

New Testament Survey

Lesson One

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS

The first four books in the New Testament are the Gospels. These books record the birth, life, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The approach of each book differs:

Matthew: Emphasizes Jesus Christ as King and was directed especially to the Jews. The book opens with the royal genealogy and closes with the King commissioning His disciples.

Mark: Emphasizes Jesus Christ as the Servant of God and was directed to the Romans. No genealogy is given since Jesus is portrayed as a servant and no one is interested in the pedigree of a servant. The book closes with the Lord "working with them," laboring as a servant with His disciples.

Luke: Presents Jesus Christ as the "Son of Man," the perfect man and Savior of imperfect men. Luke 3 traces the human genealogy of Jesus back to Adam. Luke ends with this perfect man, Jesus, ascending back up to Heaven to His Father.

John: Stresses Jesus in His position as the Son of God. The book opens with Jesus the Word revealed as God. The closing verse of John indicates that the world could not contain all Jesus did during His earthly ministry. This is further evidence He was truly the Son of God.

JEWISH SECTS

The Jews of New Testament times belonged to different sects or groups. The following groups are mentioned in the Gospels:

Pharisees: Their religion centered on obedience to the law which they interpreted, extended, followed, and enforced. They followed not only the written law but also oral tradition which had been passed from generation to generation. They were the largest group of Jews and the most influential. They believed in resurrection after death.

Sadducees: They were the governing group. They did not believe in the resurrection. They accepted only the teaching written in the law and not what had been handed down orally. They were aligned politically with the Romans who ruled Israel at the time of Christ.

Essences: These were strict legalists who looked for two messiahs to come. They lived in segregated communities.

Zealots: These were fanatical nationalists who advocated violence as a means of liberation from Roman rule.

New Testament Survey

Lesson Two

Many scholars hold James to be the earliest book of the New Testament, written about A.D. 45. Aside from the question of the place of James, it is practically certain that some of Paul's letters represent the first written records of the early church. Galatians is regarded by some to have been written as early as 47/48. The Thessalonian Epistles are from the early ministry of Paul the Missionary, written from Corinth before or during the time of Gallia (cf. Acts 18:12-17), which would mean A.D. 50 or 51.

These early writings give an insight into the character of the Christian message and the Christians themselves. Especially important in this regard are passages such as Galatians 1:6-2:21 and 3:6-15.

While the literary divisions of the New Testament do not follow a chronological scheme, they do reflect the logical order of God's program. First, the Gospels and Acts constitute the basic history which is necessary for a proper understanding and appreciation of the later works. The life of Christ and the origin of the Church is foundational. The story of the founder is required before one regards the superstructure which was erected. The Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20).

Finally, as a general overview, the New Testament Epistles give the interpretation of the person and work of Christ and apply His teachings to the lives of believers. The majority of these letters, at least 13, were penned by the apostle Paul. Most of them are written in letter form. Of the 21, all have names attached to them except Hebrews and the three Epistles of John.

Nine of the Pauline writings were sent to churches: four to individuals. Most of them deal with problem situations then existing in the churches (Ephesians seem to be an exception). Some are very personal in tone (Philippians and 2 Corinthians); others appear to have a more formal, almost thesis-like style, and in their main features, show a rather businesslike tone. Romans would probably be the outstanding example of this style. Further, the letters of Paul show great variety in content, and also combine doctrinal and practical components in good balance.

The remaining epistles, while varied in authorship, may be conveniently grouped under two main headings. Some deal primarily with the problem of suffering, (Hebrews, James and 1 Peter), while the rest treat the problem of false teaching (2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude). Both of these problems became increasingly serious as the first century progressed. Persecution came first from Jewish opponents and later from the Roman government. Christ had warned His followers of the rise of false Christs and false prophets (Matt. 24:24), and Paul had said much the same thing to the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:29,39). By the time John wrote his letters, the Gnostics (teachers who claimed to possess a superior philosophical-religious type of knowledge) were plaguing the Church. His epistles were an answer to that error.

Finally, there is the well known prophetic writing in the New Testament, The book of Revelation of Jesus Christ. Like the prophecy of Daniel in the Old Testament, this book deals, for the most part, with the judgments of God in the last days upon "those that dwell upon the earth." In Revelation, the climax of redemption is portrayed. The earlier word of Paul that God's purpose was "gather together in one all things in Christ", is realized as John writes, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15)

And so the New Testament has come to us. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1,2)

New Testament Survey

Lesson Three

Let us now take another quick look at the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The first three of these Gospels is called the "Synoptic Gospels". This term is used for them because they are "similar" in style and message. They also present the life of Christ in a way which compliments the picture given in the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew is the gospel written by a Jew to Jews about a Jew. Matthew is the writer, his countrymen are the readers, and Jesus Christ is the subject. Matthew's design is to present Jesus as the King of the Jews, the long-awaited Messiah. Through a carefully selected series of Old Testament quotations, Matthew documents Jesus Christ's claim to be Messiah. His genealogy, baptism, messages, and miracles all point to the same inescapable conclusion: Christ is King. Even in His death, seeming defeat is turned to victory by the Resurrection, and the message again echoes forth: the King of the Jews lives. At an early date this gospel was given the title *Kata Matthaion*, "According to Matthew." As this title suggest, other gospel accounts were known at that time (the word Gospel was added later). Matthew ("Gift of the Lord") was also surnamed Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27)

THE CHRIST OF MATTHEW

Matthew presents Jesus as Israel's promised messianic King (Matt. 1:23; 2:2,6; 3:17; 4:15-17; 21:5,9; 22:44,45; 26:64; 27:11,27-37). The phrase "the kingdom of heaven" appears thirty-two times in Matthew but nowhere else in the New Testament. To show that Jesus fulfills the qualifications for the Messiah, Matthew uses more Old Testament quotations and allusions than any other book (almost 130). Often used in this gospel is the revealing phrase "that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled," which appears nine times in Matthew and not once in the other Gospels. Jesus is the climax of the prophets (Matt. 12:39,40; 13:13-15,35; 17:5-13), "the Son of man" (Matt. 24:30ff.), the "servant" of the Lord (Matt. 12:17-21) and the "son of David" (the Davidic reference occurs nine times in Matthew, but only six times in all of the other Gospels).

Key Word:

Jesus the King - A Jewish tax collector named Matthew writes to a Jewish audience to convince them that the King of Jews has come. By quoting repeatedly from the Old Testament, Matthew validates Christ's claims that He is, in fact, the prophesied Messiah (the Anointed One) of Israel. Everything about this King is unique: His miraculous birth and obscure yet carefully prophesied birthplace, His flight into Egypt, His announcement by John, His battle with Satan in the wilderness, all support the only possible conclusion - Jesus is the culmination of promises delivered by the prophets over a period of a thousand years. Thus God's redemptive plan is alive and well, even after four hundred years of prophetic silence.

Key Verses:

Matthew 16:16-19 and 28:18-20 - "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:16-19).

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (28:18-20).

Key Chapter:

Matthew 12 - The turning point of Matthew comes in the twelfth chapter when the Pharisees, acting as the leadership of the nation of Israel, formally rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah, saying that His power comes not from God but from Satan. Christ's ministry changes immediately with His new teaching of parables, increased attention given to His disciples, and His repeated statement that His death is now near.

New Testament Survey

Lesson Four

The Gospel of Mark

Author:

Although the Gospel of Mark does not name its author, it is the unanimous testimony of early church fathers that Mark was the author. He was an associate of the Apostle Peter, and evidently his spiritual son (1 Peter 5:13). From Peter he received first-hand information of the events and teachings of the Lord, and preserved the information in written form.

It is generally agreed that Mark is the John Mark of the New Testament (Acts 12:12). His mother was a wealthy and prominent Christian in the Jerusalem church, and probably the church met in her home. Mark joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but not on the second because of a strong disagreement between the two men (Acts 15:37-38). However, near the end of Paul's life he called for Mark to be with him (2 Timothy 4:11).

Date of Writing: The Gospel of Mark was likely one of the first books written in the New Testament, probably in A.D. 55-59.

Purpose of Writing: Whereas Matthew is written primarily to his fellow Jews, Mark's gospel appears to be targeted to the Roman believers, particularly Gentiles. Mark wrote as a pastor to Christians who previously had heard and believed the Gospel (Romans 1:8). He desired that they have a biographical story of Jesus Christ as Servant of the Lord and Savior of the world in order to strengthen their faith in the face of severe persecution and to teach them what it meant to be His disciples.

Key Verses:

Mark 1:11: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Mark 1:17: And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

Mark 10:45: For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Mark 12:33: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Mark 16:15: And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

Brief Summary:

This gospel is unique because it emphasizes Jesus' actions more than His teaching. It is simply written, moving quickly from one episode in the life of Christ to another. It does not begin with a genealogy as in Matthew, because Gentiles would not be interested in His lineage. After the introduction of Jesus at His baptism, Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee and called the first four of His twelve disciples.

What follows is the record of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Mark's account is not just a collection of stories, but a narrative written to reveal that Jesus is the Messiah, not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well. In a dynamic profession, the disciples, led by Peter, acknowledged their faith in Him (Mark 8:29-30), even though they failed to understand fully His Messiahship until after His resurrection.

As we follow His journeys through Galilee, the surrounding areas, and then to Judea, we realize what a rapid pace He set. He touched the lives of many people, but He left an indelible mark on His disciples. At the transfiguration (Mark 9:1-9), He gave three of them a preview of His future return in power and glory, and again it was revealed to them who He was.

However, in the days leading to His final trip to Jerusalem, we see them bewildered, fearful and doubting. At Jesus' arrest, He stood alone after they fled. In the following hours of the mock trials, Jesus boldly proclaimed that He is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One, and that He would be triumphant at His return (Mark 14:61-62). The climactic events surrounding the crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection were not witnessed by most of His disciples. But several faithful women did witness His passion. After the Sabbath, early in the morning of the first day of the week, they went to the tomb with burial spices. When they saw the stone had been rolled away, they entered the tomb. It was not the body of Jesus they saw, but an angel robed in white. The joyful message they received was, "He is risen!" Women were the first evangelists, as they spread the good news of His resurrection. This same message has been broadcast throughout the world in the following centuries down to us today.

Connections:

Because Mark's intended audience was the Gentiles, he does not quote as frequently from the Old Testament as Matthew, who was writing primarily to the Jews. He does not begin with a genealogy to link Jesus with the Jewish patriarchs, but begins instead with His baptism, the beginning of His earthly ministry. But even there, Mark quotes from an Old Testament prophecy regarding the messenger—John the Baptist—who would exhort the people to "prepare the way for the Lord" (Mark 1:3; Isaiah 40:3) as they awaited the coming of their Messiah.

Jesus does refer to the Old Testament in several passages in Mark. In Mark 7:6, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their superficial worship of God with their lips while their hearts were far from Him and refers to their own prophet, Isaiah, to convict them of their hardheartedness (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus referred to another Old Testament prophecy which was to be fulfilled that very night as the disciples would be scattered like sheep without a shepherd when Jesus was arrested and put to death (Mark 14:27; Zechariah 13:7). He referred again to Isaiah when He cleansed the Temple of the money-changers (Mark 11:15-17; Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11) and to the Psalms when He explained that He was the chief Cornerstone of our faith and of the Church (Mark 12:10-11; Psalm 118:22-23).

Practical Application:

Mark presents Jesus as the suffering Servant of God (Mark 10:45) and as the One who came to serve and sacrifice for us, in part to inspire us to do the same. We are to minister as He did, with the same greatness of humility and devotion to the service of others. Jesus exhorted us to remember that to be great in God's kingdom, we must be the servant of all (Mark 10:44). Self-sacrifice should transcend our need for recognition or reward, just as Jesus was willing to be abased as He lay down His life for the sheep.

New Testament Survey

Lesson Five

LUKE

Author:

The Gospel of Luke does not identify its author. From Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3, it is clear that the same author wrote both Luke and Acts, addressing both to “most excellent Theophilus,” possibly a Roman dignitary. The tradition from the earliest days of the church has been that Luke, a physician and a close companion of the Apostle Paul, wrote both Luke and Acts (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11). This would make Luke the only Gentile to pen any books of Scripture.

Date of Writing:

The Gospel of Luke was likely written between A.D. 58 and 65.

Purpose of Writing:

As with the other two synoptic gospels—Matthew and Mark—this book’s purpose is to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ and all He “began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven” (Acts 1:1-2).

The Gospel of Luke is unique in that it is a meticulous history—an “orderly account” (Luke 1:3) consistent with the Luke’s medical mind—often giving details the other accounts omit. Luke’s history of the life of the Great Physician emphasizes His ministry to—and compassion for—Gentiles, Samaritans, women, children, tax collectors, sinners, and others regarded as outcasts in Israel.

Key Verses:

Luke 2:4-7:

Luke 3:16,

Luke 4:18-19, 21:

Luke 18:31-32:

Luke 23:33-34:

Luke 24:1-3:

Brief Summary:

Called the most beautiful book ever written, the Gospel of Luke begins by telling us about Jesus' parents; the birth of His cousin, John the Baptist; Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, where Jesus is born in a manger; and the genealogy of Christ through Mary. Jesus' public ministry reveals His perfect compassion and forgiveness through the stories of the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus,

and the Good Samaritan. While many believe in this unprejudiced love that surpasses all human limits, many others—especially the religious leaders—challenge and oppose the claims of Jesus. Christ's followers are encouraged to count the cost of discipleship, while His enemies seek His death on the cross. Finally, Jesus is betrayed, tried, sentenced and crucified. But the grave cannot hold Him! His Resurrection assures the continuation of His ministry of seeking and saving the lost.

Connections:

Since Luke was a Gentile, his references to the Old Testament are relatively few compared to those in Matthew's gospel, and most of the OT references are in the words spoken by Jesus rather than in Luke's narration. Jesus used the Old Testament to defend against Satan's attacks, answering him with "It is written" (Luke 4:1-13); to identify Himself as the promised Messiah (Luke 4:17-21); to remind the Pharisees of their inability to keep the Law and their need of a Savior (Luke 10:25-28, 18:18-27); and to confound their learning when they tried to trap and trick Him (Luke 20).

Practical Application:

The Gospel of Luke gives us a beautiful portrait of our compassionate Savior. Jesus was not "turned off" by the poor and the needy; in fact, they were a primary focus of His ministry. Israel at the time of Jesus was a very class-conscious society. The weak and downtrodden were literally powerless to improve their lot in life and were especially open to the message that "the kingdom of God is near you" (Luke 10:9). This is a message we must carry to those around us who desperately need to hear it. Even in comparatively wealthy countries—perhaps especially so—the spiritual need is dire. Christians must follow the example of Jesus and bring the good news of salvation to the spiritually poor and needy. The kingdom of God is near and the time grows shorter every day.

New Testament Survey

Lesson Six

JOHN

Author:

John 21:20–24 describes the author of the gospel of John as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” and for both historical and internal reasons this is understood to be John the Apostle, one of the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10).

Date of Writing:

Discovery of certain papyrus fragments dated around AD 135 require the gospel of John to have been written, copied, and circulated before then. And, while some think it was written before Jerusalem was destroyed (AD 70), AD 85—90 is a more accepted time for the writing of the gospel of John.

Purpose of Writing:

The author cites the purpose of the gospel of John as follows: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). Unlike the three Synoptic Gospels, John’s purpose is not to present a chronological narrative of the life of Christ but to display His deity. John sought to strengthen the faith of second-generation believers and bring about faith in others, but he also sought to correct a false teaching that was spreading in the first century. John emphasized Jesus Christ as “the Son of God,” fully God and fully man, contrary to a false doctrine that taught the “Christ-spirit” came upon the human Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the crucifixion.

Key Verses:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent’” (John 6:29).

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”(John 11:25–26).

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father?”’” (John 14:9).

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

“So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit” (John 19:30).

“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’” (John 20:29).

Brief Summary:

The gospel of John includes only seven miracles—John calls them “signs”—to demonstrate the deity of Christ and illustrate His ministry. Some of these miracles and stories, such as the raising of Lazarus, are found only in John. His is the most theological of the four Gospels, and he often gives the reason behind events mentioned in the other gospels. The gospel of John shares much about the approaching ministry of the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ ascension. There are certain words or phrases that create a recurring theme in the gospel of John: believe, witness, Comforter, life – death, light – darkness, I am, and love.

The gospel of John introduces Jesus Christ, not from His birth, but from “the beginning,” before creation. John calls Jesus “the Word” (Logos) who, as God Himself, was involved in every aspect of creation (John 1:1–3) and who later became flesh (verse 14) in order that He might take away our sins as the spotless Lamb of God (verse 29). The gospel of John includes several spiritual conversations, such as Jesus’ talk with the Samaritan woman that shows Him as the Messiah (John 4:26) and Jesus’ meeting with Nicodemus that explains salvation through His vicarious death on the cross (John 3:14–16). In the gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly angers the Jewish leaders by correcting them (John 2:13–16); healing on the Sabbath, and claiming traits belonging only to God (John 5:18; 8:56–59; 9:6, 16; 10:33).

The last nine chapters of the gospel of John deal with the final week of Jesus’ life. Jesus prepares His disciples for His coming death and for their ministry after His resurrection and ascension (John 14–17). He then willingly dies on the cross in our place (John 10:15–18), paying our sin debt in full (John 19:30) so that whoever trusts in Him will be saved (John 3:14–16). Jesus then rises from the dead, convincing even the most doubting of His disciples that He is God and Master (John 20:24–29).

Connections:

The gospel of John's portrayal of Jesus as the God of the Old Testament is seen most emphatically in the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus. He is the "Bread of life" (John 6:35), provided by God to feed the souls of His people, just as He provided manna from heaven to feed the Israelite's in the wilderness (Exodus 16:11–36). Jesus is the "Light of the world" (John 8:12), the same Light that God promised to His people in the Old Testament (Isaiah 30:26; 60:19–22) and which will find its culmination in the New Jerusalem when Christ the Lamb will be its Light (Revelation 21:23). Two of the "I Am" statements refer to Jesus as both the "Good Shepherd" and the "Door of the sheep." Here are clear references to Jesus as the God of the Old Testament, the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 23:1; 80:1; Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34:23) and, as the only Door into the sheepfold, the only way of salvation.

The Jews believed in the resurrection and, in fact, used the doctrine to try to trick Jesus into making statements they could use against Him. But His statement at the tomb of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), must have astounded them. He was claiming to be the cause of resurrection and in possession of the power of life and death. None other than God Himself could claim such a thing. Similarly, Jesus' claim to be "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) linked Him unmistakably to the Old Testament. His is the "Way of Holiness" prophesied in Isaiah 35:8; He established the City of Truth of Zechariah 8:3 when He was in Jerusalem and preached the truths of the gospel. As "the Life," Jesus affirms His deity, the Creator of life, God incarnate (John 1:1–3; Genesis 2:7). Finally, as the "true Vine" (John 15:1, 5), Jesus identifies Himself with the nation of Israel, who are called the vineyard of the Lord in many Old Testament passages. As the true Vine of the vineyard of Israel, He portrays Himself as the Lord of the "true Israel"—all those who would come to Him in faith (cf. Romans 9:6).

Practical Application:

The gospel of John continues to fulfill its purpose of evangelizing the lost (John 3:16 is likely the best-known Bible verse) and is often used in evangelistic Bible studies. In the recorded encounters between Jesus and Nicodemus and the woman at the well (chapters 3–4), we learn much from Jesus' model of personal evangelism. His comforting words to His disciples before His death (John 14:1–6, 16; 16:33) are still of great comfort in sorrowful times. Jesus' "high priestly prayer" for believers in chapter 17 is also a wonderful source of encouragement for believers. John's teachings concerning the deity of Christ (John 1:1–3, 14; 5:22–23; 8:58; 14:8–9; 20:28) are helpful in apologetic and provide a clear revelation of who Jesus is: fully God and fully man.

New Testament Survey

Lesson Seven

Acts

Author:

The book of Acts, also called Acts of the Apostles, does not specifically identify its author. From Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1–3, we know that the same author wrote both Luke and Acts. The tradition from the earliest days of the church has been that Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, wrote the books of Luke and Acts (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11).

Date of Writing:

The book of Acts was likely written between AD 61 and 64.

Purpose of Writing:

The book of Acts was written to provide a history of the early church. The emphasis of the book is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Acts records the apostles being Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding world. The book of Acts sheds light on the gift of the Holy Spirit, who empowers, guides, teaches, and serves as our Counselor. Reading the book of Acts, we are enlightened and encouraged by the power of the gospel as it spread throughout the world and transformed lives. Many miracles were performed during this time by the apostles to validate their message. The book of Acts covers the transitional time between the ascension of Christ and the completion of the New Testament canon, and the apostolic miracles were God's means of authenticating His message through the men who penned the Bible.

Key Verses:

Acts 1:8:

Acts 2:4:

Acts 4:12:

Acts 4:19–20:

Acts 9:3–6:

Acts 16:31:

Brief Summary:

The book of Acts gives the history of the Christian church and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as the mounting opposition to it. Although many faithful servants were used to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, Saul, also called Paul, was the most influential. Before he was converted, Paul zealously persecuted Christians. Paul's dramatic conversion on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1–31) is a highlight of the book of Acts. After his conversion he went to the opposite extreme of loving God and preaching His Word with power and fervency in the Spirit of the true and living God. The disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses in Jerusalem (Acts 1–8:3), in Judea and Samaria (8:4–12:25), and to the ends of the earth (13:1–28:31). Included in the last section are Paul's three missionary journeys (13:1–21:16), his trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea (21:17–26:32) and his journey to Rome (27:1–28:31).

Connections:

The book of Acts serves as a transition from the Old Covenant to the New. This transition is seen in several key events in Acts. First, there was a change in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose primary function in the Old Testament was the external "anointing" of God's people, among them Moses (Numbers 11:17), Othniel (Judges 3:8–10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), and Saul (1 Samuel 10:6–10). After the ascension of Jesus, the Spirit came to live in the very hearts of believers (Romans 8:9–11; 1 Corinthians 3:16), guiding and empowering them from within. The indwelling Spirit is the gift of God to those who come to Him in faith.

Paul's conversion in Acts 9 is a dramatic example of the power of God unto salvation (see Romans 1:16) and the opening of spiritually blinded eyes. Paul admitted that, prior to meeting the risen Savior, he was the most zealous of Israelites and was blameless "concerning righteousness based on the law" (Philippians 3:6), going so far as to persecute those who taught salvation by grace through faith in Christ. But, after his conversion, Paul realized that all his legalistic efforts were worthless, and he considered them "rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (Philippians 3:8–9). Before he met Christ, Paul had been blinded by a pharisaical misinterpretation of the law and an inflated opinion of his own righteousness. After he met Christ, the "scales fell from Saul's eyes," as it were (Acts 9:18). His boasting of his own goodness was replaced by his glorying in the cross of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:27; Galatians 6:14).

Peter's vision of the sheet full of unclean animals in Acts 10:9–15 is another sign of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant's unity of Jew and Gentile in one universal Church. The "unclean" animals in Peter's vision symbolized the Gentiles, who were declared "cleansed" by God through the sacrificial death of Christ. The Old Covenant law had served its purpose (see Galatians 3:23–29), and both Jews and Gentiles are united in the New Covenant of grace through their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Practical Application:

God can do amazing things through ordinary people when He empowers them through His Spirit. The book of Acts shows how God essentially took a group of fisherman and commoners and used them to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). God took a Christian-hating murderer and transformed him into history's greatest Christian evangelist, the author of almost half the books of the New Testament.

God used the persecution the Christians endured to help stimulate the incredibly rapid expansion of the fledgling church. God can and does do the same through us—changing our hearts, empowering us by the Holy Spirit, and giving us a passion to spread the good news of salvation through Christ. If we try to accomplish God’s work in the world in our own power, we will fail. Like the disciples in Acts 2, we must faithfully proclaim the gospel, trust God for the results, and devote ourselves “to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

New Testament Survey

Lesson Eight

Romans

Author:

Romans 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Romans as the apostle Paul. Romans 16:22 indicates that Paul used a man named Tertius to transcribe his words.

Date of Writing:

The Book of Romans was likely written A.D. 56-58.

Purpose of Writing:

As with all Paul's epistles to the churches, his purpose in writing was to proclaim the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ by teaching doctrine and edify and encourage the believers who would receive his letter.

Of particular concern to Paul were those to whom this letter was written—those in Rome who were “loved by God and called to be saints” (Romans 1:7). Because he himself was a Roman citizen, he had a unique passion for those in the assembly of believers in Rome. Since he had not, to this point, visited the church in Rome, this letter also served as his introduction to them.

Key Verses:

Romans 1:16,

Romans 3:9-11,

Romans 3:21,

Romans 3:23:

Romans 5:8,

Romans 6:23,

Romans 8:9,

Romans 8:28:

Romans 8:37-39,

Romans 10:9-10,

Romans 12:1,

Romans 16:17,

Brief Summary:

Paul was excited about being able to minister at last in this church, and everyone was well aware of that fact (Romans 1:8-15). The letter to the Romans was written from Corinth just prior to Paul's trip to Jerusalem to deliver the alms that had been given for the poor there. He had intended to go to Rome and then on to Spain (Romans 15:24), but his plans were interrupted when he was arrested in Jerusalem. He would eventually go to Rome as a prisoner. Phoebe, who was a member of the church at Cenchrea near Corinth (Romans 16:1), most likely carried the letter to Rome.

The Book of Romans is primarily a work of doctrine and can be divided into four sections: righteousness needed, 1:18–3:20; righteousness provided, 3:21–8:39; righteousness vindicated, 9:1–11:36; righteousness practiced, 12:1–15:13. The main theme of this letter is obvious of course—righteousness. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul first condemns all men of their sinfulness. He expresses his desire to preach the truth of God's Word to those in Rome. It was his hope to have assurance they were staying on the right path. He strongly points out that he is not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16), because it is the power by which everyone is saved.

The Book of Romans tells us about God, who He is and what He has done. It tells us of Jesus Christ, what His death accomplished. It tells us about ourselves, what we were like without Christ and who we are after trusting in Christ. Paul points out that God did not demand men have their lives straightened out before coming to Christ. While we were still sinners Christ died on a cross for our sins.

Connections:

Paul uses several Old Testament people and events as illustrations of the glorious truths in the Book of Romans. Abraham believed and righteousness was imputed to him by his faith, not by his works (Romans 4:1-5). In Romans 4:6-9, Paul refers to David who reiterated the same truth: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." Paul uses Adam to explain to the Romans the doctrine of inherited sin, and he uses the story of Sarah and Isaac, the child of promise, to illustrate the principle of Christians being the children of the promise of the divine grace of God through Christ. In chapters 9–11, Paul recounts the history of the nation of Israel and declares that God has not completely and finally rejected Israel (Romans 11:11-12), but has allowed them to "stumble" only until the full number of the Gentiles will be brought to salvation.

Practical Application:

The Book of Romans makes it clear that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Every "good" deed we have ever done is as a filthy rag before God. So dead in our trespasses and sins are we that only the grace and mercy of God can save us. God expressed that grace and mercy by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place. When we turn our lives over to Christ, we are no longer controlled by our sin nature, but we are controlled by the Spirit. If we make confession that Jesus is Lord, and believe that He is raised from the dead, we are saved, born again. We need to live our lives offered to God as a living sacrifice to Him. Worship of the God who saved us should be our highest desire. Perhaps the best application of Romans would be to apply Romans 1:16 and not be ashamed of the gospel. Instead, let us all be faithful in proclaiming it!

New Testament Survey

Lesson Nine

1 and 2 Corinthians

1 Corinthians

Author:

1 Corinthians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of 1 Corinthians as the apostle Paul.

Date of Writing:

The Book of 1 Corinthians was written in approximately A. D. 55.

Purpose of Writing:

The apostle Paul founded the church in Corinth. A few years after leaving the church, the apostle Paul heard some disturbing reports about the Corinthian church. They were full of pride and were excusing sexual immorality. Spiritual gifts were being used improperly, and there was rampant misunderstanding of key Christian doctrines. The apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians in an attempt to restore the Corinthian church to its foundation—Jesus Christ.

Key Verses:

1 Corinthians 3:3:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

1 Corinthians 10:31:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

1 Corinthians 15:3-4:

Brief Summary:

The Corinthian church was plagued by divisions. The believers in Corinth were dividing into groups loyal to certain spiritual leaders (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:1-6). Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to be united because of devotion to Christ (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). Many in the church were essentially approving of an immoral relationship (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Paul commanded them to expel the wicked man from the church (1 Corinthians 5:13). The Corinthian believers were taking each other to court (1 Corinthians 6:1-2). Paul taught the Corinthians that it would be better to be taken advantage of than to damage their Christian testimony (1 Corinthians 6:3-8).

Paul gave the Corinthian church instructions on marriage and celibacy (chapter 7), food sacrificed to idols (chapters 8 and 10), Christian freedom (chapter 9), the veiling of women (1 Corinthians 11:1-16), the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14), and the resurrection (chapter 15). Paul organized the book of 1 Corinthians by answering questions the Corinthian believers had asked him and by responding to improper conduct and erroneous beliefs they had accepted.

Connections:

In chapter 10 of the Book of 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness to illustrate to the Corinthian believers the folly of the misuse of freedom and the danger of overconfidence. Paul has just warned the Corinthians about their lack of self-discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). He goes on to describe the Israelites who, despite seeing God's miracles and care for them—the parting of the Red Sea, the miraculous provision of manna from heaven and water from a rock—they misused their freedom, rebelled against God, and fell into immorality and idolatry. Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to note the example of the Israelites and avoid lusts and sexual immorality (vv. 6-8) and putting Christ to the test and complaining (vv. 9-10). See Numbers 11:4, 34, 25:1-9; Exodus 16:2, 17:2, 7.

Practical Application:

Many of the problems and questions the Corinthian church was dealing with are still present in the church today. Churches today still struggle with divisions, with immorality, and with the use of spiritual gifts. The Book of 1 Corinthians very well could have been written to the church today and we would do well to heed Paul's warnings and apply them to ourselves. Despite all the rebukes and corrections, 1 Corinthians brings our focus back to where it should be—on Christ. Genuine Christian love is the answer to many problems (chapter 13). A proper understanding of the resurrection of Christ, as revealed in chapter 15, and thereby a proper understanding of our own resurrection, is the cure for what divides and defeats us.

2 Corinthians

Author:

2 Corinthians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of 2 Corinthians as the apostle Paul, possibly along with Timothy.

Date of Writing:

The Book of 2 Corinthians was very likely written approximately A.D. 55-57.

Purpose of Writing:

The church in Corinth began in AD 52 when Paul visited there on his second missionary journey. He stayed one and a half years, accomplishing much for the sake of the gospel. A record of this visit and

the establishment of the church is found in Acts 18:1–18.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul expresses his relief and joy that the Corinthians had received his “severe” letter (now lost) in a positive manner. That letter addressed issues that were tearing the church apart, primarily the arrival of self-styled (false) apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13) who were assaulting Paul’s character, sowing discord among the believers, and teaching false doctrine. They appear to have questioned his veracity (2 Corinthians 1:15–17), his speaking ability (2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6), and his unwillingness to accept support from the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:7–9; 12:13). There were also some people in Corinth who had not repented of their licentious behavior, another reason he had sent the “severe” letter (2 Corinthians 12:20–21).

Paul was overjoyed to learn from Titus that the majority of Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul (2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–9). The apostle encourages them for this in an expression of his genuine love (2 Corinthians 7:3–16). Paul also urged the Corinthians to finish collecting an offering for the poor (chapters 8–9) and to take a harder stance against false teachers (chapters 10–13). Finally, Paul vindicated his apostleship, as some in the church had likely questioned his authority (2 Corinthians 13:3).

Key Verses:

2 Corinthians 5:17:

2 Corinthians 5:21:

Brief Summary:

After greeting the believers in the church at Corinth and explaining why he had not visited them as originally planned (vv. 1:3–2:2), Paul explains the nature of his ministry. Triumph through Christ and sincerity in the sight of God were the hallmarks of his ministry to the churches (2:14-17). He compares the glorious ministry of the righteousness of Christ to the “ministry of condemnation” which is the Law (v. 3:9) and declares his faith in the validity of his ministry in spite of intense persecution (4:8-18). Chapter 5 outlines the basis of the Christian faith—the new nature (v. 17) and the exchange of our sin for the righteousness of Christ (v. 21).

Chapters 6 and 7 find Paul defending himself and his ministry, assuring the Corinthians yet again of his sincere love for them and exhorting them to repentance and holy living. In chapters 8 and 9, Paul exhorts the believers at Corinth to follow the examples of the brothers in Macedonia and extend generosity to the saints in need. He teaches them the principles and rewards of gracious giving.

Paul ends his letter by reiterating his authority among them (chapter 10) and concern for their faithfulness to him in the face of fierce opposition from false apostles. He calls himself a “fool” for having to reluctantly boast of his qualifications and his suffering for Christ (chapter 11). He ends his epistle by describing the vision of heaven he was allowed to experience and the “thorn in the flesh” he was given by God to ensure his humility (chapter 12). The last chapter contains his exhortation to the Corinthians to examine themselves to see whether what they profess is reality, and ends with a benediction of love and peace.

Connections:

Throughout his epistles, Paul frequently refers to the Mosaic law, comparing it with the surpassing greatness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace. In 2 Corinthians 3:4-11, Paul contrasts the Old Testament law with the new covenant of grace, referring to the law as that which “kills” while the Spirit gives life. The law is the “ministry of death, written and engraved on stone” (v. 7; Exodus 24:12) because it brings only the knowledge of sin and its condemnation. The glory of the law is that it reflects the glory of God, but the ministry of the Spirit is much more glorious than the ministry of the law, because it reflects His mercy, grace and love in providing Christ as the fulfillment of the law.

Practical Application:

This letter is the most biographical and least doctrinal of Paul's epistles. It tells us more about Paul as a person and as a minister than any of the others. That being said, there are a few things we can take from this letter and apply to our lives today. One thing is stewardship, not only of money, but of time as well. The Macedonians not only gave generously, but “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will” (2 Corinthians 8:5). In the same way, we should dedicate not only all we have to the Lord, but all that we are. He really doesn't need our money. He is omnipotent! He wants the heart, one that longs to serve and please and love. Stewardship and giving to God is more than just money. Yes, God does want us to tithe part of our income, and He promises to bless us when we give to Him. There is more though. God wants 100%. He wants us to give Him our all. Everything we are.

We should spend our lives living to serve our Father. We should not only give to God from our paycheck, but our very lives should be a reflection of Him. We should give ourselves first to the Lord, then to the church and the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

New Testament Survey

Lesson Ten

Galatians

Author:

Galatians 1:1 clearly identifies the apostle Paul as the writer of the epistle to the Galatians.

Date of Writing:

Galatians is likely the first New Testament book to be written, composed sometime soon after AD 49.

Purpose of Writing:

The churches in Galatia were comprised of both Jewish and Gentile converts. Paul's purpose in writing to these churches was to confirm them in the faith, especially concerning justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the Law of Moses.

Galatians was written because the churches of that region were facing a theological crisis. The essential truth of justification by faith rather than by human works was being denied by the Judaizers—legalistic Jews who insisted that Christians must keep the Mosaic Law. In particular, the Judaizers insisted on circumcision as a requirement for Gentiles who wished to be saved. In other words, convert to Judaism first, and then you are eligible to become a Christian. When Paul learned that this heresy was being taught to the Galatian churches, he composed an epistle to emphasize our liberty in Christ and to counter the perversion of the gospel that the Judaizers promoted.

Key Verses:

Galatians 2:20

Galatians 3:11

Galatians 5:22-23

Galatians 6:7

Brief Summary:

The fact that we are justified by grace through faith means we have spiritual freedom. We are not under bondage to the dictates of the Old Testament Law. Paul soundly condemns anyone who would denigrate the grace of God and attempt to change the gospel (Galatians 1:8–10). He gives his apostolic credentials (Galatians 1:11–2:14) and emphasizes that righteousness comes through Christ not the works of the Law (Galatians 2:21). The Galatians must stand fast in their freedom and not be “entangled again with a yoke of bondage (that is, the Mosaic law)” (Galatians 5:1). Christian freedom is not an excuse to gratify one's sin nature; rather, our freedom is an opportunity to love one another (Galatians 5:13; 6:7–10). The Christian life is to be lived in the power of the Spirit, not the flesh

(Galatians 5:16–18). The flesh has been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20); as a consequence, the Spirit will bear His fruit in the life of the believer (Galatians 5:22–23).

In the end, the issue is not whether a person is circumcised but whether he is a “new creation” (Galatians 6:15). Salvation is the work of the Spirit, and we must be born again (see John 3:3). External religious rites such as circumcision are of no value in the realm of the Spirit.

Connections:

Throughout Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, saving grace—the gift of God—is juxtaposed against the Law of Moses, which cannot save. The Judaizers urged a return to the Mosaic Law as the source of justification, and they were prominent in the early church. Even Peter was temporarily drawn into their web of deceit (Galatians 2:11–13). The themes connecting Galatians to the Old Testament center on Law vs. grace: the inability of the Law to justify (2:16); the believer’s deadness to the Law (2:19); Abraham’s justification by faith (3:6); the Law’s bringing not God’s salvation but His wrath (3:10); and love as the fulfillment of the Law (5:14). Believers are the spiritual children of Sarah, not Hagar—that is, we are children of the freewoman, not children of the slave; we have more in common with Isaac, the son of promise, than with Ishmael, the son of human effort (4:21–31).

The books of Galatians and James deal with two complementary aspects of Christianity. Galatians highlights the gospel of grace that produces righteous living (Galatians 3:13–14). James highlights the righteous living that proves faith. There is no conflict; James, too, emphasizes the new birth through the gospel (James 1:18), and Galatians spends its final two chapters applying the doctrine of sola gratia (the doctrine that salvation comes only by God’s Grace) to practical Christian living.

Practical Application:

One of the main themes of the book of Galatians is found in 3:11: “The righteous shall live by faith.” We must stand firm in this truth. Any compromise with legalism or the mixture of human effort and the grace of God for salvation leads to heresy. If we could be saved through the keeping of the Law, then Jesus did not need to die (Galatians 2:21). Trying to save ourselves nullifies grace.

Not only are we saved by faith (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8–9), but the life of the believer in Christ—day by day, moment by moment—is lived by and through that faith (Galatians 2:20). Not that faith is something we conjure up on our own—it is the gift of God, not of works (see Ephesians 2:8–9)—but it is our responsibility and joy to exhibit our faith so that others will see the work of Christ in us and to grow in our faith by the application of spiritual disciplines (Bible study, prayer, obedience, etc.).

Jesus said we would be known by the fruit of our lives (Matthew 7:16), which should give evidence of the faith within us. All Christians should be diligent in striving to build upon the saving faith within us so that our lives will reflect Christ and others will “glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)

New Testament Survey

Lesson Eleven

Ephesians

Author:

Ephesians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Ephesians as the apostle Paul.

Date of Writing:

The Book of Ephesians was very likely written between A.D. 60-63.

Purpose of Writing:

Paul intended that all who long for Christ-like maturity would receive this writing. Enclosed within the Book of Ephesians is the discipline needed to develop into true children of God. Furthermore, a study in Ephesians will help to fortify and to establish the believer so he can fulfill the purpose and calling God has given. The aim of this epistle is to confirm and to equip a maturing church. It presents a balanced view of the body of Christ and its importance in God's economy.

Key Verses:

Ephesians 1:3

Ephesians 2:8-10

Ephesians 6:10-11

Brief Summary:

Doctrine occupies the greatest portion of the Book of Ephesians. Half of the teaching in this epistle relates to our standing in Christ, and the remainder of it affects our condition. All too often those who teach from this book bypass all the foundational instruction and go directly to the closing chapter. It is this chapter that emphasizes the warfare or the struggle of the saints. However, to benefit fully from the contents of this epistle, one must begin at the beginning of Paul's instruction in this letter.

First, as followers of Christ, we must fully understand who God declares us to be. We must also become grounded in the knowledge of God's accomplishment for all humanity. Next, our present existence and walk must become exercised and strengthened. This must continue until we no longer totter or stagger back and forth with every spirit of teaching and subtlety of men.

Paul's writing breaks down into three main segments. (1) Chapters one through three introduce principles with respect to God's accomplishment. (2) Chapters four and five put forth principles regarding our present existence. (3) Chapter six presents principles concerning our daily struggle.

Connections:

The primary link to the Old Testament in Ephesians is in the startling (to the Jews) concept of the church as the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:32). This amazing mystery (a truth not previously revealed) of the church, is that “the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6). This was a mystery completely hidden from the Old Testament saints (Ephesians 3:5, 9). The Israelites who were true followers of God always believed they alone were God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6). Accepting Gentiles on an equal status in this new paradigm was extremely difficult and caused many disputes among Jewish believers and Gentile converts. Paul also speaks of the mystery of the church as the “bride of Christ,” a previously unheard-of concept in the Old Testament.

Practical Application

Perhaps more than any other book of the Bible, the Book of Ephesians emphasizes the connection between sound doctrine and right practice in the Christian life. Far too many people ignore "theology" and instead want to only discuss things that are "practical." In Ephesians, Paul argues that theology is practical. In order to live out God's will for us in our lives practically, we must first understand who we are in Christ doctrinally.

New Testament Survey

Lesson Twelve

Philippians

Author:

Philippians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Philippians as the apostle Paul, likely along with the help of Timothy.

Date of Writing:

The Book of Philippians was written in approximately A.D. 61.

Purpose of Writing:

The Epistle to the Philippians, one of Paul's prison epistles, was written in Rome. It was at Philippi, which the apostle visited on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:12), that Lydia and the Philippian jailer and his family were converted to Christ. Now, some few years later, the church was well established, as may be inferred from its address which includes "bishops (elders) and deacons" (Philippians 1:1).

The occasion of the epistle was to acknowledge a gift of money from the church at Philippi, brought to the apostle by Epaphroditus, one of its members (Philippians 4:10-18). This is a tender letter to a group of Christians who were especially close to the heart of Paul (2 Corinthians 8:1-6), and comparatively little is said about doctrinal error.

Key Verses:

Philippians 1:21

Philippians 3:7

Philippians 4:6-7

Philippians 4:13

Brief Summary:

Philippians can be called "Resources Through Suffering." The book is about Christ in our life, Christ in our mind, Christ as our goal, Christ as our strength, and joy through suffering. It was written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, about thirty years after Christ's ascension and about ten years after Paul first preached at Philippi.

Paul was Nero's prisoner, yet the epistle fairly shouts with triumph, the words "joy" and "rejoice" appearing frequently (Philippians 1:4, 18, 25, 26; 2:2, 28; Philippians 3:1, 4:1, 4, 10). Right Christian experience is the outworking, whatever our circumstances may be, of the life, nature, and mind of

Christ living in us (Philippians 1:6, 11; 2:5, 13). Philippians reaches its pinnacle at 2:5-11 with the glorious and profound declaration regarding the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Connections:

As with many of his letters, Paul warned the new believers in the church of Philippi to beware of the tendency toward legalism which continually cropped up in the early churches. So tied to the Old Testament law were the Jews that there was a constant effort on the part of the Judaizers to return to the teaching of salvation by works. But Paul reiterated that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone and branded the Judaizers as “dogs” and “men who do evil.” In particular, the legalisms were insisting that the new believers in Christ should continue to be circumcised according to the requirements of the Old Covenant (Genesis 17:10-12; Leviticus 12:3). In this way, they attempted to please God by their own efforts and elevate themselves above the Gentile Christians who did not participate in the ritual. Paul explained that those who have been washed by the blood of the Lamb were no longer to perform the ritual that symbolized the need for a clean heart.

Practical Application:

Philippians is one of Paul’s most personal letters, and as such it has several personal applications to believers. Written during his imprisonment in Rome, Paul exhorts the Philippians to follow his example and be “encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly” (Philippians 1:14) during times of persecution. All Christians have experienced, at one time or another, the animosity of unbelievers against the gospel of Christ. This is to be expected. Jesus said that the world hated Him and it will hate His followers as well (John 15:18). Paul exhorts us to persevere in the face of persecution, to “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

Another application of Philippians is the need for Christians to be united in humility. We are united with Christ and we need to strive to be united to one another in the same way. Paul reminds us to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” and to put away conceit and selfishness, “but in humility consider others better than yourselves” looking out for the interest of others and caring for one another (Philippians 2:2-4). There would be far less conflict in churches today if we all took to heart Paul’s advice.

Another application of Philippians is that of the joy and rejoicing which are found throughout his letter. He rejoices that Christ is being proclaimed (Philippians 1:8); he rejoices in his persecution (2:18); he exhorts others to rejoice in the Lord (3:1); and he refers to the Philippian brothers as his “joy and crown” (4:1). He sums up with this exhortation to believers: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say Rejoice” (4:4-7). As believers, we can rejoice and experience the peace of God by casting all our cares on Him, if we “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let [our] requests be made known to God” (4:6). Paul’s joy, in spite of persecution and imprisonment, comes shining through this epistle, and we are promised the same joy he experienced when we center our thoughts on the Lord (Philippians 4:8).