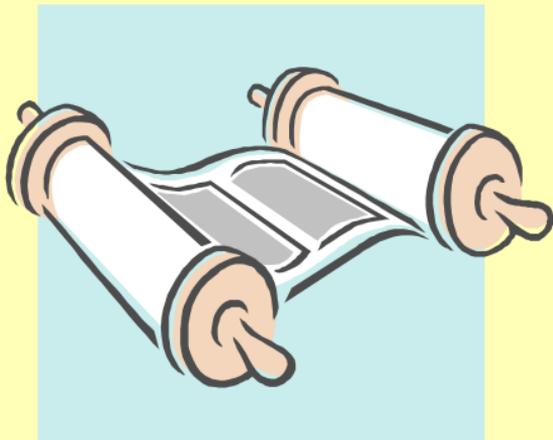


Personal Meditations

On Paul's Post-Acts Ministry



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These thoughts are purely personal; so the first personal pronoun will be used from time to time throughout, without a great deal of concern about good rhetorical principles. Any other Christian, musing on these same epistles, will find other key thoughts in them, and such meditations will be just as valid. Obviously, we cannot confine any piece of literature to a single word; yet I have found inner joy from thinking on Paul's post-Acts epistles with this question in mind: "What is the chief thought the Holy Spirit is seeking to impress upon us through the Apostle in this epistle?" I share my thoughts with you in this study.

May we never lose sight of the precious truth that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is for us. Wherever we read, we find pictures of Christ and profitable contemplation. Most believers in right division of the Word recognize, however, that the epistles of the Apostle Paul have a special place in our study, for Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. When we follow this truth a bit further, we can surely see that while all of his epistles are important for us, his seven early epistles, written during the Acts period, were written during the time that he was still going to the Jew first (cf. Romans 1:16,17), performing miracles of healing, raising the dead, speaking with tongues, observing

Jewish days and ceremonies—even offering sacrifices, or being willing to do so—and the letters he wrote during that period of his ministry reflect these things. When we come to the seven epistles he wrote after the close of the book of Acts, however, we reach the pinnacle of God’s revelation concerning the church which is the body of Christ. We find the full revelation of truth that concerns us — the truth of the mystery, kept secret in other ages, but made known to and through the Apostle Paul. I like to meditate upon these seven epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon) and try to find the one word, or the particular truth, the epistle brings to me. This, of course, is in addition to serious, detailed, word by word study of the epistles that is necessary and profitable.

EPHESIANS

The Epistle of Grace

What is the key word or key message of Ephesians? There are differences of opinion, of course. Dr. Norman B. Harrison, in his fine little devotional commentary on the book of Ephesians, builds his outline around the three-fold nature of the truths revealed in

the book; he lists “seven significant words” that he feels are key words, namely, *grace*, *spiritual*, *heavenlies*, *mystery*, *body*, *walk*, and *in*. Dr. W. B. Riley, in his *Bible of the Expositor and Evangelist*, Volume 12, on Ephesians, builds his commentary on the three-fold teaching of the book, but his approach is different from that of Dr. Harrison. Pastor Charles Welch, of London, in his excellent book. *The Testimony of the Lord’s Prisoner*, shows the two-fold division of the book, three doctrinal chapters and three practical chapters, each section balancing the other, and turning on the pivot word “worthy” of Ephesians 4:1.

These books are all helpful for study purposes, but I think if I were to select the one word that Ephesians brings to me, it would be the word *grace*. From the salutation (1:2) to the benediction (6:24) we are confronted with the grace of God. Our acceptance in the Beloved is to the praise of the glory of His grace (1:5); our position is possible because of the riches of His grace (1:7); our salvation itself, in its every facet, is by grace (2:5,8); in the ages to come, He will, through our salvation, show the exceeding riches of His grace (2:7). This epistle reveals in all of its fulness and profundity the truth concerning the dispensation of grace (3:2,7,8). The same grace that saves us enables us to

serve the Lord (4:7, 29). Truly, Ephesians is the “grace” epistle, and those of us who love the gospel of the grace of God and the truth of the mystery should search and ponder this epistle frequently.

PHILIPPIANS

The Epistle of Joy

When we open the book of Philippians, we find the word *grace*, our “Ephesian” word, in the salutation (1:2) and the benediction (4:23) and in only one other place (1:7), where the Apostle speaks of his own grace. Here the key note is *joy* and *rejoicing*. These two words occur a total of 14 times in the four chapters in the original language (in addition to these, there are several other words translated “joy” and “rejoicing” in the epistle). Interestingly enough, the words we are to consider are very closely kin to the word *grace* in the Greek. The word for *grace* is *charis* (or *karis*), while the words for *joy* and *rejoicing* are *chara* and *chairō*. Obviously, apart from the grace of Ephesians there cannot be the rejoicing of Philippians.

I learn from Philippians that I am to pray with joy (1:4); that there is joy associated with faith (1:25); that harmony among believers brings joy to spiritual lead-

ers (2:3); that the Lord's servants who minister faithfully to the church are to be received with joy (gladness) (2:29). I learn that those who are won to Christ when we give forth the Word are our "joy and crown" (4:1). The fact is impressed upon me that joy is a means of fellowship, for I read of the mutual joy and rejoicing of the Apostle with the Philippians (2:17, 18, 28). I am taught that when Christ is truly preached, regardless of the circumstances, I am to rejoice (1:18). And above all, I learn that true joy and rejoicing come only as we rejoice in the Lord (3:1; 4:4,10). I am made to pause reverently and confess my sin of failing to rejoice when I am reminded that these words on joy and rejoicing were penned from a Roman prison, under the shadow of possible martyrdom for the cause of Christ (1:20-24).

COLOSSIANS

The Epistle of Knowledge

Even the casual student of the Bible is aware of the many striking parallels between Ephesians and Colossians. We are told that out of the 95 verses in Colossians, 78 have a marked resemblance to Ephesians. This is about 3/4 of the book. Of the 155 verses

in Ephesians, 78, or about half, are parallel to Colossians. Dr. E. W. Bullinger, of England, and Dr. Robert Hadden, of the U.S.A., have both written about the differences in the way these truths are presented. They have shown that the truths are presented as doctrine in Ephesians and by way of correction in Colossians.

The central theme of the book, however, seems to be knowledge. The word that is used several times in the epistle means a precise, accurate knowledge; a thorough acquaintance with; a true knowledge. It seems that the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to use this word because he was dealing with the early arising of what came to be known as the Gnostic heresy, and the adherents to this heresy claimed to have special knowledge. The Apostle tells the Colossians that he rejoices in their faith, hope and love, but he desires that they might be filled with the true knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:9). He prays that this knowledge might lead to a worthy walk, which in turn will lead to an increase in this true knowledge (Colossians 1:10). He prays that they might possess a true knowledge of the mystery (Colossians 2:2, acknowledgment), which he had discussed at length in the Ephesian letter. In the practical section, he reminds his readers that they have

put on the new man, having been renewed in full knowledge after the image of Him that created him (Colossians 3:10). There are other words translated “know” and “knowledge,” but these are predominant and give a summary of the epistle.

1 TIMOTHY

The Epistle of Teaching (Doctrine)

One cannot read the first epistle of Paul to Timothy without noticing that the word “doctrine” occurs eight times in the six chapters. The word “doctrine,” of course, means “teaching.” In addition, the verb “to teach” occurs three times in the letter. Another verb, meaning “to teach otherwise” or “to teach any other doctrine” is found twice, a noun meaning “teachers of the law” is found once, and there are kindred words translated “learn,” etc. This book, possibly more than any other, and certainly more than any of the other post-Acts epistles, stresses the value of sound teaching. Included are admonitions concerning the necessity for wholesome teaching—sound doctrine, in the church today, especially in view of the times in which we live. Equally important, the epistle stresses the harm that can come from unsound teaching—the doc-

trines of demons. In this book we find our authority for Bible classes, Bible centered messages, Bible memory work, and all that goes to make us unashamedly a people of the Book! Note, for example, 1 Timothy 1:10, 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 3; 2:7, 12; 4:11; 6:2; 1:7, etc.

2 TIMOTHY

The Epistle of the Truth

In the last of his epistles, chronologically speaking, we find Paul the aged, knowing that he was ready to be offered for his testimony, deeply concerned with the way his fellow-members of the body of Christ handled the truth. Six times in the four brief chapters he mentions truth. The first reference is the golden text of dispensational teaching; it is the admonition to practice right division of the word of truth (2:15). Failure to follow this principle of Bible study is responsible for most of the “isms” that plague the church today. Legalism, antinomianism, liberalism, ceremonialism, and most of the other “isms” can be traced directly or indirectly to failure to practice right division. By following a concordance and noting the other occurrences of the word “truth” in this epistle we are able to

trace the following progressive steps:

Those who fail to practice rightly dividing the word of truth usually, sooner or later, note that:

1. Concerning the truth they have erred; the word means to swerve aside (2:18).
2. We are to pray that such might turn to God in repentance and acknowledge the truth (2:25).
3. Such are ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth (3:7).
4. As they continue their rebellious degeneration they begin to resist the truth (3:8).
5. In its final stages, those who have followed this path turn away their ears from the truth (4:4).

May this timely epistle remind us of the need for knowing the truth and rightly dividing the Word of truth.

TITUS

The Epistle of Good Works

The little epistle to Titus contains such a strong emphasis on works that some have questioned the Pauline authorship. Those who have done this have

overlooked the clear grace message of Titus 3:5. We cannot miss, however, the stress that is placed on the good works that result from the salvation that comes to us by grace. In 1:16, he shows that regardless of our verbal testimony, unless we practice the good works that God has before ordained that we should walk in (Ephesians 2: 10), our works will deny God. In 2:7, we are taught to be a pattern of good works to others, while in 2:14 we are urged to be zealous of good works. The admonition in 3:1 is to be ready for every good work, while in 3:8 and 3:14, we are told to be careful to maintain good works. Many who like to refer to themselves as “grace” Christians might well spend some time with this little epistle that shows so clearly that the grace that saves us also teaches us to live lives of good works (2:11-13).

PHILEMON

The Picture of Imputation

There are many ways to look at this brief epistle. Valuable insights come through a study of the names of the characters in the interesting story told by the letters. But more than anything else, I find in this epistle the picture of the substitutionary work of Christ and

His imputing His righteousness unto us. Onesimus, a run-away slave, had traveled to Rome, where he met the Apostle Paul. There, he came to know Christ as his Saviour. The letter was written to his master, Philemon, who was a friend of Paul, for Onesimus to take back to his master. In the letter, Paul makes the appeal of Philemon concerning this slave: “if thou count me a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it” (vs. 17-19). This is such a precious picture of the work of our Lord Jesus in our behalf. We, as spiritual outcasts, through the grace of God receive the very righteousness of Christ; He can say to His Father, “If he has wronged You, or owes You ought, put that on Mine account; I paid it at Calvary; whatever love You have for Me, put it on his account.” How we should rejoice in the work of our Lord that is portrayed here!

May you, the reader, find these epistles more meaningful after thinking on them along these lines. Better still, why not study them diligently and make your own summary?