



BNEXT BIBLE STUDY PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Life Changing Letters 1

FEATURING THE AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO SERIES

BNEXT STUDY

Salvation Explained : Romans 1–8

Salvation Applied : Romans 9–16

Guidance for Confused Christians : 1 Corinthians

An Example for Wayward Christians : 2 Corinthians

The Gospel of Liberty : Galatians

The Triumphant Church : Ephesians

The Triumphant Christian : Philippians

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AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO

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STUDY **BNEXT**

William P. Campbell



Welcome to BNEXT Amazing Journey

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. This electronic version contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and place a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the mast of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

An important component of BNEXT Amazing Journey are the videos that accompany each series. To access the videos associated with this particular series, see the link below my signature.

Also we have included, in the last pages of this digital version, a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT Amazing Journey series, I hope you will consider leading others through this study material.

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,



William P. Campbell

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Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

Introduction

More than half of the 21 letters in the New Testament were written by Paul. Romans was not the first one written but is found first in our Bibles because it provides the fullest explanation of the concept most central to our faith: salvation. Romans provides the clearest and most logical presentation of the doctrine of salvation in all the Bible. Luther called it, “The masterpiece of the New Testament,” declaring that “it deserves to be known by heart, word for word, by every Christian.”

The goal of this lesson is for us to understand the basic truths, the general flow, and a simple outline of the glorious book of Romans.

Background and Overview

We know from Acts that Jews from around the civilized world were in Jerusalem for Pentecost when the Holy Spirit poured forth—thousands were called by God into the kingdom of light. It is likely that some of these first converts brought the gospel back to Rome. Nearly three decades later, Paul would have opportunity to fulfill his great ambition to visit Rome, that he might build them up in their faith (Romans 1:11-12). Paul did get to Rome—in chains. Before this visit, which was near the end of his third missionary journey, Paul wrote the letter we now call *Romans*.

Why did Paul write this letter? For more than a quarter of a century, the gospel had been spreading and churches arising around the Roman Empire. Christians everywhere had deep and troubling questions about their new-found salvation, such as:

If God saves us by grace, why did God give the Law to Moses?

If sin is now pardoned freely, has God lowered His standards of righteousness?

If God is glorified through forgiving our sins, should we encourage people to sin that we might bring greater glory to God?

If God gives us victory over the penalty of sin, what about the power of sin?

The book of Romans can be divided as follows:

| Salvation Explained: Romans 1-8 | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1:1-17 | Salvation Introduced |
| 1:18-3:20 | Sin’s Penalty and Power |
| 3:21-5:21 | Salvation from Sin’s Penalty |
| 6-8 | Salvation from Sin’s Power |
| Salvation Applied: Romans 9-16 | |
| 9-11 | Salvation and God’s Sovereignty |
| 12-16 | Salvation and Christian Living |


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But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Psalms 103:11-12

Salvation Introduced (Romans 1:1-17)

Paul's glorious introduction exalts the gospel of salvation and the Christ of the gospel (Romans 1:1-7). It declares Paul's longing to visit the Christians in Rome (Romans 1:8-15) and ends with two verses that lift high the theme of the letter: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" (Romans 1:16-17).

Sin's Penalty and Power (Romans 1:18–3:20)

In this section, Paul shows that Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32), Jews (Romans 2:1-3:8), indeed all people (Romans 3:9-20) are under the power and penalty of sin. No one is exempt, whether atheist, religious, pagan, or moralist. Paul brings us all into God's courtroom. Here, God's Law and our consciences stand—irrefutable witness to the guilt of our sins.

The word *sin* means to "miss the mark." We know that none of us is perfect. In our own defense we might say, "But, God loves me and will overlook my ungodliness. He will not condemn me!" Let us remember the words that open this section: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness..." (Romans 1:18a). Our efforts to avoid God's sure judgment are useless when confronted with His perfect standard of righteousness. Sin has a powerful grip on our lives—our penalty is just.

This section of Romans closes with the eternal and righteous Judge's intent clearly expressed: "...that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Romans 3:19b).

Salvation From Sin's Penalty (Romans 3:21–5:21)

As surely as God's condemnation and wrath fall upon all of us as a penalty for sin, His offer of pardon is freely offered to everyone. The only requirement from God is belief: "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference..." (Romans 3:22).

Standing before God by ourselves, He sees in us no righteousness. Standing on faith in the righteousness of Christ, God looks at us in His Son and sees in us perfect righteousness. There is no matter of degrees here. Our justification in the sight of God is, first, a legal matter—not a moral matter. A person who trusts in Christ can look at his past sins and say, "It is just as if I'd never sinned." (A good way to remember the implications of the word justified.) Paul makes this point crystal clear by way of explanation (Romans 3:21-31), illustration (Abraham: Romans 4:1-25), and application (Romans 5:1-21). Through our Savior's inestimable sacrifice we are saved from the just punishment of our personal sins (Romans 3:21-5:11), as well as from the penalty due for our sin nature—our inherited sin (Romans 5:12-21).

Salvation From Sin's Power (Romans 6–8)

News in the daily paper is often so bad we think it cannot get worse—but it does. In Paul's letter

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

to the Romans, the good news is so good that we might think it cannot get better. But it does! Not only has God canceled sin's penalty through Christ's death and resurrection, He has also broken sin's power. God has not only dealt with the legal problem, but He also helps us with our moral problems. Once our standing is right before God, He helps our walk become right before the watching world.

The term Paul uses to describe our becoming ever more like our Savior is sanctification. Paul explains sanctification in chapter six, shows the challenges of being sanctified in chapter seven, and provides guidelines for victory through sanctification in chapter eight. These three chapters were never meant to be separated, and Christians have caused themselves great confusion and harm by building whole movements and philosophies on portions of Paul's teachings while ignoring the whole.

Chapter six tells us that we are enabled—therefore, obligated—to live a holy life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Romans 6:11 tells us, “count yourselves dead to sin,” that is, we are expected to live like Christ. In chapter seven, Paul sympathizes with our human struggle. We cannot live for God in our own strength. Rightly understood, it is impossible for us (in our own strength) to become more like Christ. The pronoun “I” occurs over 30 times in this chapter of only 25 verses. The transition from a losing battle with sin's power to victory is found in Romans 7:24-25: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

The key to our spiritual victory is reliance on the guidance, power, and aid of the indwelling Holy Spirit, shown in chapter eight, which shifts the focus from “I” to “the Spirit.” The sin nature is never fully eradicated, but a saint who trusts in the greater power of the Holy Spirit can know the ongoing joy of a victorious Christian life. Romans 8 begins with the promise of “no condemnation” and ends with the promise of “no separation.” No wonder this is one of the best-loved chapters in the Bible!

Final Thought

John Newton is remembered for his hymn, “Amazing Grace.” In his later years, he often lost his memory in the pulpit and had to be reminded of the subject about which he had been preaching. He said, “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great Savior.” What a fitting summary of the essential truths found in Romans 1-8!

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series “Life Changing Letters 1,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Reflecting on the sermon or the commentary, what is one important thing you learned, or one question that remains unanswered for you regarding the first half of the book of Romans?

2. Read Romans 1:7-13 and answer the following questions:

To whom is this letter addressed?

Why was the city of Rome important in Paul's day?

What was Paul's ambition for visiting Rome?

3. Do you recall from your study of Acts how it was that Paul eventually found his way to this capital city?

Why do you think God sometimes grants us a sense of His plan but does not show us, in advance, the difficult process we will face in getting there?

Share an example of the same from a Biblical character other than Paul or from your own life.

4. Read Romans 1:18-20. What is being stated here?



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 1

Salvation Explained | Romans 1-8

Does this sense of God's general revelation through creation remove or improve your ambition to tell others the gospel? Why?

8. Define the word "justified," using a Bible dictionary, if necessary. On what basis are we justified (Romans 3:25-26)?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Skim Romans 1:21 through Romans 3:8, and then read aloud Romans 3:9. What is Paul's main point, and why is this truth essential as a first step to receiving God's salvation?

What are examples of false means of being justified before God by other religions? By misled Christians? In your own life?

6. Read Romans 3:10-18 and complete the following statement: "It sounds like Paul has been reading a recent newspaper. For example,

What should be the fruit of our justification (Romans 5:1-2)? Is this fruit evident in your life?

7. What is the good news proclaimed by Paul in Romans 3:23-24?

9. Read Romans 6:1-7. What question does Paul ask in verse one? Have you ever heard a person ask this question or have you asked it yourself?



How does Paul answer the above question—in your own words (Romans 6:2-7)?

12. If someone who claims to be a Christian and is engaged in a sexually sinful lifestyle approaches you, how might you use these verses to counsel him or her?

10. Skim Romans 7. People have long debated whether this chapter describes Paul's life before or after his conversion. Which do you think is the right answer? Why? Does it really matter in the end?

13. From Romans 8:17-18, how should we face suffering?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Read Romans 8:1-39.

In your own words, explain Paul's logic in the first four verses:

14. Read aloud Romans 8:31-39. Take time to thank God for His victory on our behalf through Christ Jesus our Lord!

From Romans 8:5-8, what is the key to living in spiritual victory?

From Romans 8:12-14, what is our resultant obligation?

Scripture for Meditation

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:37-39



Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8



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Introduction

The way we think effects how we live. For this reason, Paul begins his letters with teaching and ends them with application. If Romans 1-8 shows us the promise of heaven, Romans 9-16 describes the changed life on earth. To move from a salvation understood to a salvation applied requires repentance...changing our direction and living for God. It has been said that repentance is what makes religion more than ritual. To repent, we must believe that God is a sovereign to be obeyed, and that God's Word describes a salvation to be applied. This lesson is built on those two truths:

1. Salvation and God's Sovereignty (Romans 9-11)

| | |
|------------|-------------------------|
| 9:1-29 | God's Sovereign Choice |
| 9:30–10:21 | The Unbelieving Remnant |
| 11:1-36 | The Believing Remnant |

2. Salvation and Christian Living (Romans 12-16)

| | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 12:1-21 | Living as the Church |
| 13:1-14 | Living under Authority |
| 14:1–15:13 | Living with Weaker Christians |
| 15:14–16:27 | Living with Paul's Example |

Salvation and God's Sovereignty (Romans 9-11)

This middle portion of the book of Romans is troubling to many. Scholars and theologians have debated through the ages the wonders of salvation described in these chapters. They ask: "How does an eternal and sovereign God apply salvation to a time-bound world filled with creatures given the capacity to make choices?" Some have wrongly read into these glorious chapters a perverted sort of divine despotism. Others have compromised the truth in this section—making Paul's words seem nonsensical and confused. Peter warned about both extremes:

"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Peter highlights ignorance as the primary reason that Christians distort Paul's teachings about salvation and God's sovereignty. Ignorance regarding what? Certainly our ignorance is regarding God and His Word. We are quite familiar with the ways of humankind. But, we are ignorant about the ways of God, unless we study the Scriptures. In the Bible, we learn that God's ways are much higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9). The more we learn the Bible, the more we realize how incomprehensible is our God. The more we know of Scripture, the greater light we have for each part we read. The safest rule of interpretation is to allow Scripture to interpret itself. Anytime a verse or a portion of Scripture is taken out of its original context, its meaning can become twisted and confused.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Paul's concern in chapters 9-11 is primarily national. God made a covenant with the nation of Israel, and now it appears that God has broken that covenant. God gave the Law to the Jews, and now it appears that God is setting that Law aside. God made countless promises to the Israelites, and now it seems that His promises are invalid. Any Jew living in Paul's day, upon hearing about the gospel of grace in Romans 1-8, would immediately want answers to these troubling questions.

Paul first reminds the Jews through examples in the Old Testament that God is sovereign, choosing and doing what He wills. It is clear that God has not changed—nor should anyone who knows God want Him to change. No Jew would argue regarding God's choosing Isaac, their own forefather (Romans 9:8-9). No child of Jacob would complain that Jacob was chosen by God over Esau (Romans 9:10-13). No Israelite would take issue with God's hardening Pharaoh's heart that He might deliver His people from Egypt in glorious victory (Romans 9:14-18). Nevertheless, once the Almighty God opened the doors of His covenant to the Gentiles (as He long ago promised He would), the Jews took issue. They missed the point that God was not rejecting them as a people, He was now including all peoples who approach Him in faith (Romans 9:30-10:21). Thus, the believing remnant now includes both Jew and Gentile—anyone who will come to God through Jesus Christ for salvation (Romans 11).

Once we recognize that God's sovereign rule is guided by His heart of love, we cannot help but rejoice. God has decreed that this glorious gospel be proclaimed to all the nations and that eternal life be offered to all who come to Him through faith. As you read Paul's closing benediction, be inspired to join Him in praise to the King of Kings (Romans 11:33-36).

Salvation and Christian Living (Romans 12-16)

In view of all that God has done for us, how are we to properly respond to Him? Paul urges us to offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1). It would be a difficult thing to be willing to die for God. A much greater challenge, however, is to live for God. Many of us would be willing to step before a firing line rather than renounce our Savior. Why, then, are we not living today for Christ with all boldness as though our pride, comforts, and reputation are of little value in comparison with the eternal gospel?

The problem, says Paul, is that we are being confirmed to the patterns of the world. We need to be transformed. We need the reality of Christ's life within us to work its way out. This is done through the “renewing” of our minds (Romans 12:2). If we really believed the truths in Romans 1-11, we would have full incentive to live the commands of Romans 12-16. Our minds are like furnace filters. All the air of the world blows through them, and dirt and debris are gathered within. If we don't renew the filters by washing them clean with the water of the Word, our lives cannot function properly. When our perspectives are right, however, we find Paul's challenges for Christian living both practical and needful:

Living As The Church - Using our spiritual gifts to serve others

Paul urges us to surrender our lives without holding back (Romans 12:1-2), to use our gifts without reserve (vv. 3-8), and to love one another without compromise (Romans

He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.’”

Mark 7:6

12:9-21).

Living Under Authority—Following God’s guidelines to submit to God’s guides

Paul exhorts us to submit to our governing authorities, for they are from God (Romans 13:1-7) and to submit to God’s Law for it is eternally true (Romans 13:8-14).

Living with Weaker Christians—Showing Christ’s love to those in need

Paul encourages us to be careful not to make weaker Christians stumble (Romans 14:1-23) and to be intentional about serving and helping people in need (Romans 15:1-13).

Living with Paul’s Example - Proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth

Paul challenges us with his big vision to reach each nation with the gospel (Romans 15:14-33) and with his personal love for each individual he meets (Romans 16:1-27).

Final Thought

If we embrace the salvation God offers as described in Romans 1–8, our lives should be challenged and then changed through the truths of Romans 9–16. This requires repentance. The word *repent* means to “change directions”—to do an about face and live for God. It requires more than intellectual assent to a concept; it is a heart decision to act like Christ.

In the days of the early Church, Christians were serious about repentance. Sin was seen not as a personal matter but as something that destroyed the unity of the Church. Penitents fasted and prayed for the forgiveness of their sins, appeared before the Church to make public confession, and were barred from the Lord’s Supper until they gave evidence of a change of heart and were absolved (“Worship in the Early Church,” Christian History, Issue 37). We may not follow these same practices today, but we do follow the same God. It is not enough to understand salvation... we are called to apply salvation’s truths to our lives.

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series “Life Changing Letters 1,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. **PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.**



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one important thing you learned, or one question that remains unanswered for you regarding the Romans 1-8.

2. Read Romans 9:1-5.

a. What is the source of Paul's grief?

b. What is the extent of his grief?

c. How do you think this grief motivated Paul in his ministry?

d. Have you ever felt passion, love and grief to a similar extent for a particular ministry, people, or cause?

3. Read Romans 9:6-33.

a. why do you think Paul is describing the sovereignty of God?

b. Do Paul's words trouble you? Humble you? Enthuse you?

c. What is the danger of misunderstanding, or wrongly applying, this chapter (2 Peter 3:14-16)?



4. Read Romans 10:1-21. What is your favorite verse in this chapter?

6. Romans 12 provides guidelines for humbling ourselves. Read carefully Romans 12: 1-2. What specific actions do you need to take to line your life up with the guidance found here?

Why?

How would you answer someone who claimed that Romans 9 of Romans removes all the incentives found in Romans 10 for proclaiming the gospel?

7. Run through the list of exhortations in Romans 12:3-21. Record below each imperative followed by a rating (on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning the poorest performance and 10 representing excellence) showing how well you think you typically do in each category. What five areas need the most work?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Skim Romans 11. From this chapter, why should we humble ourselves and magnify God with words such as those found in Romans 11:33-36?



8. The first verse for Romans 13, 14 and 15 summarize each of the chapters with a word of exhortation. During this past week, in which of these areas have you struggled most? Explain.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. The book of Romans, like most of Paul's writings, begins with teaching and ends with application. Think about one or two of the great truths of our salvation described in Romans 1-8. Try to connect the dots by finding a link between those truths and at least one call for action in the last half of this great book.

9. In Romans 16, note how many people Paul knew even before arriving in the city of Rome.

What do you learn about Paul from this chapter?

Scripture for Meditation

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay Him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.

Romans 11:33-36



I am not writing to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

1 Corinthians 4:14

Introduction

Paul first preached the gospel in Corinth during his second missionary journey. There he found a Jewish couple, Aquilla and Priscilla, who shared his trade and who would eventually become partners in ministry (Romans 16:13). It was Paul's work in Corinth that would inspire one of the most practical letters in all the Bible, addressing many of the problems that besiege the Church of our day.

Corinth, located on the narrow strip of land between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, was a wealthy commercial center. No city in Greece was as favorably situated for trade by land and sea. Merchants, wanting to avoid the dangerous journey around the Greek isthmus, dragged their ships across a stone tramway connecting the city's two harbors. The constant flow of traffic brought the filth of the world to this commercial center. The worst sorts were attracted to Corinth. Overlooking the town stood a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, which helped shape Corinth into a center of religious prostitution. The historian, Strabo, wrote that some 2,000 priestess-prostitutes sold their goods in this warehouse of sex. We also know of at least 11 other temples in this well-known city of immorality. In fact, there is a Greek term *Korinthiazomai* (literally, "To act the Corinthian"), that came to mean "to practice fornication." Undercurrents of Greek philosophy and culture fueled the city's degrading practices, and some 400,000 slaves ran the machinery of greed that supported Corinth's 250,000 citizens.

The love of human wisdom and the pursuit of selfish pleasure would make this teeming center of godlessness a difficult place for Christian ministry. When Paul entered the city, he may have wondered how many from Corinth would respond to the Gospel and become citizens of the Kingdom of God. By the time he left, 18 months later, he was probably pondering what sort of conflict and compromise the young believers would face in his absence.

Confusion in Corinth

If the book of Romans is the most comprehensive treatise on Christian salvation, 1 Corinthians certainly provides the most detailed list of answers to church confusion. Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus during his third missionary journey, around 55 AD (1 Corinthians 16:5-9). He had received disturbing reports of factions and immorality within the Church (1 Corinthians 1:11). Prior to writing 1 Corinthians, Paul had already addressed, in writing, some of these problems (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). This new letter was written to clarify those previous instructions and included a demand that drastic action be taken (1 Corinthians 5:10-11, 13).

Another reason that Paul wrote this, the longest of his letters, was that as the spiritual father of the Corinthians, he wanted to answer a variety of practical questions asked of him (1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1, 16:1). These questions and his answers address many of the same issues that the Body of Christ struggles with today. Problems related to immaturity, factiousness, jealousy, lawsuits, sexual immorality, the use of spiritual gifts, and various other topics are addressed head-on. Here, too, are found the Bible's crowning chapters on love (1 Corinthians 13) and the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). A careful study of this book is recommended for every believer and every church.



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"Mystery of Time"

I appeal to you brothers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

1 Corinthians 1:10

Guidance From Paul

Paul begins his letter with a reminder of his calling as an apostle (1 Corinthians 1:1), the Corinthian's calling to be holy (1 Corinthians 1:2-3), and God's promise to keep those whom He has called to the end (1 Corinthians 4-9). As imperfect representatives of the Kingdom of Light, we can take comfort in the fact that God uses imperfect saints to accomplish His plans and purposes in the world. Paul did not write to this confused and backslidden church to reject and condemn but to instruct, correct, and lead the weak into Christian maturity. We should heed Paul's admonitions against compromise in our own lives and follow his example when we are called by God to confront weak and burdened Christians with God's truth.

Divisions in the Church (1 Corinthians 1-4)

Before confronting the problem of division in the church, Paul presents us with the solution. In the first 10 verses of chapter one, Paul mentions Jesus Christ six times. Division between Christians is often a symptom of a deep-rooted separation from Jesus. When God's people truly love and obey the Lord, they cannot be divided. The Corinthians were separated into four factions, all based on leadership preferences. Some were of the party of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Peter, and some of Christ. Those for Paul may have preferred the intellectual approach to learning. Apollos was the man of eloquence (Acts 18:24). Peter took the practical approach to Christianity. What about those who claimed to be only of Christ? Well, no human teacher was good enough for them, so they rejected all the leaders provided them by God. Such was their spiritual pride that they convinced themselves they were the only true followers of Christ. True wisdom, however, is bred by true humility, and centers on the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16). The problem with the Corinthians was their spiritual immaturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-9). If not corrected, this childish Christianity would be met with few rewards on Judgment Day (1 Corinthians 3:10-4:5). Thus Paul concludes this section by calling the Corinthians to higher aims through the example of his own life and ambitions (1 Corinthians 4:6-21).

Morality and Ethics (1 Corinthians 5-6)

In these chapters, Paul addresses a problem with immorality that even unbelievers would find difficult to accept (1 Corinthians 5:1). A man in the church had become sexually involved with his stepmother, and the believers did nothing about it. The Apostle took authority from across the sea demanding the believers in Corinth immediately remove the sinner from their midst lest the whole church become corrupted (1 Corinthians 5:3-9). Based on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, it appears that the man who was involved in this gross immorality eventually repented and was welcomed back into the fellowship of the church (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Paul also addressed the problem of Christians suing one another, along with other issues of unrighteousness.

Marriage and Divorce (1 Corinthians 7)

Paul urged married couples to fulfill each other's needs (1 Corinthians 7:1-7). He encouraged singles to remain single, that they might serve the Lord freely as they find the grace from God to remain chaste and holy (1 Corinthians 7:8-9; 25-40). He challenged those already married to un-

You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

1 Corinthians 3:3

believers to stay with them, if possible, that they might witness to them (1 Corinthians 7:10-16). Paul would have believers take their focus off of their personal ambitions and put their focus on the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 7:17-24).

Christian Liberties & Christian Worship (1 Corinthians 8-14)

Here Paul espoused guidelines for fellowship and worship with other believers that can be summarized by his words: “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Corinthians 10:24).

The Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15)

Paul concludes his letter to the Corinthians with this longest chapter, teaching one of the most essential doctrines of the Christian faith. In fact, 1 Corinthians 15 contains the longest section in the entire Bible about the resurrection. Paul notes the facts of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-34), answers objections about the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:35-57), and concludes with a call to action based on the hope of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Final Thought

When Paul began dictating his letter to Corinth, he was addressing one of the most selfish and carnal congregations in the Biblical record. How did this “state of spiritual confusion” happen? We know that it was not for lack of knowledge, for Paul said of the Corinthians, “For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge” (1 Corinthians 1:5). It was not for lack of spiritual gifts, for Paul boasted of the believers at Corinth, “...you do not lack any spiritual gift” (1 Corinthians 1:7). We know they were not lacking help from the Lord, for Paul promised, “He will keep you strong to the end” (1 Corinthians 1:8a). So, how did this happen? What were the Corinthians lacking? The answer is spiritual maturity. The Corinthians were mere babes in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1). Paul did not abandon them anymore than would a parent abandon its infant child. Paul reproved, instructed, guided, and patiently fed them, that they might mature in the faith.

Do you need to grow in your faith? Be patient...real growth takes time. Pray for and seek out a mentor and friend like Paul who will invest in your life, to guide you along. Are you already mature in Christ? Then take note of the babes around you, and then get busy—you have work to do!

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 3

Guidance for Confused Christians | 1 Corinthians

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What teaching or truth most challenged your life from this section of God's Word?

c. What solution does Paul offer (1 Corinthians 1:13-17)?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-17. The church at Corinth had many problems. These same problems are common in churches today.

d. When you see the same problem in your church today, what do you think should be done about it?

a. What is the first area of weakness that Paul finds need to confront (1 Corinthians 1:10-12)?

3. 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 shows Paul's motive and method for ministry.

a. Summarize this section in a few words.

b. Why do you think this issue is important enough to be addressed before all others?

b. Does Paul's example challenge you?

c. If so, record at least two ways in which you would like God to help you grow, following Paul's example.



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4. 1 Corinthians 2:6-4:21 delves deeper into Paul's ministry and the Corinthian's need for spiritual maturity.

Have you seen examples of Christians abiding by the principles given here by Paul? Explain.

a. In 1 Corinthians 5 a new problem is addressed. What is that problem?

b. What is Paul's solution (1 Corinthians 5:12-13)?

6. 1 Corinthians 6:9-7:40 goes more in depth into the concerns of sexuality and marriage. 1 Corinthians 8 warns about making sensitive Christians stumble. Have you recently found need to guard against making others stumble? Describe the situation.

c. Do you think Paul's method for confronting this sin would work in our day? Why or why not?

7. In 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, we find some potentially controversial teaching about worship in the church. Do you think the practice of covering the women's head is binding upon women worldwide today? Explain your reasoning.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What is the primary concern of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8? Have you known situations where Christians sued one another?

What are the principles Paul is teaching here?



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Guidance for Confused Christians | 1 Corinthians

8. 1 Corinthians 12-14 provide guidance on the use of spiritual gifts in worship. At the heart of this section is chapter 13, the famous poem about love - the great motivation for using our spiritual gifts. In what ways do you usually see people use 1 Corinthians 13?

10. Looking back over the issues addressed in 1 Corinthians, which do you think were most important for your life and ministry?

Why?

Do you think it is a wrong or bad thing to take it out of its originally-intended context? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the most comprehensive sections on the topic of the resurrection in the Bible. Here, Paul lays the very foundations of the faith. Complete this thought: "The most incredible truth in this section is..."

Scripture for Meditation

It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:30-31



We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

2 Corinthians 6:11-13



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 ""Ministry Madness

Introduction

Paul wrote the second letter to the Corinthians at a time when persecution and opposition brought him to an all-time low. Despairing of life itself (2 Corinthians 1:8), Paul defended his ministry—even his motives—in embarrassing detail against numerous false accusations. Just as diamonds are formed under great pressure, so did the immeasurable stress placed on Paul become God's means of producing the gem we now call 2 Corinthians. This letter is considered the best autobiographical sketch we have of Paul. It gives us an in-depth look at the man who was the greatest pioneer missionary found in the Biblical record. All praise be to God for the preservation of this letter to the church at Corinth, for in it we find the encouragement and challenge of Paul's example, which speaks volumes about how we should live for God today.

Paul's Opposition

Called and set apart as an apostle, God forewarned Paul that he would endure much suffering (Acts 9:16). Of all the hardships and afflictions Paul endured, none was as unrelenting as the resistance he faced from the Jewish legalists. These Judaizers argued that true believers in God must adhere to the practices and requirements of the Jewish faith. Paul found this heresy coming into his home church in Antioch, where he labored with Barnabas for a full seven years. Surprisingly, both Barnabas and Peter were temporarily taken in by this false teaching (Galatians 2:11-14). Promoters of legalism followed Paul around—creeping into churches soon after he planted them—hoping to undermine his work. The success of these Judaizers would be greatest where Christians were the weakest. What fine prey they saw in the unguarded spiritual babes at Corinth.

Paul's primary reason for writing 2 Corinthians was to win back the hearts of the Corinthians by defending his ministry. In a small portion of his letter, Paul commended the Corinthians for their favorable response to his past two letters and exhorted them to gather funds for the saints enduring famine in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 7:9-9:15). Throughout the majority of his letter, however, Paul appealed to the Corinthians to accept his authority and teachings as from God and to reject the false doctrine of the Judaizers. These troublemakers used every tactic to undermine the apostle's ministry, and Paul found need to justify himself on every front. By reading his apologetic, it appears these false teachers accused Paul of: fickleness and cowardice (2 Corinthians 1:15-24; 10:1-18); insufficient credentials as a church leader (2 Corinthians 3:1-6; 7:2-4); dishonesty and possible embezzlement of funds meant for the poor (2 Corinthians 11:1-15); unwillingness to suffer for the faith (2 Corinthians 11:16-33); and inferior spirituality (2 Corinthians 12:1-13).

Paul's Example

We all face times and situations in which we want to give up. How would we have fared under circumstances similar to Paul's? Realizing how easily the Corinthians, to whom he had given his very life, rejected his ministry and questioned his character, Paul could have chosen to ignore them and spend his time and energy working with easier churches. Instead, Paul chose to forgive those who hurt him, to continue caring for these immature Christians, and to confront

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:13

misconceptions and lies by speaking the truth in love. In so doing, Paul provided for you and me an excellent example of encouragement (2 Corinthians 7:2-4; 1-5), exhortation (2 Corinthians 6-9), and ministry (2 Corinthians 10-13).

Paul's Encouragement (2 Corinthians 1-5)

After a short salutation (2 Corinthians 1:1-2), Paul encouraged the Corinthians with the message of God's comforting love: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Paul approached the Corinthians first with comfort, not criticism. He demonstrated his personal weaknesses before confronting them with their own. Paul opened his heart and revealed his human side—failures and struggles—as never before (2 Corinthians 1:8). He understood that the very trials and sufferings he faced in life were given to him by God to enable him to empathize with and support others as they faced the same (2 Corinthians 1:4-7). Paul also knew that the hardships he faced were allowed by God that he might learn more fully to depend on God (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Paul needed to explain why he changed travel plans—not visiting the Corinthians as early as previously intended (2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4). Apparently, the Judaizers used this change in plans as an opportunity to accuse Paul of being double-minded and untrustworthy. In truth, Paul was waiting for the Corinthians to follow through on matters of discipline and obedience before he came to visit. Their sin confronted, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to forgive those who had caused grief. In fact, if the one who had fallen from grace was repentant before the Lord, it was time to show him some of God's comfort and forgiveness (2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:8-13).

Paul also encouraged the Corinthians with the timeless truths related to the new covenant in Christ, its:

- glory (2 Corinthians 3:7-18)
- hope (2 Corinthians 4:1-5:9), and
- mandate (2 Corinthians 5:10-21)

Paul's Exhortation (2 Corinthians 6-9)

Paul's exhortation touches us on two levels, spiritual and material:

Call to Obedience in Spiritual Things

(2 Corinthians 6-7) Paul exhorted the Corinthians to reaffirm their trust in him as their spiritual father (2 Corinthians 6:1-13), and to reject impurity and idolatry (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Call to Obedience in Material Things

(2 Corinthians 8-9) In this section Paul urged the church to give, financially, for the

But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

saints facing severe famine in Jerusalem. Even if they were not rich (2 Corinthians 8:1-2; 9:10-11), they were to give generously (2 Corinthians 8:3-4, 9:6); joyfully (2 Corinthians 8:5-9, 9:7-9); regularly (2 Corinthians 8:10-11; 9:1-5); and proportionately (2 Corinthians 8:12-15).

Paul’s Ministry (2 Corinthians 10-13)

Paul not only provided us an example of encouragement and exhortation, but he also set the standard for ministry. He not only talked the walk, but he walked the talk. In 1 Corinthians, Paul declared that every believer is equipped and called by God into some form of ministry for the up-building of the Church (Ephesians 4:11-12). In 2 Corinthians, Paul models ministry for us. Through Paul’s description of his own work, we find clear principles that provide a good litmus test for the validity of any Christian work: If 2 Corinthians 1-5 encourages us to believe God can minister through us, 2 Corinthians 6-9 motivate us to get active for God, 2 Corinthians 10-13 offer a sound basis, through Paul’s example, for us to evaluate our ministries.

Established for God’s Glory

(2 Corinthians 10:1-18) Paul’s whole reason for ministry was to bring glory to God. How about you and me? Think about the choices of ministries you are involved in. Why did you choose, or establish, this ministry? Was it for your own glory or for God’s glory?

Motivated by Divine Love

(2 Corinthians 11:1-15) Paul was motivated by God’s love. What motivation keeps you going? Do you serve with God’s love?

Sustained Through Every Hardship

(2 Corinthians 11:16-33) Paul endured incredible suffering for Christ. How dedicated are you to God’s work? Will you be faithful through every hardship?

Dependent on God

(2 Corinthians 12:1-10) Paul found his strength in the Lord. Where do you place your trust for success—in your ability or God’s ability?

Aimed to Change Lives

(2 Corinthians 12:11-13:11) Paul’s sole focus was to see lives changed into the image of God’s Son. What is the ultimate goal of your ministry? Is it to get a job done; or are you, above all else, praying for people to know and grow in Christ?

Final Thought

Think of times in your life when you have been inspired and challenged by reading the biography of a great saint. Have you prayerfully and thoughtfully read through this brief autobiographical sketch of Paul’s ministry that we call 2 Corinthians? God placed this inspiring book



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An Example for Wayward Christians | 2 Corinthians

in the Bible to guide and challenge you—that your life might become an inspiration to others. Paul told the Corinthians that they were living letters, “known and read by everybody” (2 Corinthians 3:2). What do people think when they read the letter of your life?

Spending Time With God

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Devotional (personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What teaching or truth most challenged your life from this section of God’s Word?

2. Read lightly 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, and read aloud verse 5. What do you think Paul meant by “the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives?”

Do you know any such suffering yourself?

How do you think Paul’s comfort in Christ was also flowing with such abundance (2 Corinthians 1:5)? In what ways do you know the comfort of the Lord?

3. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 focuses on one who needed to know forgiveness. It is quite possible this unreconciled person is the same one who was described in 1 Corinthians 5. What is Paul concerned about here regarding Satan—what do you think Paul means?

How might this same concern apply to Church discipline and reconciliation today?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

4. Read 2 Corinthians 2: 14-17 aloud, substituting the pronoun “us” with “me” and “we” with “I”. Is this a true statement?



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Should it be? What is Paul really saying here?

Read verses 9 and 11, considering how the thought of Christ's judgment seat influenced Paul's attitudes and actions. Is Paul teaching salvation by works?

5. 2 Corinthians 3-4 can be summed up in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

a. What promise can you claim here (2 Corinthians 4:16-17)?

If not, why are works important in the life of a Christian?

b. In what manner should we apply this to our lives (2 Corinthians 4:18)?

How does the notion of the "judgment seat of Christ" challenge you personally?

c. How might this incredible truth work itself out in your life? Give a specific example.

6. At the heart of 2 Corinthians 5 is Paul's expectation to appear before the "judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). What does Paul say will happen at this judgment seat?

7. In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul begins to discuss the hardships he has faced for Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 he lays his sufferings on the table for all to see.

a. What is the reason for his openness in this regard? Was he boasting?



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b. What does Paul's unveiling of specific sufferings do for you?

10. In 2 Corinthians 10-12, Paul defends his ministry against false teachers and false apostles. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. No one knows with certainty what was Paul's "thorn in the flesh." What was the reason that God allowed this affliction?

8. a. What is the main point of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18?

What was Paul's response to it?

b. In what ways might this be applied to the life of the average Christian?

Do you have a similar "thorn in the flesh?" If so, how do you respond to it?

c. Are there areas in your life that need to change in light of this teaching? Explain.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. 2 Corinthians 8-9 provides one of the clearest and most comprehensive teachings on tithing and giving in the Bible. Extract two of three basic principles of stewardship from 9:6-9.

Do you follow and apply these principles to your life?

Scripture for Meditation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 5:17



For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Galatians 2:8

Introduction

Galatians is the clearest statement against legalism in the Bible. A legalist is one who sets up rules, regulations, traditions, and requirements as essential for our salvation. Charles Swindoll once warned, “The bite of legalism spreads paralyzing venom into the body of Christ. Its poison blinds our eyes, dulls our edge, and arouses pride in our hearts. Soon our love is eclipsed as it turns into a mental clipboard with a long checklist.”

Billy Sunday once put it more simply: “Some persons think they have to look like a hedgehog to be pious.” The book of Galatians calls us back to the basics. This letter was the Magna Carta of the early church, a declaration of emancipation from legalism of all forms. Martin Luther relied strongly on Galatians to combat error in his day; it became his favorite book and a foundation stone for the Reformation. A careful study and understanding of Galatians is essential for every believer, that the truth of the Gospel might be defended, protected, and enjoyed.

Occasion for Writing

Of the 13 or more letters written by Paul, Galatians was one of his earliest. Scholars have difficulty dating the book because it is not clear whether the epistle was intended for northern or southern Galatia. If Paul wrote to believers in southern Galatia, he would have addressed churches founded on his first missionary journey and may have sent the letter prior to 53 AD. If he addressed churches in the north, he would have visited them during his second missionary journey and written between 53 and 57 AD.

As in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote to the Galatians in order to combat Judaizers—Jews attempting to undermine the liberty found in the Gospel with restrictions found in the Old Testament law. Judaizers were perverting the Gospel and Paul would defend it. This was his fighting letter. Paul wrote Galatians with the passion of a championship boxer in the final round. It reads more as a pamphlet on some controversial argument than a typical epistle. Compare Galatians with Romans, for example, which carries many of the same themes. If Romans explains the Gospel systematically, Galatians defends the Gospel concisely. Galatians is the rough pencil sketch and Romans is the multi-colored painting. Paul does not begin his letter to the Galatians with words of commendation, thanks, or praise, as are found in his other writings. Rather, he immediately expresses his amazement and shame over the Galatian believers for listening to those who pervert the Gospel of liberty (Galatians 1:7). The word *pervert*, means to “twist a thing around, or to reverse it.” God’s wish was for believers everywhere to know the liberty of the Gospel. But the Galatians were listening to proponents of a different Gospel, which was really no Gospel at all (Galatians 1:7). In Galatians, Paul must defend the Gospel (Galatians 1:2), explain the Gospel (Galatians 1:3-4), and apply the Gospel (Galatians 1:5-6).

The Gospel Defended (Galatians 1-2)

After Paul’s striking introduction (Galatians 1:1-9), Paul defended the Gospel of liberty through the story of his own experience.



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“A Gracious Tragedy”

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ... Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

Galatians 6:14-15

The Source of the Gospel

The message of salvation was not handed down to Paul by historic council or creed but through the direct revelation of God (Galatians 1:10-12). Paul was not passing on human ideas to support a selfish agenda; rather, he passed on God's message for God's glory. Paul had once lived under the mandates of Jewish Law with unsurpassed zeal and dedication (Galatians 1:13-14). God revealed Himself to Paul, and Paul removed himself from the public eye for several years to adjust his mind and life to the Gospel of grace (Galatians 1:15-17). Finally, Paul visited Peter and James—pillars in the church—to establish their acquaintance (Galatians 1:18-20). Soon, believers throughout Judea were glorifying God for the obvious change that had taken place in Paul's life. This apostle's conversion was not a matter of tradition, or persuasion, it was a demonstration of the power of the Gospel.

The Freedom of the Gospel

Paul visited Jerusalem, bringing with him an uncircumcised believer named Titus (Galatians 2:1). This would be a good test-case for the Christian leaders in Jerusalem. If they did not require Titus to be circumcised, then all would be well for Gentile converts throughout the land. However, if they forced Titus to be circumcised, Paul's missionary efforts would be hindered, if not rendered useless altogether (Galatians 2:2). Fortunately the leaders in Jerusalem did not bow to pressure from the Judaizers (Galatians 2:3-5). Instead they affirmed Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, even as Peter had a ministry to the Jews (Galatians 2:6-9). Their primary request was that the new Gentile converts remember the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, who were notoriously poor (Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:26; I Corinthians 16:1-4). Paul was glad to comply.

The Defense of the Gospel

When Peter visited the saints in Antioch, Paul caught him compromising the freedom promised in the Gospel. Jews generally considered it disdainful to eat with Gentiles. Since Christ clearly opposed such pompous religious division among followers of Christ, Peter initially ate freely with the believers in Antioch (Galatians 2:28b). Then Jewish believers came from Jerusalem; and Peter, feeling pressure from these legalists, withdrew from the Gentile converts during meals (Galatians 2:11-12). Soon, other Jews followed Peter's lead and also separated themselves from their Gentile brethren (Galatians 2:13). Upset by this hypocrisy, Paul defended the Gospel by confronting Peter publicly (Galatians 2:14). While we are not sure whether the words recorded in Galatians 2:15-21 were the actual words spoken at that confrontation, we can thank God for Paul's example in defending the Gospel of freedom.

The Gospel Explained (Galatians 3-4)

Paul warned the Galatians that they had become “bewitched” (Galatians 3:1). As though a spell was cast on them, they turned away from the clear and logical path of God's grace and turned back into the old ways of the Law (Galatians 3:2-5). Paul held nothing back in his effort to convince them to trust once again in the immeasurable grace of God. He reminded the Galatians of the faith of Abraham, the father of the Jews (Galatians 3:6-9). He taught them the two-fold purpose of the Law: to condemn those who sought to please God by their own righteousness, and

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

to lead those seeking God's righteousness to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:10-4:11). Paul explained that those who follow the Law are under bondage as slaves, but those who trust in the Savior are sons and daughters of God.

Paul argued with the confused Galatians based on their previous dedication to God's work and their earlier trust in Paul as God's worker (Galatians 4:12-20). Using an allegorical comparison between Abraham's two sons (Galatians 4:21-31), Paul asked the believers in Galatia, who had been born of the Spirit, what logical sense was found in their now turning to the Law.

The Gospel Applied (Galatians 5-6)

Having taken a stand against legalism based on personal experience (Galatians 1-2) and from Biblical logic (Galatians 3-4), Paul now presses his point home with a challenge toward application: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). This freedom in the Gospel liberated the Galatians from the influence of religious legalists (Galatians 5:1-12). In Christ, believers are free to fully love each other (Galatians 5:13-15), to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26), to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1-5), and to take advantage of every opportunity to do good for others (Galatians 6:6-10). Finally, Paul reminds the Galatians that the Christian's only basis for boasting is not in what we can do for God but in what God has done for us, through the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:11-18).

Final Thought

Paul wrote to the believers in Galatia with a sense of unbridled urgency for one reason—they were being tempted to accept a distortion of the Gospel (Galatians 1:7). Any teaching that requires us to do something in order to be pleasing to God misses the whole point of the Gospel. We cannot please God by what we do; rather, God is satisfied by the one who trusts in what God has already done. All that we are required to do is believe. As a result of our faith, good works will follow. Susanna Wesley once put it simply:

"There are two things to do about the Gospel—believe it and behave it."

Spending Time With God

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LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 5

The Gospel of Liberty | Galatians

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study-guide. What teaching or truth most challenged your life from this section of God's Word?

2. Read Galatians 1:1-10. Briefly describe Paul's concern; why do you think he was so passionate about it?

3. From Galatians 1:8, how careful should we be about blindly accepting what is being proclaimed from church pulpits today, even from the most trustworthy servants of God?

Do you think the average Christian is adequately concerned about these matters? Explain.

4. Read Galatians 1:11-24 and skim Acts 9:1-31. What do you find most remarkable about Paul's conversion and initial period of learning and training for ministry?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read Galatians 2:1. Were you previously aware that Paul had been in basic training for at least fourteen years before embarking on his first missionary journey? What principle can we draw from Paul's own example?

6. See Galatians 2:6 and 11. Would you call Paul's attitude pompous? Proudful? Disrespectful? Bold? Humble? Explain.



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7. From Galatians 2:11-16, describe how Peter and Barnabas were carried away, along with other Jewish Christians, by the desire to please men rather than God. Are there ways in which you sometimes find yourself pushed by public sentiment to compromise your faith? If you are comfortable doing so, explain.

8. Read aloud Galatians 2:20 and note its context. Explain the meaning of this verse in your own words.

9. From Galatians 3:23-24, what was the purpose of the law (The Old Testament teachings, rules and regulations)? Is the Law still needed today? Why or why not?

10. Compare Galatians 3:23-25 with Matthew 5:19. Can you reconcile these two teachings?

11. What problem is described by Paul in Galatians 4:9-11? Do you think Paul would be in some measure opposed to the way we observe Christmas, Easter, and other religious markers in the liturgical calendar? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Read Galatians 5:16-21. What will be the consequence of those who live according to the acts of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-21)?



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How do you reconcile this with the fact that none but Christ are without sin?

15. From Galatians 6:9, what encouragement is found for anyone serious about growing in the faith and serving God faithfully?

13. Look carefully at the description of the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Can you think of anything you could do that would displease God (or violate His Law) while bearing such spiritual fruit?

14. From Galatians 6:1-2, what obligations are described here for those who are strong in the faith?

From 6:3-8, what warnings are given to those who are not as strong in the faith as they think?

Scripture for Meditation

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20



I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.

Ephesians 1:17



Watch Amazing Journey Video
"Stand Your Ground"

Introduction

Ephesus is the first of four letters written by Paul from prison (Ephesians 3:1). The other prison epistles are Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (Philippians 1:7; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 9). It is likely that all four letters were carried from Rome between 60 and 62 AD by four trusted messengers, each returning to his own home church:

- Tychicus carried a letter back to Ephesus (Ephesians 6:21).
- Epaphroditus brought a letter to the church in Philippi (Philippians 4:18).
- Epaphras carried a letter from Paul to his home in Colossae (Colossians 4:12).
- Onesimus, a slave from Colossae, carried a letter back to his master, Philemon (Philemon 10).

What great wealth was carried by the hands of these men and is now carried by the hand of God to your home and mine! The first three prison epistles are linked chronologically in the Bible and are linked thematically in their content. Together, they provide a composite view of the great victory won by God for the sake of all believers:

- Ephesians — The Triumphant Church
- Philippians — The Triumphant Christian
- Colossians — The Triumphant Christ

The Setting

Ephesus was situated on an inland harbor of the Aegean Sea via the Cayster River—the most direct sea and land route to the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. An impressive urban center, Ephesus was an emporium not unlike Corinth, Antioch, Alexandria, or Rome. No other city in Asia was as famous or populous as this jewel of the Mediterranean. The city was known for its civic monuments, commercial opportunities, and religious influence. Ephesus housed the temple of Artemis, also known as Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Coins from Ephesus carried the proud slogan, “temple-warden.”

Paul probably came first to Ephesus during his second missionary journey with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:18-19). On his third journey, Paul stayed in the city for a full three years and taught regularly for two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). Miracles accompanied the apostle's ministry (Acts 19:11-16), and the Word of God so affected lives that a great number turned from witchcraft and sorcery to the living God (Acts 19:17-20). One of the most dramatic incidences was Paul's escape from a riot in the town's 25,000-seat theater (Acts 19: 23-41)—a gathering place located in the center of town on the slope of Mt. Pion. By influencing Ephesus with the Gospel, God's Word spread throughout Asia Minor (Acts 19:26).

Ephesus is believed to have been written as a circular letter to be read by numerous churches in Asia Minor. Factors supporting this conclusion include:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.

Ephesians 1:18

No mention of specific church controversies or problems.

Paul normally addressed friends within the churches he wrote. Yet, despite the fact that he spent more time in Ephesus than any other mission outpost, personal names are not mentioned.

Some early Greek manuscripts do not contain the words “in Ephesus” in Paul’s greeting (Ephesians 1:1).

The Contents

Ephesians is the most profound letter from Paul’s hand regarding the meaning and mystery of the Church. As usual, Paul’s letter begins with doctrine (Ephesians 1-3) and ends with application (Ephesians 4-6).

In the first half of the letter the Church is likened to:

- God’s family (Ephesians 1:5; 5:1)
- God’s treasured possession (Ephesians 1:14)
- God’s glorious inheritance (Ephesians 1:18)
- Christ’s body (Ephesians 1:23; 4:12)
- a showcase of God’s grace (Ephesians 2:7)
- God’s workmanship (Ephesians 2:10)
- a new man (Ephesians 2:15)
- citizens of God’s kingdom (Ephesians 2:19)
- God’s household (Ephesians 2:19,22)
- a holy temple (Ephesians 2:21)
- a mystery (Ephesians 3:4-6)

In the second half of the letter, Paul urges us to live by and protect what God has already done for us, for we are the Church! The letter can be outlined as follows:

Ephesians—The Church Triumphant

Our Wealth (Ephesians 1-3)

Our Walk (Ephesians 4:1-6:9)

Our Warfare (Ephesians 6:10-24)

Our Wealth (Ephesians 1-3)

Paul begins with the longest sustained outbreak of praise found anywhere in his epistles (Ephesians 1:3-14). With one unbroken sentence (in the original Greek), Paul blesses God for choosing us before the world began (Ephesians 1:4), for loving us and adopting us as His children (Ephesians 1:5), for redeeming us through Christ’s death (Ephesians 1:7), for making known to us the mystery of His will (Ephesians 1:9), for working all things for our good according to His divine purpose (Ephesians 1:11), for sealing us with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), and for the promise

...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...

Ephesians 3:17-18

of a glorious inheritance awaiting us in heaven (Ephesians 1:12, 14). In short, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ and He deserves our praise forever (Ephesians 1:3).

Paul then bursts forth in one of the most glorious prayers ever written (Ephesians 1:15-23). The primary focus of Paul's petition to God is that we may have our spiritual eyes opened to know God better (Ephesians 1:17). In addition, Paul requests that we may see with the eyes of our heart three grand spiritual realities: (1) the hope to which we are called, (2) the riches of God's inheritance in us, (3) and God's immeasurable power toward us (Ephesians 1:18-19).

God's power has placed Christ over all things for the sake of His Church. Hence, our hope is secure and God's inheritance, which is the Church, will not be destroyed or lost (Ephesians 1:20-23).

In Ephesians 2 and 3, Paul describes our wealth in Christ as reflected in the Church. The riches provided each of us through Christ are immeasurable. We, who were spiritually dead, have new life in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10). We, who were separated, have a new unity in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22). We, who are temporal, have been incorporated into God's eternal mystery through Christ (Ephesians 3:1-13). We, who were God's enemies, are loved by God with a new, incomprehensible love through Christ (Ephesians 3:14-21).

Our Walk (Ephesians 4:1-6:9)

How are we to respond to the kindness and mercy of God? Paul urges us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" with which we have been called (Ephesians 4:1, NASB). The word walk means to live by or to pattern one's life after. Paul exhorts us, in view of the wealth of God's grace, to walk like Christ in the world in three ways: corporately as the unified Church (Ephesians 4:1-16), morally as godly Christians (Ephesians 4:17-5:21), and socially as God's family (Ephesians 5:22-6:9).

Our Warfare (Ephesians 6:10-24)

Satan, whose days are numbered and whose doom is sure, does not take lightly the fact that God's children carry such wealth as they walk in the world. There is nothing the devil hates more than a victorious Church—triumphant Christians. Paul warns us to prepare for warfare. Our strength is in the Lord and our armor is of the Lord (Ephesians 6:10-13). Truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer are weapons that will enable us to remain steadfast against the onslaught of evil (Ephesians 6:14-18).

Final Thought

Paul opens and closes his letter to the Ephesians with grace and peace (Ephesians 1:2; 6:23-24). These two words are the two legs of truth upon which the triumphant church stands. God's grace has provided for us immeasurable wealth, that His peace might be evident in our walk in the world, even when we experience warfare from the spiritual hosts of wickedness. All praise and glory to our Father through Christ the Savior!



Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series “Life Changing Letters 1,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What are some of the ways the Gospel has been perverted by churches in our society?

2. Read Ephesians 1:3. What does this verse mean (state it in your own words)? Do you believe it?

3. From Ephesians 1:4-14, list all the blessings described that God gives to us. After completing your list, pause to thank God for each blessing individually.

4. a. In Ephesians 1:15-19a, what are the three points of Paul's prayer?

b. Do your eyes need to be more opened to these three spiritual realities? Which of the three is most amazing to you? Why?



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. See Ephesians 1:19b–23.

a. What is stated here about the position of Christ in relation to the Church and in relation to every Christian?

b. Why is Christ's position crucial to the truths and promises already seen in Ephesians 1?

6. What does Ephesians 2:1-3 say about the state of all people before they believe in Christ for salvation?

Contrast this with the state of those who are saved (Ephesians 2:4-7).

7. Read Ephesians 2:8-9 aloud. Why, based on verses 1-7, must salvation be a free gift from God?

Are the works that follow our salvation also God's gift to us? (Careful!...see Ephesians 2:10). Describe your personal struggle to please God through your "good" works versus pleasing God through faith in what He has done, and is doing, in your life.

8. In Ephesians 2:11-3:13, Paul talks about the unity we have in Christ and the mystery of God's love as demonstrated through the Gospel for all who believe. He then offers a prayer (Ephesians 3:14-19), and a benediction (Ephesians 3:20-21). Find at least two incredible truths in this closing prayer and blessing. Do you believe these truths? Why or why not?



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 6

The Triumphant Church | Ephesians

9. The second half of the book, beginning with Ephesians 4, moves us from doctrine to application. Read Ephesians 4:1-6. Which imperative from Paul challenges you most? Explain.

12. Ephesians 5:22-6:9 focuses on relationships with one another, and Ephesians 6:10-20 focuses on our struggle against the forces of evil. Read these sections prayerfully, and ask God to give you wisdom, that you might apply His Word to your relationships, and walk in victory. Record at least one significant truth that God reveals to you through this process

10. a. Ephesians 4:7-16 challenges us to use our spiritual gifts for the up-building and maturity of the body of Christ. Do you have any dormant spiritual gift or ability that you know you can use for the sake of the church?

b. If so, what? Have you prayed that God would open a door for you to use your gift?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Ephesians 4:17-5:20 is a call to holiness. Look over this section and find at least two areas where the Spirit of God is challenging your life.

Scripture for Meditation

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3



You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.

Psalm 16:11

Introduction

The church at Philippi was one of Paul's favorites. This is evident in Paul's letter to the Philippians, which is filled with expressions of joy and thanksgiving on their behalf. In a single verse, Paul refers to the Philippian Christians as "my brothers," "you whom I love and long for," "my joy," and "my crown" (Philippians 4:1). Paul found little need for correcting the Philippians and many reasons for commending them. They had given their lives, their prayers, and their material support to him at every opportunity; Paul would in turn give to them a letter that contained invaluable truths on how to live the triumphant Christian life.

Philippi

Paul first visited Philippi during his second missionary journey because of a vision given him by God (Acts 16:6-10). Philippi was a "...leading city of that district of Macedonia" (Acts 16: 12). Philippi was known for its exceptionally fertile soil and its abundant mineral resources, including gold and silver. It was located on one of the main thoroughfares between Asia and Europe, where a mountain barrier between East and West dropped into a wide and well-used pass. Philippi was especially significant because it was "a Roman colony" (Acts 16:12). The settlers placed there by Augustus were primarily Italians who mixed with the Grecian Macedonians. The Philippians considered themselves Romans and were proud of the fact that they enjoyed the same rights and privileges as residents of the city of Rome (Acts 16:21). They were under the protection of the Roman emperor, guided by Roman Law, and free from Roman taxes. Many Roman soldiers settled in Philippi after retirement rather than return to Italy.

The First Converts

Paul's normal pattern in every city was to preach to Jews first (Acts 17:2; Romans 1:16). In Philippi, however, there were few Jews and there was no synagogue. But this military city did have a legally-proper "prayer-place" for the Jews, outside the city walls (Acts 16:13). There Paul met Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira, who would become the first believer in Christ. Near the same location Paul was harassed by a Greek soothsayer with a spirit of divination, who vexed the apostle for days. Finally, Paul cast the spirit out of this demonized woman, and her masters caused a public commotion that landed Paul and Silas in prison. While Paul and Silas sat bound in stocks, their hearts were still free and they began to worship and praise the Almighty God. The Lord shook the foundations of the prison through an earthquake, releasing Paul and the prisoners. The astounded Roman jailer and his household entrusted their lives to Christ (Acts 16:16-33). Soon a church was established in Philippi—the first church in Europe.

When and What Paul Wrote

At the end of Paul's third missionary journey, around 57 AD, Paul apparently made two brief visits to Philippi (2 Corinthians 1:16; Acts 19:21; 20:1-3). Paul later wrote his letter to the Philippians from prison (Philippians 1:13-14). Some scholars think he wrote from prison in Ephesus (53-55 AD), and some think Paul wrote from behind bars in Caesarea (c. 57-59). However, most believe he wrote while under house arrest in Rome (c. 61) some ten years after his first visit to Philippi. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that Paul describes himself as being watched by the



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Now, brothers and sisters,
about times and dates we
do not need to write to you,
for you know very well that
the Day of the Lord will come
like a thief in the night.

Matthew 24:4,5

Praetorian Guard, a body of Roman troops assigned by the emperor (Philippians 1:13). Also, Paul was facing trial and his life was at stake—which fits with his imprisonment in Rome (Philippians 1:20).

Under these adverse and dire conditions, however, Paul was not depressed. He was full of joy in the Lord. The word “joy,” in various forms, appears 16 times in the letter to the Philippians. What was the secret to Paul’s victorious spiritual walk? It was a matter of having the right ambition (Philippians 1), the right attitude (Philippians 2), the right aim (Philippians 3), and the right ability (Philippians 4).

The Right Ambition (Philippians 1)

Paul’s ambitions were not focused on his own comfort or on making others comfortable. He was concerned about one thing: preaching the Gospel to all creation according to the last command of our Lord (Matthew 28:18-20).

Paul’s Ambition for the Philippians (Philippians 1:1-11): Paul’s one concern for the Philippians was that they continue to live according to the gospel of God. He opened his epistle with expressions of gratefulness to God because of their partnership in the gospel (Philippians 1:3-5). He prayed with confidence that this work of God would continue in them and through them (Philippians 1:6-11), for he loved them with the very affection of Christ (Philippians 1:7-8).

Paul’s Ambition for Himself (Philippians 1:12-30): Paul could have complained about his imprisonment or despaired of lost ministry opportunity, but he did not. He recognized that God was working through his circumstances to cause the spread of the Gospel into a new arena—the ranks of the Praetorian Guard. This was a group of about 9,000 imperial guards in Rome, separate from the Roman army and police. These guards were required to take turns guarding Paul by sitting next to him, linked to the outspoken evangelist by chains. Paul had a ready made audience for one-on-one preaching! These influential men could in turn be effective in bringing the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

The Right Attitude (Philippians 2)

Paul urged an attitude of lowliness and humility among Christians. Plato defined lowliness as: “That state of mind which submits to the divine order of the universe, and does not impiously exalt itself.” The word is used in a secular document of the Nile River at its low stage. Paul linked lowliness with the example of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11). No human has known such heights nor stooped to such depths in accomplishing the plan of God for his life. As followers of Christ, therefore, we should cease complaining and joyfully live for God in the world (Philippians 2:12-18). Then will we “shine like stars in the universe” as we “hold out the word of life” (Philippians 15-16). The term *hold out* carries with it the idea of two travelers moving through a dark night, one with a lantern and the other with no light. The one with the light extends it, that they both might have the ability to see the path on which they walk. If we are lowly in heart, we will joyously respond to opportunities to hold out the light of the Gospel to others.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Philippians 3:12

I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

The Right Aim (Philippians 3)

The aim of Paul's life changed dramatically when he came to trust in Christ as the long-promised Messiah (Acts 22:3-21). No longer did he find reason to boast in his incredible list of religious accomplishments (Philippians 3:1-6). In comparison with the free gift of salvation through Christ, Paul's religious efforts and hard work amounted to nothing (Philippians 3:7-11). Paul pressed toward the goal of trusting God's grace to the end with the determined focus of an Olympic runner (Philippians 3:12-14). He urges us to adopt the same aim (Philippians 3:15-21).

The Right Ability (Philippians 4)

Paul's Ability: Paul did not trust in his own ability to live triumphantly for Christ. His source of strength was in the Lord. He was not like the Stoics (whom he alluded to in Philippians 4:11-12), who claimed their inner resolve enabled them to be unmoved by circumstances. Paul resolved to trust fully in the Lord. Paul did not hide the secret of his spiritual success as did the proponents of the mystery religions (possibly alluded to in Philippians 4: 12, with the word secret). Rather, having learned the secret, he shared it (Philippians 4:12). "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

We, too, can live victoriously for Christ. We serve the same God, and He is always available to support the one whose ambition, attitude, and aim is right. We can draw strength from the Lord through honest believing prayer (Philippians 4:5-7) and continual heart-wrought praise (Philippians 4:4; 8-9).

Final Thought

Are you a victorious Christian? When we realize that Christ has won the battle for us, we know that we are on the winning team. We are in Christ, and His triumph is our triumph. We may not see the victory around us, but we can know the victory within. Ambition, attitude, and aim all deal with perspective. Given the right perspective we will have ability to serve God in all circumstances with joy. The inner evidence that our perspective is right is the joy of the Lord. In each section of his letter to the Philippians, Paul expresses the joy of the Lord and urges the Philippians to rejoice with Him. Let us then take Paul's words to heart: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4)!

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series "Life Changing Letters 1," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. In which area did Paul's letter to the Philippians challenge you most: your ambitions, your attitude, your aim, or your abilities? Why?

2. Read Paul's opening prayer (Philippians 1:3-11). What is Paul confident about (Philippians 1:6)?

Do you have such confidence in your own life? Why or why not?

3. a. Describe Paul's love and longing for the Philippians (Philippians 1:7-8).

b. How does prayer for others help us to deepen our love for others?

c. What does our prayer life reveal about our love for other people?

4. What does Paul pray for the Philippians (Philippians 1:9-11)? Try praying these verses aloud, praying specifically for another person of your choice. Do you find this to be a good model prayer? Consider memorizing it and using it on a regular basis.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Paul's chains prevented him from traveling freely as he sought to do God's work.

a. Do you have your own chains in life, preventing you from serving God freely? Explain.



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LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 7

The Triumphant Christian | Philippians

b. What is Paul's perspective in the midst of his suffering and opposition (Philippians 1:12-17)?

b. In what situation or relationship do you find this most difficult?

c. What is Paul's attitude (Philippians 1:18-26)?

c. How specifically does Paul tell us to apply his challenge to our lives (Philippians 2:12-16)?

d. How does Paul exhort us (Philippians 1:27-30)?

8. From Philippians 3:1-6, in what ways could Paul boast about his religious heritage and accomplishment before fellow Jews?

6. Read Paul's imperatives in Philippians 2:1-4. What would a church look like that followed these guidelines carefully?

9. From Philippians 3:7-11, what was Paul's present view of his accomplishments?

7. a. What does Philippians 2:5-11 require of us?



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LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 7

The Triumphant Christian | Philippians

10. In Philippians 3:12-21, Paul challenges us to adopt his attitude. What verse or truth from this section is most convicting or challenging for you? Why?

c. For what difficulty or trial do you especially need God's strength this week? Take time to pray for God to show himself strong in your situation(s).

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Read Philippians 4:4-9. Is this the way you live? What hindrances do you encounter, making obedience to these verses difficult?

12. Read Philippians 4:10-13, noting especially the infamous verse 13.

a. How does the context distinguish between the right to do anything, and the power to do God's thing?

b. Do you really believe verse 13?

Scripture for Meditation

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7



So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him...

Colossians 2:6

Introduction

Once Arturo Toscanini was rehearsing the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in playing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. They played through the entire work without interruption. After the finale, there was a long silence. Everyone was moved by the music. Then Toscanini spoke. "Who am I? Who is Toscanini? I am nobody. It is Beethoven. He is everything."

Likewise in the book of Colossians, Paul reminds us that Christ is everything. He is "all in all."

The apostle wrote during his two-year house arrest in Rome under the careful surveillance of Roman officials. But he knew that One greater than Caesar was managing his affairs. That One is Jesus Christ. Colossians has some of the most clear and profound statements about the supremacy and deity of Christ in all the Bible.

In Philippians, we saw the victorious Christian life; in Colossians, we learn that Christ is our life. Ephesians shows us the Church as a body; Colossians shows Christ as the Head of the body. Our Lord Jesus is supreme, not only over the Church but over all creation, things seen and unseen "... and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17).

Background

To our knowledge, Paul never visited the city of Colossae (Colossians 2:1). How then did the church in Colossae originate? Paul spent two years teaching God's Word in the city of Ephesus, approximately 100 miles west of Colossae. From that vantage point "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Colossae, along with its neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis, was located in the valley of the river Lycus—a ten mile stretch where sheep grazed and travelers stopped to purchase wool and special dyes. Commerce from Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia, passed along the great East-West trade route, through Colossae, to the Euphrates River.

The church at Colossae may have begun meeting in the house of Philemon, the destination to which Paul later sent Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave (Colossians 4:9; Philemon 1). The likely founder of the church in Colossae, however, was Epaphras (Colossians 1:7-8). This soldier of the Lord may have evangelized the entire Lycus valley, establishing a church in Laodicea as well (Colossians 4:15-16; Revelations 3:14-22). Epaphras eventually met an enemy that he felt he could not face alone. This enemy was false teaching, a deadly spiritual poison. Epaphras found need to travel over 1,000 miles to consult Paul on the best way to combat one of the worst heresies of the day.

The Colossian Heresy

The Colossian heresy blended the extremes of Eastern mysticism and Jewish legalism. Two opposite approaches to religion came together at Colossae like the opposite poles of two magnets. These false teachings connected with the common thought that all matter is evil. False teachers claimed salvation could be obtained only through a secret, spiritual knowledge. Hence, the eventual development of "Gnosticism" (the Greek word for knowledge is *gnosis*). The reality of the Gospel was replaced by philosophies of the age. Stoics argued for avoidance of all



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1 Peter 5:8-9a

pleasures, and Epicureans sought pleasure as paramount. Both extremes gave undo attention to the material side of life. Salvation was no longer focused on redeeming humans from sin, but on redeeming philosophers from matter. The great question became not, “What must I do to be saved from sin?” but “What is the origin of evil?” As in the Garden of Eden, Satan played on people’s pride and deceived them—exchanging the basic teachings and commandments of God for a wisdom of their own (Genesis 3:5-6).

The Deceiver uses this same strategy today. Most pseudo-Christian cults stroke people’s egos and show them how to be self-fulfilled. The devil will use any tactic to cloud our vision of the triumphant Christ. Epaphras traveled all the way to Rome and landed in prison in an effort to obtain sound advice from Paul against this age-old spiritual virus. We need only open our Bibles to find Paul’s wisdom for the same heresy today.

The Triumphant Christ

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul confronts the false teachers in Colossae with a profound description of the sovereign Christ. As with most of his epistles, Paul begins with doctrine and ends with practice. Paul teaches first about the supremacy of Christ over all (Colossians 1-2), and then about the supremacy of Christ in our lives (Colossians 3-4).

The Supremacy of Christ Over All (Colossians 1-2)

In this section we see the supremacy of Christ in Paul’s preaching (1:1-8), in his prayers (1:9-14), over all creation (1:15-17), over the Church (1:18-19), in redemption (1:20-23), in Paul’s calling (1:24-29), over philosophy (2:1-10), over legalism (2:11-17), over mysticism (2:18-19), and over asceticism (2:20-23). Paul found no need to be on site at Colossae to rightly diagnose and soundly defeat this strange new heresy. All forms of error must bow the knee and submit to the truth found in Christ. Once Christians gain a vision of the majesty of Christ, the speculations and religious traditions of men fade into insignificance. Paul taught the Colossians that in Christ is the fullness of the Deity in bodily form

(Colossians 2:9). Those who grasp this truth and place their faith in Christ know they are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10).

The Supremacy of Christ in Our Lives (Colossians 3-4)

Paul drives his teaching to application with a call to a new life (Colossians 3:1-10). This new Christ-life should be evident socially, in relations in the Church (Colossians 3:11-17), in the family (Colossians 3:18-21), and on the job (Colossians 3:22-4:1). Life in Christ should also effect the way we pray to God, and how we speak to others (Colossians 4:2-6). Finally, Paul sends greetings from his co-workers, and sends his own greetings to saints in Colossae. The list of such dedicated servants of God serves as a demonstration of the ways the supremacy of Christ can be exhibited in our lives (Colossians 4:7-18). Let us consider a few of those listed as examples for us today:

John Mark also sent greetings (Colossians 4:10). Mark once ran from the challenge of God’s call on his life, turning back from a mission excursion prematurely (Acts 15:37-40). Now this seasoned disciple was back in service for the Lord and was becoming a faithful helper for Paul (2



For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.

Colossians 2:9

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

Colossians 3:23

Timothy 4:11). Have you fallen away from serving God actively and faithfully? Confess your failures and acknowledge Christ as Lord over all, and you will find abundance grace and strength to live for Him.

Onesimus, an escaped slave, was sent by Paul back to Colossae to submit again to his Christian master (Colossians 4:9; Philemon 10). Paul was not supporting the slave trade; rather, he was demonstrating the freedom and integrity that Christ's life brings into the workplace. Philemon, Onesimus' master, was now a good Christian man who would care for Onesimus as a brother in the Lord. In your workplace, do you recognize Christ as Lord over all? If so, you will honor your superiors by working as for Christ. You will honor those placed under you by demonstrating to them the love of Christ.

Tychicus carried the letter from Paul back to the Colossians (Colossians 4:7-8). This faithful minister was willing to travel all the way from Rome to Ephesus to encourage their hearts with the truth of God. If Christ is supreme in our lives, we too will make extraordinary efforts to teach others about the abundant life given to us through the victorious Christ!

Final Thought

Epaphras was unable to bring Paul's letter back to the Colossians, for he was in prison (Philemon 23). Perhaps he was so zealous as a witness for the Lord that the Romans caught him preaching in the open air. One thing we know, Epaphras labored in prayer for those he loved, that they might be built up fully in Christ (Colossians 4:12-13).

Perhaps you too have faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles in your effort to touch another life with the Gospel of salvation. Remember, however, that if you cannot influence others, Christ can. He is King over all. Never cease to pray and to believe God is answering according to His wisdom (Luke 18:1-8). We serve a Sovereign Lord!

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series "Life Changing Letters 1," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 8

The Triumphant Christ | Colossians

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Through your reading have you found a new appreciation for the sovereignty of Christ? If so, please explain.

Why?

4. Colossians 1:13-23 contains one of the most awesome descriptions of the Person and work of Christ in the Bible. As you read these verses, picture Christ as a newborn in swaddling clothes. Complete this thought: "The truth about the Christ in this passage that stands out most as a paradox when I think of Jesus as a helpless baby is..."

2. Read Colossians 1:1-8. Why does Paul give thanks for the Christians in Colossae?

3. Read aloud Paul's prayer for the Colossians (Colossians 1:9-12). Imagine if this letter were written to you. For which aspect of this prayer would you be most grateful, knowing it was prayed on your behalf?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Paul rejoiced in his sufferings.

a. From Colossians 1:24-29, can you figure out why?

b. Can you think of a time you found joy in suffering for Christ? Explain.



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 8

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6. Skim Colossians 2, and read carefully verses 6-10 and 16-23.

a. What were some of the potential sidetracks in Paul's day to embracing Jesus as the true Lord over all?

b. Are any of these concerns relevant for today as well? Explain.

7. a. What does Paul exhort us to do in Colossians 3:1-4?

b. How would you respond to the accusation that Christians are often "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good"?

8. In Colossians 3 we are encouraged to take off the "old self" (Colossians 3:5-9) and to put on the "new self" (Colossians 3:10-14).

a. Look at these lists. Do you have more "putting off" or "putting on" to do.?

b. Do you think this change of demeanor and lifestyle is meant to be a daily activity or a once-for-all action on our part?

Why?

9. Colossians 3:18-4:1 discusses relationships in the family and on the job. Which exhortation here do you find most challenging?

Why?



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 1 | LETTERS OF PAUL

LESSON 8

The Triumphant Christ | Colossians

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. Note Paul's appeal for prayer on his behalf (Colossians 4:2-4).

a. What is his specific request?

b. Do you offer them the encouragement and appreciation they deserve?

b. Do you have people who are committed to praying for you?

11. Note those who co-laborer with Paul in ministry (Colossians 4:7-18) and how Paul commends, supports, and loves these men.

a. List the people that provide support for your life work or ministry.

Scripture for Meditation

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4



BNEXT Amazing Journey Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide section is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others, but of aiding them along the way. The purpose of this Leader's Guide is to aid you in your role as facilitator. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

The BNEXT Study / Amazing Journey includes a weekly video of 15–20 minutes in length. The video provided is on a flash drive, so make sure you have USB-compatible technology. Please review the video *before* each class. Here's a materials checklist:

- TV or computer with a USB 2.0 (or faster) port
- For larger groups, a projector is needed (and may even enhance a small group experience)
- Amazing Journey videos (on USB flash-drive)
- This Participant's Guide (one per participant)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The BNEXT study series' are versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, which includes time for group discussion and video viewing. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to watch the video together. Alternately, the flash-drive videos may be made available for each small group, in which case, after the opening and welcome time, everyone can move to groups and remain there until the end of the day's session.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- A hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word.
- A commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end.
- The ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach.
- A willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Participant's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson and be thinking about how to present the questions to the class. You should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions: Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions, before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facilitator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. These lessons are designed to easi-

ly be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion," or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor, or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our Bible

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT Amazing Journey* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/.

The first class is unique in that the participant will not have anything to prepare. Use this time for getting to know one another and to introduce the BNEXT lesson format. There is an 18-minute BNEXT introduction video that accompanies this first lesson. Before showing the introduction video, we recommend:

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (10 minutes)
 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: “Tell us something unique about yourself.” Or perhaps, “What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?” Or, “This first lesson will provide an overview of the Bible. How comfortable are you with the Bible as a whole? Do you think you can benefit by learning more about each of its books and sections?”
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Handout materials and give an overview (7 minutes)
 - a. Discuss the format of BNEXT Amazing Journey:
 - Reading of a specific book(s) or chapters of a book of the Bible.
 - Lesson commentary and questions (at least the Devotion and Discussion questions, and ideally, more) to be completed individually through the week.
 - Meet weekly to watch a 20-minute video and to go

through the Discussion questions (and if time allows, the Digging Deeper questions).

- b. Review the “Rules of Engagement” (found in the front of this Participant's Guide).
 - c. Ask if there are any questions.
3. Discuss the study you will be doing (15 minutes)
 - a. Inform class of how many weeks you will be meeting to cover the study and what date will be your last date for this study.
 - b. Ask the group, “What do you know about [insert study's Bible book(s) name(s) such as Genesis].
 - c. Ask the group, “What do you hope to have answered about (Genesis)?”
 4. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey Introduction and Overview video (18 minutes)
 5. Video discussion (5 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are one or two participants who have a comment on the video or who may have learned something new from the video.
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief to allow others to respond.
 6. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 7. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (5 minutes)
 - a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).

- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are about to watch a video on the Exodus from Israel: “Why do you think the Exodus was important?”, or “From what you know about the Exodus, how does it relate to the work of Christ on the cross?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.
 - c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” in the front of this Participant's Guide.
 2. Discuss lesson questions (20 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss. These are the questions they have been encouraged to complete on their own prior to the class.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote good discussion.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
 3. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey video (about 20 minutes)
 4. Video discussion (10 minutes)

Ask what participants may have learned or found interesting in the video.
 5. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 6. Dismissal