seems to refer to the common Greek belief at the time, that the body grew out of the head. Thus the head was the source or originator of the body. Yet the head and body are one unit, of the same substance. This is how Paul illustrates our relationship to Jesus. He is both our source of eternal life and our own "flesh and bone". No other body part is also a source of eternal life. Each believer reports to God, not to each other, just as each body part only reports to the brain and not the other parts.

Shepherds guard and protect those that cannot protect themselves. When people are first saved, they are vulnerable and dependent. But if the shepherds do their jobs properly, these infants grow to adulthood, to the point where they eventually can become shepherds themselves. They are not to remain children perpetually. These tender ones are the people who must be treated

tenderly and protected from falsehood. Two important implications arise from this.

One: there is no excuse for people to think they can shirk personal responsibility by deliberately remaining children. Many people have always been content to stay in the shadow of a preacher, as if they are exempt from all Paul has been talking about. We have the ridiculous situation of senior citizens being "taught" by young, inexperienced people who simply regurgitate the contents of the approved "quarterly"; we have masses of people sitting passively in pews while a public orator with the right worldly credentials lectures them "authoritatively". Instead, the elderly should be teaching the young, and the experienced should be teaching the newly born. And this is spiritually determined, not by diplomas or seminaries.

Two: to speak the truth in love is not a club that, ironically, can be used to beat people who dare to express some righteous indignation when confronted by unbelievers or heretics. Paul is talking to shepherds guarding tender lambs. But when a wolf comes along, that same gentle shepherd is obligated to get nasty and use whatever means are necessary to remove the threat. It's a two-sided coin: protect the vulnerable, but beat off the hostile. This is what good shepherds do. But we see the "sheeple" biting the ankles of the few remaining good shepherds every time a voice is raised or an alarm sounded.

4:17–5:2 A new attitude

Paul now implores the people to get busy and stop acting like unbelievers. Continuing to live in such a hard-hearted way will result in their falling prey to sin and vice. The more we push in the wrong direction, the easier it gets to keep sliding downward. Instead, the whole idea of repentance is to change direction and go God's way. We must throw away all that drags us down and be renewed in truth and holiness. No more deceiving each other or losing control. We must stop nursing grudges and get over

ourselves. Otherwise we "give the devil a foothold", something like a key to the back door.

We must also stop being lazy, and I think we can apply that to growing spiritually as well as to providing for physical needs. And we must not think that only certain words are considered by God to be "foul". In my many years in "church", I heard few curse words but much backbiting, slandering, tearing down, and improper judging. This is in stark contrast to building up. Yet again, remember that we're talking about how believers are to treat each other. If someone teaches heresy or an unbeliever attacks, those are legitimate times for harsh words and judgment.

5:3–5:17 A higher standard

Jesus is our example to follow; he sacrificed himself out of love for all people. But does verse 5 mean we can lose our salvation if we persist in these things? Not at all. Remember what Paul has written that teaches the opposite. As before, he is contrasting the actions and attitudes of the saved and the lost. We should stay so far from all that, that people have no reason to even suspect us of doing those things.

We are warned to also stay away from smooth talkers, people who are out to deceive and undermine our faith. We are of the Light and must not wallow in darkness anymore. Some who believe that all evangelism must begin with establishing friendship with unbelievers frequently go to the point of listening to their arguments. They are not well-grounded enough in the Bible to give a strong defense or to see the errors in the unbeliever's thinking. So error creeps in, and apostasy follows. Instead of leading the unbeliever to the Truth, these immature believers follow the unbelievers into falsehood.

Here we see a command to expose error. Many today think this is wrong, but to see evil and not report it is every bit as sinful as any other form of disobedience. God told Ezekiel (ch. 33) that a faithful guardian must warn of danger. If they fail to do so, they are guilty of treason. Or as James put it, "So, if you know what is

ideal but don't do it, you fail" (James 4:17). All of this requires effort on our part to practice discernment. We need to pay attention and keep our eyes open, walking the narrow path and not turning aside. We need the Spirit's power to accomplish this.

5:18–6:9 Be filled with the Spirit

In beginning his long description of Spirit-filled living, Paul commands mutual respect among all believers. This is the complete opposite of domination or assuming authority over others, as already pointed out. He will now list ways in which we can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

He begins by contrasting this filling with that of alcohol. Notice that the scripture here does not say "never touch alcohol", but simply that we must not let it overcome us. The Spirit cannot work through people who fill themselves with mind-numbing substances. If there is any void in us, we must let the Spirit fill it instead. We can also keep a song in our hearts in praise to God, and share these with others. And no particular form of music or method of producing it is either condemned or commanded. Whatever comes from a pure heart in praise of God is the point. The entire Bible never singles out any music or art form as being intrinsically evil. And above all, we must be thankful.

The last item in this list of ways to be filled with the Spirit begins a sub-list of its own about ways to support each other. Each item in this list points back to that thought. Most translations cut into the middle of "supporting one another in respect for the Anointed One, wives, to your own husbands, as to the Master" to break the part about wives and husbands from the statement about mutual support, making it an entirely new topic. The wives-to-husbands part is a fragment that has no verb of its own; it is dependent upon "supporting one another". And it means that whatever this support is, that which is for women is identical to that which is for all believers; what is true of one is true of the other since they share the same verb.

Here again Paul speaks of the head as the source of the body, not its ruler or commander. They are one unit, one flesh and one spirit. Paul clearly makes this union of husband and wife as a depiction of the union between Jesus and the community of believers. Jesus is God, of course, but Paul is not stressing divinity here, but rather unity. Yet why does he call the man the source of the woman? It can be seen as a reference to Eve being made from Adam, but in this context it seems to refer to his being the support and protector, since he is both physically stronger and socially more powerful. There is another element of context to consider, but first we must address what Paul says to husbands.

Notice that it is the **love** of Jesus that the husband is to model — *not* his divinity, salvation, or purification! Paul says "love your wives **in the same way**" and "so **this is how men must love** their wives". What he says about Jesus' other qualities and accomplishments are *reasons to love*, not mandates to copy. We must not confuse the divinity of Jesus with his humanity, nor to assign one aspect to men but the other only to women. And since we all are the Body of Jesus, and He does not abuse us nor squash our personalities, so also a husband must not abuse his wife nor deny her personhood. The two are of one flesh.

Another important point is that the man leaves his parents to join to his wife. This models the fact that Jesus left his Father to join to his Bride, and then he went back to his Father's house to prepare a place for us. When Jesus returns for his Bride there will be a wedding feast as well. It is Jesus who joined to us, not we to him, and it is the husband who leaves home to join to his wife, not she to him. This again is how Jesus modeled humility and service, a model for *all* believers to follow, not just women.

Now for another element to all this: the Roman law called "the marriage without hand".

Abuse of wives was a common practice. In fact, wife abuse was such a problem that in the early first century A.D., the Emperor Augustus devised a system

called "marriage without hand" (*sine manu*) to protect women from husband abuse. The law provided that the woman and her dowry remained under the jurisdiction of her father's family. A woman could be taken back by her family and married to another man if the husband mistreated her too severely. The law was intended to reduce the divorce rate and stabilize family life, but in fact only contributed to further instability in marriage. An historian of the first century claimed that "the only enduring relationship a married woman had was the one with her blood relatives", not her husband... Marriage instructions were directed almost exclusively to the wife. She is to defer to the wishes of her husband, to worship his gods, to have no friends of her own, to understand and forgive his sexual relations with courtesans and men.¹⁴

The preceding historical note makes the most sense of why Paul only told husbands to love and wives to support: because he told wives to identify with their husbands instead of their fathers. He needed to say the former because he said the latter. The whole message was, "Since you wives are not to go back to your fathers, you husbands must be careful to love your wives and not beat them." So in contrast to the views of patriarchal society, Paul commands husbands to love and protect their wives. They must follow Jesus' example of self-sacrifice for the people's purity by treating their wives at least as well as they treat their own bodies. This means providing and caring for them, recognizing that the two of them are "one flesh".

In the first century, a woman was considered property. She always belonged to one man or another and had few if any rights. So what need was there for Paul to tell wives to submit to

14. O. Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul*, Scholars Press, 1985

husbands, as many translations put it? He could not have been referring to what society already imposed upon them against their will; they had no choice in the matter. So Paul was saying something quite radical for the time: wives had a choice! They could now choose to defy the Roman household codes and defer willingly to their husbands, identifying with them instead of their fathers.

Another consideration is the fact that Christians had to be careful about how they worded things. Rome had spies everywhere, and anyone could easily be accused of sedition. That would explain why some things had to be stated delicately or indirectly. And there may have been shared experiences that did not require everything to be spelled out. So while many things in scripture are very clear, those that are not should not be taken as deliberate deception or confusion.

Other groups who needed to "support one another" were parents and children, masters and slaves. Note that Paul is not seeking to instantly overturn all social norms, and to boldly oppose slavery would certainly have brought charges of sedition upon him. Instead, just as God had slowly unveiled his plan for the ages, our freedom in Jesus in some cases had to happen gradually. So in the mean time slaves and masters who were believers had to know how to act. And of course this principle applies also to women; we no longer have a societal taboo against women in leadership, in the workplace, or as full equal partners in a marriage, and women have the ability to earn their own income. There is no more reason to continue first century norms for women than there is for slavery or class distinction.

6:10–17 The armor of God

Our power to do all these things must come from God. The analogy of military armor Paul uses here indicates that our defenses come from God and not our own strength. We must not go out to battle naked! "Putting on the armor" is not something to be taken lightly or done hastily.

We hear the Truth, the gospel, which gives us the righteousness of Jesus and not our own. But the shoes we must put by means of study and learning. This is our preparation, and we dare not leave these shoes off or fail to tie them. We are to put these things on; they don't appear without effort. And we require a shield, which is firm trust in God. Last but not least is the Sword, an offensive weapon which is meant to be used effectively. A soldier untrained in how to use a sword is as useless as one who is trained but keeps the sword in its sheath. We are not to "keep the faith" from others! Get the sword, learn how to use it, and then keep it in your hand.

We need to stop briefly here to clear up a misunderstanding. The Greek word endings indicate that it is the Spirit that is the sword, not the pronouncement (a different Greek word than that translated "word") of God. The Spirit is the source of all that God decrees, whether spoken or written. That is our source of power, our strength, our guide. Of course the written Word is part of that, and no less so than when God would speak audibly. It is the One who originates the message that matters, not the means of conveyance. But since we know that God never contradicts Himself, then we can use what is written as an anchor, to which all that is spoken must agree.

We are to then stand firm, not run and hide at the first sign of opposition. Most believers avoid conflict like the plague, but what kind of soldiers are those? And what kind of shepherds run away from the wolves? (A subtle hint is found in John 10:13!) We must not be cowards but faithful soldiers who keep training for battle.

6:18–20 Prayer requests

Prayer is constantly needed in all of this. Paul asks for prayer support in his own battles, for boldness and fearlessness in spreading the good message. He had many enemies and needed support as much as anyone.

6:21–22 Personal business

He intends to send Tychikos to Ephesus to keep them up on his affairs and put their minds at ease about him. This shows Paul's tender care for the people.

6:23–24 Blessings

With a final blessing, Paul prays for peace over all the believers.

Philemon

The letter from Paul to Philemon was written around 59–61 AD while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Philemon was the master of the slave Onesimus. Paul met Onesimus after he had run away from his master, and Onesimus had subsequently become a Christian. Now he is willing to return to his master, and Paul very tactfully asks Philemon to receive him as a brother. By Roman law he could have had the runaway slave put to death.

Outline

1. 1:1–7 Greetings
2. 1:8–16 Explaining the situation
3. 1:17–22 An appeal for mercy
4. 1:23–25 Greetings

Comments

1:1–7 Greetings

Paul, who was writing from prison, identifies himself as also being the prisoner of the Anointed One. He includes Timothy as co-author, and writes not only to Philemon but also to a woman named Apphia, to another co-worker named Archippus, and to all the believers. Though the content of the letter is primarily to and about Philemon, the others are to read it and learn from it.

1:8–16 Explaining the situation

Onesimus was one of Paul's converts to Christianity. Paul could "pull rank" on Philemon but instead appeals to him out of

love, to accept the former escaped slave back as a brother. Notice that Paul also uses a little leverage by mentioning his being old, as if to say, "Do this favor for an old man, will you?"

The name Onesimus means "useful", and Paul uses a play on words in saying that although he was formerly useless, he was now living up to his name. Paul wanted to return him to his owner instead of just keeping him as a helper without first having their consent.

1:17–22 An appeal for mercy

Paul offers, in strict legal terms, to reimburse Philemon for any hardship he may have suffered due to the temporary loss of Onesimus' services. But he adds yet more leverage: Philemon owed him his life! Paul is "pulling out all the stops" and cashing in on anything he could in order to motivate (through "arm twisting") Philemon to do the honorable thing as a Christian. And on top of that he informs Philemon to prepare a room for his impending visit. Paul will be there in person to see what Philemon chooses to do!

1:23–25 Greetings

Paul gives the usual greetings, from himself and others with him.

Colossians

The letter to the Colossians was written by Paul and Timothy about 60 AD while Paul was in prison in Rome. It is a rebuttal to an undefined false teaching or collection of teachings, primarily by first presenting the true teachings.

Outline

1. 1:1–14 Greetings, prayer and praise
2. 1:15–20 Jesus' divinity, humanity, and supremacy
3. 1:21–23 Reconciliation and persistent faith
4. 1:24–2:3 Paul's mission
5. 2:4–8 Warnings about crafty arguments
6. 2:9–15 Spiritual relationships and truths
7. 2:16–23 Standing firm against falsehood
8. 3:1–17 The believer's proper focus and behavior
9. 3:18–4:1 Treating each other properly
10. 4:2–18 General instructions and final greetings

Comments

1:1–14 Greetings, prayer and praise

The Colossians were known for their faith and love for all believers, and for their spiritual growth. Paul prays that even more will be added to them: good behavior, pleasing God, success, knowledge of God, and the power to endure. As he has mentioned more than once in other letters, all believers have a guaranteed

inheritance. Notice the past tense: we have been rescued from darkness; we have had our sins cancelled.

1:15–20 Jesus' divinity, humanity, and supremacy

This passage is an excellent one for answering all who claim Jesus is something less than God. Jesus is clearly shown here to be the Creator God, the source of everything, and the sustaining power of all that exists. Yet some stumble over the phrases, "firstborn of all creation" and "firstborn from the dead", as if he were a mere creation. His being "born" here, as the context shows, is not his coming into existence, but his taking on human form (see Phil. 2:5-11) and then having that form rise from the dead in a new and immortal condition. He was the first to do that. Others rose from the dead before him, but still in their old, mortal bodies. His full Deity is further enforced by the clear statement that in him lives the entirety of God, not just a part. This is the so-called "hypostatic union". He was not part this and part that, but all of both.

Note the head/body metaphor that Paul is fond of using. The Greek indicates head **of**, not **over**, and stresses the unity of head and body as well as the Greek understanding that the body grew out of the head. Since it immediately precedes the statement about reconciliation between God and people, and since the context here is about not only divine power but "holding everything together", we cannot arbitrarily assign the modern meaning "boss" to the word "head". We will see more references to this throughout the letter. And our inability to fully grasp this hypostatic union is no excuse to ignore it or misapply it according to human arguments.

1:21–23 Reconciliation and persistent faith

Now Paul moves from how Jesus reconciled God and people to the purpose of that reconciliation: that we could be presented to God as flawless. This is something Jesus does for us, not something we do for ourselves. Yet what does Paul mean by

saying he trusts that they persist in the faith and are not removed from the hope of the good message?

At first glance this may appear to support Conditional Security, that is, that salvation itself can be lost. But context is the key, and it keeps speaking of our salvation being based upon faith in what Jesus already did. Paul sees this as the foundation that was laid, and it must be stable. A wavering foundation is one that was not properly laid. So Paul is addressing initial salvation and not the possibility of lost faith. If the right foundation was laid, we will naturally continue to follow it. The foundation determines how the building progresses, not the other way around.

Likewise, our actions flow from our salvation; if it is true and firm we will continue in it, but if not, we will waver. So our continuing in the faith is proof of the right foundation having been laid, not that the foundation can be taken away. He is telling the people to look at the solidness of their faith to determine if they had been saved in the first place. It is the difference between "If you are saved you will continue in the faith", and "To remain saved you must continue in the faith". Paul is saying, then, "If you continue in the faith I'll know you were truly saved."

1:24–2:3 Paul's mission

Now Paul briefly shares how God continues to refine him through physical hardship, and that this results in the believers' benefit. He relates that he became a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) to them by God's command, and that God had revealed to him the "secret" that had been kept hidden until now. What is this secret? That everyone, Jew and Gentile, can have the Holy Spirit in them due to faith in the risen Jesus, and through that we have hope, the assurance of "things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

He had been working hard among all the believers to both spread the gospel and then encourage new believers to grow and mature. He endeavors to guard them against deceptive teachings, and he is happy to see some strength and conviction forming in

them. Now he urges them to keep on going, to keep marching and live out the teachings.

2:4–8 Warnings about crafty arguments

Specifically, Paul warns them against subtle and cunning worldly wisdom. This can come in the form of appeals to human tradition, which is a very powerful incentive to conform to the world. We see this in Roman Catholicism for example, where human traditions are elevated above scripture. We see it in Protestantism as well, but it is much more subtle because it's not plainly stated, yet practiced nonetheless.

He mentions the danger of following "elements of the world". This probably refers to occult superstitions and can include "temperaments", the philosophy/religion behind personality testing and even so-called spiritual gifts inventories. Don't be fooled! Don't take this lightly. The Bible tells us it's the Holy Spirit who gives out gifts as he pleases, not man's psychological nonsense. Even the secular world has given up personality testing as unscientific, yet the churches have adopted it as an unbiblical way to divine spiritual gifts instead of letting the Spirit do his work in us. Psychology is not a science but is in fact a competing religion that is openly hostile to Christianity. It calls our faith a mental illness! There is simply no way to adopt its pagan teachings and give them a Christian-sounding label. These are called "hollow" for a very good reason!

2:9–15 Spiritual relationships and truths

Once again Paul stresses that Jesus is the embodiment of the entirety of God. When we are "in" Jesus we are complete. And again we see the Greek word *kephale* meaning "head" (see 1:15–20), but this time the topic is not the head's unity with the body but its being the source of life, hence the translation here as "source".

And being in Jesus means we share in his immersion (trad. "baptism"), death, and resurrection; we are alive to God but dead to sin. But what Jesus accomplished for us is more than new life; it is also declaring us "cleared of all charges" by canceling the Law that stood against us. He nailed this list of charges to the cross as a formal declaration of innocence. Because of that, all legalism and condemnation is "made prisoner" instead. What a reversal! The Law that put Jesus on the cross is now nailed there in our place, and we are free.

2:16–23 Standing firm against falsehood

In light of our being declared innocent, by virtue of what Jesus did for us and our acceptance of it by faith, we must not let anyone judge us on what we eat or drink, what days we observe, or any such external legalism. Notice that even "Sabbaths" are among the things we are no longer obligated to observe. They were part of the legalistic system that had condemned us, but they were only a shadow, a temporary darkness. Our union with Jesus is all that matters now; it is Reality as opposed to shadow.

So we must guard against legalists who try to set themselves over us and put us back under slavery. They fake humility instead of being part of the reality of our Source, Jesus. Paul refers specifically to those who participated in the conjuring of angels to do their bidding, and because of the visions they had they were conceited. As such they were like headless bodies (yet another head/body reference), cut off from the Source of Life.

Since we "died" to those things, why do we try to go back under their authority as if they still have power over us, making us "do this but don't do that"? We tend to get fooled by false humility, man-made religion, and physical deprivation. These things appear to be religious or pious or super-spiritual, but they have no effect on subduing sin or the temptations of the flesh.

3:1–17 The believer's proper focus and behavior

Here again we see our salvation referred to in the past tense. And because this is so, we must keep looking up and stop focusing on this world or on what used to be. We died to this world, and we are hidden or kept absolutely safe in Jesus the Anointed One. And when he is finally revealed to the world, we will finally be given the remainder of our inheritance.

As a result, we must treat all the "dead" things of this world as exactly that. We are new people, being continually changed into the image of Jesus. And this new image does not distinguish between ethnic groups, social ranks, or any other such divisions. We are to replace all that with new "clothing" that is the opposite of the old. And this new clothing can be summed up as Love. If we have that, the rest will follow. Everything must be done to the end of glorifying God.

3:18–4:1 Treating each other properly

Now Paul focuses on interrelationships among believers. He begins with the principle of mutual submission, mutual teaching, mutual concern. We are all equals and must treat each other as such, in gratitude to God and in the Name of Jesus. There is no favoritism here, no superiority, no bossing or ruling.

Keeping that in mind and considering the context, we see some specific areas in which people might question how this mutual submission works out in practice. Wives support husbands because we all are connected to the Master. Husbands love wives for the very same reason, and remember that "love does no harm to its neighbor" (Rom. 13:10). Children obey parents and parents don't aggravate children. Slaves obey masters sincerely, and masters treat slaves fairly and kindly, as they are treated by their Master.

What this section does *not* say is anything about domination. Support and identification cannot be twisted into a dominate/comply relationship. Women of the time were presumed to be

inferior and expected to obey their husbands, so what would be the point of telling them to obey? Instead, Paul recognizes society as it is but gently institutes a revolutionary change: the equality of all believers. We all serve the Master; nobody is closer to Him than anyone else.

4:2–18 General instructions and final greetings

Now Paul gives instructions about praying and acting wisely. We need to keep our eyes open for opportunities to spread the gospel, and to be careful how we act in front of the world. He tells of people he will send to the Colossians, along with greetings from those staying with him in prison. He also gives personal recommendations for them.

A woman named Nympha is mentioned as one who has an assembly of believers meeting in her house. We must not assume she is merely a host or just being hospitable, just because she's a woman. Had this been a man, nobody would think twice about his being a leader or being worthy of respect. That the believers meet in her house is an indication of her leadership and respectability.

Lastly, Paul instructs the Colossians to read this letter also to the believers at Laodicea, who in turn were to give their letter from Paul to the Colossians. The letter to the Laodiceans was not preserved for us, but I'm sure God had his reasons. Paul makes sure this letter is known to be authentic by adding a greeting in his own handwriting, possibly due to the problem of forgeries referenced in 2 Thes. 2:2.

Philippians

The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul and Timothy about 60–61 AD while he was in prison in Rome. This city of Philippi was where he witnessed to the jailor, and the synagogue outside the city was where he met Lydia (Acts 16). It is a letter of gratitude, encouragement, praise, and prayer.

Outline

1. 1:1–6 Greetings
2. 1:7–11 Prayer partners
3. 1:12–17 Turning adversity into opportunity
4. 1:18–26 Torn between two worlds
5. 1:27–2:11 Rewards for suffering
6. 2:12–18 Perseverance in holiness
7. 2:19–30 Recommended emissaries
8. 3:1–11 Warnings against legalists
9. 3:12–14 Straining toward the goal
10. 3:15–4:1 Unity in faith
11. 4:2–3 Unity in leadership
12. 4:4–9 The peace of God, the God of peace
13. 4:10–19 Consistent generosity
14. 4:20–23 Greetings

Comments

1:1–6 Greetings

In this greeting Paul mentions "guardians and servants". These two words are typically translated "overseers/bishops and deacons/ministers". But our word "overseer" tends to lean more toward the idea of ruler and less of protector, while "deacon" is not a translation at all but a *transliteration*, that is, putting a foreign word into how it would be pronounced in the language one is writing in. It means "servant". This word is also typically translated "minister", depending on the translator's choice. But it had no connotation such as a paid speaker or CEO, as in most churches throughout history. There is some evidence that these servants were benefactors who had the means to help the believers in matters of law or finance.

Paul is very grateful to the Philippian believers for their continued partnership with him in spreading the good message. Because of this, he is confident that God will keep supplying them with increasing spiritual blessings. Note that it is God, not the people, who both began this work and will complete it.

1:7–11 Prayer partners

The people have continually prayed for Paul and worked by his side. So one of the things he prays for on their behalf is spiritual discernment. They are to test everything, not swallow everything blindly.

1:12–17 Turning adversity into opportunity

Rather than hindering Paul's efforts, his imprisonments have actually helped. The guards and many others became aware of the reason for his arrest so that the good message was made known to them. And it makes others bold, seeing that not even imprisonment can shackle the good message. To Paul, nothing mattered more

than getting the truth out. Even if some people sought to use it to draw disciples away from him and to themselves, Paul is happy, as long as it's the truth that's being preached. God will deal with improper motivation in his good time.

1:18–26 Torn between two worlds

Paul expresses his being torn over whether he'd prefer to be dead and in heaven with Jesus, or here on earth to continue his work. But for the sake of others, he is happy to still be here to help the believers grow. Note that there is no hint here of "soul sleep" or delay between physical death and being conscious in the presence of God.

1:27–2:11 Rewards for suffering

Now his attention turns to the people's behavior, so that the good message will not be maligned. There is to be no fear of opposition from people who are still under God's condemnation. Suffering is part and parcel of salvation, so it should not be seen as something unexpected. But Paul does not stop there. He holds up Jesus as the example to which all believers must look, as one who has suffered for the sake of a greater good.

Chapter 2 vs. 5–11 is one of the most powerful and compelling passages of the entire New Testament, and it is full of deep theology. Although this is one of Paul's most positive and uplifting letters, we have controversy here because it reveals very basic truths about Jesus' deity and humanity.

It tells us first of all that Jesus "was in the form of God in the very beginning". He didn't start out as a man and work his way up, as the cults declare. Neither did he eternally exist as any kind of sub-level of God, as the "eternal sonship" proponents insist. He was not a mere angel (see Hebrews) or any other lesser being. Yet in spite of divine power and privilege, Jesus did not cling to it and refuse to stoop down to our level.

Voluntarily he set aside his divine privilege and made himself like one of us lowly creatures. It was not forced upon him or decreed by the Father over him, but something he chose to do. It was in this humble situation that he took on the position of slavery, humbling himself and perfectly obeying the Father, even to the point of a tortuous and humiliating death!

Yet this was not the end; God raised him back to glory and gave him the most exalted Name. Jesus did not permanently remain lower than the Father, but was restored to full equality as before. And because of what he did, Jesus will ultimately be acknowledged, willingly or not, by all sentient beings as the Master, to the glory of God the Father. Jesus spoke in prayer of his being one with the Father, and that they would again share the glory they had in eternity past.

We must remember that though Jesus was always divine and always will be, he did not become human until that point in history. Otherwise the statement about taking on the form of a human would mean nothing. Yet he will always remain human as well. In his divinity he is still fully equal with all three Persons of God, but at the same time, in his humanity he will always be the Son, and we will always be his adopted siblings.

2:12–18 Perseverance in holiness

This is all for our motivation, as an example to follow. Because of all Jesus did, we are then to carry our salvation to its ultimate conclusion. Yet many stop right there and say "See? We have to work for our salvation!". But they ignore the very next statement: "For it is **God** who is empowering you". Salvation is God's work; obedience is ours. Salvation is still a gift, still fully of God, and still not a reward. Instead, the context is all about following the One who is already our Master and Savior, the One we already belong to. It is this growth and new life we carry out (not "work for"). All the other scriptures cannot be ignored in favor of an incomplete quote!

Further, we are to stop whining about this following and suffering. We must hold on tight to the Word of Life and not to our own righteousness. Paul's statements cannot be used as another attempt to throw out our security as believers, but simply as he writes here: that we stop relying on ourselves and thus make all Paul's earlier teachings on how to grow as having been a waste of time.

2:19–30 Recommended emissaries

Paul hopes to send Timothy to the Philippians soon so he can relay news about them. Paul doesn't call Timothy an actual physical son here, but uses the term to describe his close relationship with him. For this reason he wants the people to treat Timothy with great respect. He also had earlier sent Epaphroditus to them, a "co-worker and comrade-in-arms". The people had worried about his (Epaphroditus') health, but Paul is happy to report that God had mercy and healed him. Now he can visit them again, and they were to hold him in the same esteem as Paul and Timothy, since he had also risked his life for them.

3:1–11 Warnings against legalists

Now Paul turns to words of advice and warning. There are people who want to control and micromanage, to rule and enslave. He had the legalistic "Judaizers" in mind especially, those who kept trying to force circumcision on all believers. Paul himself was a Jew with the highest legalistic credentials, but as great as his accomplishments had been, he counted them all as utterly worthless, as "a pile of manure"! What he had greatly valued before was now seen for what it is: all for nothing. All the greatest accomplishments, the highest credentials, the most flawless performance was now considered unworthy to be compared with knowing Jesus the Anointed One, God in the flesh. He had lost it all, but gained much more.

In light of that, how can anyone today insist that we must do this or that to get or remain saved? This works-salvation is known as Lordship Salvation, but it really isn't about the Master at all. It's all about us, our performance, our own righteousness. Look at Paul, his works both before and after salvation. Yet in all his letters he keeps pointing away from himself and towards Jesus. Salvation is still by faith alone. Those old works could never save Paul, and they won't save us today. Instead, he resolved to only know Jesus and the power of his resurrection. It's not the power of us!

3:12–14 Straining toward the goal

We have not attained our own resurrection or even reached full maturity, but we continue to pursue it nonetheless. Jesus has already taken possession of that which we reach for! We strive then, not to acquire what is already guaranteed to us, but what will result in our maturity and reward. We are not to sit on our inheritance, but to invest it, remembering Who it really belongs to. Yet at the same time, we are responsible for that investment. So we chase after that goal, straining toward the time when our faith becomes sight. A "prize" awaits all who run the race. Again, this is works/rewards language and therefore cannot refer to salvation itself.

3:15–4:1 Unity in faith

Paul encourages the people to run in the same direction and follow his example. They should note the contrast between his life and the lives of those who are really enemies of Jesus, who live only for the world. We are no longer citizens of this world but of the kingdom of God, and we should live like such citizens. Paul views the people as his medal of honor, his trophy, and he wants them to stand firm.

4:2–3 Unity in leadership

Now Paul starts to name names. Two women named Euodia and Syntyche have contended at Paul's and Clement's side, and he asks someone named Syzugos to be of assistance to them. They are called Paul's co-workers, which should not be glossed over. Many people brush these women off as mere assistants instead of being on a par with Paul and the others. Had they been men, nobody would even think twice about this. Yet Paul even tells this Syzugos to assist them, showing their importance and worthiness of respect as leaders.

4:4–9 The peace of God, the God of peace

Now some general instructions on practical Christian living. Be happy, don't worry, depend on God and speak to him often. This will result in inner peace, something the world tries to work for but Christians can have for nothing! This in turn will serve to guard our thoughts from that which would bring us down. Paul speaks of both the peace of God and the God of peace. If we keep our focus on the good and pure, we are walking with the God of Peace, who will never leave us.

4:10–19 Consistent generosity

While the Philippians had been inconsistent in the past with their giving to others, now they were showing maturity in this area. To assure them that he isn't hinting that they should give him something, Paul tells the people about his contentment in every situation. And he commends them for sticking with him in spite of their own suffering. They were the only assembly of believers to do so and went beyond expectation to help him. Yet whatever they did for him resulted in credits to their account spiritually.

4:20–23 Greetings

As was his custom, Paul signs off with blessings and praise to God, along with greetings from other believers.

1 Timothy

The first letter from Paul to Timothy was written somewhere between 61 and 64 AD. Timothy's mother was a Jew who became a Christian, and his father was a Greek. Paul had left Timothy to look after the community of believers in Ephesus, an influential center of false teaching, especially Gnosticism. It is this problem that the letter focuses on, and which is therefore the most important and over-arching context.

While traditionally referred to as a "pastoral epistle", it should be noted that Timothy is never addressed with any title or as having that particular gift. Instead he does what we typically associate with a missionary, like Paul.

Outline

1. 1:1–2 Greetings
2. 1:3–11 Timothy's task: stop falsehood
3. 1:12–17 God's mercy to Paul
4. 1:18–20 Timothy's task reinforced
5. 2:1–10 General instructions about prayer
6. 2:11–3:1a Particular instructions about a woman
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8. 3:8–13 Qualifications for Servants
9. 3:14–4:5 General instructions about behavior
10. 4:6–16 Timothy's task as a role model
11. 5:1–16 Instructions about the elderly and widows
12. 5:17–20 Instructions about Elders

13. 5:21–25 Timothy's attitude toward his task
14. 6:1–2a Instructions about masters and slaves
15. 6:2b–16 Timothy's task before God
16. 6:17–21a Instructions to the rich
17. 6:21b Final greeting

Comments

1:1–2 Greetings

Paul, as usual, identifies himself as a missionary appointed by God, especially Jesus. He calls Timothy his "child" but no scholar has cited any evidence to suggest he was a literal, physical child of Paul's. Paul was unmarried and never hints at ever having been married.

1:3–11 Timothy's task: stop falsehood

There was much occultism and a strong Gnostic presence in the large city of Ephesus, and it is this in particular that seemed to be a problem for the community of believers. So it is no surprise that Paul jumps immediately into the subject of false teachers.

The false teachers were obsessed with fiction and endless genealogies instead of doing the will of God. They abandoned teachings about holiness and simple faith in favor of wasting time on things that didn't matter. Worse, they pretended to be experts in the Law even though they had no idea what they were talking about. But Paul points out that the Law these people loved was meant for convicting lawbreakers, not for making people better or more spiritual. Paul had been entrusted with the good message and was therefore qualified to identify and expose falsehood.

1:12–17 God's mercy to Paul

Paul had been empowered by God to reveal the truth. The very fact that he had formerly been a slanderer, a persecutor, and an arrogant person was a testament to God's mercy, since his former life was lived in ignorance of the truth. He considered himself the biggest sinner, but it was that very fault that showed God's grace all the more. And if he, this great sinner, could be shown mercy, so can anyone.

1:18–20 Timothy's task reinforced

Again Paul gives Timothy a solemn charge to fight against anything that would go against the faith. Prophecies were made about him and he was to live up to them.

As an example of the opposite of Timothy, Paul holds up two individuals named Hymeneus and Alexander who had been guilty of slander. Notice that Paul had these men handed over to Satan to be taught a lesson. Instead of leaving them in the community of believers to make a mockery of the faith¹⁵, they were thrown out where Satan could oppress them. This is the same language Paul used in his letter to the Corinthians concerning the man committing incest (1 Cor. 5:5). And the purpose in both cases was so that the offenders could be brought back to repentance and restored to fellowship. This would not be true of unbelievers!

Not only are these two believers, but they are named by Paul. This is significant because Paul only names false teachers who sin knowingly; that is, they are being deceitful and spreading

15. As opposed to traditional interpretation, notice that Paul does not say that these men have "made shipwreck" of the faith of others, but of The Faith; there is no hint of possession in connection with "the faith" here. This statement is followed immediately by the charge of slander, so they were speaking lies. To keep them in the community of believers would have given sanction to their false teachings. This had to be cut out from among them in order to keep the community pure.

falsehood even though they know better. This is in contrast to Paul's habit of not naming people who teach falsehood but do so out of ignorance. So when Paul gives us names, the people are deceivers, but when he doesn't, the people are deceived themselves.

In addition to telling us that these were believers who were deliberately being deceitful, this also tells us that there is Biblical support for naming names in these cases. Today, most believers cry "do not judge!" when anyone names names, but Paul repeatedly holds himself up as an example to follow, and he named names. So any who set themselves up as Christian leaders, evangelists, or having authority can therefore not cry "touch not God's anointed!" (which of course is scripture twisting anyway) when they are publicly named as false teachers.

2:1–10 General instructions about prayer

Paul begins this passage with "therefore", translated also as "because of all that", so we need to pick up the point of what he was just discussing: false teachers. In light of that kind of problem, Paul prescribes prayer for all people, especially those in prominent positions. If the leaders are thus supported, there will be much less of a problem with false teachers, and less oppression of believers by the state.

In vs. 4–6 we see that God wants all people to be saved and to fully know the truth. This is further proof of his love for all the world, not just the "elect" or "chosen". There is only one God and one Mediator between God and people, the Anointed One Jesus. It is he who paid the ransom, and for everyone, not just some. Yet the "churches" have always put "Pastors" or preachers in the place of Jesus, as somehow needed to "cover" or mediate between the "laity" and God. That is usurping the place of Jesus! They tell people that every believer must be under some preacher's covering or they are out of the will of God. This is used to keep people from leaving them and undermining their comfortable positions of

prestige and control. They need the money and the servants. Perhaps this is the sin of Hymeneus and Alexander.

Another area of such prideful sin is the teaching of a man needing to "cover" a woman, or to be "the priest of the home". Nothing could be farther from the truth, or more damaging to the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9). No man is closer to God than any woman, or between her and God. Only Jesus occupies that place, and all others are usurpers and power-grabbers.

Paul repeats that he had been appointed by God as a courier of this good message of salvation in Jesus to the Gentiles. Being thus appointed, he has the authority to give guidelines to believers. Paul continues on with instructions about praying, directing the command to pray with a clean conscience and without anger to the men. To the women he gives instructions on modesty and moderation: no provocative outfits or showing off one's wealth in the community of believers.

As in other of his writings, Paul will sometimes give specific instructions to various groups like this. But it does not mean that only that group is under the instruction. Notice he says "likewise" to the women, then gives additional instructions. So while strife was more of an issue the men needed to be especially warned about, showing off was more of a problem for the women. And just as showing off is of course never appropriate for men either, strife is never appropriate for women. Paul did not exclude either group from the instructions to the other, but only emphasized what each group had a particular weakness for.

Think of this in practical, everyday terms. If a group of children are playing and one of them steals a toy from another, do all the children need a lecture on theft? No, only the one who stole. All the children already know it's wrong, so there is no need to reprimand those who are abiding by the rules. But by reprimanding the thief, no one would conclude that all the other children are allowed to steal! Likewise, by telling men not to argue and women not to show off, Paul is not telling women that they can argue and men that they can show off.

This is a very important principle to grasp, because this same logical error is made in other passages of scripture. For example, if Paul tells husbands to love and wives to respect (Eph. 5), does that mean wives do not have to love and husbands to not have to respect? Of course not, especially since he had just told them all to respect each other. He is merely giving emphasis, and the context there tells us why.

2:11–3:1a Particular instructions about a woman

Paul segues from what he just said about a group of women to a problem with a particular woman; note the shift from plural to singular. Remember the overall context of false teaching, especially the part about people presuming to be teachers but not being qualified. This woman was unqualified to teach and was ordered to stop because of the content of that teaching.

The Greek word translated here as "control" is *authentein*, a rare word in literature of the time and used only here in the entire New Testament. The closest meaning seems to be that of a murderer, but of course Paul is not speaking of literal, physical murder here. But the whole phrase, *de... ouk... oude...*, means "not this, and not even that". So the likely meaning in this context is that of taking strong control over someone, in this case "a man". Paul's order is to have the woman learn in quietness as any respectful student, so her teaching can be tied to the letter's overall emphasis on false teachers who mistakenly believed they were qualified to teach.

Notice that not only is this about a particular woman, but also that there are two issues here which Paul forbids for her: teaching, and *authenteo*-ing. Remembering the principle mentioned previously, would Paul be sanctioning *authenteo*-ing if it is done by men? Of course not. Men are not allowed to *authenteo* just because this prohibition is not directed at them in this instance. In fact, we know from other scriptures that it is never right for any believer to domineer another (see Mt. 20:24–26, Mark 10:41–45, 1 Cor. 13:4–7, Phil. 2:3–11), and a good argument can be made

against anyone but the New Testament writers teaching "authoritatively". So Paul is telling Timothy not to let this particular woman teach because she is unqualified, nor to *authenteo* because no believer is allowed to do that. She needed to be told this because, like the child who stole a toy, she is the one committing this infraction.

Paul follows his rebuke of the woman with a typically badly-misinterpreted and badly-translated sentence: his reference to Adam and Eve. All he actually says about them is that Adam was created first and Eve second, and Adam was not fooled. Nothing is said about hierarchy between them, either in this context or in its original context in Genesis. What does this chronological order have to do with deception? Being first, Adam knew from personal experience that God had the power to create; he knew God made Eve from part of his (Adam's) "flesh and bone". Eve, the last one created, had no such personal experience. (A discussion of Genesis 1–3 regarding this issue is found in the Appendix.) So Eve's weakness was lack of experience, and Paul relates this to the woman in question.

Who is "the woman"? Paul writes, "And Adam was not fooled, but **this woman**, being completely fooled, **has fallen into a state of error**." Most, if not all, translations put it as something like "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." (TNIV) They presume that Paul implies Eve is "the woman", but the Greek grammar does not allow it; the word mistranslated "became" is in the perfect tense and thus "has become", a past action with continuing results in the present.¹⁶ Whoever this is, she is still, in Paul's day, in error. Therefore it could not refer to Eve or anyone else who was not alive at the time. And Paul switches from naming Eve to making the generic reference "the woman" in the middle of the sentence. The only thing this woman has in common with Eve was in being

16. James A. Brooks, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, University Press of America, Lanham, Md., 1988

deceived, due to her being inexperienced, which is why she was unqualified to teach.

Why was she not named? Unlike the men named earlier (see 1:18–20), this woman believed what she was teaching was true. Otherwise Paul could not describe her as having been deceived. There is no hint that the men had been fooled, so they are named; this woman has been fooled and still in error, so she is not named. The men were thrown out of the assembly; this woman is allowed to stay, but she must step down as a teacher and take the place of a humble student. The word translated "quiet down" (trad. "silent") is *hesuchia*, which does not mean absolute silence but respectful quietness, listening to a qualified and respected teacher.

As with *authenteo*, the word translated here as "by means of proper spiritual upbringing", *teknogonias* (lit., "the childbearing"), is rare and almost always refers to the literal bearing or raising of children. The woman is to be "raised" in the faith before she can "parent" anyone, and through this instruction she will be "rescued" (lit. "saved").

This salvation cannot refer to the salvation of the soul from eternal wrath, since it is said to depend upon whether "they" **remain in** (not enter into for the first time) faith, love, and wisdom. And it cannot refer to Eve for the same reasons, as well as the fact that this salvation is in the future, and Eve had been long dead. If she were unsaved, she would not have been allowed to teach at all. And if the men who were thrown out were not considered lost (the lost don't need to be taught a lesson), then this woman who was not thrown out cannot be considered lost either. Instead, in keeping with the letter's context, she will be saved from her falsehood and deception. This, again, is in contrast to being "handed over to Satan" for an education.

The argument that this word for "saved", *sothesetai* (lit., "she shall be saved"), must mean salvation of the soul from eternal wrath is circular. It argues that Paul always means that kind of salvation because that is always the context in which he uses it. But here, the context is not about the lost at all, rather false teaching to or by the saved. If it is context that determines the

meaning, then we can only say the meaning is always the same if the context is always the same. But the context is the point under debate here. Also note that this same root, *sozo*, is used in 4:16.

3:1b–7 Qualifications for a Guardian

As with the passage about the woman, this one about Guardians (lit. *episkopes*, trad. "bishop" or "overseer") is not without controversy; much is read into it. The Greek does not specify males here, and neither does the word "office" or "position" or "pastor" appear. The grammar throughout is in the singular, suggesting that Paul is focusing on an individual, perhaps a candidate Timothy is asking about. We should keep this in mind as we read.

Notice first of all that this being a Guardian is something people can aspire to; there is no mention of someone being "called" by a subjective impression or experience. In Titus 1:5 we see very similar qualifications, but that those Elders were to be appointed by other Elders (Timothy for example). The idea in both passages is that any who exhibited a desire to lead and guard the assembly were to be watched and tested before being appointed. They must be mature and able to handle the scriptures properly before being allowed to lead and teach.

Next are listed the qualifications for Guardians. First is the phrase "husband of one wife". People have argued over what this could mean: Can only men be Elders? And must these men only have one wife ever, or is it just that they can't be polygamists? What about men who had been divorced? What about single men or those without children?

The words in the Greek phrase *mias gunaikos andra* literally read "of one wife the husband", but in New Testament times there was no point in telling women at the time to be faithful. Only men were allowed and sometimes even expected to have concubines and sleep with their slaves. So only men would need to be told this. And if it is an individual man aspiring to be a Guardian, Paul would of course stipulate the qualifications in male terms, for

example, "That guy you asked about: he must be a one-woman man..."

In addition, it was taken for granted that a married couple (especially one in which either would have had time to mature in the faith) would have children. It does not mean that having children is a prerequisite for eldership, or people like Paul and Timothy would have been disqualified; neither of them was even married, much less a parent. So the requirement about managing children and supporting them cannot be taken as a mandate for marriage and parenthood, only for faithfulness and respectability. And that being the case, we also cannot demand that the Elder be a male; we can't pick and choose which of these words are binding and which are not.

Another vital quality for Guardians is that they are experienced believers, not novices. Many ignore this advice and then wonder why so many of the people they appointed to leadership are easily caught up in sin or fail to properly guard the people. Those who are put into a position of honor and responsibility too soon are easy prey for Satan, especially in the area of pride. We see this all the time; the "Pastor" is put up on a pedestal and elevated to "clergy" class above the "laity". He bristles at any questioning of his authority and commands the people to follow his leading, imagining that whatever he thinks is God's will for the assembly, the people are obligated to blindly follow. Many cults were born of this evil seed.

3:8–13 Qualifications for Servants

The word translated here as "servant" is *diakonos*. Most translations only transliterate the word when they think it refers to some kind of office or position. If it is used in a context which the translators feel is describing someone of higher rank (such as Paul), they translate this same word as "minister". But if the person it is describing is female, they never translate it as "minister" but only "servant".

There is no connection made between any servant and the seven typically called "deacons" in Acts 6:1–7. The verb form of *diakonos* is used in the phrase "It is not good for us to neglect the Word of God in order to **serve** tables...", but there is no hint of an office or position being created for the chosen seven. This was a particular problem to solve, and no New Testament writer ever refers to it again. If anyone wanted to make a mandate for an official body called "the deaconate" out of it, they would also have to rule that there must always be seven, and judging by the names and context, they must also be Greeks.

This passage begins with "likewise" or "in the same way", referring back to the passage about Guardians. Nowhere in any of the Letters are we told what these servants were to do, but historical records of the time seem to suggest they were public benefactors who had the social and financial means to protect the community of believers in some way. Verse 11 also begins with "likewise" and refers to women. The Greek grammar does not support this as referring to "wives of servants" but to women who are servants. Around 180 AD Clement of Alexandria wrote that Paul referred here to women deacons, as did John Chrysostom in the 3rd century, so this is no feminist or modern invention. We also have Paul's mention of the servant (masculine form is used) Phoebe in Romans 16:1.

Whatever their function, the servants were to be tested before being allowed to serve, just as Guardians had to be experienced believers. Status and power were not the primary qualifications, but faithfulness, trustworthiness, and a solid Christian example to both believers and society at large. And there is nothing about rule or authority, but only provision and protection.

3:14–4:5 General instructions about behavior

Now Paul takes a short side trip to express his intention to visit Timothy soon, but also to say that he wanted to write the letter anyway, just in case. Notice that he tells Timothy how *he* should behave in the community of believers. The Greek literally reads

"that you may understand how it is binding in the home of God to behave", giving the primary meaning of being directed at Timothy, not to the people he is to instruct. And it is the community of believers, not some consecrated building, which Paul calls God's House.

In keeping with the context of falsehood, Paul gives a perspective from the angle of departures from the faith in the last days. Contrasted with the truth of "the secret" (the multi-faceted testimony about Jesus coming in the flesh and returning to heaven) was an impending turning away. This is a form of the Greek word *apostasia*, typically transliterated as "apostasy", which only means "to turn the opposite way". In this context about falsehood it tells us that this is a turning away from the faith.

Specific signs of falsehood begin with an obsession with minute details. This is the Greek word *hypokrisei*, typically transliterated as "hypocrisy", but it does not carry the modern English meaning. Instead, it had to do with what we'd call legalistic nitpicking. Other items include the forbidding of marriage and the eating of certain foods. This is hardly a comprehensive list, but these were aspects of Gnosticism at the time.

4:6–16 Timothy's task as a role model

Paul expects Timothy to do more than instruct: he should also live the teachings. He is warned not to get sidetracked by worthless fiction, another aspect of Gnosticism (see ch. 1). Instead he is to spiritually condition himself, to stay in "shape" in keeping with the example he is to live out.

What of the curious statement, "who is the savior of all people, especially of the ones who believe"? If, as some say, Jesus only died for believers, this makes no sense at all. Instead, it means that he died for everyone, but only some actually get saved because they believe.

Timothy was evidently young for his task, but it's safe to say that Paul was qualified to judge his maturity and faithfulness. So

he tells Timothy not to let anyone intimidate him over his youthfulness. He must therefore be all the more careful to always exhibit that maturity. His continuing to devote himself to the truth would result in the "saving" of not only himself but also the whole assembly.

Here again we have a word for "save" from the same root (*sozo*) as in 2:15, and again the meaning cannot be that of salvation from eternal wrath. Timothy was already saved, and nothing he could do could save anyone else, because salvation is only by faith.

5:1–16 Instructions about the elderly and widows

Paul begins this section with specific instructions on how to treat these two groups. Remember that the gentle treatment Paul commands is for believers in the assembly, not antagonists from outside who would attack and scatter the flock. He also instructs Timothy on the matter of widows, who in that society had no state welfare or social security. But this is not to say the communities of believers couldn't still follow these guidelines.

But notice in the instructions about younger widows, that they are to "rule their homes". The Greek word is *oikodespotein*, literally "house despot." And just as with the passage about head coverings in Corinthians, it is the woman who has the authority. In this particular context, it is an admonition to take the responsibility that goes with authority and not neglect one's duties. We could take the part about the ones who become idle renouncing the faith two ways: that they do not become lost but give evidence that they were never saved, or that they "make shipwreck" of the faith and bring shame on it. Some will insist that this is a case of lost salvation; see the Appendix for more discussion.

5:17–20 Instructions about Elders

The Greek word for Elders is *presbuteroi*, and context determines whether it means an elderly person or one who is mature in the faith and has been recognized by the community of

believers as such (see Titus). In this context it seems obvious that Paul is referring to the latter, since he has already told Timothy how to treat the elderly (same Greek word is used in 5:1 and 2) and because he describes them here as "protecting and providing" (lit. "have stood before").

These Elders are to be given "double honor" if they also instruct people about the Word. Paul's reference here to wages has nothing at all to do with paying the modern-day "Pastor" a salary. The context is about honor and respect. Nevertheless, some scholars say it is in fact all about money, since Paul has been talking about financial support for widows. Yet if elders are to be paid "double", who is paid "single"? Is this a legalistic command to pay "Pastors" twice as much as "Deacons"? Since no one is ever designated to receive a "single" salary, then this reference to "double" must be compared to the honor most people receive.

Further weight to the non-monetary view is given by Paul's statement about accusations against Elders. Their "double honor" lies in the fact that it takes "two witnesses" to even accuse an Elder of wrongdoing. Their work earns them that respect. And if any elders are found guilty, the community of believers must publicly rebuke them. The purpose of this is to motivate everyone to stay away from sin. As Paul will tell Timothy in the next section, all of these things are to be done without bias or favoritism. But today's "churches" not only refuse to publicly rebuke any "Pastors", they frequently won't even rebuke them privately, preferring instead to show great bias and wink at sin rather than to keep the community of believers pure. Scandal after scandal is reported in the secular media as the "Pastors" fall off their pedestals.

There is no prohibition against paying for the expenses or upkeep of travelling missionaries, who have no stable income because they are fully dedicated to a work that requires them to have no permanent home. In fact, as Paul wrote to others, such missionaries have the right to material support, but they should not demand it. But today, most believers do much service to the Christian community without any pay at all, yet if someone with the title "Pastor" does the same, a supportive salary is demanded.

5:21–25 Timothy's attitude toward his task

Following on the heels of falling "Pastors" is the revealing of the underlying cause: being too "quick to place hands" (meaning to dedicate someone for a task, to officially recognize them). Paul already covered the reasons for not doing this, and adds that anyone who does it participates in the sin of the one hastily made an Elder. So any "governing body" that has granted the title "Pastor" without following Paul's instructions is guilty of the sins of those fallen "Pastors".

Here Paul tells Timothy not to drink the local water, but to take wine instead. The Greek indicates not that the water was upsetting his stomach but his bladder, causing frequent urination. And this was wine, not grape juice. Wine is known to be healthful if taken in moderation. The Bible never commands total abstinence, only moderation. (See Deut. 14:26 for an Old Testament reference encouraging the Israelites to include "strong drink" in a celebration to the Master.) It should be noted that Paul's command about this cannot be universally applied to all Elders (a tactic also used by patriarchalists who make Paul's commands about women universal). Some take the OT proverbs about leaders not drinking wine as a binding command for all leaders of all time, clearly ignoring context.

Paul tells Timothy to be discerning and warn the people about hidden sins that will surely catch up with them. Conversely, the unseen deeds of the righteous will also be made known someday. Both will be brought to light.

6:1–2a Instructions about masters and slaves

The subject of slavery is now discussed, and Paul tells anyone in slavery to remember that they serve the Master, who sees them. By working faithfully they bring honor instead of shame to the name of God. While some may think that if their human master is a believer they can slack off and be lazy, Paul tells them that the

opposite is true: we should give even more honor to fellow believers.

Is Paul condoning the practice of slavery? Not at all. As with other social evils, Paul never condones rebellion or protest, but implores us to live like Christians no matter what situation we find ourselves in. Christianity is not about overthrowing governments or trying to force change upon society, but about changing individual hearts by our testimony and example. Notice that Paul acknowledges some believers to be slave owners! But instead of demanding that these people free their slaves, he commands them to treat them kindly.

So Paul cannot be accused of condoning slavery or any other social evil. Instead, he endeavors to help believers make the most of every situation, every society, every government in which they find themselves. This is an important principle to remember on other topics as well, especially when reading passages about women, who in that society were considered property, much like slaves.

6:2b–16 Timothy's task before God

Again Paul refers to Gnosticism in his statement about some people being obsessed with minute details and high-sounding arguments. These things only divide the Body and cause discord.

Some people are greedy and selfish, viewing the gospel as a way to make money. There is historical evidence that even in Paul's day people were selling "preacher licenses". Is it any different today? And we have television hucksters making the gospel into a way to get rich, in blatant disregard for Paul's warning, yet people don't seem to notice the problem. But the will to be rich is an easy path to sin and ruin. It is *a* root, not *the* root, of all kinds of evil. The Greek gives the idea that these people are "cooking their own goose" by pursuing wealth.

But the servant of God is to shun all of that and instead chase after real riches, being pure, holy, faithful, loving, gentle, and persistent. We must contend like athletes for the winner's prize in

faith, the rewards associated with eternal life. We are to stay clean and faithful to the end, when Jesus finally appears at the right time.

6:17–21a Instructions to the rich

To those who are already wealthy in material things in this life, Paul commands them not to be conceited or to trust in their wealth, but to fully trust God instead. In so doing they will acquire true wealth in heaven.

Now some more specific instructions for Timothy. He mentions "worthless babbling... which is falsely called Knowledge." This is a clear reference to Gnosticism, which means to have secret knowledge (*gnosis*). They taught that matter is intrinsically evil or at least fatally flawed, while only the spirit is good and light. Only by an "awakening" or insight could people be freed from evil flesh and see the true "god" within. They therefore believed that Jesus could not have ever been flesh and thus not have died for anyone's sins. They also believed that most people were unworthy of this special knowledge, forming an elite class of enlightened ones.

Gnosticism is alive and well today, sometimes adopting the title "Enlightened Christianity". They claim to be the true Christians and that Paul hijacked Christianity and opposed the teachings of Jesus. They quickly accept any scrap of ancient paper as being the real Bible while rejecting the well-supported texts of the real Bible. So Paul's warning here is not something we can ignore.

6:21b Final greeting

Paul abruptly ends the letter with that warning, adding that people were already being led astray by that false knowledge.

Titus

The letter from Paul to Titus was written around 63 AD before Paul's final imprisonment. These are specific instructions on how Titus should set up the community of believers on the island of Crete, the converts Paul had made earlier.

Outline

1. 1:1–5 Greetings and purpose
2. 1:6–9 Qualifications for Elders
3. 1:10–16 Identifying false Elders
4. 2:1–8 Male and female Elders
5. 2:9–14 Slaves
6. 2:15–3:8a General instructions and God's compassion
7. 3:8b–11 Reminders for Titus
8. 3:12–14 Personal business
9. 3:15 Final greetings

Comments

1:1–5 Greetings

Paul begins with a reference to himself as a lowly slave of God, whose job is to be a missionary. In spite of his credentials and honored commission, he is not boastful or high-minded. Our hope is in eternal life through Jesus, who in His mercy chose Paul as one through whom this good message would be spread. Like Timothy, Titus is also called a "child" by Paul.

1:6–9 Qualifications for Elders

He had left Titus in Crete to "appoint Elders in every city". Notice that there was to be more than one Elder (spiritually mature, tested and found faithful and qualified) per city. Some people might claim that each of those Elders ran an individual assembly, but the context doesn't give us that. In the first century there was only one assembly per town. They met in various homes but it was still one assembly. It's probable that each small group had an Elder, but it's also just as likely that there was more than one per group. At any rate, there is no firm backing for the traditional concept of the "head Pastor" as a kind of CEO with autocratic authority.

Paul gives a brief list of qualifications for Elders. Again, as explained in the comments elsewhere,¹⁷ these lists do not specify that only males can be Elders, or that they must be married and have children. The point is that they are upstanding members of society and the community of believers. Notice that they were to be gentle and encouraging to some, while also being able to refute any who contradict sound instruction. This is a principle Paul has discussed in other letters, that of being a good shepherd. The good shepherd is gentle to the sheep but harsh to the wolves.

Note that Paul equates the Guardian (*episkopon*) with the Elder (*presbuteros*); he makes no break between them. Elder thus refers to the quality of the person but Guardian refers also to the person's duties, and for that Paul uses a term that essentially means a manager or steward for God. Just as he has stipulated the spiritual qualifications of these people, he now adds a description of their responsibilities: to know the true teachings in order to expose the false. So these people had to not only be of the highest quality in how they lived, but also be so well-versed in the truth that they could be trusted to confront and expose falsehood. Of course, this means the person must be able and willing to confront others.

17. 1 Tim. 3:1b–7 Qualifications for a Guardian

Another important thing to note is that these are **appointments**. Age is not something that anyone can be appointed to. So here we have a clear precedent for two possible meanings of *presbuterous*, the other being a simple reference to the aged. But the context of this whole short letter is that of appointment, and thus not about the elderly.

Servants (*diakonos*) are not mentioned in this letter at all. One would expect to see them mentioned here if Paul is laying down the framework of an organization, with Guardians on top and Deacons below them, with the common people on the bottom. What the people of Crete needed was not an institution but protection and nurturing while they were immature and in training.

1:10–16 Identifying false Elders

After berating the Cretans, Paul turns to the example Titus must give to them. He is pointedly charged with not only setting an example of holiness in a debauched society, but to teach the believers the basics of the faith and make sure they learn the lesson well. He is told to control and oppose any who dispute the truths of the faith, especially the Jews who were pushing circumcision for the sake of profit. Paul even quotes a local proverb about how bad the Cretans' reputation was, as being an incentive for Titus to "expose them severely". This is a common theme in Paul's letters, to stand and oppose falsehood, not to sweep it under the rug as is practiced today. And as a popular saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." All the "God talk" in the world cannot cover up a life of sin forever.

2:1–8 Male and female Elders

Paul repeats the qualifications for Elders, both male and female. The Greek word here is the very same root word as in chapter one: "presbyters" were to be appointed in every town. So when many translations use "older men" and "older women" here, they are ignoring the overall context. These are the appointees of

chapter one, not all elderly people. Similarly, the Greek word typically rendered "young" is one from which we get the prefix "neo" meaning "new", not necessarily "young". So Paul is saying that male and female elders are to train new believers in appropriate doctrine and behavior.

This section is written as a chiasm¹⁸ as follows:

1. **A** 2:1 Be the example
2. – **B** 2:2 Male Elders
3. — **X** 2:3–5 Female Elders
4. – **B'** 2:6 Male Elders
5. **A'** 2:7–8 Be the example

Titus, like all appointed Elders, is to live these instructions out, to be an example and not just a teacher in word alone. He is to live up to the highest standard so that critics (in this case it seems to be a particular individual critic) will be exposed as false accusers. This is the "wrapper" in which the instructions he is to give to others is contained.

Male Elders are to aspire to Titus' example in every way, with an emphasis on wisdom. But the most detail is given to female Elders. In addition to the qualities they must share with the males ("the same goes for" or "likewise"), these women had the added task of raising the social behavioral bar for the women of Crete, who were not used to such things in their society. The women needed extra training in wisdom, in raising children, in mastering their homes, and in being supportive of their husbands. As discussed in detail in the commentary under 1 Tim. 2:1–10 (General instructions about prayer), this is being said about the

18. A chiasm (pronounced "key'-azm") is an intersection or crossing of two tracts in the form of the letter "X" or the Greek letter khi. An argument is built up to a central point (X) in any number of steps, then retraced in reverse order. The entire letter to the Romans is a chiasm, with many smaller ones included.

women of Crete because they were lacking in this area, not because men are not to be taught to support their wives.

Women in Crete were being irresponsible, neglecting their homes, husbands, and children. Paul will tolerate none of that in the community of believers. Titus is to see to it that the female Elders train the female new believers in what it means to be a Christian woman. Their standards are not to be lowered either because of their being women or simply being Cretans. The stakes are high because there must be a sharp distinction between the hedonistic culture and the ways of God. Note Paul's play on words between "old" and "new" here; the women who are the opposite of "elders" must be "newbies". Elders were charged with training the new believers, and such training for the women of Crete needed to include the social skills taken for granted by polite society in other places, since they had no proper role models otherwise.

When Paul addresses his instructions to female Elders, he even specifies that they are to act in accordance with the dignity of this **appointment**. The Greek word here shares the same root as in chapter 1 where Paul commands Titus to "appoint Elders"; the only difference is that the earlier reference is a verb (command) while this one is a noun, giving the idea of a kind of "office". So the female Elders must, like Titus, be examples to the women they train.

2:9–14 Slaves

Paul now adds instructions similar to those he's given elsewhere concerning slaves and masters. Of course all believers are to turn their backs on evil and live holy lives, as well as to wait for the expected, glorious, sudden return of Jesus. But there is certainly good reason to emphasize to slaves that they too live up to the same standards and must not give the faith a bad name.

2:15–3:8a General instructions and God's compassion

Titus is to teach all this with confidence and strength, not being intimidated or failing to confront false teachers. He is to remind the people of their duty to obey the ruling authorities, to keep away from slander, and to be as peaceful as possible. We were the opposite of all that while unbelievers, but have received God's kindness and mercy through the "the bath of revival and renewal of the Holy Spirit". Our good deeds had nothing to do with our cleansing, but only faith resulting in our receiving the Spirit.

3:8b–11 Reminders for Titus

Believers should be living examples of all good behavior. We must not indulge in foolish speculations, endless family trees, strife, or legalism. Anyone who does so is to be warned twice, and then expelled from the group if they still won't listen.

3:12–14 Personal business

Paul will send replacements to relieve Titus soon, and then Titus is to come back to visit Paul if possible. And he is to send out two men with provisions, as one of the examples he is to set for the people. Missionaries must not be sent out empty-handed!

3:15 Final greetings

Paul does not name individuals here, but only gives a general farewell.

2 Timothy

The second letter from Paul to Timothy was written around 66–67 AD, shortly before Paul's death. Its subject matter is much like the first letter but begins with a discussion about suffering for the faith. This was written during Paul's final imprisonment, under the infamous Roman emperor Nero, so great persecution was about to be unleashed on the believers.

Outline

1. 1:1–2 Greetings
2. 1:3–2:13 Faith and boldness in suffering
3. 2:14–26 General instructions and reminders
4. 3:1–9 The last days
5. 3:10–17 Following Paul's example
6. 4:1–5 Standing firm
7. 4:6–8 Finishing the race
8. 4:9–13 Abandonment
9. 4:14–18 Opposition and protection
10. 4:19–22 Final greetings

Comments

1:1–2 Greetings

Paul again identifies himself as a missionary for Jesus appointed by God.

1:3–2:13 Faith and boldness in suffering

Paul begins with praise for Timothy's companionship, and for the faith which his (Timothy's) mother and grandmother had instilled in him. He mentions the fact that he (Paul) had placed hands on Timothy (a way of commissioning someone for service), and that as a result of this God gave Timothy some spiritual gift.

He invites Timothy to share in his struggles for the sake of spreading the gospel and gives a summary of it. Paul was commissioned to proclaim and teach this gospel, which would be accompanied by suffering. But instead of being ashamed of his suffering or the gospel itself, Paul entrusted himself to the Savior. He was fully convinced that Jesus would "guard my commitment all the way to the end." Note that here again, as in other letters of his, Paul speaks of the assurance of our eventual arrival in heaven. It comes not from our good deeds but from the finished work of Jesus, who can be fully trusted to deliver what is promised to all who come to him in faith. It is God who guards us.

After saying all that, Paul tells Timothy to "guard the ideal assignment." But notice how this is done: "by means of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." Again, it is not our own strength we must rely upon for our endurance, but the Spirit's strength. We must not insult the Spirit by thinking we can use our own power, or by worrying about losing our inheritance. Such lack of assurance means we don't believe God when he makes a guarantee, and that we don't think the Spirit is powerful enough to keep us safe. "Conditional Security" (the belief that we can throw away our salvation) is thus both presumptuous and distrustful.

Now two men who deserted Paul are named: Phygellus and Hermogenes. It was Paul's practice to name people when they deliberately opposed the gospel. We are to follow his example by naming anyone who is an enemy of Jesus. In contrast, Paul names Onesiphorus as one who stayed with him in spite of the shame of imprisonment.

Since Timothy has been empowered by God, he is charged with passing on what Paul had been teaching him. And he is to

give such teaching to trustworthy people¹⁹, those who were known to be faithful and qualified. Yet throughout church history, teaching has been largely relegated to any warm body willing and able to read from a "teacher's guide" and help the perpetual students to remain dependent upon others for their thinking.

Paul made frequent use of the military as an analogy for the life of the Christian disciple. This should tell us something: that our path will not be a smooth and easy one, but a challenging one. And who does not fight to win? Likewise, who joins a competition but cares nothing about the outcome, or who plants seeds and doesn't care whether they ever sprout? Yet that's what most Christians have always done. They do not train, run, or plant with the intent to succeed, but only to check off the religious boxes on their lists. Such people are saved, but will lose the rewards that only disciples earn.

Paul again emphasizes the core of the gospel, that Jesus rose from the dead. The churches have long emphasized only his death, but it really is his resurrected life that saves. It is the resurrection that the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill scoffed at (Acts 17:16-34), and the reason Paul was in prison. Yet for the joy he knew was guaranteed to him by virtue of the Holy Spirit within him, Paul endured it all joyfully.

Notice in the list Paul gives that the last item is different from all the others: "If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself." Our backsliding cannot cost us that which God Himself guarantees, because it is a unilateral promise. There is nothing we or He can do to reverse that.

2:14–26 General instructions and reminders

Timothy is to remind the people of all these things, and to keep them from wasting time in endless debates over the meanings of words. The people were getting bogged down in discussions about genealogies, the Law, and all sorts of things that were of no

19. This is the Greek word for people or humans, not only males.

value. But by his example, Timothy was to prove himself a faithful worker for God, and an accurate teacher of His Word. To "cut a straight path through" is to discern, to interpret wisely. This is no surface skimming but a deep study.

Again Paul names false teachers, in this case Hymeneus and Philetos, who were saying that the resurrection had already happened. This is a popular teaching even today, and Paul calls it false, something like gangrene to the Body of the Anointed One. They were doing great damage to some people's faith because of this. And it is the same now. Many professing believers no longer wait in eager expectation for the Master's return and harass any who do. They themselves have no faith in the future resurrection and turn many others from it, destroying their hope.

In contrast to the hopeless false teachings, God's Word is solid and sealed; he knows his own. Paul illustrates the difference between faithful followers and false teachers with the analogy of items in a house. Some are for noble purposes, others for holding trash. Those who want to be useful to God must throw that trash away and be clean, instead of wallowing in it and ignoring the truth.

Calvinism or fatalism takes this all to mean that God has chosen some people for salvation in eternity past, but the context clearly is about rewards and usefulness to God, not the saved and the unsaved. It speaks of people "purging **themselves**", not God doing the purging, so it cannot be about salvation. So we are to run away from the worthless things and instead run toward the useful things: godliness, faith, love, and peace.

Then Paul gives instructions on how Christian leaders are to treat those under their care. They are servants, not despots, and must kindly and patiently teach even "difficult" people. But such people are to be corrected, not pacified or ignored. And this is not to be confused with how we are to deal with outsiders, with those who are hostile to the gospel. The way good shepherds do their jobs is to tenderly care for the sheep, but strongly repel the wolves. It is as much a sin to be kind and friendly to those who would harm

believers, as it is to be harsh with believers who just disagree with us.

3:1–9 The last days

The topic turns now to "the last days". Paul describes people at that time as being self-centered (what does this say about "self-esteem"?), fake ("playing church"), railing against God, "devoid of natural affection" (we see this daily in the news, such as when a mother kills her own children), and many other terrible things. They appear to be outwardly religious but do not have the Spirit. We are to turn away from such people.

Paul goes on to describe them as going from house to house dragging off gullible people like prisoners of war. Like many today, they have an insatiable appetite for knowledge but never find it. They are likened to the Old Testament characters Jannes and Jambres, Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses in Pharaoh's court. Eventually they will be exposed.

3:10–17 Following Paul's example

In spite of all that, Timothy has proven himself to have been a good follower of all Paul has taught so far, through all his many trials. And similar hardship awaits all who follow Jesus and take a public stand for the gospel. So he encourages us to continue on the right path no matter what.

Keeping our attention on the scriptures will result in wisdom and can save many. Notice that the scriptures have been "given life" by God. This is the same concept as when God breathed "the breath of life" into Adam. The Greek word *theopneustos* is made of two distinct words: God, and one that can mean wind, breath, or spirit, so it literally reads "God-spirited" or "God-breathed". The question is whether "God-breathed" (the most common translation) means the scriptures were literally dictated by the voice of God, or whether God breathed life into the words as he did to Adam. I believe there is good support for the latter but little for the former.

These "living" scriptures are also useful for "teaching, discovering, correcting, and disciplining in justice." Clearly we can use the Bible in apologetics, in spite of many today who think it's a waste of time. Instead of throwing the Bible away as many professing believers are doing now, we need to cling to it even tighter as the Day draws near.

4:1–5 Standing firm

Paul gives Timothy a solemn injunction to preach the gospel faithfully, because of Jesus' promised return. This hope of the Master's sudden and unpredictable return is to be our motivation, not something to be ignored or abandoned. And not only is the gospel to be preached, but it is to be done whether it's convenient or not. It includes both refuting opponents and encouraging weaker believers.

And it must be done while people are still listening. Paul warns that as the Day nears, people will turn away from hearing the truth and turn instead to fiction, yet another reference to Gnosticism. We see this happening now; people are discarding the Bible in favor of Gnostic works like the so-called "Gospel" of Thomas or the mystical practices of medieval Catholicism. People no longer believe in absolute truth or that there is only one Way to salvation.

4:6–8 Finishing the race

Paul implores Timothy once again to march resolutely onward in the faith, without hesitation or doubt. Paul knows that his time on earth is short and that he has done the work assigned to him. So it is all the more vital that Timothy be found trustworthy.

4:9–13 Abandonment

He wants to see Timothy in person soon, especially since someone named Demas had deserted him. Others had to go away for other reasons, and the only one left was Luke.

4:14–18 Opposition and protection

Paul again names names, this time an unbeliever called Alexander, who was sure to get what was coming to him. Notice that he does not treat this man kindly or gently, but wishes to see God exact revenge upon him! And in spite of having been left pretty much alone, Paul was empowered by God. Because of that, he could rest assured that God was fully capable and trustworthy to bring him home.

4:19–22 Final greetings

As was his custom, Paul ends the letter with greetings. Included are the famous couple Priska and Aquila (note that the wife is mentioned first), who taught Apollos (Acts 18).

Appendix

On Genesis

Innocence - Gen. 1–2

Both male and female are stated as being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Neither is said to reflect or represent that image more than the other. But is authority found in chronological order? God makes the only creatures with authority, humankind, last. If there is any tie between authority and chronological order, the text can only support the idea that the last created being is the one in authority. So Eve's being created after Adam does not imply his rule over her, but could actually support the opposite. However, the only concrete statement that can be made about why humans were given authority is based upon their being made in God's image; no connection is made between chronology and hierarchy.

While human society developed a pattern of supremacy based upon patriarchy²⁰ and primogeniture,²¹ God circumvented that pattern at several important stages. It was not first-created Adam but Eve through whom the Savior was promised; it was Abel, not his elder brother Cain, who was considered righteous (Heb. 11:4); it was not Abraham's firstborn Ishmael but Isaac who was the "child of promise"; it was not the elder Esau but the younger Jacob whose sons were to be the sources of the twelve tribes of Israel. And it was the tiny new nation of Israel, not the larger and stronger nations around them, who were chosen by God (Deut. 7:7). King

20. a social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; control by men of a disproportionately large share of power

21. the state of being the firstborn of the children of the same parents; an exclusive right of inheritance belonging to the eldest son

David was the youngest of all his brothers. So while society may equate order of existence with authority, no such connection is made by God.

Is naming someone or something an act of authority? Adam named animals because God told him to, and Eve wasn't around yet. If she had been there and was not allowed to name animals, there might be a case for seeing some kind of privilege for Adam. But he was the only human in existence at this time, and we already know both he and Eve were given authority over the animals (Gen. 1:28). And Adam called Eve "woman" because he existed before her and she was taken from his own flesh and bones; in fact it is an expression of unity, of sameness, of equality. But the text never calls this naming any kind of authoritative act. In fact, the slave woman Hagar would later name God in Gen. 16:13.

The text states the purpose of Eve's creation to be as a helper for Adam. Is this a proof of hierarchy, that is, is a "helper" inferior to the one needing help? The scripture here is very precise and indicates an equal. When the two Hebrew words *ezer kenegdo* (trad. "help meet") are used together they denote a strong helper who faces or stands equal to another, and it includes the idea of being a defender.²² So there is solid scriptural precedent for taking Eve to be no mere assistant but an equal partner to come to Adam's aid. In fact, if we do check other scriptures for the word "help" or "helper", we see that same word used for God as for Eve.

But what did Adam need help with or defense from? An often-overlooked detail is that Adam was told not only to cultivate the garden but also to guard (trad. "keep") it. Who or what could threaten the Garden of Eden before there were other people? There is only one possible answer: the serpent. Consider the order of events:

1. God charges Adam with both cultivating and guarding the garden (2:15)

22. God's Word to Women, *Word Study: Help-Meet*, God's Word to Women, 2005

2. "It is not good for the man to be alone" (2:18a)
3. "I will make a strong one facing him" (2:18b)
4. God brings the animals to Adam to name (2:19–20)
5. God creates Eve (2:21–22)
6. The serpent is seen in the garden, tempting Eve (3:1)

Between 1:31 and 2:18 something caused a change from "good" to "not good". The scripture states the reason for the creation of Eve (so Adam would not be alone), but it doesn't say why this was not good. We are not told of Adam feeling lonely, but of this being purely the observation of God. What did God observe in Adam that made being alone not a good thing? Why was this not a bad thing when he was first created? Looking at that list, we see that Adam had failed to keep the serpent out of the garden. Of course we can only speculate, but apparently Adam needed help because he had failed in this charge, and Eve was there to stand with him. She did this, as we will see in the next section, but without the intended result.

Another often-overlooked fact in this pre-sin world is that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh" (2:24). The man is to join to the woman, not the woman to the man. Does this signify authority or hierarchy? The passage is silent about that; it is simply stated as a fact. This statement does not prove either way that one joining to the other indicates hierarchy. If our experience says anything, it is either neutral (a joining of two equals) or indicates that the one being joined to is superior. Their being "one flesh" can either refer to a figurative return to the unity of Adam and Eve, or possibly to "one family". From there we could say that if one must take the other's name, it would be the man taking his wife's name.

We can read into the text our preconceived ideas either way, but it never explicitly or even implicitly indicates any kind of hierarchy between Adam and Eve.

Temptation and Sin - Gen. 3:1–7

Adam and Eve were together (3:6b) in the garden when the serpent tempted Eve; she did not try to hide from him or deceive him in any way. When asked what God had said about the Tree of Knowledge, Eve's answer (3:2–3) was not challenged by either Adam or the serpent. Eve attributed her answer to God, not to Adam, and there is nothing in the text (here or anywhere in the Bible) to indicate otherwise. There is also nothing to indicate that Eve lied or was improperly instructed by Adam if she had gotten the warning from him instead of directly from God. But the serpent clearly lied ("you will not die") and "sweetened the deal" ("you will be like God"). The serpent's appeal to Eve was that God had lied and withheld knowledge. This deception and appeal to being like God tricked Eve into sinning by eating the fruit.

Note that Adam was completely silent throughout the whole exchange, and when Eve handed him the fruit he ate it without objection. There is nothing in the text to indicate that Adam had also been deceived, so his sin of eating the fruit was deliberate and without excuse. And there is no hint of authority here except for that of God. If Adam had been given authority over Eve, he made no indication of it nor used it to protect her, failing miserably as a leader and authority. Again, there is no indication of hierarchy between Adam and Eve anywhere in this passage.

God Confronts Sin - Gen. 3:8–21

When God comes to the garden after this, notice the "mirrored" pattern of his questions and then his responses. This type of arrangement was a common rhetorical device in ancient writings, and it is the center of the "mirror" that is the most important point being made.

1. God asks **Adam** what he had done (3:11b–12)
2. God asks **Eve** what she had done (3:13)

3. God curses the **serpent** and promises the Savior through the seed of Eve (3:14-15)
4. God tells **Eve** about a choice she will make (2:19–20)
5. God tells **Adam** the ground is cursed because of him, and he will have to work for his food (3:17–19)

God turns to Adam first and demands an explanation. Adam's response (3:12) is to blame not only Eve but also God ("the woman *you* gave me"). He says nothing about his failure to act, but note also that he doesn't deny having been with her at the time; that is, he doesn't appeal to having been unaware of the temptation. Then Eve is challenged, and her response (3:13b) is true; she makes no effort to pass blame or change the story, and freely admits to having eaten the fruit. We must keep these facts in mind when reading about God's judgment of the matter.

Now God curses the serpent directly and physically (3:14–15); he would crawl on his belly and eat dust. Then, still speaking to the serpent, God adds that he will deliberately put "enmity" or extreme hostility between the serpent and Eve, and between her "seed" and his "seed".²³ But the next statement about what each "seed" will do involves future individuals. So a future "seed of the woman" will crush a future "seed of the serpent", and this is tied to their mutual hostility.

We must not gloss over the fact that it is specifically stated to be the seed of only the woman who would crush the serpent. There is no statement in all the Bible that explicitly states why God chose only the woman's seed, but we will see that it is tied to Adam's second sin: rebellion against God.

Now God turns to Eve and makes a statement (3:16), but we must challenge the traditional translations here. It should read:

23. In the Bible, "seed" is used to speak of someone's descendent(s) or offspring

A snare has increased your sorrow and sighing; in sorrow you will bring forth children. Your turning will be to your husband, and he will rule over you.²⁴

The difference between the traditional rendering and this one is night and day: either God ordered a punishment upon Eve (trad. "I will greatly multiply your pains in childbearing") or He didn't. The Hebrew here depends upon something called "vowel pointing"; the original text did not have any vowels, so later scribes added the points in order to supply them. However, which vowels one chooses can turn the meaning of a word completely around. But consider the context. Does it make sense for God to punish Eve for being deceived and admitting it? The original punishment was death for both of them, and nothing more. So God is simply describing to Eve what had happened to her: she fell into a trap. Then he makes not a command but a prediction: Eve would turn (possibly "desire" but no indication of what this desire was) to Adam and this would result in his ruling over her. Also note that it is Adam, not his "position" or alleged authority, that Eve would "desire".

Note first of all that Adam's rule over Eve was put in the future, so it did not exist in the present. Put another way, if Adam already had rule over Eve, why would God predict it here and make it a future event? God did not say Adam would continue to rule or rule harshly or more effectively, but just rule. Another reason we know God did not command this rule is that he had just blessed Eve with the promise of her seed alone crushing the seed of the serpent who had deceived her (remember it was part of the **serpent's curse**). To turn completely around and curse her with servitude to the man who had blamed her and God for his sin and failed to step in while she was being tempted, would be to say God rewards poor leadership and passing blame, even to the point of

24. K. Bushnell, *God's Word to Women*, Lessons 13–19

blaming God. Adam had proved himself disqualified to lead and unworthy of God's blessing with rule over anyone.

Nothing is said about future generations in this passage except the woman's future seed crushing the serpent's future seed. What God said to Adam and Eve, he said directly to them. There are no statements to the effect of putting all men over all women, or all husbands over all wives, for all future generations. Any theories about how God's words here affected future generations are only conjecture and anecdotal evidence. We can fill in some blanks in hindsight, but the passage itself says nothing about the future of all humanity.

Now God turns to Adam and makes a statement: the ground would be cursed because of him (note that God never said "because you have done this" to Eve). It would produce thorns and thistles, he would eat the plants of the field (before they were only told to eat fruit), and he would return to the dust from which he was taken. Note that Adam was not cursed directly; there is nothing said about his spirit or Eve's, or their future offspring. Finally, Adam is driven out of the garden to prevent his eating from the Tree of Life. The Hebrew states that only "the man" was barred from the Tree of Life and banished from the garden. Why only Adam? The text doesn't say. It tells us Eve would turn to him, but it doesn't say why. All we know is that God predicted Eve would go with Adam, and then he would rule over her. One possible scenario for if she hadn't gone with him, is that she would have given birth to the Savior as a direct fulfillment of God's prediction.

Adam alone was formed from the dust of the earth, and this is what God cursed because of his rebellion. He had not only sinned by eating the fruit, but he also rebelled against God when he blamed Him. It is this rebellion, this second disobedience, *not* eating the fruit, that got the earth cursed and brought sin into the world, and that is why only Adam is blamed for sin in the New Testament. God's original warning, that they would die, certainly happened: they became mortal (physical death). So this added curse on the earth because of Adam can only be due to his

rebellion. That is why the Savior could only come from the seed of Eve; she did not add rebellion to disobedience. Adam's rebellion broke the relationship with God, and that is why Jesus is called the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45); he would have to die to repair the relationship with all who would ever rebel.

Leaving the Garden - Gen. 3:22–24

After saying all this, God banishes only the man from the garden. We know this not only from the grammar but from the statement "to work the ground from which he had been taken". Eve was made from Adam, not the ground. And then the statement is repeated: "after he drove the man out". Nothing is said about "them" or Eve. Yet we know she left— just as God predicted ("Your turning will be to your husband...").

What we see in Genesis 1-3 is most striking for what it does *not* say. Many of the ideas people have about the passage are not firmly grounded in the actual words, but rely heavily on conjecture, assertion, and presumption. We can add more through the NT teachings and references, but before we could do that we had to know what's actually stated here.

On Salvation and Eternal Security

The Basics

The uniqueness of the teachings of the Bible concerning salvation is in its emphasis on faith in the one true God. Many try to add other requirements, but it is clearly presented as a gift. As such, it cannot be earned, even in part; it cannot be partly a gift and partly an earned wage. Acceptance of this gift is not earning a wage either. God paid, through the death of Jesus, the price of this gift of eternal life in heaven, and it is therefore his gift alone to offer; we can only accept it or reject it.

Saving faith must also be in the right object. Faith is not an entity in itself that can be placed just anywhere or in anyone, but

instead must be in Jesus. Could we call him by another name? What does the Bible mean (Acts 4:12) by saying "there is no other name" by which to be saved? It means not that we must have the exact name Jesus, or Yeshua, or anything else, but that we correctly identify this Individual by certain pivotal characteristics. Those are:

1. being God in human flesh
2. living a life without sin
3. laying down his life as a ransom for all sin, for all time
4. rising from the dead in a new, immortal, physical body
5. returning to heaven to prepare a place for us

By whatever name, then, saving faith must be in this Person. And this Person identified the God of the Jewish scriptures, our Old Testament, as the one true God. Jesus fulfilled every prediction that was made about the promised Messiah (Anointed One), the Savior, the "seed of the woman." It is not enough to have faith in a bright light, a presence, a voice, or a vision; to be saved, one must identify this Person and accept his death and resurrection.

Can such a salvation be lost? There are various opinions even among those who say it can. Some say every little sin causes salvation to be lost, while others say only renouncing the faith can make us lost. But we must also consider what it is besides eternal life that lost salvation would entail. Study the table at the end of the Appendix for all that happens the moment someone places their faith, their personal conviction, in those basic truths about Jesus.

Clearly there is more to losing salvation than simply denying the faith. God has promised to guard our faith, to keep us from falling, and has put down a Deposit (the Holy Spirit) as a guarantee. We are a new creation and cannot re-acquire the old one. Even if one still believes it is possible to undo all of those things, it is clear that salvation could never be re-acquired, especially considering the statement in Hebrews 6 about it being impossible for anyone to come to salvation a second time; a second

sacrifice would be required. Yet many proponents of an insecure salvation insist that they have been saved at least twice regardless of not having a second sacrifice, and regardless of all the events listed in the table.

declared righteous	Romans 3:28, 4:5, 24, 5:1, 9, Gal. 3:24, Phil. 3:9
become children of God	Romans 8:14-17, Galatians 3:7, 26
clothed with Christ	Galatians 3:27
belong to Christ, not ourselves	1 Cor. 6:19-20
heirs according to the promise	Galatians 3:29-4:7
the flesh was crucified	Galatians 5:24
redemption through Jesus' blood, forgiveness of our sins	Eph. 1:5
became God's own possession	Eph. 1:11
sealed with the Holy Spirit who guarantees our inheritance	2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13-14
made alive with Christ	Eph. 2:5
raised up and seated with Christ in heaven	Eph. 2:6
brought near to God, have peace with God	Romans 5:1, Eph. 2:13
citizens of God's household	Eph. 2:19
sealed for the day of redemption	Eph. 4:30
buried and raised with Christ	Romans 6:4-6, Col. 2:12
made alive and forgiven	Col. 2:13
died but life now hidden with Christ in God	Col. 3:3
protected from the evil one	2 Thes. 3:3
given eternal life	Romans 6:23, 1 Timothy 1:16, Titus 3:7, 1 John 2:25, 5:12-13
set free and purified	Titus 2:14
born again	Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:3,23
given an imperishable reservation in heaven	1 Peter 1:4
ransomed	1 Peter 1:18
kept from falling	1 Cor. 10:13, Jude 1:24
are God's temple	1 Cor. 3:16
washed, sanctified, justified	Romans 3:24, 1 Cor. 6:11
are a new creation	2 Cor. 5:17